

Knowledge that makes a difference

ACT is Canada's leading independent not-for-profit specializing in free evidence-informed resources for the autism and special needs community



3rd Annual Herring Sale for Autism
Sponsored by Oceanside Fisheries

ACT's 2020 Presenters



Dr. Paola Colozzo



Dr. Brenda Fossett



Dr. Georgina Robinson



Dr. Stephanie Jull



Dr. Richard Stock



Dr. Anthony Bailey



Michelle Garcia Winner



Karla Verschoor



Tracy Humphreys



Dr. Pat Mirenda



Dr. Susan Fawcett



Dr. Grace Iarocci



Dr. David Worling

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ACT's Board of Directors 2019/20

Alison Narod - President	Denise Ching	Alisa Lipson, MD
Blair Whelan - Vice President	Blair Dwyer	Nicole Provost
Brent Shirley - Treasurer	Karen Kalynchuk	

In 2020, Anne Stoll and Pharid Jaffer retired from the board, after many years of service to the autism community.

ACT's Staff 2020

Deborah Pugh - Executive Director
Linda Leung - Financial Controller
Stephanie Porter - Manager of Autism Information Resources
Ryan Quiring - Digital Communications Coordinator
Mary Yamashita - Administrative & Training Coordinator

Acknowledging ACT's Community Partners

Please see ACT's website for a list of all of our [individual donors, sponsors and community partners](#).



A letter of thanks to those who have supported ACT's COVID-19 response

In this report we thank our donors and volunteers for your support in 2019/2020, which allowed ACT – Autism Community Training to accelerate our work throughout the pandemic. Whether you donate your time or funds, you are strengthening an independent voice for the autism community in British Columbia, anchored in evidence-based resources and respect for those with neurodiversities, across the age-span.

In 2020, ACT relied on our network of supporters as never before. By mid-March 2020, as the pandemic began to tighten its grip on the people of our province, many families of children with special needs felt abandoned as support services were withdrawn. ACT worked in collaboration with other organizations and the Representative for Children and Youth, Dr. Jennifer Charlesworth, to draw attention to their plight.

ACT has mobilized all our resources to address the desperate need of families for COVID-19 related information, setting up a special COVID-19 'hub' on our website with practical information relevant to those with special needs/ neurodiversity. By telephone and email, we have directed over a thousand families to specific resources and listened to their concerns, which inform the resources we develop.

ACT is especially grateful to the advocates and clinicians who joined with ACT to offer comfort and direction to families with a series of practical Zoom presentations, focused on calming the very real fears of families. Recordings of ACT's 'Pandemic Presentations' have been watched 22,000 times since March.

Over the summer of 2020, ACT held a Social Thinking event for nearly 1,000 registrants, all online. From October to December, we organized eight days of practical training aimed at parents, using a room at the Sheraton Wall Centre as a makeshift studio for web-streaming.

Throughout the pandemic, ACT's online resources have been available 24/7 and the response has been tremendous. Indeed, research by Simon Fraser University [SFU] indicates that ACT's online resources are the most popular online source of autism information in BC. [See chart, p. 4]. Increasingly, ACT's resources are accessed across Canada and internationally.

ACT is meeting a tremendous need for objective, evidence-based resources. Traditionally we relied on our donors and money raised from registrations. 2020 was challenging financially because most of our events have been online and free. Thanks to support from individual donors and funders, however, ACT is planning more free training in 2021. If you have already donated to ACT in 2020, thank you. If not, please consider supporting our work in 2021, or recommending ACT to other potential donors.

ACT clearly met a tremendous need for information

ACT delivered 18,000 hours of training to 2,500 registrants in 2020.

ACT's website was accessed 524,000 times in 2020, a staggering 40% increase over 2019.

The COVID-19 Resources Hub has been visited over 15,000 times since March.

Users of Autism Videos @ ACT grew 64% in 2020.

ACT's Facebook page grew by 31% to 8,500 followers.

Subscribers to ACT's online 'News Round-Up' reached 8,900.

As we look forward to a better year in 2021, ACT's staff and board commit ourselves to working with and on behalf of the autism community, and all those with neurodiversity in 2021.

