

big PLANS in print

Connecting Big Plans' Parents to their Communities

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Autism Calgary Here to Support Families



It's not easy to hear the news that your child has autism, and realize that your life will be utterly different than you had expected it to be.

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and autism are both general terms for a group of complex disorders of brain development. These disorders are characterized, in varying degrees, by difficulties in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and repetitive behaviors. ASD can be associated with intellectual disability, difficulties in motor coordination and attention and physical health issues such as sleep and gastrointestinal disturbances. Some persons with ASD excel in visual skills, music, math and art. Autism appears to have its roots in very early brain development; however, the most obvious signs of autism and symptoms of autism tend to emerge between 2 and 3 years of age.

Daily life with a special-needs child presents many unique challenges. If you are wondering **“What is out there for me now that there is autism in my life?”**, Autism Calgary can help guide and support you.

Originally just a volunteer board, Autism Calgary has grown to an organization with several part-time employees. Autism Calgary staff all have a family member with autism, so they have personal experience with this disorder. They also recognize that each family is unique, and understand that the family is the constant in the individual's life, as well as the experts on the individual's ability and needs. With this in mind, they make sure that the strengths and needs of all family members are considered.

Autism Calgary helps to bring hope and meet the needs of families and individuals living with ASD by providing support, education and being their advocate. In addition, they work

to encourage the advancement of meaningful research and the development of effective treatment options while being the voice of families and individuals living with ASD. When a family first receives the diagnosis, they not only have to deal with their emotions and shock, but are also given such a long “to do” list (from connecting with the school to looking into tax credits), that it is nice to know they can turn to Autism Calgary for help.



Autism Calgary staff are not only ready to help, but each of them has a family member with autism, so they have personal experience with the disorder.

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Parents Learning About Needs and Skills

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www.bigplans.org

Continued from cover story...

Some of the support and information offered by Autism Calgary includes:

- Direct Family Support – offered on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursdays from 9:00 am to 5:00 pm. You can phone them directly at (403) 250-5033 (press '0') or email them at : info@autismcalgary.com to be connected to the family support team.
- Education about Family Support for Children with Disabilities Program (FSCD). They support families in understanding and navigating this very important benefits program.
- Information about Educational options; (Preschool, grade school and community programs, adult education)
- Providing lists of resources of community and recreational opportunities.

In addition to the direct support, Autism Calgary has a number of support groups that run monthly. Some of these include:

- Parent's Connecting Support Group: This group aims to help parents connect and to share their stories, challenges and successes of living with their special children. For families who care for someone with autism 18 yrs or under.
- BioMedical Support Group: For anyone interested in alternative therapies for the treatment of autism.

- Father's Autism Network Support Group: For fathers who care for children or adults with autism.
- KIT (Keeping it Together) Support Group: For moms only who are interested in having an evening of, simply, self care.
- FSCD Workshops: To assist families to navigate the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Program.

They also offer families a free membership which includes:

- Borrowing privileges with their extensive library. Autism Calgary has the largest autism-specific library in Western Canada that includes books, CD's and DVD's.
- Free swimming at Vecova's warm pool on Sundays for your whole family. This time is reserved solely for ACA members.
- Pokemon Club: For all youth and adults on the first and third Tuesday of the month. It is a fun and safe environment for all and the group is led by an enthusiastic father and son team.

CONTACT AUTISM CALGARY

Phone 403-250-5033

Email: info@autismcalgary.com

Visit their website at www.autismcalgary.com

Stop in to the office at 174, 3359-27th Street NE.

AUTISM CALGARY



Pokemon Trading Card Game

When: First and Third Tuesdays of the Month

Time: 6:30 – 8:30pm.

Where: Autism Calgary – 3359-27 Street NE

The Pokemon Trading card game appears complicated to the Neurotypical Brain. That is because it was created by an Autistic person. Many people have cards but have never learned to play. This is a family event that is a safe place to come learn and be with a group. Kids (bring a parent) and adults are welcome.

- Safe non-judgmental environment
- We will help you learn how to play
- If you don't have cards the club has several starter decks you can use, or you can build and take home your own deck from our donated cards
- If you are already an accomplished player come help out and be a part of the community
- Safe group facilitated by a father/son
- We will be a small group (at least to start) which should not be overwhelming from a sensory standpoint

Autism Calgary

174, 3359-27th Street NE

403-250-5033

Snack Time!



