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**From the Project Director**

This communicate is prepared as an update for our research team. With our extensive number of partners, researchers, and staff, this communicate provides a space to share the activities of all team members in the IECSS project. Our first communicate came out in 2013 when the project began. Up to this point, our communicates were intended as internal documents (simply because the intended audience was other team members), but it has become clear that some aspects of the communicate may be of interest to the broader community. For this reason, you will notice that the communicate has been re-designed and includes sections from a broader range of sources. We hope that you like it, and if you would like to contribute to the communicate, please reach out to me and let me know.

Like everyone else around the globe, we have seen many changes in our work over the last 3 months. I have been in touch with many of you on the research team and I would like to thank the Co-Investigators, Collaborators for their responsiveness to questions and decisions that had to be made quickly. Thank you also to the staff who have had to respond to these decisions and changes as they came. More details about some of these changes are below. Also, a thank you to the Partners who have been working tremendously hard to support children and families in their communities and sharing this new knowledge with the IECSS partnership.

Many of you will know Alison Smith, one of our Project Coordinators who has worked with IECSS since 2013. On April 28, 2020, Alison and her partner Jerome welcomed their first child. Congratulations on the birth of Jeremiah Justice Smith.

I would also like to share the sad news that Ann Batisse, Executive Director of the Temiskaming Native Women’s Support Group passed away in May, 2020. Ann has been a long-standing supporter of the research, and a cherished colleague of mine. I would like to take this time to acknowledge the tremendous contribution she has made to her community, and to the broader childcare and research community. Her influence on my research and the IECSS project will continue going forward. I would also like to extend my condolences to her family, several of whom are also part of our research team.

Wishing you all good health, solidarity and prosperity in these changing times.

*Kathryn Underwood*, Project Director

## News from the office

Like most research across Canada, our project moved to remote procedures as of March 13. For our research team, this means that we have limited access to our physical data files, to our office space and to mail. Ryerson University is working on plans to re-open non-essential research space and we will take direction from them on plans to return to the office. In the meantime, we have shifted staff activities to focus on data collection and continuity of the research. Details about changes to our procedures are in the ethics section below.

While many of the researchers have been involved with interviewing in the past, we are currently working with staff only, as a result of our need to be able to coordinate

interviewing schedules. For the first month of remote work, Katie Ceolin coordinated twice weekly team meetings. We have now moved to weekly meetings, with continued communication amongst team members as needed. Our current staff team includes Thanh Thanh Chung, Data Coordinator, Abneet Atwal, Laura Feltham, Alison Smith (on leave) and Catriona Kollar, Project Coordinators, Melanie dos Remedios, Research Assistant, and Katherine Ceolin, Administrative Coordinator. Tracey Ranta, a Ryerson University Early Childhood Studies placement student completed her term with us in March 2020.

## Cancellation notice:

### ***Let the Rivers Flow: Responsive Early Childhood and Community Inclusion (Kirkland Lake, Ontario), May 9-11, 2020***

We were very sorry to have to cancel this event due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you to the District of Temiskaming Elders Council who had spent many hours over the last year planning this event. I would also like to thank our partners, the Indigenous Centre of Excellence for Early Years and Child Care and Shannon

Murphy, Arlene Haché, Ann Batisse, Dani Grenier-Ducharme, and Catriona Kollar, as well as the many community members, mothers, and early childhood educators who had been preparing to speak at this event. We will be working with the Elders Council and the IECSS Executive Committee to determine how we will move forward with the event at some point in the future. We welcome feedback on accessibility of events both geographically and in our communications, as well as in the subject matter.



## Research activities

### *COVID-19 updates*

Our primary concern as we moved to remote work was the continuity of data collection. In a longitudinal study, as identified in our grant proposal, one of the concerns is participant retention from year to year. Spring is our busiest time for interviews, with the majority of Hamilton, Toronto, and Wellington interviews taking place in these months. In order to ensure ongoing data collection, we moved to telephone interviews, and we have been shortening the interviews, when requested, to accommodate participants' circumstances at home. While we have conducted telephone interviews in the past, they were an exception. We are happy to report that we have conducted 18 interviews since the COVID-19 orders to stay home began. As a longitudinal study we are in the position of being able to document changes to family services and interactions before and after the COVID-19 shutdown. We will conduct some analysis of participant retention (which may give some insight into differences in accessibility for families in face-to-face versus telephone interviews). We are also continuing with recruitment activities, albeit on a much smaller scale.

