



March 25, 2024

Thank you, Mayor & Councillors, for being part of the ongoing discussion on how to create an inclusive community for all.

My name is Lyndsay Beer and I am the owner & one of the lead Behaviour Interventionists at Ascend Behaviour & Family Support Services Inc. We provide behaviour intervention support to neurodiverse children & youth. We are requesting that the City of Fort St. John proclaim April 2024 'Autism Acceptance Month'.

In past years, Mayor & Council have made Autism Awareness proclamations. This year we ask for Autism Acceptance; with this small word change we hope to encourage adaptive community events that promote inclusion. Awareness can help parents & caregivers know the common traits and highlight the need for early diagnosis & supports but it often does not go beyond that. Acceptance should create ongoing conversations on how we can support and empower Autistic individuals.

To quote Autistic Self Advocate and blogger Lyric Holmans:
"Autism Awareness is knowing autism exists. Autism Acceptance is about embracing them as they are, with strengths and weaknesses."

It has been exciting to see the City creating events such as the Sensory Friendly Swim at the North Peace Leisure pool and accommodating spaces like the 'Parent tent' at the Canada Day celebrations & the Kids Zone tent at the High on Ice Festival. There have been local photographers offering special times with Santa and some of the grocery stores also used to have a sensory friendly shopping hour. It is our hope that with a proclamation for Autism Acceptance, the conversation can be reignited on ways we all can create more inclusive and supportive environments. At Ascend we recently started a free coffee connection event for adults with neurodiversities as well as a teen girl program that partners with local businesses to create community relationships. Events like this encourage and support Autistic people and others with neurodevelopmental differences to be active in their community and it also creates opportunities for employees to have positive interactions in return.

Recently, AutismBC wrote a letter stating that there are 56 individuals with autism in the Peace region with 100 awaiting assessments. We know that number underrepresents the Autistic community in Fort St. John and surrounding areas as we at Ascend have served or know of at least 85 autistic children & youth. That

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number does not include adults or those waiting on assessment, nor does it include other communities in the north like Dawson Creek, Hudson Hope or Fort Nelson. With the Autism community growing, the need for accessible events & opportunities is growing as well.

We appreciate your consideration for making April 'Autism Acceptance Month' and encourage everyone, local businesses and City Council alike, to continue the conversation on inclusion throughout the year.

Lyndsay Beer, RBT

Owner & Lead Behaviour Interventionist

Ascend Behaviour & Family Support Services Inc.