

Strategic Plan Update - March 2026

Executive Summary

The strategic goals outlined in this document were developed through a facilitated planning session held in November 2024. The Strategic Plan was formally endorsed by the Society for Autism Support and Services (SASS) Board of Directors in March 2025.

In February 2026, the SASS Leadership Team convened to review progress, key actions, and data related to established key performance indicators. Following this review, the team confirmed that the strategic goals remain relevant and continue to align with SASS's mission and organizational priorities.

Please note – there is a glossary of key terms and acronyms at the end of this document.

1. Mission Statement

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

2. Vision

Enhancing lives across the autism spectrum

3. Core Values

- People first: compassion, commitment, collaboration
- Transparency and trust
- Rooted in success, dedicated to innovation
- Making a difference, having fun

4. Strategic Priorities – please note these were ordered in terms of priority based on March 2026 review

- A. Strengthening Funding and Resources – Work towards financial sustainability to support agency growth and service delivery.
- B. Addressing aging facilities/infrastructure – Having specialized facilities to deliver all programs and services.
- C. Enhancing Workforce Capacity – Recruit and maintain a resilient, skilled, and motivated workforce to sustain high-quality service delivery.
- D. Expanding Service Delivery and Accessibility - Address unmet needs in the community and increase service reach.
- E. Fostering Advocacy and Collaboration - Build partnerships and advocate for systemic change to enhance support for individuals diagnosed with autism.

Strategic Priorities/Goals - March 2026 Update

Context – *The metrics discussed below are based on data collected between April 1, 2025 and December 31, 2025 (9 months), unless otherwise stated. For ease, all information associated with the March 2026 update is presented in italics.*

A. Strengthening Funding and Resources – Work towards financial sustainability to support agency growth and service delivery.

Objectives:

- Increase non-governmental funding through robust fund development program.
- Enhance financial reserves to mitigate operational risks.
- Leverage testimonials and narratives to strengthen donor engagement.

Key Actions:

- Hire a dedicated fund development professional to focus on identified funding priorities (as per case for support). *This will be replaced by – Build and maintain a robust fund development program.*
- Plan for future capital development campaign.
- Continue to secure grants.

Update on Key Actions:

- *SASS hired a dedicated Fund Development Professional on February 24, 2025.*
- *After meeting with a number of community partners with capital development experience, a draft Development Plan was developed. The plan was shared with Directors on February 4, 2026 at a special meeting. Morten Paulsen is scheduled to attend the March 2026 board meeting to continue the conversation. A special meeting will be scheduled during the second quarter of 2026 to discuss the Development Plan and finalize next steps.*
- *Please see attached Fund Development Snapshot for a summary of successful grant applications.*

Metrics:

- Raise \$620,000 annually within three years.
From April 1 – December 31, 2025 \$666,422 was raised through fund development activities. The prior year (April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025), \$381,297.50 was raised. Please see attached Fund Development Snapshot for a summary of successful grant applications.
- Increase number of donors by 20% per year.
As of January 31, 2026, SASS had a total of 171 donors on the Zeffy platform, including 11 monthly donors. In 2024-2025, SASS had 72 donors and 3 monthly donors. This represents a 127.5% increase in overall donors and a 267% increase in monthly donors.

B. Enhancing Workforce Capacity - Build a resilient, skilled, and motivated workforce to sustain high-quality service delivery.

Objectives:

- Improve staff retention and reduce frontline turnover.
- Develop mentorship programs for front line staff.

- Align compensation and benefits with staff needs.

Key Actions:

- Implement mentorship programs
- Clarify compensation structures during onboarding.
- Conduct regular staff surveys to identify areas for improvement.
- Introduce benefits such as student loan paydown and first-time homebuyer support.

Update on Key Actions:

