

The Architecture of Connection

2025-26
Annual Report

Building Sustainable Networks for Community-Engaged Research and Evaluation



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

Letter from CUP's Director

Karen Edwards

Director, Community-University Partnership (CUP)



This year marks my fifteenth year with CUP. In this time, it has been easy to take for granted what makes CUP special. It becomes second nature to see the bridge between rich community knowledge and the capacity and expertise of university researchers. It is logical to see the university as a key contributor to this city's diversity, vibrancy, wellbeing, and sustainability. But it is also inevitable to experience hurdles, complexities, and frustrations. Throughout all this, what sustains CUP is our relationships.

Our relationships are as diverse as the projects they represent: the mayor and council in a rural municipality, educators in Edmonton schools, an advocacy council, newcomer and refugee service providers, and researchers from across disciplines and institutions. In relation with one another, we are able to innovate, foster a collaborative vision, promote growth, and navigate complexities.

This year's report theme, "The Architecture of Connection," allows us to take stock of these relationships, showcase voices from across CUP, and illustrate how partners and researchers engage with CUP projects. Our 2024-2028 Strategic Plan creates a clear goal

to be a regional "hub of excellence" in community-engaged research. Over the past year, we focused on translating our core strategic roles (Capacity Builders, Community Connectors, Systems Thinkers, Co-Creators, and Activators) into concrete efforts that can serve our community for years to come. One central effort was the official launch of CUP Connect, a new online platform for responding to requests from communities and academics seeking research and evaluation support. Alongside this, we established an affiliate model, CUP Collaborators, which formalizes our connections with community and academic experts and creates an additional layer of capacity for CUP.

A key role for CUP remains cultivating the next generation of community-engaged leaders, researchers, and practitioners. At CUP, students and postdoctoral scholars are not merely trainees. Rather, they are actively embedded in community projects, gaining hands-on research and evaluation experience, mentorship, and essential skills in relational ethics, active listening, and collaborative problem-solving. These opportunities can enhance academic training with the skills and perspectives needed for lifelong civic leadership.

The stories in this report celebrate what becomes possible when research is anchored in mutual trust, humility, and long-term partnership. As you explore these pages, we invite you to connect with our teams, join our evolving network, and help us continue building the architecture of connection that supports thriving, equitable communities.

CUP's Year in Brief

During the January 2025 to December 2025 reporting period, CUP has:

- Engaged in 33 research and evaluation projects
- Collaborated with 96 organizational partners
- Mentored 31 students (Masters, PhD, and undergraduate)
- Brought 9,300 hours of student capacity to community projects
- Secured \$842,538 to support collaborative research and evaluation projects

Here are some of reflections we heard from CUP's partners as part of this past year's partner survey:

The dedication, insight, and thoughtful contributions of CUP staff and researchers are deeply valued and have positively contributed to our shared work in [the early learning and care sector].

Collaborating with CUP has expanded my perspective on the value of evidence-informed strategies and strengthened my skills in coordinating across diverse teams, navigating challenges, and adapting plans while keeping long-term goals in focus.

Steering Committee

CUP's Steering Committee provides critical guidance and direction to CUP to ensure that our activities and efforts reflect the issues that impact and influence the broader community. The Committee is essential for connecting CUP to organizational and community partners across Edmonton. In 2025-2026, the Steering Committee had 25 members representing non-profits, government, funders, community groups, and university faculties.



Michelle Maroto

Professor, Faculty of Arts (Academic Co-Chair)

When I think of architecture, I think of the planning and foundational pieces that allow for something bigger to happen. At CUP, those foundational pieces are the people and the network ties them together. In my time here, I've seen this network spread and solidify well beyond the Steering Committee. CUP has done significant work on formalizing its structure. I can see now all the ties that make CUP what it is, and it's clear CUP's reach is bigger than it first appears.

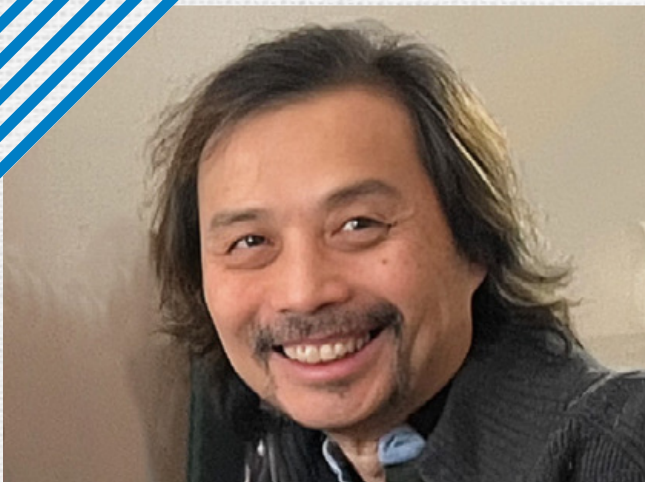
Joining CUP as a student, a partner, or as a mix of different roles, means joining a diverse and dedicated network that opens opportunities for collaboration and learning. For me, CUP has been a great resource for hearing about what's going on across Edmonton and understanding the issues that matter to different organizations. It has been an important resource for developing community-based research projects that really matter to the community.

Kourch Chan

Chief Operating Officer, e4c (Community Co-Chair)

There are many metaphors that capture the evolution of CUP over the past five years: maturing ecosystems, ripple effects, and branching out. Our newest strategic plan, which emphasizes CUP's foundational model, has given us the direction to review, assess, and build new forms of connection and collaboration. At the Steering Committee level, we have also become more focused on strategy, even if our discussions are often focused on specific research projects.

Remarkably, CUP continues to steward authentic ways of thinking, doing, and knowing within community-based settings while building the next generation of community leaders. Ultimately, our internal and partner relationships exemplify the principles of community-based research. We advance research *of* the community, *with* the community, and *by* the community to ensure the evidence is meaningful and actionable. We "walk the talk" among ourselves, even when no one is looking.



Architecture of Connection

CUP's 2024-2028 Strategic Plan calls on our centre to become a "hub of excellence" in community-engaged research by fulfilling five key roles: Capacity Builders, Community Connectors, Systems Thinkers, Co-Creators, and Activators. Our work over this past year focused on translating our strategic plan into concrete structural additions to our network. With the creation of CUP Connect and the CUP Collaborator Model, we have set up our centre for sustainable connections and impact for years to come.



Research brief based on the thesis "Understanding the experiences of newcomer ethnocultural families seeking early learning and child care services in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada" by Nashid Rahman (CUP Master Student)



CUP's first Curiosity & Connections event, which brought together partners, researchers, students, and community members for a morning of networking at University Commons (September 2025).

