



**Sinneave**  
FAMILY FOUNDATION

# 2020 IMPACT REPORT

Responding - Adapting - Collaborating  
For Community IMPACT





## President’s Message

The Sinneave Family Foundation (Sinneave) works to remove barriers and enhance opportunities that help autistic youth and adults to live, learn, work and thrive in their communities. The unprecedented disruption experienced in 2020 strengthened our resolve in fulfilling the promise of our mission in an ever-changing world. This report highlights our efforts to respond to needs in a changing landscape, to adapt and seize opportunities, and to collaborate with others where we could unlock community and system potential to shape a promising future for those on the autism spectrum.

I want to acknowledge Sinneave’s resilient staff, engaged board of directors and committed partners for their respective agility and determination in mobilizing our collective strength to achieve meaningful impact in 2020.

## Who We Are

Sinneave is an operating foundation that has been committed to enhancing quality of life for autistic youth and adults since its inception in 2008. We operate [The Ability Hub](#) in Calgary, Alberta, where we develop programs and services that help people achieve their goals. We collaborate with others to share practices and resources and to build community capacity. We generate, distil and mobilize knowledge to extend our reach and influence systems change. We employ a highly skilled and experienced team that work cooperatively with stakeholders to transform pressing challenges into opportunities. We invest in targeted initiatives using leveraged funding approaches to promote enduring solutions.

## What We Believe

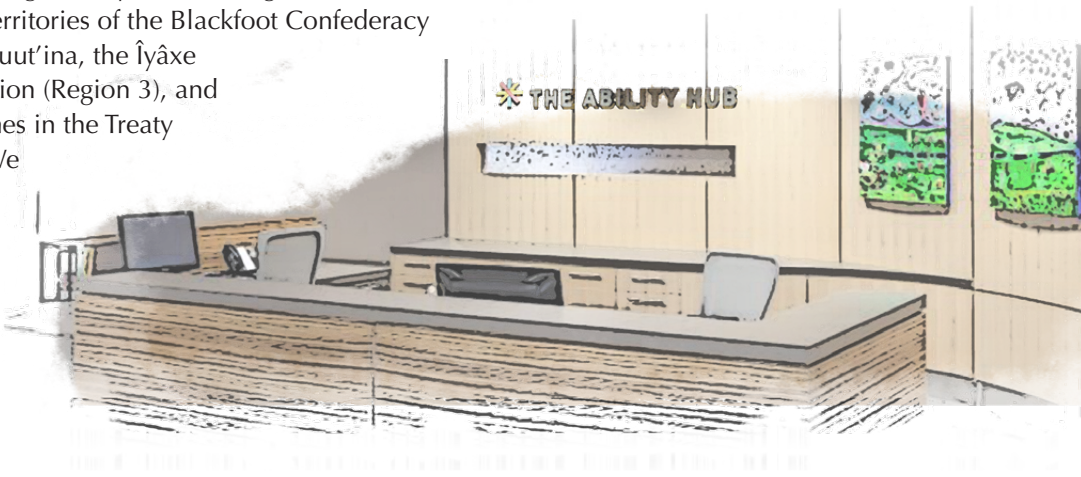
We believe that investing resources in the period of life in which youth transition to adulthood provides significant and lasting returns. We believe that intentional planning for this important window of time supports success in achieving goals. We believe that education or training beyond high school can be transformative in creating opportunities for autistic people to fulfil their potential. We believe that workplaces benefit from the unique perspectives, talents, and skills of autistic employees. We believe that every autistic person has the right to housing that is safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable. We believe it is beneficial to work collaboratively with others to achieve collective community impact.

