



# Sinneave

FAMILY FOUNDATION

**2023 Impact Report**

## Inclusive Language

Words matter and using respectful and inclusive language can have a positive impact. Using inclusive language is about being mindful, intentional, flexible, and responsive to communication preferences. We ask and listen to those with lived experience to learn and improve our language. In our experience, many people prefer “identity-first” language – that is, to lead with a description, e.g. “autistic person.” This language understands that autism is an inherent part of an individual’s identity; it is impossible to separate people from their autism. We acknowledge and respect this preference and aim to reflect it in this report.

## Land Acknowledgment

With gratitude, we acknowledge that The Ability Hub is located on the traditional territories of the Blackfoot and the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Siksika, the Piikani, the Kainai, the Tsuut’ina, and the Stoney Nakoda First Nations, including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations. The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III. We pay our respect to elders, past and present, for stewarding the land, water, and the life of this region. We acknowledge the legacy and harms of colonization and seek to move forward together to make things better and to be intentional about equality, inclusiveness and learning from the past.

The Sinneave Family Foundation prepares an annual report to share indications of our impact. This year’s report features stories from 2023 that demonstrate how our core values of Trust, Inclusion, Collaboration and Sustainability form the basis of our impact. The report also celebrates our 15 years of operation by highlighting key accomplishments since incorporation. We are proud to be part of a community that values collaboration and shares a commitment to finding innovative and sustainable ways to foster understanding and enhance opportunities for Autistic people.

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## President's Message



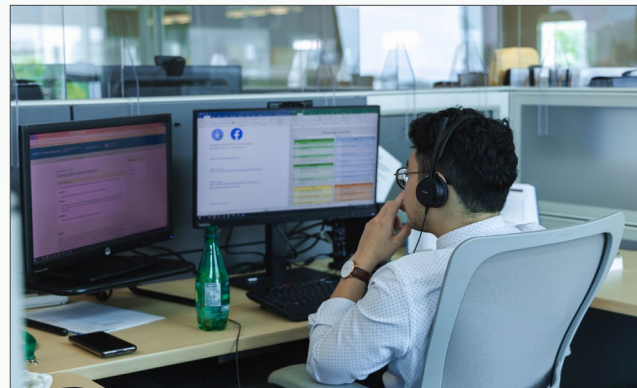
The Sinneave Family Foundation strives to empower people to achieve their goals.

We celebrated our 15-year anniversary in 2023 by reflecting on accomplishments of the past and considering opportunities in the future.

We are encouraged by our successes, inspired by those we have the privilege of serving, and motivated to continue making a difference.

I extend my gratitude to our dedicated staff, board of directors, corporate members, Autistic advisors, and partners for their unwavering support and collaboration. Together, we will continue to shape the future and create a brighter tomorrow.

- Tanya McLeod



## Our Team

When reflecting on fifteen years of operation, staff mentioned the commitment, passion, and diversity of team members as key enablers of impact and reflected on opportunities to learn and grow professionally through their work at Sinneave.

Our organization benefits when employees are both challenged and satisfied in their work. This means taking the time to understand each person's strengths, skills, and interests, matching these with opportunities, offering challenges that encourage growth, and providing experiences that bring satisfaction.

## Our Environment

Ryan began working at Sinneave about a year and a half ago. "When I first started, it was a part-time role, and the schedule was a little bit all over the place. It ended up not being great for the way I worked and what I needed." When an opportunity in the EmploymentWorks program opened, Ryan shifted to that team and demonstrated an exceptional ability to connect with participants. He enjoys working with participants and meeting them where they are. He does not see himself as an authority on employment, but his own experiences make him an empathetic mentor. "If you're there and you want to work, I want to empower you to be successful."

Ryan now works as a full-time EmploymentWorks Program Facilitator. "I didn't think I'd ever be able to work a traditional 9 to 5 type of job," he shares. "What I realize now is that I believed a lot of things I was told I couldn't do." He credits the work culture and environment at Sinneave as being essential to growth he has experienced both personally and professionally. "[They] created an environment that allows me to be who I am at a time that was so critical to me," he shares. "Now, I've started reframing opportunity through a lens of what I can do."