CUP as an Activator

Over the past year, we have been bringing our community-engaged model to life in more ways, more places, and for the benefit of more researchers and communities. We have leaned into our role as Activators in several ways in 2025-2026.

Mobilizing knowledge: We have been translating evidence from CUP projects into research briefs and policy documents. We have created community-facing reports for our partners in Drayton Valley, translated a former graduate student's thesis into a research brief for Edmonton's early learning and care sector, and converted several peer reviewed articles by CUP Collaborators into accessible formats.

Building our presence: This year, we officially relaunched CUP's website, which is our main digital presence. Our new website allows users to easily learn about CUP's mission, understand our work, and discover opportunities for collaboration.

Nurturing community-engaged research ecosystems: CUP has a long-term goal of strengthening networks for community-engaged research on campus and beyond. In 2025, we piloted a new event format called "Curiosity & Connections," envisioned as a regular gathering of researchers, partners, community members, and students to explore common concerns in a curiosity-driven environment.

CUP as a Connector

The past year saw the official launch of [CUP Connect](#), our new online platform for receiving, managing, and responding to requests for research and evaluation support. Piloted in 2024-2025, this tool formalizes and streamlines CUP's long-standing role as a "broker" of community-engaged research in Edmonton, giving communities an accessible way to connect with researchers and evaluation experts.

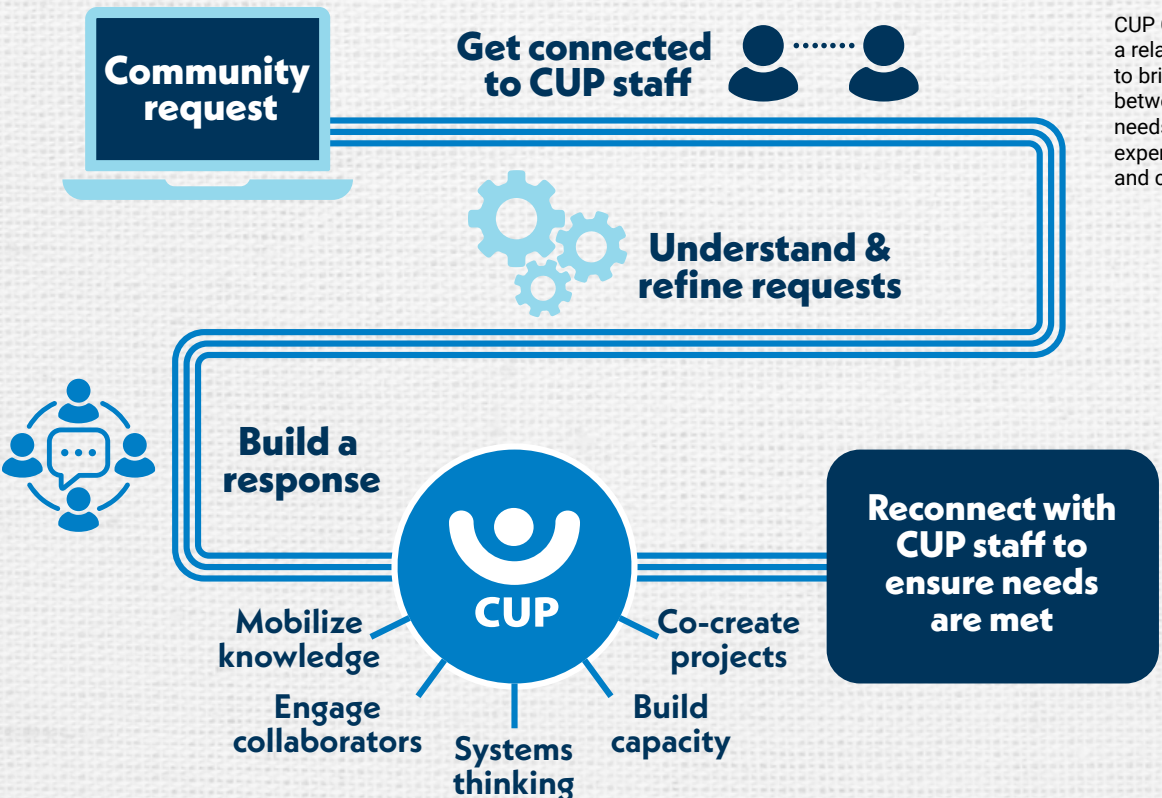
Since we began piloting CUP Connect, CUP has responded to 35 requests for support, including 27 community requests and 8 university-led requests.

I am hoping that this will be one of many collaborations with CUP, and thank you for your excellent support, work and leadership [...] The support I received strengthened the quality of the [project] planning. Specifically, it provided leadership and guidance that improved coordination, clarified key logistical and partnership considerations, and helped ensure the event was aligned with community-engaged principles. This support also enhanced the overall credibility and readiness of the initiative and helped build stronger connections between the university and community partners.

– CUP Connect user

Partnering for Impact: CUP & the TRSI Hub

CUP's relationships span disciplines across campus. The Transforming Research for Social Impact (TRSI) Hub is one of our most recent collaborations. The TRSI focuses on developing innovative methodologies that address complex social issues and create community-driven social change. As one of five co-directors, CUP ensures community partners are engaged in and contribute to all three areas of TRSI activity: education, engagement, and research.



CUP Connect follows a relational approach to bridging the gap between communities' needs and university expertise, resources, and capacity.

CUP Collaborators

CUP Collaborator Model

Learn more about CUP Collaborators on [CUP's website](#).

Over 2025-2026, CUP officially launched an affiliate model for our centre. CUP Collaborators are a network of community and academic experts who are dedicated to community-engaged research and share the core values of reciprocity, diversity of knowledge, and continuous learning. Developed in close consultation with our Steering Committee, this model formalizes our long-standing relationships across Edmonton and beyond while creating a more structured pathway for collaboration with CUP.

Collaborators have a reciprocal relationship with CUP. They might lead or co-lead CUP projects, collaborate on funding proposals with CUP, supervise CUP students, build capacity for community-engaged research, or help respond to requests through CUP Connect. In turn, Collaborators can access CUP's network, receive letters of support, get help with knowledge mobilization, and gain opportunities for student engagement.

In 2026, roughly 25 individuals signed up as CUP Collaborators. They represent a diversity of community organizations (school divisions, social innovation hubs, consulting services), academic disciplines (psychology, sociology, education, public health, and medicine), and post-secondary institutions (University of Alberta, MacEwan University, Concordia University of Edmonton).



