

# AA<sub>CL</sub>Connections

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Summer camp and new friends make for lasting memories. Natural connections illustrate what inclusive recreation and leisure experiences are all about. The City of Calgary's Recreation Department is committed to inclusion and welcomes the participation of every child. Learn how the City, AA<sub>CL</sub> and Calgary Child and Family Services Authority are working together. See story page 4.

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Family Conference March 19–20



Alberta Association for  
**Community Living**

**Changing Lives**  
**Changing Communities**

## On the cover

In Calgary, being truly included in summer camp means putting real action and resources behind the City's Commitment to Inclusion. This commitment appears in the City's Recreation Program Guide and is taken seriously by Disability Outreach Coordinator, Darlene Boyes. "I support the staff to build capacity in terms of disability issues and inclusive practices," says Boyes. "Our ultimate goal is to build something sustainable so that even if staff change, the practices are still in place." See story on page 4. ■

### Families looking for community inclusion and respite?

Our online database is connecting families in Lloydminster, Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, Canmore and Banff with available support workers.

Contact one of our facilitators to register.  
[www.aacl.org/Findstaffnow](http://www.aacl.org/Findstaffnow)

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## Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies Inclusive Education Summer Institute July 5–23, 2010

The University of Calgary, in cooperation with Alberta Association for Community Living, offers as part of the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies Summer Institute three half courses on Inclusive Education. These courses will be of interest to teachers, administrators, parents and others who are committed to educating students with developmental disabilities in the regular classroom. These courses are offered for undergraduate/graduate credit or audit.

#### Ethics of Caring and Inclusion: Implications for Educational Reform

Undergraduate: CORE 535.02

Graduate: CORE 691.33

July 5 to July 9

8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Instructor: Dr. Anne Hughson  
and Bruce Uditsky

#### Adapting Curriculum in Schools from K-12

Undergraduate: CORE 535.01

Graduate: CORE 691.04

July 12 to July 16

8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Instructor: Colin Saby

#### Addressing Challenging Behaviours in the Classroom

Undergraduate: CORE 535.03

Graduate: CORE 691.32

July 19 to July 23

8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Instructor: Carol Johnson

If you are interested in registering for any of these courses or if you require further information, please contact: Beth Parrott, ph. 403.220.2271 or [parrott@ucalgary.ca](mailto:parrott@ucalgary.ca). As a guideline, keep in mind the following information. Students who have not been accepted into a University of Calgary program or have not previously taken courses at the University of Calgary need to fill out an Open Studies Form. The form must be faxed to Beth Parrott at 403.220.6494 or mailed to Beth Parrott, Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, EDT 413, 2500 University Drive NW, Calgary, AB T2N 1N4.

In order to audit courses, a Permission to Audit Form must be completed. All of these credit courses have university transfer status. If you take these courses on an audit basis, they are not transferable to any university program.

Limited bursaries may be available for residents of Alberta through Alberta Association for Community Living for University of Calgary credit and audit participants. Contact AAAL: [mail@aacl.org](mailto:mail@aacl.org).

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# Inclusive post-secondary: Will it survive?

by Bruce Uditsky

For more than 20 years, Alberta has inspired the world with its development of inclusive post-secondary education for adults with developmental disabilities. There are more fully inclusive post-secondary opportunities in Alberta than anywhere else in the world. Many other jurisdictions in Canada and elsewhere have looked to Alberta to learn how to develop these opportunities in their own provinces and countries.

Until recently inclusion in post-secondary education was expanding, thanks to support and funding from the Persons with Developmental Disabilities (PDD) Program and its Regional Boards. Alberta Advanced Education also contributed funding to AACL to support expansion and to enable AACL to develop the world's first evaluation tool for ensuring quality and continuous improvement. To be clear, the PDD program only funds 'inclusion facilitators' – staff who are on campus to facilitate inclusion and participation. Advanced Education funds post-secondary institutions and the post-secondary institutions through their faculty, courses, classrooms, libraries and laboratories provide the education while peers and classmates without disabilities provide natural supports. In turn, the students being included annually contribute more than \$150,000 in tuition and fees.

Repeated research has demonstrated the benefits and outcomes of inclusive post-secondary education. The vast majority of completing students go on to be employed, usually at twice the rate of employment that currently exists in Alberta for individuals with developmental disabilities. Many families report that their sons and daughters require fewer paid supports as adults.