## What We Do

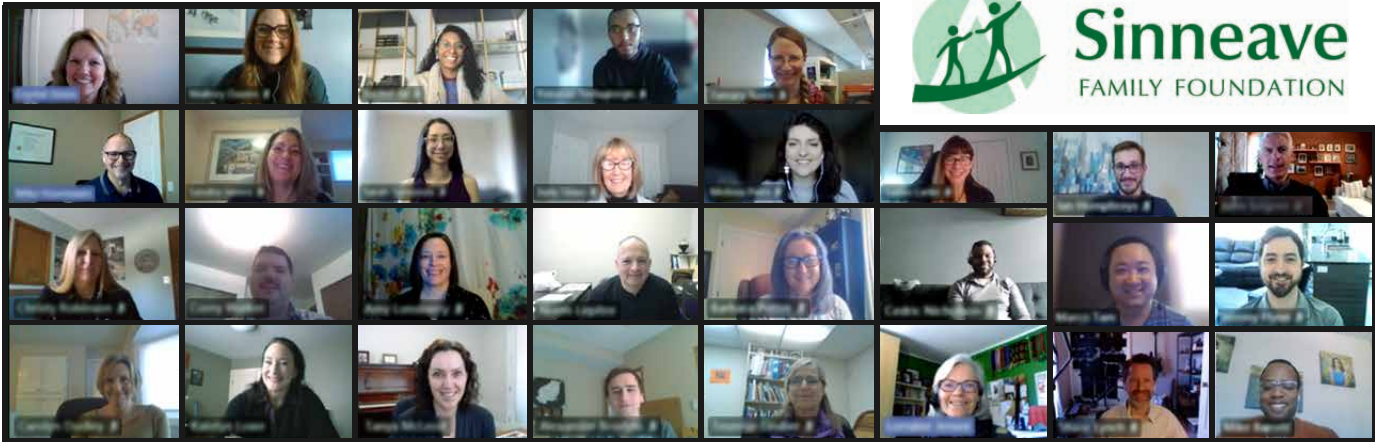
We provide reliable information and helpful navigation to a variety of local services and supports through our [Resource Centre](#). We create learning opportunities through programs, workshops, online resources and courses. We develop, test and evaluate new approaches to goal driven skill development. We share evaluative findings to scale up promising practices in other communities. We invite new ways of thinking about, understanding and addressing needs. We engage lived experience in the development and implementation of initiatives. We invest in a portfolio of purposeful projects aimed at improving outcomes in education beyond high school, employment and housing for autistic Albertans.

## Land Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, we gratefully acknowledge that our work takes place on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (Siksika, Kainai, Piikani), the Tsuut’ina, the Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, the Métis Nation (Region 3), and all people who make their homes in the Treaty 7 region of Southern Alberta. We pay our respect to their elders, past and present, for stewarding the land, water and the life of this region from time immemorial.



## Our Team: Many Voices - One Vision



## Responding to the Need for Enhanced Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

The Sinneave Family Foundation aspires to be a workplace where people of different backgrounds, identities, experiences, strengths and abilities are welcomed and their contributions to the advancement of the organization’s mission are valued. We recognize that inclusion is a journey where we will have both successes and failures, but we commit to moving forward in an inclusive, thoughtful and systematic way. In 2020, we engaged all of our staff to identify priorities for the organization and we defined four organizational pillars to support our efforts:

**Leadership and Accountability** | **Goals and Action** | **Education and Training** | **Measurement and Evaluation**

We take a broad view of inclusion that incorporates inclusion of race, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, physical and mental difference, age and socioeconomic status.

## Adapting and Collaborating to Advance Our Work

We partnered with the [Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion](#) to structure our efforts in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion in our workplace and in our work. We prioritized learning and all staff participated in two education sessions - Diversity and Inclusion Fundamentals and Unconscious Bias. Other education sessions attended by staff included Combatting Tokenism, Engaging Leaders in the Diversity and Inclusion Conversation, Measurements of Success, Skills for Inclusive Conversations, Beyond Compliance, and Advancing Inclusion.

We also enhanced our Respectful Workplace policies, procedures and guidelines to underscore that it is our impact, not our intent, that matters more, and to reinforce the need to shift our perspective.

