

2023-2024

Annual Report

A Year in Review



Better
Together



ASTONISHED!
BETTER TOGETHER

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

In the spirit of Truth and Reconciliation, we recognize the opportunity we have to be stewards of goodness and equality on Treaty 4 Territory, the traditional territory of the Cree, Saulteaux, Dakota, Lakota, Nakoda, and homeland of the Métis.

On behalf of the Board of Connectors, I am pleased to welcome you to our Annual General Meeting. Your presence today reaffirms your commitment to the innovative work of Astonished!.

Core members and student researchers have enjoyed a year of teaching and learning, social activities, and planning and dreaming. I am pleased to report that the Board of Connectors has initiated a journey to begin dreaming and planning, too, to ensure a strong future for the organization. Stay tuned, as we will ask for your engagement in the coming months!

I am thankful for Brenda MacLauchlan who has helped us grow our social presence over the last 10 years. She is passing on the ‘digital torch’ to another crafty and inspired creator. And thank you to Michael Dubnewick and Nikita Rathwell who have thoughtfully served a three-year term with the organization.

Without eager Student Researchers, Core Members, families, supporters, donors/funders and volunteers Astonished! could not continue with innovative and meaningful initiatives. And last but not certainly not least, thanks to Bonnie and Mel for another great year of planning, organizing, facilitating and administrating.

Enjoy your summer, everyone!

Brenda Rossow-Kimball
Board of Connectors, Chair

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear members and friends of the Astonished! Community,

Over the past year, I have been fortunate to witness a community that truly embodies the spirit of #bettertogether. I have seen people coming together to have fun, support one another, and pursue their own goals and interests. We continue to offer programming both at the university and throughout the wider community, fostering meaningful connections and enriching shared experiences.



I am deeply grateful for the steadfast support from our community, which has been unwavering over the past decade. Individuals, businesses, and government alike have continued to champion the vision and values of Astonished! For this, I am profoundly thankful.

In 2023-2024, we had many noteworthy accomplishments including:

- Continuing to offer 4 person-centered programs in the areas of self-discovery, recreation/leisure, and teaching/learning;
- Welcoming three new Core Members to the Astonished! Teaching and Learning Centre;
- Offering the Big Sky Outdoor Adventure Program as a 'Core Program' (originally piloted summer 2022);
- Piloting the Garden of Wellness;
- Continuing to respond directly to Core Members' strengths, dreams, and needs;
- Engaging in research, teaching, and learning opportunities with students and faculty from the University of Regina;
- Managing the 11th Annual Grow Gratitude campaign, the 9th Annual Walk and Roll, and our annual spring fundraiser;
- Facilitating workshops and educational and interactive series.

I would like to thank everyone for their continued involvement in Astonished!. Your interest, presence and the gifts that you share enable us to continue to build an inclusive community. We encourage you to share the story of Astonished! with your friends, family, and work place.

Cheers,
Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous

MANY THANKS

Communications

Brenda MacLauchlan

Board of Connectors

Dr. Brenda Rossow-Kimball-Chair

Taylor Carson - Vice Char

Rhea Boysen - Secretary

Deneeca Ludwar - Treasurer

Nora Davis

Dr. Michael Dubnewick

Dr. Helen Pridmore

Nikita Rathwell

Finance Committee

Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous

Sandra Brandt

Deneeca Ludwar

Program Advisory Committee

Kelsey Culbert

Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous

Nora Davis

Brenda MacLauchlan

Melissa Turbuck

Spring Fundraiser Committee

Tanisha Beaudry

Bonnie Cummings-Vickaryous

Avery Ottenbreit

Deb Ottenbreit

Melissa Turbuck

Dr. Brenda Rossow-Kimball

Placement Students

Jenali Dave, Sae Yeoun Hong, Shantel Hutton, Sabrina Ali, Pascalla Jacobson, Lia Reynosa, Maria Sadikov, Esther Adebayo, Kyle Huber, Shogofa Bahrami, Bailey Balaberda, Jerry Hyuen, Mishwa Patel, Wade Fullerton, Saydlynn Reinhardt, Sohui Lee, Aamad Abu Huraira.