Inclusive post-secondary education has demonstrated the wealth of untapped community capacity that can be brought to bear in both enabling inclusion and improving sustainability. The welcoming nature of the post-secondary institutions, receptivity by faculty to teaching students with developmental disabilities and the supportive relationships and friendships from non-disabled peers has been remarkable. Students with developmental disabilities constantly exceed expectations and demonstrate knowledge and skill development that often challenge pre-conceived notions of their abilities and talents. More post-

secondary institutions are wanting to offer inclusive post-secondary education and there is far more demand from individuals and families than can be accommodated, yet we have seen a reduction in the number of opportunities and no plans for expansion. One PDD Region has already terminated its funding for inclusion facilitators at a college and the PDD program appears divided on its future commitment.



Inclusive post-secondary education is also one of the most cost effective and cost-beneficial opportunities funded by the Persons with Developmental Disabilities Program. For less and certainly no more than what the PDD Program spends per person on day and community access programs that often have few if any outcomes, inclusive post-secondary education has a proven track record. Students who are employed just half-time will return to the government through reduced income supports the equivalent of what was spent to provide them with that education. No PDD funded facilities are required as students access all of the academic and non-academic facilities and activities the post-secondary education institutions offer. In effect, inclusive post-secondary education maximizes PDD funding by ensuring it goes to provide direct support almost exclusively.

If PDD does not fund the inclusion of students with developmental disabilities at university or college, it still has to provide support to these individuals. This includes the kind of unimaginative supports that students and families find pointless and frustrating, like day programs with no outcomes and such meaningless activities as touring shopping centres day after day.

Inclusive post-secondary represents the best of what Alberta has to offer individuals with developmental disabilities and their families. Yet the future of inclusive post-secondary education is in question. As inclusion in post-secondary education creates and sustains hope while providing valued and meaningful outcomes, this is precisely what government should be committed to sustaining and expanding. ■

*(Uditsky is the CEO of AACL.)*

# Calgary Recreation backs up its welcome to people with disabilities

by Karin Melberg Schwier

When three year-old Josh Porter showed up for his first day of Pirate Camp last summer, his mom Melanie hovered nervously just outside for the entire morning. The next day, she waited 20 minutes and by the third day, she went upstairs to get a workout. As one of the summer camps offered through the City of Calgary's Recreation department, it promised *all* children a fun time. When Melanie told staff about Josh's autism and what kind of supports work best, staff assured her that an inclusion facilitator was close by to help if needed. Josh pillaged and plundered with the other children for the week and staff adapted activities and expectations to his needs.

"I was very pleased about his leaders," says Melanie. "Thankfully, he didn't require [the inclusion facilitator's] assistance but I think that was due to the leader's flexibility and patience. One of them had watched Josh in the child care facility at Village Square Leisure Centre, so she was a familiar face for both of us and I know she's very competent."

It's one thing to be welcomed; being truly supported to have a quality inclusive experience as a child, parent or recreation leader is another. Putting real action and resources behind the City's Commitment to Inclusion that appears in its Recreation Program Guide is something that City Recreation's Disability Outreach Coordinator Darlene Boyes takes seriously.

"I approach my work knowing that I support the staff to build their capacity in terms of disability issues and inclusive practices," says Boyes. "But how do you do it and how do you sustain it? How do we enhance inclusion practices? Our ultimate goal is to build something sustainable so that even if staff change, the practices are still in place."

An appreciation for the inclusion of all Calgarians in recreation and leisure programming isn't new to the Recreation Department. There is an official Council-approved mandate to focus on inclusion programming, a number of strategies related to promotion, to training of staff, to registration process and communication and ultimately the participation of children. "While this work was already underway," says Boyes, "a phone call from AACL really sparked some action."

"We were asked which of our programs were fully inclusive," recalls Boyes. "Our programs are publicized as being open to all Calgarians. Of course children are physically included, but what about the social inclusion? After a summer pilot where we partnered with AACL, we knew we didn't have to convince people that inclusion is right. Everyone wants a positive experience, and not just the child with the disability and their family. How do you make it a positive experience for the staff, too?"

Alicia Fisher of AACL's Supportive Communities: Strengthening Families initiative works with Boyes, City recreation staff and families who are looking for a positive inclusive experience. The Supportive Communities: Strengthening Families initiative is a partnership with and funded by Calgary and Area and East Central Child and Family Services. Josh Porter's natural inclusion at Pirate Camp is an example of the success the partnership hopes to achieve.

"I think it's a great example that shows what the City of Calgary is doing to improve their welcome messaging to families of children with disabilities." Fisher says that since the City's clear Commitment to Inclusion has been published in its program guides, "we've seen a dramatic increase in the numbers of children being included, especially in last summer's camps."