- *Initial conversations regarding mentorship have occurred. Implementing a formal mentorship program will be priority during 2026-2027. At present, there are opportunities for informal mentorship from Staff Trainers, Supervisors as well as the clinicians.*
- *A training session was facilitated in November of 2025 to ensure all supervisors have a firm understanding of SASS' benefits package so they can explain total compensation to staff during onboarding. SASS will be implementing an HR Management System (Bamboo) during the first quarter of 2026. This will streamline our ability to share compensation related information with staff.*
- *A Staff Engagement and Benefits Survey was developed and deployed to staff in April of 2025. Moving forward the survey will be reviewed, refined in light of current issues, and deployed to staff on an annual basis each Spring. SASS retained the services of an HR professional to support the Leadership team around staff engagement and retention.*
- *As part of the 2025 Compensation Review process, SASS increased the health spending account from \$600/year to \$800/year. We also Introduced the option of a Wellness Spending account. That is, staff are given the option to use their \$800 benefit towards health spending (nontaxable benefit) or wellness spending (taxable benefit). The Wellness spending account allows staff to use funds for fitness/sport related expenses (e.g., gym membership), technology (e.g., computer purchase), family care expenses (e.g., day care fees), transportation (e.g., transit passes) or wellness (e.g., smoking cessation). In addition, retention/anniversary bonuses were doubled for all staff as these figures had remained static since the bonuses were introduced over 15 years ago. The feedback from staff regarding the changes has been overwhelmingly positive.*
- *Leadership continues to facilitate staff appreciation/engagement activities on a monthly basis (e.g., hot chocolate bar, barbeque, donut day, food truck).*

Metrics:

- To increase the average length of front-line staff retention (in months) by 20% from 2024-2025 to 2025-2026.

SASS Staff Retention (Direct Care Positions)				
	<i>April 1, 2023 – March 31, 2024</i>	<i>April 1, 2024 – March 31, 2025</i>	<i>April 1 2025 – Dec 31 2025</i>	<i>% Change from prior year</i>
Out-of-Home Living Program				
<i>Autism Support Positions</i>	<i>14 months</i>	<i>18 months</i>	<i>28 months</i>	<i>+55%</i>
<i>Overnight staff (FT)</i>	<i>20 months</i>	<i>29.2 months</i>	<i>41 months</i>	<i>+41%</i>
<i>School Staff</i>	<i>18 months</i>	<i>22.8 months</i>	<i>18 months</i>	<i>-21%</i>

<i>Part Time Staff</i>	<i>Not tracked previously</i>	<i>Not tracked previously</i>	<i>16 months</i>	<i>-</i>
Early Support Program				
<i>Child Development Specialist (Formerly Early Intervention Therapist)</i>	<i>21.72 months</i>	<i>25.9 months</i>	<i>12.6 months</i>	<i>-51.4%</i>
Adolescent and Adult Services				
<i>Facilitator</i>	<i>Not tracked previously</i>	<i>Not tracked previously</i>	<i>80 months</i>	<i>-</i>

**FSCD wait lists (reduced number of preschoolers receiving in-home services) prompted program restructuring. Staff now work exclusively in the home or preschool. As a result, the ESP program experienced more attrition than has been typically observed in the past.*

It is anticipated that Bamboo HR system will allow SASS to track other metrics regarding staff retention.

- Improve employee satisfaction scores by 15% within two years.

Results of Staff Engagement and Benefits Survey		
<i>Item</i>	<i>April 2025 % of staff that responded with agree or strongly agree</i>	<i>April 2026 % staff that responded with agree or strongly agree</i>
<i>Believe in SASS' Mission</i>	<i>94%</i>	
<i>Plan to stay with SASS for at least 1-2 years</i>	<i>71%</i>	
<i>Proud to be a member of the SASS team</i>	<i>80%</i>	
<i>Believe there are opportunities for growth and advancement</i>	<i>65%</i>	
<i>Believe SASS has an inclusive culture</i>	<i>82%</i>	
<i>Believe they have sufficient training to be successful in role</i>	<i>83%</i>	
<i>Feel valued and recognized by supervisor</i>	<i>72%</i>	
<i>Satisfied with current role</i>	<i>75%</i>	

C. Expanding Service Delivery and Accessibility - Address unmet client needs and increase service reach, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Objectives:

- Enhance program capacity and diversify service offerings.
- Expand outreach to rural areas.
- Leverage technology for virtual and remote service delivery.
- Pursue block funding with Children and Family Services

Key Actions:

- Develop marketing plan for existing programs.

- Approach FSCD about offering Triple P and modified out-of-home living placements (e.g., Therapeutic after care, part time placements).
- Pursue accreditation to allow for block funding through Child and Family Services.
- Explore rural service expansion.
- Participate in FSCD Service Requests (tender/RFP opportunities)
- Update IT systems for better efficiency in clinical and administrative processes.