CUP Collaborator Community of Practice meeting in August 2026

"Being a CUP Collaborator means being part of a research community that feels like home."

– Alexa Ferdinands

Collaborator Voices

Ozlem Cankaya

Associate Professor, MacEwan University, Department of Early Learning and Curriculum Studies:

Being a CUP Collaborator has created opportunities to bridge research, community engagement, and knowledge mobilization. My initial collaboration with CUP around a play-focused workshop grew into an ongoing partnership that has strengthened my research program and community impact. CUP helped bring together researchers, educators, and community organizations to share evidence and perspectives on children's play in accessible and practical ways [...] Overall, my experience with CUP demonstrated the value of reciprocal partnerships in which research informs community practice and community perspective informs my research program.

Alexa Ferdinands

Assistant Professor, University of Alberta, Faculty of Agriculture, Life, and Environmental Sciences (ALES):

Being a CUP Collaborator means being part of a research community that feels like home. It's a community built on shared values and a commitment to meaningful community engagement. As an early career researcher who is building my research program, being a CUP Collaborator gives me access to a diverse network of researchers and community partners whom I can turn to for both methodological expertise and mentorship. It helps me feel like I'm part of a broader network that genuinely wants to see one another succeed.

Roxanne Felix-Mah

Managing Partner, Social Impact Collective:

The Social Impact Collective has built a relationship with CUP in which we have a mutual understanding of each other's contexts, skillsets, and values. This relational approach provides grounding for co-thinking through complex issues, which is a big part of trying to address inequities in communities. When working on things like social policy, poverty, and community responses, you need colleagues to help you consider different implications and perspectives you haven't seen before. These conversations require trust, depth, and shared values, rather than a transactional approach.

CUP Projects

At any time, CUP's work includes a host of projects, many of them founded on long-term relationships with partners. We are committed to collaborating with communities at all stages of the research process, fostering environments that emphasize the value of community voices, lived experiences, and real-world needs. Here, we present the voices of CUP researchers alongside community partners with whom we share this journey.

Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN)

Learn more about the Evaluation Capacity Network on [CUP's website](#).

Shelly Jun

Research Coordinator, ECN:

For over a decade, the ECN has brought together scholars, community leaders, academics, and practitioners from across Canada to strengthen evaluation capacity in the early childhood, health, education, and social-serving sectors. Together, we have cultivated a network with 500+ members, trained 400+ emerging evaluators, responded to 150+ community evaluation capacity needs, and developed an online resource hub housing 600+ evaluation resources.

In partnership with communities and other post-secondaries, we have improved culturally responsive evaluations for equity-deserving communities (e.g., [New Canadians Health Centre](#), [Settlement Evaluation Hub](#)), promoted Indigenous-informed evaluation approaches (see our [webinar series](#)), and co-hosted innovative capacity-building competitions such as the [Evaluation Capacity Case Challenge \(EC³\)](#).

As our seven-year SSHRC Partnership Grant concludes, the ECN is envisioning our next chapter. We are examining the Canadian evaluation landscape, holding ongoing conversations with collaborators, and working through strategic questions about ECN priorities, partnerships, and direction. Looking ahead, we will continue to explore strategies for sector-wide support and impact.



"Dine Around Town" with the Evaluation Capacity Network, held during the Canadian Evaluation Society Annual Conference in May 2026 (Edmonton)

Rich Janzen

Executive Director, Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR):

The CCBR has been a long-time member of the ECN, sustained by a fruitful and reciprocal partnership. As a non-profit organization with over 40 years of community-based research and evaluation experience, CCBR was given the opportunity to lead the ECN's annual internal evaluation and participate on the ECN steering committee. Our collaboration led to partnering on a national initiative that built the evaluation capacity of refugee programs (funded by IRCC). The ECN also provided Community-Engaged Research & Evaluation (CERE) grants for CCBR to promote evaluation capacity-building in a variety of other ways (e.g., [Certificate Program in Community-Based Research](#) and [Evaluating Early Child Development Programs toolkit](#)). Most importantly, the ECN connects CCBR with like-minded partners to advance community-based evaluation nationwide.

Building a Foundational Understanding of Early Childhood Wellbeing in Edmonton

Learn more about Building a Foundational Understanding of Early Childhood Wellbeing in Edmonton on [CUP's website](#).



ECF – Early Childhood Development Sector Meeting, June 25, 2026

Safra Najeemudeen

Early Childhood Research and Evaluation Associate, CUP:

Over the past year, CUP partnered with Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF) on a local research project to understand how young children in Edmonton are doing. We convened an advisory committee that reviewed our early childhood wellbeing framework to ensure our research is grounded in four foundational principles: child wellbeing is multidimensional and interconnected, ecological and relational, shaped by equitable access and social structures, and best understood through a strengths-based and trauma-informed lens.

As findings emerged from our environmental scan, we shared them with community partners, keeping the research responsive to what they were seeing in their own work and reflective of the lived realities of young children and their families. This back-and-forth between the data and our community partners allows a complex research project to produce actionable findings for the sector.

"It is very difficult for me to express with words the gratitude for CUP and the shared commitment we have for the communities we serve."

– Astrid Velasquez

Rob Buschmann

Manager, Impact Assessment, Edmonton Community Foundation (ECF):

In 2025 and 2026, CUP and ECF worked together closely to help shape ECF's thinking around its new Early Childhood Development focus area. This collaboration included informal brainstorming sessions, larger community consultations, and ultimately a complex and often difficult research project—led by CUP—to understand how young children are doing in Edmonton. Throughout that research project, CUP kept ECF closely involved and shared important findings as they emerged. It has been wonderful to have CUP walking alongside us in this exciting work!

New Canadians Health Centre

Learn more about CUP's partnership with the New Canadians Health Centre on [CUP's website](#).

Jessica Haight

PhD Candidate, School of Public Health:

The New Canadians Health Centre (NCHC) provides newly arrived, government-assisted refugees with integrated primary healthcare for their first two years in Canada, building a strong foundation for health and community integration.

CUP's long-term research partnership with NCHC ensures the NCHC's model remains evidence-based to support planning, improvement, and knowledge sharing. Using mixed-methods research, we are building evidence about experiences and outcomes of refugees served by NCHC. In the past year, we published a study highlighting the first-hand experiences and outcomes of more than 30 refugee

patients. We are also continuing to strengthen the infrastructure needed to use patients' electronic medical record data for research



CUP researchers at the 2026 NCHC Conference.

and evaluation, deepening our understanding of the patient population and examining their continuity of care following transition from NCHC.