Darlene Boyes, Disability Outreach Coordinator with the City of Calgary's Recreation Department. Working with AACL was "definitely a win and why not partnership. We had some ideas, but with AACL we were able to really focus and learn and take that forward to improve our practices."

In Melanie Porter's case, Josh was registered on-line so she wasn't aware of the City's message of inclusion and didn't realize she could explain Josh's needs ahead of time. "I'd suggest a link on their registration form that asks parents if their child has special needs," she says. "Then provide a link to an area where parents can list specifics and offer suggestions about how to help the child participate and adapt. It would have been very helpful if I could have found a number to call so I could send along information about any behaviours that might come up."

Based on an initial pilot project with AACL and feedback from a focus group, Boyes says having well-trained staff in the role of Inclusion Facilitator is very important. Their role is not to provide one-to-one support. Rather, they are on hand to answer questions, offer ideas, facilitate communication between the parents and staff, assist in adapting activities, and troubleshoot if the need arises. So far, Inclusion Facilitators have only been available at two major leisure centres in the city, but the hope is they will be available through all recreation and leisure programs. Boyes says, "Training all staff to be more knowledgeable and capable of enabling inclusion and participation is one of our principal goals."

"Darlene and I have met several times to talk about developing a model of sustainability for their commitment to inclusion," says AACL's Fisher. "And that inclusion facilitator is key. Work has already begun to expand the development of Inclusion Facilitators. By maintaining a Commitment to Inclusion, City Recreation staff and the larger community realize and embrace the value of inclusion to all children."

On behalf of the City of Calgary, Boyes accepted an AACL Community Inclusion Award at the 2008 Family Conference, and calls it "humbling but affirming to know we are on the right track. No one questions the value of inclusion," she says. "People just want the support and training to be sure it's done well and successfully."

"I was definitely working on inclusion," she says, "but it was wonderful to have that greater support to explore how to make it work for every child. We had some ideas, but with AACL we were able to really focus and learn and take that forward to improve our practices."

The City now tracks inclusion, its success and challenges. "As success grows, the hope is that word will spread and more families will enroll their



**"No one questions the value of inclusion. People just want the support and training to be sure it's done well and successfully," says Darlene Boyes. Friendships can blossom when there's good communication with families, staff and participants.**

children in inclusive recreation programs," says Fisher.

Boyes looks forward to further collaboration with AACL to build on the success to date. Recreation leaders felt more empowered with information and suggestions from families and Inclusion Facilitators. In fact, Boyes heard from staff that the ideas for making a child with a disability have a successful recreation experience could be used for any child.

Armed with many positive examples and feedback from happy parents and camp staff, Boyes looks forward to another season of inclusive recreation and leisure opportunities for all children.

"We haven't reached all our goals, but it was a wonderful affirmation that we're on the right road. AACL is a great support, available to train staff and offer ideas, suggestions and tools. AACL's approach is one of fostering partnerships and building relationships and we certainly have that with them."

As for Pirate Josh, his mother is looking forward to sending him to a camp this summer, something with a lot of physical activity like swimming and outside activities, and will be sure to talk with camp staff in advance to ensure a good experience for everyone. ■

**Fill up with Husky** Every time you use your AACL Husky card, the Association receives 2% of the purchase price. A little adds up to a lot. Get your free Husky card from AACL and fill up to support people with developmental disabilities.



# Post-secondary options benefit students with developmental disabilities

Seventeen post-secondary universities and colleges offer inclusive post-secondary education across Alberta – Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Norquest, Bow Valley College, Red Deer College, Lakeland College, Augustana Campus at the University of Alberta, The King’s University College, Concordia University College, Grant MacEwan University, Lethbridge College, Olds College, Mount Royal University, Keyano College, University of Alberta, University of Calgary and St. Mary’s University.

These inclusive post-secondary initiatives are not traditional congregated, pre-vocational, partly integrated or life skills programs. Instead, students with developmental disabilities including those with severe and multiple disabilities, are fully included in the regular programs and courses offered by Departments and Faculties that are as diverse as the students themselves.

Of the 83 students currently enrolled, courses of study include, but are not limited to: Bachelor of Arts, Design Studies, Office Assistant, Physical Education, Educational Assistant, Theatre Production, Travel, Event Coordination, Animal Health Technology, Applied Business and Entrepreneurship, Applied Communications/Electronic Publishing, Disability and Community Studies, Social Work, Early Learning and Child Care, Public Relations, Aboriginal Community Support Worker, Recreation Therapy, Culinary Arts, Baking, Office Management and Business Operations, Radio and Television Arts, Agricultural Management, Agricultural and Heavy Equipment, and Horticulture/Landscape.

