



Who We are

A group of proactive parents working collaboratively with family, neighbours, community, education & autism professionals, school districts, government, and private associations to create happiness and success for their children with Autism.

SASS – YEAR AT A GLANCE 2023!

We've finished another **AMAZING year supporting families** in our community affected by **Autism and other special needs** and we are excited to provide you with an **overview of what we've been doing to help so many families**. This support would not be possible without the **generous contributions from organizations like yours**, directed by **kind & purposeful people like you**.

Here are some of the HIGHLIGHTS from 2023:

CAREGIVER MEETINGS & EDUCATION

- We provided **Monthly SASS Support Meetings** from **September to May** for parents, caregivers & community advocates with a variety of guest speakers providing valuable information making a meaningful difference in the lives of others and connecting families to the resources they need. Each meeting included a Guest Speaker on a purposeful topic for our families.

We are especially grateful to the local sponsors who support these meetings: **Whiskers & Wags, Pizzability, Tim Hortons, Route 14 and T & H Nails**.

INCLUSIVE FAMILY EVENTS & ACTIVITIES

- We provided a **free Sensory Santa Photo Shoot for 20 families** making memories for years to come – our measure of success was every single child sat with Santa which in and of itself, is an accomplishment! Many of these kids had never experienced sitting with Santa & having their photo taken – and siblings loved participating! #Adorable #WarmsYourHeart

We are especially thankful for our Volunteer Photographer, **Mary-Anne Bowcott** of Westcom Plumbing and Santa, **Dave McMillan** of McMillan Renovations & Repair.

- We provided **20 amazing Holiday & Craft Care Packages to families in November**. These are loaded with crafts and memory-making items for families to share together. This initiative receives wonderful support each year from **AutismBC**.



- We provided a **Free Family Swim Pass to 20 families in April** to acknowledge **April as Autism Acceptance Month**.
- We sponsored a tree for **SASS the Festival of Trees in December** and families came down to add their home-made decorations and enjoy a **free family swim on behalf of SASS**. This is also a great way of promoting SASS within the community.



SUMMER CAMP GRANT for EASTER SEALS

- We were delighted to award a family with our brand-new **Summer Camp Grant**, which covered the fees for one week worth of summer camp at Easter Seals BC (www.eastersealsbcy.ca). They have been providing fun & adventure for children & adults with special needs for many years.

This was made possible due to a grant SASS received from the **Juan de Fuca Health Foundation**.

COMMUNITY AWARENESS

In April, we participated in **Sookarama** to promote awareness in our community and spoke to over **200 people** in one day! We spoke to grandparents, parents, siblings, relatives and neighbours of those with ASD. Many signed up to be added to our monthly SASS E-Newsletter or our SASS FB page to stay connected & informed.

We were awarded a **\$500 Grant through 4imprint** which allowed us to buy a SASS Sign and SASS-logo Table Cloth to use at this and other events this year!



SCHOLARSHIPS

- We awarded the **SASS Ambassador of Inclusion Scholarship** for the 5th year to a deserving graduate of EMCS who promoted the positive inclusion of those with special needs at school, in the community and/or at home! For a list of recipients, check out our website.
- We awarded the first **SASS Individual Support Scholarship to** a deserving graduate of EMCS who has special needs to help them with the next chapter of their special needs journey! This new scholarship was made possible due to a grant SASS received from the **Juan de Fuca Health Foundation**.

SIBKIDS SIBSHOPS

We delivered the first ever **SibKids Sibshops** 5-part workshop series in April to **siblings of those with special needs** who are often overlooked when it comes to support. We are delighted to be offering this program again in May/June 2024.

- Siblings will be part those with special needs lives LONGER than parents will
- Siblings endure a LIFETIME of challenges and responsibilities they did not sign up for
- Siblings make many personal SACRIFICES that go unrecognized and unacknowledged
- Siblings bring PEACE OF MIND to parents when they have to think about what life is like once they are not there to support their child with special needs (this IS the kind of stuff we lose sleep over)



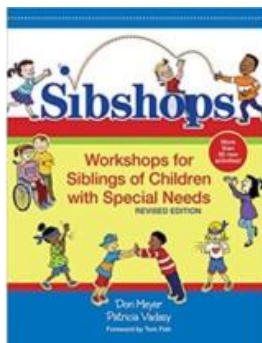
The impact of this program was so important as per the parent feedback provided:

[Jennifer] had a great time meeting 'kids like her'. She made 2 new friends and was smiling at the end. It was very fun and it helped [Jennifer] to remember to be nice to her brother and not just expect him to be nice to her. Of most value – to have somewhere for [Jennifer] to go that was just for her. To talk about her feelings and meet other kids who understand.

