

ripple effects

How community-university partnerships contribute to personal, organizational, and systemic change



Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families

2022-23 annual report



letter from the director

CUP enters conversations with community partners with several questions front and centre. Why is the issue or gap on the table important to the community? What's the social, political, or systemic context around this issue? What new learning can researchers bring? Who will use and apply this learning? What is the desired outcome of this work? Every partner and project has unique answers to these questions that are influenced by personal, professional, political, sectoral, and organizational experiences. Over the past 23 years, CUP has learned that succeeding at community-based research means embracing the many changes, redirections, frustrations, and opportunities that emerge in this context. By committing to long-term relationships with partners, we have been fortunate to see the long-term, systems-level, and often surprising "ripple effects" of our projects.

In this year's annual report, CUP faculty, staff, and students explore the "ripple effects" they have witnessed and contributed to over the course of their ongoing projects. "Ripple effects" loosely refers to the impacts and influences that research activities have over time. While it is challenging to quantify and define ripples, the metaphor helpfully evokes the ways community-based research can impact the wider community, how the ideas emerging from this

research can influence broader intersecting systems, and how the feeling of doing this research can be both gentle and turbulent. Overall, this report reveals the myriad of ways CUP researchers are carefully and critically attuned to the personal, organizational, and systemic aspects of their work.

One of the most powerful ripple effects I observed over the past year was related to the [CUP Graduate Student Equity Award](#). Funding from the Suncor Energy Foundation allowed CUP to dismantle and innovate the merit-based award process, support ten exceptional graduate students across campus, and observe the effects the initiative had on their academic and professional careers. Involvement in the award also provided the CUP Steering Committee a way to take action after a year of conversations about how to live out our commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The stories in this report show how CUP teams are navigating challenges in systems-level partnerships, adapting projects based on community engagement, developing and sharing innovative research and evaluation methods, and experiencing personal and academic growth. These experiences underscore an inherent open, reflexive, and innovative nature to community-based research. As CUP researcher Li Yu aptly says, "you have to anticipate that you'll be surprised—and yet when that moment comes, you are still surprised."

Looking ahead to 2024, CUP aims to broaden access to community-based research opportunities and strengthen relationships by supporting the launch of a community-engaged research network. We envision this as an environment that values both community and university expertise, fosters authentic engagement between partners, and promotes dialogue around sustainable solutions to complex challenges faced by children, youth, families, and communities.

Karen Edwards, Director

the "ripple effects" of CUP

students

CUP and the Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN) create opportunities for students to work alongside community partners, generating valuable learning opportunities and "ripple effects" beyond the curriculum.

- In 2022, 35 students were involved in CUP projects, bringing over 11,000 hours of research and evaluation capacity.
Students I work with have...gained a chance to see evaluation and research in practice in a range of contexts. They have grown their networks and been exposed to additional knowledge mobilization opportunities. (Supervisor)
- Over 2022/23, CUP supported ten Graduate Student Equity Award recipients from across the University of Alberta.
[This award] enhanced my resume and made my experience in community research stand out. This recognition demonstrates that my dedication, hard work, and achievements in the community that I belong to do not go unnoticed. (Equity Award recipient)
- The 2022 UEval session engaged 41 learners, including 31 from the University of Alberta. It also engaged 10 organizations, which built evaluation plans in pediatrics, Indigenous education, HIV prevention, and more. QEval, the UEval sister course at Queen's University, registered 16 learners.

organizations

CUP's collaborative projects provide evidence for decision-making around practices and policies, creating impacts beyond the bounds of research activities.

- In 2022, CUP researchers collaborated with 58 partner organizations, including not-for-profits, charities, post-secondaries, governments, funding agencies, and research centres.
- 76% of CUP partners say CUP greatly contributed to their enhanced ability to meet the needs of clients and communities.

We have adopted new approaches to education, re-designed our program structure, and introduced new learning aids in the classroom because of this project with CUP. (CUP partner)

- Over the past 3 years, 70% of CUP partners said the project influenced their organization's practices, programs, and/or policies.

Evidence obtained from our projects has informed our decisions to improve our service and organizational culture. (CUP partner)

CUP projects involve a complex web of partners attuned to opportunities to embed research into systems-change discussions. Over time, new knowledge and collaborations can create "ripples" in the systems we all participate in.

- Since 2021, ECN researchers have been collaborating with the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) to develop a proposal for an early childhood educator (ECE) wage grid and compensation framework. The team is sharing its findings with the provincial government to inform policy recommendations that reflect the needs and lived experiences of ECEs.
- Since 2016, CUP researchers have been helping EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) better understand systems and develop practices and policy recommendations to alleviate poverty in Edmonton. CUP advises EPE's executive members, evaluates systems-change efforts, and presents research to inform decision-making.
- For the last 7 years, CUP has supported the evaluation of the All in For Youth (AIFY) initiative. Evaluation learnings have informed how educators work with social support staff in the eight Edmonton schools. Edmonton Public Schools has begun using resilience measures used by AIFY in all district schools, and longitudinal evaluation data is informing efforts to advocate for sustainable funding for AIFY.

systems

the CUP steering committee

kourch chan and deanna williamson

Kourch Chan is the Chief Strategy Officer for e4c and serves as community co-chair for the CUP Steering Committee. Deanna Williamson is an Associate Professor in the Department of Human Ecology and serves as the committee's academic co-chair.

When asked to reflect on “ripple effects” over the past year, Kourch and Deanna’s minds turned to CUP’s focus on equity, diversity, inclusion, and Indigeneity (EDII). This is the primary way CUP has responded to influences or “ripples” coming from an increasingly diverse Edmonton community, they say.

In 2022, CUP launched its first-ever Graduate Student Equity Award, which provided funding and mentorship opportunities to ten equity-deserving graduate students focusing on community-engaged research. Kourch, Deanna, and several other committee members helped design and adjudicate the award and participated in a final celebration event in May 2023.

“The ‘ripple effect’ theme is, by its nature, transitory,” says Kourch, “but when you’re in the middle of a ripple, you certainly feel it. I’m feeling there is an increased level of consciousness within and around CUP about inequities that exist in our world and how they work.” Conversations CUP has created around EDII started as a series of intentional reflective activities, but they’ve attained a rhythm of their own. Personal reflection at the Secretariat and Steering Committee levels has turned organically into the Equity Award, which became a chance to put these wonderful ideas from EDII into practice.

“Now we’re at the point of considering whether there is anything from our experience that can be taken up by other institutions and organizations. Having met the award recipients, I know the experience changed them as well.”

Deanna suggests CUP’s ability to be more responsive to societal changes is at least partly because CUP, which is now over 20 years old, has matured to a point of relative stability.

