FAMILIES IN CANADA CONFERENCE 2019

MARCH 27-28, 2019
GUELPH SATELLITE LOCATION

UNIVERSITY *of* GUELPH

LIVE • WORK • WELL
RESEARCH CENTRE

Families in Canada Conference

Conférence sur les familles au Canada

WHAT WE HEARD

Over the course of two days, community members, researchers and practitioners gathered in Guelph to discuss challenges and opportunities for families. Our conference, co-hosted with the Vanier Institute of the Family, explored themes related to families and care, food, work, and well-being.

This brief report reflects what we heard over the course of those two days. We know we cannot do justice to the depth and breadth of conversations, but hope you see some of your experiences and reflections in this document.

The Vanier Institute of the Family will be sharing various outputs from the conference soon. In the meantime, this report summarizes the morning panel discussions on March 27 and 28, 2019 at the University of Guelph satellite location.

We look forward to continuing the discussion.

DEBORAH STIENSTRA

Director, Live Work Well Research Centre
University of Guelph

CARE AND FAMILIES

Caring happens in both directions; we often focus on care-giver or care-receiver, but relationships are at the heart of caring and that often includes a wide and diverse network of people and organizations; relationships can be disrupted through policies and programs that are not family-centred, causing trauma and distress.

Challenges: Advocacy and Support

- We have designed a system where a full-time advocate is needed when a family member requires supports, but advocacy is challenging for families already in distress; "We wake up every day living in the margins" (John Beaton, Panelist).
- A change to or elimination of services and supports due to age or circumstance can be traumatizing for those in care relationships; for example, a change in doctor can lead to crisis.

Challenges: Diverse Forms of Care and Families

- We cannot make assumptions about care (i.e. who is the carer?).
- Care relationships are made up of diverse networks that may or may not be biological; chosen families are often critical for historically marginalized folks and provide stable support and advocacy, yet many areas with our system don't recognize or leave room for chosen family members.
- There is often a lack of the diversity recognized within groups and categories; grandparents are not a homogenous group; people over the age of 65 are not a homogenous group.

When it comes to caring relationships, community supports are essential; they shape families. There can be issues related to 'ageing out' for those of us who are young and in care-giving or care-receiving roles.

We need to make sure supports are there at all ages.

- Abbigail Wright-Gourlay, Panelist

Opportunities

- Diverse individuals within the circle of care (example: educational assistants, community organizations) offer support and recognition for those within care relationships, and can become part of the family
- Siblings and friends within caring relationships offer support that can be intuitive and unwavering, offering peace and reassurance for others within the caring circle
- Inclusive research frameworks are built upon the notion of nothing about us without us and include the voices and experiences of historically marginalized individuals and groups. This can include prioritizing the voices of family caregivers across the life course.
    - However, there is a risk of straining caregivers through inclusion - for example, depending on the same caregivers for research and/or panel discussions can lead to burnout.; we can address this type of burnout by using diverse forms of inclusion such as digital storytelling and creating resource libraries to tell caregivers' stories that can be shared easily and without barriers
- Folks who engage with those in a caring relationship (such as teachers, service and support providers) must remain open and flexible; "you don't know about people's experiences" (Kim Wilson, Panelist)
- How do we deepen the role of the ally?
    - Awareness and understanding are necessary to change the status quo
    - Action must be part of being an ally: getting at the why and how to shift from awareness to action
    - Co-design across care relationship spectrum, including providers, those who care and those who receive care.
    - Create opportunities to move from engaging those in caring relationships to empowering them
    - Replace policies that interrupt or disrupt caring relationships (example: hospital visiting hours should be designed to be family-centric)

FOOD AND FAMILIES

While our food system contains barriers to access and can often foster transactions and exchanges between and among people and organizations, authentic relationships are possible when formed through food, nutrient communities and shared meals.

Food and meal preparation has the capacity to encourage thoughtfulness and respect for food and the living environment, particularly when we begin to think outside the traditional meal box and see food as a way to sustain caring relationships.

Challenges: Access

- "How do we get the food to the people?" (Gail Hoekstra, Panelist); scheduling of supports can be a challenge and can result in a barrier to folks accessing the food they need (ie hours of a food pantry that conflict with a complex and changing work schedule)
- Often, policies and programs take a middle-class view (such as assuming someone can be available between 9am to 5pm to access supports, has transport to get where they need to be, child-minding, etc.)
- Some food supports are income-tested, which can foster feelings of shame among folks who use the services
- Unlike rent or utilities, food is an expense that can be modified, which means folks will often compromise on quality and fresh produce

*- presentation slide courtesy of Dr Andrew Judge*

Challenges: Food and Living Environments

- Natural foods in the environment have been disrupted
- Family homes are thought of as buildings with grass in front and back, when grass is one of the most invasive species in our living environment

