

**ASNL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2022**  
**September 16, 2023 (10:00 pm – 11:00 pm)**  
**ASNL Greenhouse, 70 Clinch Cr., St. John's, NL**

**MINUTES**

**Attendance:**

There were 23 people in attendance in person and 4 people in attendance via Zoom.

ASNL Staff (10)

Paul Walsh, Alicia Penney, Leah Farrell, Alex Collins, Sarah Hardiman, Paul Lockyer, Christopher Dedde, Rachel Hogan, Candace Moakler, Lisa Lovell

Directors (6)

Elizabeth Churchill, Charlene Hann, Karen Flynn, Lisa Baker-Worthman; Matt Norman, Sarah Hollett

Members of the General Public (11)

Terry Bursey, Meghan Careen, Renee Traverse, Lesley White, Gail Stanford, Charissa Lyda, Robert Peddle, Colleen Pittman, Mekaela Gulliver, Michelle Power, Michelle Goodyear.

**Items:**

1. Call to Order at 10:00 am
2. Adoption of Agenda
  - a. Motion AGM-2023-001: that the agenda be adopted as presented  
**Moved:** Matthew Norman  
**Seconded:** Karen Flynn  
**Decision:** Carried
3. Adoption of Minutes of AGM 2022
  - a. Motion AGM-2023-001: that the minutes of the AGM 2022 be adopted as presented  
**Moved:** Matthew Norman  
**Seconded:** Sarah Hollett  
**Decision:** Carried
4. Report from the Chair (Elizabeth Churchill)
5. Report from the Chief Executive Officer (Paul Walsh)
6. Report from the Auditor (Lesley White of Harris, Ryan)
7. Adoption of Financial Report from the Auditor
  - a. Motion AGM-2023-003: that the report from the auditor be adopted as presented  
**Moved:** Matthew Norman  
**Seconded:** Sarah Hollett  
**Decision:** Carried
8. Adjournment
  - a. Motion AGM 2023-004: to adjourn AGM 2021 at 10:40 am  
**Moved:** Matt Norman  
**Seconded:** Karen Flynn  
**Decision:** Carried

Churchill  
Chair:

Sept. 21/24  
Date:

All board meeting minutes must be approved at the next AGM and be signed by the Chair. Only then will they be made public.

## Board Chair; Report to the AGM

It has, again, been my honour to serve as your Board Chair over this past year, a busy one that has seen new and exciting activities and opportunities. For me, and your board, it continues to be a tremendous learning experience as we refine our roles and work together for the benefit of those we serve.

It's a pleasure to welcome you all here today.

It is your boards hope that we create a community where all voices, including those in this room, can collectively impact what we do, and how we move forward, at ASNL.

For the purposes of this report, I will share some highlights in each of ASNL's key strategic plan areas of Provincial Reach, Advocacy and Finance. While these three areas are distinct, they cannot be viewed in isolation... as our work must build on, and consider, aspects of all three.

ASNL is positioned to be precedent setting, when it comes to current research and understanding. Such was the case back in May when we hosted, *our second*, very well received conference on Neurodiversity. We are hoping to make such informative opportunities regular annual occurrences. While the conference itself was beneficial, what was perhaps even more valuable was the gathering of a variety of individuals from the autistic community whom we could meet and chat with, hearing from many perspectives. One result of such interactions has been the development of a social narrative with (and for) the St. John's International Airport.

Our social enterprise, The Pantry Café & Gardens continues to welcome patrons and offers an employment opportunity for autistics. Income is used to support all people across Newfoundland and Labrador.

This past year ASNL has received two significant grants; one from Rotary which saw the development of the *Rotary Welcome Room* here at the Elaine Dobbin Centre, and a financial commitment from the Sisters of Mercy & Presentation Sisters which has helped bring additional support and recreational programs.

Another new and very successful fundraiser was the initial **Afternoon Tea Event**, held on October 22<sup>nd</sup>. What a wonderful afternoon, held in this beautiful setting! We look forward to the second tea being held next Saturday, September 23<sup>rd</sup>. If you haven't already done so I encourage you to get your tickets for an elegant afternoon tea, fashion show and online auction....you won't be disappointed!!

Our board has a very positive relationship with the Provincial Govt. Having a government representative on our board, has certainly enhanced this collaborative connection. For example, there is currently a project ongoing (in conjunction with the provincial govt), with Aide Canada to introduce an online tool kit of province wide resources. Significant work is also ongoing with a number of Government/Community Groups: Autism Action Council, Provincial-Territorial Autism Network, NLESD/NLTA, City of St. John's Inclusion Advisory Committee, Health Care Foundation and Board of Trade. ASNLs contribution is necessary, we need to be at the table for our impact to be felt.