“In the early days of CUP,” she says, “there were



CUP GRADUATE EQUITY AWARD FINAL CELEBRATION. (LEFT TO RIGHT: KAREN EDWARDS, KOURCH CHAN)

CUP GRADUATE EQUITY AWARD FINAL CELEBRATION. (LEFT TO RIGHT: MARTIN GARBBER-CONRAD, DEANNA WILLIAMSON)

many ‘ripple effects’ as we found our footing, leading to a lot of growth. Now CUP has become, in a sense, ‘institutionalized,’ and we’ve been fortunate to receive consistent support from a few funders in recent years. Because the waters within CUP are a bit calmer, we can be more receptive to issues. But we shouldn’t take this calmness for granted. The sustainability of CUP will depend in part on ongoing funding commitments from both the university and community partners.”

Kourch and Deanna agree that, going forward, CUP’s sustainability also depends on remaining relevant to communities.

“One way we’re renewing our relationships is by launching a community-engaged research network that brings community members and academics together,” says Kourch. “The network is another way to ‘share the news’ about CUP and invite people to join our partnership.”

“Remaining relevant doesn’t necessarily mean remaining the same,” says Deanna. “It’s okay to make changes and even take risks because what worked 20 years ago for CUP may not work now. This isn’t to say that CUP has or does always remain the same, but it’s something to be mindful of.”

learning from challenges

maria mayan

Maria Mayan is a professor in the School of Public Health as well as the Associate Dean of Research. She serves as one of CUP's associate directors along with Rebecca Gokiert. Maria's current research revolves around CUP's partnerships with the Town of Drayton Valley and EndPovertyEdmonton.

"I sometimes envy people who wear lab coats and spend time in a relatively quiet and controlled environment," Maria says. "In the community-engaged research space, people come in with a lot of their values and a lot of themselves. When things don't go well, whether due to capacity issues or friction with partners, it hurts."

Maria says the past few years have been among the most difficult in her long career in community research, even if the projects she oversees have seen many wins. Notable examples include observing initial positive impacts from Drayton Valley's tuition assistance program and having an evaluation plan approved by partners at EndPovertyEdmonton.

Nonetheless, struggles arise because CUP continues to engage with sectors experiencing burnout, funding obstacles, and other issues exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We are also living through a time of heightened economic pressures and political polarization, which can saturate the types of systems-level work CUP is engaged in.

"In some circles," Maria says, "we've struggled to find common ground to resolve the differing politics of people at the table. When I think 'politics,' I think 'values,' which are what cause people to become invested in projects on a deeper level. Naturally, things can get tough, and for good reason. It is human nature for people to lash out in anger or place blame. All the while, researchers remain pressured by the demands of academia, funders, and other Western systems when it comes to securing money, meeting deadlines, and the like."



While the struggles CUP teams experience are real and can impact morale, they also help CUP identify new ways to grow, Maria says.

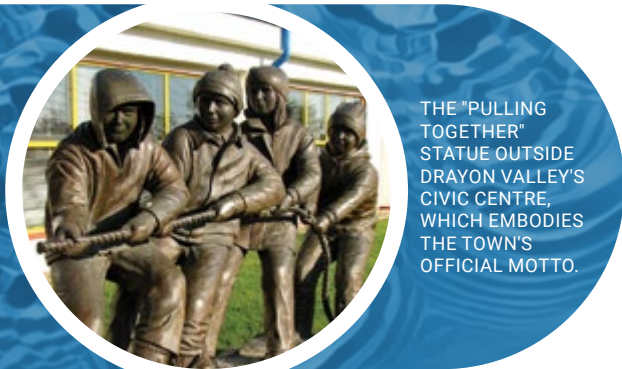
"There are times we need to question our identity and role as researchers. I believe there's a lot of maturity that comes with that. People in the university can approach the world with a kind of idealism, but this is challenged when we start sitting in rooms with people as they share their stories and lived experiences. A major benefit coming out of the past year is that we are more prepared than ever to engage in very complex systems-level work and evaluations.

"Going forward, I hope CUP and other researchers can use the privilege we have in the university to put ourselves in more of those scary, difficult, systems-level discussions. These are the places where we get to the root causes, what's preventing them from being addressed, and how to respond to them.

"Many faculty members are extremely privileged and don't need to engage with people who are struggling on a daily basis. As academics, we can often speak about things that other people would lose their job for raising their voices about. If we don't go to some of those gritty, gritty spaces, I don't know who can."

deepening partnerships

matt ormandy



THE "PULLING TOGETHER" STATUE OUTSIDE DRAYON VALLEY'S CIVIC CENTRE, WHICH EMBODIES THE TOWN'S OFFICIAL MOTTO.

Matt Ormandy is a Research Coordinator working primarily on CUP's partnership with the Town of Drayton Valley, which focuses on the town's Zero Fee Tuition (ZFT) initiative. ZFT aims to help students attend post-secondary institutions that partner with the town, encourage residents to stay in Drayton Valley, and diversify the local economy.

When CUP began its partnership with Drayton Valley in 2021, the goals were to better understand how to sustain a model of municipally funded education and evaluate the extent to which ZFT creates resilient and inclusive economies. Throughout 2022-2023, Matt says, CUP became increasingly involved in discussions with community members, businesses, and officials around the overarching educational vision for the town.

For example, researchers recently spoke to local youth to better understand their future educational goals and secured a grant through the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) to work with the town's youth advisory committee. The team is also interested in reaching out to businesses and other local organizations to identify possible supporters and funding sources for ZFT.

"We're starting to become more attentive to questions around how we can widen our community connections and bring new partners into the project," he says. "We are also beginning to think about areas somewhat beyond the initial focus, such as how post-secondary education in a rural community supports municipal goals regarding the social determinants of health."

Matt explains that CUP's initial data collection created "ripple effects" in the sense that it expanded the scope and direction of the project. Survey and interview data collected from town staff and officials inspired research questions that led to connecting with high school students, and the team's involvement on municipal committees arose from a need to learn more about issues they identified through analysis.

The team recently observed the early effects of ZFT on recipients as well as their families and communities.

"For example, we spoke to the first cohort of healthcare aid students who received support from ZFT about six months after their program. Many told us they're feeling more confident in their jobs and lives. Some of them are on the bargaining team for their union now, so they're continuing to have an impact on their workplaces and the systems they live in."

As CUP's role within the town has grown, Matt says, so have the challenges often associated with community-based participatory research.

"One of the biggest challenges is communication—even knowing whom to speak to and how. When partnering with a relatively complex organization like a municipality, it is important to develop strong connections with individuals who are enthusiastic and inspired by the project. Our work has been greatly supported by the mayor and coordinators who live in town and have longstanding relationships with residents. These connections help build an environment of trust in which difficult conversations or disagreements can happen in a productive way."

