

2015-2016

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE: AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS



Touch our future

ALBERTA CENTRE FOR
**CHILD, FAMILY
& COMMUNITY**
RESEARCH



The Centre funds policy-relevant applied research that has the potential to improve the wellbeing of Alberta’s children, their families and communities; we are specifically interested in research that looks at outcomes for children and/or youth. We offer a variety of funding opportunities to get research started and sustain it for both trainees and independent investigators.



We support Community-Based Research (CBR) and encourage researchers and communities to partner equitably in the research process. The Centre funds policy-relevant research that aligns with five research themes:

- Early Childhood Development
- Middle Childhood and Youth Wellbeing
- Family Capacity Building
- Community Capacity Building
- Tracking Long-Term Outcomes

Our primary relationship is with Alberta Human Services and our agreement includes supporting research, analysis and knowledge mobilization related to the following strategic issues:




- addressing issues with respect to Aboriginal and recent immigrant populations;
- alleviating broader socio-economic conditions including poverty and homelessness; and
- meeting challenges related to disabilities and mental health.

In 2015/16, the following projects were either initiated, completed or in progress from a previous year.

Each project has been sorted into a thematic area.

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Legend

-  Completed
-  Initiated
-  Ongoing



BRAIN AND EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Projects in this section were co-funded through a special Request for Proposals in collaboration with Palix Foundation's Alberta Family Wellness Initiative.



Dose-Response Relationships between Physical Activity, Sedentary Behaviour, and Neurocognitive Development among Children of the Early Years

~ Dr. Valerie Carson & Dr. Sandra Wiebe, University of Alberta

Background:

The overarching goal of this project was to develop an interdisciplinary team of researchers, trainees, and stakeholders with collective expertise, experience, and interest in physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and neural and cognitive development in early childhood, to address three objectives:

1. Build on previous systematic reviews to examine the relationship between physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and neurocognitive development in the early years of children.
2. Conduct a pilot study to explore dose-response relationships between physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and neurocognitive development in the early years of children.
3. Use the results of the systematic reviews and pilot study to plan and prepare a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Operating Grant Application for the spring, 2015 competition to longitudinally examine the dose-response relationships between physical activity, sedentary behavior and neurocognitive development in a large representative sample of the early years of children.

Results:

1. The team successfully completed two systematic reviews. Different types of sedentary behavior were found to have different impacts on cognitive development. Screen time, in particular television viewing, was either not associated with or had detrimental associations with cognitive development. Reading or being read to had beneficial associations with cognitive development.
2. Preliminary findings showed small to large effect size observed between different intensities of physical activity, and working memory and response inhibition.
3. The results from the systematic reviews and preliminary results for the pilot study led to the successful submission of a two-year Women & Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) Innovation Operating Grant (\$50,000). This grant is examining the longitudinal relations between physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and neurocognitive development in early childhood. This project began in July, 2015. Those who participated in the baseline portion of the study have been invited back to participate in a six-month and 12-month follow-up.



Action Team on Triadic Attachment and Child Health (ATTACH): Developing and Testing a Reflective Function Attachment Intervention

~ Dr. Nicole Letourneau, University of Calgary

Background:

Parents suffering from toxic stress (depression, addictions, and/or family violence) are often unable to respond sensitively and appropriately to their infants. This interferes with the formation of secure parent-infant attachments, necessary for healthy infant and child development. Secure attachment is also influenced by parental reflective function (RF), the capacity of parents to understand and therefore regulate their own feelings and behaviour toward their child. As a relatively new concept, few RF interventions exist. Evaluations of the only two RF interventions found suggest that RF is modifiable and predicts improvements in maternal sensitivity and responsiveness, attachment security and infant development. While parent training programs are numerous, RF is not a typical intervention component, limiting their effectiveness. This study sought to develop (Phase 1) and pilot test (Phase 2) a RF intervention program, called RF+, suitable for 'adding on' to existing parenting programs. Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) was the Innovation Site for this project and collaborated in the RF+ program development, adaptation, and pilot implementation into their existing services. The grant also provided data to support successful funding applications to further test and expand the intervention program to additional partner sites across Canada.

Results:

The ATTACH RF+ program was "added on" to the Nurturing Parent program. Using a quasi-experimental design, participants in the Nurturing Parent program were invited to participate in the RF+ program as well. As each Nurturing Parent group is comprised of up to 10 mothers and fathers (or co-parenting support; 5 couples), two groups were selected for program testing. One group received the Nurturing Parenting and RF+ program and the other received only Nurturing Parenting. Thus, the total sample size was comprised of 20 mother/child dyads and their co-parent support with half of whom received the RF+ program. The two Nurturing Parent groups will also take part in Ainsworth Strange Situations to assess attachment security in a follow-up phase of the study.



Gestational weight gain and infant neurodevelopment at 2 years of age

~ Dr. Piush Mandhane, University of Alberta & Dr. Ryan Van Lieshout, McMaster University

Background:

Psychiatric disorders affect 1 in 5 Canadians. As brain development begins at conception, it can be adversely affected by maternal health problems during pregnancy. Pre-pregnancy overweight affects nearly 40% of Canadian women and 55% will gain too much weight during pregnancy. The intrauterine environment associated with excess maternal adiposity may adversely affect offspring neurodevelopment. Investigators have enrolled and followed 840 families as part of the Edmonton Site of the Canadian Healthy Infant Longitudinal Development (CHILD) Study from pregnancy to two years postpartum. Already collected CHILD data provided the team with an unparalleled opportunity to identify the early childhood origins of mental health and cognition including the role of prenatal programming

The project will allow the research team to:

1. Develop a new interdisciplinary collaboration between the University of Alberta and McMaster University;
2. Collect new data on pre-pregnancy BMI and gestational weight gain from mothers' birth records; and,
3. Develop future proposals examining the biological underpinnings of associations between prenatal exposures and childhood neurodevelopment using existing biological samples. Identifying associations between maternal pre-pregnancy BMI, GWG and neurodevelopmental problems provides a potential therapeutic target to prevent or reduce the severity of mental health and cognitive problems across the lifespan.

Results:

No interim results are available.





Perinatal Programming of Biomarkers of Stress Resilience and Mental Health

~ Dr. Gerlinde Metz & Dr. Igor Kovalchuk, University of Lethbridge

Background:

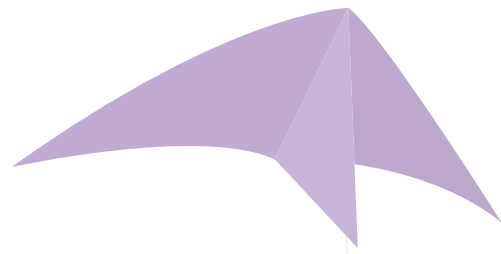
Our ancestors' stressful childhoods and lifetime adventures may change our personality, inflicting anxiety or resilience by altering epigenetic regulation of genes in the brain. A history of toxic stress during early childhood, or in ancestors', critically determines lifetime stress vulnerability and resilience. Epigenetic mechanisms of transgenerational programming may mediate both stress vulnerability and resilience. The overall objective targets a framework that investigates the origins of maternal and offspring mental health through the transgenerational inheritance of behavioural, endocrine and epigenetic manifestations of stress. The focus will be to identify markers associated with stress resilience and mental health in the presence of a stressful environment. This interdisciplinary team used a multi-level approach in an established, unique rat cohort of transgenerational stress spanning five aging generations. The team identified robust biomarkers associated with prenatal and transgenerational programming of stress response and resilience to stress, maternal and offspring mental health. The main hypothesis is that early childhood and transgenerational experiences, through epigenetic regulation, critically influence healthy development, stress response and resilience, and maternal mental health. This innovative research program will advance the understanding of the origins of maternal and child mental health, stress resilience and life health trajectories.

Results:

The results revealed a coordinated pattern of DNAm and miRNA signatures that are inherited across generations which link the experience of stress to a higher risk of mental illness. The next steps involved the validation of these signatures in tissues from established human cohorts of prenatal stress. To confirm that prenatal stress in humans will modify epigenetic signatures of mental health the research team began collaborations with multiple individuals who direct established human cohorts of prenatal and lifetime stress. These collaborators have begun to collect human tissues of their various clinical cohorts to pursue for the collaborative epigenetic studies. In addition to up-stream epigenetic regulation, they will also search for down-stream metabolomics biomarkers of stress and mental health.



BUILDING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING, IN FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, RURAL AND URBAN COMMUNITIES



◆ Utilization-focused evaluation of a First Nation school's nutrition policy and activities

~ Dr. Noreen Willows, University of Alberta

Background:

The recent development of a school nutrition policy at Kipohtakaw Education Centre (KEC) in Alexander First Nation provides two important opportunities.

1. To review the policy and the accompanying activities to support healthy eating for congruency with the health goals of the community and with the Alberta Government's Alberta Nutrition Guidelines for Children and Youth.
2. To evaluate the policy and its implementation for relevance to, and acceptability by school staff, students, and families.

The intended use of this community-based participatory research is to strengthen the nutrition policy so that it is grounded in the core values of the community; will have limited barriers to implementation; and will ensure that the school environment provides children with access to healthy food choices for all foods and beverages served and sold within the school. Findings will provide evidence-based strategies to inform best practices for the development of effective policies to improve healthy eating in other First Nations schools. KEC is an Alberta Project Promoting active Living and healthy Eating (APPLE) School. Learnings can help to define more effective ways to create, support and sustain healthy First Nations, Metis and Inuit APPLE School communities. The synthesis of findings from this research will be used to develop coordinated nutrition policy and programs at KEC that are amenable to school staff, students and parents, and that include nutrition education, a school environment that models healthy food choices, and community partnerships.





Maskwacis Youth Perceptions of Strength and Resilience

~ Dr. Lola Baydala, University of Alberta

Background:

Although Maskwacis has a vibrant culture, negative media reports have painted a bleak picture of the community, highlighting instances of violence and gang activity. In the face of such attention, the aim of this project is to bring Elders and youth together to explore three research questions:

1. What are the most important elements of cultural identity from the perspectives of youth in the Maskwacis community?
2. How do Maskwacis youth view their community strengths and resilience?
3. To what extent can photographs be used as a tool for reframing perceptions of an Indigenous community?

This project will be led by a team of academic researchers in partnership with the Nehiyaw Kakeskewina Learning Society as well as Maskwacis schools and the Maskwacis Health Centre.



A Narrative Inquiry alongside Urban Indigenous Children and Families into their Familial and Early School Curriculum Making Experiences

~ Ms. Cindy Swanson (supervised by Dr. Jean Clandinin & Dr. Janice Huber) University of Alberta

Background:

The proposed inquiry attends to the experiences of three young children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they begin, and continue, to compose their lives in familial and school curriculum-making worlds. There are three research purposes:

1. Understand the early experiences of children and families of Indigenous ancestry as they compose familial curriculum.
2. Attend to personal, social, historical, cultural, and institutional narratives shaping the lives of the children and families within the dominant narratives of school curriculum making.
3. Understand the tensions experienced by the children and families as they move between familial curriculum-making worlds into school curriculum-making worlds.





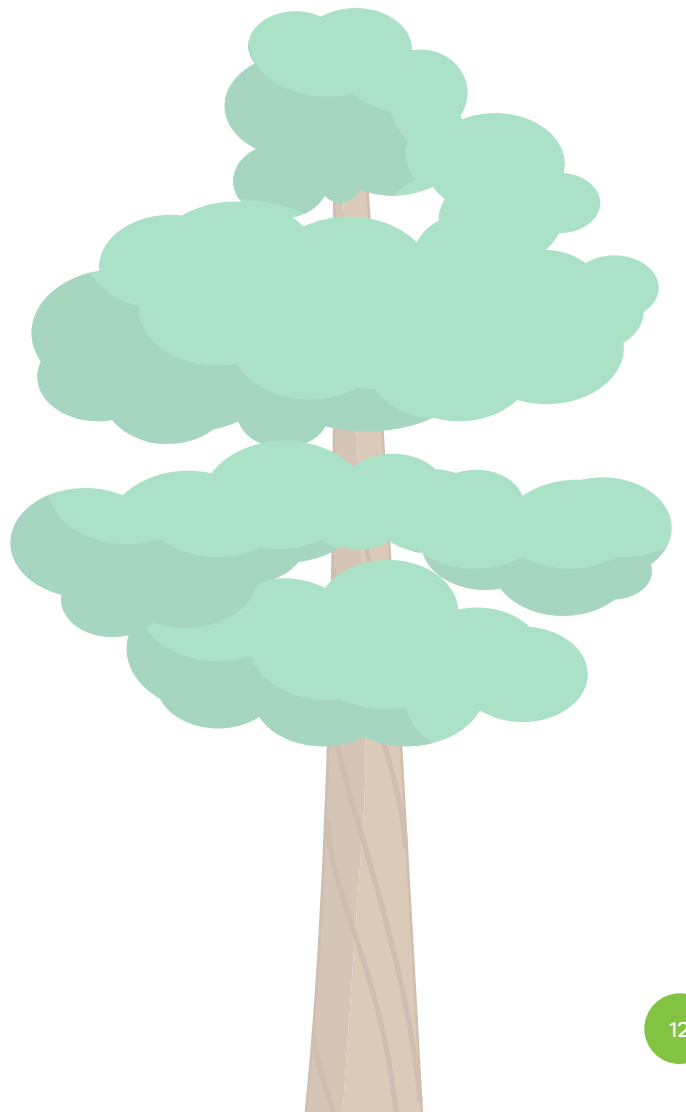
Assessing the Feasibility of an Aboriginal Community-led Health Centre in Lethbridge

~ Dr. Cheryl Currie, University of Lethbridge

Background:

In Lethbridge, Alberta there is a community-identified need for culturally relevant treatment and prevention services, and improved continuity of care. To address these problems in other cities, a promising practice has been the introduction of a full-service Aboriginal health access centre. These Aboriginal community-led centres provide traditional healing, primary care, cultural programs, health promotion programs, community development initiatives, and social support services. The goal of this project is to assess the feasibility of an Aboriginal Health Centre in Lethbridge by:

1. conducting a needs assessment.
2. meeting with teams who lead Aboriginal health centres in other cities and learning from them.
3. conducting a gap analysis to determine the technical requirements needed on a team to move forward.
4. engaging the community as the team moves through these steps as well as at the end of the project to share both the process and the outcomes of this work.



