



Society for Autism Support and Services'
Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan
Adopted March 3, 2026

Introduction

Society for Autism Support and Services (SASS) values diversity in persons served, employees, students, volunteers, community partners, and other interest holders. SASS seeks to fully serve the community and the diversity it represents. SASS is committed to ensuring all autistic individuals and staff view SASS as an organization that is responsive to their needs. To fulfill this commitment, SASS is strongly committed to diversity in all aspects of our work and must be a culturally competent organization.

Every community is comprised of diverse people from a variety of backgrounds. SASS' plan addresses persons of varying race, age, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual belief, socioeconomic status, neurodiversity, abilities, and languages. This plan design demonstrates the understanding and care SASS places on all individuals regardless of where they are in life.

Through our attitudes, organizational structures, policies and services, we will strive to respond effectively to the needs of all persons served and their families, employees, students, volunteers, the community and interest holders from diverse groups.

What is Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion reflect the organization's commitment to respecting the dignity, rights, and unique strengths of all individuals served, personnel, students, volunteers, and key interest holders. Cultural competency is the ability of the organization and its staff to recognize, understand, and respond respectfully and effectively to diverse cultural identities, lived experiences, values, beliefs, and communication styles.

Diversity refers to the presence of differences among individuals, including but not limited to culture, race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, ability, neurodiversity, language, spiritual beliefs, socioeconomic status.

Equity recognizes that individuals and communities may experience systemic barriers that affect access, participation, and outcomes. SASS is committed to identifying and removing these barriers and ensuring fair, responsive, and accessible services, policies, and opportunities.

Inclusion refers to creating environments in which all individuals feel welcomed, respected, valued, and able to fully participate. Inclusive practice ensures that diversity is not only acknowledged but meaningfully integrated into service delivery, workforce practices, and organizational decision-making. An awareness of and respect for diversity among persons served, personnel, students, volunteers, and other interest holders is reflected in individual attitudes, organizational structures, policies, procedures, training, and service delivery models. SASS views cultural competency as an ongoing process of learning, reflection, and improvement that strengthens person-centred practice and contributes to positive outcomes and quality of life.

Importance of a Cultural Competency, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan

As SASS continues to meet the needs and expectations of increasingly culturally and ethnically varied populations, understanding of cultural differences and their relationship to the hallmarks of quality service (respect, inclusiveness, and sensitivity) become essential. Serving autistic individuals across the

spectrum, is not a "one size fits all" process. Diversity includes all differences, not just those that indicate racial or ethnic distinctions.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, SASS responds to the changing needs and expectations of the people we serve and our interest holders, in conjunction with the changing needs of our organization. Through ongoing strategic planning, we ensure that our leadership maintains a viable planning structure focused on our mission, vision, and core values that guide our organizational practices.

The creation and implementation of our Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan is an essential foundation to ensure that our staff, persons served, students, volunteers and other interest holders develop awareness and sensitivity specific to the diversity of our service delivery areas.

The framework for our cultural competency, diversity, and inclusion plan is based on CARF's ASPIRE to Excellence model and uses the CARF standards as a guide to ensure on going process of continuous quality improvement.

Importance of DEI statement and land acknowledgment in culturally competent, diverse and inclusive practice

SASS includes a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) statement and land acknowledgement within our agency handbooks, on our website and prior to agency gatherings, as foundational elements of our commitment to culturally competent, diverse, and inclusive practice. The DEI statement affirms our dedication to fostering equitable opportunities, eliminating systemic barriers, and ensuring all individuals – persons served, families, students, volunteers and staff – feel valued, respected, and heard. The land acknowledgement grounds our work in awareness of the historical and ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples, reminding us that reconciliation and cultural humility are integral to ethical and inclusive service delivery. Together, these statements in conjunction with our mission, vision, and core values, move SASS beyond intention to action, guiding policies, relationships, and daily practices toward equity, representations, and belonging for all communities we serve.

Mission

We deliver innovative, personalized solutions that empower autistic individuals across the lifespan; promoting independence, community access, and success

Vision

Enhancing lives across the spectrum

Core values

People First: Compassion, Commitment, Collaboration

Transparency and Trust

Rooted in Success, Dedicated to Innovation

Making a Difference Having Fun

DEI statement

SASS is committed to fostering an organizational culture grounded in equity, diversity, and inclusion, where the dignity, rights, and unique strengths of all individuals are recognized and respected. We value diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and lived experiences, and recognize that these contribute to high-

quality, person-centered and culturally responsive services. SASS does not tolerate discrimination or harassment in any form on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, sex, physical or cognitive abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, neurodiversity, or socioeconomic status, etc. We actively work to identify and remove barriers to access, participation, and opportunity by integrating equity, diversity, and inclusions into our service delivery, recruitment, hiring, promotion, and organizational practices, and through ongoing review, education, and improvement.

