2013/2014
ANNUAL REPORT
Community-University Partnership for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families
Rising to the challenge and overcoming adversity is an almost universal experience that has inspired countless writers and philosophers over the centuries. It was also an experience that dominated much of this past year for CUP. Like other post-secondary institutes across Alberta, we faced uncertainty and challenges that inspired us to re-examine our goals and priorities and refresh our approach to the work we do and how we do it. As a result, we are now re-energized and refocused on leading and facilitating research that supports the wellbeing of children, youth and families. This annual report celebrates our resiliency and profiles the culmination of many long-term collaborative research projects. It also speaks to the results we hope to achieve in the future. Although this year was far from easy, we have emerged from it with a clearer understanding of what we are capable of and what we hope to do next.

“Challenges make you discover things about yourself that you never really knew. They’re what make the instrument stretch—what make you go beyond the norm.”

Unknown
LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

I am delighted to present to you our 2013/2014 Annual Report: Refresh, Refocus, Results. The past year was challenging for all universities across the province, and CUP was not exempt from changes: Steering Committee members, staff, and students came and went and we squeezed every loonie out of our budget. But the intense scrutiny helped us to really question our activities, principles and priorities. Are we fulfilling our mission? Meeting community and government needs? Adding value? Operating in an effective and efficient manner? Our Steering Committee, led by Co-Chairs Jane Drummond and Gloria Chalmers, faced some tough decisions and, as always, provided "agenda-less" leadership and guidance. They helped us refocus our efforts and refresh our approach to what we do and how we do it.

On page 5, learn about the workshops that were designed by community and government partners interested in providing evidence-based policy and services for families living with low incomes. Through our partnership with the Women and Children’s Health Research Institute, we are providing capacity and leadership in areas of community-based research methods, knowledge translation and qualitative methods to our health colleagues (p. 8 and p. 10). ECMap compiled the first comprehensive results on early childhood development in Alberta and continues to provide leadership to 100 community coalitions that are working to improve local outcomes (p. 4). In addition, ECMap studied the community coalitions themselves to try to document successes, barriers and challenges (p. 9). We also launched two new initiatives—a national Evaluation Capacity Network (p. 7) and an exploration of how best to design research projects in the community with marginalized populations (p. 9). Even in the midst of changes and challenges, we continued to do what we do best. The coming year is filled with more possibilities as some projects are ending while others are growing. Always dynamic. Never boring.

Personally, I would like to thank those that sent me warm wishes during my health challenges. Like CUP, I am “refreshed” and look forward to new opportunities.

Last, on behalf of the Steering Committee, staff, and students, I want to thank Yoshi Iwasaki for his hard work over the past few years and wish him continued success.

Sincerely,

Dr. Laurie Schnirer
Interim Director
how CUP serves the community

In addition to CUP’s varied research projects, CUP engages in three main activities: consulting, brokering and leading projects. As consultants, we meet with community partners about their research, evaluation and knowledge mobilization needs. We also assist researchers and students on campus with how to work with community and government partners. For example, a not-for-profit organization may want some help on their program evaluation plans. **Brokering** is a “match-making” service: connecting researchers with government or community partners and vice versa. For instance, a government department might want to find researchers on campus that focus on autism or bullying. Last, if there is a significant need in the community that many could benefit from research, we might develop and **lead a project** such as examining packages of services for low-income families or workshops that build capacity for community and government members to undertake research and evaluation. We take direction from our interdisciplinary and multi-sector Steering Committee (see p. 11) and work in service to bridge University of Alberta researchers, government policy makers and community program planners.

Although CUP offers consulting, brokering and project leadership as a service to all members of the university and community, we are often limited by funding and staff. Talented and rigorously trained staff and students are our “infrastructure.” Donations, grants and contracts are welcomed as they allow us to expand our capacity to meet demand.