Deborah Pugh

Executive Director, ACT - Autism Community Training

ACT mobilizes a community response to COVID-19

COVID-19 Resources Hub – filling the information void

ACT's first response to the pandemic was the creation of the COVID-19 Resources Hub. Launched on March 16, 2020, it gathered information for families and autistic adults on COVID-19, providing resources for coping with anxiety, uncertainty, changing routines and engaging children in home-based interventions. It is also where ACT has centralized links to information from government ministries to keep the community informed of any supports available to families and/or adults affected by neuro-developmental conditions. It has served as a portal for updating the community on our advocacy efforts, and those of our partners. It has also been a space for the community to share their experiences.

"Undoubtedly this has been ACT's finest hour. All the work they have done over many years to provide online support and information to families across BC became a lifeline for desperate families whose support systems were suddenly stripped away by the pandemic. ACT quickly mobilized their staff and volunteers, including BC autism experts, and offered information and reassurance to families. I couldn't be prouder of their efforts."

Dr. Mary Ellen Ross, former board member, donor and volunteer

The COVID-19 Information Hub has been visited over 15,000 times since March 16, 2020

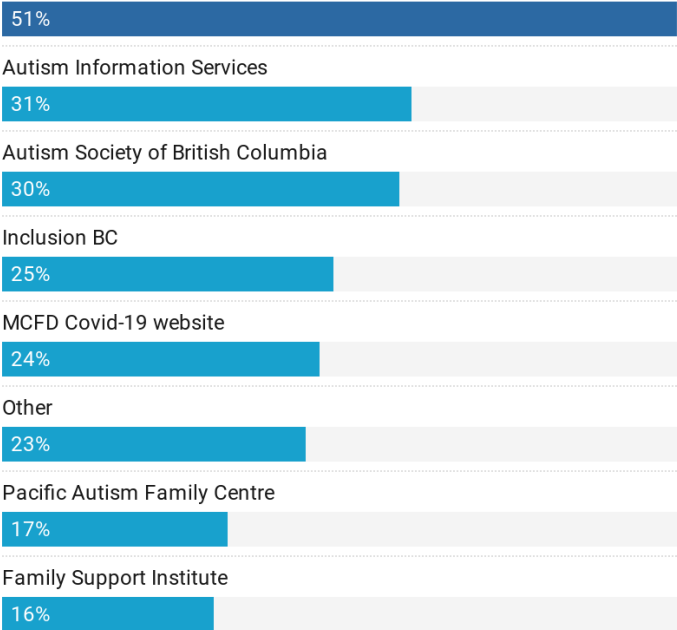


ACT - BC's leading source of autism information since 2005

ACT was able to respond swiftly to the pandemic because we have been developing our online resources for over a decade. This was in recognition of the diversity of the autism community and the need for a range of evidence-informed resources to support inclusion at home, in the community, at school and in the workplace.

SFU researchers recently published results of a survey of 238 families of children with autism, about their experiences with support services during the COVID-19 pandemic up to September 2020. 90% of the families who responded indicated they relied on the internet for information during the initial months of the pandemic. ACT's online resources was the source most frequently cited, with over 50% turning to ACT's website for autism-related information during this time.

ACT – Autism Community Training Society



¹ Simon Fraser University Research November 2020
www.actcommunity.ca/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-mental-health-quality-of-life-and-service-and-support-needs-in-families-of-children-with-asd

The 'Pandemic Presentations' – an immediate response in April & May

For those who work with families supporting high needs children, it was obvious that many families, who were struggling even prior to the pandemic, were panicked as to how to help their children. Researchers at SFU have demonstrated the shocking impact that the pandemic has had on families with 9% so desperate they have considered putting their children into care. ACT worked closely with Dr. Anthony Bailey, Chair of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of British Columbia [UBC], who offered himself as an "honorary member of ACT's staff for the duration". His advice was invaluable as we set up a series of free presentations to provide families with strategies to help their children, with the emphasis on prioritizing the mental health of all family members.

Sharing ACT's acute concerns, our community partners volunteered their expertise. They presented from their homes and, while there were interruptions including equipment failure, leaping cats, and downed powerlines, the response from the community was heartening. Hundreds joined the series of seven, one-hour live web-streams, but many more have watched the free recordings, which are still available as part of ACT's Autism Videos @ ACT.

ACT extends our gratitude to the presenters, listed below, who volunteered their insights as part of this series.

