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autism and other cognitive special needs, which is why we are always looking for ways to provide excellence in service and product innovations to empower our passengers and make them feel welcome."

The increasing cost, according to the Town of Halton Hills communications manager, Alexendra Fuller, could be attributed to the growth of Magnus Mode from a small two-person operation into a company with a staff of 15.

"We had a lot of learning to do," Nadia Hamilton, founder and CEO of Magnus Mode, said. "Including how to appropriately cost out product and services to ensure we could provide continual value to users and partners."

Across North America, Hamilton said, the app has 75,000 to 100,000 users across North America, with applications as far as Las Vegas' McCarran Air-

port. But the app began at home.

"I had lived with somebody impacted with autism — my brother — and I became acutely aware of the challenges people with autism face," Hamilton said.

By drawing step-by-step guides for her brother, Hamilton noted the benefit.

"I worked with people who had Downs syndrome and other cognitive disabilities, and I would go into their home and experience the same challenges my brother faced," Hamilton said.

"Although it's a diverse spectrum, there are consistencies in terms of challenges and barriers as well as abilities and strengths."

From the drawn guides, Hamilton said she began to work toward building an app, partnering with several institutions to test and tune the app.

"People with autism and other disabilities experi-



David Lea/Metroland

Following the lead of the Town of Oakville and the Town of Milton, the Town of Halton Hills will implement Magnuscards, an app to aid people with autism, for a number of Town services.

ence the world very differently," Hamilton said. "It's overwhelming to focus on one task when every sound is explosive, every light is blinding."

Halton Hills decks will offer instructions on how to sign up for a library card at the Halton Hills Public

Library, how to be prepared for a public swim, and how to book a trip with the ActiVan, among other topics.

"The app is intended to increase accessibility and inclusivity," Alexandra Fuller, communications manager for the Town of

Halton Hills, said. "The intent is to remove barriers for persons with autism or any other special cognitive needs and support their ability to access the Town's three social municipal services without limitations."

Fuller noted accessibility was measured not just

by physical barriers but any barrier limiting a person from completing an action.

"In general, it allows for more information and less anxiety," Sinthea Chowdhury, support co-ordinator for Autism Ontario, said. "For the autistic community it's been a great benefit. It allows a clear understanding of what to expect from beginning to end."

The program will roll out in April. MagnusCards is a free-to-download app available on Android and iOS devices.

THE STORY BEHIND THE STORY: While a partnership with a new app would offer more independence and autonomy for residents with autism or other cognitive special needs, the price tag has increased for Halton Hills compared to what Oakville and Milton paid to integrate it into their municipal services. We wanted to learn why.

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