



Annual Report 2023

Individualized. Interactive. Inspired.

THIS YEAR...

22% increase in students served.

of instructional hours provided: **1242**

(minimum required by Ministry of Education = 850)

\$15,000 fundraised per student.



PALS Board of Directors:

Allison Arai, Treasurer
Tina Chiao
Katy Harandi, Board Chair
Tammy Kalla
Sahar Kanani
Cindy Maltman, Board Secretary
Robert Standerwick, KC

PALS Administrators:

Andrea Kasunic, Executive Director
Rebecca Tayler, Head of School

PALS Finance Committee:

Allison Arai, CPA, CA
Atefeh Biglar, CPA
Larry Bisaro, CPA, CA
Hesha Phillips, CPA, CA
Vincent Tong, CPA, CA

Parent Support Group Executive Members:

Ahsan Alam, Secretary
Nicole Daga, Co-Chair
Nasim Khan, Co-Chair
Atefeh Biglar, Co-Treasurer
Akm Moniruzzaman, Co-Treasurer

PALS Advisory Council:

Dr. Vikram Dua, MD FRCPC
Landa Fox, MA, BCBA, CSHE
Noah Morantz, CFRE
Shannon Muir, MSc RSLP
Beverley Wasmund, MSc OT
Jean Wong, BCom

Our ***mission*** is to provide year-round, scientifically validated educational programs designed to encourage individual growth and personal achievement.



A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT AND CHAIR OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

KATY HARANDI

As we reflect on our journey this past year, we can proudly state that this has been a year of growth, resilience, and accomplishment. We introduced the role of Executive Director which Andrea Kasunic wholeheartedly embraced and transitioned into in July of 2023. As Executive Director, Andrea will be focusing on strategic fundraising and revenue generation for the school and its programs. Rebecca Tayler stepped into the Head of School position and is leading our dedicated team of teachers and staff and continuing to provide exceptional education and support to our students. As a result of the commitment of the staff in creating a meaningful learning environment for our students, many have achieved functional milestones and we are immensely proud of their progress. Every child's unique abilities are celebrated.

While we have made significant progress, securing funding for our programs remains a challenge. We will continue to explore grants, donations, and partnerships to ensure the sustainability of our school. Thank you to the generosity of our Gala 2023 sponsors, donors and volunteers. "Andiamo, An Evening in Capri" successfully achieved record revenue figures. THANK YOU!

As we move forward, we remain committed to our mission of providing the highest quality education and support for children with autism. Our priorities for the coming year include improving our facilities to accommodate a growing student population. I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated staff, supportive parents, and the entire board for their unwavering commitment to our cause. Together, we will continue to make a positive impact on the lives of the students we serve.

Thank you for your trust and support.





I am so excited to share this story with PALS supporters! We were visiting family out of town and they had a basketball court in front of their house. I went out on my own to play and my daughter, Adriana, must have seen me. She came outside independently and started playing with me! Catching, throwing, she even tried to shoot. Adriana even let me do hand-over-hand to help her dribble and shoot the ball. This was amazing! I work as a Support Worker in a special needs multi-sport program and I never once considered registering Adriana for it because I knew it would go poorly. Now, it might just be something we can try :) This is a HUGE step for Adriana. I couldn't be prouder of my girl and more grateful for PALS. I just couldn't believe it. I got to play basketball with my daughter! I can't thank PALS enough for everything they do, not just for my daughter, but for all these wonderful kids. PALS has created such an incredible environment for them to thrive. Their lives are better because PALS is a part of it.

-Nicole D., Proud PALS Parent of 11 year old Adriana

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ANDREA KASUNIC



It is my honor to be reporting this year from the position of Executive Director of PALS Autism Society. The creation of this new role is a testament to the organization's positive and steadfast growth since 2007. As Executive Director, my focus is to ensure PALS has strong leadership, clear direction, and accountability so that we can continue to fulfill our mission of providing year-round, scientifically validated educational programs to students with autism.

We are extremely grateful to the Foundations, Organizations, and Private Donors listed below who have contributed \$5,000 or more to the Society between November 1, 2022, and October 31, 2023.

PALS expresses our profound gratitude to **Alireza and Natalia Harandi** for their kind and generous act. Instead of receiving wedding gifts, they requested family and friends to make a tribute donation to PALS. Thanks to their thoughtfulness and the funds raised, the school was able to replace four aging Smartboards, which are extensively used by the teachers at PALS for interactive group learning activities.