These services are an important part of what we do and allow us to constantly refresh and strengthen our connections to our various communities.
The Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap) was created with the goal of developing a better understanding of early childhood development in Alberta. This past year ECMap compiled the first baseline provincial results, based on 70,206 kindergarten-aged children. These results show that young children in Alberta are falling below Canadian norms. Collected over a five-year period (2009 to 2013), the results provide a basis for making future comparisons in Alberta. Community-level results will be prepared for a report scheduled for release in April 2014 to the more than 100 coalitions that represent communities across Alberta.

Working with the ECMap team, coalitions were able to identify and map more than 23,100 community resources. Much work needs to be done to understand the link between community resources and early development — and to refocus efforts and energy on improving early development supports and outcomes for all children across the province.

ECMap is funded by the Alberta Government through the Early Child Development Mapping Initiative. See www.ecmap.ca.
REFRESHING OUR COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR FAMILIES LIVING WITH LOW INCOMES

In 2013, the longstanding Families First Edmonton (FFE) partnership refreshed their commitment to improving outcomes for children and families living with low incomes in Alberta. Refocusing to align with provincial and municipal poverty reduction efforts, the Fulfilling Alberta’s Commitment to Children and Families (FACt) Initiative was launched. The goals of the FACt Initiative are two-fold: to engage in research efforts that are timely and responsive to current community and government priorities, and to share results with community stakeholders through a series of interactive workshops.

Inspired by Deputy Minister Steve MacDonald’s keynote speech at the 2013 CUP Annual Celebration Event, the FACt working group identified poverty’s impact on early childhood development as a priority area of investigation. Using longitudinal data, the FACt team found that (a) the mental health of the primary caregiver, (b) family functioning, and (c) housing conditions are predictive of the psychological health and general wellbeing of young children (ages 2-6 years). The FACt team also focused on exploring ways of understanding pathways out of poverty.

Using advanced modeling techniques, the FACt team demonstrated that families who are supported psychologically and socially (e.g., through mentoring relationships) financially fare the best over time.

Reception by community stakeholders to the FACt workshop series has been enthusiastic. The FACt team has received numerous invitations to present to other audiences, including the Mayor of Edmonton’s Task Force on Poverty Elimination. By refreshing our commitment, refocusing our efforts and sharing our results, the FACt Initiative has influenced major strategic initiatives underway in our province and has been instrumental to how we think and talk about poverty in Alberta.

See www.familiesfirstedmonton.ualberta.ca.

$23,666 the average after-tax household income for families when they first enrolled in the FFE study.

At the start of the FFE study, the majority of employed caregivers worked in the service sector.

The FACt workshops have been attended by over 100 senior-level representatives, including policy makers, managers, etc., from across all sectors (e.g., government, not-for-profit).
REFOCUSING OUR EFFORTS TO UNDERSTAND FIRST NATION CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Over the past three years, the First Nation Child Development (FNCD) project has been working closely with four Yellowhead Tribal Council communities and the Yellowhead Tribal College to better understand early child development from a community perspective. In the fall of 2013, the participating communities received their 2012/2013 data reports and began planning how to use the results to strengthen early child development messaging and programming in their communities. The reports included comprehensive information on how young children are developing based on three sources of information: (1) the results from the Early Development Instrument (EDI); (2) Teacher and Family FNCD questionnaires that were developed for the project and measured areas of development that are unique and critical for First Nation children; and (3) qualitative results highlighting community perspectives on healthy development from focus groups with nearly 100 youth, adults and Elders across communities.

Members of each community’s research committee and other community members working in early childhood-related fields attended full-day workshops to review and plan on how to share the information. Each community developed a communication plan identifying primary audiences for sharing the results, including leadership, interagency committees, parents, Elders and funders. Community members indicated that they felt the project provided important baseline data on how young children are developing and could help them refocus programming on teaching First Nation language and culture. In winter and spring 2014, Dr. Rebecca Gokiert’s team and the community research committees worked towards fulfilling many of these communication priorities by organizing presentations and community gatherings. Looking into the future, the FNCD team is exploring ways to revisit and refresh the project to respond to community priorities. FNCD is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Max Bell Foundation.

