



Skillcity
Institute

Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community

FUNDED BY
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PREPARED BY
Skillcity Institute





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Acknowledgements

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to the Government of Alberta for their funding of the project: **'Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community.'**

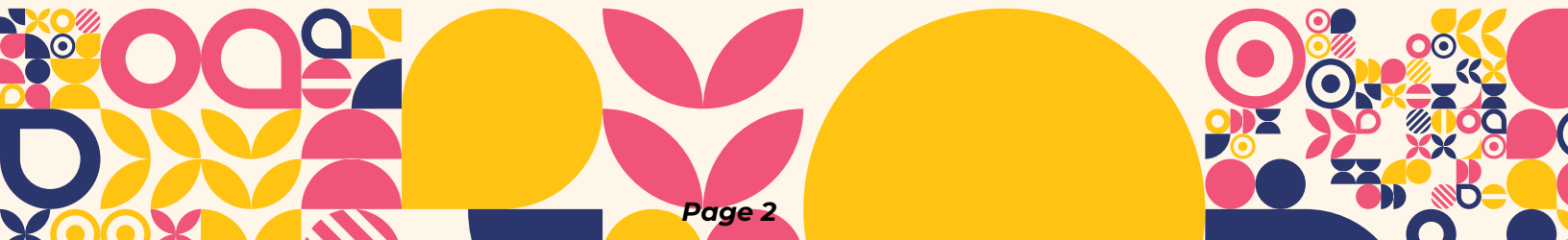
We also express our sincere thanks to all project participants, volunteers, and facilitators whose contributions were instrumental in the successful completion of this phase. Special thanks to Uchechi Anaduaka for the invaluable evaluative support and feedback throughout this process.

Authorship

This report was compiled and written by SPECTRA Management and Consulting Services in collaboration with Skillcity. For a complete copy of this report, please visit [Skillcity.ca](https://www.skillcity.ca).

Format and Accessibility

We have consciously kept this report concise to improve accessibility for our target communities. Please remember that the brevity of this document should not be seen as a lack of depth or critical analysis. Significant work was conducted throughout the planning process, including workshop development, accessibility considerations, cultural brokering, community outreach, and evaluation. We are confident that this project will continue to make a lasting impact, as highlighted by the sentiments of our participants.





Definitions

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to the identification with a specific cultural, national, or social group, characterized by shared traditions, language, and experiences that shape both individual and collective identities.

Culture

Culture encompasses the beliefs, customs, and behaviours shared by a community, including language, religion, cuisine, art, and music.

Ethnoculture

Ethnoculture combines elements of ethnicity and culture within a group, representing shared practices, languages, and traditions that contribute to cultural identity.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity recognizes neurological differences, such as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, and others, as natural variations of the human brain worthy of respect and celebration. It highlights the unique strengths and perspectives that neurodiverse individuals contribute to society.

Essential Neurodevelopmental Terms

- **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A developmental condition characterized by challenges in social interaction and communication, encompassing a range of symptoms.
- **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD):** A condition affecting focus, impulse control, and behaviour regulation.
- **Dyslexia:** A specific learning disability that hinders reading and language processing.
- **Intellectual Disabilities:** Conditions marked by limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviours.





I. Introduction

Purpose

The "Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community" project, conducted from June 2024 to March 2025 in Edmonton, Alberta, aimed to enhance cultural inclusivity for members of the Neurodiverse community. This report seeks to provide an overview of the project's implementation, highlighting its successes and the valuable lessons learned throughout the process. Additionally, it features a resource directory compiled by project participants, showcasing various initiatives and organizations dedicated to supporting neurodiversity.

Context

Neurodiversity recognizes and celebrates the natural variations in human brain function, underscoring the importance of accepting and supporting all neurological differences. Common neurodivergent conditions include Attention-deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Specific Learning Disabilities such as dyslexia. In Canada, about 1 in 50 children were diagnosed with ASD as of 2019, emphasizing a significant demand for awareness and support. Individuals with ASD frequently encounter challenges in social interactions and overall health, impacting not only their lives but also those of their families and caregivers.

Anecdotal evidence indicates a rise in diagnoses among racialized children and youth on the autism spectrum, as well as among other neurodivergent populations. Unfortunately, this trend has not been thoroughly examined in existing research. Racialized neurodivergent children and their families often face unique barriers that hinder access to essential support services. Feedback from parents and caregivers utilizing Skillcity's programs has revealed critical gaps, including language barriers and insufficient cultural representation in the available support services.