Opportunities

- By recognizing nutrients and living plants as having their own communities, we begin to see the larger eco-system of which we are all a part
- Foodscapes offer the opportunity to create places of gathering, learning, and nutrients; they can become part of curriculum, helping build community and family through programming throughout the full food cycle
- Food and friendship form lasting bonds and community, affording opportunity to better understand where people are; "we don't need to teach people" (Gail Hoekstra, Panelist), we need to recognize and celebrate their experiences and capacities
- Food delivery might be a way to address some of the barriers to accessing quality, nutritious food
- Programs like Hidden Harvest (Ottawa), Gleaners Guild (Waterloo Region), and Appleseed Collective (Guelph) make use of orchard trees on public lands that bear fruit and nuts that might otherwise go to waste; instead, volunteers harvest and distribute food, while many also offer workshops and seed collectives

Resources

Hidden Harvest (Ottawa)

Gleaners Guild (Waterloo)

Appleseed Collective (Guelph)

rare Charitable Research Reserve
(Minjimendan: Sustainable Indigenous Food Garden)
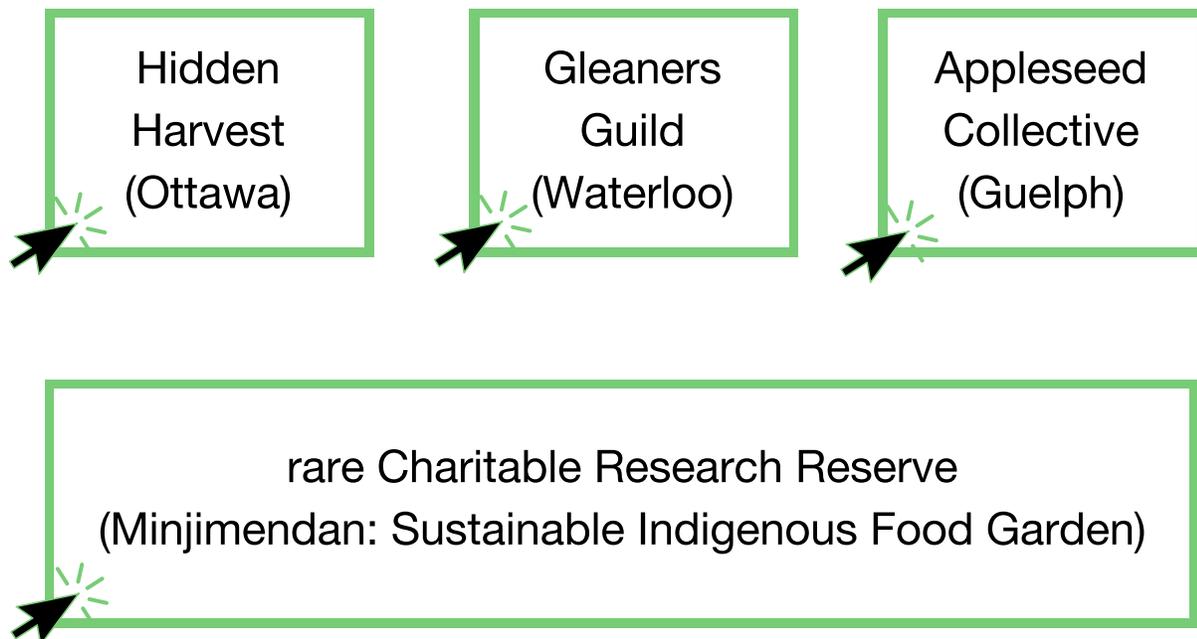
WORK
AND FAMILIES

While family form and make-up have both permanence and fluidity, work spaces too often remain inaccessible and inflexible to diverse forms of family and ways of being.

Policies that guide and organize places and spaces where we work would benefit from:

- a framework that supports full and active citizenship;
- national working definitions (on work, disability, family, etc.);
- anti-discrimination practices that not only foster inclusion and diversity in numbers, but also feelings of belonging and recognition.

, g

There is recognition that true diversity and inclusion at work requires understanding how people feel at work:

Do they feel heard?

Do they feel welcome?

- Thomas Sasso, Panelist

What is Family?

- Family can be chosen or can be blood, and is often a combination of these forms
- Family can be a source of joy or trauma; relationships are often complex
- Family is made up of relationships, but can also be formed as a singleton
- Family is ever-evolving, but can also be permanent
- Family is whatever life looks like around you: humans and non-humans, including animals, plants and the broader living environment

What is Work?

