



CAN | **15** YEARS
CANUCKS AUTISM NETWORK

2023 in Review

Canucks Autism Network acknowledges that our head office is located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh Nations – and that our work takes place in the territories of Indigenous peoples across the province, including the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.





We strive for a future where every individual on the autism spectrum is understood, accepted, and supported in all community spaces.

Canucks Autism Network is governed by a democratically elected Board of Directors

Mark Zastre, Chair & Treasurer

Clara Aquilini

Charmaine Crooks C.M.

Norah Flaherty

Andrew Hung

Garth Stoll

Steve Wallace

Julia Ward

Marie Westby



Board of Directors

Our mission is to provide programs for individuals on the autism spectrum and their families, while promoting acceptance and inclusion through community engagement and training initiatives across BC and beyond.



Programming for Children (3-12)

Goal: To provide a positive, highly supported introductory experience that encourages social connection, skill-building and confidence-building.

Focus areas: Sports, recreation and arts



Programming and Services for Youth and Adults (13+)

Goal: To provide autism-affirming, accessible, community level opportunities that support the important transition into adulthood.

Focus areas: Recreation, employment, wellness, and mental health



Training and Accessibility Consultation

Goal: To build capacity by empowering a wide range of community groups and sectors to better support, welcome and effectively include people on the autism spectrum in all community spaces.

Focus areas: Training, sensory friendly events & spaces, resource development, and consultation

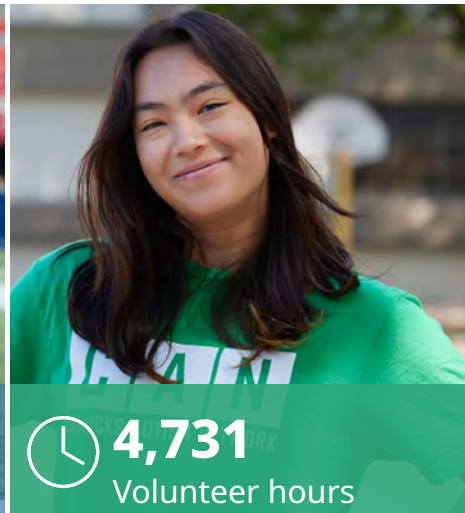


Family Experiences

Goal: To deliver fun, accessible activities for the whole family while providing opportunities for connections with other families.

Focus areas: Community level activities across regions and seasons

2023 Impact at a Glance





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Celebrating 15 Years of Progress: Reflecting on 2023

In 2023, Canucks Autism Network (CAN) commemorated a significant milestone - our 15th anniversary. This pivotal year prompted us to reflect on our journey, acknowledging both our triumphs and our learnings.

From our modest beginnings as a children's charity offering one soccer program, we've evolved into a multifaceted organization, as showcased in the pages of this report. Our growth stands as a testament to the passion and dedication of our founders, Board of Directors, staff, volunteers, members, and supporters, all of whom make up our CAN community.

This past year marked an overwhelming influx in demand for our children's programs, highlighting the rising need for support. Meanwhile, our youth and adult programs continued to expand in the areas of employment, recreation, and life skills training. Innovative mental health programming for Autistic youth and adults took center stage, underscoring our commitment to holistic well-being.

Our critical work in the mental health space extended to our training arm where we partnered with groups such as Foundry BC and the Crisis Line BC to improve accessibility of the mental health system. Requests for autism training and consultation services continued to rise, reflecting a growing commitment to accessibility and inclusion across sectors and communities.





Operationally, we made significant strides in improving efficiencies, investing in new registration, accounting, and employee orientation systems. These enhancements enabled us to scale up our programs and training initiatives in a much more efficient and cost-effective manner.

Our fifteenth year also saw record-high support for key fundraising events including our CAN Pro-Am Hockey Tournament, the Dave McAnerney Ride for Autism, and an abundance of third-party fundraisers. Moreover, we forged exciting new partnerships with various communities, funders, and organizations.