Many families may believe inclusive post-secondary education is just for individuals with developmental disabilities who do not have severe disabilities. But in fact it is open to and proven successful for any adult with developmental disabilities who may have an interest in learning, including those with severe and multiple disabilities.

Dave Sobsey is in his first year at Concordia University College. He is in the Bachelor of Arts program with a major in music and an undecided minor. Last semester he studied Religion and Music and this semester is now enrolled in history as well as another music course. His professors are committed

to his learning and modify his course work to enable Dave’s learning and participation.

Dave’s health and physical mobility have always been a challenge and while in high school he used a wheelchair most of the time, but now he rarely uses one. He’s walking better as he is motivated by his peers and an interesting world to explore. His parents have commented that his health has never been stronger and that he has a robust social life and curricular expectations.

“Prior to our son going to university I didn’t really know what was possible for Dave,” says his father. “The experience has far exceeded our expectations and has changed our view of what might be possible.” Dave is a Concordia Student Representative and tours potential new students around the campus.

Over 100 students with developmental disabilities have now completed their studies through inclusive post-secondary education since its inception in 1987. Many have made friends and 70-80 percent have secured employment. ■

*(Learn more about inclusive post-secondary education. Request Inclusive Post-secondary Education for Adults with Developmental Disabilities: A promising path to an inclusive life by Bruce Uditsky and Anne Hughson. The book comes with Living the Dream, a DVD that illustrates inclusive post-secondary education. Both are available from AACL. Watch future issues of Connections for inclusive post-secondary education student profiles.)*



Dave and his friends enjoy getting together, hanging out and going to hockey games. .

# Positive approaches support people with difficult behaviours – Part 1

Last spring, AACL hosted an intensive nine-day training institute with David Pitonyak, featuring guest speakers John O'Brien and Al Vecchione. Over 40 participants—students, staff, parents, professionals and human service workers from around the province participated. AACL sponsored this event in response to the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities with serious and challenging behaviours, their families and the agencies committed to supporting them. In many regions and communities throughout Alberta, there are insufficient resources to address the needs of some individuals with complex needs who consequently end up in institutions or in other dehumanizing conditions.

Institute leader David Pitonyak believes that difficult behaviours are “messages which can tell us important things about a person and his or her surroundings.” Understanding the meaning behind those messages is the first step toward positive change.

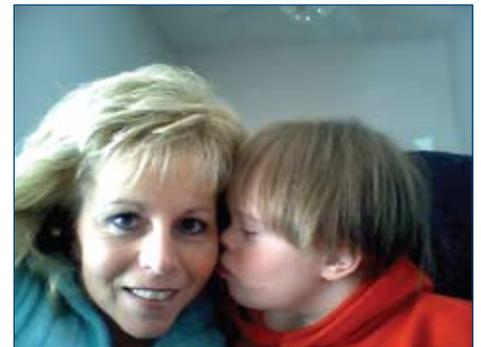
“The Institute is designed to build capacity within a community to deliver and sustain respectful and positive approaches to difficult behaviours,” Pitonyak told *Connections*. “A basic building block of the Institute is that difficult behaviours result from unmet needs, for example, the loneliness so many people with developmental disabilities experience throughout their lives. The work is to understand a person so that positive approaches to meeting these needs can be established.” Pitonyak insists the focus is not only on the person

with difficult behaviours. “Another building block is that a person’s needs are best met by people whose needs are met. It is critical to develop real and meaningful support for the people who most care about the individual to ensure success.”

Throughout the two-week training, participants were exposed to several important areas of learning including crisis support, functional assessment, person-centered planning and community building, and were asked to think about one or two individuals they know and support, Pitonyak explains. Participants learned a set of core competencies covering topics that included the importance of belonging; seven steps for building a support plan; strategies for meeting the needs of direct support staff; crisis support plans; post traumatic stress disorder and recovery; physiological and emotional needs with psychologist Al Vecchione; difficult behaviours as intentional communication; promoting person-centered practices in traditional organizations; understanding behaviours that result from unmet needs and next steps with John O'Brien.

“Change of mind and heart is difficult for all of us, including those who want to persuade an organization to better serve individuals with complex needs,” says Anne Hughson, Director, Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies at the University of Calgary. “One frequent theme in the stories shared by Institute participants was the difficulty they had in trying to do the ‘best’ or

‘right’ thing to help an individual get what he or she needed. They often felt policies, procedures and decision-making processes of agencies or funders interfered with or interrupted their capacity to be responsive to the individual with behavioral challenges,” Hughson adds. “In fact, they felt it was often agency or government procedures that created ‘problem behaviors’ or further traumatized people.”



