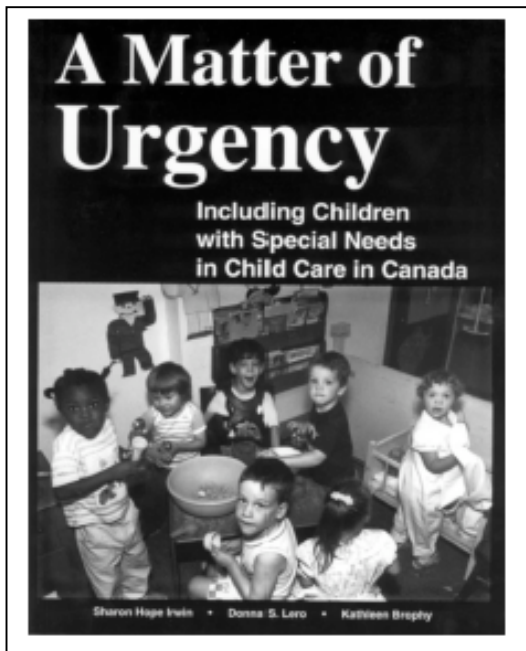


Annual Report

April 1, 2002 – March 31, 2003



SpecialLink

The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion

Table of Contents

BACKGROUND	3
ACTIVITIES	4
BENCHMARKS FOR INCLUSION	4
COURT CHALLENGE	6
CANADIAN UNION OF POSTAL WORKERS (CUPW SPECIAL NEEDS PROJECT)	6
YMCA INCLUSIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP	7
PRESENTATIONS	9
CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH REPORTS	10
1-800 LINE AND E-MAIL ACCESS	10
ENHANCED WEBSITE	10
SPECIALINK PERSONNEL.....	11
SPECIALINK EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.....	11

Background

In 1990, after fifteen years of frontline experience in developing and directing an inclusionary child care centre and influencing collateral training in early intervention and child care as well as provincial policy direction, and with substantial *ad hoc* experience and knowledge of the Canadian child care community, **Specialink** “went national”, taking that unique knowledge across Canada. Under the *Child Care Initiatives Fund*, *Child Care Visions* and *The Social Development Partnerships Program*, through research, resource building, networking, centre visits, conferences and workshop presentations, as well as a presence at many provincial and federal policy tables — **Specialink** became identified as the premier Canadian service for and about child care inclusion.

Although **Specialink** operates out of Sydney, Nova Scotia, it is a national presence, with affiliates and members across Canada. Its 800 number, web site, and e-mail address assure that it is anywhere it is needed in Canada. There are no boundaries to the hours at which the telephone line is answered or the e-mail accessed. Over six hundred child care centres and agencies participate in its inclusion network. Newsletters and bulletins go to over 4,000 child care providers, centres, trainers, early interventionists, family resource sites, government officials, and related health professionals. Earlier **Specialink** newsletters and published articles are re-printed, and are mailed to members and other interested parties upon demand. Five major publications and a video are currently in print, with one (*In Our Way: Barriers to Full Workforce Participation Experienced by Parents of Children with Special Needs*) in a second printing to meet demand across Canada and the United States. University and college ECE professors across Canada frequently request permission to use **Specialink** articles or tools in their courses or syllabuses. Networking is strengthened by face-to-face contacts that are often piggybacked on child care centre research site visits and/or conference presentations by Dr. Irwin.

Specialink's research role is strengthened through an on-going collaborative partnership with professors Donna S. Lero and

Kathleen Brophy of the University of Guelph's Department of Family Relations and Applied Nutrition and with the Roeher Institute. Other public and private partnerships including the University of Toronto's Child Care Resource and Research Unit, the Canadian Association for Community Living, the University College of Cape Breton, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, and the Isaak Walton Killan Children's Hospital bring additional talents and resources to its work.

Activities

BENCHMARKS FOR INCLUSION

Specialink's current research project, *Benchmarks for the Inclusion of Children with Special Needs in Early Development Policy and Practice in Canada*, undertaken by Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin, Executive Director, in partnership with the Roeher Institute, builds on their mutual research interests in children with disabilities. It is especially timely because of the new agreement signed by the federal/provincial/territorial governments, called *The Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care*. This pivotal document makes “inclusiveness” one of its five core principles, and speaks of indicators of progress toward those principles. Only in the case of “inclusive” do they NOT spell out any indicators. So it is especially timely that our project, *Benchmarks*, will be able to offer tools for measuring inclusion quality and progress. This project has been funded under the Social Development Partnerships Program, HRDC Canada.

Activities involved in the *Benchmark* project included:

- translated the *Child Care Inclusion Principles checklist* into French;
- reviewed both the *Child Care Inclusion Profile* and the *Child Care Inclusion Principles checklist* with child care staff in Kingston, Toronto, Winnipeg, Edmonton, Vancouver, Montreal, Glace Bay, and Fredericton during January – March 2003, as part of discussions

after centre observations;

- developed and tested a workable set of benchmarks for Early Childhood Development (ECD) inclusion, exploring methods of benchmarking the level of inclusiveness in early childhood development programs and services;
- reviewed the literature on existing measurement tools used in policy and program evaluation for inclusion, through a contract with the Roeher Institute;
- conducted key informant interviews with early childhood specialists to assist in identifying a relevant set of benchmarks for inclusive policy, through a contract with the Roeher Institute;
- commissioned the Roeher Institute to produce a publication on inclusion policy benchmarks, which was published as *Inclusivity of the Child Care Policy Environment in Canada: Much Work to be Done*;
- refined the *Child Care Inclusion Profile* and the *Child Care Inclusion Principles checklist*, analyzing their reliability and validity through comparisons with expert knowledge of centres and checks of inter-rater reliability among observers viewing the same sites at the same times. Statistical analysis were performed to see whether the correlations between these tools and ECERS-R are statistically significant, and whether the relationships among the scores on the different tools revealed correlations similar to those seen in our earlier study (*Inclusion: The Next Generation*). Descriptors and scoring methodology were refined in response to suggestions from inclusion facilitators in Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia;
- developed a situational picture of 10 child care centres across Canada that are high on the benchmarking scale for full inclusion of children with disabilities;
- transcribed interviews from the 10 centres and conducted a content analysis of each. The published results of this situational picture will augment the modest literature base regarding survival/retenement of inclusive programs, and support initiatives and interventions that seem to make a difference (“promising practices”);
- answered hundreds of calls and emails regarding inclusion issues;
- prepared dozens of customized research reports on inclusion issues for students, parents, officials;
- updated web site on a timely basis.

