

# Annual Report

April 1, 2005 – March 31, 2006



## **How to Measure Inclusion Quality in Child Care**

**A DVD for Inclusion Advocates,  
Early Childhood Educators, Researchers,  
Trainers, Students & Parents**

**SpecialLink**

*The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion*

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## **Executive Director's Report**

For the past fifteen years, **SpecialLink** has been at the forefront of inclusive child care in Canada, involved in research, resource, public policy, training, and advocacy. Throughout Canada, most people in this field think of **SpecialLink** when they think about inclusive child care.

During the past several years, we have thought and strategized about the focus of **SpecialLink** for the next decade. In order to continue, the work of **SpecialLink** must take on added dimensions and structural changes.

On the added dimensions side, we must keep up with the information age, and see that all our communications — including our web site, our “branding,” our training and our activities — fit into the new age. It has also become very clear that, if **SpecialLink** is to continue, it must find multiple sources of funding and partnerships. Our mission remains clear: “to increase the quality and quantity of inclusive child care so that children with disabilities/special needs have equivalent opportunities to participate.” In order to facilitate this mission, we must focus on training especially given the results of a recent study conducted by the Child Care Human Resource Sector Council which reports that students about to graduate from ECE training state they feel “less prepared to work with children with special needs than with typical children and with adults...Students identified working with children with special needs 40 times more often than the next most frequently mentioned areas requiring more preparation.”<sup>1</sup> We are pleased to report that over 2000 early childhood professionals in almost every part of Canada have taken part in our **SpecialLink** training on our *Practices and Principles of Inclusion* in the past two years—quite an accomplishment! Furthermore, during 2007 we will be working with trainers in British Columbia, Alberta and Manitoba to infuse **SpecialLink** values into their respective inclusion training programs for early childhood professionals.

We must also heighten our focus on serving as a source of information/concepts to provincial and territorial governments, as well as to the federal government, as they plan new policies and funding measures for child care that may, or may not, fully support children with special needs. As such, we were part of the new Conservative Federal Government's national consultation about their child care space initiative, and also did a formal presentation to the Federal Finance Committee's pre-budget consultation.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cpsc-cssge.ca/english/pdf/bulletins/CCHRSfall06E.pdf>

On the structural side, we must think about the future of **SpeciaLink** as an organization, particularly of broadening our board and our membership. Paid membership has grown, and has the potential to grow still further. Our board of directors is pan-Canadian, but we need to find additional ways to involve them in our work. In addition, we have been dealing with succession planning — the tough task that all organizations face when founding staff leave.

We are pleased to report that our Search Committee, having focused on critical criteria of experience and commitment to both child care and disability, a national profile in the child care/disability community, knowledge of inclusive child care across Canada, and a strong grounding in the non-profit, NGO world — found the right person to be the next Executive Director. Debra Mayer, now based at the University of Winnipeg's new **SpeciaLink National Centre for Child Care Inclusion**, has accepted the position.

As of April 1, 2007, Debra will become the Executive Director, while Sharon Irwin shifts to a research and consultative position. Vagaries in government programs and funding gave us a chance to work together for a full year — co-facilitating numerous trainings, editing each other's proposals, listening to each other's dreams for the organization. I was particularly pleased at our agreement on values and principles, but also saw in Debra a source of new ideas and leadership. Our Executive Committee was able to meet Debra at the 2005 Annual Meeting and was enthusiastic about the personality and skills that she brings to **SpeciaLink**. Most of the National Board members have either worked with Debra directly or met her at the 2005 **SpeciaLink** breakfast and pre-conference session at the Winnipeg *Child Care for a Change* conference.

Thank you for the opportunity to work with **SpeciaLink** for the past fifteen years, and to play a part in making high quality, inclusive child care a reality across Canada.

## Chairperson's Report

My role as Chairperson of **SpeciaLink** has been to conduct the business of the annual meeting and to consult periodically about issues facing the organization — a special privilege accorded to me for the past fifteen years.

However you, the Executive Committee, the Board of Directors and the members, were the shakers and the movers with the power to influence change. You have been steadfast in upholding the high ideals of **SpeciaLink**: *The*



*National Centre for Child Care Inclusion.* You were not content to change as the world changes, but you were determined to lead the way toward constructive relationships with children with special needs and their families. You have demonstrated intelligence, vision, energy and good will.