We recognize that we couldn't do all that we do without the unwavering support of our donors, partners, and supporters who believe in helping Autistic individuals live their best lives. We would be remiss if we didn't underscore the notable contribution of our core funder- the Canucks for Kids Fund.

Looking ahead to 2024, strategic planning takes precedence as we envision the next four years for CAN. Key themes include exploring new revenue streams, leveraging partnerships, enhancing operational efficiencies, and delivering exceptional programs and services for our ever-growing CAN community.

We invite you to join us on this exciting journey as we position ourselves for an even brighter future.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Britt Andersen'.

Britt Andersen
Canucks Autism Network CEO

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark Zastre'.

Mark Zastre
Chair of the Board



FAMILY EXPERIENCES



A large-scale celebration

Set against the backdrop of BC Place Stadium, we celebrated CAN's 15th anniversary alongside 3,100 participants, 5 professional sports leagues, and 7 Provincial Sport Organizations at our 9th annual CAN Sports Day.

It was a joyous occasion filled with sports, camaraderie, and new possibilities.





Connection through shared experiences

Family Experiences continued to see high demand this past year with a combined **16,921** attendees across all events.

Families in Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Vancouver Island, and the Interior enjoyed local attractions and community activities such as:

- Pumpkin Patch
- Corn Maze
- Movie theatre
- Bowling
- Holiday Trains
- Spring at the Farm
- CAN Sports Day
- Waterparks
- Mini golf
- And much more!



“We feel like we can just be ourselves and that takes a lot of stress out of the day.”

- CAN Parent

“I saw other kids who were jumping and flapping their arms in excitement, just like my son.

Seeing this put a smile on my face, to see that I’m not alone.”

- CAN Parent





CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS



We believe that every child on the autism spectrum has the right to play sports.



Children's Programs

Our children's programs allow participants to develop skills while practicing following group instructions and building social connections in a fun, safe and supportive environment.

- We introduced a creative dance program in Surrey in partnership with **Arts Umbrella**
- CAN's presence in the Fraser Valley expanded significantly, with nine programs, including gymnastics, now being offered.
- We continued to expose CAN participants to new sports such as baseball and tennis and introduced intersquad scrimmages in our hockey program.

Programs for children include:

- Dance
- Day Camp
- Gymnastics
- Hockey
- Multisport
- Music
- Skate
- Swim
- Virtual (Art, Coding, Science, Yoga)



2023 Provincial Adapted Hockey Tournament

To kick off Autism Acceptance Month, CAN hosted our second adapted hockey tournament on Saturday, April 1st at the Surrey Sport and Leisure Complex.

The tournament brought together **11 adapted hockey teams** from across the province for a weekend of comradery, friendly competition, and inclusion in sport. The day-long tournament and celebratory banquet were generously supported by the **Canucks for Kids Fund, Carha Hockey, and Sport Surrey.**





"I cannot say enough amazing things about our involvement in all things CAN. This organization has been life-changing for our family.

The weekly programming has increased my son's desire to be social and helped him have a fun activity to go to like his sisters do."

- CAN Parent



YOUTH AND ADULT PROGRAMS



Growing and Thriving Together

CAN's youth and adult programs promote the well-being of Autistic individuals by providing autism-affirming, accessible opportunities that empower participants to connect, learn, lead, and grow together.



Youth & Adult Programs

CAN introduced several new programs, workshops, and services that empower Autistic youth and adults to develop positive mental health practices, build self-confidence and social connections, and thrive in their communities.

- This past year, we launched the **Leisure Ed** program, based on consultation from the autism community. The goal of the program is to help participants identify and meet their community recreation goals through individualized supports and group sessions.
- Our **Women's Peer Group** for Autistic women, gender non-conforming, and gender-diverse folks continued to grow in demand, with over 70 participants interested in the bi-monthly meetings.
- In Spring 2023, the **Transition to Adulthood** program, supported by RBC, provided Autistic participants, aged 15-25, with the opportunity to learn life skills (eg. public transit use, cooking basics), career skills (eg. resume building, volunteering), and self-care strategies (eg. mental health maintenance).





