

Asperger Manitoba Inc.

2009-2010 Annual Report

Asperger Manitoba Inc. is completing its sixth year as an organization providing service to, and advocacy for, individuals with Asperger Syndrome, their families, and caregivers. We are proud of what we have achieved since our incorporation in 2004. We have hosted conferences and support groups. We have facilitated research, provided public education, worked to create better community awareness of Asperger Syndrome, and now we have begun building an Asperger Manitoba Resource Centre (AMRC).. We have developed positive working relationships with service providers, funders in government, community, the corporate sector and the public media. All this we have achieved as an organization composed entirely of volunteers.

Achievements in 2009-10

The past year has been a busy one as we continued to build on previous initiatives while planning and implementing new ones.

Asperger Manitoba Resource Centre (AMRC)

A major accomplishment for AMI this year was the implementation of the Asperger Manitoba Resource Centre (AMRC) with support from the Investors Group, Winnipeg Foundation, and SMD Clearing House. Phase one of AMRC began with offering several sessions of Skills Group for Adults with AS at SMD Clearing House facilities.

The Asperger Manitoba Resource Centre (AMRC) is a resource centre offering social skills groups for children and skill development training in relationship, occupational, functional (life), and social skills to adults with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and related conditions who are not eligible for other community programs. The psycho-social small group programming is offered on a weekly basis facilitated by trained professionals to provide opportunities for adults and children to learn and practice social skills in an environment with peers and professional support. Skills training in different areas can help people with AS learn how to behave appropriately in a wide range of social situations, how to make friends, as well as how to create the structure in their lives that will help them to live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

A more detailed report on AMRC activities is attached at the end of this report.

Conference Planning

This year we are moving forward from the "Breaking Through" conference themes of the past 3 years to the next "Altogether Strong" theme. Our conference format changes somewhat as well with a one-day conference scheduled for November 4th followed by a series of shorter

workshops beginning on November 10th and progressing throughout the year. For full details on all sessions check our website at <http://www.asperger-manitoba.ca/conferences/altogether-strong-2010/> .

Of course we are very excited about our upcoming national conference in 2011. Planning has already begun for this conference scheduled for early November of 2011 with Dr. Tony Atwood as our keynote speaker. Watch our website <http://www.asperger-manitoba.ca> for more details as they become available.

Support Groups

AMI continued to sponsor or provide assistance to a number of support groups in 2009-2010.

The Parents of Children with AS and Parents of Adults with AS groups were combined for a period this year because we were not able to find a facilitator for the parents of adults group. Happily, a facilitator is now available and this fall we will once again sponsor both groups separately so that care givers can get support related to the age of their children with AS.

The Adult Peer Support Group and the Social Group for Adults with AS continue to flourish and initial planning has started on creating a Peer Support Group for Young Women with AS.

Thanks to the efforts of one of our retiring Board members, Vanessa Kimball, a Manitoba Chapter of the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN) was formed this year. ASAN provides people an opportunity to connect online around issues related to ASD. The Manitoba Region ASAN site can be found at <http://asanmbchapter.wordpress.com/>.

Research

This year AMI continued to connect with the research community and provided whatever assistance was possible to facilitate research related to AS. Results of our own Quality Of Life Research Project, carried out with funding from the Winnipeg Foundation, will soon be made available to AMI membership and the community at large.

Advocacy

AMI has continued to meet and dialogue with government and community representatives to advocate for improved services for those with AS, their parents, and caregivers. This is a continuous process that requires patience and the wisdom to "jump in" when opportunities present themselves. Change does not come as quickly as we would like but we must keep pursuing it.

Communications

The big news in AMI communications this year was that we finally updated our website. Thanks to Board members Andrea Villeneuve and Charlene Walberg we now have an informative website where our community and the public can go to get helpful and needed information. Keep checking our website regularly to stay in touch with happenings at AMI.

Education and Awareness

Over the past year, a number of presentations have been made on Asperger Syndrome throughout the province. AMI has fielded many requests, as has University of Manitoba, Department of Psychology. Presentations have been done by a number of board members including, Anne Kresta, Bev. Larmour and Janine Montgomery. Young Adults have also been involved in providing their perspectives to audience members. The following is a list of dates, places and audiences that have participated in increasing their knowledge of ASD.

- November 17, 2009 Springs Academy - Staff
- November 23, 2009 Winnipeg School Division - Staff
- January 16, 2010 Seine River School Division - Educational Assistants
- February 1, 2010 Jobworks - Educational Assistants
- February 18 + 19, 2010 Manitoba Council for Exceptional Children - educators etc
- March 2010 Autism Society of Manitoba - Telehealth Conference - parents and clinicians
- April 20, 2010 Springs Academy - Staff
- April 27, 2010 Brandon - Adult Service Providers
- April 30, 2010 St. James School Division - Staff
- April 30, 2010 Winnipeg School Division - Staff
- May 6, 2010 Steinbach - Adult Service Providers
- October 27, 2010 Holy Cross School - Staff
- October 27, 2010 River East Transcona School Division - Educational Assistants and Parents

Policy

Building upon last year's revision of our Bylaw, this year the Board began the process of policy development based on the revised Bylaw. Policies relating to conflict of interest and a code of conduct were developed and adopted by the Board. The Board also acquired insurance policies to protect AMI members, volunteers, staff, and Board members during performance of work on behalf of AMI.