In his role he has flexibility in how he does his job and the ability to bring his own unique perspective to the work. He acknowledges that the role is continually showing him parts of the person he wants to be. "I don't want to give people a script. I want to give them the tools they need to draw on to find success. I want the people I work with to see that they have the ability to choose," he says. "It's a hopeful thing, realizing potential as a possibility."

For Ryan, the highest praise for his current work came recently from a program participant, who told him simply, "You make it possible to be autistic in this world."

Ryan's story reflects the transformative impact of creating work environments that nurture and empower personal and professional growth.

## Our Growth

Over the years, we have gained valuable insights into neuro-inclusive employment practices and have implemented overall improvements to our work environment and culture. Being an inclusive employer is an ongoing journey that involves a commitment to continuous learning, improvement, and flexibility. Sinneave's efforts to improve are paying off, as measured through an anonymous Human Resources Survey in 2023, which showed feelings of belonging, job satisfaction, and diversity within our organization.

100%

of our team feel that employees usually or always treat each other with respect.

100%

of our team are usually or always satisfied with their job.

39%

of our team identify as a person with a disability.

56%

of our team identify as neurodivergent.

# Trust

We understand that building relationships with a foundation of trust and mutual respect are critical to our effectiveness and ability to deliver impact.

We aim to be a trusted source of information, navigation and transition support, and to expand how we reach and serve the community.

We are committed to creating learning opportunities and to engaging lived experience in the development and implementation of initiatives.

## A Trusted Voice in the Community

For 15 years, Sinneave has focused its efforts on supporting autistic youth and adults during their transition to adulthood by helping them live, learn, and work in their communities while pursuing the futures they want. Our approach involves addressing immediate needs that foster change in the short term and building evidence to guide long-term systemic improvements.

Trust is the foundation for building a strong and supportive community. We aspire to be a trusted voice so we can foster connections, provide resources, and help create a sense of belonging among autistic people and their support networks.

Over the years, we have gained valuable insights and continued to evolve by working closely with autistic youth and adults, who are our greatest teachers.

## Supporting Transitions

Sinneave's scholarships and awards support autistic youth transitioning from high school to further educational pursuits. For many, post-secondary education does not feel attainable. The reasons vary, but associated costs are often a barrier.

For some students, receiving an award or scholarship can be life changing. We are pleased to know that in big and small ways, our scholarships and awards make a difference to every student who receives one. They are often a stepping stone along the path to a larger goal.

In 2023,  
Sinneave  
distributed awards  
and scholarships  
to 43 individuals  
totalling  
\$40,000.

## A Perfect Academic Record

A scholarship recipient reached out to share news of his university graduation.

Growing up, Troy did not always feel like post-secondary education was in the cards for him. He did not enjoy school as a child. Though he could not put it in words at the time, he thought school was "negligibly easy." Early on he found himself in a class for "emergent readers" because assessments did not accurately capture the way he processed information.

In junior high he found something that piqued his interests. "I liked reading food nutrition and ingredient labels," he says. "So, I thought I might like a career in food science."

Troy began studying sciences at the University of Alberta in 2019, managing two significant transitions at the same time: moving out and starting post-secondary studies.

Once at university, it did not take him long to discover that he was passionate about cell membranes. In his first year, Troy reached out to Michael Overduin—a biochemistry professor—to express interest in a project on biological codes he was supervising. Under the mentorship of Prof. Overduin, Troy's academic trajectory took off.

"Troy immediately impressed me with his deep fascination with the fundamentals of how biology works," says the professor. "Troy has generated more manuscripts and publications than any undergraduate student I've ever known," says the Professor, who challenged him to submit his biggest ideas to the top journals. Troy has risen to the challenge, co-authoring nine papers to date. "Having Troy work in my lab has been an absolute delight and makes being a professor very satisfying, I feel like I've learned more from him than I could have taught him."

Troy's passion and dedication continues to open doors for him. In 2022, he completed a 10-week internship at Rockefeller University in New York. And, upon graduating with his BSc Honours Biochemistry degree this past spring (with a perfect academic record!), he received word that he had been accepted to continue his studies in a doctoral program at Oxford University in the UK, receiving the prestigious Clarendon Scholarship. When selecting Clarendon scholars, Oxford University has one goal in mind: "to choose the best students worldwide, as decided by experts in each student's field." That is quite an accolade.