Astrid Velasquez

Executive Director, New Canadians Health Centre

The NCHC's collaboration with CUP has been essential to our journey over the past seven years. CUP began supporting us two years before we opened our doors in 2021, and their support continues today. It is very difficult for me to express with words the gratitude for CUP and the shared commitment we have for the communities we serve.

From the beginning, we worked side by side to develop the principles that guide our work as Edmonton's only non-profit community health centre dedicated to serving refugees. Since then, our partnership has grown through several successful projects that have helped shape the NCHC's work. Together, we have built an evidence-base for our model of care, strengthening our ability to secure funding and continue providing vital services to newcomers in Edmonton.

As a true collaborative partner CUP generously shares its expertise and genuine willingness to listen and build alongside us.

Community Wealth Building in Drayton Valley

Learn more about CUP's partnership with Drayton Valley on [CUP's website](#).

Jessica Hermary

Research Assistant, CUP

One of the beautiful things about connections is that they build upon one another, and this is certainly true of the Drayton Valley-CUP partnership.

In the past year, our team and community partners attended both the Banff Systems Summit and the Southeast Tech Hub's rural innovation conference in Estevan, Saskatchewan. In Estevan, we met Gordon More, who later travelled to Drayton Valley to provide a keynote speech at the launch of the Drayton Valley Business Support Network (BSN) earlier this year. This connection opened new conversations about the potential of Drayton Valley's tech industry to complement ongoing work to support youth and local businesses.

Our work continues to be possible because of a foundation of trust and the graciousness afforded to our team by our Drayton Valley partners. We are excited to see where the next year takes us.

Geraldine Cahill

Director, UpSocial Canada:

It is not an exaggeration to say that without CUP, many of the positive and long-lasting economic and community outcomes recorded in Drayton Valley over the past seven years would not have happened. The life-changing impacts for many mature-aged women and youth through the Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) program are due to the tireless engagement pursued by CUP with the Town of Drayton Valley.

More recently, we have been working to realize a Community Wealth Building strategy. CUP's openness, curiosity, and commitment makes this exploration possible. I have found no comparative university-based community-engaged partner in Canada so committed to collaboration. I aim to shout it from the rooftops.



CUP and Drayton Valley partners at the Banff Systems Summit



CUP and Drayton Valley partners visiting the Southeast Tech Hub (SETH) in Estevan, Saskatchewan

"I have found no comparative university-based community-engaged partner in Canada so committed to collaboration. I aim to shout it from the rooftops."

– Geraldine Cahill

CUP Students: The Next Generation of Community-Engaged Leaders

As part of our strategic thinking, CUP has been reflecting on how to contribute to building the “next generation” of community-engaged leaders and researchers in Edmonton. A core part of our mission is creating hands-on opportunities for students to learn community engagement fundamentals and lead in their communities, workplaces, and academia.

We asked two recent practicum students to reflect on their most significant learnings, skills, or insights with CUP and the Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN).



Lauren Guibat
Masters of Public
Health (MPH)
Practicum Student,
CUP/ECN

Working with CUP and the ECN has been instrumental in shaping my development as a budding public health professional.

One of the most formative skills I developed is knowledge mobilization. I have contributed to the creation of infographics, presentations, and reports that translate complex information into clear, accessible, and meaningful products for diverse audiences. This reinforced for me that effective communication requires understanding the audience, context, and intended outcomes to ensure evidence is relevant, accessible, and actionable.

Perhaps the most significant insight I gained is an appreciation for the power of collaboration and the value of agility. Working with the team has shown me that community needs and priorities constantly evolve, highlighting the importance of engaging diverse perspectives, establishing trusted relationships, communicating openly, and adapting thoughtfully to change.

Ultimately, CUP and the ECN deepened my perspective on public health as both evidence-informed and relationship-driven. I learned that combining rigorous research with intentional knowledge mobilization strategies, meaningful collaboration, and responsiveness to emerging needs is truly essential in this work.



Sarah Stein
Masters of Public
Health (MPH)
Practicum Student,
CUP/ECN

During my practicum, I was involved with a partnership with the Edmonton Community Foundation assessing Edmonton's early childhood wellbeing landscape. This is a deeply complex topic, as every facet of life in Edmonton ties to early childhood wellbeing in some way. Especially on a tight timeline, a project as complex as this one can be daunting. However, working with the CUP team helped me to build the confidence to take on such projects.

I initially held the assumption that a “qualified” individual would be able to untangle the complexity of a topic such as early childhood wellbeing. Through my practicum, I came to realize that complexity is inherent to community work. I learned to work within the complexity and get comfortable with the unknowns that come along with it. I learned to take the project one step at a time, letting learnings from one stage guide the approach to the next. Working with CUP, I gained experience as a facilitator and coordinator, bringing together the knowledge of colleagues and partners across many disciplines.

My practicum placement with CUP was an enriching experience that built both my skills and confidence as a public health practitioner, and my learnings will shape how I work moving forward in my career.

CUP Students: The Next Generation of Community-Engaged Leaders

Since our founding in 2000, CUP has supported hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students in building the skills and values required for community-engaged research and evaluation. Many of our students go on to become key contributors to the health, social, and education sectors. Over the past year, CUP reached out to former CUP/ECN students to better understand how their experiences with CUP contributed to their personal and career development. *For more testimonials, see the new [Students](#) page on CUP's website.*

Binita Jirel

I joined CUP during my very first year in Canada. It was a year of big transitions [...] What truly stood out about CUP was the sense of community, collaboration, and belonging, and the opportunity to learn from the wide range of research and community projects everyone in CUP was engaged in.

The main reason I work with the people and organizations I do today is their genuine commitment to community, collaboration, and social impact not just in words, but in action.

U of A Program: Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE)

Where are they now: Research Consultant with Social Impact Collective



Kirsty Choquette

I was involved with the ECN primarily in their work with the Alberta Mentoring Partnership. Specifically, we worked to provide training and support to mentoring programs in conducting and using meaningful, strengths-based, and community-based evaluations.

The most significant insight I

gained while working at the ECN was the importance of conducting evaluations (and academic work more broadly) in partnership with community. I realized that hearing from communities about what their strengths, needs, and desires are makes our work richer. It also makes it come alive and have real-world impact.

U of A Program: PhD in School and Clinical Child Psychology

Where are they now: Registered Psychologist at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital and private practice.