Land Acknowledgement

SASS respectfully acknowledges that we live and work on the traditional and ancestral territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai, Piikani and Siksika as well as the Tsuu T'ina Nation and Stoney Nakoda Nations: Chiniki, Bears paw, and Goodstoney. We also recognize that this area is part of the Métis Nation within Alberta, District 5 and 6 and lies within the historical Northwest Metis Homeland. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples who have lived in, cared for, and continue to care for these lands for generations. We make this acknowledgement as an expression of gratitude and a reaffirmation of our commitment to reconciliation, relationship-building, and shared responsibility in advancing equity and inclusion.

Purpose

The purpose of this plan is to ensure SASS employees have a greater awareness/knowledge and are able to successfully respond to the diversity of persons served as well as our interest holders, including areas such as spiritual beliefs, holidays, dietary regulations, clothing, attitudes towards varying abilities, language, interpreter use, etc.

Our equity vision is to build upon our core values, creating an organization that is welcoming, accessible, and inclusive. We are committed to:

- Ongoing implementation of anti-racism/anti-oppressive documentation
- Promoting equity principles as an integral part of our ongoing activities
- Developing and maintaining ongoing relationships with diverse communities and populations
- Creating and implementing hiring and recruitment practices that are inclusive
- Ensuring that all print, visual, and other promotional materials reflect diversity and inclusivity and present positive images
- Taking a leadership role in promoting equity within our agency

All employees, students and volunteers have access to SASS' Cultural competency, diversity and inclusion plan within our employee orientation training and orientation manual. All persons served, families, community members and other interest holders are able to access the plan from the website at <https://www.autism.ca/about-society-for-autism-support-services> . It is also available upon request

Consideration of Diversity in Cultural Competency Practice

SASS recognizes and respects the diversity of individuals served, personnel, and key stakeholders. Cultural competency is integrated into service delivery, workforce practices, and community engagement to ensure equitable access, meaningful participation, and inclusive decision-making across the following areas:

Culture

SASS acknowledges that culture shapes values, communication styles, family roles, and experiences of disability. Cultural beliefs and practices are respected and incorporated into service planning, staff interactions, and engagement with families and communities whenever possible.

Age

Services and workplace practices are responsive to the needs, preferences, and rights of individuals across the lifespan. Age-appropriate approaches are used in communication, service planning, and supports, recognizing developmental, generational, and life-stage differences.

Gender

The organization respects gender diversity and expression. Individuals are supported in ways that affirm their gender identity, and staff are expected to use inclusive language and practices that promote dignity, respect, and safety for all genders.

Sexual Orientation

SASS supports an inclusive environment where individuals of all sexual orientations feel respected and safe. Discrimination or harassment based on sexual orientation is not tolerated, and inclusive practices are integrated into service delivery, workplace culture, and communication.

Spiritual Beliefs

Spiritual and religious beliefs are respected as an important aspect of identity for many individuals. The organization accommodates spiritual practices and preferences where feasible for staff, students, volunteers and persons served. SASS ensures that services are delivered in a manner that respects diverse belief systems.

Socioeconomic Status

SASS recognizes that socioeconomic factors may impact access to services, participation, and outcomes. Efforts are made to reduce barriers related to income, housing stability, transportation, and access to resources, and to provide supports that are equitable and responsive to individual circumstances.

Language

SASS strives to support effective communication by recognizing language diversity. Reasonable efforts are made to accommodate language needs, including the use of plain language, visual supports, interpretation, or translation when appropriate, to promote understanding and meaningful participation.

Race

SASS acknowledges the impact of racism and systemic inequities on individuals and communities. Services and workplace practices are guided by anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles, with a commitment to equity, respect, and the ongoing identification and removal of barriers.

Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusive Practices

SASS seeks employees that are committed to their community and represent a variety of cultural backgrounds, particularly those who are neurodivergent and therefore often left out of the labour market. Discrimination is not tolerated and employees are expected to provide services and supports,

and interactions in a manner that recognizes, values, affirms, and respects the worth of each individual, protecting and preserving the dignity of each person.