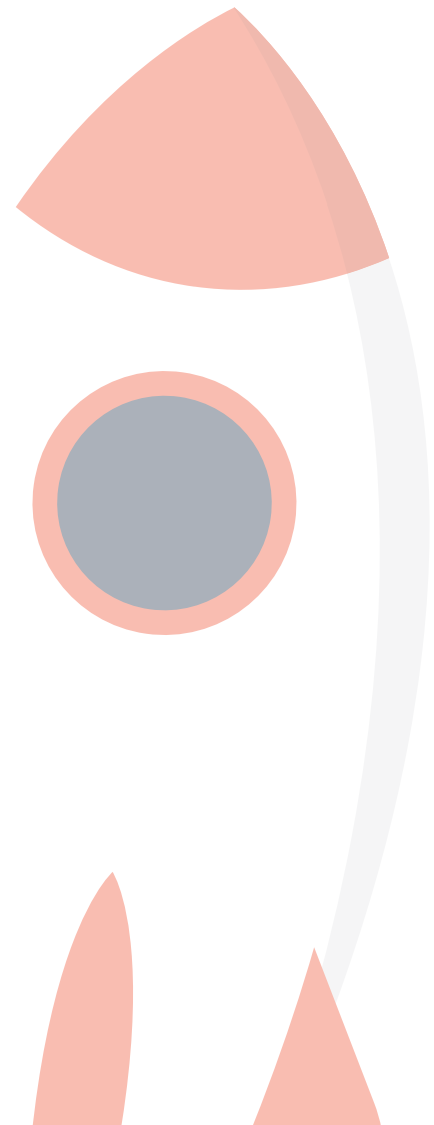


Experiences of Urban Aboriginal Families as They Ready Their Children For, and During, Kindergarten

~ Dr. Janice Huber, University of Alberta

Background:

These questions of the experiences of Aboriginal families as they ready their children for entry into, and success in, kindergarten grow out of an earlier study into early school leaving. Results indicated that some Indigenous youth began to leave or disengage from school during their early years of schooling. Influences of early schooling experiences in the lives of Aboriginal children and youth, and their families, are concerning given the rapid growth of the Canadian Aboriginal population. Although there is research on the experiences of teachers who are struggling with ways an increased focus on academic achievement is reshaping kindergarten classrooms, little is known about the experiences of urban Aboriginal families as they interact with school readiness policies and practices. Attending to the experiences of urban Aboriginal families will improve educational policies and practices for Aboriginal children.





The participation of Indigenous populations in Health Services planning and development

~ Dr. Wilfreda Thurston & Dr. Stephanie Montesanti,
University of Calgary

Background:

This seed grant is supporting work to ensure effective community participation strategies with First Nations and other Aboriginal peoples in the planning of and decision-making about health services and programs to both urban and rural Aboriginal people in Alberta. Investigators are developing a research program that involves a series of case studies that examine effective participation strategies with First Nation's and other Aboriginal populations in health planning and decision making. This project is examining how to involve First Nations in the planning of and decision-making about policy solutions to address the social and health impacts from the recent flood disasters to First Nation populations in Treaty 7 communities in Alberta (Stoney Nakoda, Siksika and Tsuu T'ina Nations, upstream, downstream, and adjacent from Calgary, respectively), as well as solutions for future flood prevention. The objective of the forthcoming program would be to continue this case study and to add case studies and new investigators. Future cases will include:

1. The participation of Aboriginal people in decision-making about oil sand operations in northern communities in Alberta; and
2. The participation of Aboriginal populations in the planning and delivery of primary and community care services in both rural and urban Aboriginal communities within Treaty 7 territory.

Results to date:

No interim results available.





Wildfire Evacuation Experiences of Residents in an Aboriginal Community in Alberta

~ Dr. Tara McGee, University of Alberta & Dr. Amy Christianson, Natural Resources Canada

Background:

This research piloted study for the planned multi-year research by the Aboriginal Wildfire Evacuation partnership. The aim of this research was to examine how Aboriginal residents in Driftpile Cree Nation in Alberta were affected by wildfire evacuations in 2011. The objectives of this proposed research were to:

1. Document how Aboriginal residents were affected by the 2011 wildfire evacuation.
2. Identify characteristics of the wildfire evacuation that influenced how residents were positively and negatively affected by the evacuation.
3. Identify characteristics of individuals, their social context, and the Aboriginal community affected how residents were positively and negatively affected by the wildfire evacuation.
4. Identify ways to reduce the negative impacts of wildfire evacuations on Aboriginal people.

Results:

Data collection was completed this summer/fall, with the main periods of fieldwork taking place in July and September 2014. The team completed 30 interviews with residents, with assistance from two community research assistants. The interviews have been transcribed (except for two transcripts, which are currently being transcribed) and data analysis is currently underway. The team plans to return to the First Nations community with which they are working to seek their input as part of the data analysis process.

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
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CHILD HEALTH





Caring for late pre-term infants: public health nurses' and parents' experiences

~ Dr. Shahirose Premji, University of Calgary

Background:

Between 2009 and 2010, late preterm infants (LPIs)—those born between 34 and nearly 36 weeks' gestation—made up 10.7% of all live births in Calgary. Aware of the challenges associated with the biological and developmental immaturity of LPIs, a team of public health nurses from Alberta Health Services and researchers from the University of Calgary partnered to improve the quality of care for LPI families. The team began by studying the specific needs of these families and the challenges faced by public health nurses in delivering care.

Results:

Public health nurses:

1. Believe parents would have fewer challenges if they understood the biological and developmental needs of their LPIs; note that LPI families with limited social support face more problems;
2. Would prefer if families better understood the benefits of nursing care and more willingly accepted nursing support; and,
3. Lament the delays faced by families that required the assistance of a lactation consultant.

Parents of LPIs:

1. Indicate little understanding about the biological and developmental needs of their LPIs; when they do not know what is normal or expected, some parents become hyper-vigilant, and others overly causal about the challenges of caring for LPIs;
2. Report that they feel privileged in comparison to the families of severely challenged infants in the neonatal intensive care unit; and,
3. Want public health nurses to give the same or more emphasis to meeting the families' psychosocial needs as their infants' biological needs.



Evaluating the effectiveness of neuromuscular training in decreasing the risk of sport and recreational injuries and improving healthy outcomes in junior high school students

~ Dr. Carolyn Emery & Dr. Brent Hagel, University of Calgary

Background:

Participation in sport and recreational activities is extremely important to maintain a healthy lifestyle. However, sport and recreational activities are also the leading cause of injury in youth, accounting for two out of every three injuries sustained in this population. Neuromuscular training (NMT) programs implemented in the youth population are designed to reduce injury risk, improve cardiovascular fitness, and improve measures of adiposity. This randomized controlled trial evaluated a NMT program implemented as a warm-up in junior high school physical education (PE) classes. The warm-up was delivered by the PE teachers. Injury information was collected over the course of the program, and changes in healthy outcomes were evaluated. In the first year (2014-2015 school year), the study was conducted in four schools. The second year (2015- 2016 school year) saw another four schools being recruited. Analyses assessed the effectiveness of the program in reducing injury risk and in improving healthy outcomes compared to a control warm-up program, while evaluating changes in the sport and recreational injury knowledge and beliefs in both students and teachers over the course of the study.

Results:

As this is an ongoing study, results are preliminary. From 2008 to 2010, a pilot study was conducted in two junior high schools that used the neuromuscular training program. They had a reduction in injury risk and improved physical fitness and healthy outcomes. Investigators are also looking at what students and teachers already know about injury prevention, and they want to see if they learn more over the course of the program.

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
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CHILDREN IN CARE





Child welfare process and outcomes for children of parents with cognitive impairment [II]

~ Dr. David McConnell, University of Alberta

Background:

The number of children referred for protective services who have a parent with cognitive impairment (CI) is increasing. There is however scant data on the child maltreatment investigation process and outcomes for children of parents with CI in Canada. In the only Canadian study to date, McConnell, Feldman and Aunos analyzed data from the 2003 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003) and found that 10.1% of child maltreatment investigations featured parents with confirmed or suspected CI. Further, the analysis found that cases featuring parents with CI are more likely to result in:

- A. substantiation;
- B. the case remaining open for ongoing protective services;
- C. the out-of-home placement of the child; and,
- D. child welfare court action.

More than one in four investigations resulting in court action involved children of parents with CI. Further research is needed to identify predictors of different investigation outcomes for children of parents with CI.

Utilizing the 2008 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, the proposed study is replicating and extending McConnell et alii analysis of the CIS-2003. There are two parts to the study. The first part involves the statistical modeling of child maltreatment investigation outcomes. One hypothesis is that the odds of out-of-home placement and court action are greater in cases featuring parents with CI than in all other cases, due in part to the conglomeration of psychosocial risk factors.

The second part of this study involves the statistical modeling of maltreatment type and child functioning issues. One hypothesis is that parental CI is associated with a heightened risk of child functioning issues. A second hypothesis is that the association between parental CI and child functioning issues is partially explained by parental mental health issues, socioeconomic hardship, and low levels of social support.

Results:

No results to date.



Aging out of care: Rural youth in transition

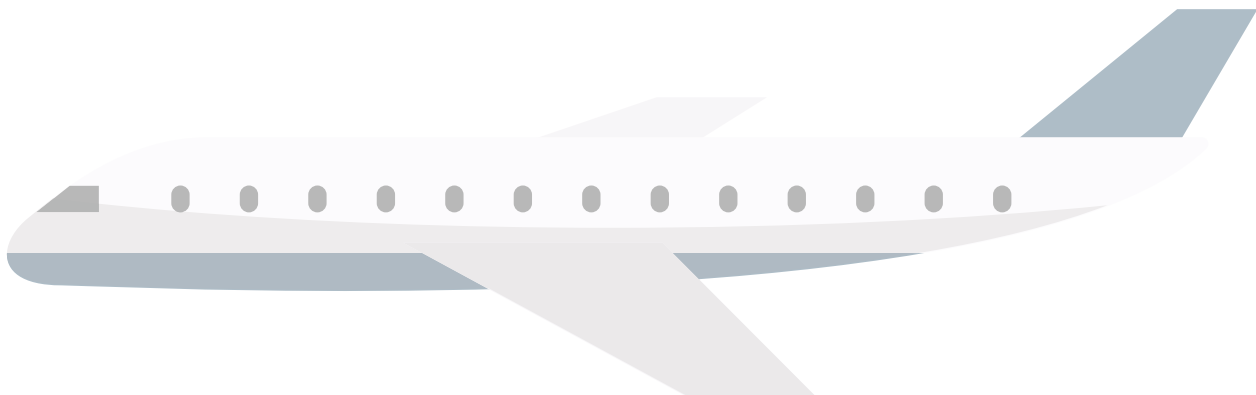
~ Dr. Anne-Marie McLaughlin, University of Calgary

Background:

This study endeavors to understand the processes of transition for rural youth leaving care in order to build knowledge regarding how communities and service providers can better support these youth and improve long-term outcomes. The investigators are examining the experiences and perspectives about aging out of care from those most closely connected to the issue: the youth and those who care for them.

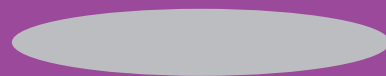
Results to date:

The team has completed many interviews with social workers from across the north part of the province including Slave Lake, Athabasca, Whitecourt, Bonnyville and Cold Lake. Interviews have also been completed with caregivers and youth who have aged out or are in the transitioning phase of aging out of care. Data analysis has begun. An additional number of youth have been recruited and are in the process of being interviewed. Preliminary findings have been presented at a number of conferences.



GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
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EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT, LEARNING AND CARE



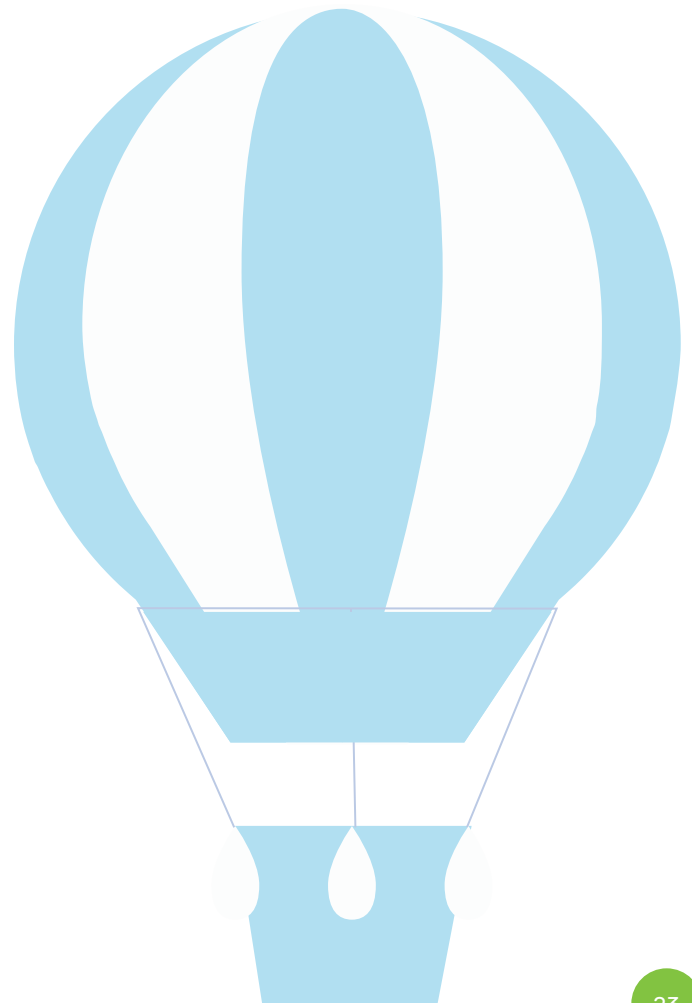


Can the Associative Learning Abilities of Late Talking Toddlers Predict a Persistent Language Impairment?

~ Dr. Beverly Collisson & Dr. James Magnuson,
University of Calgary

Background:

Two-year olds who are behind schedule to begin talking (late talkers) are at high risk for a diagnosis of Specific Language Impairment (SLI), one of the most common neurodevelopmental disorders. Little is known about late talkers' abilities in domains outside of language because clinical tests that categorize late talkers center on measuring their vocabulary abilities. This study focuses on measuring late talkers' associative learning abilities. It builds on our own line of research demonstrating that three and four year-old children with SLI are impaired in simple visual associative learning and ability critical to linking language to physical objects. In this pilot, investigators will test whether visual associative learning ability at ages two and two and a half predicts which late talkers will progress to diagnoses of SLI. If so, paired visual associative learning could provide an easily measurable, early biomarker of SLI, helping to identify children most in need of early intervention.





Coaching Early Educators to Invest in Children's School Readiness

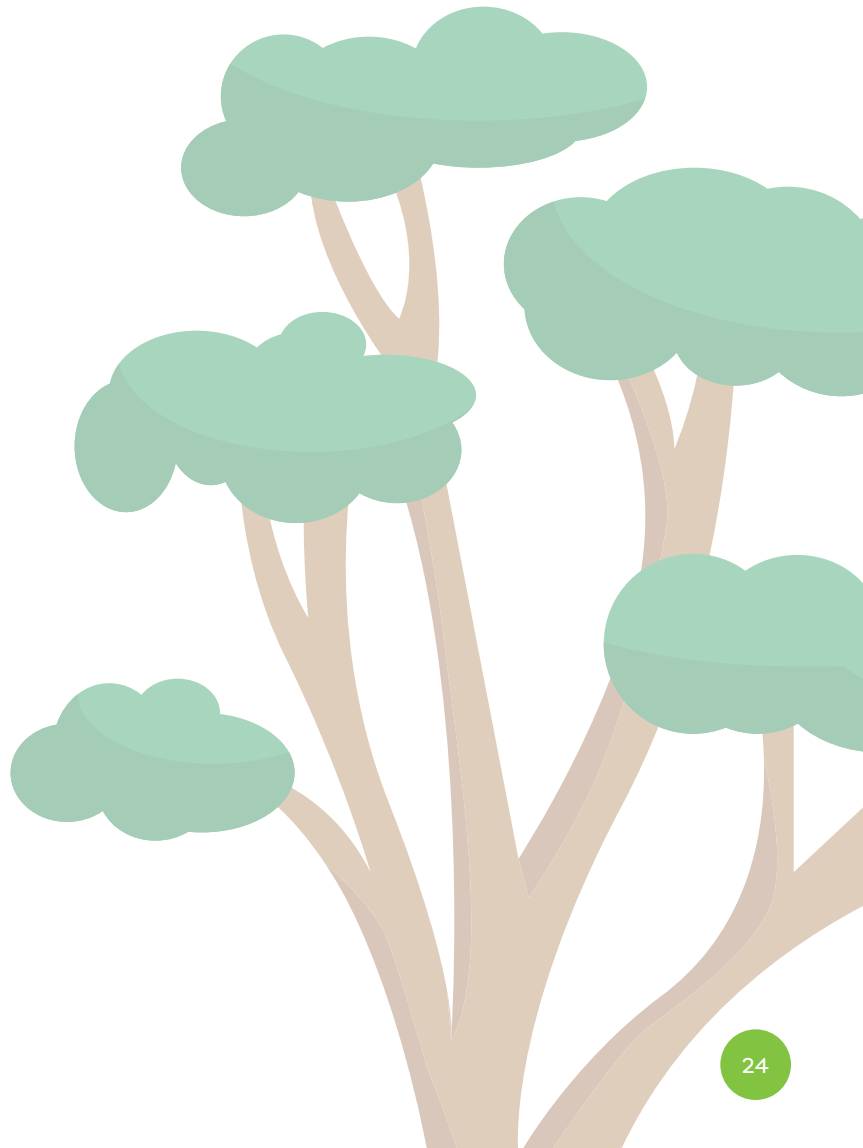
~ Dr. Wendy Hoglund, University of Alberta

Background:

One-third of Alberta children demonstrate significant delays in their readiness for school, higher than the Canadian norm of one quarter of children. Rigorous research indicates that early educators' instructional quality and interactions with children are the mechanisms through which the value of attending early education programs transmits to children and enhances their school readiness and self-regulation skills. This project addresses the need for comprehensive approaches to strengthen the workforce of early childhood educators and to support early childhood development. This small grant specifically proposes to:

1. Develop a research partnership; and,
2. Develop an external funding proposal.

The overall objective of the external funding application will be to conduct a randomized-control evaluation of whether and how systematic efforts to provide ongoing coaching with early childhood educators can improve instructional quality in early childhood educational settings and, in turn, improve young children's school readiness and self-regulation skills in early childhood, particularly for young vulnerable children.





Examining the Impact of Music Education and Afterschool Programming for Underserved Students: Piloting Tools, Measures, and Processes

~ Dr. Laurie Schnirer, Dr. Holly Stack-Cutler & Ms. Alyssa Paterson

Background:

Although many studies have examined the cognitive impacts of music learning, there is a paucity of research on understanding the impact of music instruction on social and emotional skills for children in general, and for underserved students, their families and community, in particular. As a preliminary step in developing a program of research on tracking the long-term outcomes of engagement in an intensive socially-focused music education program for underserved students, their families and community, this pilot study will:

- A. Pilot tools, measures, and processes suitable for longitudinal tracking of student, family, and community outcomes;
- B. Build collaborative, multidisciplinary partnerships with community and university partners, funders, and policy- and decision-makers; and,
- C. Prepare a high-quality proposal, informed from this pilot's findings, to secure external grant funding in order to initiate a study to track long-term outcomes of underserved students, their families and community.

The outcome of this pilot will be to submit a high-quality grant proposal to secure funding to conduct a cohort longitudinal research study.

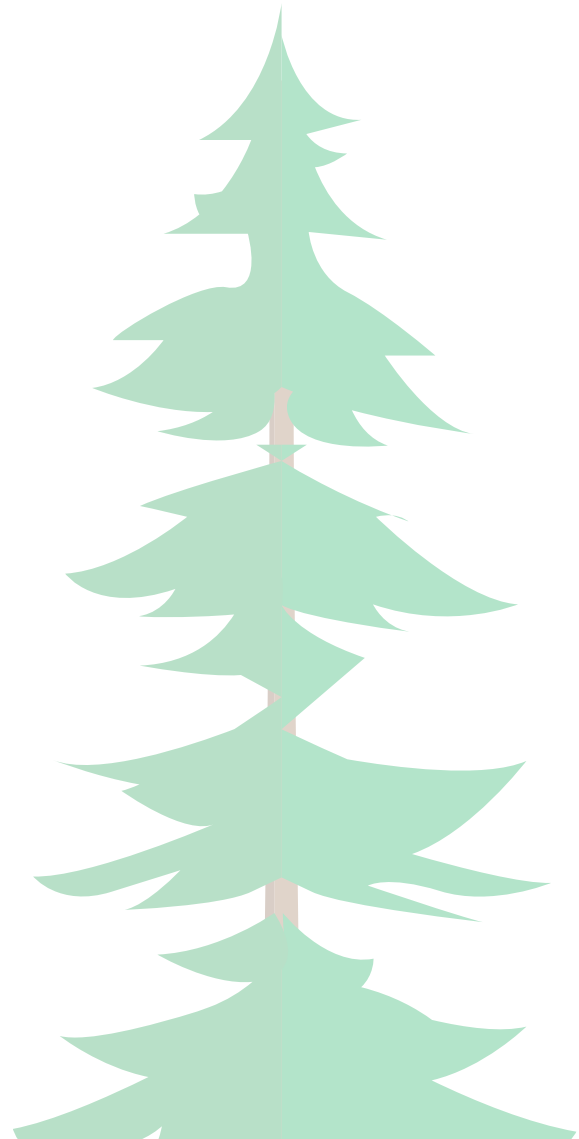


Increasing school capacity to provide evidence-based support for young children with behavioural struggles

~ Dr. John McLennan & Dr. Julie Owens, University of Calgary

Background:

Many young children starting school have serious gaps in their ability to successfully navigate this new social environment. Behavioural difficulties are among the most common challenges contributing to this gap. Intervening with such students early in their schooling experience may help reduce subsequent challenges and improve the likelihood of healthier trajectories, whereas failure to effectively address early concerns may lead to difficulties worsening over time with negative impacts on social and academic success. While effective approaches for supporting such students exist, some of the most evidence-based supports are not used or are not effectively implemented. A main contributing factor to this research-practice gap is the limited access teachers have to support in implementing evidence-based strategies. Online tools that reduce barriers to access and facilitate teachers' use of evidence-based strategies hold important promise for addressing some of the support gaps. However, it is critical to evaluate such tools and not assume they will be beneficial even though they may be underpinned by strong theory and evidence. The implementation of the Daily Report Card (DRC), a structured approach to delivering positive behavioural support to students in the classroom, has extensive evidence for helping behaviourally struggling students when paired with direct consultation to the teacher. Unknown, however, is to what extent full reliance on online DRC tools would be effective. The aim of this project is to pull together a research team, with community partners, to develop a proposal to obtain funding to conduct a rigorous study of the uptake, implementation, and impact of an online DRC intervention that is compatible with existing structures and resources in Alberta schools. Such an initiative could contribute to important capacity building and raise the bar on quality services for young children struggling at school.





School Integration Among Newcomer Youth: A Community Perspective

~ Dr. Anusha Kassin, University of Calgary

Background:

Migration is steadily increasing within the province of Alberta and Canada as a whole. In 2012, 90% of the individuals given permanent residency status in Alberta were between the ages of 15 to 24 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2012). Beginning school in Canada often represents the first point of contact for these newcomer immigrants and refugees. The long-term contributions that they will make to the Albertan and larger Canadian community are dependent on their experiences as they start high school. However, research shows that migration and its accompanied academic adjustments are particularly complex and challenging during adolescence. As such, the aim of this study is to develop an in-depth, multi-layered, contextual understanding of adolescent newcomers' experiences of 'school integration' which is defined broadly to include all aspects of students' lives that impact their school adjustment (e.g., academic performance, occupational transition, peer relationships, home life, emotional well-being, etc.).





The Elephant in the Room: Talking to Children with ASD about their Diagnosis

~ Dr. Adam McCrimmon & Dr. David Nicholas,
University of Calgary

Background:

This project is addressing a pervasive issue within the ASD community: parental disclosure of the diagnosis to their child. To date, the majority of clinical and research efforts have focused on assessment of ASD and disclosure of results to parents. However, the important topic of diagnostic disclosure to individuals with ASD has been relatively ignored. As research has indicated that parents are primarily responsible for disclosing clinical conditions to their children and that self-awareness of a diagnosis has an important impact on an individual's self-esteem and personality, the oversight of this topic is surprising. To address this issue, this project is an Alberta-based exploration of the lived experience of parents of an individual with ASD with a focus on parental decision-making regarding diagnostic disclosure to their child. A strong investigative team consisting of researchers, trainees, and prominent community partners will facilitate the project and effective dissemination of new knowledge arising from it. A robust qualitative research approach is being utilized with a two-stage data collection procedure to effectively gather and analyze information on parental experiences and perceptions of this important topic. This research will benefit the ASD community through improved understanding of parental decision-making and experience with diagnostic disclosure to their child. The results of this project will form the basis of the creation of a free and publicly available experience-based manual and will inform practical community-based guidelines to support families regarding how to navigate issues of diagnostic disclosure. Accordingly, the study offers tangible benefits (i.e., enhancement of self-esteem and self-awareness) that will serve to enhance the support and services provided to the ASD community, augment parental strategies and skills, and inform policy and practice in the aim of better serving individuals with ASD and their families.

Results to date:

No results to date.





Improving Social Participation for Children with ASD in Elementary School: Proposal Development

~ Dr. Sandra Hodgetts & Dr. Sharon Phelan, University of Alberta

Background:

This seed grant will fund proposal development for peer-reviewed funding to evaluate child-specific versus general indirect interventions aimed at improving social participation of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in elementary school settings.

Specifically, this request is to fund three activities:

1. Developing a research team;
2. Building community partnerships; and,
3. Preparing a comprehensive research proposal (including a publishable scoping review).