Update on Key Actions:

- *During the last year, marketing efforts have focused primarily on the Early Support Program as enrollment was down in both the FSCD funded (i.e., due to FSCD wait list) and Alberta Education funded (i.e., AHS no longer completing screenings, families opting to pursue PUF program in a daycare setting) programs. An ESP-specific brochure was developed and sent to community pediatricians, contacts at Alberta Children’s Hospital, as well as service navigation/parent support organizations in August 2025 and February 2026. SASS also purchased social media advertising and developed a short video. In addition, we hosted an open house for prospective families on Feb 28, 2026. Moving forward we will be asking families how they heard about SASS to guide future marketing decisions.*
- *Given their mandate to maintain to a flat budget, FSCD has been reluctant to expand/enhance services. There were no opportunities for Triple P training (i.e., to build internal capacity) this year. SASS will continue to explore ways to provide modified out-of-home placements to meet community need with our Contract and Procurement Specialist. The Clinical Director participates in an FSCD Working Group that is focused on Out-of-Home Living Arrangements. Although FSCD has historically funded the vast majority of placements in the OOHL, we are now providing services to 7 children/youth funded by Child and Family Services.*
- *SASS has committed to becoming a CARF accredited provider of Behavioral Health – Residential Treatment by late 2026/early 2027. A senior staff was hired as our Quality Assurance Lead. The process has required significant revisions to existing policies/procedures and our staff training program.*
- *SASS continues to provide services in rural communities, including Drumheller, Ponoka, and Acme. Although we have not dedicated additional resources to rural consultation or specifically marketed this aspect of our programming, SASS was able to accommodate all rural service requests over the last year.*
- *There was only one Service Request (i.e., tender/RFP) opportunity over the last year. It focused on providing clinicians to serve on FSCD’s Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) to make recommendations regarding funding and services for families. SASS was successful and four of our clinicians have been approved to serve as MDT members. Serving on the MDT generates fee for service revenue for the agency.*
- *In April of 2026, SASS transitioned to Calitso as our IT service provider given ongoing frustration with Plenum. The transition was relatively seamless and ongoing issues have been largely resolved. SASS adopted the Pebble Student Portal to generate and manage report cards and Individual Program Plan documents. As noted earlier, SASS will be implementing an HR management system in Feb/March of 2026 to increase administrative efficiency. It is anticipated that a Learning Management System will be rolled out in 2026 to enhance staff training efforts.*

- Over the last year SASS introduced in-home services for School Aged children (Specialized Services, Behavioural Developmental Support). This was done in response to the FSCD wait list which is delaying funding approvals for preschool aged children.
- During 2025-2026 the Adolescent and Adult and Counselling programs offered a variety of new groups to address identified community needs (e.g., Digital Literacy, Setting Health Boundaries, Social Wellness).

Metrics:

- Increase the number of children, youth and adults served by SASS' programs by 25% within two years.

<i>SASS Capacity (# of Persons Served)</i>			
	<i>April 1 2024 – March 31 2025</i>	<i>April 1 2025 – December 3, 2026</i>	<i>% Change</i>
<i>OOHLP placements</i>	21	26	+24%
<i>School Program (Christine Meikle)</i>	-	16	-
<i>ESP contract</i>	64	94	+47%
<i>AAS</i>	85	89	+5%
<i>Counselling</i>	106	121	+14%
<i>Community Consultation (FFS)</i>	20	46	+130%
<i>LEAP</i>	7	5	-29%
TOTAL	302	397	+31.5% - NB this figure should be interpreted with caution as leadership has been more diligent about tracking all services since this metric was established

D. Addressing aging facilities/infrastructure – Having specialized facilities to deliver all programs and services.

Objectives:

- Expand Early Intervention services by opening a site in the north.
- Renovate or replace existing Out-of-Home Living facilities.
- Having adequate space for Counselling and Adolescent and Adult Services to maximize capacity and service quality.

Key Actions:

- Engage a commercial real estate broker.
- Consult with City of Calgary regarding options for development on current site.
- Plan for capital development campaign.

Update on Key Actions:

- *As noted earlier, efforts have focused on drafting a comprehensive Development Plan. An initial draft was circulated to the Board in February for comment. A revised draft is currently being prepared. It is anticipated a special board meeting will take place in the second quarter to finalize the plan and identify next steps.*
- *Over the last year, five of the eight bathrooms in the OOHLP building were renovated as was the primary kitchen (i.e., cook's kitchen). SASS will also be replacing most/all of the bedroom windows in the spring with grant funding from the Calgary Real Estate Board (\$72,000).*

Metrics:

- Developing a detailed plan within the next 18 months to renovate or move the OOHLP.