OVERVIEW

The Big Sky Centre for Learning and Being Astonished! Inc. is a registered charity based in Regina, Saskatchewan. We work in an inclusive community to address barriers facing young adults with complex physical disAbilities (Core Members) by creating opportunities for teaching and learning; social, recreational and cultural engagement; and for employment and housing.

We work towards an inclusive community where young adults with complex physical disAbilities can share their dreams, explore their strengths, and lead others to a more authentically inclusive society.

Over 50 adults with complex physical disAbilities make up our 'Core Membership' and represent Astonished! Together we have created 4 core programs:

1. The Astonished! Teaching and Learning Centre (A!TLC)
2. The Astonished! Social Club
3. Summer Literacy Program
4. The Big Sky Outdoor Summer Adventure





GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

The Astonished Guiding Principles and Values, developed in the early years, and always a work in progress, continue to guide us:

Who we are and how we work together

- Astonished! focuses on young adults with complex physical disAbilities and their particular place in a vibrant and diverse community.
- Astonished! celebrates creativity, capacity, and diversity.
- Astonished! believes that inclusion is individual, and starts with the dreams, strengths, and needs of the individual.
- For Astonished!, inclusion means we are better together, and is always a work in progress.
- Astonished! affirms interdependence.

Astonished! Values Community

- Astonished! believes in building and nurturing respectful, resilient community and a culture of inclusion and respect.
- Astonished! works to create spaces and places of belonging where all ages, abilities, races, incomes, genders, and sexual orientations can offer their gifts and time, and receive the gifts and nurture of others through living, working and playing together.
- Astonished! respects Earth and the natural world which offers teachings about resilience, change, diversity, healing, and community that contribute to our vision and work.
- Astonished! encourages and supports arts and artists. We live out inclusion and accessibility in language and communication, facilities and activities, while we build and sustain the well-being of community.

Consensus

- Astonished! respects our humanness; we try our best, learn from mistakes, and hang in with each other through rough times, as well as, easy times.
- Astonished! makes decisions by consultation and consensus.



2023-2024 PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

CORE PROGRAMS

- ATLC
- SOCIAL CLUB
- SUMMER LITERACY
- BSSOAP

INNITIATIVES/PILOTS

- SERIES
- GARDEN OF WELLNESS

2023-2024 A!TLC HIGHLIGHTS



Astonished! Teaching and Learning Centre (A!TLC)

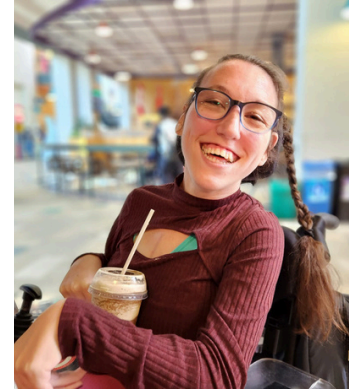
A!TLC is a place where Core Members become Student Researchers. Established in January of 2013, A!TLC provides unique opportunities designed around each individual's particular strengths, dreams, and needs. Astonished! staff, volunteers, and placement students support each Student Researcher as they determine and navigate a program PATH or areas of interest unique to them. Additional program content is designed around common areas of interest. Further, Student Researchers are leaders and work with the University Community in research and teaching about disAbility and inclusion.

2023-2024 A!TLC HIGHLIGHTS

- Dedicated time for each Student Researcher to work on individualized goals and areas of interest;
- Weekly yoga sessions co-facilitated by Student Researcher Rebekah Lindenbach and Ruth Blaser from 'Yoga for Every Body';
- Participating in a monthly Truth and Reconciliation Workshop;
- Developed and delivered presentations to University of Regina students enrolled in Kinesiology and Health Studies and Education;
- Baking Day at Prairie Spruce Commons with Jodi Robson who was a finalist on 'The Great Canadian Baking Show';
- Workshops on: Human Rights (Winter 2024), Cognitive Health (Winter 2024), Code of Conduct (Fall 2023), Gardening (Spring 2024), Adapted Physical Activity (Winter 2024);
- Adapted Physical Activity Sports Day with the Saskatchewan Wheelchair Sports Association, Soccer Saskatchewan and Brenda Rossow-Kimball's Kin 341 class (Winter 2024);
- Participated in a 10-part 'Tell it Like it is' Sexuality Workshop with Master's of Kinesiology Student (Spring 2023);
- Making a Recipe Book with the hopes of completing it for Gala 2025;
- Making the Video for the Gala (Winter 2024);
- Student Researcher A!TLC program lead days (curling, hockey, music therapy, Disney Trip, and Cultural days,);
- Planted and tended to the Accessible Garden plot at the South Zone Community Garden