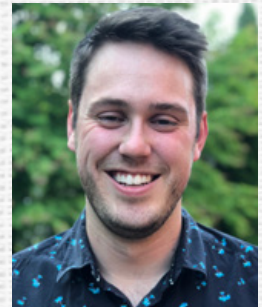


Nick Denomey

I worked with CUP/ECN for several years while I was a graduate student at the University of Alberta. My portfolio with CUP/ECN consisted of various projects throughout my time there, including Edmonton Youth Economic Ecosystem Collaborative (EYEEC) and UEval [...] I would not be where I am professionally and personally if I did not have the opportunity to work with CUP/ECN. My collaborations with key figures in the evaluation landscape through UEval gave me the confidence to effectively lead evaluation efforts within the pediatric healthcare sector.

U of A Program: Master of Education & Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE)

Where are they now: Research Coordinator for the Department of Neurodevelopmental Health with the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario in Ottawa



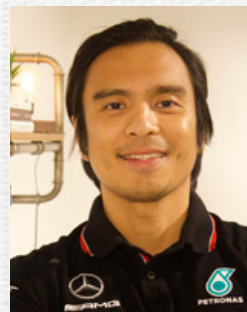
Prime Illumin

My experience with CUP and ECN was an important part of my academic and professional development because it connected learning with real community issues and practical application. What stands out most to me is the opportunity to engage in meaningful research, reflection, and writing that was grounded in community context. It gave me space to think critically, connect theory

to practice, and better understand how community-engaged work can contribute to broader social and policy conversations.

U of A Program: Master of Arts in Community Engagement (MACE)

Where are they now: Public Policy Specialist with the Government of Alberta



CUP Staff

CUP staff are the foundation of our centre, making it possible to build and maintain long-term connections across the community. Research staff are deeply committed to developing projects that are meaningful and useful to partners, mobilizing evidence into community conversations, and managing resources to keep projects sustainable. Meanwhile, operational staff provide foundational expertise and capacity to ensure CUP remains a hub of excellence for community-engaged research on and off campus.

We asked three staff members what makes working at CUP different from other academic and professional environments they've experienced.

Lauren Lees

Research Assistant, CUP

3+ years at CUP

There are many things that make CUP different from standard academic or research roles. While community-based participatory research (CBPR) itself is not unique, CUP's particular approach is rooted in the longevity of its relationships with and a commitment to ensuring research remains responsive to community priorities throughout the entire process.

At CUP, we generally aren't generating research ideas before engaging with the community. Rather, our partners bring forward challenges or ideas based on what they're seeing in their day-to-day work. Together, we explore questions to address community priorities, ensuring the research is shaped by lived experiences and knowledge from the outset.

Relationships are rarely limited to a single project. Many of CUP's partnerships have developed over several years, allowing us to build deep trust, deepen our understanding of community contexts, and collaborate across multiple initiatives. As projects evolve, each initiative builds on those that came before.

Another important difference at CUP is how we think about research outcomes. While academic publications can be valuable, they are not the primary measure of success at CUP. From the start, we ask partners what they need from the research and how findings can be useful to them. Often, findings are included in reports, infographics, workshops, or webinars to ensure they are useful to the intended audience.



Pauline MacPherson

Research Coordinator, CUP

6+ years at CUP

What makes CUP truly special is being surrounded by a passionate, like-minded team of staff and students who are all deeply committed to driving positive change in their community. CUP focuses on cultivating a strong, supportive culture that directly trickles down to guide and empower our community partners. This unique environment nurtures ethical and empathetic leaders who in turn carry this fundamental commitment to community transformation into their future career endeavors and community work. At CUP, research isn't just an academic pursuit. It is a vital way of giving back to the community.



Kevin Holowack

Communications Coordinator, CUP

4+ years at CUP

I can confidently say CUP is unlike any other academic or professional environments I've experienced. It's clear that CUP students, staff, and community partners are genuinely passionate about their work, willing to take on the complications and risks of community engagement and go above and beyond to contribute to community goals. If you ask staff, students, and partners how they experience CUP, you will frequently hear that CUP is a "safe space," a "site of belonging," or a kind of "home," which helps explain why so many people remain connected for many years, even if their exact role or position changes. As Communications Coordinator, I have the singular privilege of engaging with a wide variety of CUP teams. This job never fails to leave me inspired by the dedication, commitment, and kindness of my colleagues.



Postdoctoral Scholars

CUP provides unique opportunities for postdoctoral scholars. In academia generally, the role of a postdoctoral scholar can feel like a temporary step, intended to help emerging scholars build their publication record, develop a funding portfolio, and build professional skills. At CUP, postdoctoral scholars also have a chance to become embedded in relationships with community partners, take on leadership roles in community projects, and gain new perspectives to enrich their careers.



Sophie Wood
CUP Postdoctoral Scholar
(Supervisor: Dr. Rebecca Gokiart)

Moving from the UK to Edmonton in 2025 to begin a postdoctoral scholar position with CUP, I was immediately struck by the team's shared passion and core values. There is genuine commitment to

conducting research that is meaningful to communities, and to working with people and organizations rather than simply researching about them.

My own work centres on a partnership with the New Canadians Health Centre (NCHC), where I am leading research focused on youth mental health and wellbeing. Through this work, I gained important insight into the challenges experienced by refugee families and young people, alongside the hope, resilience, and culturally informed support that exists within the NCHC community.

One aspect I value about CUP is the emphasis on relationship-building and sustained engagement throughout the research process. Rather than limiting consultation to particular stages of a project, there is a strong focus on maintaining dialogue, responding to community priorities, and ensuring that partners shape the direction and interpretation of the work. This closely reflects my own values as a researcher and the way I want to build my research programme.

Establishing myself in a new country was a significant transition, and CUP provided a highly supportive and collaborative setting. I have also been fortunate to receive a Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) Postdoctoral Fellowship Award, supported by the Stollery Children's Hospital Foundation, enabling me to further develop my research in youth mental health.

I am grateful for the support of my supervisor, Dr. Rebecca Gokiart, and the wider CUP team as I continue this work.



Carol Bomfim
CUP Postdoctoral Scholar
(Supervisor: Dr. Maria Mayan)

I have learned to be suspicious of the moment when I think a research project is finished.

As a researcher, I was trained to recognize endings: the interviews are done, the analysis

is complete, the paper is submitted, the project is closed. Working at CUP has made those endings much harder to locate.

I return to the same community. I see the same people again. Someone brings up a conversation from months ago. A question that seemed secondary suddenly matters much more. A project that I thought was wrapping up becomes the beginning of something else. Sometimes, what looked like an "output" from the university side does not feel like an ending at all to the community.

The continuity has changed how I experience research. I get to see what happens after a project might otherwise have been considered finished. Ideas keep moving. They lead to new conversations, shaped by other people, and sometimes return in ways I could not have expected.