ACT'S Pandemic Presentations - 22,000 views since March

Apr 2 Autism, Anxiety and COVID-19

Anthony Bailey, MD - University of British Columbia
Grace Iarocci, PhD, R-Psych - Simon Fraser University
David Worling, PhD, R-Psych - Westcoast Child Development Group

Apr 15 Using Enforced Family Time to Support Learning at Home

Anthony Bailey, MD - University of British Columbia
Grace Iarocci, PhD, R-Psych - Simon Fraser University
Georgina Robinson, PhD - Provincial Outreach Program for Autism and Related Disorders

Apr 30 What Can I Do with My Child All Day? Strategies for Supporting Young Children

Pat Mirenda, PhD, BCBA-D - University of British Columbia
Paola Colozzo, PhD, RSLP - University of British Columbia

May 7 & 14 Coping with Behavior Challenges During COVID-19 – Setting Realistic Expectations for Families (Pt 1 & 2)

Brenda Fossett, PhD, BCBA-D - Capilano University
Richard Stock, PhD, BCBA-D - Capilano University

May 8 The Challenges of Advocacy During A Pandemic

Anthony Bailey, MD - University of British Columbia
Tracy Humphreys - BCEdAccess
Deborah Pugh - ACT - Autism Community Training
Karla Verschoor - Inclusion BC

May 19 Practical Tips for Helping Families Reduce Stress

Anthony Bailey, MD - University of British Columbia
Susan Fawcett, PhD, RSLP - Down Syndrome Resource Foundation

Summer Social Thinking® workshop – 1,000 registrants via web-streaming

In August, Michelle Garcia Winner of Social Thinking® presented a two-day Focus on Emotions workshop, web-streaming direct from the Social Thinking studio in Santa Clara, California to nearly 1,000 ACT's attendees, receiving glowing reviews. Thanks to support from POPARD and the Surrey School District, 750 educators from 55 BC school districts and 53 independent schools attended. ACT provided over \$8,000 in bursaries to low-income registrants, mainly parents.

ACT's free Fall-Winter 2020 web stream series

During the summer of 2020, not knowing how long the pandemic might last, ACT radically redeveloped our 2020 training program. Given the financial stresses facing families, we decided to develop a free, web-streamed only series with the long-term goal of ensuring we had new online videos to offer as part of Autism Videos @ ACT. Our focus has been on parent-friendly, practical presentations featuring local specialists.

Oct 22 **Building Community Recreation Skills:
Why it's Important to Get Your Child with Autism Involved, And Where to Start**
Dr. Stephanie Jull, Canucks Autism Network

Oct 23 **Combating Compassion Fatigue for Families and Caregivers of Children with Special Needs**
Dr. Georgina Robinson, POPARD

Nov 5 **Helping Your Child with Autism Thrive in Sport and Recreation**
Dr. Stephanie Jull, Canucks Autism Network

Nov 6 **Guided Practice in Mindful Self-Compassion – An Experiential Introductory Session for Parents of Children with Special Needs**
Dr. Georgina Robinson, POPARD

Nov 27 **Make It Stop! Understanding and Preventing Problem Behaviors**
Dr. Brenda Fossett, Capilano University

Nov 28 **Parents are Teachers Too! Embedding Instruction into Daily Routines and Activities**
Dr. Brenda Fossett, Capilano University

Dec 3&4 **IEP's... Why They Still Matter!**
Dr. Richard Stock, Capilano University

Over 1,500 people have registered for this free series of eight presentations in 2020, from 97 communities, from across Canada and around the world. The response from families and professionals is heartening:

“Please continue with these highly important topics and issues concerning our families. Being remotely located makes it difficult to access information. However now with COVID restrictions on everybody, we're all in the same boat!”

“Supporting others by sharing knowledge becomes way more accessible when it's free.... Your generosity and thoughtfulness will have an impact on the lives of those who need it most.”

“During this pandemic lockdown, there are families who are unable to have behavioral intervention services for their children ... A workshop like this one has helped many families with functional strategies and tips on how to prevent and manage problem behaviors from their children.”

ACT's online information resources are essential as numbers skyrocket

According to the latest statistics from the Ministry of Children and Families, there are over 19,000 children eligible for autism funding as of June 2020 – a 2,000 child increase over June 2019. The need for ACT's accessible and evidence-based information and training, so that families can use autism funding effectively, is greater than ever.