We have successfully completed fifteen years promoting the inclusion of children with special needs in child care and community programs. We must continue to promote and encourage policies, practices and services that make it possible for children with even the most challenging needs to attend inclusive child care programs, and for their parents to participate in work and community life, just as other parents do.

**SpecialLink** is not a solo performance—of one person—but rather a symphony of the efforts of many dedicated professionals and parents from sea to sea to sea.

In conclusion, I think that the best glue to hold our Executive Committee and Board of Directors together is commendation for a job well done. And I could never say “Thank you” enough to our Executive Director “par excellence,” Dr. Sharon Irwin,” and to our loyal, professional staff. With Sharon, the Executive Committee and the Board, I look ahead confidently to the move to the University of Winnipeg, where **SpecialLink** will flourish under the leadership of Debra Mayer

Respectfully submitted,  
Shirley Chernin, **SpecialLink** Chairperson

## **Activities**

### **MEASURING INCLUSION PROGRESS (MIP)**

**SpecialLink**'s current major research project started in September 2003 and ended in May 2006. This project has been funded by the Social Development Partnerships Program, Department of Social Development, Government of Canada. The primary goal of the project was to develop several easy-to-use instruments for measuring inclusion quality, and to achieve buy-in from governments and the field in the use of these instruments, through consultations, workshops and on-line training. Although we had applied for a further 2-year project contribution (*Monitoring Inclusion Quality in Child Care –MIQCC*), we received, instead, an upward amendment to *MIP* and an endorsement of a one-year proposal to complete the second year's objectives of *MIQCC*. The change of

government in January 2006 delayed decisions on projects such as our pending *MIQCC* one.

Major achievements during 2005-2006 included:

- Collected, entered and analyzed data from Maritime child care centres, and completed 3-province comparison report;
- Finalized measures of inclusion quality;
- Finalized training modules for awareness workshops, trainings and on-line self-training;
- Presented at over 4 national conferences, 13 regional conferences, and 31 training events on *Measuring Inclusion Quality*;
- Met with provincial officials and partner project coordinators from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Toronto, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, and Yukon;
- Published the *Inclusion Scales* on the website at the end of November 2005 — attracting over 200 interested individuals, colleges, agencies, and governments by the end of December 2005;
- Trained observers working for research partners (mainly consultants and evaluators for resource agencies and governments) to use the instruments at a high level of inter-rater reliability;
- Developed and presented additional materials and methods to assure a high level of inter-rater reliability with the instruments;
- Collected data from trained observers throughout Canada.

### **YMCA INCLUSIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP ~ 10<sup>TH</sup> YEAR!!**

Locally, **SpeciaLink** maintains a grassroots presence — helping community programs more effectively include children with special needs. We regularly consult with child care, early intervention and family resource staff regarding inclusion issues. Each summer, through successful grant applications, we have been able to provide one summer staff person to a child care centre that includes a child with significant special needs. For the past ten summers, we have also partnered with the YMCA to see that children with special needs can be included in their summer day camp. **SpeciaLink** applies for funding in March of each year, and is able to hire three or four students for 10-week periods — students who act as “inclusion facilitators” at the YMCA summer camp, enabling individual children with significant disabilities to attend. **SpeciaLink**:

- develops grant applications;
- recruits inclusion facilitators;
- trains them intensively;

- trains “regular” staff on two pre-service days;
- monitors performance;
- liaises with YMCA staff throughout summer;
- troubleshoots the inclusive elements of the summer day camp;
- acts as a resource to the students throughout the summer;
- maintains on-going contact with the parents of children with disabilities, scheduling support staff, gathering necessary information, ensuring that families are comfortable with the program;
- develops and oversees evaluation study at the end of summer.

Part of the benefit to **SpeciaLink** is its heightened local profile. Another part is the feedback loop of recruiting, training, monitoring, and surveying students and parents. It is very useful to evaluate the effectiveness of our training modules and interventions through surveys of student staff and parents who are involved in the summer day camp. Moreover, we are able to influence the sensitivities and knowledge (and sometimes, career choices) of university students who work as inclusion facilitators and to influence other children, parents and community regarding difference. With 4 inclusion facilitators this summer, the camp was able to accommodate all children with disabilities on the waiting list, for 2 weeks each. While we would like to be able to accommodate all children with disabilities for as long as their parents wish (providing the *same range of options* as is available for typically developing children), we could not do so and still keep the camp at an enrollment of roughly *natural proportions* of children with disabilities. Another issue that has come up is the age limit —thirteenth birthday. Parents have argued that their children have developmental ages that are much lower than their chronological ages, and that therefore they belong in the camp for additional years. Although we sympathize with their predicament, we feel that the continued enrollment of older youth in a camp for children 5-12 would create two major difficulties – it would increase the number of children trying to access the *inclusion* spaces, and it would violate the principle of *age appropriateness*. Both of these principles are extremely important, if the camp is to continue to be attractive for *all* children.