COURT CHALLENGE

The Court Challenge, for which **SpecialLink’s** Dr. Irwin was an expert witness, was concluded. This Court Challenge was undertaken by a Winnipeg family whose daughter’s exceptional health care needs kept her in hospital for over a year after her birth. Even before the Court Challenge made its way through the tribunal, legislation was amended in the Maternity/Parental Leave Act to acknowledge the unfairness of limiting this leave to the first twelve months of a child’s life, when the child had spent that full year in hospital. Other issues raised by the family were still being considered. Dr. Irwin’s literature review and analysis of trends in this area are available for public use, after the Court Challenge.

- developed literature review and trend analysis for Court Challenge.

CANADIAN UNION OF POSTAL WORKERS (CUPW SPECIAL NEEDS PROJECT)

SpecialLink’s resource role with the Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) grew out of our 1996 research project that examined the barriers faced by parents of children with special needs in gaining or maintaining employment. The book, written by Drs. Sharon Hope Irwin and Donna S. Lero (*In Our Way: Barriers to Full Workforce Participation Experienced by Parents of Children with Special Needs*) brought national attention to a long-neglected subject. CUPW decided to build a special needs project on the recommendations of that study, and asked **SpecialLink** to administer it. With staffing and resourcing from the Child Care Fund of CUPW, over 350 postal worker families that include a child with special needs receive funding, resource assistance, information, newsletters, and mutual aid through the CUPW Special Needs Project. During 2002-2003, **SpecialLink** congenially left its role as the “home” of the Special Needs Project, and located a new home and staffing for the project. Extensive consultation with union, staff and new umbrella organization (Family Place Resource Centre, Sydney) continued throughout 2002-2003.

- Supervised coordinator and consultation with CUPW families with children with special needs;

- Wrote articles for CUPW *Parent-to-Parent* newsletters;
- Liaised with CUPW staff and with Family Place Resource Centre director regarding new home for the project;
- Provided extensive research and policy information to staff and parents;
- Consulted with new project staff over resources, procedures, finances, history of CUPW project.

YMCA INCLUSIVE SUMMER DAY CAMP

Locally, **SpecialLink** 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 seven summers, we have partnered with the YMCA to see that children with special needs can be included in their summer day camp. **SpecialLink** 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. **SpecialLink:**

- 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 **SpecialLink** 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.

Although NO administrative funding comes from the student employment grants, **SpecialLink** staff chose to volunteer extra time for this project.

PRESENTATIONS 2002-2003

- May 3 - 5, 2002: *Braiding Our Resources Conference* — Moncton, NB. Workshop and keynote.
- May 23 - 25, 2002: *International Conference on the Rights of the Child* — Montreal, QC. 2 workshops.
- October 17-22, 2002: *Communities Together for Children — Partners Conference*, Thunder Bay, ON. Keynote, two workshops, visits to centres and agencies.
- October 30 - 31, 2002: Combined conference of *Manitoba Association of Community Living and Manitoba Child Care Association* — Winnipeg, MB. Keynote, workshops, poster session and visits to centres and agencies and research partners,
- November 1-4, 2002: *Canadian Association for Community Living Annual Conference* — Mississauga, ON. Panel presenter and expert committee consultation.
- November 26 – December 13, 2002: San Diego (DEC); Ottawa (NCA), Halifax (PFI). 3 workshops; 1 consultation.
- January 30-February 2, 2003: Halifax, NS. *Partners for Inclusion* board meeting and presentation of all-day training session.
- February 7 – February 17, 2003: Site observations in Winnipeg (2 centres), Edmonton, Vancouver.
- March 19 – March 21, 2003: Site observations at Kingston, ON day care centre; Montreal Children's Hospital Centre and Marie Enfant centre.
- March 27-March 31, 2003: Ottawa and Kingston — CCSD workshop; meeting of CCDAA; National Children's Alliance National Symposium.

CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH REPORTS (ON-GOING)

During 2002-2003, approximately 75 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# is 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 1000 calls and emails for information, consultation, and advice over the past year.

ENHANCED WEBSITE (ON-GOING)

Our web site was updated this year, providing a downloadable version of our book, *A Matter of Urgency*, as well as a work-in-progress document on our current project, *Inclusion: The Next Generation*, to a listserv group.

SpecialLink Personnel

Sharon Hope Irwin — Executive Director and Principle Investigator

Gail Holdner — Office Coordinator

Glenda Watt — Librarian, Receptionist

Regular Contract Persons: Sylvia Ho, Bonnie Thompson, James Fader, Mike Peters

SpecialLink Executive Committee

Debra Martell

Nelson Martell

Shirley Chernin

Anne Marie Singler

Wilma Hutchison

SpecialLink

The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion

P.O. Box 775, Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada B1P 6J1

☎ 1-866-902-6333 ☎ 1-902-562-1662 Fax: 1-902-539-9117

specialink@ns.sympatico.ca <http://www.specialinkcanada.org>