Autism Videos @ ACT

www.actcommunity.ca/videos

Autism Videos @ ACT (AVA) features 66 videos on many aspects of living with autism, relevant to a range of neurodiverse conditions, across the age span, presented by expert presenters and those with lived experience.

As of December, 2020, users have visited AVA 90,900 times, an increase of 64% over 2019.

BC Community Resources Database

www.actcommunity.ca/aid-search/community

The BC Community Resources Database (BCCRD) provides local information to users across the province, allowing searches of 1,200 resources based on town/city or postal code. Use of the BCCRD declined temporarily in 2020 as most community service providers were closed.

By September 2020 searches surpassed those of September 2019.

ACT's Autism Manual for BC

www.actcommunity.ca/autism-manual

13 chapters providing practical information from diagnosis, treatment to transition to adulthood.

The Autism Manual for BC was consulted 5,400 times in 2020, an 8% increase.

ACT's Autism Information Database

www.actcommunity.ca/aid-search

The Autism Information Database (AID) is a unique online portal that allows users to keyword search nearly 1,400 curated records containing evidence-based, practical, information resources. The AID has records in 36 languages. Submissions are screened by staff with oversight from ACT's International Advisory Panel.

The AID was searched over 16,000 times in 2020, a 15% increase over 2019.

Special Needs Community Events

www.actcommunity.ca/special-needs-community-events

As the pandemic shut down in-person services, many BC organizations started to offer online activities, including summer camps. ACT supported them by sharing information on their events.

British Columbians visited Community Events pages over 24,000 times, a 23% increase over 2019.

ACT in Chinese

www.actcommunity.ca/chinese

ACT in Chinese is a resource hub contains information on autism, Positive Behavior Support (PBS), Social Thinking and more.

ACT in Chinese received 41,000 visitors in 2020, a 17% increase over 2019.

"COVID-19 has intensified the need for ACT's resources as families dealing with ASD are always very vulnerable to misinformation and now their stress levels are so high. To me it is very important that ACT promotes resources that are evidence-based and can be trusted. This enables families and support workers to access quality, valid information that is free and available online anytime, regardless of their geographic location."

Anne McCaw, Donor, Member, Parent

Building ACT's resources for the future

To serve children with autism, autistic adults, and those with related conditions, in 2021 and beyond, ACT must continue to expand our resources. It is in the context of the need to support an extremely vulnerable and isolated sector of our province's population that ACT is seeking support. The following are ACT's goals for 2021. Achieving them all will depend on the level of funding we receive in the coming months.

ACT's Action List for 2021

- » Finalize our 2021 training program, recording key presentations for Autism Videos @ ACT (AVA)
- » Edit the 28 hours of video we have recorded in 2020 for inclusion in AVA
- » Expand captioning of key AVA videos into additional languages
- » Develop a new platform for the Autism Information Database and BC Community Resources Database
- » Accelerate ACT's systemic advocacy efforts in collaboration with other organizations
- » Continue updating our information resources, including ACT's Autism Manual for BC

Donate to Support ACT's Free Online Resources

www.actcommunity.ca/donate

ACT relies on donations to support our extensive free online resources. Please consider a one time donation or making a small monthly donation to sustain our training and information resources to ensure that the BC autism community, as well as users internationally, can benefit from evidence-based, positive and practical resources.

As a federally registered Canadian not-for-profit society, ACT can provide tax receipts for donations over \$10. ACT's Charitable Tax Number is #861691236RR0001.

Visit www.actcommunity.ca/donate for more information, or contact info@actcommunity.ca.

Thanking Oceanside Fisheries and all the "3rd Annual Herring Sale for Autism" Volunteers

ACT appreciates the continuing generosity and enthusiasm of Anne McCaw and Mike Rekis of Oceanside Fisheries, who donated 20,000 lbs of herring for the 2020 Herring Sale for Autism. We also extend our gratitude to the volunteers who braved the chilly weather to help sell every single one of those icy fish and to the sponsors who all contributed to ensuring the sale was a tremendous success. Please visit ACT's website for our [herring sale supporters](#).

Our thanks to each one of them for helping ACT serve the many thousands of people across BC, Canada and around the world who depend on our resources.



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www.actcommunity.ca/updates