Fruit and cheese in a fun package. Simply put your snack in a plastic bag and twist a pipe cleaner around the center. Curl the ends to make antennae. Photo from kraftrecipes.com

Trade in the crackers for this brain-boosting snack - cucumber and cheese sandwiches! Found on skinnymom.com



get to know your wild neighbours

The City of Calgary Parks is proud to partner with the Get to Know program. The Get to Know program has been inspiring connections between children and nature in the outdoors for over a decade. We hope you can participate in one of these exciting opportunities and “get to know your wild neighbours!”

o.i.s.e.a.u.

Psst, have you heard of the super-secret Agents of Nature mobile app? Download the game for free, head to a participating Calgary park, and get ready for adventure! Explore the park while solving fun nature challenges to earn coins and rewards! The game is available at these City of Calgary parks:

- Devonian Gardens
- Sandy Beach
- Bowmont Park
- Ralph Klein Park
- Nose Hill Park
- Prairie Winds Park

Be prepared for adventure, mystery, and a whole lot of fun! Kids learn more, have more fun, and feel more connected to nature when they play Agents of Nature (compared to a self-guided or an interpreter-led tour of a park). There's even a study to prove it! Rise to the challenge. Join the Agents of Nature. Download the free app at *Agents of Nature* <http://agentsofnature.com> and get ready for a game that's a real adventure!



agents of nature



The not so secret, secret agency dedicated to working & playing outside to solve challenges, explore local parks, and connect with the natural environment. The Game is free and is available to download and play on all Android and Apple iOS mobiles. Once downloaded, choose a Mission Site to start your adventure. You play the game your way, right at the Mission Site! Each Mission Site will have hidden challenges that you unlock by scanning QR codes with your super secret Agents of Nature scanning device (your phone). Use the hints and clues from your surroundings to solve the riddles. Become an Agent of Nature Today! <http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Programs/Get-to-know.aspx>

Free Outdoor Fun In Calgary's Ralph Klein Park

Don't miss Parks Fest 2015 and check out the unique drop-in programs offered at Ralph Klein Park during the summer months.

Parks Fest 2015

Celebrate Calgary's unique 30-hectare park featuring a man-made wetland, endless nature trails and breathtaking mountain views. Bring your family and friends to enjoy an afternoon of activities, including nature games, face painting, pond dipping and much more! Please note that dogs are not permitted on site (excluding assistance dogs).

Date: June 21

Time: 1 – 3 p.m.

Location: Ralph Klein Park

Cost: FREE, donations welcome

Wetland Bug Safari

Safari in the city! Discover ferocious floaters, amazing acrobats and tiny transformers in our wetland. Guided by an environmental educator, participants will capture fascinating insects and invertebrates and learn how these tiny creatures survive and thrive in the storm-water pond. All equipment and bug guides are provided.

Dates: Tuesdays, July 7 - August 25; Time: 1 – 3 p.m.

Location: Ralph Klein Park; Cost: FREE

What Bird is That?

Learn cool bird ID skills and use binoculars and scopes to spot amazing birds. Impress your friends and stump your parents with your newfound skills.

Dates: Thursdays, July 9 - September 3; Time: 1 – 3 p.m.

Location: Ralph Klein Park; Cost: FREE

A WALK IN THE PARK

Come enjoy some fresh air and exercise as Calgary Parks invites you to explore four of Calgary's amazing parks! Join us in each of these parks to learn about their history, wildlife and plants through fun-filled nature experiences, including guided walks, learning stations, games and activities. All ages are welcome!

- June 11 - Elliston Park - 6:30 - 8 p.m.
- June 12 - Nose Hill Park - 6:30 - 8 p.m.
- June 13 - Carburn Park - 11 a.m. - 3 p.m.
- June 14 - South Glenmore Park - 9:30 - 11 a.m.

