



Support
PREP's 50/50
WDSR Raffle
Today!

2026 Impact Newsletter

Welcome to a World of Inclusion and
Belonging.

This Newsletter Covers:

PREP News

Donor Highlight

Featured Impact
Story

SLP Profile

Advocacy
Spotlight



PREP NEWS

As we celebrate the remarkable achievements and milestones of our community members with Down syndrome, we also extend heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated donors who make our mission at The PREP Society possible. Your unwavering support propels us forward in our commitment to providing educational and therapeutic services that empower every individual to thrive.

PREP's Casino Was a Hit!

To our incredible casino volunteers, thank you for showing up! Your time, energy, and team spirit truly made it happen. Casino proceeds are one of the most reliable and impactful sources of funding for PREP. These funds directly support our mission-critical needs, from delivering programs to providing the essential resources that make a difference for children and families every single day.

If you want to make a meaningful impact at PREP, volunteering at our events is one of the most powerful ways. **We encourage our community to get involved and be part of the difference!**



Suzanne Iaquina and Mara Marchesan

Up and Coming

WSDS 50/50 Raffle

Celebrate World Down Syndrome Day and support PREP by entering our WSDS 50/50 Raffle! WSDS (21/3) celebrates the lives and contributions of people with Down syndrome while promoting equal rights and inclusion worldwide, with the date representing the three copies of chromosome 21. Ticket sales run from February 18–March 22, 2026, with the draw taking place on March 23, 2026.

Buy your tickets [here](#).

PREP NEWS

Up and Coming

16th Annual Mother's Day Retreat

Join us for our 16th Annual Mother's Day Retreat on May 2, 2026, from 8:30 AM–3:30 PM at The Hamptons Golf Club in NW Calgary. We're honoured to welcome Carmen Wilde, healing practitioner and educator, who will guide a meaningful session focused on reflection, connection, and guidance. Register [Here](#).



Carmen Wilde



Up the Down Market

Up the Down Market is a fast-paced trading event that brings together leaders from the financial, investment, and legal sectors to compete by buying and selling shares in fictional companies. While teams compete for the top spot, they are also making a meaningful investment in individuals with Down syndrome. A portion of the proceeds supports programs at PREP Society, helping provide education, therapy, and family support services. Volunteer today and help make an impact!

Volunteers Needed!

We are currently seeking enthusiastic individuals with a background in finance, investment, or law who are interested in volunteering with the Up the Down Market Fundraising Committee.

Fundraising Committee Members

- Attend meetings and actively participate
- Leverage personal and professional networks to identify sponsors, donors, and in-kind support
- Support fundraising outreach and share campaign messaging

If you are interested please email Jane Dafoe at jdafoe@prepsociety.ca

PREP NEWS

Celebrate WSDS: PREP's March Events at a Glance

MAR 9

Grab Your WSDS Swag in the Waiting Room!
(Bookmarks and Bracelets)

MAR 21

World Down Syndrome Day!

Ups and Downs Hitmen Game

6:00 – 8:00 PM

555 Saddledome Rise SE, Calgary, AB T2G 2W1

Register [here](#).

MAR 22

50/50 WSDS Raffle Closes

(Last day to buy tickets!)

Buy tickets [here](#)!

MAR 23

50/50 WSDS Raffle Winner Drawn

(Winner will be contacted to claim their jackpot!)

MOVING FORWARD

Over the past several years, the PREP Society has experienced tremendous growth. As more families seek our services, our programs have expanded to meet the increasing need in our community. While this growth is something to celebrate, it also presents an important opportunity to pause, listen, and plan intentionally for the future.

Recently, Curtis Slater, Executive Director, shared a comprehensive survey with families to better understand their experiences, identify emerging needs, and gather feedback on how PREP can continue providing exceptional support.

Thank you to everyone who shared their voice — your input is helping guide PREP's next chapter!

DONOR HIGHLIGHT



For over 25 years, the Big Hearted Mavericks have brought Calgarians together to support children's charities through unforgettable events, authentic western spirit, and a shared love of giving back. What began with a single chuckwagon tarp at the Calgary Stampede has grown into a long-standing community tradition.