While on the surface it appears that Troy sailed through his undergraduate degree, it has not been without challenges. There have been many opportunities for fear to derail Troy's path. But neither he—nor his parents—have let it.

Troy admits that he has not always been the type of person to take risks or embrace excitement, but somewhere along the way, he became someone who does. He observes, "Fear comes from [or is a by product of] living an interesting life. So, you can choose fear and excitement, or mundanity and security, or something in between."

Wise words from a young man who is pursuing his academic and career dreams across the Atlantic Ocean.



# Inclusion

We value neurodiversity and believe that people should have fair and equitable access to what they need to be successful.

Our goal is to be an inclusive centre for learning and community connection.

We make The Ability Hub space, as well as virtual platforms and tools, available to support community networking, cooperation and the delivery of complementary services and programs.



## Autistic Leadership

We regularly engage individuals with lived experience to lead inclusive learning and connection activities and mentor participants.

In May, we hosted James Townend, a financial advisor and certified life coach diagnosed autistic in 2017, to present **Building Financial Literacy: Budgeting 101**. James is passionate about helping others reframe their attitudes towards money and finances, and teaching them to align their budget with their values.

In June, Dr. Caroline Buzanko, a neurodivergent therapist, provided a session on **Recovering from Autistic Burnout** that empowered attendees to learn about autistic burnout, its contributing factors, and practical things you can do to prevent it.

In December, autistic artist and entrepreneur Margaux Wosk, shared their experiences as an entrepreneur in **Empowering Neurodiversity: The Entrepreneurial Journey**. They shared why self-employment works for them, what they learned along the way and how entrepreneurship can be a viable career path for many.

## Learning and Connection

An exciting addition to our Learning and Connection activities is the introduction of **The Joy of Cooking: Cooking Skills for Independent Living** classes in Sinneave's kitchen.

Santiago (Santi) and Sydney, both graduates of SAIT's Professional Cooking program, lead these classes. Cedric, one of Sinneave's Life Skills Coaches, came up with the idea to showcase their professional skills while creating a fun and engaging opportunity for others to learn important skills.

**"I say all the time, keep trying, follow what you like to do and what you believe in,"**

- Santi  
Joy of Cooking Instructor

## Believe in Yourself

Sydney has participated in various Sinneave's programs and does not shy away from a challenge. Sydney had never led a live class, but she did have some prior experience presenting. "I wasn't planning to be a teacher of any kind. However, I do think that I teach and inspire already," she shares. "I have a YouTube channel called Syd Cooks, where I share recipes that people can make at home."



Santi connected with Cedric through Launch + Skills coaching. When Cedric suggested the idea, he was proud to be recognized for his skills, but the idea of teaching others was initially nerve wracking.

The overall experience for Sydney has been phenomenal. "I have loved every second of it," says Sydney. "I learned about myself that I am capable of leading a group and helping people when they struggle, tailoring my instructions to a level that's appropriate to the participant," she shares.

Santi's experience has also been positive. "I learned that 'practice makes teachers'", he says. "It feels great showing others what I know and helping them to not fear cooking."

Santi and Sydney are both empathetic teachers because their own journeys haven't been linear. When Santi received his diagnosis, he struggled to find the right support for his needs. "Before knowing about Sinneave, I was lost," he says. Finding people and a program that worked for him was instrumental for his personal growth and he draws on that to inspire others.



"I say all the time, keep trying, follow what you like to do and what you believe in," he says. Adding that it's ok to get help and talk to someone you can trust.

Sydney's encouragement is similar: "Believe in yourself! If I can do it, you can too!" she says. "It's good advice for life and for cooking."

Santi and Sydney are signed on to lead more classes in 2024 and we can't wait to see what they'll be cooking up!

# Collaboration

We recognize the benefit of working with others toward collective community impact and prioritize lived experience in helping build solutions and opportunities.

We invite new ways of thinking about, understanding and addressing needs.

We co-create resources and services that help people achieve their goals.

We convene stakeholders and invest in partnerships that focus on priority issues.