As awareness of neurodiversity expands, and the need for inclusivity grows, it is essential to address the intersection of cultural diversity and neurodiversity.



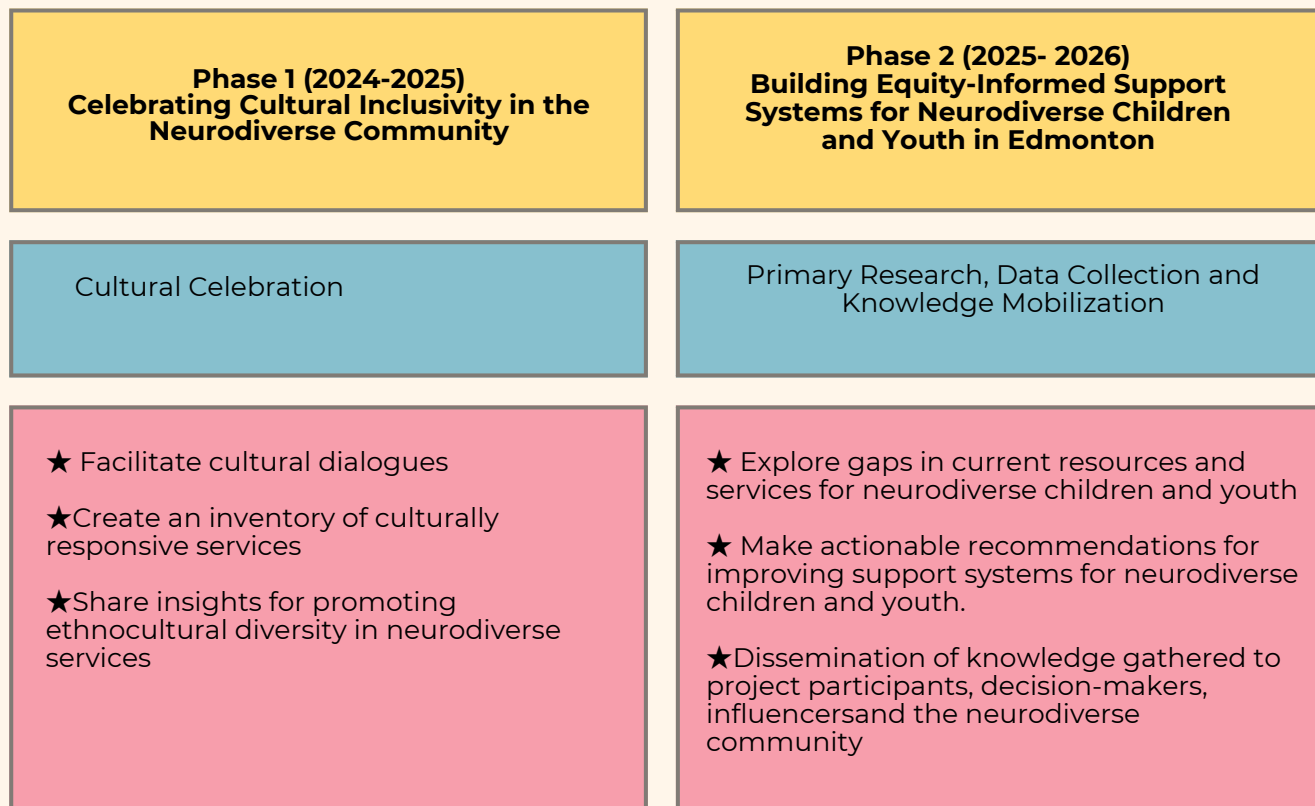


About the Overarching initiative: Embracing Neurodiversity, Bridging Cultures

In response to the above context, Skillcity sought and has since attained, community funding to carry out the initiative: Embracing Neurodiversity, Bridging Cultures. The initiative features two key projects: (1) "Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community" and (2) "Building Equity-Informed Support Systems for Neurodiverse Children and Youth in Edmonton." These projects aim to foster cultural dialogues, establish robust support systems, and propose policy recommendations that promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity. The first project, "Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community," was funded by the government of Alberta and took place from June 2024 to March 2025.

Phases of the Initiative

The Embracing Neurodiversity, Bridging Cultures will unfold in two Phases





Project Team and Responsibilities

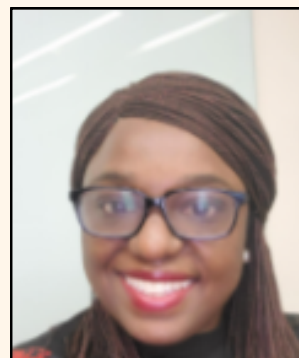
The Embracing Neurodiversity, Bridging Cultures project is led by a dedicated team of experts specializing in community engagement, cultural competency, and advocacy for neurodiversity, ensuring a holistic approach to this initiative.