For the past 15 years, the Mavericks have generously funded our reading program, helping PREP kids build confidence, strengthen literacy skills, and develop a lifelong love of learning. Their commitment has made a lasting impact on the children and families we serve.

We're proud to support the **Mavericks' Charity Poker Tournament** on March 19 at Deerfoot Inn & Casino — a key fundraiser that helps them continue giving back to organizations like ours. Player seats are \$350 and non-player seats are \$100.

To RSVP, email dan@rollingmix.com. For more information and sponsorship opportunities, visit [here](#).

Thank you Mavericks!

JASON REACHES NEW HEIGHTS

Originally from Nigeria, Thomas and Mercy were excited to welcome their second son. However, this special moment was peppered with a mix of joy and apprehension, as they learned that Jason had Down syndrome. Their sweet baby also suffered from oxygen deprivation at birth and he spent many months in the AB Children's Hospital relying on tubes to help him breathe and receive nourishment.

When Thomas and Mercy brought Jason to PREP, they immediately felt a connection to the staff. Thomas describes PREP as a safe place and a "Real community where people understand you! I could tell that they genuinely cared about my son." Further, Thomas sees Roxane Schulte, PREP's program director, as incredibly supportive and a staunch advocate for the family. Thomas and Mercy have been bringing Jason to PREP for services since he was 18 months old.

Now eight, Jason is a social boy who loves nature, music, watching Cocomelon and playing with his siblings Nathan (9) and Irene (3). Some of their favourite games include the classic hide-and-seek, clapping along to music, and parachute.



Jason Gets the Big Picture

A key member of Jason's team is Kayla Fitch, SLP. She is working with Jason to build his communication skills.

Kayla explains her strategy as follows, "When someone is nonspeaking, typically I will see where they are at with communication outside of speech. Someone can be nonspeaking but still very communicative."

In Jason's case, he is sometimes in his own world. So my goal is to uncover a way into his world that is engaging for him. Showing that you are a safe person who understands him, can unlock a whole type of connection and interaction that you otherwise would not see."

"Little by little the bird builds its nest."

– Nigerian Proverb

JASON'S STORY

For example, Kayla builds upon Jason's love of music by beginning each session with a song. As she sings "one little squish, two little squishes", she gently squeezes his hands. At first he was engaged for a bit then would turn away. Now, as soon as she starts singing he grins and extends his hands indicating that he wants to join the game. That is communication.

Kayla is working with Jason on upping his communication skills. He's learning to press a button to express that he wants more of something. Time and repetition will bring consistency; in the long-term he may be able to use an AAC device.

Kayla uses visuals, gestures, and signs to support Jason's comprehension. The goal is to foster joint attention and engagement. She encourages Jason to explore sounds, which are a natural precursor to speech.

Kayla's description of Jason's ability to comprehend spoken language is short, but with a caveat. "The extent of Jason's understanding is a private matter. However, this should not be mistaken for a lack of comprehension. In reality, Jason likely understands far more than he is able to express."



Perspective is Everything

Kayla stresses that in the end, the goal is to celebrate all types of communication. Some parents believe that speech is the end goal. However, if they can shift their perspective of what communication is, they'll understand that it has been there in some form - all along.

We hear you, Jason!

**"Listen with your eyes as well as your ears."
– Graham Speechley**

SLP PROFILE: Q & A WITH KAYLA FITCH

We're pleased to profile Kayla Fitch, a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) who has been with PREP for the past year and a half. Kayla is passionate about supporting communication development and working with children and families to build meaningful skills. Read on to learn more about her experience and insights in our Q&A!

What first inspired you to become a speech-language pathologist?

My first exposure was through my grandpa, his brother had a stroke and ended up with Broca's aphasia. When I met him, I realized there was a difference between what he was thinking and what he could physically say, but ultimately he was still himself. His humour, personality, and intelligence were all the same. In grad school what stuck with me the most was the idea that when someone has aphasia or something similar it's like getting on a plane and landing in a foreign country. You are still who you are when you land, but you don't have the same ability to express yourself anymore.

What motivates your work today?