## Community Engagement

In 2023, we broadened our impact by collaborating with Trellis Society, The Genesis Centre, and the Village Square Community Hub. These collaborations enhanced our understanding of diversity and provided insights that help us discuss autism in ways that resonate more with people from various cultures, religions, and backgrounds.

We also forged new relationships with the Centre for Newcomers and introduced Sinneave's programs and services to the 20 staff members in the Newcomer Settlement Program.

Neelam Madan, Associate Director, is encouraged by the new partnership. She says the Centre simply does not have the resources or capacity to meet all the needs that come through their doors, and partnering with organizations like Sinneave enables them to meet more needs.

**"In many cultures, autism and disability in general is considered taboo. Families don't want to talk about these things, and it can keep them from accessing the support they need," she says. "The services Sinneave offers help us to meet a real need in the community."**

- Neelam Madan  
Associate Director of Settlement Services

**"I wanted to offer my sincere thanks for your group presentation yesterday. We are still talking about the content and potential next steps. Your content was brilliantly organized and presented in a very engaging and pragmatic way. We are so happy to start this work with you."**

- Roberta Kuzyk-Burton  
CPL Training and Recognition Specialist

Another new collaborative relationship is with Calgary Public Library. We shared the Six Principles for inclusion with staff at the library's annual staff training and development event. We are now exploring ways to use the library's platform and services to make information more available.

## Featured Collaborations

Through strategic partnerships and collaborations, we expand our reach and influence. Here is a snapshot of a few collaborations in 2023:

### University of Calgary: Work-Integrated Learning Initiative

With Sinneave's support, University of Calgary advanced a work-integrated learning initiative that is enabling campus-wide systems change and opening doors for neurodivergent students.

**"Your steadfast support of our university has translated into new opportunities for neurodiverse students to benefit from work-integrated learning, and a collaborative forum for educators to learn more about the value of neurodiversity in the workplace."**

- Ed McCaulay  
President and Vice-Chancellor

### Autism Alberta's Alliance

The Alliance brings together stakeholders. It is a collaboration, a knowledge hub, an advocate, and an educator that seeks to raise awareness about autism, cultivate acceptance, and foster accommodation across the lifespan. Sinneave joined the Planning Committee in 2023, and has staff involved in four Working Groups: Education, Housing, Post-secondary Education, and Employment.

**"Welcome to Autism Society Alberta's Alliance Planning Committee! As our employment champion, we look forward to collaborating with you and learning from your expertise."**

- Shino Nakane  
Provincial Director

### Autism Housing Network of Alberta

We are working with Autism Edmonton and Autism Alberta to better understand housing needs across the province, extend the reach of support to families, and learn from each other to facilitate new housing solutions.

**"Sinneave was instrumental in initiating this project and creating a foundation for us to build upon."**

- Drewe Rowbotham  
Facilitator and Curator for AHNA

### Accessibility Institute – Carleton University – Neuroinclusivity in Housing

This initiative brings champions together into a National Housing Network and connects them to a knowledge hub that identifies promising practices, leverages ideas, and supports coordinated action on the ground. We seek to generate momentum, influence policy change and support a broader change in thinking toward housing systems that are inclusive and accessible for all.

**"My goal in participating in this project is to influence policy frameworks that promote equitable housing access. My hope is that the policies being developed from this research are comprehensive, informed, and considerate of the unique needs and rights of neurodivergent individuals, regardless of their backgrounds."**

- Advisory Committee Member

# Sustainability

We are committed to promoting enduring solutions that are adaptable to local circumstances and community resources.

We strive to be a data-informed influence by sharing knowledge and evidence.

We facilitate coordination among stakeholders to advance common interests, expand capacity, support scalability, and attract investment.

Sustainability takes many shapes.