Thank you to **The Ames Family Foundation** for their continual support towards the PALS occupational therapy program. The program focuses on teaching essential skills like executive functioning, fine and gross motor movement planning, and self-regulation, which are vital for the overall development of PALS students. Their families are grateful that their children can access this important program.

PALS Autism Society would like to express gratitude towards the **Burnaby Firefighters Charitable Society, In Memory of Alan and Marilyn Codyre**, for their annual pledge. This contribution is a part of their 20-year commitment towards the PALS School Tuition Bursary and the Post-Secondary Scholarship Fund. These scholarships are specifically designed for PALS School Students who would benefit from an additional year of schooling and life skills training after completing their Grade 12 year.

Thanks to the generosity of **The CCSF Autism Foundation**, PALS students receive critical developmental therapies, bursaries, and adapted teaching materials. The members of the CCSF Autism Foundation continue to keep PALS at the forefront of their work by organizing their own fundraisers and donating the proceeds to PALS. At these events, they always strive to raise autism awareness and autism acceptance in the Chinese community. We appreciate their frequent visits to the school, where they witness the impact of their support first-hand.

PALS Autism Society expresses its heartfelt gratitude to the **Government of Canada** for awarding our organization the Enabling Accessibility Fund. This generous grant is being utilized to enhance the playground facility of PALS, making it more accessible and accommodating for students with autism. The improvements are specifically designed to meet the unique needs of students with autism and to ensure that they can enjoy the playground to the fullest.

PALS remains committed to making every reasonable effort to enable students to remain in school while working through regressive, self-injurious, or other challenging behaviours. Thanks to **Grosvenor Americas**, the PALS Behaviour Support Bursary has been extended for another year. As a result, families are eligible to receive financial assistance to cover the cost of additional one-to-one staff support, additional consultation from Board Certified Behaviour Analysts, and additional costs for necessary materials and environmental modifications for students experiencing temporary periods of challenging behaviours.

Thank you to **The Mary and Gordon Christopher Foundation** for their unwavering support of the PALS speech and language therapy program. Effective communication is the foundation of all skills taught at PALS, and it is heartening to note that families continue to appreciate The Mary and Gordon Christopher Foundation's support year after year.

Variety – the Children's Charity of BC has greatly contributed to making learning inclusive, accessible, and safe for all students at PALS. With the help of Variety BC School Grant program, PALS was able to purchase equipment for a new sensory space in the school. This equipment includes a swing, bubble table, music panel, ball pit, and sensory pathways. PALS is grateful to Variety BC for bridging a part of the gap in government funding and helping to make the school a more comfortable place for PALS students.

The PALS Before and After School Care Program (BASC) is an essential support system for families who need out-of-school care to work full-time and afford PALS school fees. The BASC program allows our families to continue enrolling their children in the school program. We express our sincerest gratitude to **The Wolrige Foundation** for once again helping to make this program affordable and accessible to all our students. As a major supporter since PALS' establishment in 2007, The Wolrige Foundation was recognized as the 2023 *Imagine...* Gala Honouree. PALS Autism Society expresses our heartfelt appreciation to graduating student **Douglas Wong**, for making a tribute gift to the BASC Program in honour of his graduation. Douglas participated in BASC at PALS for many years, benefiting greatly from the social and recreational components of the program.



PALS said *arrivederci* to the virtual gala format in 2023 and returned to the in-person format we all missed and loved. At the 16th Annual *Imagine...* Gala, guests were transported to the beautiful Capri coast, sipping Aperol Spritz and savoring decadent risotto while emcee, Sophie Lui, and auctioneer, Fred Lee, kept us entertained. That night, PALS set a new fundraising record thanks to our many event sponsors, an extravagant silent auction, exciting Live Auction, generous Fund-A-Therapy pledges, and prosperous raffle. *Grazie!*

As we experience an ever-growing demand for our school services, we remain committed to making a lasting impact on our students and their families. We are excited about the opportunities that lie ahead in these growth years and are confident that, with your continued support, we will achieve even greater success in the years to come.

Thank you for your ongoing support and partnership so that PALS remains a vital educational resource for families of children with autism.