While the "ripples" and early impacts of ZFT are promising, Matt cautions that economic development and systems change take time. We can expect to see further positive impacts, he says, but this momentum must be supported by administrators and policymakers to become sustainable.

"Having a unified goal is what creates and encourages these kinds of ripple effects," he says. "That's why we're trying to bring more people on board who see the importance of ZFT. Without broad support, it's easy for the progress to disappear, especially if funding is taken away."

navigating systems

claire brandenburg and janelle knoop

Claire Brandenburg and Janelle Knoop are Research Coordinators working on CUP's partnership with EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE). CUP has been involved with EPE since it was first formed as a mayoral task force in 2014. Today, EPE is an independent entity with a city-approved strategy. CUP works with EPE in developing systems-level approaches to fighting poverty in Edmonton.


Throughout 2022-2023, CUP has been involved in two of EPE's "game-changer" areas. The Indigenization area has involved the convening of an Indigenous Circle to guide EPE's work, while the Inclusive Economy area aims to address systems-level economic barriers through research and connecting stakeholders in Edmonton.

Claire and Janelle describe CUP's work as creating, tracking, and furthering the "ripple effects" of EPE's interventions while evaluating and documenting these efforts. For example, CUP frequently processes EPE's work and presents it back to them to help identify new opportunities for action or reflection. CUP also helped the Inclusive Economy team develop its strategic plan.

"Over the past few years," says Janelle, "CUP has facilitated learning about workforce development and policy grounded in research and evaluation. In response to this information, the Inclusive Economy team shifted their focus from convening workforce development agencies, many of which don't have the capacity for systems change, to gaining a better understanding of the workforce development system itself."

In many ways, they explain, EPE is an experimental project. There is no precedent for a systems-level poverty-reduction initiative in a city with Edmonton's size and context. The nature of the initiative requires EPE staff to follow and further momentum wherever they find it in the city, which has challenged CUP to develop an evaluation plan appropriate to EPE's fluid approach.

"For the 2022-2023 year," says Janelle, "we took a leap of faith and built the evaluation plan around tracking learning as an outcome. This means we would focus on tracking qualitatively what each



PANEL
DISCUSSION
BETWEEN
CUP AND EPE
COLLEAGUES AT
CITY HALL AT CUP'S
ANNUAL CELEBRATION
EVENT IN OCTOBER 2022.

Inclusive Economy and Indigenization staff member was learning and how this informed their ongoing and future work. This more malleable approach allows us to remain responsive to EPE's changing work plans."

CUP researchers have experienced numerous challenges in the context of the CUP-EPE partnership over the past few years, which can be attributed to the inherent difficulties of working at a systems level. One obstacle has been uncertainty around process and how the partners should be interacting. But difficulty, Claire and Janelle note, should not be avoided in the context of community-based work. It is often where the most important lessons are.

"We hope that our dynamic of 'rippling back and forth,' as messy as it may be, will be a helpful and realistic example of what systems-level initiatives look like," says Claire. "While the work we do is specific to Edmonton, we hope other researchers and organizations can learn from us what works and what doesn't work when it comes to advocating for an inclusive economy, Indigenization, and more. Moreover, we hope they can learn the benefits and pitfalls of tackling poverty from a deliberate systems-change perspective."

They advise other researchers working in systems-change contexts not to be discouraged by challenges inherent in the work.

"Follow the ebbs and flows," says Claire. "With something as big and wide-ranging as poverty elimination, it's hard to know when a particular focus area will be promising and when it needs to simmer in the background. Systems change is slow and messy. Researchers and evaluators need to be patient and responsive to changing priorities."



exploring impact

li yu

Li Yu is a Postdoctoral Fellow working on CUP's partnership with the Edmonton Community Development Company (ECDC), a community-owned non-profit aiming to revitalize the McCauley and Alberta Avenue neighbourhoods.

Founded in 2017, ECDC is the first organization in Alberta to use a community development corporation (CDC) model. In recent years, ECDC's scope has narrowed due to capacity issues, and its current priority is on restoring problem properties. ECDC also created the McCauley Development Cooperative (MDC), which fundraised \$2 million to buy a street mall in McCauley called La Piazza with the aim of turning it into a community-owned hub.

Over the past year, Li and his team's primary goal was to understand the perspectives of community members impacted by ECDC's interventions. Their second goal was to evaluate ECDC's impact and progress. Li says his focus has evolved, however, after spending a great deal of time speaking with McCauley and Alberta Avenue residents. He is currently developing a report to present the interview data back to ECDC and guide decision-making.

"It's very important for researchers working with communities to visit the places and get a physical sense of what people are talking about," he says. "That's a building. That's a park. That's how you get from point A to point B. When I first started this research, I would often drive to Alberta Avenue and

McCauley and just walk around, buy something, have a coffee, and explore the place.

"The first thing I sought to do was understand the experiences of residents and business owners. People who are on the frontlines of what we can call 'community decline.' What have they witnessed in terms of decline? Do they feel the city, non-profits, and community organizations have done what they can to address the problems they're seeing?"

Li says these conversations have provided new and nuanced perspectives about housing and economic barriers in Edmonton, which is key to understanding how ECDC and other non-profits can enact positive change as well as the possible pitfalls of their actions.

"As researchers, we're going into these spaces with the intention of collecting all perspectives, positive or negative. The interviews are open-ended, and every story can open a completely new outlook on the issue.

"For example, I've met people who considered La Piazza to be a dilapidated hub of social disorder and others who perceive MDC's purchase of the building to be a force of gentrification. Many people have more nuanced views. More data must be collected to verify some of these claims, but what's important is that all these perspectives need to be heard to get a full picture of MDC's intervention and understand the complexities of using a community-owned model in a commercial context."

Li says his research illuminates how data collection can lead to unexpected changes within projects. Researchers and organizations involved in community-engaged initiatives should expect challenges to their theoretical views and understandings of what's best for the community.

"But these challenges make me think more deeply," he says. "They are what excites me most as a researcher. One of the most fascinating things about community-engaged research is that you have to anticipate that you'll be surprised—and yet when that moment comes, you are still surprised."

evaluating a principles-based model

madeleine kruth

Madeleine Kruth is currently a medical student and the Research Evaluation Coordinator at the New Canadians Health Centre (NCHC), which launched in 2021 and has a longstanding relationship with the ECN and CUP. The NCHC acts as a transitional care space for government-assisted refugees in Edmonton. Madeleine was previously a faculty member at Brandon University's Faculty of Health Studies, where she helped researchers coordinate and implement projects on topics including refugee mental health.