Specific outcomes expected from these activities include the development of a comprehensive research team, including researchers, relevant policy/decision makers, service providers, and community-partners, well positioned to carry-out and obtain tri-council funding for the proposed study; completed scoping review of evidence related to child-specific and general interventions aimed at improving social participation for children with ASD in classroom settings, which will be submitted for publication; and additional funding will be sought for pilot work (if necessary), and/or other relevant operating grants.

Results:

The team has successfully completed all phases of the project. Early on in the process, investigators developed a nationally-representative, interdisciplinary team of researchers, many of whom have not been collaborators on multiple projects. They also built relationships with a variety of community-partners, including people from home and community-based service providers for children and youth diagnosed with ASD, Edmonton Public Schools and Inclusive Learning, and Alberta Education. The team formulated with assistance from this seed grant submitted a knowledge synthesis grant to CIHR. If the CIHR application is not successful, the team will continue to seek funding opportunities for knowledge syntheses in their path to conducting an intervention study targeting social participation for children with ASD. Like many scoping reviews, the scope and questions morphed as the team delved into the literature. The purpose changed from a focus on comparing outcomes based on diagnostic disclosure, to understanding broader perspectives and outcomes of disclosure or non-disclosure. The team presented these findings at the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists National conference in April, 2016 and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Convention in Victoria in June, 2016. This review is currently in preparation to submit to a peer-reviewed journal for publication. They also received an additional peer-reviewed grant, through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute, with funds from the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, for a qualitative study exploring processes related to diagnostic disclosure.

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

A decorative graphic featuring three kites: a purple one at the top left, a dark blue one at the top right, and a green one at the bottom left. Lines connect the kites, with some lines looping and crossing. A light blue stylized graphic of a hand or a building is at the bottom right.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING



Understanding Inter-generational Dependency: Examining the Intersecting Issues of Homeless Families with Complex Need

~ Dr. Katrina Milaney, University of Calgary

Background:

How do women understand the complexities related to their experiences of family homelessness and violence and the influence of services and policy on their life trajectories? This study will take up multiple methods in order to examine the incidence and prevalence of intergenerational issues and systems use but also, to identify changes to service delivery and public policy to propose an effective approach. The findings will provide enough information to propose a gender appropriate model of integrated service delivery and policy alternatives to support mothers and children who are homeless in order to break long-term or repeated cycles of dependence and vulnerability.





“Who are the Homeless in Slave Lake?”

~ Dr. Anne Marie McLaughlin, University of Calgary

Background:

In partnership with the Slave Lake Friendship Centre, this research attempts to explore the question of “who are the homeless in Slave Lake?” Homelessness in Slave Lake over the last few years has taken on a very high profile for most members of the community, in part due to the recent wildfire that caused many to be homeless (though temporarily). Beyond the fire and the rebuilding, a persistent number of individuals appear to be chronically homeless, while others appear to be episodically homeless. The ultimate purpose of this research is to explore exactly who is homeless in slave Lake, who is at risk of homeless and what supports are necessary to prevent and to ameliorate the issue.





Mobilizing community resources for literacy development: new pedagogies for new times

~ Dr. Rahat Naqvi, University of Calgary

Background:

How can middle school students (with a high percentage of English language learners) potentially thrive in an environment where there is affirmative action being taken to validate their home languages and affirm their identities, specifically through the use of dual language books (DLB texts are written in two different languages contained within the same book)? In partnership with the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) and with particular interest in the transition to junior high structures and expectations (Chall, J.S., 1996) and the objectives of the Standards of Practice for English Language Learners document, this qualitative 10-week study involved three weekly readings of DLBs in four grade 5 and 7 classrooms in one school. Readings were carried out in English and, Spanish, Tagalog and Urdu. The two classroom teachers read the English and the guest community readers read the other language.

Results:

Data collection included:

- A. Video recordings of all reading and discussion sessions;
- B. Teacher, system specialist and researcher planning and debrief sessions;
- C. Scanned versions of student artifacts, including student language portfolios and student written DLBs; and,
- D. Student, guest reader, and teacher questionnaires.

A school celebration including community members and student sharing of their own DLB stories is forthcoming and may provide more data. Results to date confirm English language learners and monolingual (English) learners benefit from culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogical practices (Naqvi et al., 2012; Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Most significant achievements include:

1. The development of a guide to use DLBs in grade 5 and 7 with students in mainstream schools;
2. Identification of appropriate book titles for the students;
3. Development of a language portfolio for grade 5 students; and,
4. Strong partnerships with our community stakeholders.

The development piece is ongoing and an official document collaboratively designed to assist with program implementation will be provided towards the end of the project.



The Health and Well-Being of Children and Families of Temporary Foreign Workers: A Pilot Stakeholder Consultation

~ Dr. Bukola Salami, University of Alberta

Background:

Approximately 66,000 temporary foreign workers are present in Alberta and some transition to permanent resident status with their family, yet there is little research on the health or well-being of their children and families. As a first step in developing a program of research on the health of children and families of temporary foreign workers in Canada, this pilot study was a stakeholder consultation on the health and well-being of this population. The research team interviewed 10 to 20 representatives of social, immigrant, and health service organizations in Alberta as well as policy makers to shed light on the health and well-being of these children and families, the barriers in accessing programs and services, and how future research can best inform policies and programs on the needs of this population. The future outcome of this study is to collect preliminary data that will be useful in applying for a CIHR operating grant on the health of children of temporary foreign workers in Canada.

Results:

The results of the study indicated that temporary foreign workers experience barriers in accessing health service, occupational health challenges, mental health challenges, and family health challenges. Final reports were provided to participants, temporary foreign worker policy makers in Alberta, all government-funded organizations that provide services to temporary foreign workers in the province of Alberta and other vital stakeholders. The team submitted two publications based on the findings to peer reviewed journals. The team applied for a CIHR Project Scheme Grant to conduct multiple case studies on the health of temporary foreign workers and their families in the province of Alberta.



Community Capacity Building for Sexual Violence Prevention

~ Dr. Florence Glanfield, University of Alberta & Dr. Christine Mhina, University of Alberta

Background:

This pilot study applied a community development approach to engage community members in the initiation of processes to reduce sexual and intergenerational violence. The project, based in a rural Alberta Métis community, will enhance local family well-being and build community capacity to address these issues. The pilot study will:

1. Assist community members to become local change agents by facilitating the development of a critical understanding of structural factors contributing to the perpetuation of sexual violence;
2. Develop an action plan of what should be done to begin the work of changing the attitudes of local people towards sexual violence; identification and implementation initial steps to be undertaken; and,
3. Identify allies and community leaders with whom they can work with to implement a long-term community plan to prevent sexual violence in their community

Results to date:

Over the past year the research team has completed a literature review and has been negotiating working with a new community; discussions with four First Nations communities in the Edmonton area have begun.





Exploring birth choices in cultural context - A case study of Red Deer, Alberta

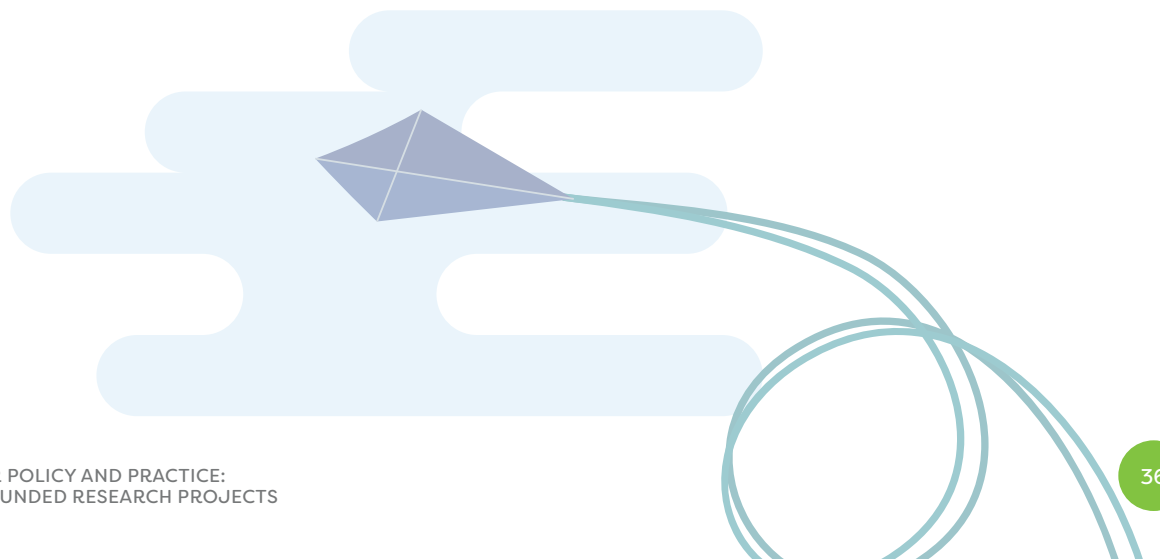
~ Dr. Claudia Malacrida, University of Lethbridge

Background:

This project examined the culture of birthing in Red Deer, Alberta, as a way of understanding the effects of medicalization on childbirth. Following a pilot project in Lethbridge, Alberta that examined how key stakeholders understand and make decisions about birth, investigators conducted in-depth interviews with 22 mothers, two obstetricians, four midwives, six doulas, and three birth professionals in Red Deer, Alberta. They collected and analyzed childbirth education materials, and policy and practice guidelines related to childbirth in the community of Red Deer and immediate surrounding area. The team explored how relevant stakeholders learn about birthing options, and how this influenced their choices and actions prior to and during women's actual deliveries. They examined what resources were available to women and how those resources affected professional and maternal practices. In turn, the implications of those decisions for childbirth outcomes and maternal satisfaction were explored.

Results:

The data collected and analyzed in this portion of the larger project has, to date, produced one journal article, and is being disseminated across a website, www.childbirthandchoice.com, designed to contextualize the culture of birth and birthing choices for mothers and lay people. Along with data collected during the initial pilot portion of this project in Lethbridge, the research illuminates the factors influencing birth decisions, complicating the notion of informed choice and highlighting a need for practitioners to provide women with more than just medical information about childbirth choices.





A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Young Women with Learning Difficulties involved in the Canadian Criminal Justice System

~ Dr. Elly Park, University of Alberta

Background:

Young women with learning difficulties are over-represented in the criminal justice system. They are more likely to be arrested, charged, sentenced, incarcerated and re-incarcerated. This project generated insight into the lives of young women with learning difficulties, and their experiences 'inside' the criminal justice system (CJS). One primary aim was to advance understanding of the 'pathways' - stories connecting the past to the present and into the future - that have led these vulnerable women to a troubled place in their lives. The significant impact on family and community well-being was further explored as the layers of addictions and mental health issues, abuse and violence, and culture intersect with involvement in the CJS. This understanding is needed to collaboratively develop appropriate policy and prevention strategies, and in turn, build on the capacity of the young women in challenging circumstances to support themselves and their families as well as receive support from government and community.

Results:

The results of this project include the narrative threads that resonated across the participants' narrative accounts, an awareness of stories as counter-stories that are situated in broad social, institutional and political landscapes, and insight into ethical tensions that formed during the research process. A need for relationships and prolonged interactions was recognized as a critical part of sharing stories as well as understanding the women's experiences. Ethical implications include the responsibility to participants as co-researchers and as part of relationships.



Conducting Community-Based Research (CBR) with Vulnerable Populations: An examination of considerations, challenges and best practices

~ Dr. Holly Stack-Cutler, University of Alberta

Background:

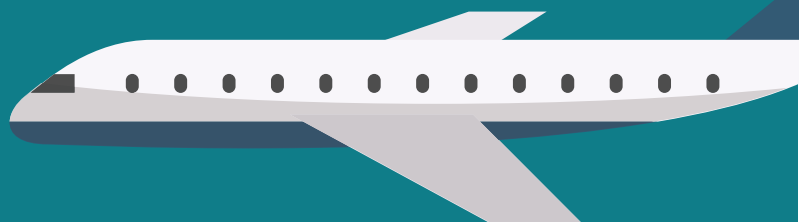
The purpose of this research was to develop a project that documented the “how” of the entire Community-Based Research (CBR) process when working with vulnerable families from the perspective of multiple stakeholders— key informants (decision-makers, community partners, service providers, funders), vulnerable families, and CBR researchers and community partners. This innovative project focused on the needs of vulnerable families and individuals and the considerations and best practices that should be undertaken to create collaborative, respectful, and positive environments in which to conduct research. Considerations across all stages of the research process were examined:

- A. Project planning;
- B. Participant recruitment;
- C. Data collection;
- D. Data analysis;
- E. Results;
- F. Knowledge mobilization; and,
- G. After care (e.g., debriefing, researcher self-care, change sustainability).

Results:

In all three studies, participants emphasized the importance for researchers to build trusting, respectful relationships with their participants; understand and accommodate participants’ needs (e.g., culture, language, literacy level); and ensure participants benefit from taking part in research (e.g., honorariums, new knowledge). Results and learnings from this project are being mobilized through several outlets including local, national, and international community-university conference presentations; articles in academic journals and association and agency magazines; community websites and listservs; workshops; and are currently being used to inform practices for upcoming CBR projects and curricula for the University of Alberta’s Master’s of Arts in Community Engagement.