2023 ANNUAL REPORT

PALS AUTISM SOCIETY

16th Annual *Imagine...* Gala Sponsors

Thank you to all our sponsors for their generous support.

Presenting Sponsor	Reliance Insurance Agencies Ltd.
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My son, Nicholas, started at PALS Autism School in January 2023 after our family moved to BC from Alberta. The PALS staff regularly share pictures of Nicholas with a smile on his face, reminding me every day how great this move was for him and our family. Nicholas sings happily every morning on the way to school and is so excited to see his friends and teachers. The teachers are so greatly appreciated and knowing that I don't have to worry about Nicholas when he is at school is such a relief. I'm so proud of how my son is growing up and making huge leaps and bounds. His language is blossoming and I'm so incredibly grateful for all the incredible work being done by PALS each and every day.

-Lori H., Proud PALS Parent of 11 year old Nicholas

A MESSAGE FROM THE OUTGOING HEAD OF SCHOOL

ANDREA KASUNIC

PASSING OF THE TORCH

The School Program at PALS Autism Society is well regarded for its excellence in providing students with autism an individualized education that is based on scientifically validated teaching methods. It takes a large team to run the school, and at its core are the Educational Instructors. At the start of each school year, students are assigned a new Primary Educational Instructor who is responsible for preparing and conducting the student's intensive teaching session each day, as well as for communicating regularly with their family and the rest of the school team.

With one of the hallmark characteristics of autism being rigidity, you may wonder why we change the pairings each year instead of keeping them the same. The change allows students to form new, flexible relationships and generalize their learning across different people, and it helps our staff grow their teaching toolkit with diverse learners. The Primary Educational Instructor becomes their student's expert, advocate, and biggest cheerleader, forming a strong bond after 1 year together.

Every August, the PALS Administrative team takes utmost care in planning the new pairings and conducts a meeting to make the announcements. This ritual is called the 'passing of the torch', as the outgoing Primary Instructor entrusts the incoming Primary Instructor with the responsibility of developing the same sacred bond they held with their previous student and continuing to nurture their learning throughout the year.

After serving as the Head of School for 13 years, I made the decision it was time for me to 'pass the torch' to Rebecca Tayler, a trusted PALS teacher who is an expert in special education, a strong advocate for autism acceptance, and the most passionate PALS cheerleader I know. Rebecca will say that learning is not just for the students! As noted above in the symbiotic relationship between students and instructors, change is good. This change provides Rebecca and me opportunities to use our skills in different ways, form new relationships, and grow as leaders within the Society. I know that Rebecca shares the same sacred connection to the school program as I do, and I'm confident that she will continue to nurture its growth in the years to come.



A MESSAGE FROM THE NEW HEAD OF SCHOOL

REBECCA TAYLER

I feel profoundly fortunate to prepare my first annual report as the newly appointed Head of School at PALS Autism Society. My journey at PALS started 8 years ago, as a Special Education Classroom Teacher, before stepping into my current role as Head of School. Having read these annual reports each year, it is with a sense of surreal wonder and excitement that I now have the honor of composing my own message.

From my first year, it became evident to me, that PALS was a uniquely exceptional school. I learnt quickly that the PALS motto, "Individualized, Interactive, Inspired", is an everyday living reality that permeates every facet of our daily operations. *Individuality* is a cornerstone of the PALS approach, evident in our commitment to one-on-one intensive teaching for personalized goals and behaviour interventions, and the ability to tailor group lessons thanks to our small class sizes. The school is unwavering in its dedication to provide an engaging and *interactive* curriculum that values the aspirations and needs of each child and their family. This level of customization sets PALS apart as a leading institution for children and adolescence with autism, and is genuinely *inspiring* to see in action.

While embracing my new role as Head of School, I am still deeply-rooted in the perspective of an educator. Looking back on my time as a teacher at PALS, I deeply appreciate the privilege I had in providing my students with essential resources to facilitate accessible education. I know first-hand, that I could not have offered such unique and enriching learning experiences without the expertise from Speech Language Pathologists, Occupational Therapists and Board-Certified Behaviour Analysts and the use of extensively adaptive materials and technology, all made possible by our generous donors.

I am excited to announce that this new school year, September 2023, we have expanded to our largest enrollment numbers ever at PALS, adding a third classroom. Our steadily increasing waitlist emphasizes the importance of school-wide growth to accommodate more children in need of the educational model PALS provides. With a 22% increase in students, our staff has also increased, and they are working diligently to make the expansion as smooth as possible.