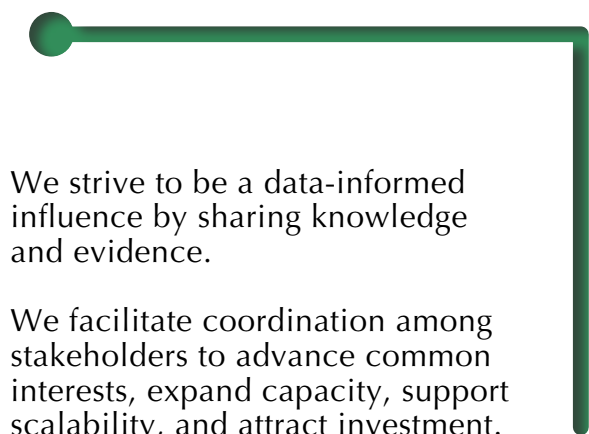
We enhance opportunities for needs to be met within the community by empowering individuals and organizations to extend the work beyond our reach. We share data and knowledge to influence policy and support decision makers to take action that transforms systems.

## Strengthening Capacity

Our Educator Learning Series empowers staff in educational settings to strengthen their knowledge and skills for inclusion.

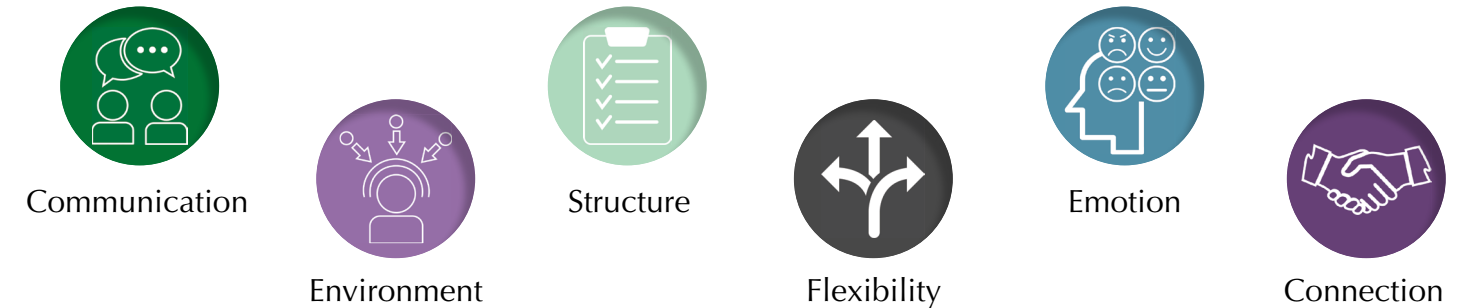
Sinneave staff partnered with the Calgary Regional Consortium to deliver the Educator Learning Series aimed at helping teachers, educational staff, and school administrators to learn about autism in the classroom, co-occurring conditions, and promoting student success. These capacity building sessions saw 300 + registrants each offering, with multiple requests for more presentations.

The popularity, turnout, and feedback from the sessions confirm that this series is meeting a real need in the education realm. As a result, work has begun to adapt the content into a sustainable learning resource for the community, accessible through Calgary Regional Consortium. We will multiply our reach with this in-demand resource by equipping people who are already champions for inclusive education and who have existing relationships in their schools and districts.



## Building Acceptance

For those interested in making their organization more inclusive, Sinneave shares **Six Principles** for inclusion through guided discussions. We cover basic information about autism and neurodiversity, and share practical ways to create inclusive settings.



For each discussion, we adapt the content and delivery method to meet the needs of the group. We facilitated discussions with several post-secondary settings in 2023, including: the Healthy Campus Alberta Wellness Summit in June, a province-wide virtual presentation in November, four staff in-service presentations with Southern Alberta Institute of Technology's Accessibility Services and Diversity team, and the Haskayne School of Business at the University of Calgary.

## Sharing Knowledge

Sinneave has facilitated opportunities for Autistic representatives to contribute their knowledge and experiences at round table discussions hosted by Federal Ministers, the Office of Disability Issues, the Canadian Human Rights Commission, and Accessible Canada. Discussion topics have included youth experiences with the labour market, advancing disability inclusion, climate action, entrepreneurship, the Canada Disability Benefit and understanding barriers in application processes.