This approach to research also changes how I experience setbacks. Even a rejected grant feels different. By the time we make a submission, something real has already taken shape through conversation and mutual expectations. If funding doesn't come through, that can affect more than the research team. But the ideas and plan behind the proposal don't simply disappear. Sometimes they pause or shift, and sometimes they open a different path forward.

Maybe that is what feels most different to me about CUP: research has a long memory here. What happens after we leave the room?

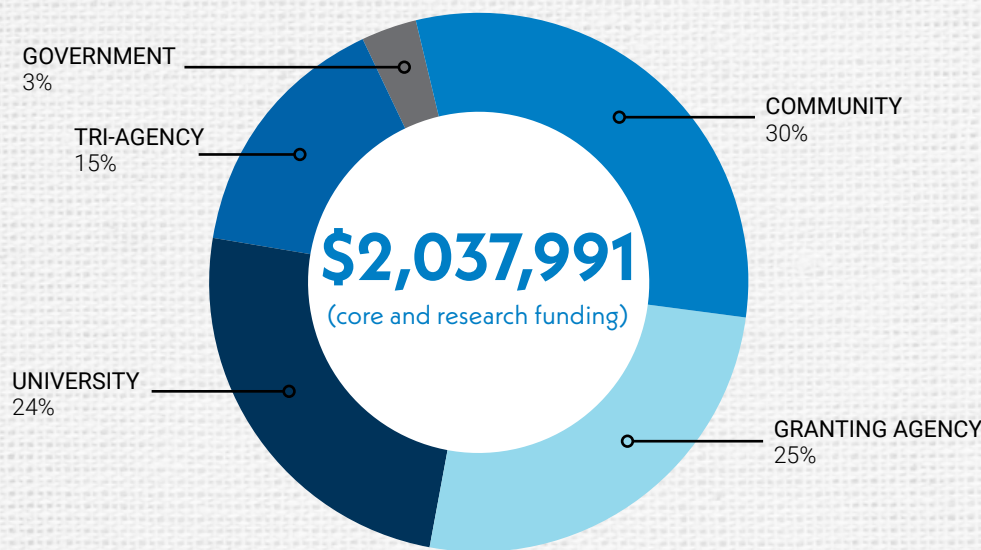
"Maybe that is what feels most different to me about CUP: research has a long memory here. What happens after we leave the room?"

– Carol Bomfim

2025-2026 Finances

CUP's operations and research model are responsive to community. Our core operations are funded through a blended model of community, government, university, and funding agency sources. In the past year, we developed new operational processes that streamline how we receive community requests for support, engage with partners to understand their needs, connect resources and expertise across our networks, and account for the depth of our engagement.

In the 2025-2026 reporting period, CUP's core operations and research funding totaled \$2,037,991. These initiatives are made possible through the generous support of our funding partners.



2025-2026 Operational and Research Funders:



Publications

Here are the publications and presentations CUP researchers contributed to during the reporting period of April 1, 2025 to March 31, 2026.

Botwe, A., Velasquez, A., Whalen-Browne, M., Haight, J., Wood, S., & Gokiart, R. (2025). The New Canadians Health Centre: A community and principles-based refugee health centre in Canada. *European Journal of Public Health*, 35(6). doi:10.1093/eurpub/ckaf180.101. [Link](#).

Budgell, K. & Hermary, J. (2026). Rural Tuition Assistance Policy Toolkit (public resource). [Link](#).

Community-University Partnership (CUP). (January 2026). Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program: An Investment in Long-Term Community Well-Being (information brief). [Link](#).

Community-University Partnership (CUP). (January 2026). Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program: A Pathway to Economic Resilience for the Drayton Valley Region (information brief). [Link](#).

Daniels, J., **Edwards, K., MacPherson, P., Severin, S.** & Zentner, K. (March 2026). All In for Youth: Road to Resilience (community report). [Link](#).

Ferdinands, A., Olsen S., Ormandy M. & **Mayan, M.** (July 2025). A qualitative study of how young women in a rural Canadian community plan their futures. *Health Promotion International*, 40(4), doi:10.1093/heapro/daaf095. [Link](#).

Ferdinands, A., Ormandy, M., **Hodge, L. & Mayan, M.** (July 2025). Rural Health Care Aide Training Experiences in a Canadian Tuition Assistance Program: A Qualitative Study. *BMC Nursing*, 24(914). doi:10.1186/s12912-025-03582-z. [Link](#).

Graham, K., John, R., **Botwe, A.**, Chan, L., Grant, J. & Hanney, S. (2026). Assessing and optimizing research and innovation impact: developing and implementing a holistic systems approach. *Research Evaluation*, 35. doi:10.1093/reseval/rvag011. [Link](#).

Haight, J., Wood, S., Botwe, A., Monaghan, E., Honardar, M., Whalen-Browne, M., Velasquez & Gokiart, R. (2026). Addressing refugee health needs in Canada: The role of the New Canadians Health Centre. Published in *Handbook of Migration and Health*, second edition. Thomas, F., Georgis, R., & Ghezal, M. (Eds). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Hodge, L., Ormandy, M., Ferdinands, A., Cahill, G. & Mayan, M. (August 2025). How do oil and gas workers cope with a changing economy? Economic vulnerability among rural Canadians in the oil and gas sector. *Energy Research and Social Science*, 216. doi:10.1016/j.erss.2025.104146. [Link](#).

Lees, L. (January 2026). Annual Report 2024-25: A Focus on Quality. Published by the Council for Early Learning and Child Care. [Link](#).

Liao, L., Scourfield, J., **Wood, S.**, Smith, F., Sobo-Allen, L., Meindl, M., Pallmann, P., Wilkins, D., Au, K. M., Evans, R., Lugg-Widger, F., Mahachi, T. L., Palmer, A., Petrou, S. & Schroeder, E.-A. (2026). How do family group conference outcomes vary by implementation context and quality of experience? *The Society for Social Work and Research 30th Annual Conference*, Washington, DC. doi:10.2139/ssrn.6079816. [Link](#).

Liao, L., Scourfield, J., **Wood, S.**, Smith, F., Sobo-Allen, L., Palmer, A., Meindl, M., Au, K. M., Evans, R., Lugg-Widger, F., Mahachi, T. L., Pallmann, P., Petrou, S., Robling, M., Schroeder, E.-A., Wilkins, D. (2026). How do family group conference outcomes vary by implementation context and quality of participation? Results from a UK questionnaire study (preprint). SSRN. doi:10.2139/ssrn.6079816. [Link](#).