In the early days of the ECN-NCHC partnership, a major focus was establishing a “principles-based” model of care. Distinct from an “outcomes-based” model, a principles-based model establishes an organization’s values and ethos and is created in consultation with service users and people with lived experience. The ECN helped develop five principles that underpin the NCHC’s goal of socially responsible, equitable, and inclusive care provision.

Since taking up her position in April 2023, Madeleine has been implementing NCHC’s evaluation framework, which is grounded in the principles-based model. This involves connecting stakeholders, navigating university ethics approval, and supporting knowledge mobilization activities. Bringing the model to life continues to require a strong collective effort by researchers, NCHC directors, administrators, and staff.

“It’s been such a labour to ensure it’s integrated,” she says, “and it deeply informs the evaluation we’re doing now. While we are recording outcomes, we are also looking at how the principles inform the way care is delivered. This is sort of novel in terms of refugee health care in Canada, so we also want to describe the approach, promote it a bit, and inspire others to take notice.”

Madeleine’s connections as a medical student have been an asset to the partnership. For example, it has made it easier for her to connect the NCHC to other medical students seeking community service placements and develop a process to facilitate a service learning program. A primary way the partnership creates “ripple effects,” she says, is by

generating opportunities for students who will enter their careers with greater awareness of refugee health and the novel research approaches used at the NCHC.

The NCHC, Madeleine explains, will also have powerful long-term impacts on Edmonton, which has for years been without a primary care space specifically for refugees.

“Many people can appreciate how, if you can’t access the care you need, it becomes the most important thing in your life. The NCHC helps by having a more unified service provision model that is accessible, easy to understand, and ultimately connects people to permanent family care providers. Also, many of the staff at the NCHC are new Canadians themselves. They’re able to take ownership of the space, and the number of people coming and going creates vibrancy throughout the building and surrounding community.”

While NCHC staff and researchers do think about systems change, Madeleine acknowledges this can lead to feelings of disillusionment.

“In an ideal world, maybe decisions would all be informed by rigorous data collection, and all research would be fair, equitable, and well-designed. But anyone who’s been paying attention in the past three years knows that things don’t work that way. And as we become more polarized as a society, it is going to be harder to fund needed support services.

“This isn’t to say there isn’t room for advocacy and innovation. But spending too much time dwelling on things can be exhausting. Focusing on the impact you can have with each individual can be enough to remedy that frustration of being a part of a system that doesn’t always work.”

NCHC STAFF AND RESEARCHERS (LEFT TO RIGHT: ASTRID VELASQUEZ, MADELEINE KRUTH, ANITA EWAN, EMMA MONAGHAN)





HEAD START
CLASSROOM.
CREDIT: APRIL
MACDONALD
KILLINS.

shifting paradigms

sarah scott and april macdonald killins

Sarah Scott is a Research Coordinator whose focus is on CUP's work with the ABC Head Start Society, which is part of the Edmonton Head Start Project, a collaboration that also includes Alder Academy and e4c. April MacDonald Killins is the Executive Director of the ABC Head Start Society.

The Edmonton Head Start Project launched in 1994, combining the efforts of three Head Start providers with a shared mission to support children's growth and development in a comprehensive preschool program. In 2019, the partner organizations asked CUP to help them understand and find solutions for the increasingly complex behavioural challenges in the classroom. Since then, CUP has grown to become an integral partner to ABC Head Start and the wider project.

"What's been most striking about this project," says Sarah, "is that the Head Start organizations were so open and committed to learning from the beginning. They genuinely wanted to understand why behaviour had become increasingly complex and, most importantly, they wanted to learn what they could do to better support young children, their families, and staff. They've then applied the evidence we gathered in many innovative ways, relying on their own expertise and organizational contexts."

April says the evolution of her organization's partnership with CUP was an organic process, with partners inviting one another to share findings, present at conferences, explore data, and ultimately co-author a final report. Today, ABC Head Start's team regularly reaches out to CUP for resources and support with evaluation and data analysis.

In 2022-2023, CUP was involved in evaluating ABC Head Start's pilot project to implement the SCERTS® model, which is a research-based framework designed to enhance the communication and emotional competence of preschool learners. The evaluation results led directly to what April calls a "paradigm shift" across ABC Head Start program locations.

"We really started to see new perspectives emerging," she says. "Behaviour was being discussed as a function of communication in the classroom domain rather than a problem situated in the child's domain. Detaching behaviour from 'good' or 'bad' allows us to get curious about the communication behind the behaviour and decode what the child is trying to accomplish."

ABC Head Start has used its learnings from the SCERTS® evaluation to inform its long-term plans for evidence-based practice. All agency staff are now trained in SCERTS® as well as Safe Management, a framework that teaches crisis prevention and crisis management to maximize desirable outcomes when working with children.

"A challenge for these types of projects is often that organizations are too busy or low on resources and capacity to gather and apply evidence," says Sarah. "It is commendable that the Edmonton Head Start Project decided to intentionally dedicate time and effort to this. They're a role model for other organizations looking to make evidence-based decisions and remain committed to learning."

The Edmonton Head Start Project is advancing the "ripple effects" of the research through knowledge sharing. Partners recently released the final report of their multi-year project with CUP and plan to continue sharing the findings with other organizations and policymakers. They also presented at the AISCA Teacher's Convention in 2022 and at a showcase organized by the Faculty of Extension in 2019.

"Our team at ABC Head Start has learned so much by following the SCERTS® evaluation plan that CUP created for us," April says. "CUP provided a roadmap by giving us the tools and timeline, and we executed the evaluation activities on our own. This built great capacity inside the organization, and we still use that plan as a template when we set out to study other projects."

building on collaborations

mackenzie martin

Mackenzie Martin is a Research Associate working on CUP's early childhood learning and development portfolio and collaborating with community partners on issues facing parents, families, and educators. She works closely with several organizations including the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC), which includes members from the YMCA, the Muttart Foundation, Child Care Now, the Edmonton Public Library, and the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA).

Mackenzie arrived at CUP in May 2023 on the heels of completing her PhD at the University of Oxford, during which she evaluated the implementation of a parenting program for 35,000 families in Tanzania. In her current role, she continues to build on her research into family programs and has been quick to pick up CUP's long-standing relationships in early learning and child care (ELCC). Stakeholders in this space are grappling with a variety of issues impacting parents and educators, Mackenzie says, especially in light of the roll-out of the bilateral child care agreement between Alberta and Canada.

"My transition into this role was smoother than expected thanks to CUP's embeddedness in the ELCC community," she says. "This, and the enthusiasm of our partners, has made it easier for me to understand diverse perspectives, learn directly from educators, and gain in-depth knowledge of policies and trends affecting parents and educators today."