Today I work with kids with disabilities, where it's not that they lost language, it's that they haven't developed it. I'm passionate about helping people find their voice and ensuring they have access to communication. One thing about someone losing their ability to speak, like in aphasia, is people recognize that loss. But when a child is born with a disability, those communication barriers become normalized. My job is to make sure those barriers aren't just accepted and kids get the necessary support.



From a SLP's perspective, what does communication truly mean?

Communication is way more than speech. It can be anything. From facial expressions, gestures, or even using a speech generating device. Ultimately, communication is about successfully getting a message across.

How do you define success in speech therapy?

I always emphasize communicative effectiveness, which is just the idea of your message being understood. So if the child is able to get their needs met, share joy, say no to things, and all those communicative functions, then I see that as successful communication. Sometimes parents are really focused on speech, so part of my job is to highlight all the ways communication already exists.

SLP PROFILE: Q & A WITH KAYLA FITCH

Why is it important for families to broaden their understanding of communication beyond verbal speech?

I think people are trained to just focus on speech. They're not noticing the fact that their child is communicating and the ways the child is making progress in communicating. For example, with Jason he didn't speak verbally and still doesn't. If you left it at that it doesn't look like we made any progress. But in reality he's gone from minimal communication to using gestures or vocalizing in order to ask for things. Keeping your perspective broad so you don't miss all the progress being made is extremely important.



“I emphasize to parents, meaningful communication, meaningful connection, and meaningful participation, because that’s what I really care about.”
– Kayla Fitch, SLP

How can communities create more inclusive environments for nonspeaking individuals?

People with communication difficulties, as much as they need support, they also need good communication partners. There is lots you can do to support the communication of someone with Down syndrome, being patient is one. Giving them enough processing time is essential, especially with an AAC user. If I say something and they don't respond fast enough and I move on, I may be missing an opportunity for communication. Everyone wants to feel seen, heard, and understood so when they have someone who cares about their message they can feel that.

ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT:

Families Facing Extended Wait Times for FSCD Supports

For far too many families across Alberta, accessing timely and adequate disability supports has become a prolonged struggle. While the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program is intended to provide essential services that enable participation in community life, many families are waiting years for help after applying. These delays are a part of a province-wide crisis that demands attention and action.

What's Happening?

Recent surveys conducted by Inclusion Alberta reveal systemic problems with FSCD and the related Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) program. You can read more about their research and call to action [here](#).

Programs like FSCD are meant to be supports that help children and families thrive. Instead, the current system is leaving many without the supports they urgently need. These delays can undermine progress during crucial developmental windows, progress that cannot be recovered.

Findings

- Programs have become **bureaucratic and unresponsive**, with families waiting up to **three years (or longer)** for supports after being deemed eligible.
- **Wait times come at a cost.** Parents report lost employment opportunities, children missing critical early developmental interventions, and increased stress and hardship.
- Families who once thought their experience was unique now see a **pattern of delayed access, denials, and chronic under-resourcing.**





ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT:

What Can You Do to Help?

Contacting your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) is one of the most direct ways to make your voice heard.

How To Take Action:

1. **Reach out to your MLA:** Share your FSCD experience and advocate for timely access and adequate funding. If you're not a parent, send a letter in support as an ally.
2. **Be clear and specific:** Explain how delays have affected your child or family, and ask for support in advocating for increased funding, reduced wait times, and better accountability.
3. **Follow up:** If you don't receive a response, call again. Persistence shows that this issue matters.

Meeting with MLAs, and bringing others with you, can help signal that tens of thousands of families count on these essential services, and that they shouldn't be left waiting.

Alberta's disability support programs are at a critical crossroads. Without meaningful changes to reduce waitlists and ensure adequate funding, children and families will continue to face unnecessary hardship. Advocacy isn't just about speaking up, it's about shaping a system that truly works for everyone it was designed to support.

If you'd like help preparing to connect with your MLA or want to share your story with our community, please reach out to PREP's Executive Director Curtis Slater (cslater@prepsociety.ca). **We're committed to supporting you in this effort.**



THANKS FOR READING!



FOR MORE INFORMATION

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