Mayan, M., Brandenbarg, C., Knoop, J., Hanewich, B. & Cameron, S. (2026). Strategies to Change Systems Toward an Inclusive Economy. *Canadian Journal of Nonprofit and Social Economy Research*, 17 (1), 1-13. doi:10.29173/cjnser799. [Link](#).

Ormandy, M., Ferdinands, A. & **Mayan, M.** (2025). Exploring Youths' Experiences of Attending a Rural Outreach School in Alberta. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 48(2), 752-778. doi:10.53967/cje-rce.6941. [Link](#).

Roberts, L. M., **Wood, S.**, Wilkins, D., & Shelton, K. H. (2026). Transitions from child and adolescent to adult mental health services for young people involved with social care services in Wales: A national population-based retrospective cohort study using linked administrative data (preprint). *Research Square*. doi:10.21203/rs.3.rs 9105839/v1. [Link](#).

Round, J. & **Mayan, M.** (July 2026). Drayton Valley's Tuition Assistance Bursary (TAB) Program: Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence for Return on Investment (community report). [Link](#).

Schroeder, E.-A., Petrou, S., Wilkins, D., Pallmann, P., Robling, M., Lugg-Widger, F., **Wood, S.**, Mahachi, L. & Scourfield, J. (2025). Family VOICE: Family group conferencing for children and families: Implementation, context and cost-effectiveness. *International Journal of Integrated Care*, 25, 178. doi:10.5334/ijic.NACIC24178. [Link](#).

Scourfield, J., **Wood, S.**, & Meindl, M. (2025). The international evidence on family group conferences (book chapter). Published in *Experimental methods and children's social care*. M. Sanders, D. Westlake, & V. Hirneis (Eds.). Edward Elgar Publishing.

Sobo-Allen, L., Liao, L., Scourfield, J., Smith, F., **Wood, S.**, Meindl, M., Au, K. M., Palmer, A., Evans, R., Lugg-Widger, F., Mahachi, T. L., Pallmann, P., Petrou, S., Robling, M., Schroeder, E.-A., & Wilkins, D. (2026). Family group conference provision across the lifespan of child welfare intervention: A mixed-method realist-informed evaluation, comparing three stages of welfare concern (preprint). *OSF Preprints*. doi:10.31235/osf.io/s7f8g_v1. [Link](#).

Turlock, L., & **Mayan, M.** (March 2026) What happens when someone reports a hate crime or incident? *The International Review of Victimology*. doi:10.1177/0269758026142778. [Link](#).

Velasquez, A., Whalen-Browne, M., **Botwe, A.**, **Haight, J.**, **Gokiart, R.**, & **Wood, S.** (2025). The New Canadians Health Centre: A community- and principle-based approach to refugee health in Canada. In *Proceedings of the World Congress on Migration, Ethnicity, Race and Health*. doi: 10.1093/eupub/ckaf180.101. [Link](#).

Wood, S. (2025). Increasing and varying rates of children in out-of-home care: Insights from ecological systems theory (book chapter). Published in *Participatory approaches in child and family social work: Creating meaningful relationships and empowering families*. C. Diaz, S. Fitz-Symonds, & T. Fisher (Eds.) Policy Press.

Wood, S., Lowthian, E. & Forrester, D. (2025) Mapping the Evidence on Parental Alcohol Use and Children's Social Care Outcomes: A Rapid Scoping Review Protocol. *Open Science Framework*. doi:10.17605/OSF.IO/HDK57. [Link](#).

Yu, L., Ali, A. & **Mayan, M.** (September 2025). Motivation, Collaboration, and Challenges: Insights from the Edmonton Community Development Company's Approach to Urban Redevelopment. *Journal of Urban Affairs*, 1-23. doi:10.1080/07352166.2025.2552384. [Link](#).

Zukiwsky, R. (September 2025). AMP's evaluation journey: *AMP's evaluation journey: In the beginning...* (blog). Published by the Alberta Mentoring Partnership. [Link](#).

Presentations

Budgell, K., **Hodge, L.**, **Libo-on, J.**, **Cahill, G.**, **Lepage, M.** & **Mayan, M.** (May 2025). Fostering economic stability in rural, resource-dependent communities: A scoping review of community wealth building and rural wealth creation strategies. Oral presentation at the C2UExpo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

Cahill, G. & **Mayan, M.** (April 2025). Rural Wealth Creation Background Information Session (community presentation). Rotary House, Drayton Valley, AB.

Cahill, G. & **Mayan, M.** (April 2025). Rural Wealth Creation Background Information Session (community presentation). Nodding Donkey Brewery, Drayton Valley, AB.

Cahill, G. & **Mayan, M.** (May 2025). More than Oil: Rural Alberta Community Innovation. Oral presentation at the Banff Systems Summit. Banff, AB.

Cahill, G. (May 2025) Rural Wealth Creation Workshop (community workshop). Facilitated by Skills Society Action Lab. Community Education and Training Center, Drayton Valley, AB.

Cahill, G., Cabaj, P., Harris, L. & Bulthuis, M. (June 2025). Housing Opportunities for Rural Wealth Creation (community presentation). Held online on Zoom.

Cahill, G., **Mayan, M.** & Cabaj, P. (August 2025). Designing the right fit housing opportunity for Drayton Valley and region (community workshop). Drayton Valley Community Health Center, Drayton Valley, AB.

Cahill, G., More, G., Bell, C. & Cabaj, P. (August 2025). Driving local business creation for Drayton Valley and region (community presentation). Held online on Zoom.

Carbone, K., Portelance, F. D., Crowder, S., Searle, M., & **Gokiart, R.** (May and June 2025). Examining student competency development through community-engaged experiential learning (paper presentation). Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Toronto, ON.

Carbone, K., Portelance, F.D., Thompson, J., Lee-Yow, C., **Gallimore, A.**, Searle, M., Tremblay, M. & **Gokiart, R.** (May and June 2026). Cultivating well-being through collaboration: A justice-oriented approach to evaluation capacity building (multi-paper presentation). 54th Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education, Winnipeg, MB.

Doucette, J. & **Mayan, M.** (September 2025). Rural Wealth Creation Theory of Change Workshop (community workshop). Kickstand Youth Hub, Drayton Valley, AB.

Edwards, K. (July 2025). Collaborating with Community for Health Impacts. Guest lecture in Global Health Science Program, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Alberta.

Edwards, K. (March 2026). Innovative Model of Community University Engagement. Social Innovation Problems and Solutions Fair (University of Alberta Senate).