From 2022-2023, CUP was involved in an array of ELCC projects seeking to bring research to issues affecting educators and parents. For example, CUP and AECEA are collaborating on a community-engaged research project to propose a wage grid for early childhood educators. This project was the focus of CUP's [2023 IMPACTS report](#). CUP and community partners are also engaged in conversations to mobilize findings of the [Journeys Project](#), which in 2022 released a report on the lived experiences of ethnocultural and newcomer families accessing early learning and care in Edmonton.



ECELC MEETING AT THE
ENDPOVERTYEDMONTON
OFFICE IN SEPTEMBER 2023

Recently, CUP has been working on a survey conducted in collaboration with ECELC and the Muttart Foundation. Two CUP researchers—Dr. Jeff Bisanz and PhD student Ping Lam Ip—are involved with the survey, which collected data from 1,479 Alberta parents and guardians regarding their early learning and child care arrangements. Partners hope the results will support advocacy and evidence-based decisions around child care in the coming years.

"ELCC is an exciting environment to be working in," Mackenzie says, reflecting on the ongoing projects and ones on the horizon in her new role. "It's also a complicated one as early learning and care is deeply related, for example, to value-based questions like what it means to be a family, who should be taking care of kids, and how much the government should support family life. These are topics we have discussed as Canadians for a long time, but now we're in a policy window that allows us to revisit some of these questions. CUP can play an important role by continuing to bring researchers and community partners together to bridge science and practice."

from evaluation to knowledge mobilization

pamela mellon and jessica haight

Pamela Mellon is the Project Coordinator of CUP's partnership with All in For Youth (AIFY), which delivers a school-based wraparound social support model for youth experiencing vulnerabilities in Edmonton schools. Jessica Haight is a Graduate Research Assistant completing her master's degree in Health Promotion at the School of Public Health. AIFY is a collaboration of ten organizations, including Edmonton Public Schools, Edmonton Catholic Schools, BGCBigs, e4c, and The Family Centre. In September 2022, the AIFY model expanded from five to eight schools.

When CUP began evaluating AIFY in 2016, the team was considered external evaluators and relatively removed from the project's leadership and operations. Over the years, Pamela says, CUP's community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach led researchers to being more engaged with stakeholders and considered true collaborators in AIFY. Partners, including CUP, meet regularly with the understanding that working together is the best way to support youth and families.

CUP's most consistent role in the project has been to lead data collection and analysis, integrate learning into ongoing AIFY conversations, and produce an annual evaluation report. The most significant change, Pamela says, occurred just recently when the team began discussions about pivoting their attention from evaluation to knowledge mobilization. This new focus was inspired by data that identified a lack of awareness among AIFY school staff about the holistic nature of available wraparound supports.

"In meetings with stakeholders, we brought up the findings from our year six evaluation about the lack of awareness," Jessica says. "It took hold, and this eventually led to the re-designing of a professional development curriculum for school leadership and agency staff. This is an exciting outcome and ripple effect of the earlier data collection. Now, schools are building the awareness needed to better support the wraparound model."

"The professional development component arose from us being in schools and talking to people," says Pamela. "It also comes from us being in those operational meetings and bringing that data-based perspective. For AIFY, this re-design is about going back to basics, focusing on what we mean by wraparound, and strengthening the wraparound model, which looks different in each school."

Societal pressures are also driving the need to apply evaluation findings. AIFY is well designed to support youth, says Pamela, but the severity of the youth mental health crisis puts enormous strain on funding and resources across organizations. AIFY's nutrition program has also seen greater need in the face of rising food insecurity after the pandemic.

"The needs are undeniable," says Pamela. "Mobilizing knowledge means bringing the perspectives gained from staff, families, and students on the ground to inform decision-making for programming and demonstrate the initiative's impact to potential funders as AIFY seeks sustainability."

Pamela says it takes time for "ripple effects" to emerge and spread in the context of community-based research. However, CUP has been fortunate to witness and advance some of these ripples because it invests in long-term partnerships.

"When I started in January 2023," she says, "I was really excited about the participatory element. This is the cutting edge of CBPR, bringing together this committed group of partners all invested in the health and well-being of children and families. We know CUP invests the time to make sure these relationships can be built. Otherwise, our involvement wouldn't have lasted as long as it has."

LEFT: CREDIT: ALL IN FOR YOUTH

RIGHT: SPRUCE AVENUE JUNIOR HIGH, ONE OF EIGHT AIFY SCHOOLS, TAKEN BY A STUDENT FOR A PHOTOVOICE PROJECT CONDUCTED BY CUP



graduate student reflections mary-frances smith



Mary-Frances Smith is a student in the Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE) program in the School of Public Health. She leads CUP's partnership with AECEA to develop and propose a wage grid for Alberta early childhood educators (ECEs). She has years of experience as an ECE. Her supervisor is ECN director Rebecca Gokiart.

Mary-Frances decided she wanted to pursue a thesis about ECE compensation and working conditions while taking the Exploring Early Childhood Curriculum course at MacEwan University. The reflective assignments had her returning to the issue that most ECEs describe being too strapped for time and resources to reflect on their practice, seek professional development, or further their careers.

"I believe that if you want to know the answers to something in society, you need to ask the people who are on the ground," she says. "So I've always imagined working directly with ECEs as part of my thesis.

"My research work started with that one small inquiry about ECEs. Then came the ripples. First, I was accepted into grad school, then I was invited by Rebecca to go into the community, and then we invited the community partner to join us on this journey. The ripple moved out into a pan-Canadian team of graduate students who have been engaged in this project since May 2022."

In February 2023, Mary-Frances and her team released the first of several reports based on research around the wage grid recommendation. In it, they provide an environmental scan, literature review, and critical analysis of the issues surrounding the establishment of an ECE wage grid. In summer 2023, they began focus groups with child care facility owners and operators and interviews with ECEs to collect perspectives on a possible wage grid, which they hope will inform policy and advocacy work.