CAN is dedicated to increasing Autistic leadership across all levels, respecting and consulting with the diverse community we serve. This past year, we hired **8 Autistic Peer Facilitators** who are now developing, running, and facilitating various peer groups and programs.

New and returning programs include:

- Blueprint for Overcoming Barriers*
- Canine Cuddles
- Craft and Connect*
- Dungeons & Dragons*
- Healthy Relationships, Sexuality and Autism
- Hockey
- Intro to Meal Prep
- Intro to Mindful Eating
- Leisure Ed
- Mindful Yoga*
- Music to Move my Mood
- Painting to Process Experiences*
- Skills Training Employment Program
- Swim
- Thriving Together: Self Advocacy for Autistics*
- Women's Peer Group*
- Walking Club

****Autistic-led***

“Sometimes people share strategies that work, sometimes they share mistakes that resonate with my own lived experience and then I feel less alone.

It’s also a good anchor for a low-pressure social event. When autistic women learn to take care of themselves better, we can better contribute our unique skills and strengths. We can be truly part of community instead of hiding.”

- Women’s Peer Group Member



EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) is a national initiative that engages, educates and supports employers to hire people on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability. Canucks Autism Network is a provincial delivery partner of RWA in British Columbia.

- **Lower Mainland**

Navigation: 44 Autistic job seekers were connected with employment supports.
Employer Engagement: 41 Autistic job seekers were successfully hired.

- **Kelowna**

Navigation: 6 Autistic job seekers were connected with employment supports.
Employer Engagement: 18 Autistic job seekers were successfully hired.

CAN Skills Training Employment Program (CAN-STEP)

This program is funded by Government of Canada's Youth Employment and Skills Strategy (YESS) program

Over the course of 12 weeks, Autistic youth and adults receive paid classroom training and work experience across the Lower Mainland.

- The program took place from January 2021-December 2023.
- 46 of the 85 program participants are now employed, representing a **54% employment rate.**





CAN-STEP Participant Spotlight

Henry Woo

Henry Woo joined CAN-STEP in July 2023 and quickly became a valued member of the classroom.

He then secured his dream work experience at the Vancouver Aquarium where his contributions were recognized, and he was eventually hired permanently.

Since then, Henry has continued to be an asset and was even chosen by the Vancouver Tourism Board to receive an award for Excellence in Customer Service based on the following review:

“I was trying to get a highchair out and this employee named Henry W noticed right away and came to help me, and then thoroughly cleaned it before he offered to take it to my table. As I sat there, he went around to every table and literally picked up people’s jackets off the floor and went above and beyond to be helpful. I was really impressed.”

Way to go Henry!



Recreation and Social Connection

Canada Post
Rowing BC
PISE (Pacific Institute for Sport Education) *Updated name*
Community Recreation Initiatives Society (CRIS)
BC Parks Foundation
Chill Foundation
MOVE Adapted Fitness
Papa John's King George
Blind Tiger Comedy
North Vancouver Recreation and Culture (NVRC)
Prospera Foundation
The HIVE
CMMN GRND
Save-On-Foods Memorial Centre
City of Victoria
Stanley Park Ecological Society

Employment and Life Skills

Stanley Park Ecology Society
Working Gear
Science World
Rogers Arena
Translink
Coast Mental Health
Vancouver Public Library
Vancouver Aquarium
Holiday In Express
Flyover Canada
Meridian Farm Market
Spectrum Works Consulting
Rae Morris Counselling Group

Mental Health and Wellness

Shift Education
Dori Zener and Associates
Rae Morris Counselling Group
Spectrum Works Consulting
Crisis Center BC
Autism Nova Scotia
Hillcrest Community Center
Pet and Friends
Small Blessings Animal Retreat
United Way BC
Curiko





INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT





Our Commitment to Inclusive Employment

We believe that every Autistic individual has the right to equitable access to meaningful employment.