A detailed Development Plan is currently being revised. It is expected to be finalized in the second quarter of 2026.

- Completing feasibility study within the next 12 months to determine if ESP expansion is viable financially.

Given that enrollment was down for our preschool program (Sprout's Academy) this action item was not prioritized. Rather, attention was focused on drafting a comprehensive Development Plan. Some families who expressed interest in our ESP elected to go with a provider closer to their home. Having a site in the North may allow us to increase, but not double capacity, as originally thought. ESP expansion will be addressed within the development plan.

E. Fostering Advocacy and Collaboration - Build partnerships and advocate for systemic change to enhance support for individuals diagnosed with autism.

Objectives:

- Collaborate with organizations like Autism Calgary for joint advocacy efforts.
- Influence government policies for sustainable funding and improved service frameworks.
- Enhance community awareness and understanding of autism.

Key Actions:

- Continue to retain Communications and Government Relations Consultant.
- Partner with advocacy groups to address funding and policy barriers.
- Maintain regular engagement with government officials and stakeholders.
- Develop a testimonial library to support advocacy and public awareness campaigns.
- Offer government sustainable, clinically sound recommendations to address ministry capacity and budget issues.
- Participate in regional working groups to shape policy and service delivery

Update on Key Actions:

- *SASS continues to retain and rely on Morten Paulsen for support and direction regarding government advocacy.*
- *SASS partnered with a number of other Autism-serving organizations, including all of the provincial Autism Societies, to draft a letter to the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services. The letter outlined current concerns/issues, as well as potential cost effective, sustainable solutions. Although the letter prompted a response, it did not result in any tangible action.*

- *Over the last year we have met with the MLA for Calgary Acadia, Diana Batten, and the previous Councilor for the ward. A tour is scheduled for Rob Ward, the current Councilor, in early March. Invitations have been extended to Stephanie Kusie, MP for the area, and the Minister of Children and Family Services, Searle Turton. Kim was appointed to the National Autism Network Strategic Advisory Committee for Screening, Diagnosis and Services. This committee will provide recommendations to the Public Health Agency of Canada regarding the National Autism Strategy.*
- *A testimonial library has been established and the Leadership team is adding to it ongoingly.*
- *As noted above, a letter was shared with Minister Nixon which offered clinically sound and fiscally responsible options for FSCD reform. Unfortunately, there has been not action to date.*
- *In the past, FSCD contracted service providers were invited to participate in working groups to shape policy and address regional issues. At present, all direction appears to be coming from the Ministry and regional input has not been requested/encouraged. When unsolicited direction has been provided it has been largely ignored.*

Metrics:

- *Meet with Ministry of Seniors, Community and Social Services leadership at least one a year to share challenges and potential solutions.*
- *Requests to meet with the Minister of Assisted Living and Social Services have not been successful. Kim was able to meet with the Minister's new Chief of Staff, Saheb Dullet, Clay Buchanan, Assistant Deputy Minister and Jonah Pickle, Ministerial Assistant, in December. During the meeting the return on investment of early services was highlighted. Following the meeting the LEAP Toddler evaluation completed by the University of Calgary was shared.*

Glossary of Acronyms/Terms used in the Strategic Plan

CARF- Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities

- independent, non-profit organization that accredits health and human service providers

CFS – Children and Family Services

- Ministry that funds some of the placements in SASS' Out-of-Home Living program

ECS – Early Childhood Services

- The classroom portion of our Early Support Program
- Funding is provided by Alberta Education, program unit funding (PUF)

ESP – Early Support Program

- Program that serves children from diagnosis to age six

FSCD – Family Support for Children with Disabilities

- Funds SASS' Out-of-Home Living Program Services and a portion of our Early Support Program
- Part of the Ministry of Assisted Living and Social Services (under Disability Services)

OOHLP – Out-of-Home Living Program

- Group home services, offered at the The Nest (primary site) and Acadia House

MDT – Multidisciplinary Team

- A team of clinicians that makes recommendations to FSCD regarding hours and services, four SASS clinicians sit on the committee

PUF – Program Unit Funding

- Funding provided by Alberta Education to prepare children with disabilities to prepare them for school

Sprout's Academy

- The name of SASS's specialized preschool

Triple P - Positive Parenting Program

- a research-based parenting program designed to give parents simple, practical strategies to manage children's behavior confidently, build strong relationships, and prevent future problems