Edwards, K. & **Scott, S.** (2025). Reimagining How we Assess the Impact of Engaged Scholarship: Shifting from attribution to contribution. Oral presentation at the C2U Expo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

Evaluation Capacity Network & Boyce, A. (May 2026). Informed Approaches to Evaluation: Lessons, Reflections, Advice (webinar).

Evaluation Capacity Network & Three Hive Consulting. (January 2026). Trauma-Informed Approaches to Evaluation: Lessons, Reflections, Advice (webinar). Available on Youtube. [Link](#).

Evaluation Capacity Network & Tremblay, M. (March 2026). Indigenous-Informed Approaches to Evaluation (webinar). Available on Youtube. [Link](#).

Gallimore, A. (May 2026). Advancing evaluation capacity through a networked approach (panel presentation). Canadian Evaluation Society Annual Conference, Edmonton, AB.

Gallimore, A., Lee-Yow, C., Tremblay, M., Searle, M., & **Gokiart, R.** (May 2026). Learning through connection: A community of practice approach to decolonial evaluation in complex environments (storytelling presentation). Canadian Evaluation Society Annual Conference, Edmonton, AB.

Gallimore, A., Tremblay, M., **Gokiart, R.**, Young, E., & Busari, M. (April 2026). Learning through connection: A community of practice approach to decolonial evaluation within an educational context (panel discussion). Festival of Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Gokiart, R., de Vos, P., Fierro, L., Bourgeois, I., **Edwards, K.,** Searle, M., **Wood, S.,** Janzen, R., Buschmann, R., Lundell, S., Janus, M., Lifshitz, J., **Jun, S., Behzad, U. & Gallimore, A.** (May 2026). Advancing evaluation capacity through a networked approach (panel presentation). Canadian Evaluation Society Annual Conference, Edmonton, AB.

Gokiart, R., Wood, S., Sanchez, M. C., Flores Villalobos, M., & **Behzad, U.** (April 2026). Beyond the grade: Turning the classroom into a shared-learning hub (interactive paper presentation). Festival of Teaching and Learning, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Haight, J., Botwe, A., Wood, S., Velasquez, A., Whalen-Browne, M., & **Gokiart, R.** (May 2026). On the ground and in practice: Learnings about community- and culturally-responsive evaluation through a principles-driven refugee health centre (panel presentation). Canadian Evaluation Society Conference, Edmonton, AB.

Hodge, L., Ormandy, M., Ferdinands, A., Cahill, G. & **Mayan, M.** (May 2025). *Navigating economic transitions: Oil and gas workers' perspectives on community wellness in a changing energy landscape.* Oral presentation at the C2U Expo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

Janzen, R., Schincariol McMurtry, L., & **Gokiart, R.** (March 2026). A national evaluation hub for community-based evaluation: Eval4settlement.ca (presentation on the panel titled Building Evaluation Capacity and Coordination in Canada's Settlement Sector). 2026 28th Annual National Metropolis Canada Conference, Halifax, NS.

Kammerer, E., Hartling, L., Basi, C., Candelaria, P., Khangura, J.K., Kaahiye, S., Sapon, L., Iliscupidez, L., Zelyck, Z., Elliot, S.E., Dennett, L., Ladha, T., **Mayan, M.,** Scott, S., Ruzycki, S. & Ali, S. (October 2025). Equity-deserving children and acute pain care in the emergency department: a scoping review. Women and Children's Health Research Institute Research Day 2025. Edmonton, AB.

Ip, P.L., Lees, L., Martin, M., Bisanz, J., & DeKeseredy, A. (June 2025). Alberta parents' perception of high-quality early learning and child care (symposium presentation). Early Learning and Child Care Systems in Canada: Sociological Reflections and Critical Insights. 2025 Canadian Sociological Association Annual Conference, Toronto, ON.

Lees, L., Martin, M., Ip, P.L., Bisanz, J. (June 2025). What about quality in early learning and child care? (webinar). [Link.](#)

LePage, M. & Cahill, G. (August 2025). Rural Wealth Creation and Youth (community presentation). Kickstand Youth Hub, Drayton Valley, AB.

Martin, M., Lees, L., Kheder, M., Bisanz, J., & Chui, Y. (May 2025). Aligning research and advocacy: Advancing early learning and child care in Alberta (roundtable discussion). C2U Expo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

Mayan, M. (August 2025). Language Use in Equity Work. Guest lecture for SPH 303: Health Promotion in an Unequal World (Erin Wright).

Mayan, M. (January 2026). Rigour in Qualitative Research. Guest lecture for NURS: 513/687 Qualitative Research (Drs. Gillian Lemmermeyer and Heather Morrison).

Mayan, M. (March 2026). Working with Policymakers. Guest lecture for SPH 546: Public Health Practice and Professional Skills II (Erin Wright and Sara van Leusden).

Mayan, M. (October 2025). Muddled Relationships in CBPR. Guest lecture for MACE 501: The Practice of Community-Engaged Scholarship (Denise Spitzer).

Mayan, M., Budgell, K., Hodge, L. & LePage, M. (May 2025). The impact of a tuition assistance program in a rural, resource-dependent Canadian town. Presentation at the C2UExpo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

More, G. (January 2026) Drayton Valley Business Support Network Launch - Estevan's Southeast Tech Hub and Rural Innovation. Mitch's Restaurant, Drayton Valley, AB.

Rahman, N., Martin, M., Lees, L., Chiu, Y. & **Gokiart, R.** (June 2025). Newcomer ethnocultural families' experiences seeking early learning and childcare services in Alberta (symposium presentation). Early Learning and Child Care Systems in Canada: Sociological Reflections and Critical Insights. 2025 Canadian Sociological Association Annual Conference, Toronto, ON.

Schincariol McMurtry, L., Janzen, R., & **Gokiart, R.** (November 2025). Eval4settlement.ca (poster presentation). Pathways to Prosperity Conference, Halifax, NS.

Simmons, C., Shinkaruk, C., Bickford, K., Smale, P. & **Edwards, K.** (May 2025). In it for the Long Haul: Insights on the long-term community-partnerships from the All In For Youth partnership (presentation). C2U Expo 2025: Partners in Place. Edmonton, AB.

Thompson, J., Carbone, K., Crowder, S., Portelance, F.-D., Lee-Yow, C., Searle, M., Cooper, A., & **Gokiart, R.** (October 2025). Community-Engaged Pedagogy (CEP) at Queen's: Supporting transformative thinking, interdisciplinary education, and reciprocal connections (poster presentation). Bridging Campus and Community: Collaborating for Impact Community Engagement Summit, Kingston, ON.

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

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