*Funke Smith
Systems Navigator*



*Ese Ejebe
Project Consultant*



*Dr. Urhechi Anduaka
Project Researcher*

II. Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Project Summary

This project aimed to:

- Showcase diverse cultures within the neurodiverse community, fostering pride among individuals with ASD and ADHD.
- Promote welcoming environments for caregivers and service providers, facilitating cultural activities, and sharing personal narratives to enhance a sense of belonging.
- Encourage collaboration among neurodivergent individuals, their families, and the wider community to build a supportive network that transcends cultural boundaries.





Demographics

Our project engaged over 130 participants, including 25 men, 50 women, and 55 children, representing a rich tapestry of ethnocultural backgrounds spanning China, India, Nigeria, Syria, Zimbabwe, and several other ethnocultural groups. This diversity underscores our commitment to inclusivity and highlights the various perspectives within the neurodiverse community.

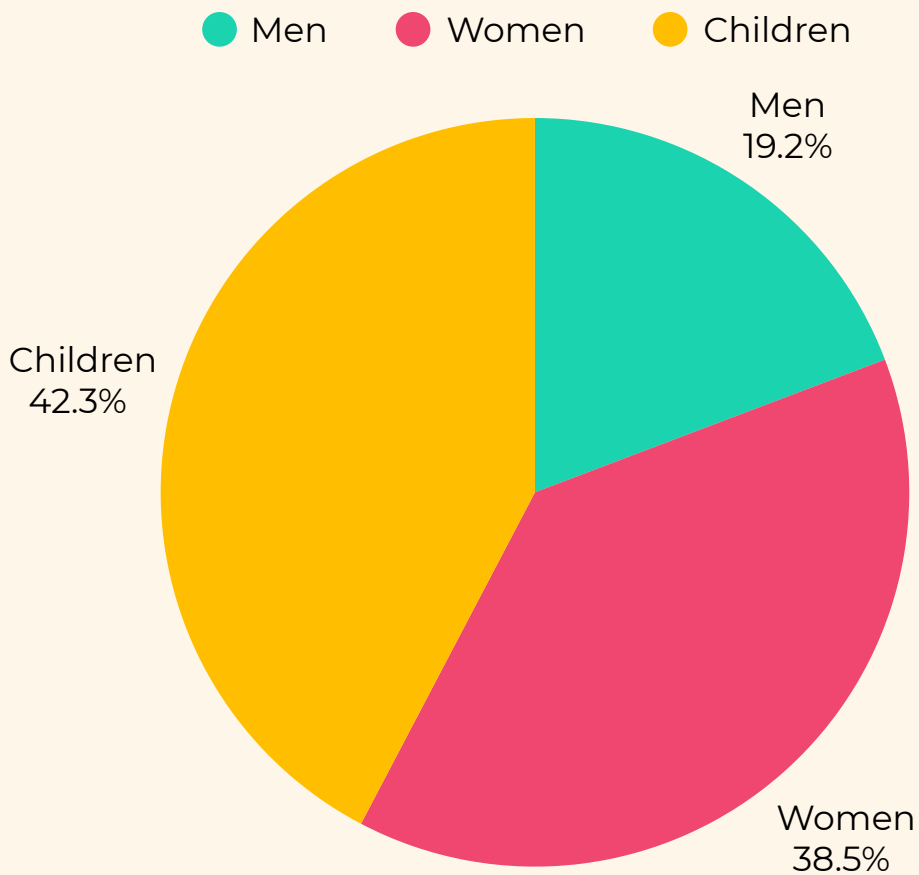


Figure: Participant Demographics by Gender





Cultural Celebration Event

A cultural celebration event was held at "We Rock the Spectrum," an accessible gym designed specifically for neurodiverse children and individuals. This venue provided an inclusive space that encouraged participation and connection among attendees.



South Asian dancers performing



Drum circle with drummers and participants



Filipino traditional dance performance



Filipino traditional dance



Children enjoying the bubble show



participants networking





Cultural Celebration Event (Contd.)