We are also proud that our board has been able to attract individuals from a **variety of sectors**, bringing different perspectives and backgrounds to the board table. We have recently welcomed an additional Self-Advocate, will today finalize the election of a Parent Rep. (Avalon) and are currently seeking Clinician and Communications Representatives. Worthy of note is that 8 individuals put their names forward for the Parent Rep.....it is so wonderful to see this level of interest. I will introduce each of our current members shortly.

Recognizing the challenges of reaching all areas of our province and having the strong desire to be more inclusive, this past year has seen the initiation of **Town Halls**. Board Members, with ASNL management, plan to hold these throughout our province with the first being this past Spring. April 22<sup>nd</sup> in Stephenville and 23<sup>rd</sup> in Corner Brook, the third is today here in St. John's. These provide valuable face to face opportunities.

There is also an e-mail address that's sole purpose is for collecting feedback from community members. In both cases... feedback is direct...from the ASNL community to the Board of Directors. I want to thank everyone for this **first hand** information gathered that will no doubt be so valuable in our decision making.

As you can see, our provincial reach is continuing to grow. A recent example is the renewal of a partnership with the Burin Peninsula Autism Parent Support Group.

While we recognize that some areas still have connectivity issues, the **Internet** is allowing ASNL to have a broader reach. As a school Principal myself, if it's one thing that the pandemic taught us was the benefits and utilization of a variety of technologies as it pertains to keeping connected when apart geographically. This AGM is enhanced by virtually reaching approximately 100 communities across NL! There are also four navigators in place across our province and recreation coordinators in three, funded by Jump Start

To help fulfill ASNL's mandate of "***being a leader in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador***" it is imperative, while we acknowledge, and celebrate the work completed, that our board focus on what we still need to do. We are cognizant of the work ahead, and our financial ability to address these concerns is growing. Strategically in the future, we will look to the issues highlighted in the gap analysis, including;

- Access to professionally trained respite care
- Access to better residential options;
- Programs and services for adults with autism and seniors with autism;
- Shorter assessment wait times;
- Increased employment opportunities for adults with autism;
- Improved and more inclusive childcare options;
- Increased supports in schools, especially in rural areas and;
- Less reliance on ABA-based therapies, looking at more research supported interventions.

You may notice that many directly impact autistic teens and adults, an area that has been left out of the conversation with the emphasis placed on young children and early intervention.

Your ASNL Board of Directors has reflected on the past and looks forward to the future. We have listened closely to our community and our vision was clear that the way forward was changing. With that in mind, we have taken the opportunity to refresh our brand – how we look and how we communicate. This change is reflected in our **updated** website, our publications, our messaging, and in what we do. A first-person approach is the message we heard loud and clear from our community. We will maintain this as we continue our advocacy and awareness ,through such events as Be Cool 4 Autism and Active for Autism, evidence-based initiatives for autistic individuals, improved support and services, and an extension of our service delivery models.

In closing, I wish to express my sincerest gratitude:

- To our supporters, partners, and volunteers: your generosity and commitment support us in all that we do;
- To our employees: We have so lucky to have a professional team of individuals and I am grateful for your work ethic, skills, and dedication. It's a pleasure to get to know each of you and come to better understand your daily work.
- To ASNL's Chief Executive Officer, Paul Walsh, and the entire management team. Thank you for your invaluable support of our work and we look forward to our continued, collaborative relationship.
- To retiring board members Desiree Simmons and Matthew Carroll – your leadership and knowledge have served us well and I wish you continued success.
- To each board member; who give unselfishly of their time and talent, and acknowledging the work of our Governance, Communication and Executive committees....**Thank-you.**

BOD INTRODUCE...

Anna Burke - Self-advocate

Dr. Matthew Carroll – Parent, Avalon (Finishing his term today)

Elaine Dobbin – Honorary Board Member

Karen Flynn - Parent, Off Avalon (Chair, Governance Committee)

Charlene Hann – Clinician, Off Avalon (Vice Chair)

Sarah Hollett – NL Govt. Representative

Matthew Norman – Chartered Professional Accountant (Treasurer)

Desiree Simmons – Clinician, Avalon (Secretary) (Finishing her term today)

Elizabeth Churchill (myself) – K-12 Educator (Chair)

Welcome to Self Advocate elect, Terry Bursey who today joins our Board.

- **And perhaps most importantly... to the community we serve: we work for you and with you; we welcome your participation and engagement; you can be assured that we will continue to listen and work together to advocate, pursue our mandate, and help this organization evolve to best serve and support you. To take a direct quote heard at May's Neurodiversity conference, "we are all interdependent...collective impact is needed"**

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Thank you so much.

Good morning.

As Elizabeth mentioned, my name is Paul Walsh and my pronouns are he and him. I serve as the Chief Executive Officer of the Autism Society of Newfoundland & Labrador.