Cost: FREE, donations welcome

<http://www.calgary.ca/CSPS/Parks/Pages/Programs/Parks-programs.aspx>

NATURE COLOR HUNT

Gather a multi-compartment tray (ice cube tray, egg carton, baby food tray etc.), scissors and colored paper or foam for each section. Cut your foam/paper into pieces small enough to line the bottom of the tray/carton. For younger kids choose colors that you know they have a chance of finding a match. Head outside and start finding things to match. Start off by choosing a color with your child and both go looking. If they have a hard time finding a match, find one and narrow down the area for them. Continue working together or if they want to work all alone, watch your child explore and make connections, that is exciting and fun too!



Dance & Movement for Children With Special Needs

"Imprinted on the muscular memory structure of our bodies is not only the knowing of how to sit, stand, walk and run, but where we are in space and how to move with grace and reason - even to create something beautiful and exquisite in the process."

- Carla Hannaford

Dance and Movement offers many benefits, from improving physical health to giving children a creative way to express themselves. However, for children with special needs, the benefits of being involved in a Dance or Movement program are endless. From improving motor skills to fostering social relationships and self-esteem, these programs give students a sense of belonging and invite them to be a part of a caring and supportive community.

One Calgary company, Dubasov Dance and Wellness, offers specialized and inclusive dance, yoga and movement programs to children, youth and adults with special needs. Telisa Dubasov, founder and owner of the studio, says her goal is to get students with mixed abilities "moving and able to find a different means of expression for themselves. Of these children with special needs, she says, "many of them are non-verbal, many of them have behavioral issues and many of them would have difficulty finding the same success and enjoyment in mainstream activities."



The studio offers a wide array of programs for those who are touched with physical, developmental, cognitive and sensory needs. Current programs include: Autism Movement Program, Dance for Physical Needs, Dance for Down Syndrome, Sibling & Me Creative Art, and Yoga for Special Needs. While the children are excited to participate in a real dance or yoga class, these classes are often "therapeutic programs in disguise," says Dubasov. "There are physical benefits from the class. While the children may think they are just learning ballet, they are also gaining gross motor skills, fine motor skills, plus getting social interaction," says Dubasov.

For example, the Autism Movement Program for ages 3-17 was created for children diagnosed with Autism and/or ADD/ADHD and incorporates movement and music, yoga and heavy work activities. The students are among peers with similar needs in a safe, welcoming and structured environment, allowing them to gain independence, decrease anxiety and increase social skills. It is a fun way for students to develop and improve strength, coordination and balance while exploring their imagination and finding a means of expression. The Yoga Program for Special Needs is another example of a program that has therapeutic benefits, as the specialized breathing exercises and relaxation techniques are practiced to improve concentration and reduce hyperactivity.

Cutting-edge research points to children with Autism needing multiple types of stimulation in order to process information. The combination of music and dance help the brain to reorganize itself. In dance, the child processes music, learns movement, performs movement to that music, then repeats it multiple times. The hearing, listening, processing, executing and repetition enable a child's brain to forge new pathways, engaging both the right and left sides of the brain.¹

While students are developing and improving their motor skills, they are also improving their overall health. Since participating in team sports or other types of exercise may be a challenge for some children with special needs, these activities allow them to improve strength and flexibility in a program that is catered to their needs and abilities.

Many parents also notice a significant improvement in their child's mood, self-confidence, self-esteem and social skills after participating in dance and movement classes. One mom said, "Since my daughter has started a dance and movement program, she has a new light of light that shines through her eyes. She is more social now. She is smiling more and when asked to look in a certain direction or turn her head she listens. She has a deeper sense of awareness and wisdom coming out."



Dance and Movement can have a calming effect and make children feel happy, which, in turn, improves their overall mood. This effect is due in great part to the release of endorphins that takes place during physical exercise. An increase in the child's self esteem and confidence is also typical as they achieve new skills. For many people with special needs who have trouble communicating, dance and movement provide them a means of self-expression and an outlet for them to creatively communicate their thoughts and feelings with peers that can relate and share in the experience.

1. www.autismkey.com

If your child would like to experience a Dance, Movement or Yoga Class, Dubasov Dance and Wellness invites families to try a complimentary class! Contact Telisa for more information at dubasovdw@gmail.com.

 **dubasov**
DANCE & WELLNESS

EXPRESSIVE MOVEMENT FOR ALL ABILITIES

12-6325 12 St SE www.dubdw.com