## Looking Ahead

In 2021, we will continue to educate ourselves, develop goals, define actions and measure outcomes in advancing our diversity, equity and inclusion journey. We recognize that language is important, and will commit to being mindful of how we speak and communicate in writing, while promoting a culture that embraces difference. We will also prioritize a deeper understanding of how to recognize and prevent ableism in our work.

## Responding to Need

The number of students on the autism spectrum who choose to enroll in college or university continues to increase each year. Despite meeting admission criteria and having the cognitive ability to be successful, many individuals find post-secondary education challenging - many do not succeed the first time. A majority of autistic students gain admission without identifying themselves as being on the spectrum or applying for academic accommodations. Students may go unnoticed by their professors until their sensory, social, learning styles and organizational challenges, combined with fatigue and mental health problems, cause them to fail.

“I myself had no transition planning and no understanding of what might be different going into post-secondary education and as a result I failed my first few attempts. I believed that the failure was with me, and I left my community college experiences feeling that I was not intelligent enough to make it. I am now a Doctor and I fully understand that the failure was a result of both my lack of preparedness for the challenges of post-secondary education, and my not having the skills to manage those changes.”

- TC Waisman

## Adapting our Delivery

The inaugural Excel Campus Prep in-person course was delivered in the summer of 2019 to help prepare autistic students for the transition from high school to university or college campus settings. Due to the pandemic, the summer offering of this course in 2020 was not possible. We engaged lived experience to adapt the content, [which is now available on our website](#), and to co-create an online course that would benefit students preparing for post-secondary. The **Autism Campus Prep** online course will be available for autistic students across Canada in the spring of 2021, through the AIDE Canada digital platform.

9 Modules Developed | 12 Videos Created | 3 Autistic Art Projects Created | 23 FAQs Answered



## Collaborating for Impact

Sinneave convened six university students and alumni as a Lived Experience Advisory Group (LEAG) to co-develop an online course intended to assist prospective post-secondary students. LEAG provided advice based on their own experiences as post-secondary students and graduates.

“Far too often, we see well-meaning neurotypical people doing their best to provide advice to autistic people. I’m happy Sinneave asked autistic scholars to develop this course so that our own experiences, and the things we would have liked to have known as autistic post-secondary students, could guide and inform it.”

- Patrick Dwyer

“Being involved in the Autism Campus Prep Program reminded me how important the transition was between secondary school and post-secondary education. My hope is that young autistic adults will utilize these tools to assist them to make their decision regarding post-secondary education and to prepare them for the transition should they choose that path.”

- TC Waisman

Sinneave engaged staff from the Student Success Centre at the University of Calgary to conduct a scan of existing campus supports for neurodiverse students. This project generated numerous suggestions on how to improve the campus experience, several of which are being implemented across campus to better support students with academic, social and mental health needs.

We also collaborated with the University of Calgary in the creation of a new staff position within the [Student Success Centre](#) aimed at specifically supporting neurodivergent students. The **Neurodiversity Support Advisor** will work directly with students, faculty and program support staff to enhance academic performance and future career success.

2020  
Shared  
Outcomes

45  
Individuals returned to school



## Looking Ahead

Sinneave is collaborating on a grant from the University of Calgary to build partnerships with faculty, staff and autistic students from universities across Canada. This seed grant will support the development of a multi-campus working collaboration in preparation for a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council application aimed at improving conditions across post-secondary settings.

Given the University of Calgary’s commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion, this work is vital and will help identify strategies, opportunities and resources that effectively improve opportunities for autistic students to successfully graduate from campuses across the country.

## Responding to Need

Many autistic adults are able and eager to work, however they face significantly worse employment outcomes compared to the general population and often struggle to find and maintain employment. According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability, only 33% of autistic people aged 20+ reported being competitively employed compared to 79% without disabilities. Of the 60 new participants enrolled in our [Launch + Skills](#) program in 2020, 39 were working on employment-related goals.

