

Annual Report

April 1, 2006 – March 31, 2007



**A PROUD LOOK AT OUR PAST
AND OUR FUTURE!**

SpecialLink

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WHAT IS SPECIALINK?

A helpline, clearinghouse and virtual resource and research centre for people working to include children with special needs in child care and community programs, SpecialLink provides personalized responses to specific questions, referrals and links to other organizations, site visits, and help, information, and technical assistance including curriculum development and program evaluation. We share SpecialLink fact sheets, books and videos, as well as training in your community in partnership with community organizations. We maintain an alert network of key inclusive child care advocates across the country, who can quickly identify and respond to opportunities and threats to inclusion quality and funding.

SPECIALINK'S COMMITMENT

SpecialLink is committed to action research that is informed and shaped by practice, building from the experiences of real-world child care with its limitations and its strengths. It connects researchers and policymakers with inclusive practices on the frontline. By identifying innovative practices, testing them, and presenting them to the wider field and to policymakers, SpecialLink helps improve practice and inform policy.

SPECIALINK'S RESOURCES ARE USEFUL TO:

Early childhood educators, inclusion facilitators, mentors, resource teachers and consultants, policymakers, early interventionists, therapists, parents, family child care providers, trainers, researchers, policy makers, social justice advocates and students.

ACTION RESEARCH

Our *Measuring Inclusion Progress* project, funded by Social Development Canada, came to an end in this fiscal year. It helped us to develop, refine and test ways of "Measuring Inclusion Progress" in child care centres. Research was used to produce tools and training packages for practitioners, trainers, advocates and parents for use at workshops or self-training on-line, to help to create a common knowledge base for inclusion on Early Childhood Learning & Care (ECLC) service provision across Canada.

This project helped child care centres to include children with special needs, built pan-Canadian networks and alliances within the ECLC sector, and provided useful information to researchers, trainers, disability advocates, students, support agencies, and all levels of governments. By 2007 well over

2000 individuals had taken part in our training which ranged from conference workshops, presentations to classes, insertion in text books used in ECE training programs, two day training seminars and full week university courses. Across Canada, all these groups are helping us to ‘test’ out the effectiveness of these tools and their role in helping us to understand inclusion quality. We welcome you to be a part of this action research project as it unfolds across Canada. We also completed an evaluation of the first four cohorts of Nova Scotia child care centres involved in Partnerships for Inclusion – NS, using the Specialink Child Care Inclusion Scales.

2007

In early 2007 the Canadian Council on Learning funded our Assessing Inclusion Quality in Early Childhood Learning and Child Care (ELCC) in Canada project with the Specialink Child Care Inclusion Practices and Principles Scales. The project is timelined for completion by March 31, 2008. The overall purpose of the project is to complete the development of a statistically sound, valid, reliable, user-friendly and well-accepted tool for assessing inclusion quality in early childhood learning and child care settings.

On April 1, 2007 we saw a major leadership change when after 17 years leading the organization she founded, Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin moved into the role of Senior Researcher for Specialink. Debra Mayer assumed the role as Director of Specialink as the organization completed its transition to its new home at the University of Winnipeg in downtown Winnipeg, Manitoba. Most recently, Debra served as Specialink’s Project Manager, a role she filled while being mentored by Sharon, co-facilitating training in many parts of the country, and helping to promote the Practices and Principles.

Specialink's commitment continues. Our fundamental goal is to bring Canadian child care closer to the reality of full inclusion by locating or developing and then sharing innovative strategies and tools that work with the field, with families, and with governments.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

In 1990, when SpecialLink was founded, we thought that we soon would work ourselves out of a job. We thought we would soon see full inclusion of children with special needs in child care programs across Canada. As David Young, a board member at the time (and now ED of Family Resource Canada) said: "Children" would soon mean "all children," not just "some children." Seventeen years later, and the fight has only begun. The great victory we thought was won when the principle of inclusion was embedded into the National Child Care Plan proved to be short-lived. When the new Conservative government was elected in January 2006, the bilateral agreements leading toward the creation of a universal child care program ended, and with them went federal support for the principle of "inclusion."

Although I officially remained SpecialLink's ED until April 1, 2007, Debra Mayer and I were really co-directors during 2006-2007. Appropriately, much of Debra's work focused on the future (the move to Manitoba, membership development, board development and other aspects of the strategic plan), while my work focused on tasks already in progress.

I suspect that our transition process may well provide a template for other non-profit organizations that are moving from leadership by "the founder" into leadership by someone of the next generation. We developed a transition year plan (06-07) during which we co-presented at numerous trainings and workshops, edited each other's writing, tested our ideas with each other. Now, five months after the transition year and into the new arrangement, I can say with certainty that both the choice of Debra Mayer and the transition are very positive for SpecialLink. Congratulations to the new Board of Directors, who took a brave step. Despite uncertain federal financing, they continue to bring their fresh vision and commitment to further develop SpecialLink in a new place, with a new executive director. They share a vision of inclusion for children with special needs and their families toward which they are prepared to work.