Karen and Dylan Way of Slave Lake.

Karen Way of Slave Lake has two teenagers. Dylan, 13, has Down syndrome, autism and some related medical concerns. “Dylan has significant behavior issues and the opportunity to attend was amazing. I learned so much, it’s hard to pinpoint just a few things. It really did open my eyes wider to possibilities and to Dylan and his needs.” One of those was medical issues and Way discovered, through the Institute, doctors had only been testing her son for three instead of four thyroid components. Since the Institute, extensive bloodwork has revealed a need for a medication adjustment. “It is so wonderful to know that you are not alone and there is support and information out there,” Way says. ■

(Watch *Connections for Part 2 of Positive Approaches*.)

## Our son was born with the right to inclusion

by Roman G.

Hope and despair. Hope is the road that led us to Canada. Despair is the state in which we found ourselves here after autism turned our dream into a nightmare. Our son was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder before the age of three. Since we didn't even know the word autism existed, never mind having a child with it, it was and still is a mind-blowing experience. Coming from a foreign country and not being familiar with the diagnosis and the whole system, we were overwhelmed and didn't know what to choose in terms of our son's education.

We are from Ethiopia. My husband came to Canada as an international student and we joined him later. We were excited to be here and hoped for a better future. Indeed this great country warmly welcomed us, in spite of its brutal winter. We had only one child when we arrived, but were anticipating having more. We put the idea of childbearing aside while my husband pursued his education. Our third child, a son, was born as planned. As parents we were more than happy, to say the least, to see our beautiful child growing up only to be devastated later by his diagnosis. However, we were determined to give him our best, which included planning for his education.

Our son attended early education from the time he was close to three until he was six years old. When it was time to start grade one, we scrambled in search of a better way of educating him because we couldn't see much improvement.

We asked for professional help to determine which way to go. One of the professionals suggested that our son would benefit from special education and the other suggested that he would benefit from being in a regular classroom with a one-on-one teacher aide. They both gave us their best advice according to their experience with schooling. Deep down inside we felt inclusion was the right thing, but we were scared to pursue it.

We feared discrimination, mocking and possible bullying from other children. We worried our son might feel frustrated in not being able to do what the rest of children were doing. All this made us nervous and made us decide against our deepest belief. Special education classes sounded irresistible with small class sizes, speech and occupational therapy and many teacher aids in the classroom. It is good to have all these resources. However, in my opinion this kind of school setting lacks the natural teaching environment where children with disabilities are taught in the same classroom as their peers without disabilities and learn from each other.

Our son went to special education for grades one to three. When he was in grade two, we grew less enthusiastic about special education and more comfortable with the idea of inclusion. I began to think about what it meant to our son to be segregated. This knowledge fueled my determination. I realized we were setting our son up for a life of

segregation, separated from his peers without the opportunity to make friends or learn from them.

This time around, I was determined to get it right and have our son included. No turning back. We set out asking different schools in our neighbourhood if they would include our son. Our request was turned down many times. For example, some schools said they had no children with special needs in their school, implying they either didn't want to or wouldn't know what to do. Some would say they don't take students outside of their area, while others would say they had finished registrations for the year.

We were so frustrated, especially me, since I was the one who was calling and meeting with schools while my husband worked to provide for the family. I became so tired of trying with no result that I wanted to drop everything and home school him myself. But I was exhausted before I even started. At the age of nine, our son already had six years of early education and special education under his belt and had fallen behind. Regular schools were reluctant to take him and we fell into despair and hopelessness again.

My husband and I presented our request to our community school once again for the following school year. We didn't want anything less than inclusion for our son. My husband and I were not going to take, for example, the "higher functioning" special education class, or the "opportunity" class

as those were the first choices we were told we could enroll our son in. As things were still not going our way no matter who we asked or what we did, I contacted Edmonton Public School Board for help. That is how I became aware of AACL.

I am ever grateful to the woman who told me about the involvement of AACL in inclusion. She told me if we are not getting the help or response we needed, that AACL would give us an advocate to go to the schools with us to advocate for our son. That day was one of the happiest days I had in so long.

Despite thinking where on earth AACL was all that time, I was able to contact the organization. In no time AACL assigned an advocate for our son. Thanks to AACL, our son was welcomed into a regular classroom at our community school. AACL also had an Inclusive Education Consultant that would work with his teachers to modify and adapt his curriculum and instruction.