### *Ethics*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we made several changes to our research procedures. We were able to do this after submitting an ethics amendment to Ryerson University, which was approved. While we have ethics applications at many institutions, we moved forward with the procedural changes based on the approval from Ryerson. We will include the changes in procedure (which we believe are not substantive to the approved applications at other institutions) in our annual renewals as they come due.

Our data storage procedures have been adjusted to accommodate remote work. Project laptops are used directly by the Project Director and Data Coordinator who have been granted secure access to project data through the Shared Drives at Ryerson University. Data is shared securely between project staff and researchers using Hightail encryption software, and all staff have password protected USB drives to store working data files. Project staff are also required to use a secure VPN within Ryerson's network while working on project data.

In addition to the changes to procedures and data storage, we had made two changes to our research procedures prior to the pandemic. The first is that we will ask Cohort 1 participants if they are willing to continue with interviews for an additional 3 years, taking us to a 9 year data collection timeline for that cohort. Second, we have been approved to ask parents from Cohort 2, in year 3, and Cohort 1, in year 6 to bring to the interview documents that they believe have been critical in their interactions with institutions. We did this in year 3 for cohort 1, and it was very successful. First, it produced images that we used for our photo exhibit, and second, we are working on analysing the texts. Perhaps more importantly, it really added to the interview dynamic and expanded how the participants talked about their experience. While these changes were amended at Ryerson and approved, we have put the document analysis on hold, as it is not possible to photograph documents during the telephone interviews. We will revive this activity once we are back to face-to-face interviews.

Laura Feltham has been coordinating ethics applications and annual renewals and ensuring that these changes are documented in our ethics applications and approvals.

## Community News and Partner Activities: City of Toronto report

*Thank you to Nancy Hendy for contributing to this report from the City of Toronto. We will be featuring different team partners in upcoming communiques. IECSS methods were developed by partners from the outset and these original contributions continue to guide our work.*

The City of Toronto, Children's Services, along with a wonderful group of active and engaged agency partners from across the country, have been working together since 2013 on the IECSS project. The original group of partners were instrumental in designing the study to ensure the voices of children with disabilities and their families would be the source of information in the research and findings.

Listening to and hearing the journey of children and families through service systems helps to deepen our understanding of each unique and personal story. Collectively those voices form a comprehensive cross-cultural sample providing a lens on the lived experience of children and families. This was central to the Toronto Children's Services interest in being part of the research, including design, implementation, analysis and dissemination of research findings.

The IECSS project examines institutional systems, identifying barriers and systemic exclusion for children and families, which, in turn, impacts outcomes for all children in early learning and child care programs.

Toronto Children's Services has drawn on learning from the IECSS project, embedding findings in our strategic planning. Specifically, we have analyzed and continue to draw on findings related to the impact on families of experiences with the Every Child Belongs (Children's Services inclusion model) and the EarlyON system. We have included new understanding of Indigenous peoples' experiences within the early learning and care system. We also have been able to use findings in ongoing reflection on the work of front line caseworkers, child care consultants, resource professionals and the work of the Toronto Child and Family Network.

The City of Toronto has invested in this research because it heightens our understanding of the challenges and barriers facing families of children with disabilities, and the hidden systemic issues that we can address. The research is helping to inform the strategic directions that can lead to better outcomes for children with disabilities, building on a foundation of rights, equity and inclusion laid out through the Ontario Human Rights Code. At this time of great challenge within the world, the journey of children and families is central to building the services that will provide what is helpful and supportive.