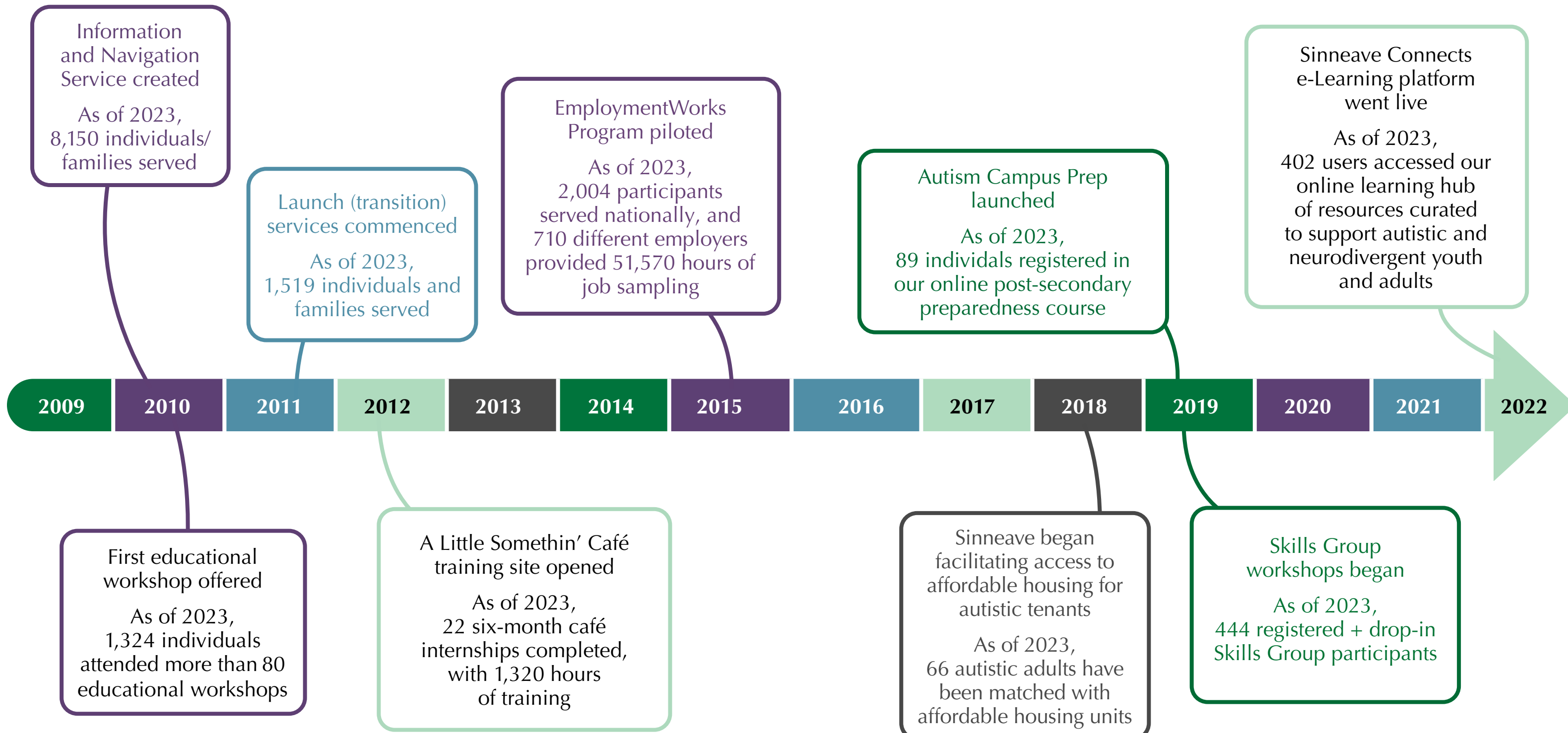
We were very pleased that AJ, an advocate from the Edmonton area, was available to share their knowledge and experience during two round table discussions in 2023. They did not set out to be a speaker or advocate for the autistic community, but AJ recognizes the importance of it. "I'm grateful to be given the opportunity to do these things because they give me a sense of purpose," they say. "The fact that I'm asked is validating. There's an acknowledgement that I have something to offer that is of value."

AJ is clear that their goal is not to set themselves up as some kind of authority. "I want to be a leader and a teacher, and have a positive impact if I can. I want to use my experience to help elevate others," they say. Aspirational advice that they offer to other autistics: "If you can't find someone to support you, be that person to someone else. No matter who you are, you can have a positive impact on others."