ASTONISHED! INC

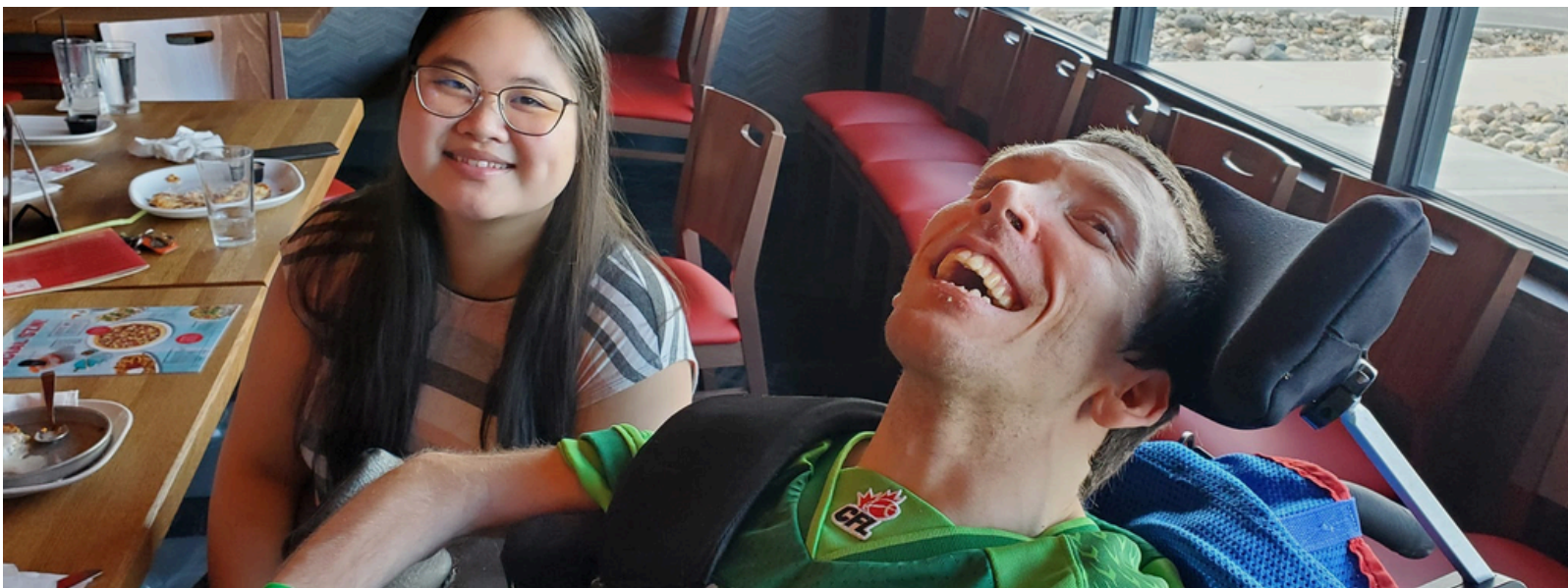


2023-2024 SOCIAL CLUB HIGHLIGHTS

On a monthly basis, Astonished! offers an inclusive, social recreation, and/or physically active event to the Astonished! Core Members. This program is carried out through the vision and planning of the Astonished! Leadership Team. Volunteers assist with event implementation.

Events typically take place throughout the community. These events provide a great avenue for building inclusive community as Core Members gather with and meet new friends; potential Core Members have a chance to see what Astonished! is all about; and university students have a chance to form meaningful relationships and gain valuable experience.

We are thankful for our collaboration with the City of Regina. Astonished! receives funding from the City of Regina Social Development Grant - Annual Activity to partially fund the Social Club. In the letter accompanying the grant, the city wrote “Your program provides supportive, meaningful, and accessible social, recreational, and cultural activities to young adults with complex physical disabilities. The committee acknowledged that your program responds to a great need in community and, aligns strongly to the City’s social development priorities.”



