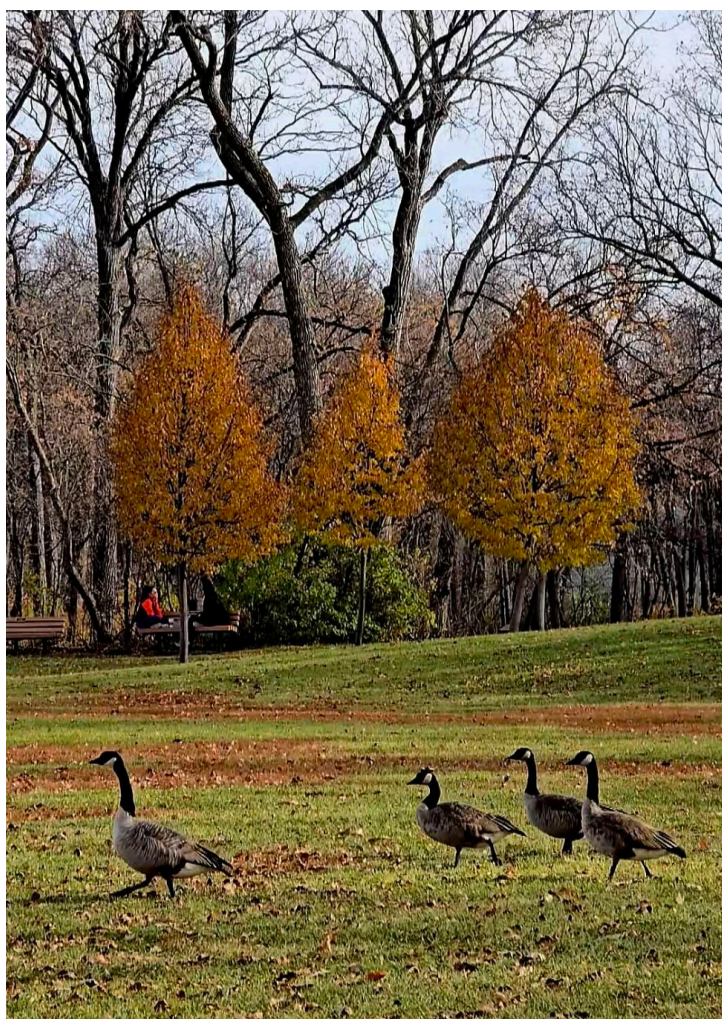


OPTIONS

Newsletter of the Independent Living Resource Centre (Manitoba)



Fall/Winter Issue

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Created/Edited through the ILRC Options Newsletter Committee. The views and opinions expressed in this edition are those of the original authors and other contributors. These views and opinions do not necessarily represent those of ILRC

From the Soapbox

John Young



For four decades, *Options* has been part of the Independent Living Resource Centre's identity. It has documented our achievements, shared community news, promoted activities, and offered something rather more important: a place for people to speak their minds.

And they have. These pages have carried their fair share of criticism, frustration, uncomfortable questions, and the occasional well-deserved complaint about governments, institutions, and systems remarkably resistant to common sense. We have celebrated progress when it happened, but have been equally willing to point out when it didn't.

Options was never intended to be simply a collection of pleasant announcements. It was a place where community members could express themselves openly, challenge assumptions, and question decisions affecting their lives. A place where criticism was not something to be politely discouraged, but something to be heard.

After forty years, however, we have decided to retire *Options* in its traditional newsletter format.

When *Options* first appeared, a printed newsletter was a sensible way to reach people. Today, information moves considerably faster, and members increasingly expect news when it matters, not months later when there happens to be enough material to fill 16 pages. There is something faintly absurd about spending

weeks preparing announcements that could have been delivered in an email the previous Tuesday.

And so, we are changing how we communicate. ILRC will introduce a monthly email update for members, sharing timely news, events, community developments, and opportunities for involvement. We will also maintain a dedicated space on our website for longer articles, reflections, opinions, and community contributions, with links shared through our monthly updates.

The format may be reaching the end of its useful life, but the need for independent community voices most certainly has not.

Government policies will continue to deserve scrutiny. Bureaucracies will continue to produce decisions that defy reasonable explanation. Systems supposedly designed to support people will occasionally manage to accomplish the opposite. And people with disabilities will continue to have experiences, frustrations, and ideas that deserve more than a polite acknowledgment before being filed away somewhere.