Participants dancing with drum beats



South Asian dancers performing



South Asian dance performers



Parents' discussion



Filipino traditional dance performance



Drum circle with drummers and participants





Community Dialogue Insights

During the celebration, four themed community dialogue groups were formed. The purpose of the group was to create a safe space for peer engagement and to improve relatability in the sharing of experiences and best practices:

Fathers Together: Fathers discussed parenting challenges, emphasizing the importance of male support and improved service access.



Mothers Together: Mothers shared their needs for culturally sensitive services and robust support systems.



Service Providers Together: This group focused on enhancing cultural competence in service delivery for neurodivergent individuals.



Neurodivergent Minds Together: Participants discussed self-advocacy and fostering positive social interactions within their communities





Key Quotes from Participants

Participant feedback highlighted the profound impact of the initiative:

"This was an amazing opportunity; thank you for inviting us. I hope this continues!" - **mother of a child on the spectrum.**

"I didn't realize how much I needed this. We need more of this; the conversations should keep going."- **event volunteer.**

"Thank you for putting this together. I cried when I saw my son drumming and dancing; everyone was so happy to be ourselves. We went home feeling refreshed and hopeful." - **mother of a 10-year-old boy on the spectrum.**

"This event gave me hope that there are people who understand our struggles and celebrate our joys." – **caregiver of a teenager on the autism spectrum.**

"I learned so much from everyone here. It was truly inspiring to see how different cultures embrace neurodiversity." – **service provider attendee.**

"The drumming circle was amazing! It brought everyone together in a way I've never experienced before." – **sibling of a child with ASD.**

"Seeing my son confidently participate in the activities was the highlight of my year." – **parent of a 12-year-old with ASD.**



Key Learnings and Future Directions



Event Planning Essentials

- **Location**
Select a venue that accommodates activities and accessibility needs.
- **Sensory-Friendly Design**
Design spaces minimizing sensory overload while providing suitable activities.
- **Dietary Inclusivity**
Cater to diverse dietary needs.



Communication & Programming

- **Clear Communication**
Ensure materials use straightforward language
- **Diverse Programming**
Provide options catering to different interests and engagement styles.
- **Social Support**
Include designated quiet areas for individuals needing respite and implement structured social activities to facilitate connection.





Key Learnings and Future Directions



Support Services

- **Childcare Services**

Ensure adequate childminder availability, ideally maintaining a 1:2 or 1:1 ratio, allowing parents to engage freely.

- **Venue Usage**

An accessible gym is ideal, providing a space for participants to choose their level of engagement in activities.



Professional Support

- **Facilitators**

Utilize knowledgeable facilitators for community dialogues to effectively support emotional and conversational dynamics.

- **Cultural Brokers**

Implement feedback mechanisms from participants to continuously refine future events, aligning them more closely with the needs presented.





IV. Suggestions for Implementation

Based on the insights collected during community dialogues, we recommend that organizations, service providers, and policymakers focus on the following:

- **Promote Shared Experiences:** Create platforms for storytelling that allow neurodivergent individuals and their families to share their experiences, fostering understanding of cultural challenges.
- **Enhance Support Frameworks:** Develop robust support systems for parents and children, placing a strong emphasis on community-based support groups that enhance resilience and emotional well-being.
- **Implement Culturally Relevant Services:** Design services that respect and integrate the diverse cultural backgrounds of individuals, ensuring they are accessible and meaningful to all communities.
- **Encourage Ongoing Engagement:** Maintain regular dialogue between policymakers and community stakeholders to ensure that services and support systems adequately address the needs of neurodivergent families.
- **Clarify FSCD Policies:** Provide clear communication regarding the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program's acceptance of international diagnoses, facilitating better accessibility for newcomers to Alberta.
- **Review Policies Linking Support to IQ Thresholds:** Reassess existing policies that restrict support based on IQ thresholds, advocating for expanded resources for adults between ages 25 and 60 with IQs exceeding 70.
- **Recognize Relocation Trends:** Analyze and understand the patterns of families moving to Alberta to seek better services. Sharing their stories can inform strategies to enhance service quality and availability across the country.





Next Steps in the Initiative



Phase Two: Primary Research and Data Collection (2025)

In this phase, focused research will be conducted to understand the experiences of neurodiverse individuals in the diagnostic process. We aim to create a detailed report that not only identifies the strengths and challenges faced but also proposes policy recommendations for enhancing cultural inclusivity within the diagnostic process.



Knowledge Mobilization (2026)

Following research and analysis, we will enter a phase of knowledge mobilization, distributing our findings to project participants, decision-makers, and community influencers. Our goal is to ensure the insights gained lead to practical improvements in service delivery and community support systems.