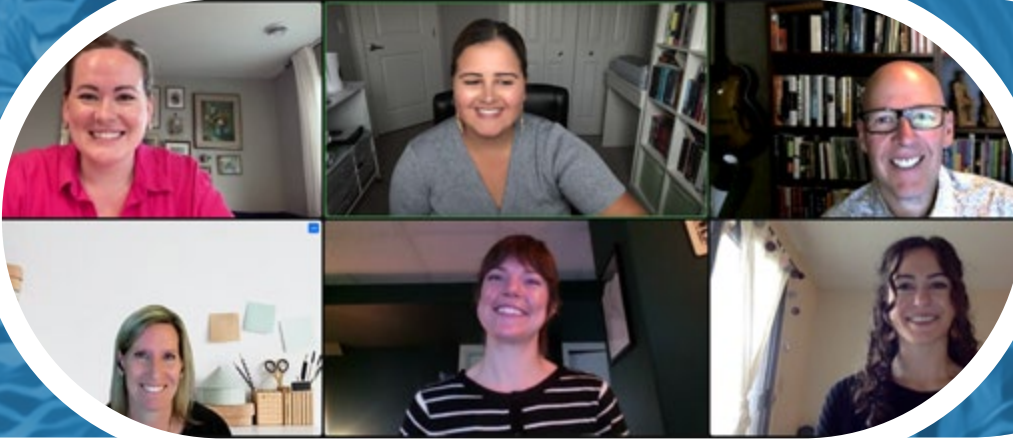
ECN RESEARCHERS (LEFT TO RIGHT: JESSICA HAIGHT, PIETER DE VOS, PRIMITIVO ILUMIN, MARY-FRANCES SMITH)

"The conversations are professional and kind," she says. "Operators generally want a wage grid to be in place, but they're uncertain about the details of its roll-out. They agree with the values, but they're worried about the implementation. Lots of provinces have already created wage grids, but the fact that we're speaking to owners, operators, and ECEs is unique. We hope we can bring the voices of these stakeholders to the table when we have conversations with the government in the future."

Mary-Frances says a powerful "ripple effect" of CUP's projects, including the wage grid project, is the learning experience they provide students. CUP, she says, is an excellent training ground for community-engaged researchers and has a track record of launching the careers of leaders in academia, the non-profit sector, government, and beyond.

"I had an interesting conversation with my team the other day about the value they brought to the success of the wage grid project," she says. "This is a question I often ask because it centres on building self-affirmation rather than external validation. What was most interesting was hearing about the impact the project had on them as researchers. All team members indicated that this hands-on work has helped them understand the importance of the community-engaged process and the rigour required.

"The support system in place through CUP and the ECN is also really fantastic. I encourage anyone involved with CUP to really embed themselves in the communities and networks surrounding CUP and the ECN."



ECN-AMP PROJECT TEAM. (TOP LEFT TO BOTTOM RIGHT: COURTNEY COX, KIRSTY KEYS, AL CHAPMAN, REBECCA GOKIERT, LAUREN ALSTON, RACHEL ZUKIWSKY)

graduate student reflections

kirsty keys

Kirsty Keys is a fourth-year PhD candidate in the School of Child and Clinical Psychology in the Faculty of Education. Her work with the ECN centres on projects with the Alberta Mentoring Partnership (AMP). Her dissertation focuses on raising children within a First Nation in northern Alberta.

"I may be just starting the data analysis process that I thought I'd have done in March," says Kirsty, "but that's just part of the community-based research process, right? We have to go back and forth to make sure the work makes sense for the community and builds relationships. So while I'd like to stop living on a student budget, I didn't come into my dissertation just to do a dissertation."

Kirsty joined the ECN in 2021 after hearing about the position from her supervisor Christina Rinaldi, who is a professor in the Faculty of Education and a member of CUP's Steering Committee. She wasn't sure at that time how to develop her research project, and she noticed there was a lack of research literature on parenting in Indigenous communities.

"The reason community-based research is so important, in my opinion, is that you can focus on doing something meaningful in the world instead of just being seen by, say, three people who then cite you for their own dissertations.

"My transition to the community-based research space was actually quite a learning experience. I had to switch off a lot of my own theoretical perspectives and biases. Speaking for myself, I've learned how to engage with communities, formulate better research

questions, apply mixed methods, and navigate the nuts and bolts of the process like ethics applications. Now when I attend conferences, I am surprised to meet people who aren't familiar with community-based research, even as the work seems so important and natural to people in CUP who are doing it."

Kirsty says her experience with AMP has greatly enhanced her academic life by introducing her to evaluation practices and teaching opportunities. The partnership has connected her to hands-on opportunities, including working with the Yukon's First Nation School Board to build evaluation capacity. She has also acted as a facilitator for UEval.

"CUP is a very open and supportive environment. For example, we all have the opportunity to go to the Secretariat meetings. I feel I can say what's on my mind because what I say will be valued and listened to, which is a huge confidence-builder for a student researcher. CUP is also very focused on learning. I would never expect anyone at CUP to say 'Oh, I already know everything about that topic.'

"CUP is also unique in that it is a strong academic environment guided by successful women. Karen and Rebecca have an awesome ability to show interest in what students are doing and value student input. They're also really honest about their experiences—for example, of having family responsibilities but also successfully managing six projects at once. It is inspiring to see how you can have a rich life and still succeed in a space where women have been historically excluded and under-represented."

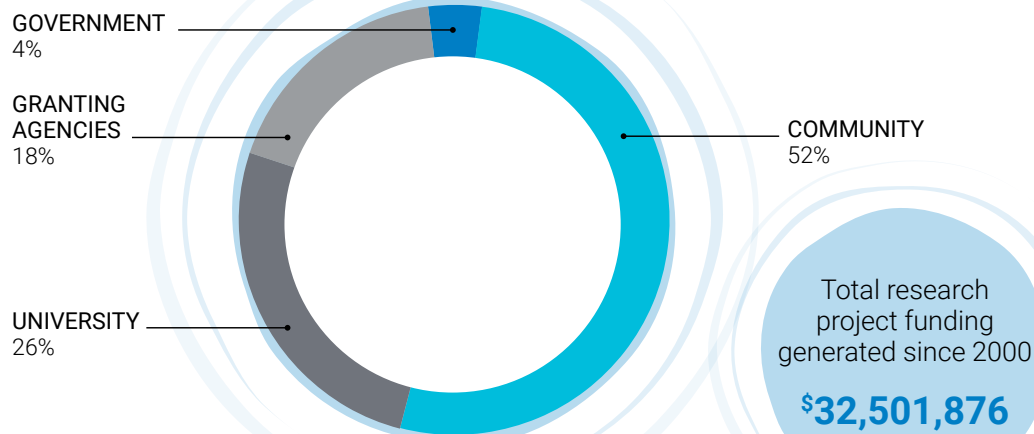
financials

CUP is constantly asking: How do communities' research interests align with government or foundation funding opportunities? How can we help communities access funding to support their research and evaluation needs? How can we leverage student expertise and scholarship opportunities to increase human resource capacity for community partners?

CUP's ability to ask and act on these types of questions depends on our long-standing funding relationships with community partners, agencies, and government. Reliable financial support ensures CUP projects continue to have short- and long-term "ripple effects" on students, organizations, and systems. We

also depend on the University of Alberta, which invests in our workspaces and faculty to provide a foundation from which to navigate these waters.