We intend to keep talking about those things.

Of course, some members will miss the familiar publication. We will miss producing it, too. There is satisfaction in holding a finished newsletter and discovering an article or perspective that makes you stop and think. Digital communication is wonderfully efficient, but efficiency is not always superior to something more tangible.

We owe considerable thanks to the writers, editors, volunteers, staff, members, and community advocates who contributed over these forty years. Together, they created more than a record of ILRC's history. They provided a forum for honest expression,

difficult questions, and conversations about independence, dignity, and change.

That conversation is far from finished.

Perhaps that is the fitting conclusion to forty years of *Options*. We are willing to retire a familiar way of doing things when it no longer serves us particularly well. But we are considerably less willing to retire the principles behind it.

The pages may be disappearing, but the opinions, questions, criticisms, and occasional good-natured grumbling are coming with us. The format is changing. After forty years, *Options* is changing.

But we are not planning to become any quieter.



The Expanding Spectrum

Robert Mitchell

There was a time, not especially long ago, when autism occupied a narrow place in the public imagination. I am a Gen X-er, and I remember it. The autistic child was imagined as remote, silent, unreachable. Many adults could plausibly say they had never knowingly met one.

Today, the word is everywhere. In schools, workplaces, TikTok biographies, and university disability offices. Adults discover in middle age that a lifetime of social confusion or sensory discomfort may have had a name. Teenagers casually describe themselves as “on the spectrum.” The numbers have moved with the culture. In Canada, reported autism prevalence among children and youth rose from roughly one in 714 in 2000–01 to about one in 44 by 2023–24.

Something happened. The argument is over what.

One explanation is biological: environmental or developmental factors may be contributing to more cases. Another is diagnostic: autistic people were always there, but medicine became better at recognizing them. A third is social: autism has expanded beyond a medical diagnosis into an identity, shaped by schools, advocacy, public benefits, and social media.

These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Autism has no single known cause. Research points strongly toward genetics interacting with prenatal and developmental factors. Claims about vaccines, meanwhile, have repeatedly failed scientific scrutiny.

But the definition itself has changed.

In 2013, the DSM-5 combined Asperger's syndrome and related diagnoses under autism spectrum disorder. The change recognized a genuine reality: autism presents differently across individuals. Some require lifelong assistance with basic daily living. Others hold demanding jobs, raise families, and live independently while experiencing substantial social or sensory difficulties.

The broader criteria also helped identify people medicine had overlooked, particularly women and girls whose symptoms were often masked or misdiagnosed.

Society also became much better at looking. Pediatricians screened earlier. Schools learned the signs. Diagnoses opened doors to accommodations, education plans, therapies, and public supports.

Then social media transformed diagnosis into autobiography. Personal accounts of sensory discomfort, social exhaustion, and lifelong difference offered recognition to millions. Unfortunately, they also encouraged complex diagnostic criteria to be reduced to ordinary personality traits. Not every awkward conversation, dislike of loud noises, or preference for routine indicates autism.

Recognition is powerful. So is identity. A diagnosis can transform shame into explanation and isolation into community. But today, the word *autism* is being asked to do many jobs: describe a disability, explain a personality, unlock services, and define an identity.

And somewhere within that expanding spectrum is a child who cannot speak, who needs assistance eating and dressing, and whose parents worry constantly about who will care for him when they die.

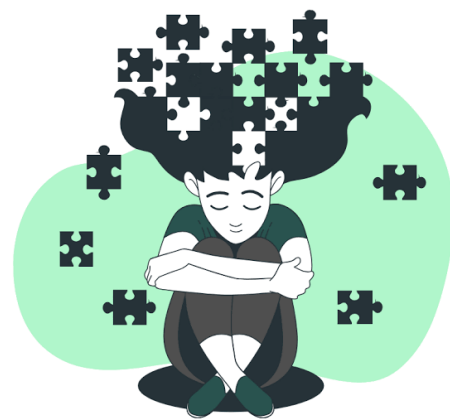
He shares a diagnosis with adults who discovered autism in middle age and live independently. Both may genuinely be autistic. Their needs, however, are radically different.

This is the deepest tension in the modern autism debate. A broader spectrum has allowed society to recognize people it once ignored. But it has also made the diagnosis *less precise* in communicating severity and support needs. Where resources are limited, expanding eligibility without expanding capacity risks leaving those with the greatest needs underserved.

So why are there so many autistic people now?

