

Committed to improving the development of children, youth, families, and communities.



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



Impacts 2014



Left to Right: Martin Garner-Conrad (CUP community chair); Laurie Schnirer (Interim Director); Jeff Bisanz (CUP university chair).

How full is our CUP?

- 3 **Provincial-scale community based projects** are disseminating final outcomes.
- 2 **Post-doctoral fellows** are leading the development of two new CUP projects building on previous project outcomes.
- 3 **New streams of research** are being fostered by CUP directors and their partners.
- 16 **Graduate students** were mentored within CUP's project teams. Students are the heart of our capacity to conduct research.
- 7 **Awards received** by CUP students in 2014

Culture is a Key Component of Early Learning

Over the past four years, CUP has been working closely with four Yellowhead Tribal communities and the Yellowhead Tribal College on the *First Nation Child Development Project* to better understand early childhood development from a community perspective. Throughout the project we have:

- collected early childhood development data for 271 kindergarten-aged children;
- collected 176 Teacher and 144 Family FNCD Questionnaires which measured unique aspects of First Nation children's development such as cultural engagement, language, and kinship; and
- shared project findings and lessons learned in individual community reports; a collective community report; the development of 2014-2015 community calendar with early childhood messages in English and the community languages (Cree, Nakota, & Saulteaux); and presentations made to Chief & Council, Elders, parents, schools, and Interagency committees.

Working with Those Living in Vulnerable Conditions

How can we create a collaborative, respectful, and positive environment when we work in partnership with vulnerable populations? Holly Stack-Cutler (postdoctoral fellow) is exploring best practices of how to engage community participants who live in complex social environments in different phases of the research process (e.g., planning, recruitment, data collection and analysis, results, knowledge mobilization, and follow-up).

The aim is to understand the factors that hinder involvement of participants and the dynamics CBR researchers and community partners need to consider when responding to the needs and complex environments of vulnerable populations. To date, Holly has interviewed 14 researchers, community partners, policy makers, and funders, as well as 25 families living in vulnerable conditions. Families identified barriers to participation and practices to better engage families in research. On-line surveys with CBR researchers and community partners will take place in April 2015.



Alberta Children Falling Short of Developmental Milestones

The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) created baseline data on children's early development in Alberta. The data shows that **less than half of preschool children are meeting key developmental milestones by kindergarten.**

The information, collected over five years on 72,200 kindergarten-aged children, reveals great disparities among communities. The percentage of young children experiencing great difficulty in one or more areas of development ranged from 53 per cent to 12 per cent. Sixty-six per cent of communities are falling below the Canadian norm.

The data was put directly into the hands of early childhood development community coalitions throughout the province. Coalitions, made up of a diverse, cross-section of community members, were mobilized in 100 communities across Alberta. More than 4,300 community members were engaged in these coalitions, contributing more than 40,000 volunteer hours a year to sharing community results and planning actions. Engaged communities are one of ECMap's most important legacies.

ECMap developed the first comprehensive baseline data on early development in Alberta, which can be used to track change over time and provide context for measuring the effectiveness of current programs and policies. A final report makes six recommendations to government for improving outcomes.

As well, ECMap created an interactive, digital LiveAtlas that integrates geographical maps, early childhood development data, socio-economic data, and community resources. The LiveAtlas can be accessed at the ECMap website www.ecmap.ca.

A solid foundation has been laid for moving early childhood development forward in Alberta.

Mobilizing Multicultural Knowledge of Early Development

Rebecca Georgis (postdoctoral fellow) is collaborating with a group of stakeholders with an interest in multicultural early childhood development to build capacity to work with culturally diverse families.

The stakeholders are developing tangible methods of mobilizing existing knowledge related to determinants of early childhood wellbeing for immigrant and refugee children.

This project is building on the momentum, recommendations, and outcomes of previous CUP projects.