We are thankful that AJ also accepted the invitation to join Sinneave's recently established Strategic Advisory Committee so that we can continue to learn from their experience and perspectives.

# Programs & Services

## Highlights from 2009 - 2023

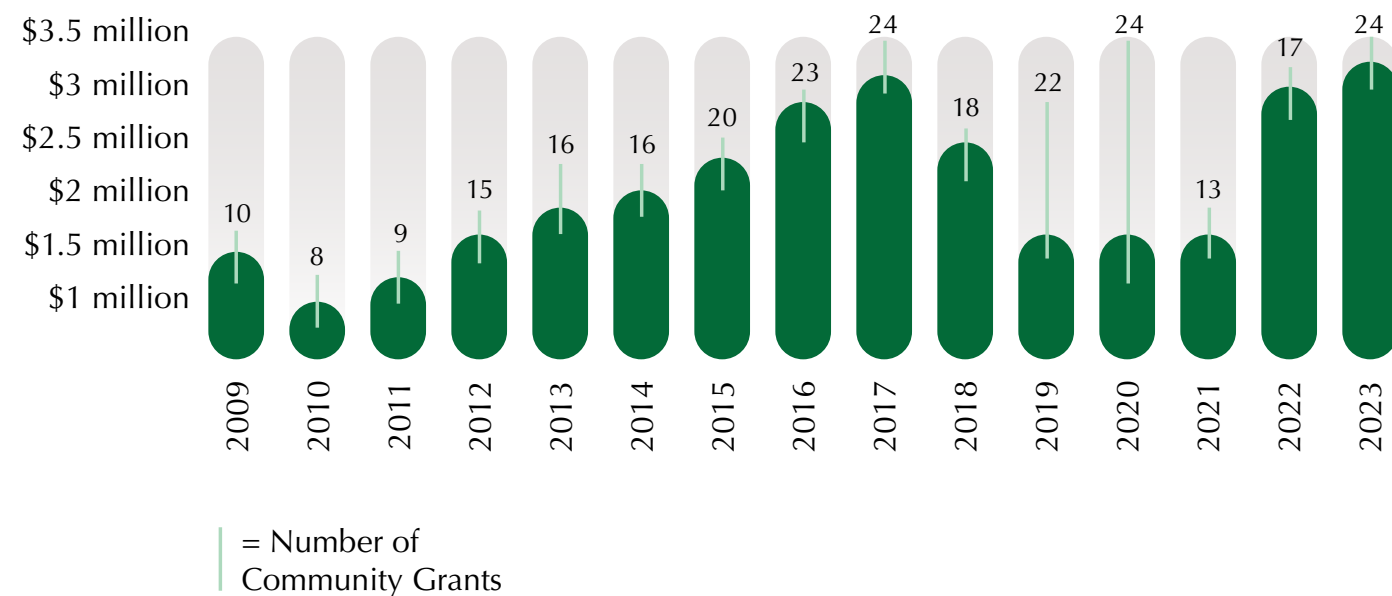
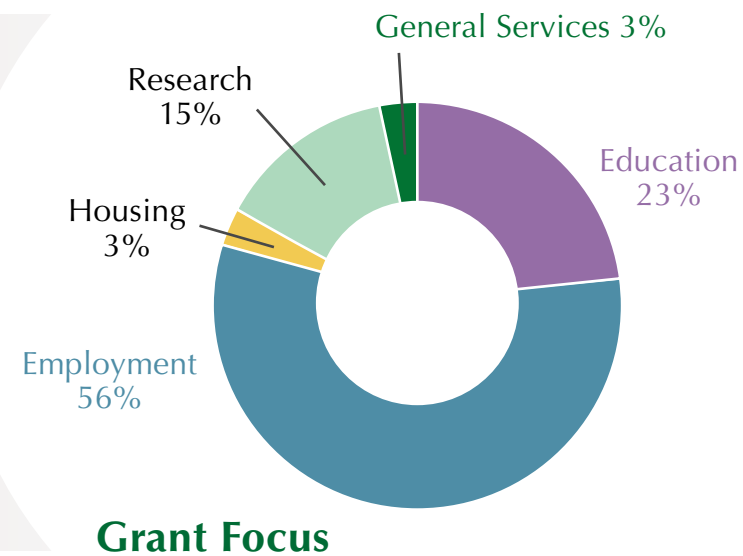




# Community Support: Grants from 2009 to 2023

## Our Priorities

Since incorporation, we have braided funding from public, private and philanthropic sources to provide 259 grants totalling \$27 Million. These grants aim to identify and share promising practices, build community capacity and generate evidence to enable system change.