Perhaps there *are* more. Science has not entirely settled that question. But we also broadened the definition, improved screening, attached services to diagnosis, and created a culture in which people increasingly recognize and publicly describe autistic experiences.

Some people were missed for decades. Others may now be misdiagnosed. Both possibilities deserve serious examination. The challenge is to embrace greater recognition without allowing the expansion of a diagnosis to obscure profound disability or diminish the resources required to support it.



Salt and Strength

Doug Lockhart and Krystal Polson

January marked the launch of ILRC's **Salt and Strength Pilot Program**, developed in partnership with the Liang Foundation to increase awareness, strengthen community connections, and provide practical supports for people living with Postural Orthostatic Tachycardia Syndrome (POTS) and other forms of dysautonomia.

POTS affects the autonomic nervous system, which regulates functions such as heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, digestion, and temperature. Its symptoms can affect many aspects of daily life and are not always well understood.

Salt and Strength was created to address the need for greater awareness, peer connections, practical resources, and supports grounded in lived experience.

Peer support is a key part of the program. The Salt and Strength Peer Support Group meets on the last Wednesday evening of each month, both in person at ILRC and virtually. Participants can connect with others who understand the realities of living with POTS and dysautonomia, sharing experiences, strategies, information, and encouragement in a supportive environment. This fall, ILRC will also introduce a parent advisory and peer support option.

Education is another important component. ILRC has developed a POTS-focused DART training session to complement existing empathic modelling stations and build understanding of the lived experience of dysautonomia. The training also provides practical information on daily living, symptom

management, self-advocacy, and informed decision-making.

A new PACE module has also been developed to help prospective care workers better understand and respond to the needs of people living with POTS and related conditions.

As with all ILRC programming, Salt and Strength is grounded in the principles of Independent Living. It is consumer controlled, choice driven, informed by lived experience, inclusive and accessible, and focused on independence, dignity, and empowerment.

We have been encouraged by the strong community response and look forward to continuing to develop Salt and Strength through peer support, education, resources, and accessible wellness opportunities. Most importantly, the program is creating a place where people living with POTS and dysautonomia can connect, be understood, and access support on their own terms. If you or someone you know is living with POTS and they would like more information they can reach out to Krystal at 204-947-0194 or krystalp@ilrc.mb.ca



Tech Corner

Jason Hirose

The world can be a scary place these days, but it's always nice to hear from someone you care about. What happens, though, when that person calls in distress and urgently needs money?

These scams are becoming increasingly sophisticated. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to protect yourself while still helping someone who may genuinely be in trouble.

With today's technology, scammers can create a convincing imitation of someone's voice using only a short audio recording, potentially as little as 10 seconds. That recording might come from a previous phone call or even a video shared online. A clip from a birthday party, for example, could provide enough audio to imitate someone's voice and convince a relative to send money.

These scams rely on two things: urgency and compassion. Scammers create a crisis, often insisting, "I need help right now!" The goal is to make you act before you have time to think. They also exploit your natural concern for family and friends.

So how do you protect yourself?

First, be suspicious of unexpected calls requesting money, even if the voice sounds familiar. Ask questions only the real person would know. Remember that caller ID can be spoofed, so recognizing the phone number is no guarantee. The safest approach is to hang up and call the person using a number you already know and trust.

Another useful precaution is to establish a family safe word. Choose something unusual

that would not come up in everyday conversation. If someone calls claiming to be in trouble, ask them for the safe word before taking any action. Keep in mind that a safe word is an additional safeguard, not a substitute for independently verifying the caller.

Finally, remember that recovering money sent to a scammer can be extremely difficult. Banks may reimburse certain unauthorized transactions, but money you willingly transfer under false pretences may not be covered.

The message is simple: pause, verify, and never let urgency override caution. A genuine loved one will understand why you're taking a moment to make sure they're safe.



A Remarkable Year on the Water

Able Sail Team

The 2026 Able Sail season has come to a close, and by almost every measure it was a strong year for the program.

Able Sail saw strong growth in 2026, with participation increasing from 14 to 39 people and sailing sessions nearly doubling from 57 to 112—the highest level recorded in four years. Individual participation reached a four-year high of 16 sailors, evenly split between new and returning participants, while agency involvement also increased to six organizations and 12 group sailing sessions.