2023-2024 SOCIAL CLUB HIGHLIGHTS



ADULT SCIENCE NIGHT, ACCESSIBLE GARDEN EVENT, THEATRE IN THE PARK, POETRY SHOWCASE IN VICTORIA PARK, PICNIC AT CANDY CANE PARK, RIDER GAME PIZZA NIGHT, 'IS IT CAKE?' EVENT, 'LIGHT UP THE DARKE' MUSIC CONCERT, HOLIDAY FEAST, U OF R WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL GAME, FROST FESTIVAL & OUTDOOR CAMPFIRE NIGHT.

2023-2024 SUMMER LITERACY HIGHLIGHTS



Astonished! is dedicated to developing and delivering literacy services tailored to the unique strengths, dreams, and needs of our Core Members.

In Summer 2023, we proudly offered in-person literacy programs with 14 enthusiastic Core Members participating. Summer staff creatively planned a summer filled with fun and engaging literacy activities. Core Members participated in a book club, enhancing their comprehension and retention skills. Additionally, they delved into creative writing, health literacy, technology, and cultural literacy, broadening their horizons and skills in diverse areas.

2023-2024 SUMMER LITERACY HIGHLIGHTS

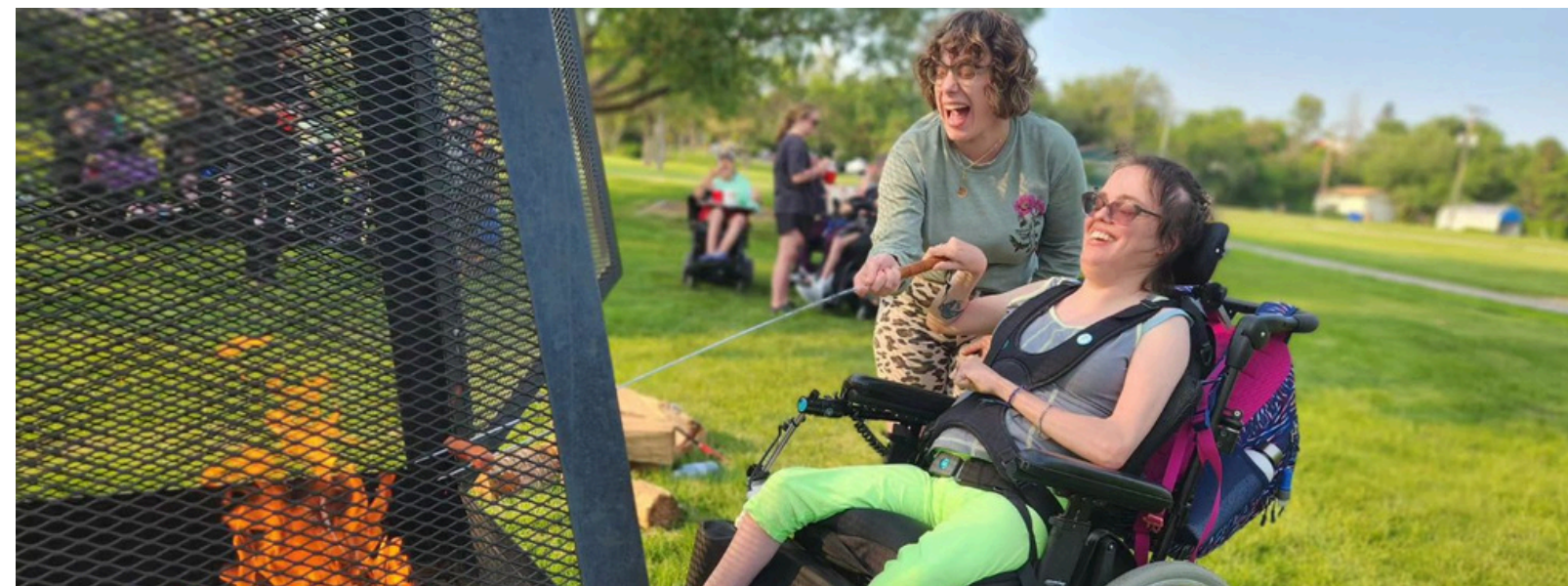


2023-2023 BIG SKY SUMMER OUTDOOR ADVENTURE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