IV. Resource Directory for Neurodiversity Support Initiatives

A list of initiatives and resources supporting neurodiversity was compiled based on contributions and references provided by project participants. This list includes organizations, events, and services that have proven beneficial to project participants.

No.	Organization	Program, Initiatives & Services	Address, Contact Information & Hours of Operation
1	Alberta Black Therapists Network	Counselling Services	Email: info@albertablacktherapistnetwork.com
2	Autism Edmonton	Programs and Services Autism Edmonton Resources guide	Address: 11720, Kingsway NW, Edmonton, AB T5G0X5 Phone: (780) 453-3971
3	Centre for Autism Service Alberta	Programs and Services	Edmonton Office #1, 9353-50 Street NW Edmonton, AB T6B 2L5 T: 780-488-6600 F: 780-488-6664





No.	Organization	Program, Initiatives & Services	Address, Contact Information & Hours of Operation
4	Council for the Advancement of African Canadians in Alberta (Africa Center)	Early Learning & Child Care, Youth Programs, Seniors Wellbeing & Engagement, Enhancing Gender Equality, Economic Sevelopment, Supporting Black Canadian Communities	Address: 11808 Saint Albert Trail Northwest, #106, Edmonton Alberta, T 5L 4G4 Phone: 1780-455-5423 Fax: 1587-773-3531 Email: info@africancentre.ca
5	Emerging Stars Autism International Family Support (ESAIFS)	a non-profit organization offering assisatnce, resources & a support community for black immigrant families navigating autism	Call Anytime +1-780-245-3005
6	Edmonton International Airport	Assistance for passengers who have a hidden disability (Sun Flower Program)	Sunflower Airport Program





No.	Organization	Program, Initiatives & Services	Address, Contact Information & Hours of Operation
7	Gateway Association	Family Resource Centre	201-10941 120 Street NW Edmonton, AB T5H 3R3 Tel: 780-454-0701
8	Gateway Pediatric Dentistry	Gateway Pediatric Dentistry offers dentistry for all children, including those with special needs	#215-2920 Calgary Trail NW, Edmonton. AB Phone: (780) 705-5437 Email: info@gatewaypd.ca
9	Multi-cultural Health Brokers Cooperative	Events and Workshops, Field trips and children's activities, home visitation, Multicultural Family Connections, Early Children Development, Therapy (adults, teens and children (starting from at age 5), Counselling and Meditation, Outreach, Partnerships	Address: Edmonton Intercultural Center (McCauley School) located at 9538-107 Avenue, Edmonton, Alberta, T5H-0T Phone: +1780-423-1973 Email: mchb@mchb.org





No.	Organization	Program, Initiatives & Services	Address, Contact Information & Hours of Operation
10	Neuro Affirming Language	Sinneave's Preferred Approach to Neuro-Affirming Language (April 2024)	https://sinneavefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Guide-to-Neuroaffirming-Language-April-2024_External-v2.pdf
11	Nurse Next Door	Respite Support -Can meet language needs	Phone: 780-737-1115 Email: edmonton@nursenextdoor.com
12	Skillcity Institute	STEM Afterschool Programs (iRockSTEM, Youth Rocks, STEM Heroes+), Mentoring, Youthpreneur (Entrepreneurship Skills Training), STEM & career Exploration Lab, Youth Economic Ecosystem Collaborative	Address: Clareview Recreation Centre, 3804 139 Ave NW, Edmonton, Alberta, T5y 3G4 Phone: +1 844-633-2060 Email: info@skillcity.ca





No.	Organization	Program, Initiatives & Services	Address, Contact Information & Hours of Operation
13	We Rock the Spectrum	Indoor Play gym for kids	Address : 4152 99 ST NW, Edmonton, AB-T6E 3N5 Phone: (780) 450-2282 Email: info@werockspecturmed monton.ca





Conclusion

The "Celebrating Cultural Inclusivity in the Neurodiverse Community" project was a groundbreaking initiative in Edmonton. The high level of engagement from project participants demonstrates that this initiative effectively addressed a vital need within the community. This report serves as a valuable resource for service providers and policymakers striving to cultivate inclusivity for the neurodiverse community. By prioritizing collaboration, cultural understanding, and actionable recommendations, we can create a more supportive environment that recognizes and values the unique contributions of all individuals. As we move forward into the next phase of the initiative, we aim to continue to engage people who are neurodivergent and their families and continue to apply the lessons learned and develop a range of resources, including this toolkit, to further support neurodiverse individuals, their families, and caregivers.

