

# SpecialLink

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## Annual Report

April 1, 2004 – March 31, 2005

### INCLUSION VOICES

Canadian Child Care Directors  
Talk About Including  
Children with Special Needs



**SpecialLink**

*The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion*

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## For Your Notes

## SpecialLink Personnel

Sharon Hope Irwin — Executive Director and Principle Investigator

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

## Executive Director's Report

**SpecialLink** is now officially fifteen years old, and it is important to ask whether our mission is still a vital one.

At one time, we thought that the time would soon come when **SpecialLink** would not be necessary — when children with special needs would be fully included in child care and when we wouldn't have to say "children with special needs" anymore; we'd just say "children." Progress *has* been made. In autumn 2004, the QUAD principles of the federal/provincial/territorial agreements on child care changed from "Quality, Universal, Accessible and Developmental" to "Quality, Universally Inclusive, Accessible and Developmental." **SpecialLink** was highly instrumental in effecting that change. While this may not seem like a big step, while it may seem only to be word-smithing, **SpecialLink** saw the change as an historic opportunity to promote the rights of children with special needs to attend community-based, inclusive child care, in the principles and objectives of the bi-lateral agreements.

To make the second QUAD principle, "universally inclusive," a reality, Sharon Hope Irwin and associates working with **SpecialLink** wove consultations with government officials into conference and workshop schedules. So, for example, instead of doing a single workshop in Edmonton, Sharon also held a full day consultation with Alberta government officials and a full day training on "Measuring Inclusion Progress" with child care consultants. Similar piggybacking allowed this policy/training/information mix to occur in six other provinces in 2004-2005. Sometimes, an additional consultation was held with ECE training faculty — hoping they would begin to address inclusion quality in their curricula. We think we made progress in raising awareness of "universally inclusive" among these groups.

However, neither policy nor practice have reached the point yet when we can stop referring to "children with special needs" and know that these children will be fully included in child care. Thus, **SpecialLink** is not yet ready to fade out.

Until the time we are assured that when governments, agencies, child care centres, trainers and the public say "all children," they really mean "all children, including those with the most difficult challenges," we still have much work to do. Thus, **SpecialLink's** role remains vital, and worth fighting to maintain.

## Chairperson's Report

At the Annual Meeting, it is time to stand back and look at what we are doing, why we are doing it, and how we are doing it. Our Annual Reports, hopefully, will give you some insights into these questions. Annual Reports are a review of the past year — our accomplishments, our progress (and even our disappointments). This is also an opportunity to express our appreciation to staff, board members and volunteers.

Our thanks to the Early Childhood Resource Centre for providing this space for our meeting and to Tammy Madden, their coordinator, for coming back from New Waterford to host our meeting. And thanks to Executive Committee members for coming out right before a snowy night for this meeting. Also thanks to Debra Mayer, for flying here from Fredericton last night, to be with us.

Respectfully submitted,

Shirley Chernin, **SpeciaLink** Chairperson

## Activities

### MEASURING INCLUSION PROGRESS (MIP)

**SpeciaLink's** current major research project started in September 2003 and ends 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 is 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. During 2004-2005, we:

- Printed and circulated workshop versions of the *SpeciaLink Inclusion Principles Scale* and the *SpeciaLink Inclusion Practices Profile* to additional national partners. No changes to items or indicators were made after March 1, 2005; however, instructional pages continue to be improved, based on participant comments;
- Continued to review and revise measures, as per feedback from additional partners. Suggested revisions will be collected until January 2007, when the most valuable will be added to an updated edition of the *Inclusion Scales*. In the meantime, suggested clarifications will be presented on the listserv bulletin board so that users of the tools can benefit from them;

### CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH REPORTS (ON-GOING)

During 2004-2005, approximately 100 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 2000 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 versions of *Une question d'urgence : L'intégration des enfants qui ont des besoins spéciaux en garderie au Canada*, and *Intégration : La prochaine generation de services de garde à l'enfance au Canada — les faits saillants*. Monthly e-bulletins to a wide listserv group of members were sent. These alert readers to **SpeciaLink** 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.specialinkcanada.org](http://www.specialinkcanada.org).

**SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS 2004-2005**

- June 2004 (Ottawa, ON): Canadian Union of Postal Workers thinktank.
- September 2004 (Oak Island, NS): Partnerships for Inclusion – NS Atlantic thinktank (workshop and facilitator).
- November 2004 (Toronto, ON): Metro Toronto Resource Educators and Supervisors Workshop on *Inclusion: The Next Generation* research.
- November 2004 (Winnipeg, MB): SpecialLink and Community Living Manitoba. *Measuring Inclusion Progress* workshop (3 hours, co-presenter with Debra Mayer).
- November 2004 (Winnipeg, MB): Child Care for a Change! Workshop #10: *Including Children with Special Needs in Early Learning and Child Care* (co-presenter with Janis Douglas, CACL).
- November 2004 (Ottawa, ON): Family Policy Forum (CACL). Discussant.
- November 2004 (Ottawa, ON): National Summit on Inclusive Education (CACL). Plenary: Challenges and Opportunities.
- November 2004 (ON): Meeting with HRDC Minister Ken Dryden on child care issues.

- Met with government officials responsible for child care inclusion, including those from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland;
- Met with Social Development Canada's Minister Dryden at reception and dinner for eight national child care experts, to discuss national child care agenda;
- Made presentations at four national conferences, and held workshops on the *SpecialLink Child Care Inclusion Principles and Practices Scales* for child care consultants, child care staff, disability advocates, researchers, program managers, trainers, etc. in nine provinces;
- Published French version of *A Matter of Urgency* and *Highlights from Inclusion: The Next Generation in Child Care* on website at end of November—attracting many requests from francophones for the books;
- Produced 2 articles for the Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Division (English and French) on “What is Inclusion in Child Care?” and on *Inclusion: The Next Generation in Child Care*;
- Held successful inter-rater reliability checks with five *Partnerships for Inclusion* staff in Nova Scotia. (Successful inter-rater reliability was also established by two Resource Consultants in Toronto who used the scales in 70 centres as the beginning of a pre/post evaluation study of a year-long change process in the centres.);
- Analyzed data from presentations and from *Inclusion Scales* scores;
- Created a bulletin board on **SpecialLink** website providing additional points of clarification for users of the *Inclusion Scales*;
- Wrote proposals that were accepted for presentations (2005-2006) at the Manitoba Child Care Association annual conference, the Canadian Child Care Federation annual conference, the Canadian Social Welfare Conference, and the International Conference on Inclusion Recreation;
- Developed a training video “How to Measure Inclusion Quality”—for use at the workshops and for self-training, and for review, by people in the field;
- Supported over 300 people who emailed **SpecialLink** for information about the *Inclusion Scales*—with verbal suggestions, additional print materials, bibliographic references, etc.;
- Perhaps most important, we have continued to walk a fine line—to bring the *Inclusion Scales* up to research standards while still keeping them user-friendly for the field.

### YMCA INCLUSIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP ~ 9<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 nine 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. Over the past several years, Rob Smith—Aquatics Director and Summer Camp Supervisor at the YMCA—has taken on an increasingly strong role in making the camp more inclusive and developing leadership and advocacy skills among the camp staff.

Although no administrative funding comes from the student employment grants, **SpeciaLink** staff continue 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 **SpeciaLink**, as well as reports and documents sent to **SpeciaLink** 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 **SpeciaLink** 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 **SpeciaLink** 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 **SpeciaLink** collection, featuring new books or critical articles on child care and inclusion. The **SpeciaLink** Collection will be maintained as a unit, and will be visibly designated as “The **SpeciaLink** 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, **SpeciaLink** 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*.