Although no administrative funding comes from the student employment grants, **SpeciaLink** staff continue to choose to volunteer extra time for this project.

### **PARTNERSHIP WITH DISABILITY AWARENESS CENTRE, MARCONI CAMPUS**

The **SpeciaLink** Collection has moved. The large **SpeciaLink** collection of books, manuals, journals, articles and videos, on topics related to child care and inclusion, is now housed at the Disability Awareness Centre of the Marconi



Campus of the Nova Scotia Community College. The Collection includes all the publications purchased for use by **SpecialLink**, as well as reports and documents sent to **SpecialLink** by federal and provincial task forces, working groups, public consultations, etc. And because Dr. Irwin was a member of the Technical Advisory Committee to Child Care Visions, she received complimentary copies of numerous books, reports and videos produced through projects funded by HRDC under the Child Care Initiatives Fund, Child Care Visions, and Social Development Partnerships. These, too, are housed in the **SpecialLink** Collection.

While some students have found their way to our Cottage Road office, we wanted to see that this large and unique collection was more accessible to students, parents, disability organizations, local researchers, child care advocates, directors and staff, medical personnel, etc. The Disability Awareness Centre is able to provide shelving, desks, computers, tables, video equipment — and library staff — to facilitate broader utilization of the collection. The **SpecialLink** library database will continue to be developed in-house, but will have an on-line presence through the community college. The Disability Awareness Centre has agreed to provide a bi-annual newsletter about the **SpecialLink** collection, featuring new books or critical articles on child care and inclusion. The **SpecialLink** Collection will be maintained as a unit, and will be visibly designated as “The **SpecialLink** Collection.”

#### **PARTNERSHIPS FOR INCLUSION — NOVA SCOTIA (PFI-NS)**

In partnership with the Early Childhood Development Services section of the Department of Community Services and the Early Intervention Network of Nova Scotia, **SpecialLink** has taken a lead role in the development and evaluation of the *PFI-NS* initiative. Under this initiative, five staff (one coordinator and four inclusion facilitators) support twenty-two child care centres, over a full year, to increase and maintain both their overall quality and their inclusion quality, through a structured, on-site consultation process. The evaluation process has been designed in partnership with Professor Donna S. Lero, of the University of Guelph, to measure change, but also to highlight emerging topics that may create both opportunities and challenges for *PFI-NS*. In 2005-2006, Drs. Lero and Irwin (with M.A. student, Tanya Darisi) completed the evaluation of the first cohort which — along with the Executive Summary, is available on the **SpecialLink** website.



## **SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS 2005-2006**

- April 2005 **Facilitated 4 all-day trainings on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales*** for supported child care consultants, government officials, trainers, child care staff and disability advocates in **Nova Scotia, City of Toronto (co-presenter with Dr. Donna Lero) & Seneca College (ON).**
- May 2005 **Co-facilitated (with Dixie Mitchell) 4 all-day trainings on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales*** for supported child care consultants, government officials, trainers, child care staff and disability advocates in **Saskatoon, SK, Vernon BC, Vancouver, Seabird Island BC.**
- May 2005 **Manitoba Child Care Association conference. Winnipeg.** Workshop on measuring inclusion quality.
- May 2005 **Co-facilitated (with Debra Mayer) 4 workshops on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales*** for supported childcare consultants, government officials, trainers, researchers, childcare staff and disability advocates in **Winnipeg.**
- May 2005 **Community Living Manitoba staff and members.** (Co-facilitated with Debra Mayer) Workshop on measuring including quality.
- May 2005 **Plan-It Quality conference (CCCF).** Regina. Workshop and poster presentation on *Inclusion Scales.*
- May 2005 **Facilitate 4 trainings on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales*** for inclusion facilitators and government staff in Nova Scotia.
- June 2005 **Canadian Social Welfare Policy Conference.** Fredericton. Seminar on *Inclusion Scales.* (Unable to attend; presentation by Dr. Donna Lero).
- September 2005 **New Brunswick conference on quality inclusion,** Fredericton. Speaker and resource person at New Brunswick conference on quality inclusion.
- October / November 2005 **Facilitated 13 full-day trainings on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales*** for researchers and evaluators as well as supported child care consultants, government officials, child care staff, ECE trainers and disability advocates in **Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia and New Brunswick.**
- November 2005 **International Symposium on Inclusive Recreation.** Edmonton. Workshop on inclusive recreation (co-facilitated with Rob Smith, Cape Breton YMCA).
- November 2005 **Canadian Association for Community Living.** Regina.. Workshop.
- January 2006 **Atlantic Forum on Inclusive Child Care,** Fredericton. Workshop on inclusion quality (co-presenter with Rob Smith).
- January / February 2006 **Co-facilitated (with Dixie Mitchell) 3 all-day trainings on Measuring Inclusion Quality,** Kelowna, Victoria & Nanaimo, BC.
- February 2006 **Facilitated 1 workshop on Measuring Inclusion Quality,** Langara College Child Care Centre, Vancouver, BC.
- February 2006 **British Columbia Early Years conference,** Vancouver. Presented lunchtime workshop on Measuring Inclusion Quality.
- March 2006 **Co-facilitated (with Debra Mayer) 2 all-day trainings on Measuring Inclusion Quality,** Castlegar & Cranbrook, BC.