Core operational funding allows CUP staff to dedicate themselves to building trusting partnerships, becoming immersed in community issues, organizing complex projects, and mobilizing knowledge to improve programs, practices, and policies. Project-specific funding supports CUP's research teams. In the 2022-2023 reporting period, CUP managed a total of \$1.34 million in combined project and operational funding.



presentations

Alberta Early Learning and Care Workforce Stability Project Team. September to March 2022. Presentations to Early Childhood Development Branch of Children's Service (Government of Alberta), Child Care Now, AECEA Connect Webinar, and CUP Steering Committee.

Boyce, Ayesha, Jill Chouinard, Yvonne Chiu, and **Rebecca Gokiert.** May 2022. "Culturally Responsive and Equitable Evaluation." Online panel hosted by the Evaluation Capacity Network. [Link](#).

Daniels, Jason, Kirsty Keys, R. Tong, and Jenae Gauthier. May 2022. "Analyze & Mobilize: Using What You've Learned from Your Evaluation." Online webinar for the Alberta Mentoring Partnership Pre-Eval Series.

Daniels, Jason, Kirsty Keys, R. Tong, and Jenae Gauthier. April 2022. "Ethical Considerations: Ethics in Evaluation & Working with Youth and Vulnerable Families." Online webinar for Alberta Mentoring Partnership Pre-Eval Series.

de Vos, Pieter and Primitivo Illumin. 2022. "Journeys through Early Learning and Child Care" (presentation). Evaluation Capacity Network: Community-Driven Evaluation and Capacity Building Lunch & Learn. [Link](#).

Edwards, Karen. April 2022. "Engaging for Impact: CUP's Model of Community Engaged Research." Sociology Graduate Student Association.

Edwards, Karen. October 2022. "Complex Partnerships." Guest lecture for MACE 501.

Edwards, Karen. November 2022. "The Complicated Commitment to CBPR." Guest Lecture for SPH 503.

Edwards, Karen and Mary-Frances Smith. December 2022. "Context & Considerations: Creating a Jasper Early Learning and Care Strategy." Presentation to Jasper Town Council.

Ferdinands, Alexa, Brooks Hanewich, Dana Wagner, Tina Watchman, and Maria Mayan. May 2022. "Examining the outcomes of zero-fee education in building a resilient, inclusive economy in Drayton Valley." Alberta Centre for Sustainable Rural Communities (ACSRC) at the University of Alberta.

Ferdinands, Alexa, Brooks Hanewich, Dana Wagner, Tina Watchman, and Maria Mayan. 2022. "Examining the Implementation and Health Outcomes of Zero-Fee Post-secondary Education in Drayton Valley, Alberta." Public Health 2022 (online conference).

Gokiert, Rebecca and the Evaluation Capacity Network. May 2022. *Community-Based Evaluation and Capacity Building*. Online webinar hosted by the Evaluation Capacity Network.

Haight, Jessica and Augustine Botwe. 2022. "All in For Youth: Evaluation of a School-Based Support Intervention" (presentation). Evaluation Capacity Network: Community-Driven Evaluation and Capacity Building Lunch & Learn. [Link](#).

Haight, Jessica. September 2022. "Public health, healthcare, and the social determinants of health" (virtual lecture). Action for Health Communities: Health Literacy for Newcomers.

Haight, Jessica, Jason Daniels, and Rebecca Gokiert. May 2023. "Fostering Children and Youth's Mental Health through a Collaborative, School-based Support Intervention" (poster). Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE): 51st Conference (Toronto).

Haight, Jessica, Jason Daniels, and Rebecca Gokiert. May 2023. "Fostering children's mental health: A collaborative school mental health service delivery model" (poster). University

of British Columbia Centre for Health Services and Policy Research: 35th Annual Health Policy Conference (Vancouver).

Knoop, Janelle. "Culturally Responsive Evaluation Methods and Design." Presentation to the EndPovertyEdmonton Indigenous Circle.

Knoop, Janelle and Maria Mayan. February 2023. "How to Evaluate Inclusive Economy and Indigenization Strategies." EndPovertyEdmonton Stewardship Round Table.

Knoop, Janelle and Maria Mayan. December 2022. "How to Evaluate Systems Change." EndPovertyEdmonton.

Mayan, Maria and Dana Wagner. October 6 and December 6, 2022. "Marketing of the Drayton Valley Zero Fee Program." Invited presentations to MARK 432: Digital Marketing taught by Onita Blankenfeldt.

Mayan, Maria. January 2022. "How community-level organizations can work with partners and use innovative strategies to improve early child health outcomes." CIHR Best Brains Exchange: Supporting the Healthy Development of Young Children Facing Health Equity. Virtual.

Mayan, Maria, Brooks Hanewich, Susannah Cameron, Karen Bruno, and Karen Gingras. October 2022. Panel response to "How Non-profits Will Solve Government's Priciest Problems" by Shaun Loney. CUP Annual Celebration Event.

Mayan, Maria and Alexa Ferdinands. January 2023. "Tuition Support to Increase Participation in Post-Secondary Education and Training and for Rural Revitalization." The International Academic Forum on Research in Education (Hawaii).

Mayan, Maria and Alexa Ferdinands. May 2022. "Initial outcomes of the Zero-Fee Tuition Program." Presentation to Drayton Valley City Council.

Puinean, Giulia and Melissa Tremblay. March 2023. "Some people shouldn't have jobs like that': A qualitative study of teen mothers' experiences accessing mental health services" (poster). UBC Centre for Health Services and Policy Research Annual Conference (Vancouver).

Puinean, Giulia, Melissa Tremblay, and the Terra Centre for Teen Parents. November 2022. "A qualitative exploration of teen mothers' experiences accessing mental health services" (poster). Women and Children's Health Research Institute Research Day.

Yu, Li, Maria Mayan, and Amber Ali. "The ECDC Nexus: Navigating the Middle Ground for Community Revival." Presentation to CUP Steering Committee.

publications

All in For Youth and the **Community-University Partnership (CUP)** for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families. 2022. *All in For Youth Year 6 Evaluation Report (2021-22)*. Report. [Link](#).

Browne, Nadia, Amanda Newton, **Rebecca Gokiert**, et al. October 2022 "The application and reporting of motivational interviewing in managing adolescent obesity: A scoping review and stakeholder consultation." DOI: 10.1111/obr.13505. [Link](#).

Buschmann, Rob. June 2022. "Headed Up, But Still Behind." Brief for Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC). [Link](#).

