**ACTIVITY ENGAGEMENT AND BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION IN THE FRANCOPHONE COMMUNITY**

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**Objectives:** Participation in community activities has many benefits for individuals with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) including opportunities to increase social interaction, and thereby improve quality of life (Brown & Oullette-Kuntz, 2010; Felce & Perry, 1995). Unfortunately, individuals with ASD are less likely to participate in social, recreational and leisure activities than their peers (Solish, Perry, & Minnes, 2009). For Francophone families living outside Quebec, this number may be even lower due to language minority status limiting the family’s access to activities in their community. Unfortunately, little research exists examining the activity engagement and barriers to participation of Francophone families living outside Quebec – the largest concentration of whom live in Ontario (Statistics Canada, 2011) - who also have a family member with ASD. Autism Ontario is an organization that works to promote acceptance and opportunities for individuals with ASD in Ontario.

**Method:** 96 Francophone families completed an online survey circulated by Autism Ontario. The survey inquired about (1) Autism Ontario activities that the families had participated in over the past few years and the languages the activities were offered in, (2) barriers to participation for families in this group, and (3) types of activities that the families would like to see offered.

**Results:** Results indicate that families engaged most frequently in social learning opportunities and webinars that were offered in French. Families reported desiring a range of opportunities including activities for parents of individuals with ASD, and more artistic or sports activities for individuals with ASD. Several barriers to participation were reported by families, including; accessibility (e.g., distance, transportation, date or time offered), the nature of the activities being offered, and lack of communication about the activities. While language was noted as a barrier by some families, it was not among the most commonly endorsed barriers.

**Discussion:** Previous research has demonstrated the benefits of participation in community activities for individuals with ASD (e.g., Brown & Oullette-Kuntz, 2010). The results of this study are encouraging in that Francophone families reported engaging in many of the activities offered by Autism Ontario, even when offered in English. Unfortunately, several families still identify language as a barrier to participation. A number of other barriers to participation were also noted, suggesting that some intervention is needed to better facilitate community participation in this population. These data provide direction for future program development by Autism Ontario and support the efforts to better serve the Ontario Francophone community. For more information on French Language Services at Autism Ontario please visit rpcprovincial@autismontario.com

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