23 community research committee meetings were held in 2013/2014
45 early childhood champions (including Elders, parents, teachers and service providers) across the four communities attended communication planning sessions in fall 2013
12 focus groups with 99 youth, adults & elders
214 EDIs collected & analyzed
117/93 Teacher/Family FNCD questionnaires analyzed
RETHINKING HOW WE MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES THROUGH THE EVALUATION CAPACITY NETWORK

Policy and service initiatives that promote early childhood development (ECD) can reduce the risks of learning difficulties, behaviour problems and chronic diseases in later life. That’s why provincial and territory governments across Canada have developed frameworks and allocated significant funding for developing ECD policies and services. These efforts also require evaluations that can demonstrate impact, justify continued funding, and inform program development and practice. However, discussions among ECD stakeholders in Alberta indicate that evaluation perspectives differ widely and that there is a lack of central coordination of evaluation resources and expertise accessible to ECD stakeholders.

To address these community-driven issues, CUP is developing the Evaluation Capacity Network (ECN). ECN is a multidisciplinary intersectoral partnership focused on aligning thinking around ECD evaluation and enhancing evaluation capacity that informs programming, practice and policies.

The emerging partnership has recently been granted a three-year Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Development Grant entitled Evaluation Capacity Network: Aligning Evaluative Thinking and Practice among Early Childhood Stakeholders. With this grant, the ECN aims to achieve three primary objectives:

1. to conduct an intersectoral needs assessment using community engagement forums with the aim of identifying common evaluation knowledge and capacity gaps;
2. to develop and deliver educational resources and training opportunities that address these gaps, and then to evaluate and refine the resources and training; and
3. to nurture and sustain a network that supports ongoing dialogue of evaluation experts, government, funders and community agencies at a national level, and knowledge mobilization of community-engaged evaluative practices across the range of sectors that impact ECD.
PARTNERSHIP WITH WOMEN AND CHILDREN’S HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE (WCHRI)

CUP and WCHRI continue to complement their expertise, support their mandates and contribute to their organizational transformations.

Over the past year, WCHRI strategically strengthened services previously created to support research capacity among WCHRI members (clinicians, researchers and students). In order to achieve that, WCHRI established a single program, Support Platforms for Integrated Research (SPIR). SPIR is a platform to encourage, facilitate and support clinical and health outcomes research excellence related to women and children. SPIR will bring more efficiencies and coordination in existing processes, and ensure the expectations set forth by the funders, members and patients are met. Among others, the goals of SPIR include: improving member capacity in areas of health research relevant to the needs of women and children; increasing opportunities for women and children to participate directly in the design and conduct of research; and enhancing support for the development and application of innovative research designs.

CUP’s contribution in achieving these goals involves providing expertise and leadership in areas of community-based research/patient and community engagement, knowledge translation and qualitative research methods. By working with other SPIR colleagues in an integrated manner, CUP provides an important additional foundation for WCHRI’s aspiration to “support complex projects, far reaching ideas and collaborative initiatives” in the field of women and children’s health research.

See www.wchri.org.
People living with vulnerabilities (e.g., low income, disabilities, abuse, newcomers/refugees, health issues) experience a variety of stresses that can negatively impact their lives. Although involving these people in research can improve their wellbeing and increase the relevancy of findings to mediate factors, often there are barriers that impede connections among community programs, families and researchers.

Over the next two years, Dr. Holly Stack-Cutler (postdoctoral researcher) and Dr. Laurie Schnirer will be exploring the best way to conduct community-based research (CBR) with marginalized populations. They will look at best practices at all stages – from planning, recruitment, data collection and analysis, to results and knowledge mobilization plans. Interviews with researchers, community partners, policy makers and funders will be conducted in the spring of 2014 and interviews with families will follow. Funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research through an Early Career Transition Award, this project will refocus our understanding of how to best engage individuals and families with complexities so that research results are relevant to those who design programs and develop government policies.