It was a whole new beginning for our son. The school is working with us and the progress our son is showing is promising. His advocate and education consultant from AACL go to his school to review his progress, and follow up, while working hand-in-hand with his teachers. We have a great relationship with his teaching team. They all work hard towards making a difference in his schooling. His classmates are little angels to say the least and they proved us wrong by showing him love and support as opposed to mocking and bullying. It was great to see them cheering and singing "Happy Birthday" to him in class. His classmates also invite him to their birthday parties, play with him, read with him and do their best to make him feel at ease. We are fortunate to have AACL, a great ally and advocate by our side.

AACL is helping us dream once more that our beautiful child will reach his potential, whatever that might be. By continuing with inclusion and working to make it successful, we hope our son will have a happy adulthood with his older sisters. Nobody is doing a child a favour by including him. It is the right he is born into. It took a lot of effort by us and from AACL to fight for inclusion, but our despair has turned into hope. ■

*(Watch for the next in the New to Canada Series in the Summer issue of Connections.)*

## Family Voices

Alberta is divided into six regions— Northwest, Northeast, Edmonton, Central, Calgary and South. AACL has developed networks of families, known as Family Voices (FV), to advocate regionally on behalf of children and adults with developmental disabilities. These networks work with school districts to improve inclusive education, with Child and Family Services Authorities to improve supports to families and with Persons with Developmental Disabilities Community Boards to improve supports to adults with developmental disabilities. An AACL Community Development Advocate supports each network:

**Northwest:** Aimee Steinke, [asteinke@aacledmonton.org](mailto:asteinke@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 780.832.7326**

**South:** Heather Wiebe, [hwiebe@aacledmonton.org](mailto:hwiebe@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 403.892.5817**

**Tracey Semko**, [tsemko@aacledmonton.org](mailto:tsemko@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 403.548.4016**

**Central:** position vacant.

**Northeast:** Leane Maguire, [lmaguire@aacledmonton.org](mailto:lmaguire@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 780.206.5522**

**Calgary:** Alicia Fisher, [afisher@aacledmonton.org](mailto:afisher@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 403.880.5951**

**Edmonton:** Dolores Patterson, [dpatterson@aacledmonton.org](mailto:dpatterson@aacledmonton.org), **ph: 780.717.2049**

**In this issue, we feature Edmonton.**

In addition to regular Network meetings, Family Voices Edmonton has begun holding small group discussions as a way for families to more deeply explore issues or topics of interest. These discussions have resulted in Family Voices members collectively and individually taking action to address concerns or pursue possibilities, all aimed at improving inclusion for family members with developmental disabilities. Topics covered have included how education and other systems are and are not inclusive and what to do about it, a discussion about employment opportunities, supports and barriers to inclusive experiences, and most recently a session explored some of the creative ways families have established homes for their sons and daughters.

In each of these gatherings, families come together, some sharing their past experience and others sharing what they hope for the future. Network meetings provide an opportunity for the families involved in the small group discussions to share highlights with the larger group and invite participation in any resulting action. The recent small group discussion around inclusive housing options led to the creation of a sub-committee to learn more about inclusive cooperative housing. The families involved are very interested in finding others who would also like to research this option and are planning to host an information session to share what they have learned and invite other members to join in this journey. ■

*For information about Family Voices Edmonton, contact Dolores Patterson at 780.717.2049 or [dpatterson@aacledmonton.org](mailto:dpatterson@aacledmonton.org).*

# Canada to ratify Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

## Will it make a difference in people's lives?

By Diane Richler

On December 3, 2009, the government of Canada tabled the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in the House of Commons. At the time of writing, it appears that the ratification will be completed in time to be announced at the Paralympic Games in British Columbia. On ratification it will become law in Canada, taking precedence over existing provincial and federal legislation. Will it make a difference for individuals who have disabilities, and for their families?

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was intended to guarantee rights for all, but a convention specifically to protect the rights of persons with disabilities is recognition of the prevalent worldwide discrimination on the basis of disability. The CRPD was negotiated over five years at United Nations headquarters in New York and adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 13, 2006. Inclusion International, the global federation of families to which AACL belongs through its membership in CACL, was an active participant in the negotiations together with other global disability organizations and hundreds of individuals and organizations, including CACL.

