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Ontario Freemasonry's Autism Spectrum Disorder Project

Following the election of our new Grand Master every two years, one of their first actions is to name their "Grand Master's Charity" for support by the brethren. This effort is additional to the regular charity projects supported by the Masonic Foundation of Ontario. Grand Master Green's "Project Prostate Hope" was highly successful and generated \$1.1 million in his two-year term.

Grand Master Paul E. Todd has selected Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) as his Grand Masters' Charity. Autism affects children in a variety of ways: impairing social communication, repetitive behaviour and restricted interests. This disease affects children on a global scale regardless of age, weight, race, ethnic and socio-economic groupings and overall health. Specifically Grand Master Todd's project will focus on supporting research into ASD at several research establishments in Ontario.

Autism in its many forms affects approximately 20,000 children in Ontario schools. In the United States the prevalence is 1 in 68 which is similar to Ontario. Boys with ASD outnumber girls by as much as 4:1, but the underlying reasons for this difference remain elusive. Early detection through improved awareness, family studies and better screening programs, contributes to early and effective interventions. Best practices for pre-school-aged children with ASD include a focus on improving language and cognitive and adaptive skills using Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) techniques.

Demands on Ontario's health care system have increased dramatically. Health care professionals in many capacities encounter children and their families coping with ASD. Optimal care depends on a large network of providers, given the breadth and complexity of associated medical issues (epilepsy, ADHD, disturbed sleep, anxiety

disorders, depression, gastrointestinal issues, obesity and schizophrenia). Collaboration between medical, educational and social services is of paramount importance.

The Government of Ontario's newly revamped Autism Program, with an investment of some one half billion dollars over the next 5 years will attempt to streamline consistent delivery of services across the province. These efforts into a childhood disease of this extent and magnitude are critical. At the present time there is no known cure for Autism and life expectancy for individuals with autism is considerably lower than the general population.

Donations to Autism Spectrum Disorder Project #2300 are tax deductible and can be made by cheques written out to "Masonic Foundation of Ontario" at 361 King Street West, Hamilton, L8O 1B4, by credit card (phone (905) 527-9105), by fax or on-line through <https://www.canadahelps.org>.

As prepared by Michael Jenkyns, Grand Historian, Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario

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