- Work as part of the organized labour system is designed to exploit our time and energy, making it difficult to find time to do the fulfilling things we want to do in our lives
- Work describes how we each contribute our time to make this world better; it can be financially rewarding, but is also often rewarded emotionally and socially
- Work is the effort we put into the world

Challenges to Advocating and Researching Work

- "There are no spaces in workplaces to feel safe" (Skylar Sookpaiboon, Panelist)
- Researchers' work is not always accessible to community or practitioners
- Burnout is a reality for many who are on the front line of advocacy for change, making it impossible to see positive long-term outcomes
- Many organizations still do not see the value in creating inclusive and flexible work places

- presentation slide courtesy of Roz Vincent-Haven

Challenges to Accessing Sustainable Work

- There are challenges for those who get labelled and re-labelled
- Labeling creates stigma and discrimination; disability is a social and cultural construct
- People often have to give up paid work in order to fill a caring role
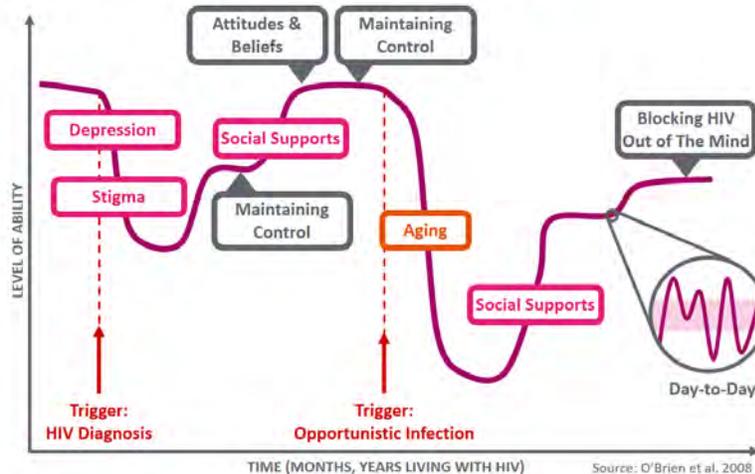
- presentation slide courtesy of Tammy C. Yates

Opportunities

- Researchers, practitioners, and community members must develop a shared language, otherwise we risk making individuals and work inaccessible
- Seeing families and work in concentric circles helps us to see bigger systems that need to recognized
- At the community level, communities of practice offer a way to share experiences and know-how; "it is where seeds are planted that down the line can become popcorn with butter" (Tammy C. Yates, Panelist)
- We need to help organizations see the financial benefit of change, along with the broader individual and community benefit

> Researchers and practitioners need a shared language to learn from one another. Otherwise there is a risk of alienating individuals and making the research work inaccessible.
>
> Shared language requires cohesive, national working definitions of concepts like disability, work, and family.
>
> - Tammy C. Yates, Panelist

WELL-BEING AND FAMILIES

Family and community well-being is often unique to different places and spaces, and when informed by the experiences of those within the community, well-being frameworks have the capacity to positively influence social and economic policies and practices.

Frameworks and methods of intersectionality offer a way to explore and measure family well-being while considering race and other categories and levels of historic and ongoing oppression, particularly when data is dis-aggregated.

Challenges: Well-being and Social Determinants of Health

- Families do not have equal access to the social determinants of health, which has ripple effects; access to one often leads to access to another social determinant of health
- Families make choices that affect their well-being when they live in low-income

Challenges: Well-being and Racism

- We cannot think about well-being without thinking about racism; having to resist racism impacts well-being
- There is a risk that agencies and providers who are in positions to support marginalized individuals and families may create harm when they are supposed to be safe places of refuge
- The reality and lasting effects for individuals and families who face racism everyday is akin to PTSD; there is a trauma that is lived and relived everyday
- An intersectional lens is imperative to any work that explores issues of well-being

Challenges: Well-being and Economic Development

- Economic development impacts women's well-being
- With the arrival of resource development projects come the potential for harmful effects on women's well-being, particularly women in the north, where development brings temporary and often transient population growth and short-term economic goals
- Relationships that influence our well-being are complex; many women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador had caring experiences that were both rewarding and stressful; the research questions we ask about well-being must reflect this type of complexity
- Economic and social realities within communities have an influence over individual and family well-being, along with general feelings of safety, inclusion and belonging

Conceptualized and designed by women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay Labrador;
Digitized by Monica Peach, Nunatsiavut Government

- presentation slide courtesy of Leah Levac
How women in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, Labrador conceptualized well-being

Opportunities:

- We need to think about well-being across diverse spectrums
- There is a tension in identifying communities as resilient; while communities and families can benefit from building up protective barriers to safeguard well-being, we cannot do so without losing sight of the larger systemic issues at play
- When designing research questions and interpreting data, we need to ensure diverse people and experiences are present and able to contribute
- A long-view of economic and social policy design, implementation and impacts is required in order to address issues of well-being; "we need to get out of the perpetual project cycle" (Panelist)
- We need to ask key questions at the beginning of well-being research projects and this will help ensure we stay on a course for justice:

    - why do we need this data?
    - what is the problem we are trying to solve?
    - who is around the table when we interpret data?
    - how do we share this information in accessible ways to further the goals of those in the community who need it most?

Too few community investments have long-term views of economic and social well-being. We are always in a perpetual cycle of short-term projects.

- Leah Levac, Panelist

Resources

The Well-being Experiences of Women in the Haisla Nation and District of Kitimat

Executive
Summary

Full
Report

A Community Definition of Well-being

Creating a Community
Vitality Index

WHAT YOU SAID

To me, family is...

... love

... everything

... chosen

... care

... home

... support

... complicated

... nurturing

... belonging

... commitment

... adaptive

... home