All policies are created from a person-centred perspective, reflective of the employee population and interest holders we represent. Please refer to the following policies that support our cultural competence, diversity, and inclusion work:

- Accommodations (Policy III 81)
- Workplace Harassment Prevention (Policy I 199)
- Religious Holidays (Policy III 270 Hours of Work and Leaves)
- Holidays and Celebrations (Policy IV 370)
- Dress Standards (Policy III 390)
- Ethical and Legal considerations (Policy I 30)
- Hiring and Recruitment (Policy III 60)
- Individualize Programming (Policy IV 110)
- Onboarding (Policy I 109)
- Respectful Workplace (Policy III 195 and Procedure III 196)
- Rights of Person Served (Policy I 10)
- Program Philosophy (Policy IV 100)

Comprehensive, cultural competence trainings focused on acceptance and respect for individual differences are provided throughout the year for all personnel. Trainings are based up on the following:

- Assessment and awareness of personal biases
- Content on general culture-specific attributes
- Use of person-centred language

Specific trainings include but are not limited to:

- DEI practices in hiring - external presenter/presentation
- Mental Health First Aid certification - external presenter/presentation
- Diversity awareness training - external presenter/presentation
- Teaching Guidelines - internal presenter/presentation
- Families we support – internal presenter/presentation
- Hygiene/Peri-Care – internal presenter/presentation
- ALI and AAC; ASL - internal presenter/presentation

Objective of SASS' Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan

Goal	Indicator	Activities	Timeline	Outcome	Measurement/ Methodology	Responsible Person(s)	Status
Individual differences are recognized in person-centered planning.	ISPs formally address and document cultural and diverse variables of pertinent to the person- served	Cultural and diverse variables are identified during intake, or at ISP meeting and throughout service delivery. All efforts are made to support these preferences.	At intake, during ISPs, and ongoing	Individualized Support Plans (ISPs) contain information regarding the cultural preferences of the person-served if identified as needed by the parent(s)/guardian(s).	Observation, Tally of ISP reflecting cultural and diverse variables of importance to the family.	Social Worker, Program Manager, Service Coordinator	In Progress
Worksites are free of harassment and discrimination	Harassment and discrimination concerns are reported, tracked, and addressed in accordance with agency policy, with staff demonstrating awareness of reporting processes and confidence in using them	Investigation of all complaints and address concerns accordingly	Ongoing	Staff experience a safe, respectful, and inclusive work environment where harassment and discrimination are not tolerated, concerns are addressed promptly, and individuals feel confident reporting issues.	Tracking and review of harassment and discrimination reports, documentation of follow-up actions, staff feedback via check-ins	Clinical Director	In Progress
To ensure a diverse workforce that is reflective of the communities we serve	Increase in the number of employees with diverse backgrounds to reflect diversity of person's served	Ongoing review of job postings, language used, places posted etc.	Ongoing	SASS increasingly reflects the diversity of the communities served, contributing to culturally responsive serve delivery, inclusive decision making, and improved engagement with individuals and families.	Review workforce demographic data (where voluntarily disclosed), comparison to community demographics, and tracking diversity trends in recruitment, hiring, and retention over time.	Leadership Team	In Progress

<p>To build and sustain a welcoming, accessible, and inclusive organization by embedding equity, anti-oppressive practices, and cultural responsiveness across service delivery, workforce practices, community relationships, and organizational leadership</p>	<p>Equity principles are consistently reflected in agency policies, service planning, workforce practices, and communication.</p>	<p>Promote equity leadership through ongoing communication, training and accountability. Ensure print, visual, and promotional materials reflect diversity and inclusion. Update communication and educational materials available for user groups in an understandable way.</p>	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>SASS demonstrates a consistent organization-wide culture of equity, inclusion, and accessibility, resulting in culturally responsive services and leadership that actively advances equity</p>	<p>Review of policies, procedures, and documentation through an equity and anti-oppressive lens Audit of communication and promotional materials for inclusive representation.</p>	<p>Leadership Team, Program Managers, Social Workers</p>	<p>In Progress</p>
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Summary commitment to continuous quality improvement

SASS recognizes that it is not possible for everyone to be fully educated or trained in all aspects of every culture. However, we are committed to ensuring that any gaps in cultural competency do not negatively impact service delivery. When such gaps are identified, they will be addressed by seeking educational opportunities, listening to the voices of those affected, and learning from cultural leaders and communities.

At SASS, we feel that it is imperative that our leadership and all employees develop an understanding of the major values and beliefs generally of the majority of those we support. Attendance at cultural competency and diversity training will be mandatory, documented and included in training records.

The framework for our Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan is based on CARF's ASPIRE to Excellence and uses the CARF standards as a guide to ensure an ongoing process of continuous quality improvement.

Furthermore, implementation of this plan is to be reviewed annually in December by the leadership team. Outcomes of all four identified goals will be analysed. While the Cultural Competency, Diversity, and Inclusion Plan is an ever-evolving living document, it is intended to be a permanent part of our service delivery model.