- We introduced the role of Supported Employment Specialist to support and increase inclusive hiring efforts across the organization. Engagement with employment and educational organizations such as **Work BC** and **Vancouver Community College** resulted in a significant increase in supported staff and volunteer placements.
- We introduced Job Coaches to support Program Staff on the autism spectrum.
- We increased our focus on professional development for staff and volunteers on the autism spectrum to support the transition from CAN Volunteer to Program Assistant to Support Worker and even Coach and Onsite Supervisor roles.
- Autistic staff designed and led programs for Autistic youth and adults.



OUR TEAM

The backbone of our organization

Our volunteer program experienced significant growth for the first time since the pandemic. We hired and onboarded **255 new volunteers** and logged **4,731 volunteer hours**.



Internal Training Numbers

- **2,014** staff received CAN training
- **318** volunteers received CAN training

The heart of our programs

To meet the demand of our growing portfolio of programs, we employed over **550 program staff**, which included hiring **259 new staff**.



TRAINING AND ACCESSIBILITY CONSULTATION



We believe that every community should take action to include and support individuals on the spectrum.



Training & Consultation Highlights

- **Nak'azdli Whut'en First Nation Training:** CAN delivered two trainings to over 80 individuals in the community of Fort St. James. Attendees included childcare workers, recreation staff, teachers and school administration.
- **Lifesaving Society Visuals:** CAN created swim visuals that will be used across the province by CAN staff and Lifesaving Society Swim Instructors.
- **Autism Aviation Day Event at YYJ:** On April 29, 2023, Victoria International Airport (YYJ) and Air Canada Foundation welcomed over 50 CAN members for Autism Aviation Day. The event allowed families to rehearse the entire pre-flight process including checking in, going through security, waiting at the gate, and boarding the plane. The practice run aims to help increase predictability and decrease anxiety associated with the entire air travel process.
- A total of 76 **training workshops** were delivered to the following sectors: sport, recreation, schools, first responders and community spaces.
- In 2023, **CAN hosted Sensory Friendly Spaces*** at 15 different events including the Vancouver International film Festival and the Vancouver Pride Parade. CAN was also invited to showcase Sensory Friendly Spaces and Sensory Kits at the Union of BC Municipalities Convention.

**Sensory Friendly Spaces are designated areas with reduced input (lowered lighting and sound) from the sensory environment.*



“It was truly incredible to have the experience at YYJ Autism Aviation Day. I’ve never felt so accepted with my son before, and I was truly touched.

We are so thankful for the amazing dedication and hard work from all of you at CAN, to Air Canada, and all the other wonderful people who helped make this beautiful day happen.

When we are often met with one roadblock after another so it was very heartwarming to be surrounded with people who understood, and cared and wanted to help”

- CAN Parent



Crisis Line Network of BC
Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC
Foundry BC
Dori Zener and Associates
Rae Morris Counselling Group
Spectrum Works Consulting
Autism Nova Scotia



Training Resources for BC Crisis Centre Workers

We partnered with the BC Crisis Centre to provide autism training to their frontline staff that focused on best practices and strategies for supporting Autistic individuals accessing Crisis Centre services.

CAN youth and adult program staff were also given the opportunity to receive suicide intervention skills training from the Crisis Centre to better meet the needs of CAN participants.

Following the success of this training, CAN partnered with the Crisis Line Network of BC, including the Crisis Intervention & Suicide Prevention Centre of BC, Crisis Centre of Northern BC, and Canadian Mental Health Association, Cariboo Chilcotin to begin to develop a new autism-informed e-learning resource for crisis response organizations. A team of Autistic Advisors and Clinicians are also part of the advisory group.

Autism-Informed Training for Foundry BC Staff, Clinicians, and Peer Support Workers

Building off the success of our initial Autism-informed Youth Peer Support Training Module in partnership with Foundry BC, CAN developed two additional e-learning modules for Foundry's frontline service staff and clinical staff. The content was developed with direct input from subject matter experts engaged in professional clinical practice who directly support the mental health needs of Autistic individuals, Foundry staff, and Autistic self-advocates.