## Adapting our Delivery

### EmploymentWorks National Project and Virtual Expansion

Sinneave provided ongoing leadership to the 3-year [EmploymentWorks National Project](#), and successfully collaborated with 7 partner organizations across Canada to deliver the EmploymentWorks program. This proven program is designed for autistic adults who are seeking opportunities to practice and develop the skills necessary to obtain sustainable employment. Concurrently, it offers employers direct experience working with autistic individuals to enhance awareness about the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce.

**235** Participants Served | **19** Program Locations | **88** Employers Provided Job Sampling

EmploymentWorks has enhanced employability skills and contributed to increased employment rates among the first 146 participants to complete the program. Prior to participating, 17% were employed, and within 12 months of the program start date, this doubled to 34% employed.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, EmploymentWorks partners shifted to online program delivery and quickly identified tools and resources to create a safe and engaging virtual learning environment. This shift created the opportunity to reach a greater number of people by removing geographic and transportation-related barriers to participation.

“This program allows participants to have autonomy over their futures despite living in a world that tells them otherwise.”  
- EW Participant,  
Autism Society of Newfoundland & Labrador

In October 2020, Sinneave secured short-term funding under Canada’s COVID-19 Economic Response Plan for a virtual expansion of the EmploymentWorks program. The 6-month project provided participants with expanded access to online training opportunities via simulated work environments and a wide variety of existing and custom designed online learning resources.



**100**

Chrome Books and WiFi Sticks distributed to remove technological barriers to participating.



**104**

Participants provided with access to highly interactive and immersive **EASy® Job Simulations**.

**LinkedIn Learning**  
**104**

LinkedIn Learning Licenses assigned to help participants acquire specific skills and recognized micro-credentials to increase their confidence and competitiveness in the labour market.

## Collaborating for Impact

In March 2020, Sinneave launched the development of a unique [Employer Toolkit](#) filled with simple, innovative, autistic-approved tools to support autistic employees to achieve success in the workplace. 171 autistic Canadians provided input about what they feel makes an inclusive, welcoming and supportive workplace. Sinneave shared key learnings from this project at various large national events and conferences in the fall 2020.

### SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Strategies from  
Autistic Employees

“I am confident that the toolkit will equip employers to better support their autistic employees, and I am optimistic that we can change the future of autism employment in Canada for the better. During this project, I heard stories from hundreds of employees, and over two dozen employers about their past experiences, and future goals, and while some of the stories were hard to hear, they were always inspiring.”

- Corey Walker, Project Lead and Primary Author



### Policy Compendium



Sinneave contributed to the development of a collection of policy briefs providing specific recommendations for immediate federal action. Sinneave either led or had a role in incubating and scaling five of the six initiatives highlighted in the [Employment Policy Brief](#) submitted by the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance to the Government of Canada in October 2020, in connection with ongoing advocacy for a National Autism Strategy.

**2020  
Shared  
Outcomes**

**125**  
Individuals employed



## Looking Ahead

Sinneave will continue to develop, test and evaluate new approaches to skill development to support improved labour market participation and employment outcomes for those on the autism spectrum. We will seize opportunities to collaborate with others to create efficiencies, leverage resources, share promising practices, expand our reach, and scale impact. We will also continue to develop and grow the Employer Toolkit and other employer resources to support inclusive workplace practices and build employer capacity to change the odds of employment success for autistic Albertans.

## Responding to Need

Every autistic Albertan has the right to housing that is safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable to use as a base from which to pursue their life goals. Of the people we have connected with at Sinneave, 96% indicate that they need some form of support to live independently, yet only 14% qualify to receive supports funding. About 20% are looking for affordable housing now, and another 40% are looking in the next 1-2 years. **While there is an urgent need for affordable housing at all levels of support**, a significant number of adults need only transitional, light, or variable levels of support. Adults who do not receive supports funding are less likely to be attached to a support agency and therefore have had very limited access into affordable housing.