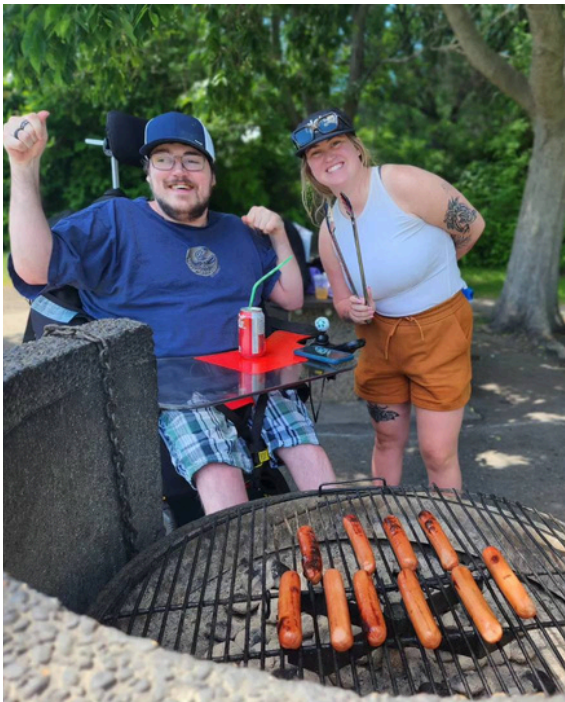
First piloted in Summer 2022, the Big Sky Summer Outdoor Adventure program became a cornerstone offering in Summer 2023. We provided a 10-week program designed to offer young adults with complex physical disabilities opportunities to engage in accessible recreation and leisure activities within the city of Regina. We are grateful for the support from the City of Regina through their Annual Sport and Recreation grant.

Astonished! staff carefully planned and facilitated enriching summer recreation and leisure activities aimed at exploring the Queen City and encouraging Core Members to be active. Our Core Members were encouraged to step outside their comfort zones and try new recreational and leisure activities, all while enjoying the company of friends and support staff.

From June to August, Astonished!'s Big Sky Summer Outdoor Adventure program offered a variety of weekly activities, including nature trekking and scavenger hunts, an amazing race, pizza in the park, outdoor sports and games, community festivals and events, and outdoor movie nights.



2023-2024 BIG SKY SUMMER OUTDOOR ADVENTURE HIGHLIGHTS



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA



Through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the University of Regina, Astonished! and the University collaborate on research and inclusion opportunities. This reciprocal partnership provides great opportunities for young adults with complex physical disabilities and the U of R student body, faculty, and staff to learn from each other.

We demonstrate a model for social inclusion in an accessible post-secondary education environment. This year saw us welcome back in-person volunteers and multiple placement students from the Faculty of Kinesiology and Health Studies, Social Work and Nursing. We continue to seek out and build partnerships with University Faculty and explore mutually beneficial collaborations.

COMMUNITY PROFILE AND FUNDRAISING

Key Successes



Campaign goals reached

The Astonished! Board of Connectors and Staff are responsible for raising the annual budget. The Global Fundraising Committee along with the Board of Connectors have set a goal to work towards building an operating reserve equal to a minimum of our annual operating budget.

We continue to build awareness of Astonished! in the community and at the University of Regina.



Partnerships

Through the persistent work of the Global Fundraising committee, staff, many Core Members and their families and with support from our long-time donors, new donors, the community, and our annual contract with Community Living Service Delivery we were able to meet the 2022-2023 budget and build towards establishing a healthy operating reserve.

- 2023 Grow Gratitude Campaign (\$19,037)
- 2024 Spring Fundraiser (\$51,085)
- Walk and Roll (\$35,200)
- Grants & Foundation Support (Lorne and Evelyn Johnson Foundation at the South Saskatchewan Community Foundation; Canada Summer Jobs Grant; The City of Regina Social Development Grant; City of Regina Sport and Recreation Annual Activity Grant; Community Initiatives Fund; Intact Better Communities Program)



City of Regina

