

Report of the Advisory Committee of Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders Presented to the Autism Society Canada Board of Directors February 4, 2007

As adults diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) from across Canada, we are concerned about the lack of services for adults who have been diagnosed with an ASD and for those who require an ASD diagnosis. In our experience, there needs to be a greater understanding and recognition of the needs of adults with ASDs through provision of a wider range of specialized services across the lifespan. The needs for services and supports for individuals with ASDs do not end in childhood. They continue into young adulthood, mid-life and in later life. Specifically, adult Canadians with ASDs must have greater access to:

- Psychological services: diagnosis and assessment services
- Counselling: individual, couple and family counselling
- Educational and support groups and workshops (e.g., ASDs, self-care, social skills, mental health, sexuality, and sensory issues)
- Appropriate and safe housing: group homes and supported housing options
- Lifeskills training: budgeting, organizational skills, work skills
- Social and recreational opportunities
- Legal aid and other legal resources
- Mental health resources: counselling, medication, and advocacy
- Post-secondary education and supports
- Employment opportunities: assessment and training

Adults diagnosed with ASDs who are parents require financial supports, education about child development and non-verbal communication, individualized and specialized assessments of their parenting capacity, genetic counselling, parenting skills counselling, and respite.

Public and professional awareness of the needs of adults with ASDs can be raised through the education of:

- Law enforcement professionals and others in the legal system
- Post-secondary institutions
- Child welfare agencies
- Policy makers and politicians
- Mental health and counselling professionals
- The general public
- Employers or potential employers
- Medical and mental health professionals

A few areas require special attention. The first is the needs of older individuals or seniors with ASDs. We need more information on issues such as income supplements, poverty, health risks, housing and care and retirement planning. Resources and supports need to be put in place to meet the needs of seniors living with an ASD. Second, prospective employers for adults with ASDs must be educated about the positive aspects of employing people with ASDs and their particular strengths such as attention to detail, punctuality, logical thinking, reliability, honesty, and adherence to routines. Third, sensory problems and sensory overload in public spaces is often a

barrier to full participation in the community. Awareness of this problem is lacking and has to be raised.

We feel that adults with ASDs have an important role to play in raising awareness and understanding such as having more participation of adults with ASDs at conferences and in other educational opportunities, and working closely with professionals who provide services to adults in order to inform research and best practices.

Misunderstanding and stigma associated with ASDs, is unfortunately pervasive in Canadian society. Unrealistic images of adults with ASDs are perpetuated by misinformation and stereotypes of adults with ASDs presented in the media. The belief that all ASDs are associated with “mental retardation” is outdated; in fact, many diagnosed with an ASD have little or no cognitive disability, and are highly intelligent and very knowledgeable and capable in specific areas. Inappropriate treatment of Canadians with ASDs in the medical and mental health community, in the workforce and in society at large requires greater public recognition and attention.

When “neurotypicals” and adults affected by ASDs work together, proactively, we will gain greater insights into the life-long needs of individuals with ASDs and improve the quality of life for all Canadians living with an ASD.

Advisory Committee of Adults with ASDs

Autism Society Canada

(submitted February 2007)