The CRPD marks a dramatic shift in the framework for international law affecting people with disabilities. Although it does not establish new rights, it does establish new concepts for those rights to become reality. Its purpose is "to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all persons with disabilities, and to promote respect for their inherent dignity." It clearly moves away from thinking of people with disabilities as "objects" of charity, rehabilitation and social protection to considering them as "subjects" with rights, capable of making decisions about their lives.

Inclusion International was successful in enshrining our top four priorities in the CRPD:

1. The role of *families* is recognized as the link to community.
2. There is a right to *inclusive education* at all levels.
3. There is a right to *live in the community* – where and with whom one chooses.
4. There is a right to *support in making decisions*.

Once the ratification process is complete, the United Nations will monitor Canada's adherence to the CRPD. AACL, CACL, and Inclusion International will be able to participate in the monitoring process.

While there is much room for interpretation of the CRPD, and while we cannot expect practice to change immediately, the Convention does set a standard of support for persons with disabilities and their



Diane Richler, President, Inclusion International; Louise Arbour, former Justice of the Supreme Court and then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; and Gordon Porter, Director, Inclusive Education Initiatives, Canadian Association for Community Living and Chair, New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, in New York the day the Convention was opened for signatures. (Inclusion International photo)

families much more consistent with our vision of the future than what currently exists. Already, the CRPD is beginning to force many governments, funders, and service providers to re-examine their policies and practices. How much impact it has in Canada will largely depend on how well families and others hold government to account. Ratification of the CRPD will not lead to overnight changes in people's lives. But knowing our rights is the first step to having them respected. The CRPD can be a useful new tool in our advocacy efforts. Read the full text of the CRPD at: [www.un.org/disabilities/](http://www.un.org/disabilities/). ■

(Richler is President, Inclusion International and the former Executive Vice-President, CACL.)

## In the Reg Peters Library

The AACL Reg Peters Library has over 400 videos and DVDs, 2000 print materials, 45 journals and 70 newsletters. It is one of the most extensive holdings of resources from Canada and around the world on inclusion, community living and disability. In this issue of *Connections*, we feature two training resources from Australia.

Healthy Start is a new national strategy in Australia to help young children of parents with learning difficulties, including intellectual or developmental disabilities. Around 40,000 Australian children under five have a parent with a learning difficulty. Healthy Start is a strategy to better support the practitioners and organizations that support these families and, in turn, create safe, stimulating and supportive environments for young children.

**Step-by-Step Baby Care** Research shows that parents with learning difficulties and intellectual disabilities are better able to learn new skills for effective parenting when service support and resources match their learning needs. The DVD uses best practice teaching strategies and video modeling which have been shown to support the acquisition of complex parenting skills.



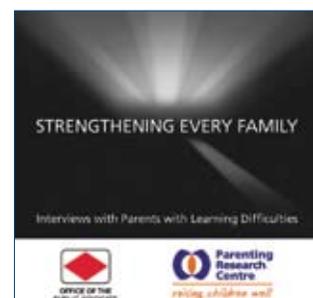
The *Step-by-Step Baby Care* DVD is a resource to support the specific needs of new parents who have learning difficulties. The DVD can be used as an interactive teaching aide and left with parents to use at home. Skills are broken down into step-by-step components with repetition and prompts to direct the viewer's attention to the most important parts of each skill.

The skills demonstrated are based on feedback from parents with learning difficulties who identified the skills they found the most difficult to learn. The DVD shows parents how to perform critical childcare tasks related to nutrition and daily care for new babies, including:

- Cleaning and sterilizing baby bottles (Milton method and boiling method)
- Making up a baby bottle using infant formula
- Washing your baby without a bath
- Giving your baby a bath.

In line with best practice teaching strategies, the parents performing the skills in the DVD are real parents, and one of the parents has a learning difficulty.

**Strengthening Every Family** This DVD presents interviews with parents with learning difficulties, including intellectual disabilities. The parents talk about a number of issues and give their views on significant topics about parenting including: good things about being a parent, challenges of being a parent, how they best learn new skills, and their experiences with services.