Buschmann, Rob, Jennifer Fischer-Summers, Mary-Frances Smith, and Anja Dzunic. October 2022. "Context and Considerations for Creating a Jasper Early Learning and Child Care Strategy." Report for the Municipality of Jasper.

Conde, Alfredo and **Alexa Ferdinands**. April 2022. "Working Hard or Hardly Working? Who are Canada's Working Poor?" *Journal of Poverty*. DOI: 10.1080/10875549.2022.2071663. [Link](#).

de Vos, Pieter, Naheed Mukhi, **Primitivo Illumin**, Yvonne Chiu, and **Rebecca Gokiart**. 2023. *Journeys through Early Learning & Childcare in Edmonton: The Experiences of Ethnocultural Families*. Report. [Link](#).

Eaton, Andrea, Geoff D.C. Ball, **Rebecca Gokiart**, et al. March 2023. "The Impacts of COVID-19 Restrictions on Physical Activity in Children and Youth: A Systematic Review of Qualitative Evidence." *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*. DOI: 10.1123/jpah.2022-0350. [Link](#).

Eaton, Andrea, Michele Dyson, **Rebecca Gokiart**, Hasu Rajani, et al. June 2023. "Priority topics for child and family health research in community-based paediatric health care according to caregivers and health care professionals." *Paediatrics & Child Health*. DOI: 10.1093/pch/pxac106. [Link](#).

Ferdinands, Alexa, Brooks Hanewich, **Tina Wachman**, **Dana Wagner**, and **Maria Mayan**. Fall 2022. "Mapping the zero-fee tuition program to advance Drayton Valley's community economic development." Community report.

Gillies, Chistina, Rosanne Blanchet, **Rebecca Gokiart**, Anna Farmer, and Noreen Willows. September 2022. "Comprehensive Nutrition Interventions in First Nation-Operated Schools in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*. DOI: 10.3148/cjdpr-2021-039. [Link](#).

Gokiart, Rebecca, Cheryl Poth, **Bethan Kingsley**, Btissam El Hassar, and **Teresa Mejia**. 2022. "Responding to the Evaluation Capacity Needs of the Early Childhood Field: Insights from a Mixed Methods Community-based Participatory Design." *Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation*. DOI: 10.3138/cjpe.70920. [Link](#).

Janzen, Rich, Mischa Taylor, and **Rebecca Gokiart**. 2022. "Life Beyond Refuge: A System Theory of Change for Supporting Refugee Newcomers." *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*. DOI: 10.25071/1920-7336.40892. [Link](#).

Knoop, Janelle and **Maria Mayan**. "Navigating Systems-Level Workforce Development Collaboration in Edmonton." Report.

Mayan, Maria, **Alexa Ferdinands**, and **Dana Wagner**. 2022. "Initial Outcomes of the Zero-Fee Tuition Program." Community report.

Oster, Richard, Angela Grier, Rick Lightning, **Maria Mayan**, and Ellen Toth. 2023. "Diabetes and Culture: Time to Truly and Sincerely Listen to Indigenous Peoples" in *Walking Together, Working Together*. University of Alberta Press. Pages 207-230.

Meherali, Salima, Sarah Munro, **Giulia Puinean**, et al. March 2023. "Co-designing a Sexual Health App With Immigrant Adolescents: Protocol for a Qualitative Community-Based Participatory Action Research Study." *JMIR Research Protocols*. DOI: 10.2196/45389. [Link](#).

Puinean, Giulia and Melissa Tremblay. 2023. "Using community-based research to enhance mental health services for teen mothers." *Population Medicine*. DOI: 10.18332/popmed/164908. [Link](#).

Puinean, Giulia, **Rebecca Gokiart**, Mischa Taylor, **Shelly Jun**, and **Pieter de Vos**. 2022. "Evaluation in the field of early childhood development: A scoping review." DOI: 10.1177/1035719X221080575. [Link](#).

Quintanilha, Maira and **Maria Mayan**. 2022. "Cross-Lingual Focus Groups in Cross-Cultural Community-Based Participatory

Research" in *Handbook of Qualitative Cross-Cultural Research Methods*. Edward Elgar Publishing (United Kingdom). Pages 108-195.

Smith, Mary-Frances, **Miranda Brown**, and **Abhiroop Saha**. February 2023. "ECE wage-grid recommendations: A compensation framework review for the development of a target values-based wage grid for early childhood educators in Alberta." Report. [Link](#).

Tremblay, Melissa, **Rebecca Gokiart**, Karen Mottershead, and Jacqueline Pei. 2022. "Characteristics of Teen Families Accessing a Supportive Housing Program." *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*. DOI: 10.29173/cjfy29803. [Link](#).

Worthington, Paisley, Rebecca Stroud Stasel, Katrina Carbone, Jennifer Hughes, and Michelle Searle. 2023. "Learning by linking the Canadian Evaluation Society's student case competition within a graduate evaluation course." *New Directions for Evaluation*. DOI: 10.1002/ev.20536. [Link](#).

Yu, Li, Wei Xi, et al. 2023. "Determinants of housing moving intention of urban low-income residents in China: Life-cycle, lived experience, and place." *Transactions in Planning and Urban Research*. DOI: 10.1177/27541223231182255. [Link](#).

evalbytes

Every month, the Evaluation Capacity Network releases a snapshot overview of its ongoing evaluation and research projects.

- April 2023. "[The All in For Youth Initiative: Year 6 Evaluation.](#)"
- March 2023. "[Alberta Compensation Framework Project.](#)"
- February 2023. "[Building Evaluation Capacity with Diverse Needs in Alberta's Mentoring Sector.](#)"
- January 2023. "[Journeys through Early Learning and Childcare: Experiences of Ethnocultural Families \(Part 2\).](#)"
- December 2022. "[Evaluating Ourselves: A Summary of Findings from the Second Year of our Partnership Evaluation.](#)"
- December 2022. "[Tackling Challenge Areas in Evaluation.](#)"
- November 2022. "[EvalByte: LaboEval.](#)"
- October 2022. "[EvalByte: Documenting the Development of the New Canadians Health Centre \(part 2\).](#)"
- September 2022. "[ECN Partnership Evaluation Year 2.](#)"
- August 2022. "[Childhood Educator Wage Grid.](#)"
- July 2022. "[EvalByte: Documenting the Development of the New Canadians Health Centre.](#)"
- June 2022. "[Evaluating an Innovative Model of Experiential Co-Learning.](#)"
- May 2022. "[Journeys through Early Learning and Childcare: The Experience of Cultural Minority Families.](#)"
- April 2022. "[Bringing Awareness to Children, Youth, and Families' Mental Health During the Pandemic.](#)"

steering committee membership 2022-23

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University of Alberta

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Simic

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Beth Hunter

City of Edmonton

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