### **CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH REPORTS (ON-GOING)**

During 2005-2006, approximately 90 customized reports were produced for policymakers, media, students, therapists, consultants and researchers. These reports were created from our literature data base, providing an annotated critique of related articles, as appropriate. For example, a student would generally want references to practice, not to research, so we would compile a list of articles, books, web sites and videos that relate to the actual classroom. Students in ECE programs are gently encouraged to use the Web, but some of them need a lot of support — we try to be especially supportive to local students who have no other hands-on materials but ours (as their instructors, the university research librarian and the public library librarian tell us).

### **1-800 LINE AND E-MAIL ACCESS (ON-GOING)**

Our 800# and e-mail address are widely circulated in the Early Childhood Education world, as well as among government officials, agencies, therapists, researchers, advocacy associations, parents, media, and so forth. We received over 2200 calls and emails for information, consultation, and advice over the past year.

### **ENHANCED WEBSITE (ON-GOING)**

Our web site was updated again this year, providing a downloadable version of *Partnerships for Inclusion — Nova Scotia: An Evaluation Based on the First Cohort of Child Care Centres*, along with the Executive Summary. Monthly e-bulletins to a wide listserv group of members have been sent. These alert readers to **SpecialLink** events, publications and projects, to other publications and events of interest in the child care inclusion/disabilities field, to related policy initiatives, etc. See [www.speciallinkcanada.org](http://www.speciallinkcanada.org).

### **SpecialLink Personnel**

Sharon Hope Irwin — Executive Director and Principle Investigator

Debra Mayer — Project Manager

Glenda Watt — Office Coordinator

Regular Contract Persons — Bonnie Thompson, James Fader, Mike Peters, Dixie Mitchell

### **SpecialLink Executive Committee**

Debra Martell

Nelson Martell

Shirley Chernin

Anne Marie Singler

Wilma Hutchison

Margaret Burke

Valerie Donovan

Ronald Caplan

## Income Statement

**Specialink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion  
Consolidated Statement of Income and Expenses, Accrued  
For the Year Ended March 31, 2006**

**Income**

Membership	\$	715
Sales	\$	5,152
<u>Projects:</u>		
Measuring Inclusion Progress (funded by Social Development Partnerships Program)	\$	265,683
Partnerships for Inclusion (funded by the Government of Nova Scotia)	\$	30,000
Nova Scotia Employment (funded by the Government of Nova Scotia)	\$	3,454
SEED Grant (funded by the Government of Canada)	\$	10,718
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>315,723</b>

**Expenses**

Printing & Communication <sup>1</sup>	\$	7,506
<u>Projects</u> <sup>2</sup> :		
Measuring Inclusion Progress <sup>3</sup>	\$	266,585
Partnerships for Inclusion	\$	30,000
Nova Scotia Employment	\$	3,454
SEED Grant	\$	11,914
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>319,459</b>
<b>TOTAL INCOME / EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>(3,736)</b>

<sup>1</sup> includes purchase of books and videos for inventory

<sup>2</sup> separate schedules available

<sup>3</sup> projector disallowed by SDPP (\$1,345)

# SpecialLink

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