In my report today I will use identity-centred language, meaning I will use *autistic*, versus *Person with Autism* or *Autistic Person*.

Based on feedback we have received from those we serve and support, autistic is preferred. Language is a dynamic topic and words are important, so it's vital that we leave the choice of language up to the individual. I am disabled, as I was diagnosed with cerebral palsy at birth. Disabled is how I choose to describe myself, so it becomes the language which I use. Either approach is valid, and the use of one over another is in no way meant to show disrespect to those who would opt for a different choice. If you are unsure, ask the individual what is their preference.

This is my third AGM as CEO, and I want to begin by thanking all who have joined us either in person or virtually. ASNL is an organization focused on elevating and centering the voices of the autistic community in our province. Your presence at this meeting, and at the town Hall which follows, helps provide us with a tremendous opportunity to hear and listen t those voices.

2022-23 marked some significant firsts for ASNL. The initial Embracing Neurodiversity conference brought together many in our community to hear and participate in key presentations from leading edge thinkers in Autism including Dr. Stuart Shanker and Andreae Callanan. The meeting was held in an inclusive space that attempted to address the needs of participants and ensure that those who wished to express their opinions, whether directly, in person, virtually, or through a post-it note board, had the opportunity to have their say. That feedback went right to our Board of Directors and the information helped them shape the strategic direction of ASNL moving forward.

Last year in this space I spoke about how much there is to do to change society's attitudes and perceptions, and how there are many gaps which remain as many in our community continue to struggle for their rights and dignity as human beings. We are far from the recognition of equity. Will still see systemic barriers around legitimate needs. We're still fighting for concepts like presumed competence, especially for those who are non-speaking. The recognition that autistic rights, like all disability rights, are basic human rights is still a constant battle.

Changes are incremental. Recently the American Medical Association, or AMA, endorsed a motion removing their support for Applied Behaviour Analysis, or ABA. This came because of

the advocacy, and in some cases activism, of many in the autistic community. Among the rationale for this change the AMA noted:

- “ABA practices are historically based in abuse such as holding autistic children’s communication hostage through the use of their devices as leverage, and denying basic rights such as food and toileting privileges”
- “A 2018 study found that adults with autism who have received ABA are more prone to suicide”
- “ABA has been repeatedly linked to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), with 46% of 460 participants meeting the diagnostic threshold for PTSD”
- “A 2021 study on conflicts of interest (COIs) in autism early intervention research found COIs to be prevalent and under-reported, with 70% of studies containing a conflict of interest and less than 6% declaring them as such”

The complete resolution includes many other points and I’d be happy to share a copy with anyone who has yet to read it. It’s an example of what can happen when society listens to, and elevates, the autistic voice.

Closer to home, ASNL asked members of the autistic community to help us re-define the definition of autism on our website. The

result is an affirming definition that recognizes autism as part of natural diversity. It reads:

*Autism is a Neurotype and part of the range of natural variation in human neurological development.*

*Human beings have a diverse range of Neurotypes — “Neuro” meaning brain. This diversity in human Neurotype is what we call “Neurodiversity”.*

*Neurodiversity (“Brain Diversity”) includes other diagnoses such as Attention Deficit Hyper Activity Disorder (ADHD), Dyspraxia, Dyslexia, Down Syndrome etc. and is a part of nature’s normal biodiversity. This biodiversity ensures all species have healthy ecosystems to thrive in. Autism is a Neuro (“brain”) developmental (“process of developing”) difference and may therefore be on a different developmental timeline.*

*Autistics may avail of supports in different areas at different times in their life across their lifespan.*

One of the most important things about this definition is how it is neuro-affirming. In the past autism (and other disabilities) had definitions that were deficit-based and related to what a person is unable to do. This type of thinking and language has been replaced by the realization that nature’s diversity comes in all forms and that variance is natural and helps to grow our cultural fabric.

Now these are changes, but they don't create the magnitude of change that we all want to see happen. And therefore our work continues, and I want to take the time to introduce the team of people here at ASNL that work hard for the changes our community is seeking.

Beginning with our Navigation Team. Going from west to east, Paul Lockyer in Corner Brook, Kayla Snow in Grand Falls-Windsor, Chris Dedde in Clarendville and Rachel Hogan in St. John's. For many in our community these people are ASNL as they walk with them in their journey every day. In addition, we are also fortunate to have part-time recreation co-ordinators in each of the resource centres outside St. John's. I'd also like to mention Stephanie Caravan in our Grand Falls-Windsor office who provides navigation support.