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## Other IECSS Activities

### ***IECSS Website***

Some of you may have noticed that our website has had an update. We have migrated to a Ryerson University webpage rather than our former blog. This update has facilitated better technical support for our team, as well as giving us the opportunity to revise and update information on the site. We continue to update the site regularly and would love to hear your feedback. Our website can still be found at [www.inclusiveearlychildhood.ca](http://www.inclusiveearlychildhood.ca).

### ***Youth Advisory Committee***

Two of our youth advisors, Munashe Z. Nyenya and Grace Sweetman, have been selected to be a part of the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child Day of General Discussion on the theme of Children in Alternative Care. Several of our team applied to part of this day, and we are so pleased to be represented. Jointly Organised by Lumos and a coalition of partner organisations, IECSS is the sponsoring organisation for Munashe and Grace. Abneet Atwal, IECSS Project Coordinator, will support these activities. The Day of General Discussion is intended to take place in Geneva, although plans may be adapted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Leading up to the meeting in Geneva, both youth are participating in online planning meetings with other youth from around the world. Following the event in Geneva, the youth will be reporting back to IECSS and the other IECSS youth advisory members.

### ***Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) Proposal***

Some of you will remember that in 2019 we reached out to all of our partners about an opportunity through Employment and Social Development Canada to carry out an action research project. This project was very successful and as a result ESDC again reached out to us in May, with an opportunity for those organisations who had participated in 2019 to propose research related to COVID-19 planning. As a result, the Temiskaming Native Women's Support Group and the Comox Valley Child Development Association, along with Ryerson University, submitted a proposal to ESDC in order to address disability and inclusion specific issues arising from the closure of early childhood and family services. While we have not had a response to the proposal, we are working with several partners to document their activities during the pandemic, and the opportunities and learning that has arisen from this time. If you would like to work with other partners in this activity, please contact Kathryn Underwood directly.

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## Recent IECSS publications

Our partners and researchers have been incredibly busy during the COVID-19 pandemic and stay home orders. Thank you to Breanna Lawrence and Patty Douglas for dedicating time to analyzing data from Brandon, MB for an analysis of the tensions between COVID-19 responses that focus on

the economy versus those that focus on children.

Lawrence, B., Underwood, K., & Douglas, P. (2020). *IECSS Policy No. 9: Reconciling Interests of Children and Economies during the COVID-19 pandemic: Learning from families in Brandon, Manitoba*. Toronto, ON: Inclusive Early Childhood Service System project.

Thank you to Alison Smith who was able to finish this policy brief before going on maternity leave. Look for more from Alison who is currently working on her PhD at OISE.

Smith, A. (2020). *IECSS Policy Brief No. 8: Black Experience and Disabled Childhoods: Comparison of Federal and Provincial Policies*. Toronto, ON: Inclusive Early Childhood Service System project.

We are also pleased to announce that the following publications came out since our last communiqué. Stay tuned for more publications from our international advisory committee and an article resulting from our photo-exhibit:

Underwood, K., Church, K., & van Rhijn, T. (2020). Responsible for Normal: The Contradictory work of Families. In S. Winton, & G. Parekh (Eds.), *Critical Perspectives on Education Policy in Schools, Families, and Communities*. Charlotte, NC: IAP Publishing.

Underwood, K., Frankel, E., Parekh, G., & Janus, M. (2019). Transitioning work of families: Understanding trans-institutional power in early childhood programs and services. *Exceptionality Education International*, 29(3), 135-153.

## Resources from the community and our team:

In light of recent events in Canada the US and across the globe, we are featuring writings and resources from Black disabled commentators and activists on COVID-19 in this communiqué. We will continue to feature resources of relevance to our partners and research team:

### **Ontario Alliance of Black School Educators webinar series on COVID-19:**

June 9, 16, 23, 2020. Free Registration: <https://onabse-webinars-2020.eventbrite.ca>

### **The Disability Justice Network of Ontario:**

<https://www.djno.ca/>

### **National Black Disability Coalition**

<http://blackdisability.org/>

### **Disabled Women's Network of Canada (DAWN)**

<https://www.dawncanada.net/>

### **Crutches and Spices Blog:**

<https://crutchesandspice.com/>

## **New resources from team members**

Our research team members hold a wide range of expertise and are active in many research projects across Canada and the globe. In our new communiqué format, we will feature publications and research from our team members that may be of interest to other team members, partners and staff.

