

Autism Society Canada celebrates its 35th Anniversary in 2011 “Bringing Autism to Parliament – Jerome’s Story”

Jerome McIntyre’s story is similar to the many stories featured in Autism Society Canada’s awareness campaign. The message remains the same—we need more! Jerome is a Past President and a member of Autism Yukon (AY), an advocacy and support group for families and individuals with Autism. As the Yukon chapter representative for Autism Society Canada (ASC), Autism Yukon advocates for policy issues related to service delivery, raises awareness, and educates the community through workshops for parents, teachers and frontline workers.

Today, 35 years later – and with the help of dedicated community members like Jerome - ASC has grown to become the largest collective voice in the Canadian autism community. Provincial and territorial autism societies and their member groups provide direct support to people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and their families all across Canada.

Jerome is one of the many parents of children on the spectrum who is determined to make Autism a priority in Canadian politics. Jerome says, “It’s important that politicians be made aware that autism isn’t a small issue, it is a large issue. They need to know that the current situation creates a lot of uncertainty for parents because they do not have guaranteed access to services in the same way that health care is provided to the rest of Canadians.” While funding for autism services has increased, so have the numbers of individuals living with an ASD. And with more funding comes more bureaucracy, more administration and more “caps” on services. The situation is especially hard for those parents who do not have the skill sets or the knowledge of government processes to effectively navigate the system in order to access services for their children.

Jerome believes people need to learn about autism. “People should take some time to learn something about autism,” says Jerome, “especially since you will most likely encounter more than one person with Autism. It is a worthwhile investment of your time.” An example of the low level of awareness about the disorder in Yukon is the fact that Jerome had to go out of province to get his son diagnosed. Initially his son was misdiagnosed as having auditory neuropathy before being accurately diagnosed with an ASD. There is also little consistency in the area of services provided through the schools in the Yukon, either. While Jerome’s son is fortunate to attend a school where the principal has a soft spot for kids with disabilities and advocates on their behalf, this is not the case in other schools in Yukon.

As the prevalence of ASD’s has increased, the way in which politicians approach the topic has also changed. “Politicians originally had a sense of detachment when they were discussing services for our children,” says Jerome. “Now that their grandkids have autism, they have become advocates like us. We even have a parent who is running for office in this election.” ASC’s awareness campaign aims to educate politicians about autism and tell them that there are many Canadians out there that want autism spectrum disorders to be a priority for our provincial and federal governments. The time is now to bring autism to Parliament.

Autism Society Canada supports Jerome and his family by advocating on a national platform on their behalf. After 35 years of experience working with the Canadian autism community, ASC knows that the time is now to develop the foundation of a Canadian Autism Strategy, so individuals across Canada can access high quality services for their Autism related needs. For more information log on to www.autismsocietycanada.ca, or contact us at 866-476-8440.

ASC’s Provincial Member society in Yukon is Autism Yukon.

<http://www.autismyukon.org> or 867.667.6406