In programming, Sarah Hardiman provides leadership for Transitions, Lisa Lovell leads Employment Works along with her team of Terra Wiseman and Renette Mbroh (M-brow). STEP, Students Transitioning to Employment & Post-Secondary, is led by Shauna Collins and also involves the Navigators. Danielle Knutsgrachian is the driving force behind our recreation programming. Program facilitation and co-ordination is led by Kayla Warren.

In property, our social enterprise restaurant, The Pantry Café and Gardens features the terrific team of Ty Buckle, Colin Power, Angel Hewlett, and Dan Domney. Ty is filling in for Chef Brenda Williams during her maternity leave. Cathy Drake, who greets everyone who enters the Elaine Dobbin Centre and is my right-hand person, provides office management and website leadership. Candace Moakler administers all aspects of our fund development along with community programming such as Be Cool 4 Autism and Active for Autism. Candace is also instrumental in planning, organizing and delivering our annual conference, and is the vision and driving force behind our Afternoon Tea. The amazing property at the Elaine Dobbin Centre which we are privileged to benefit from is managed by Adam Chafe and William Feltham. Adam also a significant role with Transitions and Will delivers a key part of our programming. Our leadership team is comprised of Finance Manager Alex Collins, Client Services Manager Alicia Penney, Advocacy Manager Leah Farrell, and me. The support, commitment and devotion of Leah, Alicia and Alex is exemplary and I thank them for all that they do every day to make my job so much easier. We are a team in every sense of the term.

Many of our ASNL staff are here today and if you haven't already had the chance I encourage you to stay around for a few minutes after the meeting so we can all meet and chat.

At this time, I'd like to pause for a moment to acknowledge and remember Scott Crocker. Scott was my predecessor at ASNL and for 8 years faithfully served the autistic community in this province. Scott passed away in April of this year, and all of us at ASNL offer our condolences to his family and our thanks for all that Scott accomplished.

In 2022-23, your ASNL team reached over 3,000 clients. This includes pre-employment programs such as STEP, Employment Works, and Transitions, along with many and varied recreational programs. Additionally, approximately 1,300 individuals participated in program offerings and support groups and over 230 people participated in overnight family camps. Further, over 9,200 people participated in Autism Awareness and Understanding programs. These are significant accomplishments, and it is to the credit of the ASNL team, who work hard every day for autistics, those who love them, and those who work with them throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Advocacy, both individual and systemic, is also a big part of what we do. From the Navigators who work daily with individuals and

families as they manage the complexities of the various offerings that are available to them, to having a voice and participating in municipal, provincial and federal boards, councils and commissions, we are at the table and on the ground working with our community members. To my colleagues at ASNL who give so much of their time and energy to all our endeavours, thank you for all that you do. Your work is very much appreciated.

Of course, all of this requires financial support. ASNL sincerely appreciates the support of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador not only financially but also for always being available to us when we need to advocate, no matter how difficult or challenging the topic. Your partnership with us delivers measureable outcomes. We are also so privileged to have the commitment of many foundations, businesses and individuals whose significant contributions allow us to sustain and build on our work. So many people do so much to help us make a difference. Thank you all for your generosity.

In addition to this support, ASNL has signature events each year. They are Be Cool for Autism in April, Active for Autism in October, the Embracing Neurodiversity Conference in May, and our Afternoon Tea and Auction. Each of these are delivered through the skill and leadership of Candace Moakler. If you'd like to know

more about our events or indeed become involved with them, we look forward to chatting afterwards.

Our social enterprise, The Pantry Café & Gardens, is a great source of pride to all of us. In 2022-23, over 8,700 meals were served by the Pantry and 3,750 hours of training and employment were provided to our community.

Please review our 2022-23 Impact Report for more details on our operations.

A few words on our finances. ASNL works hard to deliver on our commitments while managing within our means. We are careful to ensure that whatever we spend is done in the interest of our community, and are consciously very prudent with that spending.

Overall, two-thirds of our resources goes toward programs and services with the remaining one-third split evenly between social enterprise and property & administration. The two most significant areas of spending in programs and services are advocacy (22%) and navigation (18%). For those who would like more information I again refer you to our Impact Report or, for additional detail, our audited financial statements.

This past year marked the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of ASNL. As we look ahead we must address the gaps that remain and others which emerge. Solutions to address the quality and

accessibility of respite are needed. Better residential options are required. Services throughout the lifespan must be expanded. Supports for individuals in pre-school, primary, secondary and post-secondary need further enhancements. Systemic change in these and other areas is part of our strategic focus and is the basis for our discussions with our partners in government and elsewhere.

In closing, thank you once again for your attendance here today. To the team of talented professionals who I work with every day, thank you for all that you do and know that you are very much appreciated. It's a privilege to be part of this team. I look forward to continuing our work with all of you and with the other members of our community as we strive to achieve the best outcomes possible, never afraid of doing the brave things that make a difference.