Talking About Poverty Across Communities

The *Fulfilling Alberta's Commitment to Children and Families Initiative* received funding this year to facilitate conversations, around the Families First Edmonton* data, that inform ongoing practice, program, and policy development.

The FACT team has:

- hosted 3 workshops on:
 - Pathways out of Poverty,
 - Housing & Child Care,
 - Health & Social Service Usage by Edmonton's low-income families.
- engaged over 170 cross-sectoral partners from government, university and community.
- developed a psychosocial model of poverty demonstrating the importance of social (personal relationships and social networks) and individual (mental and physical well-being) factors on a family's poverty profile.
- presented key findings to the Mayor's Task Force for the Elimination of Poverty (EndPoverty YEG).
- developed a new project with the United Way of the Capital Region, Edmonton Community Foundation, and the City of Edmonton to use data to shape policy outcomes from the Mayor's Task Force.

* Families First Edmonton was a longitudinal study of 1,200 low-income families. For further information, please see www.familiesfirstedmonton.ualberta.ca.

Changing How We Think About Evaluation

The *Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN)* is a provincial network of intersectoral stakeholders in the field of early childhood development working together to understand and address capacity barriers within evaluation. For example, community agencies do not have internal capacity to run evaluations and are frequently under time pressures. Service providers may not understand why specific data is being collected. Funders often request specific evaluation methods to ensure accountability. The end result is a disconnect in how different stakeholders think, define, and use evaluation outcomes.

The goal of the ECN is to facilitate a shift towards more evaluative thinking and enhance capacity for evaluation.

To date we have engaged 35 Network partners across provincial and territorial government departments, university departments, and community organizations.

In the coming months, we will be:

1. distributing a survey to ECD stakeholders involved in evaluation for feedback on their practices, thinking and capacity in evaluation;
2. completing a report outlining the nature of the evaluation capacity issues within the ECD sector; and
3. hosting provincial forums to foster intersectoral dialogue.



"A study like this is complex; we want to understand the impact that complementary therapies have made on a hospitalized child. Partnership across disciplines is essential for in-depth understanding. We are very fortunate to have partnership with Dr. Mayan and her team at WCHRI/CUP to lead the qualitative part of this mixed-methods trial. With their help, we are better able to answer our research questions."

Dr. Sunita Vohra

The Impacts of Alternative Therapies for Sick Children

CUP's partnership with the Women and Children's Health Research Institute (WCHRI) builds capacity among researchers, students and community partners to include qualitative methods, knowledge translation and the principles of stakeholder engagement into their research practice.

In 2014, the CUP-WCHRI research team joined the Pediatric Integrated Medicine (PIM) Trial, led by Dr. Sunita Vohra, from the Department of Pediatrics, at the University of Alberta. The study aims to understand whether complementary and alternative medicine therapies such as acupuncture/acupressure, massage, and Reiki (in conjunction with the best of conventional care) can make a difference and relieve symptoms such as pain, nausea, or anxiety in hospitalized children.

The team is learning from parents, health care professionals and practitioners of complementary and alternative medicine about their experiences of having this novel approach as an additional tool in treating sick children.

In the past year, the CUP-WCHRI research team also supported:

- 3 additional research teams
- 1 community-based organization
- 16 clinicians and students

As a result, these colleagues and partners improved their research programs and/or received funding grants.

Ear to The Ground...

Here are a few new initiatives that we are currently exploring:

- The CUP Steering Committee, along with support from the CUP leadership team, is considering how we might incorporate a "policy" related stream in to CUP's work. We are looking into the literature and doing an environmental scan to determine what policy focus and capacity already exists in the child and family field.
- The *ECMap Research Advisory Committee* is exploring ways that secondary data analysis of its early learning data might help inform other provincial initiatives supporting healthy child development.
- CUP is currently supporting the work of the Mayor's Task Force for the Elimination of Poverty and we will continue to use the vast Families First Edmonton databases to answer community-driven questions on low-income families.

For further information on any of these projects or partnerships please contact us directly @:

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