She definitely had fun, mentioned a few kids names and some she already knew from school. Of most value – Just giving the kids the opportunity to know they aren't alone in their experiences and feelings.

My child discussed that he likes the games and activities. Of most value – Ability to connect with other kids in similar circumstances (not alone, feeling okay)

My daughter shared that she had fun, really enjoyed the games and snacks! Of most value - It was a positive experience for her to interact and share time with kids with a similar experience.



This was another program made possible due to a grant SASS received from the **Juan de Fuca Health Foundation**. We are so grateful to **Margaret Treleven** of **Community Options for Children and Families** for facilitating this program on our behalf.

We are so committed to this program, two of the SASS Executive have now taken the **Sibshops Training** to become certified Sibshop Facilitators. We will be delivering again this May/June!

SOCIAL GROUPS FOR ADULTS 18+ WITH ASD & OTHER SPECIAL NEEDS

- We launched a brand-new **Social Group for Adults 18+ with ASD** and other special needs designed to provide social opportunities & connect them to their community! This group meets via Zoom each month to decide on their in-person activity for the month.

So far this group has enjoyed an Evening of Board Games, Bowling, Video Gaming Party & is Laser Tagging this month!

This program is possible due to a grant SASS received from the **Victoria Foundation.**

MENTORING & RESOURCE SUPPORT

- We provided **several one-on-one mentoring and support sessions** to families receiving their new ASD diagnosis.
- We provided families with **several items from our SASS Lending Library**, which includes books, videos, games and other learning & development resources. We also received many wonderful donations making our library even bigger!

COMMUNITY FUNDRAISING



We held our **Annual Bottle Drive Fundraiser in May** and raised \$1,280 -- This is a great way to connect as a group as well as, raise awareness in the community!

Thank you to **Keith Palle** of Keith's Mini Excavating for supporting our bottle drive by providing a dump truck to provide signage for this event!

This year our annual bottle drive is set for April 2024.

OUR SASS REACH IS GROWING!

We are now **providing information, support and programs for 153 families in Sooke** which is up from **112** last year. We now have approximately **48 community advocates and service providers** which is also up significant from last year at 30. Our SASS Community is growing every single month!

We do this through our active **SASS Facebook** page (**568 followers** up from 513 last year), our website, our monthly E-newsletter and the many, many emails we receive and respond to at sooke.sass@gmail.com.



WHAT'S NEW FOR 2024?

This year we plan to add a **SASS Easter Egg Hunt** in Sooke along with an **educational workshops series** for 18+ related to budgeting and other life skills.

We also continue to apply for grants to **continue the many wonderful programs** we've recently established along with bringing new ones to the community. We would love to be able to establish a Respite Fund to offer this to our families at some time in the future.

As more and more families rely on the many services SASS provides, we are proactively seeking ways to ensure we can continue to fund and provide this support.

A SINCERE & HEARTFELT THANK YOU

As you can see, we are **passionate about our commitment to making a difference** in the lives of those affected by Autism. Everyone in our organization is a volunteer and the work we do is only possible because of the generous contributions from people like you – thank you!

An extra heartfelt THANK YOU to the private organizations who've provided **generous donations** over the past few years – your consistent support helps us make a difference in the lives of others:

- Pareto Systems
- Morson Carson Wealth Council of Richardson Wealth
- Accutax Sooke
- Westcom Plumbing
- McMillan Renovation & Repair
- Keith's Mini Excavating
- Mindset Consulting

If you have any questions about any of our SASS community initiatives or would like to continue to support the Sooke Autism Support Society (SASS), please feel free to contact us.

We appreciate you and we wish you all the very best for 2024!

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