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS



FAMILY SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



SKIP Program: Supporting Kids Inclusion and Participation (Autism Focus)


~ Dr. Sandra Hodgetts, University of Alberta

Background:

This program of research relates to multi-dimensional, interdisciplinary treatment approaches to improve participation, inclusion and well-being for people diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families. This research is focused on interventions and treatment approaches embedded within the context of daily life (home, school and community environments), based on philosophies of family-centered care and inclusion. This program of research will be aimed at building capacity of various stakeholders, across home, school and community settings, to facilitate understanding and inclusion of children with ASD. It may also build parent capacity to identify when/if their children with ASD are being isolated or victimized, facilitate understanding and inclusion with peers/friends in organized or informal community activities, and increase understanding of cultural nuances related to disclosing and explaining ASD.



GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS



FAMILY VIOLENCE, BULLYING AND TRAUMA

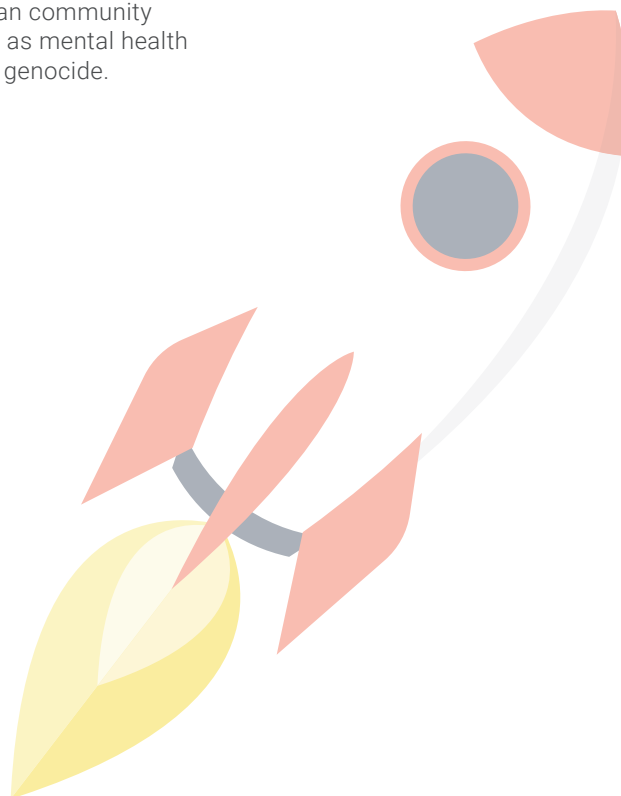


Post 1994 Genocide Survivors in Edmonton: Rwanda Community-Based Research Project Exploring Mental Health Challenges, Strengths and Pathways to Healing

~ Dr. Linda Kreitzer & Dr. Sophie Yohani, University of Calgary

Background:

The purpose of the research is to identify mental health issues that are experienced by survivors of the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi of Rwanda and their children. The objective is to ultimately identify a community-driven mental health intervention that is culturally appropriate and community specific that will address these mental health issues experience by children and their families. The impact of this research will be transformative to the Edmonton Rwandan community who are concerned about what they see as mental health issues in their community related to the genocide.





Improving services to mothers and vulnerable children affected by domestic violence: Building an evidence base to guide policy and programs

~ Dr. Michael Rothery, University of Calgary

Background:

Among scholars and professionals whose focus is Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) there is a consensus that female victims of spousal violence often do not avail themselves of services from which they could benefit. For several years, help-seeking by such women has therefore been a topic of interest to researchers who acknowledge that the field suffers from a lack of practical theory within which questions and findings can be framed. This study had two focuses, one being a preliminary quantitative look at stages of change; the second, a more ambitious qualitative aspect was an analysis of transcripts of focus groups with women receiving services and front-line service providers.

Results:

The quantitative focus comprised generating and administering potential items for measuring stages of change. The qualitative focus involved an in-depth thematic analysis, assessing its fit with critical ecosystems theory (ecological theory being identified by scholars as a potentially useful perspective within which investigators can fruitfully study women's experiences of coming to terms with abusive relationship histories and seeking to find a safer life for themselves and their children). The quantitative work resulted in development and preliminary testing of a large set of draft items measuring stages of change. This could be of value for future research intended to generate psychometrically valid scales for assessing such stages. The qualitative work resulted in a convincing exploration of women's experiences and service needs; there are multiple practically and theoretically useful findings reported and an endorsement of critical ecosystems theory as a valuable tool for future research and professional best practices.

● **Transition from pediatric to adult care services: the experiences of family caregivers of young adult survivors of traumatic brain injury (TBI)**

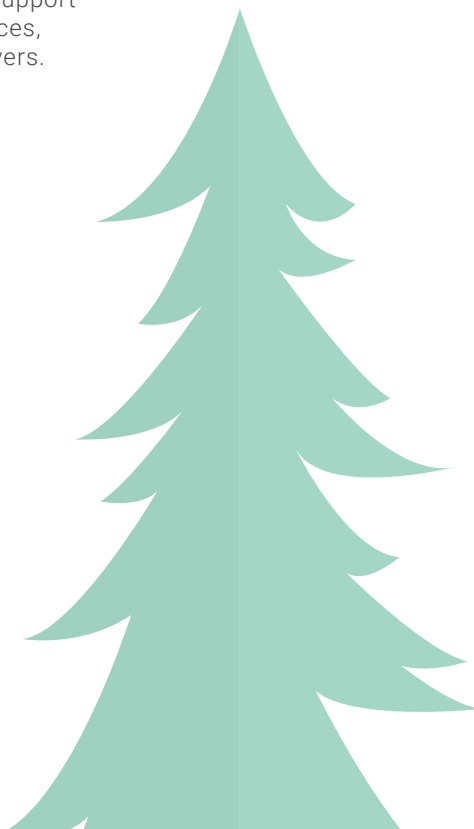
~ Dr. Janki Shankar & Dr. Sharon Warren, University of Calgary

Background:

This study is examining the experiences and support needs of family caregivers of young adults with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) who transitioned from services for children and adolescents to adult supports and services. Conditions such as TBI are complex, and many young survivors require various kinds of ongoing support due to the often long-term and multifaceted nature of TBI related deficits. Family caregivers are often the main source of support for these individuals during the transition phase and can play a key role in ensuring several successful outcomes. However, care-giving is stressful as caregivers must navigate through several sectors such as health, vocational, educational, and income support services. This study is focusing on the experiences, challenges, and support needs of parent caregivers.

Results to date:

Data collection and analysis is complete, and the research team is recruiting clinicians, families, policymakers, and service providers to participate in two Delphi forums.



GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDER





Mathematics Intervention for Children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders

~ Dr. Carmen Rasmussen, University of Alberta

Background:

Children with Prenatal Alcohol Exposure (PAE) and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) display behavioural, physical, and mental deficits, which can lead to adverse outcomes. One prominent area of deficit for individuals with FASD/PAE is mathematics. Previous research has demonstrated improvement in mathematics with this population with a targeted intervention. In this study, investigators aimed to examine whether children with FASD/PAE could benefit from a one-on-one, individualized math intervention program, with a focus on cognitive abilities underlying math achievement. Participants included 28 children, age 4-10 with PAE or FASD, who participated in either a math (15 children) or social skills (13 children) intervention. In each intervention children worked one-on-one with a tutor for ~10 half-hour sessions, conducted over 5-8 weeks. Children completed a variety of tests measuring mathematics, visual-spatial abilities, executive functioning, and working memory, and caregivers provided ratings of social skills and behaviour. Measures were completed before and after the intervention and again at 6-months follow up.

Results:

Children in the math intervention group showed significantly more improvement in overall math scores, as well as basic math concepts, measurement, and numeration (subcategories of math functioning), than children who received the social skills intervention. The significant difference in improvement in overall math scores between groups was maintained six months following the intervention. This team received an additional grant from the Canada FASD Research Network to continue their work.



Promising Practices in Delivering Housing and Support Interventions to Chronically and Episodically Homeless with FASD

~ Dr. Dorothy Badry, Dr. Christine Walsh, University of Calgary & Ms. Meaghan Bell, Calgary Homeless Foundation

Background:

This project explored the support needs of adults with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) within the episodically and chronically homeless population and the impact of FASD on service utilization, program compliance, and housing outcomes within the Calgary System of Care. FASD is a disability caused by prenatal alcohol exposure and can impact a person's functional ability with regards to memory, planning, and understanding cause and effect. Individuals with FASD may be seen as non-compliant in housing programs and thus end up cycling through homeless shelters, housing programs, and other systems.

Results:

The key recommendations focus on:

1. Increased awareness of FASD;
2. The need for training and education on FASD;
3. Effective screening for FASD;
4. Mentorship to support prevention;
5. FASD specific housing supports;
6. A complex case management approach including assertive outreach strategies to promote housing stability;
7. Increased cultural connections; and,
8. Gender-based supports for maternal health, sexual health, advocacy work and systems navigation supports.



A pilot project on the impact of pre and postnatal risk factors on secondary diagnoses in Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD)

~ Dr. Carmen Rasmussen & Dr. Jacqueline Pei,
University of Alberta

Background:

The goal of this pilot project was to examine risk factors associated with secondary diagnoses in children with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). Children with FASD have elevated rates of some secondary diagnoses (e.g., mental health diagnoses, sleep problems, seizures), but the factors that contribute to these diagnoses are poorly understood. This project was a retrospective study with clinic data (in partnership with Dr. Gail Andrew, Director of the Glenrose Hospital FASD clinic) looking at specific prenatal, e.g., pregnancy complications, exposure to other substances, and postnatal, e.g., early life adversity, risk factors associated with secondary diagnoses.

Results:

A large proportion of the data from this project was used for a graduate student doctoral thesis which was focused on understanding pre and postnatal risk factors associated with various types of mental health diagnosis. Some very novel findings emerged from this thesis as risk factors for internal and external mental health issues were different. Specifically, investigators found that having an internalizing mental health co-morbidity was associated with a number of risk factors including more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), exposure to abuse or violence, and an older age of assessment. Risk factors for an externalizing disorder included sleep issues and some pregnancy-related variables. This data is currently being prepared for publication and has been presented at conferences.

Additionally, an honors Psychology student is examining some of the data on the impact of ACEs on executive functioning impairments in children with FASD for thesis research. This data analysis is underway.

MENTAL HEALTH (INCLUDING MATERNAL) AND ADDICTIONS





Acute Physical Injury and Subsequent Stress Symptoms

~ Dr. Sarah Curtis & Dr. Amanda Newton, University of Alberta

Background:

Physical injury commonly impacts children and families greatly and causes stress. This stress can have devastating long-term effects. The occurrence of unhealthy stress after injury may be higher than originally thought. Stress can be severe, even after a mild injury, and untreated, unhealthy stress in childhood may increase rates of mental and physical illness in child and adult life. Currently, it is not known how often children and families are affected by unhealthy stress after injury and so hospitals do not know how to best meet the needs of children and families in this regard. Currently, after treatment in a hospital emergency department (ED) for physical injuries, families go home without being prepared for the possibility of stress symptom development in the injured child and parent, and without knowledge of what to do if this should happen. This project will include all recently injured children (and parents) seeking care in the Stollery Children's ED over a six-month period. In addition to routine care for physical injuries in the ED, they will undergo a brief screening questionnaire to determine how many children and parents are identified as being at high risk for later stress symptom development. One month after discharge home into the community, children and parents will be asked to fill out a brief stress symptom questionnaire by email or telephone to see if they have experienced symptoms of ongoing post-trauma psychological distress. This information will help investigators to address gaps in knowledge and service delivery with policy-makers and health care decision-makers so that trauma-related care for children can improve.





Seeking Mental Health Services for Children and Adolescents: Are We All on the Same Page?

~ Dr. Kristin von Ranson, University of Calgary

Background:

In adults, collaborative decision-making about mental health treatment has been linked to better treatment outcomes and satisfaction, and most adults prefer to be involved in decisions about the mental health treatment they receive. However, little is known about how knowledgeable parents and guardians of children and adolescents are about how a youth's mental health treatment is chosen, or what their preferences are, such as how important research evidence is to them in selecting a psychotherapy approach. This pilot study will systematically examine the knowledge and perceptions of parents or legal guardians/custodians about mental health service decision-making for their children and youth. Results of this pilot study will tell us about the needs and desires of parents or legal guardians/custodians seeking mental health services for children and adolescents, and will support subsequent larger-scale research. Findings also will inform outreach efforts aimed at caregivers of youth with mental illness via community partners, and will influence policy related to youth mental health services.





Conceptualization of Antenatal Anxiety: A Synthesis Review and Meta-analysis

~ Dr. Suzanne Tough & Dr. Hamideh Bayrampour,
University of Calgary

Background:

The purpose of this study was to review and summarize what is known about anxiety during pregnancy in the scientific literature to:

1. Determine which individual, familial, and environmental factors predict this condition among pregnant women;
2. Understand dimensions of pregnancy anxiety and its symptoms and characteristics; and,
3. Identify the somatic, cognitive, and behavioral effects of anxiety on pregnant women.

Results:

To achieve these objectives, the research team conducted a comprehensive review of the literature to combine various types of evidence including quantitative and qualitative studies, and mixed methods research. Two researchers independently screened titles and abstracts of the retrieved papers and documents to determine their suitability for inclusion in the study. Disagreements among reviewers were discussed until agreement was reached. Articles that met inclusion and quality criteria were included in the review and information reported in their results or discussion sections generated the data for our review. In this project, researchers clarified the concept of pregnancy related anxiety and identified its attributes, antecedents, and consequences. Also, they have identified and summarized the risk factors of antenatal anxiety and its dimensions. A definition of the concept based on these findings has been proposed. Finally, the items of current measures of pregnancy related anxiety were assessed qualitatively to determine the component of the concept that each scale taps. Alberta has one of the highest rates of women's mood disorders (such as depression and anxiety) in Canada. Findings can inform the development of a valid instrument to assess anxiety among pregnant women.