CONDUCTING COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH WITH POPULATIONS LIVING IN VULNERABLE CONDITIONS

In March 2013, Alberta Culture funded a research project that looked at sharing the wisdom of coalitions across Alberta. This initiative was undertaken in partnership with the Ministry of Education and CUP through the Early Child Development Mapping Project. The three phases included: (1) a literature review and highlights report summarizing key factors in forming and sustaining coalitions; (2) the development of a database of existing coalitions across the province; and (3) an online survey and focus groups with coalitions to explore experiences in forming and sustaining coalitions.

The research looked at more than 150 different coalitions addressing a broad range of issues at the local, regional and provincial levels. Focus groups were asked about the benefits and challenges of working as a coalition, how they evaluated their work and what resources supported their development.

The findings will be released publicly in the summer of 2014. The next phase includes the development of a toolkit that addresses governance, evaluation tools, leadership and community engagement.

HARVESTING THE WISDOM OF COALITIONS IN ALBERTA: A STUDY OF SUSTAINABILITY OF COMMUNITY COALITIONS
CROSS CULTURAL SCHOOL TRANSITIONS OF REFUGEE STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

The Cross Cultural School Transitions project examined experiences of school transitions for newcomer refugee students and their parents. Led by Rebecca Georgis, a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology, under the supervision of Dr. Gokiert and Dr. Rossiter, the project had two objectives: (a) to examine the socio-emotional and academic needs and strengths of newcomer adolescent refugees with limited formal schooling; and (b) to understand barriers to school engagement for refugee parents.

Early conversations with Edmonton Public Schools and the Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative revealed the need to better understand the realities of adjusting to school for the growing number of student refugees arriving in Alberta. Multiple sources of data were collected and analyzed over the course of two years, and in the spring of 2013 a research forum was co-organized with Edmonton Public Schools. The forum was attended by more than 25 program stakeholders working with newcomer students and families. The project will wrap up in summer 2014 with the creation of a handbook for sharing key learnings.

REFLECTING ON FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS IN GRADUATE, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH (CBR)

Dr. Sherry Ann Chapman, with the assistance of Wesdyne Otto, led a critical reflection and dialogue among graduate students and university mentors regarding what they learned about community-based research (CBR).

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with a number of graduate student-university mentor pairs and individuals who participated in the Science Shop program: a summer studentship in community-based research with WCHRI and CUP between 2009 and 2013. Student-mentor interactions, particularly feelings and emotions that arise while learning about CBR, were examined. The project aims to apply the findings in the development and implementation of curricula about critical engagement, in the practice of CBR and in the growing scholarship about engagement. A final report, presentations and a reflective learning tool were developed and plans are in place to discuss the technical report with the staff of the WCHRI / CUP Science Shop.
CUP steering committee

Gloria Chalmers  [Co-Chair]  
Community Member  

Jane Drummond  [Co-Chair]  
Faculty of Nursing  
University of Alberta  

Jeffrey Bisanz  
Department of Psychology  
University of Alberta  

Katy Campbell  
Faculty of Extension  
University of Alberta  

Al Cook  
Rehabilitation Medicine  
University of Alberta  

Michelle Craig  
Health Promotions, Disease & Injury Prevention  
Alberta Health Services  

Julian Daly  
Boyle Street Community Services  

Sandra Davidge  
Women and Children’s Health Research Institute  
University of Alberta  

Lionel Dibden  
Pediatrics  
University of Alberta  

Richard Enns  
Faculty of Social Work  
University of Calgary  

Cecelia Fenrich  
Edmonton Catholic Schools  

Donna-Mae Ford  
Multicultural Health Brokers Co-op  

Sandy Forster  
Edmonton Public Schools  

Cheryl Gagnier  
Community Services  
City of Edmonton  

Martin Garber-Conrad  
Edmonton Community Foundation  

Jane Hewes  
Early Learning and Child Care  
University of Alberta  

Susan Lynch  
Early Child Development Mapping Project (ECMap)  
University of Alberta  