## Adapting our Approach

At Sinneave we look for gaps, and consider how to address them in innovative and sustainable ways. We recognized that access to affordable housing was a current challenge. We shifted our approach from having conversations about new construction, to extending our relationships with the experts who build affordable housing. We are now able to connect autistic adults with existing and new affordable housing opportunities and we work with community agencies to provide a variety of low cost support models.

## Collaborating for Community Impact

With the shift away from in-person events in 2020, we pivoted from planning a Provincial Housing Symposium, to the creation of a [Housing & Supports Landing Page](#) on The Sinneave Family Foundation website. This page offers information, resources and a point of access to affordable housing opportunities.

Sinneave previously hosted monthly meetings of the Aspires Housing Group of Calgary on-site at The Ability Hub. In 2020, we facilitated Zoom meetings for Aspires which extended the reach allowing those from outside of the local Calgary area to attend, including Medicine Hat, Lethbridge and Red Deer.

Sinneave participated in the Alternative Home Living Working Group as part of the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program transformation project, offering our housing experience to a Provincial, solutions focused discussion.

We partnered with the [Housing through an Autism Lens project](#), funded by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation under the National Housing Strategy. In 2020, we participated on project working committees and provided financial support for self-advocate engagement. This 18-month project took a Solutions Lab approach to developing relevant and immediately useable pathways to secure housing options for autistic adults that include supports, services, and resources.

"....Ability Hub programs....have and continue to provide me and my daughter with the support we both need to keep moving forward....she has absorbed these initiatives and now lives as an independent adult with minor support. My daughter is now gainfully employed, working full time hours in a position that suits her abilities and offers future employment skills so she can become a more valuable employee for this organization. Through these programs, she has developed into an adult with hope, higher self-esteem and definitely a more positive outlook on life."

- Doug, Parent



Legacy on 5th (Calgary)

## 2020 Shared Outcomes

**39**  
Affordable housing units for autistic  
adults directly facilitated by Sinneave



## Looking Ahead

Sinneave anticipates facilitating access to additional affordable housing units in 2021, with opportunities to explore the role of technology and community based supports.

## Responding to Need

In response to the pandemic, The Sinneave Family Foundation established an **Autism Community COVID-19 Response Fund**. This fund directly supported the immediate financial needs of vulnerable autistic youth and adults across Alberta. It also assisted autism serving non-profits in Calgary to enhance supports focused on the mental health and well-being of individuals and their families during the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic.

## Adapting our Services

Adhering to public health guidelines, The Ability Hub physical site closed on March 16th, 2020, and all staff quickly pivoted to working remotely from their homes. Sinneave continued to support individuals and families by offering programs and services virtually. Concurrently, we recognized that more was needed to ensure that autistic youth and adults remained connected, included, and supported through the sudden changes and periods of self-isolation. Therefore, we quickly mobilized our Directors Award in April to meet the immediate financial needs of individuals and families.

## Direct Financial Support to Individuals and Families

We successfully coordinated with stakeholders across the province to ensure that individuals and families were aware of the financial supports made available through Sinneave's Autism Community COVID-19 Response Fund. Needs expressed by recipients included: data to stay connected, food, medication, basic necessities, health insurance, cleaning supplies, sensory and learning tools, art and craft supplies and communication devices.



"....enough to cover a month of my health insurance takes a substantial weight off my shoulders, giving me some breathing room to try and find an alternate source of additional income. It's really nice to know that someone understands I (and others!) may be struggling and wants to help."

- Recipient

## Collaborating for Impact

Recognizing that community collaboration was more critical in 2020 than ever before, Sinneave repurposed internal operating dollars to create a Response Fund to provide one-time grants to assist autism serving non-profit organizations in Calgary so they could meet urgent needs despite the uncertainty associated with the pandemic and their organization's future.