# Community Reflections

Community members shared their thoughts on the impact of our collaboration and support.

"I feel lucky that there are organizations like The Sinneave Family Foundation that work so tirelessly to support and advocate for individuals like me. It makes such a difference to our lives. Thank you for supporting me on my journey to knowledge and independence. Your faith in me means a lot."

- A.N.  
2023 Directors Award Recipient

"Sinneave has been our partner in the employment space and...empowered us to be able to serve people who otherwise slipped through the cracks."

- Sarah Taylor  
Project Manager,  
Spectrum Advantage Initiative

"...I think there's an opportunity for us to pull all the work we've done together through employment, housing, interventions, and all these areas of need to build a lifelong map for autism."

- Lyndon Parakin  
Executive Director of Autism Calgary,  
Vice President of Autism Alberta

"The impact of this open collaboration model in Calgary is a long chain of support for individuals....We have awareness of each other's services and a wonderful understanding and mutual respect amongst all of us. The work we're doing together is phenomenal."

- Dean Svoboda  
Executive Director,  
Autism Aspergers Friendship Society

\$264K in  
Scholarships &  
Awards to 164  
Individuals

# Staff Reflections

At our Annual General Meeting, staff shared what they wish to celebrate when reflecting on our work, our organization and our impact in the community.

A video with more reflections is available on our website [here](#). [🔗](#)

**“My biggest celebrations are working with participants and watching their determination and their desire to succeed, and I get to be a part of that.”**

- Joannie  
Program Facilitator

**“What I’m most proud of is Sinneave’s efforts to include and amplify the voices of autistic Canadians in all aspects of our work.”**

- Shane  
Director of Innovation

**“It’s a true pleasure to work with a team of committed professionals who are ready to collaborate, or take on an extra challenge, to help a participant take that next step forward in their own journey.”**

- Lorraine  
Learning and Connection Associate

**“...Just seeing the participants acknowledge the growth, the positiveness they’ve actually accomplished... is something I think we should be celebrating all the time”**

- Sherry  
Program Coordinator

**“I’m really proud of our ability to give autistics a sense of confidence that helps them to...get out into our communities and connect with people...”**

- Mason  
Program Associate

**“I am very proud of the innovative approaches being led by Sinneave to support sustainable improvement in employment outcomes for neurodivergent individuals across Canada...”**

- Christy  
Project Officer

## Board Chair’s Message

I was pleased to take on leadership of The Sinneave Family Foundation’s Board of Directors in 2023.

I wish to express a special thanks to Mike Lambert for his leadership as Board Chair for the last three years. His role in convening board members with an impressive depth and breadth of knowledge resulted in thoughtful guidance and direction to management.

I commend the dedicated staff for their work to identify needs, deliver responsive programs and services, and influence the broader community to reduce barriers and create opportunities for autistic Canadians. I also want to acknowledge our corporate members for their strategic insights and engagement.

We appreciate the vital contributions of Autistics, their families, our staff, community partners, and governments across the country. Sinneave’s values of trust, inclusion, collaboration, and sustainability are evident in our collective work. We move forward with optimism as we seek to be effective in having a positive impact.



- Susan Mallon

## Members of the Corporation:

Rick Sinneave, Brune Sinneave, Andrew Hakin, Garry McCulloch

## Board of Directors



(Left to right)  
Melinda Noyes  
Tanya McLeod  
Carl Andrade  
Dawn Leonard Gaudreault  
Michael Lambert  
Michelle Chan  
Wes Peters  
Susan Mallon  
Evan Spiropoulos

**Directors not pictured:** Roby Brar, Carissa Carleton, Michel Cantin, Ian Holloway, Scott Morrow, Jason Scheyen, Cobus van de Venter


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