Public Relations and Media Issues

Asperger Manitoba Inc. is starting to become the source that the media comes to for comment when ASD issues surface in the news. When the American Psychiatric Association released its first draft of the DSM-5 for comment and discussion the Globe and Mail came to AMI for comment on the proposal to subsume the diagnosis of Asperger Disorder into the Autism

Spectrum Disorder. In other examples the CBC, CJOB, and other media have come to AMI for comment and information on various AS related issues.

The AMI Board has formed both a Public Relations and a Media Issues committee to enable us to respond effectively and intelligently when the media calls on us for information.

Financial Report

We have been able to make significant progress on initiatives such as AMRC and our annual conferences even though AMI has no core funding or a significant regular revenue stream. We rely on community partners for project funding and upon volunteer commitment to make our projects happen.

Our Annual Audited Financial Statement is available under separate cover and will be presented to membership at the AGM.

Membership

At AMI's August 2010 Board meeting it was voted that membership fees would be raised starting January 1, 2011. Memberships will also be available for family rates. The membership structure will also be changed to reflect a member having a membership for their entire year, rather than all memberships expiring at the Annual General Meeting. The membership fee structure will be as follows:

- Individual \$15
- Family \$25
- Corporations, Organizations, Etc - \$40
- Individuals with Asperger Syndrome - \$10

Individuals/Families/Corporations will receive discounts on services offered (such as conference, skills groups (if a fee is charged) and merchandise), as well as voting privileges at AGM's and the ability to fill positions on the AMI board

AMI Knowledge Base

AMI has developed a FAQ that is currently available on the website. It is hoped that it will answer many of the common questions that we get regarding AS. The FAQ will always be a document that will be continuously updated, to contain current information and resources as well; additional questions for the FAQ will be added as they come up.

Priorities for Next Year

Continue Development of AMRC

Over the next year we will work to expand programs and services available through AMRC as we move from phase 1 to phase 2 of this initiative.

Host National Conference with Tony Atwood

We are very excited about hosting a national conference with Tony Atwood next fall. Planning has already begun but there is still much more work to do. We invite all AMI members to get involved in making this conference a huge success.

Challenges

Our challenges for the next year are similar to the challenges we faced this year.

AMI runs exclusively on volunteer people power. We need to recruit additional volunteers to serve on committees and to work on projects. We also need to find ways to prevent volunteer burnout in those who have already given so much and are such valuable assets to our organization.

We also need to pursue core funding to sustain the work of AMI and to help us become a more effective service provider to, and advocate for, the Asperger community.

Acknowledgements

A successful organization that survives because of its volunteers will always have many people to thank. AMI is no different.

Members of the AMI Board of Directors

Our Board members are actively involved in all our activities. They are:

- Gene Semchych - Chair and President
- Bev Larmour - Vice-Chair and Vice-President
- Andrea Villeneuve - Treasurer
- Anne Kresta - Secretary
- Janine Montgomery - Director
- Vanessa Kimball - Director
- Janet Thompson - Director
- Charlene Walberg - Director
- Jeremy Strub - Director

We are sorry that Directors Janine Montgomery, Vanessa Kimball, and Jeremy Strub will be retiring from the Board this year. Our thanks and best wishes go out to them.

I will also be retiring from the Board this year after 6 years of involvement dating back to the beginning of Asperger Manitoba Inc. It has been a fruitful and enjoyable 6 years and I am somewhat saddened in leaving. But I prefer to think of my departure as not leaving, just resting.

Support Group and AMRC Social Skills Leaders

We thank Jeremy Strub and Janet Thompson for leading the Peer Support Group, Hazel Birt and Jeremy Strub for leading the Social Group for Young Adults, and Andrea Villeneuve and Charlene Walberg for leading the two parent support groups. We thank Vanessa Kimball for her leadership in initiating the Manitoba Chapter and Website for ASAN (Autistic Self- Advocacy Network) and for laying the groundwork for a peer support group for young women with AS.

We also thank those who have made our initial efforts at building AMRC possible. Bev Larmour has been the tireless leader of the AMRC initiative. Anne Kresta, Janine Montgomery, and Charlene Walberg have worked diligently on funding proposals and advising Bev in her work. Jeremy Strub has provided input from the AS community. And not to be forgotten are the Social Skills Group Facilitators: Nick Enns, Quinn Senkew, and Seb North.

Friends of AMI

There are many others to thank including Richard Irish, Murray Taylor, Jon Gerrard, Kathy Grabowecky, Natalie Mulaire, staff at the Winnipeg Foundation, and many others who are good friends to AMI. Unfortunately there are too many to mention and I apologize to those I have neglected to acknowledge.