Liz O’Neill  
Big Brothers Big Sisters  
Edmonton & Area  

Marni Pearce  
Cross Ministry Services  
Alberta Education  

Christina Rinaldi  
Faculty of Education  
University of Alberta  

Jane Springett  
Centre for Health Promotion Studies  
University of Alberta  

Allan Undheim  
Community Building and Investment  
United Way of the Alberta Capital Region  

Deanna Williamson  
Department of Human Ecology  
University of Alberta  

Wendy Yewman  
Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services, Region 6  

Financial support

CUP’s core operations are supported by contributions from community, government, and university sources. 

Community Contributors

Edmonton Catholic Schools  
Edmonton Community Foundation  
Edmonton Public Schools  
Telus Community Foundation  
United Way of the Alberta Capital Region  

Government Contributors

City of Edmonton - Community Services  
Edmonton and Area, Child and Family Services, Region 6  

University

The University of Alberta supports CUP’s core operations by providing four tenure-track academic staff positions through the Faculty of Extension.

In addition to the financial support, the Faculty of Extension provides extensive administrative and infrastructure support to CUP.

In addition to core operating funding, CUP secures funding for projects. This chart highlights CUP’s cumulative project funding from 2009 when CUP joined the Faculty of Extension.

CUP Project Funding 2009-2014

$19.5 million  $20 million  $20.5 million  $21 million  $21.5 million  $22 million  
2009/10  2010/11  2011/12  2012/13  2013/14


Stack-Cutler, H. & Schnirer, L. (2013, April). Best practices for conducting CBR with vulnerable populations: Conversations with those in the know. Poster presentation at the 13th annual Community-Campus Partnerships for Health conference, Chicago, IL.

Alvadj, T. & Chapman, S. A. (co-developer of content) (September 2013). CBRE Workshop. One-day, customized workshop for the Integrated Community Clerkship Program, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.


Chapman, S. A., Hyshka, E. & Kingsley, B. (September 2013). An Introduction to Community-Based Research (CBR). Medical Residents' 2013 Trainee Research Methodology Course, Faculty of Medicine & Dentistry, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Chapman, S. A. (June 2013). Advanced community-based research – A facilitated discussion. Invited half-day workshop. ‘Thinking Qualitatively’ Conference, International Institute for Qualitative Methodology, University of Alberta, Edmonton, AB.

Drummond, J. (September 2013). Service to Low-income Families: Right Target, Right Practices, FACT Workshop 1*, Edmonton, AB.


Templeton, L.J. (April 2014). Pathways out of Poverty: Key findings using the Families First Edmonton data, FACT Workshop 3*, Edmonton, AB

*The workshop materials can be found on the FFE website: www.familiesfirstedmonton.ualberta.ca
This past year’s challenges inspired us to reflect on our priorities and refocus on our goals for the future. We remain committed to strengthening collaborations between the University of Alberta and the community that support the wellbeing of children, youth and families. We also recognize that we are leaders in facilitating the kind of collaborative research that influences and informs the policies and practices that can improve the lives of Albertans. It’s a responsibility we take seriously and one that guides everything we do as an organization.

We are looking to the future with a renewed sense of purpose and a refreshed understanding of what we can and must do to propel us, our partners and our research forward. We’re not only ready to tackle new opportunities and explore new collaborations – we are already making it happen.

To learn more about our work and our focus, visit us at www.cup.ualberta.ca.
Community-University Partnership
for the Study of Children, Youth, and Families

2nd floor, Enterprise Square
10230 Jasper Avenue
Faculty of Extension
University of Alberta
Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4P6

www.cup.ualberta.ca
email: cup@ualberta.ca