"Without delay, The Sinneave Family Foundation filled imminent gaps in capacity and resources for autism community charities in danger of closure earlier in the year."

- Lyndon Parakin, Autism Calgary Association

"The Fluxkits helped ease isolation for our artists....we have seen many thrive through digital programming....both artistic and social development were two key areas we have seen significant growth in."

- Nicole Kaczowski,  
National accessArts Centre

"The Sinneave Foundation emergency pandemic support was a lifeline for us....integral in AAFS success and survival. The funds directly supported the creation and delivery of our virtual programs.... allowed us to staff virtual programs for about 2 months without concern for revenue which in turn allowed us to make these programs fully accessible for our families."

- Dean Svoboda,  
Autism Aspergers Friendship Society

"The grant funding was used to buy equipment crucial to the launch of the CQR Centre for Opportunity in the fall of 2020, during a pandemic."

- Barbara Pitts,  
Calgary Quest Children's Society

"I can't overstate the importance of the Centre to Tom's development....organization's like the Centre for Opportunity offer hope."

- Parent

"This donation allowed our community coach to work virtually with participants on their individual goals to find success in their daily lives during a pandemic; through virtual community kitchen, online resources, weekly social connection video chats, mental health mindfulness group sessions, stress management and most importantly peer support groups."

- Amberly Wrubleski,  
New Heights School and Learning Services

## Looking Ahead

Once it is safe to do so, Sinneave looks forward to re-opening The Ability Hub to the public and leveraging our flexible funding and autism-friendly space to increase access to affordable services and programs that continue to benefit the mental health and well-being of autistic youth and adults, as well as their families.

## Responding to Need

We understand that addressing complex societal issues such as employment and affordable housing requires a connected community and multi-sector collaboration. In 2020, Sinneave identified targeted areas of need and offered our expertise, organizational supports and financial resources where we saw opportunities to unlock potential in the community that could address gaps in services for autistic youth and adults.

## Adapting our Approach

The challenges of 2020 reinforced the need for us to shift from reactively serving and collaborating with those that find us, to proactively identifying opportunities to connect broadly. Appreciating that needs are great and varied; we recognized the necessity to think differently about integrated and enduring solutions, and we sought to build quality networks and relationships with those who could advance our collective work and shared interests.

## Collaborating for Impact

### Community Networking and Collaboration

The Sinneave Family Foundation facilitated a successful application to co-lead a Prairie Hub with Autism Calgary Association as part of [AIDE Canada](#)'s Hub-to-Hub network. Through this federally funded project, a team of collaborative partner organizations across Alberta joined a national knowledge network to help individuals and families access the information, services and supports they need to thrive. Leveraging lived experience was at the heart of the Prairie Hub's resource creation in 2020.



### Building Community Capacity through Leveraged Funding

The federal government created the National Workplace Accessibility Stream of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities in June 2020, and invited The Sinneave Family Foundation to submit a proposal. We accepted the challenge to expand online training opportunities and efficiently coordinated with seven community partners and three contracted service providers to make online training opportunities available in less than two months. This project injected an additional \$300,000 of public funding into the EmploymentWorks National Project in 2020, and enhanced accessible online training for autistic job seekers across Canada.

## Removing Barriers and Enhancing Opportunities

When the global pandemic forced the closure of in-person programs and services, the world quickly pivoted to virtual operations, and individuals and organizations without access to technology were at risk of being left behind. Sinneave gifted new computers and video conferencing tools, provided grants to access virtual platforms and distributed Chromebooks to service providers to lend to individuals and families they serve.

"The acquisition of Remo has had an impact beyond what we ever imagined. We have developed an enterprise to provide virtual events for third parties. This project has employed a few adults from our community and become a connection point for area Resource Fairs and community events."

- Dean Svoboda,  
Autism Aspergers Friendship Society

"Without the Sinneave Foundation's support for our new computers, we would have been left behind, unable to reach out and meet our community where they were at...The impact on the organization would have been devastating to the 2500 individuals we connect with each year."