Autism Acceptance Games

This past year, CAN partnered with the following teams to deliver Autism Acceptance Games:

Vancouver Canucks
Abbotsford Canucks
Coquitlam Express
Victoria Grizzlies
Nanaimo Clippers
Chilliwack Chiefs
Kamloops Blazers



Arena staff received CAN autism training and various sensory adaptations were made to ensure the arenas and games were autism accessible. Resources for fans on the spectrum included:

- A designated quiet room for anyone needing a break from the sensory-rich environment.
- CAN sensory kits containing sensory toys to reduce anxiety, a schedule of the game to improve predictability, and noise-cancelling headphones to ease sensory sensitivities.



FUNDRAISING & EVENTS





CAN PRO-AM

Since its inaugural year in 2019, this annual charitable hockey tournament has continued to reach new fundraising heights, and the **2023 CAN Pro-Am, presented by Dallas Watt Demo Ltd**, was no exception.

Held at Parq Vancouver, Good Co. Granville, and North Surrey Sport & Ice Complex, the event featured **18 teams, 21 NHL Alumni**, and over **290 rec players** determined to make a difference.

After months of fundraising, players succeeded in raising an all-time high of over **\$1.07 million** in support of CAN.

Participating NHL Alumni included Canucks fan favourites **Michael Del Zotto, Matthew Barnaby, Kirk McLean, and Frank Corrado**, who brought their A-game both on and off the ice. Longtime CAN supporter, Rob Anselmo, topped the individual standings claiming the rights to the inaugural golden bucket award, while The Constructors were crowned top fundraising team, earning the right to first overall pick.

The event culminated in an **All-Star Game, sponsored by Nightingale Electrical Ltd**, featuring the top 25 fundraisers who went above and beyond to support the cause. It was a fitting end to a weekend dedicated to helping individuals on the autism spectrum live their best lives.





CANADIAN TIRE JUMPSTART CHARITIES

To help develop and sustain sports and recreation programming for kids, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Charities has been supporting CAN's core sports programs since 2017.

In 2023, their cumulative donations surpassed \$500,000.00! Together, CAN and Jumpstart have developed an e-learning course called Supporting Positive Behavior, which is required for coaches within all organizations, and is funded by Jumpstart across Canada.

HARVEY SOHI BALL HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

In 2022, the Harvey Sohi Foundation, founded in memory of Harvey Sohi, presented CAN with an idea that would bring together generations of families to make a positive impact. An event that would encapsulate Harvey's core values of inclusion and community.

On March 5, the Foundation hosted their inaugural charity Ball Hockey Tournament in support of Canucks Autism Network. The event continued to gain momentum in 2023 with even more teams, sponsors, volunteers, and family members stepping up to support.

To date, \$41,232 has been raised for CAN, with another charity tournament slated for 2024.

TD BANK

Recognizing the support connected communities can provide one another, TD Bank Group sponsored five Family Experiences across BC in 2023.

In addition to financial support, TD staff volunteered their time welcoming and supporting over 4,200 CAN members at Mini Golf, Family Skates, Egg Hunts, and Corn Mazes. Thank you to our friends at TD for supporting this community initiative!





Donor Spotlight

DOUG PERKS

Since 2012, Doug Perks and his company have donated over a quarter of a million in support of CAN's programs.

Doug's passion for youth and sport is emulated in the support he provides CAN in aquatics and the BC Recreation and Parks Association.

Doug is a loyal supporter of CAN's most popular Family Experience, CAN Sports Day, and can often be seen at the event roaming the field with a smile on his face and his grandson by his side.

We truly appreciate Doug's dedication and ongoing support! Thank you, Doug!