Understanding depression among pregnant Aboriginal women: a constructivist grounded theory study in the city of Calgary

~ Dr. Wilfreda Thurston, University of Calgary

Background:

Depression during pregnancy is a serious maternal-child health issue – particularly for Aboriginal populations who face significant social and health disparities. This qualitative constructivist grounded theory study (“Voices and PHACES”) was conducted in Calgary with academic researchers from the University of Calgary working in partnership with local health and social services and with the involvement of Aboriginal community members and Elders. The study aimed to understand the risk factors, the protective factors and the societal context of prenatal depression in Aboriginal populations. It also aimed to examine how services in Calgary are doing, and how they can be improved, in meeting the needs of this population. The study involved personal interviews and focus-groups with pregnant Aboriginal women, service-providing professionals and other stakeholders.

Results:

Chronic life stress and trauma were identified in the results as key causes of depression, and were influenced by socioeconomic factors, negative life events and circumstances, and negative relationships. Driving these determinants were upstream, systemic factors related to historical and present-day societal context (e.g., racism, sexism, social exclusion, and intergenerational trauma from residential schools and other occurrences of colonization). Substance abuse was found to be a common coping mechanism for stress, trauma and depression, indicating that mental health issues need to be addressed in order to effectively manage addictions. Social support and traditional Aboriginal healing practices appear protective, and thus may be key intervention strategies. While services in Calgary appear to be working well in certain ways, a need was identified for more culturally-appropriate services, better networking among agencies, and better training of service-providers to reduce stigma and enhance a safe and empowering healing environment.



Integrated Maternal Psychosocial Assessment to Care Trial (IMPACT: PILOT)

~ Dr. Dawn Kingston, University of Alberta

Background:

The purpose of this pilot study is to evaluate the acceptability, clinical and cost-effectiveness of a sustainable, innovative, integrated process of online psychosocial assessment, referral, and cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) for pregnant women. The main outcome of this project is the feasibility and acceptability of the intervention. Secondary outcomes are: reduced symptoms of prenatal depression/anxiety/stress; reduced risk of poor child (birthweight, Apgar scores), maternal (postpartum depression/anxiety/stress, parenting competence, parenting stress, maternal-child attachment, sleep quality) and family outcomes (partner relationship, maternal-child attachment). This is the first study to evaluate an integrated prenatal psychosocial assessment referral-care intervention, and only one other trial has evaluated the effect of prenatal psychosocial care on child outcomes. This intervention addresses many of the significant barriers that prevent pregnant women from optimizing their mental health.

Results to date:

The IMPACT study was funded for a two-year pilot randomized controlled trial (2012-2014) with funding for the full RCT provided by CIHR (2015-2018). Investigators completed recruitment for the two-year pilot trial on schedule in December, 2014. They exceeded target recruitment numbers (N=160) because additional sites were interested in participating in this trial. As a component of the pilot, the team evaluated the feasibility and acceptability of the online screening and cognitive behaviour therapy interventions through qualitative interviews and surveys. Qualitative interviews with 20 women indicated high acceptability and feasibility. Minor changes to the navigability of the program were instituted as a result of women's feedback. Because the essential intervention remains the same, the team is able to add women from the pilot to their total recruitment number for the RCT. The pilot provided invaluable opportunity to refine trial processes including tracking and following up women.

OBESITY & HEALTHY LIFESTYLE





Developing Partnerships for Indigenous Youth Health and Activity Programs

~ Ms. Angela Coppola & Dr. Tara-Leigh McHugh,
University of Alberta

Background:

The Centre funded phases two and three of this community-based participatory research doctoral dissertation. The overall purpose of the dissertation was to learn how to support Alberta Aboriginal youth health and physical activity programs.

Phase 1: Listening to community members

Phase 2: Exploring how to co-create and engage others in programming

Phase 3: Facilitating knowledge-to-action and creating a space for support

Results:

Thirty community members who attended four consultations in late 2013 indicated the importance of holistic programming for Aboriginal youth that was inclusive of traditional cultural practices, however, they were unsure of how to go about creating programming. To address the identified need from phase one, 15 Aboriginal youth health programmers who included physical activity in their programming were asked how programs and partnerships were created and sustained. They generally talked about how to create a space for growth and support of programs relating to the following 7 themes:

1. Advocating for youth and programming
2. Creating holistic programming with youth
3. Supporting traditional cultural practices and community connections
4. Focusing on relationships and building partnerships
5. Providing and receiving professional support
6. Promoting and navigating interagency support
7. Identifying program outcomes and evaluation methods

In Phase 3, participants provided feedback on what they thought was useful about the gathering as well as their abilities to network with others, and their key take-away points. Based on this feedback, the gathering facilitated knowledge-to-action by supporting participants' needs, facilitating a decolonizing space, creating opportunities for networking and engagement, and supporting on-going networking and knowledge-sharing opportunities.



Evaluation of a Play-Based Recreation Program for Preschoolers: Municipal Recreation Policy Implications of Strathcona County's Love-to-Play Program

~ Dr. Candace Nykiforuk, University of Alberta & Dr. Jane Hewes, Grant MacEwan University

Background:

Free play is an essential, positive determinant for children's lifelong health and development. A myriad of benefits are associated with free play, such as development of motor, cognitive, and socio-emotional skills, as well as improved self-confidence and speech. Preschools help meet children's play needs as these safe, supervised environments provide group interaction and foster exploration. The investigators' interest in supportive built environments and children's health and development, combined with the emergent opportunity in a preschool program and space in rural Strathcona County (SC), Alberta, provided a strong foundation for this project. The purpose of the research was to understand how the unique and leading edge design of a free play-based preschool space and accompanying program (Love to Play) encourages free play amongst 3-5 year old children and the nature of the immediate benefits gained from this intervention.

Results:

In close partnership with SC Recreation, Parks and Culture department (the creators of Love to Play), the team evaluated Love to Play in comparison to two traditional preschool programs (also offered by the same provider) using a multi-method approach organized over three parts. In Part 1, they conducted before- and after-interviews with parents and instructors at the three sites. Part 2 involved a systematic assessment of the quality of each preschool space. In Part 3 children utilizing the preschool spaces multiple times over the evaluation period were video-recorded. Study findings have allowed investigators to better understand how a free play-based space and program affects preschoolers' play behaviours and how to maximize optimal child development and wellbeing through dynamic play space and program design. The community-university partnership established through the research process was also evaluated.

GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS

PARENTING CAPACITY AND PARENT-INFANT RELATIONS





Parent and Community Experience and Engagement with EAL Policies

~ Dr. Yan Guo, University of Calgary

Background:

Parents are unique experts on their own children and their own socio-cultural context. This is especially the case of English as an Additional Language (EAL) parents who are promising untapped sources of knowledge and wisdom about EAL policy. Nonetheless, policy-makers and educators rarely consider their perspectives in EAL policies. This study explores the experiences and perceptions of parent and community groups of the practical effects and outcomes of EAL policies.

The study takes policy not only as text and identifies disjunctions between policy documents and the reality of a linguistically and culturally diverse population but also as discursive practice and documents how policy is experienced and constructed locally by parents (Dagenais, 2013). It focuses on eight components of EAL policy: visibility, designation of responsibility, eligibility, duration, placement, programming, assessment and reporting, and funding (Kouritzin, 2013).

The objectives of the study are two-fold:

- A. Examine how language education policies for EAL are interpreted and experienced by parents; and,
- B. Understand how parental groups engage with and contribute, if at all, to EAL policies and practices in Calgary, which receive most of Alberta's immigrants.

Results of this study will provide directions for EAL policies, programs and services, as well as new insights into the effectiveness of advocacy and capacity building of EAL parents.

Results to date:

No results to date.



● Building parenting capacity in families of children with disabilities Phase 2: Understanding and resourcing fathers of children with ASD from diverse socio-economic and cultural backgrounds

~ Dr. Bonnie Lashewicz & Ms. Beth Parrott, University of Calgary

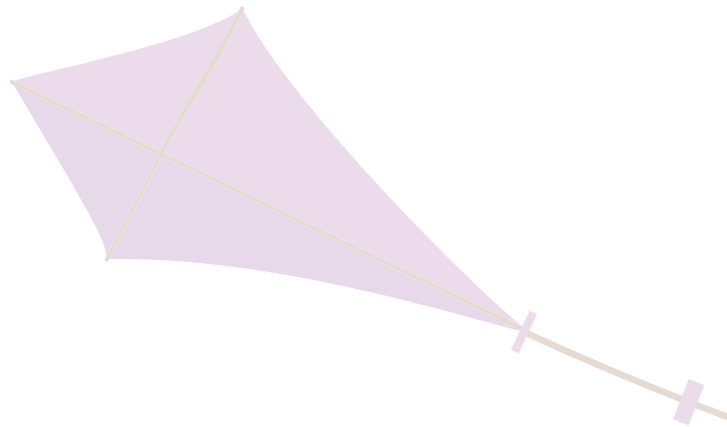
Background:

The purpose of this collaborative project is to promote the health of Alberta children and families by building understandings and informing practice, policy and research priorities related to supporting socio-economically and ethnically diverse fathers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). Parents of children with ASD have distinct needs given the behavioral and communication challenges associated with ASD. Researchers, policy makers and practitioners responding to these needs have tended to target, and reflect, the experiences of mothers leaving us with limited understandings of the specific roles and needs of fathers. The research team has made strides in more fully representing voices of fathers through The Centre- funded Phase 1 project where they examined first-hand accounts of fathers' experiences and needs in raising their children with ASD.

However, the team joins other researchers in having drawn from a sample skewed towards the middle/ upper middle class socio-economic backgrounds that tend to characterize self-selected research participants. This distinct study will fill gaps in knowledge, policy and practice related to the roles and needs of socioeconomically and ethnically diverse fathers raising children with ASD, and children with disabilities that pose challenges similar to those associated with ASD. The findings will be disseminated to promote the fuller, more deliberate incorporation of fathers from diverse backgrounds into practice and related scholarship about families of children with disabilities. Through this study, investigators will continue to build the expertise and collaboration among their own ACCFCR funded project team, as well as deepening collaborations with other Centre-funded researchers, in topics of family well-being and family resilience.

Results to date:

Investigators hosted a stakeholder knowledge exchange event attended by families, professionals and researchers/students where the work was showcased. The team has one publication, four additional articles in press and two more under review.





After a Child's Traumatic Brain Injury: An Ethnographic Study of Being a Parent

~ Dr. Helly Goetz & Dr. Vera Caine, University of
Alberta

Background:

In young children, traumatic brain injury (TBI) is the most frequent cause of disability. There are marked differences in how mothers and fathers handle the stress associated with their child's TBI. Mothers more willingly accept and use emotional approaches to adjust to their child's injury, while fathers report denial of the injury and believe that their child's injury is more stressful. Investigators explored the meanings associated with being a parent of a child with a severe TBI. Providing care that is well-suited and developed based on parent experiences may optimize the family environment for a child with a TBI. They wanted to investigate what strategies can enhance the services provided by health care providers (HCP) in rehabilitation programs and how they could support the re-integration of families into the community.

Results:

Investigators found that HCP acknowledged that time constraints made it difficult to consider dedicated time for discussion with parents. The findings have significant implication for rehabilitation services to improve outcomes for parents and families of children with TBI. Addressing parental concerns and implementing solutions based on parental needs in practice have vital implications for developing trustable relationships between the families and HCP. Better communication and removing the gaps in care that have led to tension between parents and the HCP are critical to address.



Adding Circle of Security © to Enhance Parenting Resources in Alberta

~ Dr. Gwendolyn Rempel, Athabasca University

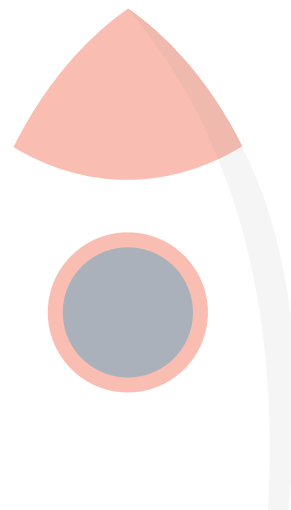
Background:

The aim of this seed grant is to establish an interdisciplinary team of academic and non-academic researchers, collaborators, and knowledge users to conceptualize a fundable intervention study to test the effectiveness of a relationship-based parenting program with parents of typically developing young children (urban and rural) and young children with congenital heart disease (CHD). A further contribution of this proposed research is to test the waters as to the readiness of service providers and policy makers in Alberta to engage in a paradigm shift from traditional parenting training programs to attachment/relationship based parenting intervention.

The research team plans to conceptualize and design the rural/urban aspects of the program for typical populations and for the complex congenital heart disease population. A literature review of the Circle of Security© in parent interventions will be conducted and a research protocol for testing Circle of Security© in parents of typical children/parents of at risk children will be developed, in order to be used with future vulnerable parenting situations. This will be done with consultation from Dr. Kent Hoffman, one of the Circle of Security© program developers.

Results to date:

No interim results available.