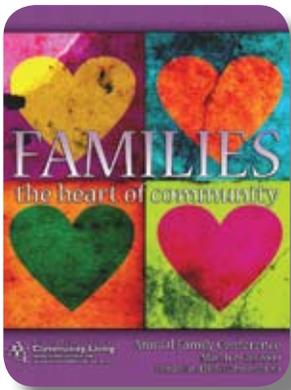


This production provides an opportunity to hear about parenting issues from the perspective of parents with learning difficulties. It highlights factors considered important by parents with learning difficulties regarding the support they need and how they best can learn. Resources such as this help people gain an understanding of the experience of parents with learning difficulties in the service system. ■

*(To borrow these materials, contact Lisa Snyder, Library Technician, AACL, 1724 Kingsway Ave., Edmonton, AB T5G 0X5; email: library@aacl.org or call 780.451.3055, ext 225. For more information, contact the Parenting Research Centre, Level 5, 232 Victoria Pde., East Melbourne VIC 3002, Australia. Email: healthystart@parentingrc.org.au.)*

### Unique training event with Dr. Wolf Wolfensberger

A reflective format workshop on The Philosophy of Personalism with Special Reference to People in Service Engagements and Advocacy with Societally Devalued People. Co-sponsored by Alberta Safeguards Foundation and ACCL, will be held June 11-13, 2010, at Ambrose University College, 150 Ambrose Circle S.W. Calgary, AB. Ph: 403.410.2000 or visit: [www.ambrose.edu](http://www.ambrose.edu). Participants are urged to take accommodation and meals at the college. The workshop is designed and directed by Prof. Wolf Wolfensberger, Director, Syracuse University Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency. Several associates will assist. Contact Carla Hamarsnes, phone 403.249.1554; email [chamarsnes@shaw.ca](mailto:chamarsnes@shaw.ca).



# Annual Family Conference

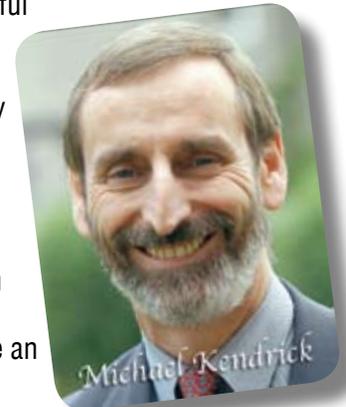
March 19-20, 2010



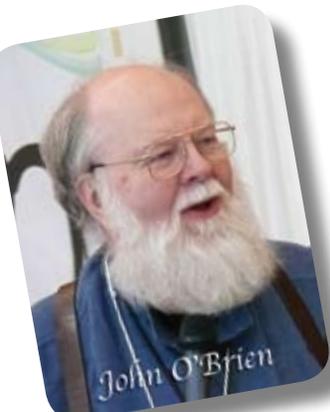
Attend two full days of presentations and workshops on a variety of topics including transition to adulthood, inclusive post-secondary education, advocacy strategies, and how an inclusive life begins at preschool. Held at the Fantasyland Hotel at the West Edmonton Mall in Edmonton, Alberta, this is the longest running and largest family conference in Canada. Child and youth programming is offered at a nominal cost as well as a fun-filled and informative youth forum for ages 14-29. We wrap up Saturday evening with the fantastic and always fabulous family dance and celebration.



Conference highlights include a number of the most respected and thoughtful leaders in the field of developmental disabilities. John O'Brien and Connie Lyle O'Brien, Michael Kendrick and Darcy Elks will together present a one-day workshop on what families and their allies need to consider as they continue to pursue an inclusive life irrespective of the difficult times ahead. Each of these speakers will address topics such as the natural authority of families, creating a family vision for an inclusive life, and community engagement and capacity. Also, Tim Loreman, noted authority on inclusive education, will provide a practical one-day workshop on inclusive education that will be of particular importance to parents and teachers as Alberta examines the future of inclusive education. The conference will also provide an opportunity to hear directly from Alberta Education about its future plans.



The conference is occurring at a time when services and funding to children and adults with developmental disabilities are once again seriously threatened, inclusion and individualization are at risk and the future looks bleak rather than bright. The need for hope, inspiration and sustained collective family action and leadership has never been greater. It is a time for families to gather.



Registration information, grant applications, child & teen programming registration forms and detailed session information are available at [www.aacl.org](http://www.aacl.org).



Accommodation: Book online by visiting The Fantasy Land Hotel's site: [www.fantasylandhotel.com/reservations](http://www.fantasylandhotel.com/reservations) or toll-free at 1.800.RESERVE (737.3783) or by email at [rooms@fantasylandhotel.com](mailto:rooms@fantasylandhotel.com). For group rates, please advise the booking agent that you are with AACL. Alternative options for accommodations include the Executive Royal Inn (PH: 1.800.661.4879, quote AACL, or group #4973), The West Harvest Inn (1.800.661.6993, quote AACL, or group #1545), The Sandman Inn (1.800.SANDMAN, quote AACL, or group #222451), or the Comfort Inn and Suites (780.484.4415, quote AACL). To take advantage of special AACL rates, please book rooms one month in advance.

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