FINANCIALS

ALLOCATION OF EXPENSES

92%

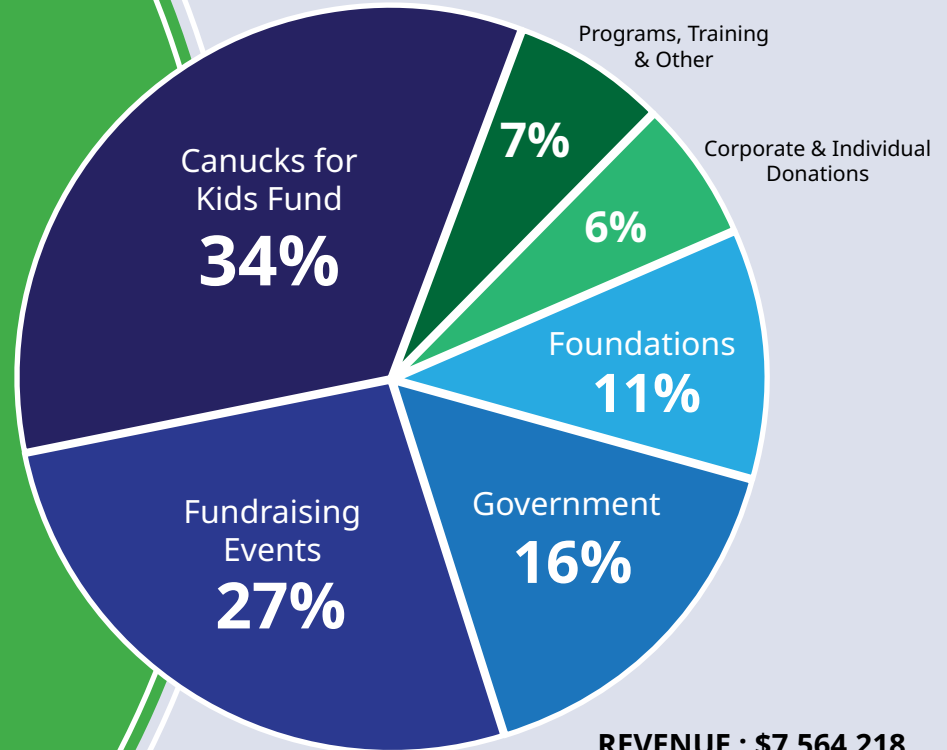
PROGRAMMING & FUNDRAISING

8%

ADMINISTRATION

EXPENSES : \$8,519,476

SOURCES OF REVENUE



REVENUE : \$7,564,218

In 2022-2023 fiscal year, children's programs continued to grow, resulting in an impressive 29% increase in participant numbers.

In Q2 and Q3, CAN adopted a more mindful, data-driven approach to program planning to better align offerings to demand, while ultimately reducing waitlists. As a result, CAN not only surpassed its program targets but invested in additional spaces in existing programs and introduced several new programs in all regions, with the Fraser Valley (50% growth) and Kamloops (41% growth) showing the highest growth.

CAN's mental health programming continued to grow and attract the attention of funders. In March 2023, the program received \$540,000 from the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, most of which (78%) will be deferred to the next fiscal. In February 2023, we received confirmation from Employment and Social Development Canada that the Opportunity Fund application was successful, meaning that the CAN-STEP program will be extended until the end of 2025.

Despite the few fundraising initiatives that were cancelled or postponed, we anticipate that CAN will come very close to reaching its revenue goal and raise a total of \$7.6M (\$7.3M in 2021-2022). The Canucks for Kids Fund, special events, foundations, and government funding remain our largest sources of revenue (\$6.4M or 85%).

We project that the prior years' surpluses will be fully utilized by the end of 2022-23, marking the end of the program expansion phase. In 2023-2024, CAN will focus on maintaining a balanced budget and further diversifying its revenue streams to sustain current program levels.



Mark Zastre

(39) Chair of the Board & Treasurer





**We believe
that people on
the spectrum
have the right
to an active
voice: to be
heard, valued
and seen.**

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