Douglas, P., Rice, C., Runswick-Cole, K., Easton, A., Gibson, M., Gruson-Wood, J., Klar, E., & Shields, R. (Advance online publication January 4, 2019). Restorying autism: A body becoming disability studies in education approach. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1563835>

Murray, J. J., Hall, W.C., & Snoddon, K. (2020). The importance of signed languages for Deaf children and their families. *The Hearing Journal*, 73(3), 30-32.

- doi:10.1097/01.HJ.0000657988.24659.f3
- Parekh, G., & Underwood, K. (2020, May 14). *Coronavirus crisis shows ableism shapes Canada's long-term care for people with disabilities*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-crisis-shows-ableism-shapes-canadas-long-term-care-for-people-with-disabilities-137478>
- Snoddon, K., & Murray, J.J. (2019). The Salamanca Statement and sign language education for deaf learners 25 years and on. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 23(7-8), 740-753. DOI: 10.1080/13603116.2019.1622807.
- Zeraatker, D., Duku, E., Bennett, T., Guhn, M., Forer, B., Brownell, M., & Janus, M. (2020). Socioeconomic gradient in the developmental health of Canadian children with disabilities at school entry: A cross-sectional study. *BMJ Open* 2020, 10, 1-8. DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-032396
- Lero, D., Prentice, S., Friendly, M., Richardson, B., & Freaser, L. (2019). *Non-standard work and child care in Canada: A challenge for parents, policy makers, and child care provision*. Childcare Resource Research Unit and University of Guelph.
- Friendly, M. (2019). *A bad bargain for us all: Why the market doesn't deliver childcare that works for Canadian children and families*. Childcare Resource and Research Unit. <https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/OP31-A-bad-bargain-for-us-all.pdf>
- Rice, C., & Chandler, E. (2019). Representing difference. Disability, digital storytelling, and public pedagogy. In: K. Ellis, G. Goggin, B. Haller, & R. Curtis. *The Routledge Companion to Disability and Media*. (pp. 367-376). Routledge.
- Montgomery, P., Mossey, S., Rice, C., McCauley, K., Chandler, E., Changfoot, N., & Underhill, A. (2019). Healthcare providers' experiences as art-based research participants: "I created my story about disability and difference, now what?" *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 51(4), 255-263. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0844562119835130>
- van Rhijn, T., Maich, K., Lero, D.S., & Hope Irwin, S. (2019). Assessing inclusion quality: The SpecialLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale. *Exceptionality Education International*, 29(3), 92-112. Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/eei/vol29/iss3/7/>
- van Rhijn, T., Osborne, C., Ranby, S., Maich, K., Hall, C., Rzepecki, L., & Hemmerich, A. (2019, early online view). Peer play in inclusive childcare settings: Assessing the impact of Stay, Play, & Talk, a peer-mediated social skills program. *Child Care in Practice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13575279.2019.1588707>
- Areguy, F., Mock, S., Breen, A., van Rhijn, T., Wilson, K., & Lero, D. (2019). Communal orientation, benefit-finding, and coping among young carers. *Child and Youth Services*, 40(4), 363-382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0145935X.2019.1614906>

### Research to Watch:

**Rights for Children and Youth Partnership.** <http://rcypartnership.org/> (led by Dr. Henry Parada, with Kathryn Church)

**Critical Transitions: Identifying key factors shaping students' elementary, secondary, and post-secondary pathways.** SSHRC Insight Grant (led by Dr. Gillian Parekh)

**What is the Best Policy Mix for Diverse Canadian Families with Young Children? Re-imagining Family Policies.**  
SSHRC Partnership Grant, October 2019.

(led by Dr. Andrea Doucet at Brock University, includes Dr. Donna Lero, Martha Friendly, Dr. Tricia van Rhijn, and Dr. Patty Douglas)

**COVID-19 Creative Writing Contest.**

Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights.  
<https://carleton.ca/landonpearsoncentre/>

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