Our students are not the only ones learning at PALS, as we introduced two exciting initiatives for families and instructors. In May we successfully completed our first 'Parent Learning Session'. Topics and presenters are chosen based on parent interest in the field of autism education and allows for customizability based on each student's unique needs. So far this has included topics such as an Occupational Therapy-led workshop on mealtime success and a Certified Sexual Health Educator-led workshop on puberty. Additionally, we have also started a monthly 'After-School Study Club' as an optional paid training opportunity for all instructors, offered twice a month outside of work hours. PALS is committed to providing accessible and innovative learning opportunities to everyone within our school community.

This year, we reintroduced two highly successful programs that were on hold due to the pandemic; the PALS snack program and swimming lessons. Whether it be increasing our student's repertoire of healthy food options or learning how to prepare snacks and lunches independently, the snack program allows for a compassionate and systematic approach to meal time success and independence. The reintroduction of our 4-week swimming lessons was also met with palpable joy from students and parents, as learning to swim is both an enjoyable and invaluable life skill.

Also marking the end of COVID restrictions for PALS, we have secured two new work experience placements for our transition aged students. A special thanks to BASES Thrift Shop and Don't Go Hungry for providing our older students with important job skill opportunities for their employment success after PALS.

In closing, this year we celebrated the graduation of long-time student, Douglas, who attended PALS for 15 years. We wish him all the best on his transition to Pals Adult Services Society (PASS). To learn more about Douglas' journey from PALS to PASS, [please watch this short video](#).

I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to our dedicated supporters, staff, volunteers, therapists, families, board members, and invaluable donors for their contributions to making PALS what it is today.



2009



2023



When meeting with my son Andy's school team, otherwise known as our PALS family, to discuss and set goals for his upcoming Grade 12 school year, I was overcome with emotions and could not help but shed tears of joy, realizing all of his accomplishments over the last 9 years. My husband and I will never get tired of expressing our deepest appreciation for everyone's efforts, dedication, and professionalism. Their hard work enables our son to reach his fullest potential. When we ask Andy "What did you do at school today?" he can use his words and tell us. PALS has enriched our family's life more than they'll ever know and we will never get tired of thanking everyone for their dedication in helping our son. Our hearts are full of gratitude.

- Abi M., Proud PALS Parent of 19 year old Andy

2023 ANNUAL REPORT

PALS AUTISM SOCIETY

A MESSAGE FROM THE TREASURER

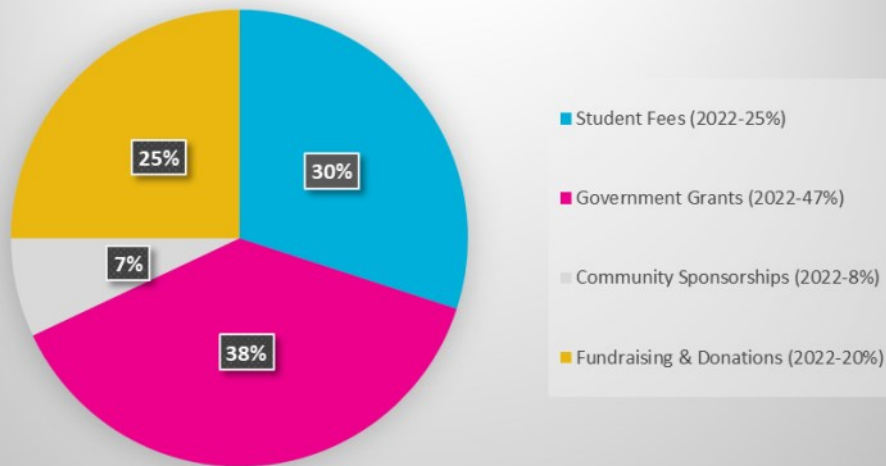
ALLISON ARAI

Fiscal 2023 welcomed the enrollment of 6 new early learners, the parting of PALS students to return to their neighborhood schools with the new skills they acquired while at PALS, and the graduation of PALS longest attending student who now attends the adult program operated by PALS Adult Services Society.