Several factors helped make that growth possible. For the first time in several seasons, Able Sail had two functioning boats available for much of the summer. That additional capacity allowed staff to accommodate more sailors, make better use of suitable weather and provide considerably more sailing opportunities. Reduced program fees also made Able Sail more accessible, particularly for community agencies bringing groups of participants. Agency representatives told us that cost had previously been a barrier and that the more affordable fee structure made participation much easier to arrange.

Most importantly, however, the numbers tell only part of the story. Throughout the summer, participants and agency staff consistently described Able Sail as welcoming, engaging and inclusive. One agency representative summed up the experience simply: “Each person on my team who has gone sailing this summer has absolutely loved it!”

For many participants, Able Sail provides access to an experience that might otherwise be difficult or impossible to pursue. A day on the water can mean recreation, independence, confidence, connection and the opportunity to try something entirely new. For some, sailing through Able Sail has even meant accomplishing a long-held personal goal or checking an experience off a bucket list.

That makes the future of Able Sail particularly important to consider. While demand for the program remains evident, operating an accessible sailing program requires specialized equipment, boats, maintenance, staffing and ongoing financial support. Much of Able Sail's equipment is aging, and finding sustainable funding sources for this type of recreational program has become increasingly difficult.

As a result, ILRC is beginning to consider whether 2027 may be the sunset season for Able Sail if adequate long-term funding and equipment solutions cannot be identified.

The irony is that Able Sail arrives at this crossroads following one of its strongest recent seasons. The 2026 results demonstrate that when boats are available, costs are kept accessible and community organizations are engaged, people participate. They come back. They bring others with them. And they value the experience.

As we look toward 2027, ILRC will continue exploring what may be possible. We also welcome conversations with community partners, supporters and potential funders who recognize the value of ensuring that people with disabilities have opportunities not

simply to access essential services, but to participate fully in recreation, adventure and community life.

Whatever the future ultimately holds, we want to thank the sailors, families, agencies, volunteers and staff who made the 2026 Able Sail season such a memorable one.

It was a very good year on the water.



ILRC Pickleball

Doug Lockhart

ILRC is committed to supporting athletes with disabilities in competition and to creating meaningful connections between people with disabilities and their communities through participation and sponsorship.

One example is ILRC's ongoing sponsorship of Leanne Lotecki, a Deaf athlete who has been playing pickleball for approximately three years. Through ILRC's sponsorship, Leanne is able to pursue an active lifestyle while competing alongside other athletes at the community and provincial levels.

This partnership provides an opportunity to showcase Leanne's skills and demonstrate the seamless inclusion of people with disabilities in community sport. It has also created opportunities to promote ILRC programs and services, including the Family Caregiver and Agent options, which support people with disabilities to live independently in their own homes for as long as possible.

The increased awareness generated through this sponsorship has already produced tangible benefits for ILRC. The relationship has contributed to the development of two new Agent arrangements, an ongoing partnership with Dakota Community Centre through its seniors' information and awareness initiatives, and greater overall awareness of ILRC and the range of programs and services we provide.

The partnership has also been highly successful on the court. This year alone, Leanne has competed in more than 13 local and provincial tournaments and has reached the podium four times, earning one gold medal, two silver medals, and one bronze.

Her most recent accomplishments include a gold medal at a PICKLR tournament and silver-medal finishes at both a PICKLR event and a 55+ tournament.

ILRC is proud of Leanne's accomplishments and pleased with the awareness our partnership continues to generate both on and off the pickleball court. It is a meaningful example of how community participation and sponsorship can promote the skills, abilities, and contributions of people with disabilities while strengthening awareness of ILRC and its work.



We Want You! Not Your Flu!

