

# ASD-CARC Trainees eNewsletter

Volume 4 November, 2008

## Trainee Conference Summaries

I attended many fascinating presentations during the RSIG-OADD conference, however one presentation was of particular interest to me. The transition to young adulthood is a challenging time, particularly for individuals with

Trainee  
Jessica Schroeder

Training Site  
York  
University

Conference  
OADD RSIG  
2008

Family Network, has provided direct funding to 10 families of young adults with developmental disabilities. This funding is intended to enable families to develop supports needed to help with the transition from high school to adulthood and includes a facilitator to help the family develop networks within the community and to provide advocacy support. This project led to several positive outcomes including: the development of community connections, participation in meaningful community and employment activities, and a parent-reported increase in quality of life. The presenter emphasized the importance of skilled

facilitators to assist families to develop networks within the community. The importance of being engaged in *meaningful* work was also highlighted. Through this evaluation, a manual outlining best practices to support individuals into adulthood was developed. This research will assist the community in providing services to adults with developmental disabilities.

In May 2008 I attended the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual Association for Behavior Analysis Conference in Chicago. Individuals attending ABA come from a number of professional backgrounds, which results in presentations with varying emphases and methodologies.

This was the first opportunity that I had to present the results of my Master's thesis (*Parent and Therapist*

Trainee  
Abbie Solish

Training Site  
York  
University

Conference  
IMFAR 2008

*Perspectives on Parent Involvement in Behavioral Intervention*) at an international conference, which was an excellent learning experience. I had the chance to dis-

cuss my research with students from a variety of universities and professionals from diverse organizations. I also had the opportunity to meet individuals from across Ontario who have been supporting my Master's and Dissertation research at their respective agencies, and to share my progress with them.

I was very interested in a presentation entitled *Evidence-Based Support Systems for Parents of Children with ASD in Australia* as it shares some commonalities with the work that I am doing for my dissertation. The individuals presenting this work discussed how measures of self-efficacy and parental distress were included in their research, which are constructs of interest in my work. I will be contacting the presenters with the hope of obtaining additional information about their research and potentially sharing some ideas with one another.

I attended a symposium about motivational interventions for children and adolescents with diagnoses on the autism spectrum. I enjoyed the talks presented in this symposium and can envision how this research will help to inform behavioural

## Trainee Conference Summaries cont....

programs for children with autism in the near future. One of the presentations addressed the benefits of providing embedded social reinforcement during therapy sessions with children with autism, and showed preliminary data on the effectiveness of this reinforcement. A second talk in this symposium also showed preliminary data on a program being developed to help children with autism spectrum disorders to broaden their interests and increase their flexibility while engaging in activities. Video footage of the skills that children learned throughout different stages of the program was shown.

One presentation, *Urban Legends and Autism: Clinical Encounters with Popular Fiction*, was delivered by a behaviour analyst from the United States. He discussed a number of “hot topics” in autism, including a behavioural perspective on the increasing prevalence rates of autism diagnoses and the perceived effect of the MMR vaccine. His presentation elicited conversation, as professionals shared their experiences of discussing these topics with families throughout their careers. Although these are conversations that are not new to me, I am accustomed to primarily engaging in such conversations with other psychologists. I found it interesting to hear the way that individuals with different training and backgrounds

conceptualize these sensitive issues.

This was the second ABA conference that I have attended since beginning my graduate work at York. On both occasions I have found it to be both a positive and educational experience.

Trainee  
Abbie Solish

Training Site  
York  
University

Conference  
IMFAR 2008

Both this year (2008) and last year (2007) I attended the Research Special Interest Group (RSIG) of the Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities conference.

RSIG provides a unique opportunity to meet with multidisciplinary professionals involved in the field of autism and developmental disabilities. Over the last two years a number of presentations have made lasting impressions.

Firstly, back in 2007, Dr. Patricia Minnes’ keynote address entitled “Family Research: Lessons Learned, Current Trends and Future Directions”, was passionately delivered and insightful. It highlighted how research about families of children with developmental disabilities has evolved over time. Dr. Minnes also reviewed the

numerous research paths that she and her colleagues have been exploring at Queen’s University. Furthermore, Dr. Valerie Temple from Surrey Place Centre also gave an inspiring talk about the use of videoconferencing technology. She discussed how she and her colleagues have been using this new technology to conduct psychological assessments with children and adults with developmental disabilities living in remote Northern communities. Research was currently underway to determine the stability of the participants’ scores when the assessments were done in person versus through videoconferencing. Moreover, Dr. Adrienne Perry spoke about work that she did with the clinical directors of the Intensive Behavioral Intervention (IBI) programs in Ontario. This study provides evidence for the effectiveness of IBI programs and highlights specific conditions under which IBI is more likely to produce optimal outcomes (e.g., relatively higher developmental level and younger age at entry).

In 2008, one interesting presentation was given by Dr. Karola Dillenburger from Queen’s University in Belfast. She spoke about the status of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) for children with autism in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. Dr. Dillenburger explained that unlike Ontario’s

## Trainee Conference Summaries continued...

government funding for Intensive Behavioural Intervention (IBI), there is currently no mandated funding for intervention in Ireland. Furthermore, many professionals working in the field have not received sufficient training to work with children with autism or to provide ABA services. Dr. Dillenburger stressed the need for further advances in the provision of ABA services in Ireland, focusing on the evidence-base that exists for the intervention. The distinction between Ontario's IBI services for children with autism and those currently being provided in Ireland is striking.