- Leslie Allen,  
Autism Edmonton

### A Hub of Community Connection and Collaboration

Sinneave adapted the utilization and layout of its facility, and implemented robust COVID-19 protocols to make safe teaching space available to stakeholders delivering complimentary services and programs.

"....in-kind support for space within their facility has enabled me to engage in clinical training activities....and also to support members of the autism community through PEERS and PEERS-YA, our social intervention programs for teens and young adults, respectively."

- Adam McCrimmon,  
University Of Calgary

### Working with Others toward Collective Community Impact

Despite the instability of 2020, Sinneave worked with others, and prioritized lived experience to build solutions and turn pressing challenges into opportunities.

"Our local and provincial communities have pulled together to work more as a collective. Being responsive to the vulnerability of our community, The Sinneave Family Foundation has been instrumental in supporting these efforts, increasing their investment of time, expertise, resources and funding to lift collective impact initiatives that are gaining momentum. Examples include efforts to capture the lived experience to inform policy and reviews of critical programs, plus work to strengthen autistic and parent networks across the province."

- Lyndon Parakin,  
Autism Calgary Association / Autism Society Alberta

**Looking Ahead**

The Sinneave Family Foundation remains committed to being a backbone support to community connection and collaboration, and to operating an inclusive centre for innovation and learning.

# 2020 Shared Outcomes

We hold ourselves accountable to measure the work that we do, the outcomes that we achieve and the impact that we have.

Improving outcomes in Education, Employment and Independent Living takes time, and requires us to remain focused and work collectively with others who share our ambitious vision.



## Connecting Directly with Individuals & Families

- 638 Information & Navigation services provided
- 112 New Enrollments in our programs
- 759 Skills Coaching Sessions
- 24 Attendees in 6 Skills Groups
- 400+ Attendees at 9 workshops

## Creating Opportunities in the Community

- 117 Recipients of Directors Award totalling \$29,209
- 5 Scholarships totalling \$15,000
- 10 Leveraged grants to organizations totalling \$1,271,476
- 6850 Hours of in-kind space provided at The Ability Hub
- 22 Community presentations

## Our Virtual Reach

- 26497 Website visitors
- 2058 Facebook followers
- 455 Twitter followers
- 228 LinkedIn followers
- 1733 Newsletter subscribers
- 125 Tip sheets shared

## Our Pivot to Virtual Operations



## Board Chair Message



Mike Lambert,  
Board Chair

In 2020, I was honoured to be Board Chair for The Sinneave Family Foundation, which is fortunate to have a talented Senior Leadership Team and Staff dedicated to the enhancement of the quality of life for autistic youth and adults. This year was a year that challenged all of us and The Sinneave Family Foundation was no exception. Staff persevered and adapted and this Impact Report demonstrates their success. Their adaptability and resilience allowed the organization to continue many programs and services in the fulfillment of our Mission and to create new online resources and virtual opportunities.

We are also fortunate to have an experienced Board of Directors in addition to expert Community Members that serve on our Board Committees. In 2020, three Directors retired from the Board. I want to thank those former Directors for their dedicated service and sound advice. We also added three new Directors to the Board and four new Community Members to Committees of the Board. I want to welcome all of them and thank them for joining us.

The current environment continues to be challenging for all of us, but I am confident that with the talents and commitment of our Staff, Senior Leadership Team and Board, we are prepared to meet that challenge.



Board of Directors (left to right): Dawn Leonard Gaudreault, Cobus van de Venter, Scott Morrow, Mike Lambert (Board Chair), Melinda Noyes, Roby Brar, Bill Karny, Rick & Brune Sinneave, Laurene Beloin, Garry McCulloch, Ian Holloway



Community Expertise (left to right): Paul Constance, Susan Mallon, Katherine O'Neill, Evan Spiropoulos



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