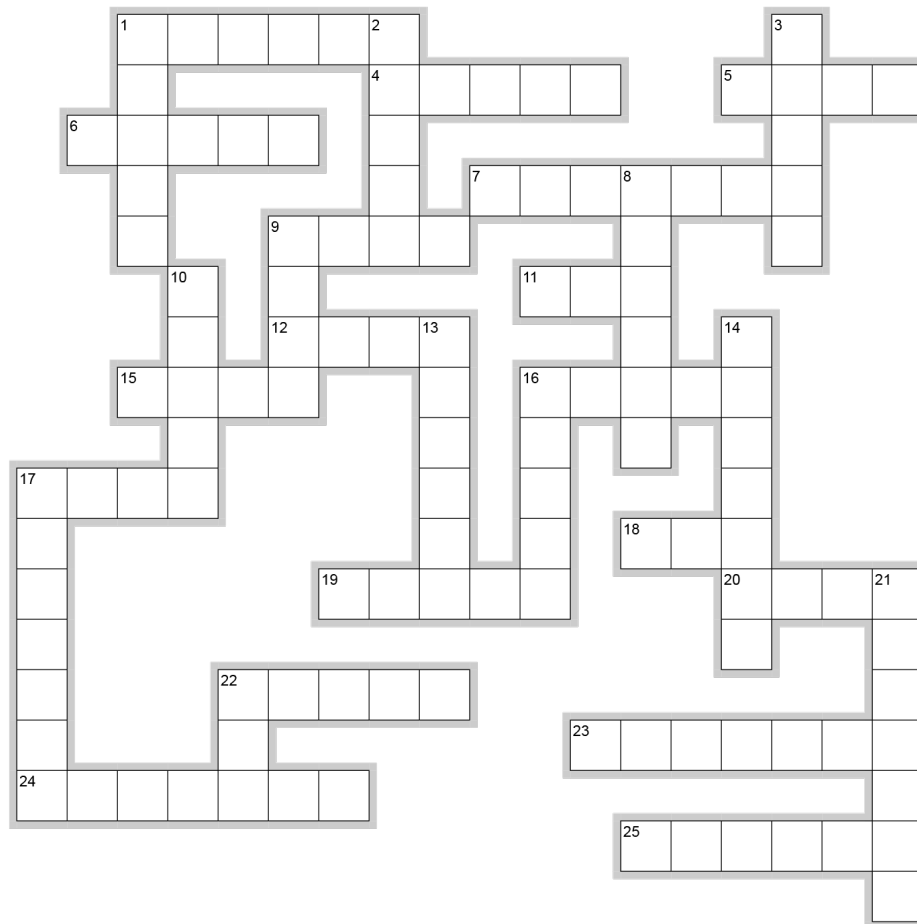


ILRC supports a “Stay Healthy” policy for all consumers, volunteers, visitors and staff members.

Please DO NOT come to the office if you are sick. Many people with disabilities have weakened immune systems and a simple cold or flu can easily become a dangerous illness.

Do your part to help everyone stay healthy!

Sports Crossword



Across

1. Sporting footwear
4. 2024 Paralympic host
5. Banned by James II because it distracted from archery practice
6. Sport where you might go for a scrum, ruck, or a try
7. Slapshot bros
9. Ping ____
11. "I am the greatest!"
12. Les Glorieux's other nickname
15. Orb used in many games
16. Bombers-Riders annual clash: ____ Bowl
17. The aim of bowling
18. Namath, Montana, Burro, Flacco
19. One half of the Williams sisters
20. Safe to throw in curling
22. One over par
23. Wee soccer players or donut holes
24. Best to do before most sports

25. Shared instrument for canoeists and pickle ballers

Down

1. Place for tennis or basketball
2. 2026 World Cup champs
3. Last animal to win the triple crown
8. Can be done on a hill or in a lake
9. Elite women's hockey league
10. Not spelled leaves
13. Penalty box nickname
14. 2025 World Series champs
16. Jordan brought them six titles
17. Goes great with cracker jacks
21. Famous Winnipeg speedskater
22. For hitting a ball

PACE

PERSONAL ATTENDANT COMMUNITY EDUCATION

Employable skills today Experience for a lifetime

Start your career as an
[Independent Living Attendant](#)

PACE is a recognized training program designed and delivered by the disability community. Get job ready with the vital skills needed to make a real difference!



personal care * home management
communication * mental health * diet/nutrition,
body movement * workplace safety
assistive devices * emergency management
wound care * community accessibility

We Have Choices!

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FORM

Your membership helps support newsletter distribution. Being a member has its benefits in that you can vote at our next annual meeting and receive exclusive invitations to community events. If you have not renewed your membership, please do so. The cost is **\$5.00**.

Please inform us about the following:

☐ **New Member**

☐ **Renewal**

☐ **I prefer not to receive any mailings from ILRC.**

Name: _____

Org. Name: _____

Visit Us at www.ilrc.mb.ca

Phone: _____

Address: _____

Postal Code: _____

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/Community Outreach

Patrick Stewart, Jason Hirose, Cherie-Lou Bagro

Personal Attendant Community Education Program (PACE)

Natalie Pirson

And many volunteers and members who support ILRC daily. We greatly appreciate these members of the **community team!**