Another interesting presentation included a talk by Dr. Maurice Feldman from Brock University that explored the use of behavioural services for preschool children with developmental disabilities. Results suggest that a minority of children in the study were receiving behavioural interventions or had parents who were receiving parent training despite the fact that the children had behaviour difficulties requiring intervention. Potential reasons for this lack of utilization (e.g., parents not being comfortable with behavioural services, waitlists, use of alternate services) were considered by Dr. Feldman and the audience. Finally, Kate Sheese from York University presented her research about the experiences of six Latin American mothers raising children with disabilities. She shared some of the chal-

lenges that the mothers experience, including the need to overcome economic, social, and cultural barriers.

---

Presentation: McDonald, K., Raymaker, D.M., Robertson, S., & Nicolaidis, C. (2008, May).

*Participatory action research with disabled adults: advancing scientifically sound, socially relevant, ethical research.* Symposium presented at the American Association for Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Annual Meeting, Washington, DC.

Mentor  
Jonathan  
Weiss

Training  
Site  
York University/Centre  
for Addiction  
and Mental  
Health

Conference  
Summary of  
the American  
Association  
of Intellectual  
and Developmental

It gives me great pleasure to give some feedback about the 132<sup>nd</sup> AAIDD annual conference. This year's theme was: The New Professional: Leadership in Science, Practice, Policy, and Advocacy, and thus very fitting for attendance by a postdoctoral trainee from the ASD-CARC training program! I have observed in recent years an increasing presence with regard to the number of talks and posters focused on autism-related issues. I found one particular symposium most en-

gaging, which centered on self-advocacy and participatory action research initiatives within the autism research field. The presenters were Katherine McDonald, PhD (Portland State University), Dora Raymaker, MSc (Portland State University), Scott Robertson, MSc (Pennsylvania State University), Christina Nicolaidis, MD (Oregon Health and Science University), and Louise Lynch, MSSW (Austin Travis County Mental Health Retardation Center).

I am making a point of who presented only to be able to let you know that two of the presenters were on the autism spectrum, and were considered researchers and self-advocates. Ms. McDonald is co-director of AASPIRE: Academic Autistic Spectrum Partnership In Research and Education project. The panel spoke of the quest to develop scientifically sound, yet socially relevant and ethical research. This novel approach turns the "Ivory Tower" idea of science on its head, being steered by the community stakeholders first and foremost. They presented on the structure of AASPIRE as an example.

The AASPIRE project is a partnership between people from the Academic, Autistic, and Support communities. (The speakers stressed that they consider themselves "autistic", as opposed to having an autism spectrum disorder). Each person

## Trainee Conference Summaries continued...

brings unique perspectives, experiences, and skills to AASPIRE. Some partners may be members of more than one community, and people from all communities work together on all phases of research. From the Autistic Adults Community, individuals express their understanding of the needs and wants of autistic adults, insight into both how to conduct research appropriately for the community and how to do research that is relevant to the community, and personal knowledge of being on the autistic spectrum. From the Academic Research Community, researchers bring an understanding of the scientific process, academic knowledge in key fields, and the ability to manage aspects of the project specific to research (i.e., grant writing). From the Support and Service Community, individuals who provide a support role, such as disability workers, parents of autistic individuals, doctors, or teachers, provide insight into the systems that the community intends on researching and access to resources that the other communities may not have.

AASPIRE is in its infancy, but I was impressed by their message of cooperation and attitude. They are currently undertaking a study of health care access for adults with autism. The presentation left a thought-provoking question – how can we as researchers avoid speaking *to* stakeholders, and instead speak *with* stakeholders, at all phases

of the research, including inception?

---

Dr. Feldman delivered the keynote address at the 2008 Manitoba Association for Behaviour Analysis conference in Winnipeg. His presentation, entitled *Preventing Child Neglect: Evidence-Based Parent Training*

Trainee  
Kerri Walters

Training Site  
University of  
Manitoba

Conference  
Manitoba Association for  
Behaviour  
Analysis  
(MABA)

described his research on assessing and teaching parenting skills to adults with intellectual disabilities. He explained that by using a task analysis to develop assessment tools for evaluating parenting skills, training can be designed to teach those skills which the individual is struggling with. His research then demonstrated the effectiveness of his training procedures in producing improved performance among the individuals with whom he worked.

Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) is most well known for its application in providing treatment for children with ASDs, however, many of the ways in which ABA can be implemented stretch far beyond the scope of ASDs. In the case of Dr. Feldman's research, he

demonstrated the effectiveness of ABA techniques for teaching parenting skills to individuals with intellectual disabilities who were at risk for losing, or had already lost, custody of their children. Given the lack of skill-based assessment tools available for evaluating the ability of parents with intellectual disabilities to carry out the necessary tasks associated with parenting, Dr. Feldman's research offers both assessment tools and effective training procedures to teach the necessary skills to individuals within this population. This research offers hope to both parents and social agencies dealing with these difficult situations.