Improving healthcare to better meet the needs of parents: A feasibility study of CenteringParenting®

~ Dr. J Cyne Johnston, Alberta Health Services

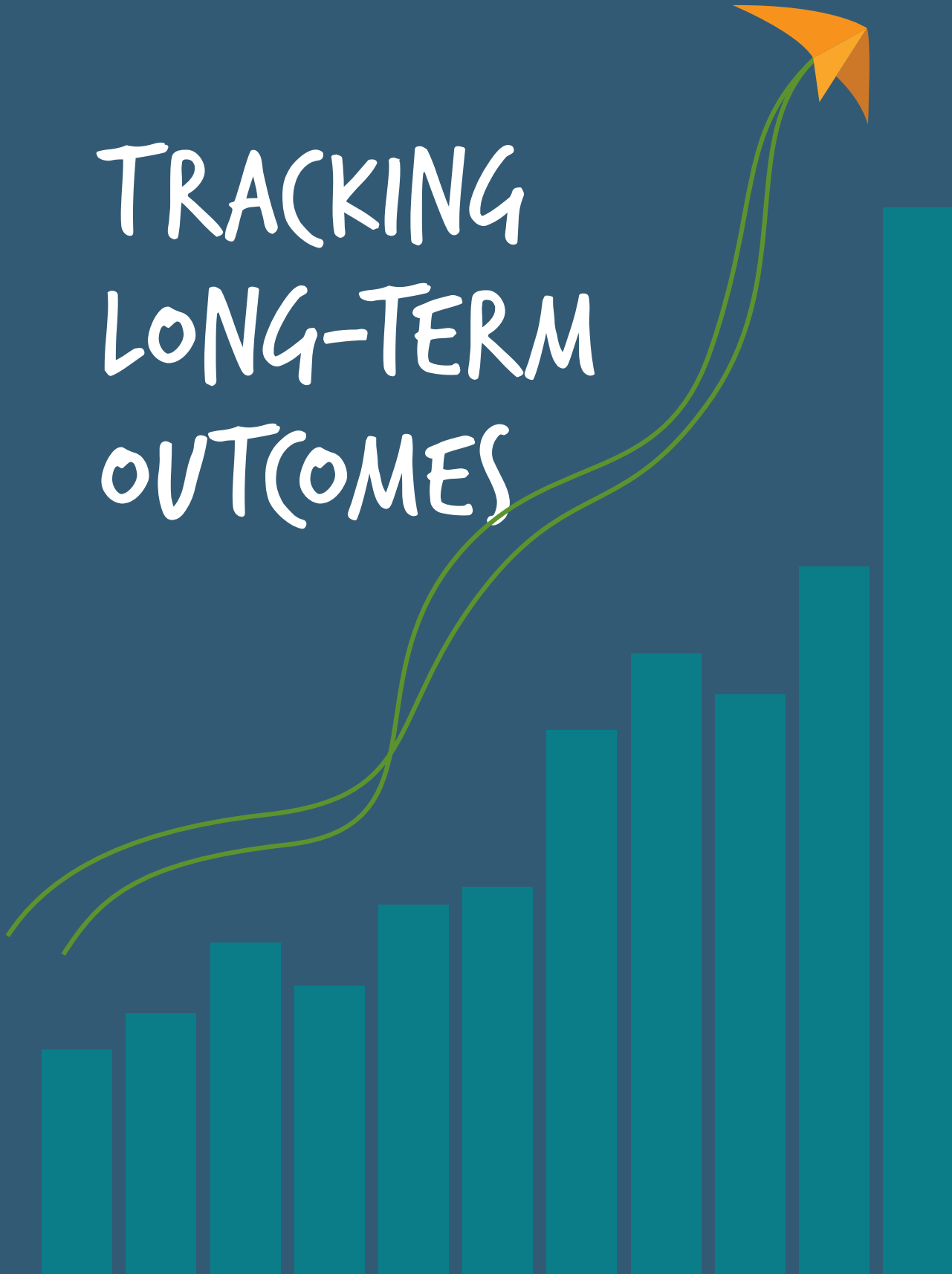
Background:

CenteringParenting is a model of group care for the postpartum period. Health assessment, education, and support are combined to promote greater engagement, personal empowerment and community building. A team led by Alberta Health Services (AHS) researchers, content experts, public health managers, and decision-makers adapted and implemented the way public health well-child services was delivered in a pilot study at two Calgary community health clinics. Rather than attend the typical one-on-one visits with a Public Health Nurse (PHN) at four vaccination time points; families attended six, two-hour group sessions in the child's first year of life. Families came with three to seven other families and had a short 1:1 assessment with their PHN, participated in a parent-led discussion, and were vaccinated, all within the group space. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the feasibility of this service delivery model and see if it met the needs of parents, nurses, and decision-makers.

Results:

Participating parents reported improvements in their parenting skills and confidence, their stress management, and their ability to find answers to their parenting questions following the program. Parents found that the program met their needs, particularly their needs for peer and personal support, information, and skill development. Nurses reported enjoying the opportunity to "support a model where people are relationship building and being supportive." The piloting of the CenteringParenting program was successfully completed in two Calgary Public Health locations. A number of logistical challenges need to be overcome in order for the program to be implemented more widely.

TRACKING LONG-TERM OUTCOMES





Views and Preferences of Alberta Birth Cohort Parent Participants on Secondary Use of Research Data

~ Dr. Suzanne Tough & Dr. Kiran Manhas, University of Calgary

Background:

In Alberta, a partnership involving four research institutions is preparing to implement a child-focused research data repository (RDR), as part of The Centre's SAGE initiative, which will enable secondary use of research data. Two Alberta longitudinal, birth cohort studies, All Our Babies (AOB) and Alberta Pregnancy Outcomes & Nutrition (APrON), have collected questionnaire data and biological samples since 2008 for over 500 mother-baby pairs (and 1100 fathers) followed from early pregnancy. Plans are underway to include all non-biological data from these cohorts in the RDR.

This study aims to describe the views and preferences of AOB and APrON parent participants as they relate to the transfer of their own and their child's individual-level, non-biological data to a structured research data repository (RDR) and to subsequent secondary uses. The specific research objectives are:

1. To understand the factors that influence cohort parent participant willingness to include data in a secondary RDR.
2. To describe cohort parent participant views around the risks and benefits of RDR establishment and participation.
3. To describe preferences of cohort parent participants on RDR governance strategies.

Results to date:

The qualitative component of the research is complete, including collection and analysis. This has led to four conference oral presentations and two conference poster presentations, as well as one submitted manuscript. The cognitive interviewing component is also complete, resulting in a finalized online survey. Collection of data using the online survey is complete, and this data is being analyzed by a Bachelor of Health Sciences student as part of research coursework. A research proposal is under development to conduct a further online survey of researchers' perspectives on data sharing.

Participant, legal and privacy issues related to longitudinal research projects

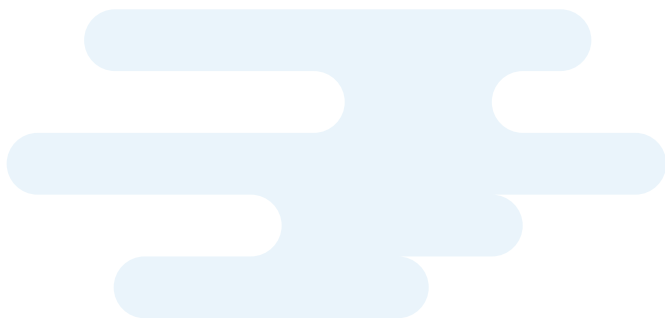
~ Dr. Kiran Manhas, supervised by Dr. Suzanne Tough

Background:

This work will examine parental experience of participation in the All Our Babies cohort study to clarify their perceptions of the risks, benefits, costs and burdens associated with participation in a longitudinal birth cohort. Dr. Manhas will also be invited to contribute to the development of SAGE at The Centre, specifically regarding legal and privacy issues. An additional project related to researchers' perspectives has been added to the work as well.

Results to date:

Investigators have completed two of the three phases of this mixed-methods study, and have begun work on a related research project within the scope of this funding. The qualitative component of the project is complete; analysis led to four conference oral presentations, two conference poster presentations, and one submitted manuscript, with a second manuscript under development. The cognitive interviewing component of the project is complete, resulting in a finalized online survey. An externally funded summer student completed data collection and analysis; this work has led to two conference poster presentations and one conference oral presentation, with a manuscript under development. Data collection using the online survey is complete, and analysis is currently underway. The team is also finalizing a research proposal to submit for ethics approval to conduct an online survey of researchers' perspectives on data sharing.



GENERATING EVIDENCE FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE:
AN OVERVIEW OF CENTRE-FUNDED RESEARCH PROJECTS



YOUTH

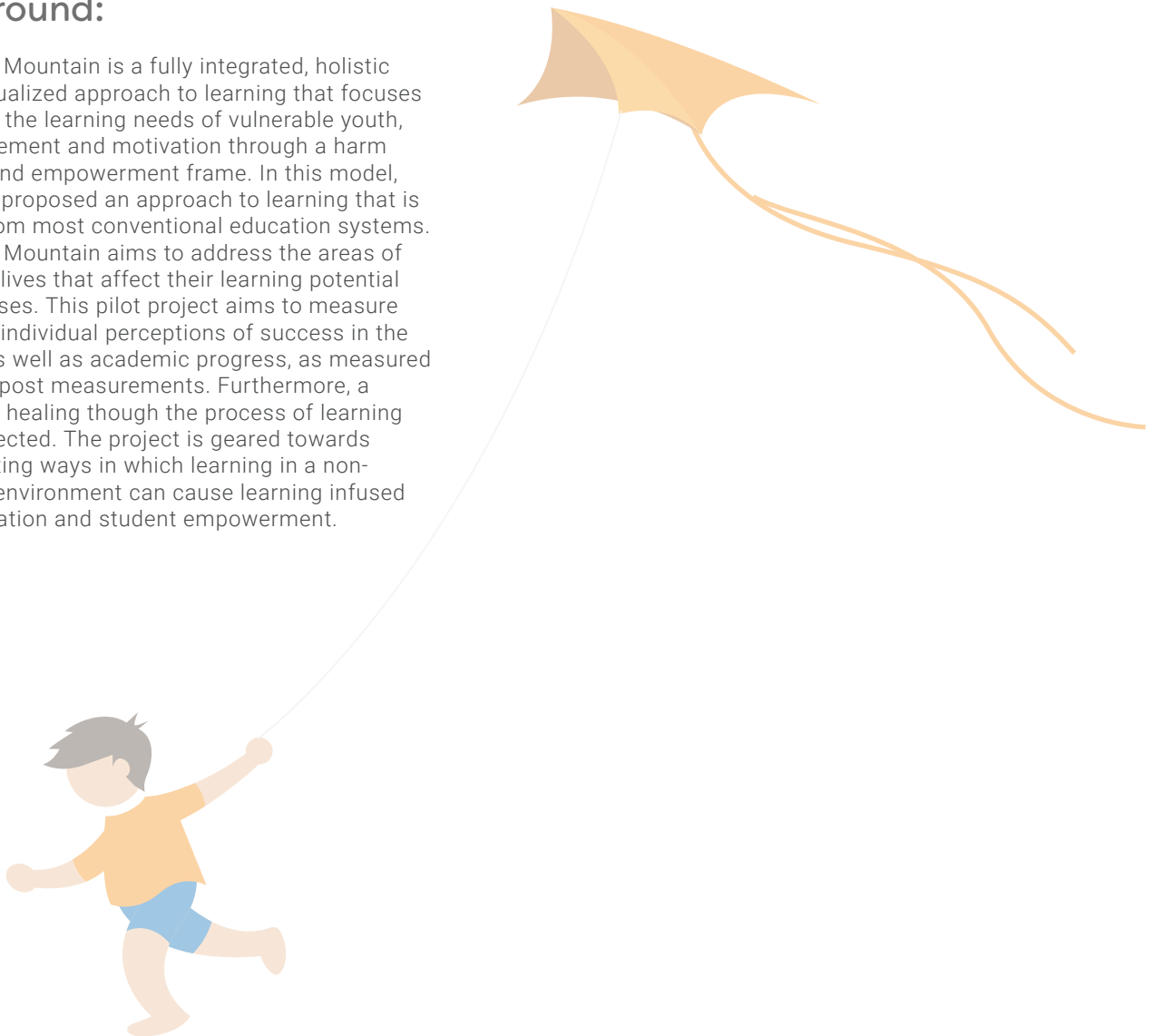


Moving the Mountain: Piloting a Learning Model for Youth with High-Risk Behaviour

~ Dr. Jacqueline Pei & Catherine Broomfield,
University of Alberta

Background:

Moving the Mountain is a fully integrated, holistic and individualized approach to learning that focuses on meeting the learning needs of vulnerable youth, with engagement and motivation through a harm reduction and empowerment frame. In this model, youth have proposed an approach to learning that is different from most conventional education systems. Moving the Mountain aims to address the areas of the youth's lives that affect their learning potential and processes. This pilot project aims to measure the youth's individual perceptions of success in the program, as well as academic progress, as measured on pre and post measurements. Furthermore, a measure of healing through the process of learning can be collected. The project is geared towards demonstrating ways in which learning in a non-traditional environment can cause learning infused with exploration and student empowerment.



◆ Training Parents and Service Providers to Promote Healthy Sexuality and Relationships among Youth with Intellectual Disabilities

~ Dr. Sandra Reilly & Dr. Wendi Lokanc-Diluzio,
University of Calgary

Background:

Sexuality is a significant aspect of the overall wellness of all individuals, including those with intellectual disabilities. Although all Canadians have a right to comprehensive sexuality education, youth with intellectual disabilities do not always receive it. Youth who do not receive sexuality education that is inclusive to their needs are vulnerable to abuse, sexual exploitation, sexually transmitted infections, HIV, social isolation, and lower quality of life. Youth with intellectual disabilities require "support, acceptance, understanding and compassion from their families [and caregivers] to transition through healthy development" (PHAC, 2013, p. 11). However, it may be difficult for families and caregivers to fill this role, when they themselves need support. The main purpose of this mixed methods study is to explore the effectiveness of two types of training programs (face-to-face and blended learning) in enhancing the capacity of parents and service providers to promote healthy sexuality and relationships among youth with intellectual disabilities.