On to Next Year

In summary, this has been a good and successful year for Asperger Manitoba Inc. I invite you to help us make this next year even better.

Submitted by:

Gene Semchych, President

On behalf of the Board of Directors, Asperger Manitoba Inc.

AMRC Annual Report

The Asperger Manitoba Resource Centre (AMRC) is a resource centre offering social skills groups for children and skill development training in relationship, occupational, functional (life), and social skills to adults with Asperger Syndrome (AS) and related conditions who are not eligible for other community programs. The psycho-social small group programming is offered on a weekly basis facilitated by trained professionals to provide opportunities for adults and children to learn and practice social skills in an environment with peers and professional support. Skills training in different areas can help people with AS learn how to behave appropriately in a wide range of social situations, how to make friends, as well as how to create the structure in their lives that will help them to live healthier, more fulfilling lives.

The Skills Training Group for Adults with AS is a client-driven program that will provide adults with AS and other related disorders, who are currently not receiving this kind of support, an opportunity to gain knowledge and competence in using various skills in their daily lives.

Specific skill development areas that may be covered in the group sessions:

- Understanding non-verbal cues and body language
- Dealing with frustration and anxiety
- Using conversation skills
- Building and maintaining friendships
- Dating and Employment skills
- Dealing with school and family demands

The Building Social Skills Group for Children and Youth with AS is a social skills training program designed to help individuals with AS to navigate a wide range of social situations and to make friends. Since Parent/Caregiver involvement can greatly improve generalization of the skills learned during group sessions to their home and school environment, parent/caregiver sessions are offered concurrently with the children's social skills group.

Students in the Masters level School Psychology program at U of M have facilitated two 8-session pilot groups of the Skills Training Group for Adults with AS with 10-12 participants in each session. Pre- and Post-Group evaluation data scores indicate that all participants scored higher on emotional intelligence assessments following the 8 sessions. Participants have given overwhelmingly positive feedback about their experiences. Most expressed a desire for more sessions and the facilitators have agreed to begin a monthly support group for "grads" of the program. Some of the participants' comments have included the following:

- I can keep conversations going for much longer
- It helped me with some friendships, maintaining them, trying to fix anything which went wrong in the past. I've also used some of the calming techniques talked about in the group.
- When dealing with people who do offend me, I'm actually able to express the fact that I'm offended rather than playing the victim and pointing fingers at them.
- I think I was able to analyze anger more effectively. I used to react, now I try to calm and relax before approaching a disagreement with someone and assess the situation more. People from the group said it was helpful to try and see where the other person is coming from, where their

thinking might be. Maybe it wasn't the bus drivers fault I was late. I could try organizing my time a little better before boarding the bus, so I have the right connections.

- I've found that it's getting easier for me to function in public, like asking for directions if I'm lost or going places on my own.
- Everyone had a chance to contribute something. We all had a good time and made each other laugh. We all tried our best to be supportive. I think there will be a few new friendships out of this group, as they've already begun to take shape.
- I had a safe place to talk about my feelings and felt safe sharing my knowledge with others.
- I liked being around others. Meeting new people, receiving support. Building positive, safe relationships. I felt I came out of the group with new skills, new perspectives and knowledge.
- When I talked I felt that I was really being listened to.
- It gave me the push I needed and I met lots of nice people. I was relieved. I found myself thinking on more than one occasion, "thank god I'm not the only one".
- The freedom to share my feelings and fears with people who all share the same if not similar fears. And hearing other people's stories made me realize how strong some of us are.

Through the Building Social Skills Group for Children and Youth with AS project supported by the U of M, two graduate students from the University of Manitoba conducted an 8 week social skills group for five boys aged 10 to 12 years of age with Asperger syndrome and related disorders. This project also demonstrated success as indicated by pre- and post-Group evaluation data scores that indicated that all participants scored higher on emotional intelligence assessments following the 8 sessions. Social Skills Pre & Post Scores based on parent and self-assessments also demonstrated growth and improvement. All parents were very or extremely satisfied with the program, ranked it better or much better than other groups their child had attended and wished it would continue or go on much longer than 8 weeks. Positive parent evaluation comments included the following:

- The group has given us chances to talk about some of the topics and made him more aware of how to interact with others and the impact of his actions on others.
- He introduces himself more often. He also walks away from conflict more often.
- Seems to be somewhat more cognizant of others.
- Seems more confident. Less anxious. During games (electronic or sports), more able to handle his emotions and has less flare ups. Participates a little more in class discussions.

New applications are being received for both programs regularly and new applicants are put on a wait list for upcoming sessions. Plans are underway for sessions to begin during the 2010 fall term for both groups. The 12 individuals on the wait list for the adult group have been contacted for the upcoming session and plans for contacting the families for the children's group are in process as well.

The AMRC has received grant support from: The Winnipeg Foundation, Investors Group and the University of Manitoba. A proposal to apply for a grant to support a new group for teens/youth has been submitted to the Opt In program at St. Mary's United Church.