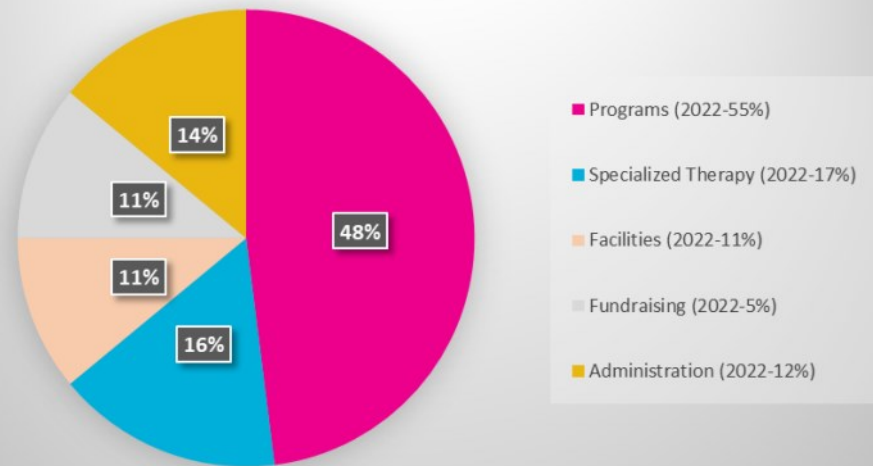
Thank you to all our supporters for making these milestones happen and furthering our mission to provide year-round, scientifically validated educational programs designed to encourage individual growth and personal achievement. Your generosity enables Pals students to learn using best practices in the School and Before/After School Care Program.

The financial results of the Society for the year ended June 30, 2023 are summarized as follows:

Sources of Revenue



Where We Spend





To highlight, as a total of Society revenues, there was an 5% increase in Student Fees received and a 9% decrease in Government Funding. In response to rising operational costs, the Society increased tuition rates resulting in governmental funding being a reduced percentage of total revenue. Fundraising revenue increased 5% and Fundraising expense increased 6% from the prior year due to the return of PALS signature in-person *Imagine...* gala fundraiser after three years of virtual “armchair” galas. Administration expenses increased 2% to 14% of total expenditures as overlapping in the Head of School and Office Manager positions occurred to ensure a smooth operational transition.

As always, we strive to ensure every dollar spent is furthering the learning opportunities of our students.



DONOR RECOGNITION

Individualized.
Interactive.
Inspired.

We wish to thank everyone who has generously contributed to the creation and fostering of the PALS Autism Society. Since opening in 2007, these donors have helped provide specialized education, adaptive programming, therapeutic training, and innovative technology for all PALS students and families.

This wall honors those whose cumulative contributions have exceeded \$5,000. We would like to thank all our donors including those who wish to remain Anonymous.



As of October 31st, 2023

Partner: \$100,000+

Ames Family Foundation
The Arai-Wong Family
Canucks for Kids Fund
CCSF Autism Foundation
Els for Autism Canada
The Harandi Family

The Mary and Gordon Christopher Foundation
Methanex
The Raffii Family
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The Sutton Place Hotel Vancouver
The Wolrige Foundation

Advocate: \$50,000

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Variety-The Children's Charity

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The Grams-Jekubik Family
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The Maghsoud Family
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TELUS
Vancouver Foundation
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Y.P. Heung Foundation

Supporter: \$15,000+

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Friends of PALS: \$5,000+

100 Men Who Give A Damn

Fahimeh Abghari

Haideh and Foizr Adab

Hamidreza Ahmadian

Bruce Aitken

Hossein Amanat

David and Cynthia Arai

Farshid Assemi

Nicholas and Stania Bedford

Alastair and Kristen Bird

Eric Carlson

Carriere Foundation

Robert and Ann Carson

Richard and Gwen Chan

Graham Coutts and Helen Wong

Lucy Devita

The Edith Lando Charitable Foundation

Lorne Folick and Shannon Taylor

Foundation for Youth

Linda Gibbs

Barbara Grossman

The Hamber Foundation

Samuel Haptom

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Craig and Donna Smith

Leo Smyth and Jane Loftus

Shaune and Lee Stoddard

John and Verna Stewart

T&T Supermarket

Vincent and Marie Zelig Tan

Jun and Karin Terado

Michele and Graham Thom

Murray and Shirley Thomson

Vincent and Lillian Tong

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The Windsor Family

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