Enhancing Resilience in Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder through Social Intervention

~ Dr. Adam McCrimmon & Dr. David Nicholas,
University of Calgary

Background:

The primary objective of this project is to address a pervasive issue within the field of intervention for youth with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder (HFASD): How might the social and emotional development of youth with HFASD be better supported so that they may experience improved social ability, mental health, wellbeing, and capacity to integrate with their community as they transition into adulthood? This project is working to establish evidence supporting the enhancement of these constructs in youth with HFASD through the implementation and evaluation of the Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS).

PEERS is a 14-week program designed to teach HFASD youth developmentally-appropriate social skills. The program also provides direct instruction to parents regarding how to support their youth's social and emotional development, increasing parental capacity to care for youth. HFASD youth will have their social skills, emotional wellbeing, resilience, and related abilities assessed prior to commencement and after program completion to determine the nature and degree of improvement in these areas. Abilities will also be assessed 14 weeks post-program to determine long-term maintenance of skills.

Results to date:

The final cohort of participants completed the intervention in June, and results are anticipated this fall.



An Exploratory Examination of the Transition to Adulthood in Autism Spectrum Disorder

~ Dr. David Nicholas, University of Calgary

Background:

Among the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) population, there is a growing recognition of the need for transition practice development including better ways to optimize transition experiences and outcomes for youth and young adults with ASD. Recent studies illustrate alarming young adult outcomes following transition especially in areas of post-secondary education, community integration and employment. Likewise, recent studies suggest that about 5-40% of young adults with ASD attend post-secondary school, however attendance rates are lower for those with ASD and a comorbid diagnosis of intellectual disability or maladaptive behaviors. As more youth with ASD move into adulthood, there is a burgeoning concern about the existing lack of services available and limited evidence to offer models to optimally support this population. To address these gaps, this study is examining:

1. The process of transition to adulthood in ASD;
2. Elements that inhibit and conversely foster effective transitioning;
3. Components that demarcate what is perceived to be viable and desired outcomes and markers for adult experience and transition; and,
4. Recommendations for transitional support.

Based on the identification of experiences and needs yielded from this study, it is anticipated that improved resources addressing these needs for young persons with ASD will be developed and tested in a future study within this research program.

Results to date:

No interim results available.



Beyond the Hurt: The effects of a national cross-age mentoring program on bullying in middle school children

~ Dr. Wendy Hoglund & Dr. Bonnie Leadbeater,
University of Alberta

Background:

The project is using a quasi-experimental design to conduct a pilot investigation of the effectiveness of the Canadian Red Cross' Beyond the Hurt (BTH) Bullying Prevention Program over one year. The overarching objectives are:

1. Fill a gap in knowledge about how this school-wide, anti-bullying program is implemented in middle and high schools; and,
2. Test the logic model of how the BTH program works to reduce peer bullying and victimization.

The outcome of this project will be to increase the capacity of the Red Cross, a non-governmental organization (NGO) to refine the BTH program, which has already been disseminated at a national level, and to evaluate its impact.

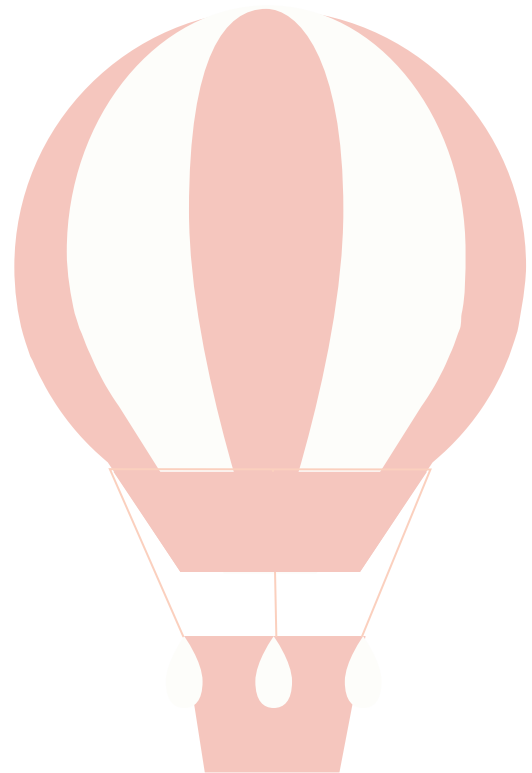
Primary research goals include:

- A. Assessing the impacts of the BTH program on reducing peer bullying and victimization;
- B. Improving the school climate, knowledge, and awareness for youth in grades 6-9;
- C. Examining the program impacts on bullying and victimization among vulnerable youth with high symptoms of depression and anxiety; and,
- D. Documenting/assessing the effects of variation in the program uptake, implementation, and adaptation on rates of bullying and victimization.

This study will provide a foundation for a national evaluation of this program by the Red Cross.

Results to date:

No interim results available.





Supporting Safe and Inclusive Environments for School-Aged Children and Youth: Building the Case for a Review of ‘Safe and Caring’ Programs, Practices and Policies in Alberta

~ Dr. Christina Rinaldi, University of Alberta

Background:

The Society for Safe and Caring Schools & Communities (Safe and Caring) is a not-for-profit organization which builds community capacity to prevent bullying, violence and exploitation of children and youth through the promotion of healthy relationships. Safe and Caring shares the Government of Alberta’s vision by working to ensure every child in Alberta has the opportunity to grow up in a caring and nurturing home, an engaging and supportive school, and a safe and inclusive community. To achieve this requires the involvement of parents, teachers and all the important adults and community members in a young person’s life. In order to support Safe and Caring in meeting this vision, investigators intend to work towards creating a multi-stakeholder engagement model of coordinated and evidence-based programs, strategies, policies and practices to support a culture of healthy relationships, free from bullying (including cyberbullying) for children and youth from K-12 in Alberta and for building and maintaining safe, caring, respectful, and inclusive learning environments focused on diversity, equity and human rights. This project sought to develop the formation of a project team and support the planning and development of a project charter that includes an Alberta Stakeholder analysis.

Results:

These findings reflect the current state of safe and caring practices, programs and policies across Alberta.

1. No common language: there is a need for building a shared understanding and common language around bullying and safe and caring environments.
2. Over-reliance on programs: Overwhelmingly, stakeholders feel that programs have a limited scope in creating safe and caring school environments. Programs are considered too limited in efforts to address a multi-facted and complex issue like safe and caring schools. However, many schools turn to programs because they offer a concrete and time-limited solution.
3. Schools are overwhelmed: As a key focal point for addressing a wide range of community issues (e.g., poverty, pregnancy, gangs, mental health, etc.), schools are bombarded by requests from community stakeholders, on top of facing immense pressure to achieve academic outcomes. Safe and caring practices and initiatives are often viewed as add-ons to an already stretched system. Stakeholders believe that ensuring that school and system personnel such as principals, superintendents and policy makers are aware of the link between safe and caring environments and positive outcomes will bring more attention and effort towards implementing safe and caring practices.
4. Fragmented approaches: There is an immense breadth and depth of resources and programs available to support Alberta schools and school districts in building safe and caring environments. However, many that do come into schools, do so without collaboration, in an uncoordinated, haphazard way. Often, programs or resources do not successfully meet schools’ needs, and in some cases, schools have not been able to deliver resources effectively, due to issues such as time constraints.
5. Limited capacity: Although stakeholders recognize the importance of using high-quality resources and programming, there is a lack of capacity and experience in Alberta schools to discern quality evidence, as well as a lack of time to look for quality evidence-based programming.
6. Lack of strategic collaborative planning: Safe and caring efforts in schools by teachers and administrators are often individual and unconnected. Resources could be used more effectively and greater system change could occur if school districts were working as a whole to develop plans around safe and caring school environments.
7. Lack of consistent policy development and implementation across Alberta: There are a wide variety of policies in place to support safe and caring learning environments. However, there is an unmet need for support in order to successfully implement these policies.



Alberta Writes 3

~ Dr. David Slomp & Dr. Roger Graves, University of Lethbridge

Background:

The capacity to write well is among the most universal of skill sets required in the modern workforce. At the same time, preparing students for writing across the multitude of contexts and modalities they will face in the 21st century economy is extremely challenging. The great challenge of preparing 21st century writers is not to provide them with the skills they need to successfully write specific types of texts. Instead, they need support to develop the skills necessary to learn how to write across the range of modalities (social media, email), genres (reports, letters) and contexts (social, business) they will be faced with when they transition from high school classrooms to university and college courses, and into the workforce. The funding received for this grant supported a conference that brought together representatives from industry, the post-secondary and secondary education systems, and government and discussed the challenges involved in preparing student writers to successfully transition from writing effectively in high school to writing effectively in college, university and the workplace. The long term goal of this project is to secure funding for an Alberta Institute for 21st Century Writing. The institute would include partners in the K-12 system (school districts), the college system, the university system and industry. Working in collaboration with these partners, the institute would focus on researching and developing writing curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices necessary for writing required in the knowledge economy of the 21st Century.

Results:

The Alberta Writes 3 project brought together professionals responsible for supporting the development of writing ability within the K-12 system, the post-secondary system, and the workplace environment. Participants included more than 50 junior and senior high school English teachers, university and college level writing instructors, provincial and federal government literacy programming specialists, and workplace writing instructors. They gathered together for a day of discussion structured around the following 5 conversations:

1. What do studies in writing tell us about how students transform their writing skills across diverse contexts?
2. What challenges do employers face in developing employee writing skills?
3. What role does government have in supporting the cross-contextual development of writers?
4. How do we and how might we support adult students as they move through education and training and into the workplace?
5. What are the implications you draw from these conversations for your own work and for a networked approach to addressing the development of writing ability in Alberta?

These conversations enabled investigators to better understand the complexities involved in taking a system's level approach to understanding the development of writing ability. They also pointed to the importance of understanding writing as a problem-solving activity. This problem-solving lens will enable investigators and professionals to rethink writing curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy.

An additional \$6,000 of funding was received from the University of Lethbridge. Investigators plan to apply for a SSHRC Insight Grant in the Fall of 2016.



Social Identity in Rural School-Based Youth Sport Groups

~ Dr. Luc Martin, University of Lethbridge

Background:

The health benefits related to physical activity participation are well documented for younger populations. Unfortunately, too few youth are obtaining the recommended daily amount of physical activity—less than 5% of Canadian children and youth between the ages of 5 to 17 years. The purpose project is to develop a highly qualified research team and to establish preliminary pilot data with regard to the relevance of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) in the context of rural community physical activity groups (e.g., sport teams).

Results to date:

No interim results are available.



Working with and engaging marginalized youth and families to make positive changes

~ Dr. Yoshitaka Iwasaki, University of Alberta

Background:

Urban-dwelling marginalized youth (UMY) including youth from Aboriginal and immigrant/refugee families are high-risk or at-risk of a variety of life challenges such as poverty, homelessness, inadequate housing, physical and sexual abuse, alcohol and drug abuse, neglect, dysfunctional family, exposure to violence, discrimination, stigma, suicidal behaviours, and psychiatric disabilities. Due to the complexity of these issues facing UMY, the literature supports the use of a holistic, ecological framework to broadly recognize the key factors that contextualize the lives of UMY. Also, to overcome the limitations of a conventional top/university-down approach, actively engaging youth through community-based participatory action research (PAR) is considered significant and has important implications for making positive changes to greatly benefit UMY. This PAR project involved developing, pilot-testing, and refining a framework of youth engagement, specifically for marginalized youth in a culturally meaningful way, with the aim of making a difference in better supporting marginalized youth from a holistic, ecological perspective.

Results:

The literature on working with high-risk youth points to both the importance and challenges of using a youth-centered approach to build positive, meaningful relationships with youth. However, the existing literature fails to examine truly youth-guided approaches to engaging and supporting high-risk youth. Centre funding has enabled the Youth4YEG team to address this gap by strategically using youth-centered engagement and leadership approaches. These approaches involve youth-guided participatory action research (PAR) to ensure mutual respect, co-learning, relationship-building, power-sharing, empowerment, capacity-building, and collective commitment to social change.

Importantly, youth leaders have been co-drivers/co-researchers to guide the trajectory of our project. So far, the project involved:

- A. the youth-guided development of a framework of youth engagement (including youth-identified nine key themes such as relationship-building, opportunities, empowerment, and achievements);
- B. pilot-testing of this framework through facilitating a series of engagement sessions with youth recruited locally; and,
- C. hosting of a local youth conference named “2K15 Youth4YEG Forum” with the themes of “finding your voice” (building youth’s self-awareness and claiming youth’s own truth by sharing youth’s stories, and focusing on inspiration, advocacy, and social change) and “transferable skills” (transferring and applying youth’s skills to educational, career/employment, and other life opportunities in a positive, constructive way).

Currently, the Youth4YEG team involves in youth-led fall and winter activities in 2015-16, focusing on “poverty” and “identity” issues contextualized within youth’s lives. The Youth4YEG team has already produced a number of refereed journal articles published in *Child & Youth Services*; *Engaged Scholar Journal*; *Internal Journal of Adolescence and Youth*; *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*; and *Relational Child & Youth Care Practice*.