PROJECT MANAGER'S REPORT

The approach undertaken by SpecialLink deepens our shared understanding of best practices in inclusion, and allows interventions in early learning and child care centres to be measured, reflected upon, and thus improved.

The SpecialLink vision – through books, on-site presentations and DVDs — is increasingly being embedded in college and university texts and courses, provincially sponsored training (such as BC and Alberta), and when faculty share our training with their students. A new and very successful initiative was the co-sponsoring of last summer's weeklong institute, *Being Universally Inclusive: Promotion and Practice*, with the University of Winnipeg's

Division of Continuing Education which attracted 27 students from Manitoba, British Columbia and Alberta.

We offer training in communities across Canada in partnership with community organizations and we thank all of them for their work in helping us to share the SpecialLink approach with well over 2000 Canadians. I visited many parts of Canada in the past year and I am so impressed by the real commitment of service providers to “do better” for children with special support needs. By identifying innovative practices, testing them, and presenting them to the wider field and to policymakers, SpecialLink helps improve practice. Our findings inform the development of provincial and municipal policies that promote inclusion. Our scales are now being used to support the efforts of child care practitioners, such as BC’s Supported Child Development program; The City of Toronto’s Children’s Services; Halton, ON’s Quality First project; Nova Scotia’s Partnerships for Inclusion; Prince Edward Island’s Bridges program; New Brunswick’s Opening the Door to Quality Childcare & Development; Newfoundland’s Enhancing Quality and Inclusive Practices; and Community Living Manitoba’s Inclusive Child Care Capacity Building Project.

Key work over the past three years has involved the development of succession and sustainability plans for SpecialLink, approved by our board of directors and membership. I want to acknowledge the forward thinking of my predecessor, Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin and long time Chair Shirley Chernin, who put into place the succession plan that led me to work as project manager from 2005-2007, all the while being mentored by Sharon, to assume the role of Executive Director on April 1, 2007.

Sustainability planning involved securing community support. We now have over 300 members representing thousands of staff, children and families) have recruited a national board of directors; and have cultivated local community partners such as the University of Winnipeg where we are now located, and Community Living Manitoba which now supports our administrative functions. I want to thank both these local organizations for their incredible show of support for our work.

We have also diversified our funding sources, and now work in partnership with a number of funders who have helped us to maintain our connection to the community despite the loss of the multi-year federal funding we previously enjoyed.

Much of my work in the past year has been in the redevelopment and enhancement of our website which has become an important way to foster inclusive culture right across Canada in a cost effective way. (As the web stats on page 10 show, we have experienced a remarkable number of hits — up to

70,000 in one month!) We will increase our web presence, keeping it timely and comprehensive.

The relocation of SpecialLink to Manitoba offers us a wonderful opportunity to expand the range of our inclusive quality enhancement efforts and our work in knowledge exchange. The resource centre will be open to the public and will share its resources in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Canada-wide through consultation via in-person visits, our website and our toll free number. This important work in 2007/08 will be supported via a grant from the Province of Manitoba and we thank the Province for that assistance.

I want to thank the wonderful members of the board of SpecialLink, and make special mention of our local executive committee, who represent parents of children with disabilities, the University of Winnipeg, service providers, and Community Living Manitoba. I especially want to thank my mentor, Sharon Hope Irwin, a source of inspiration to me and so many others for so many years.

Thanks to all of you who are members and supporters of our work co-creating a culture of inclusion, from coast to coast to coast across our great land.

Together, we will make it happen.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT

As I reflect upon the motto of this Annual Report — “A Proud Look at Our Past and Our Future,” I realize that not only am I looking back on 17 years in my role as chairperson of SpecialLink, but at another 10 years as chairperson of Town Daycare Centre, in Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. Imagine that; 27 years of learning about inclusive child care within a centre, and about inclusive child care as a national vision.

It seems like yesterday that we launched the Town Daycare Centre in Glace Bay, with Sharon Hope Irwin as the visionary, founding director who led us on the road to full inclusion. The centre became a model of inclusion for all of Canada. And it seemed so reasonable then — as it does now — that all kids should have the opportunity to be in child care, along with their friends. Why has it taken so long for inclusion to be accepted, even the norm, in Canada, in child care?

When I moved from the role of chairperson of the Town Daycare Centre to chairperson of SpecialLink, I was gratified to have the opportunity to work on inclusive child care at the national level. Our accomplishments during these past 17 years have been immense, influencing policy, research, and practice across Canada. As always, I must point to the role of the volunteers — the Board

members, the executive and the members who continued to pursue a vision of full inclusion of all children.

As a national organization, we must not forget that sound community planning for child care must originate with the people who live in the community, like the people who started Town Daycare Centre, and then began to share their ideas across Canada, community by community.

Dr. Sharon Hope Irwin had a vision, and with it a commitment, not a compliant dealing with things as they are, but a positive and spirited adventure into what might be.

Debra Mayer, our new Executive Director, brings to SpecialLink both a background in community work and experience in non-governmental organizations at the national level.

Looking into our future, I am certain that we have made a brilliant choice in the successor to Sharon, and that SpecialLink's future as a force for full inclusion is assured through the dedication of the staff, the Board and the members of SpecialLink.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS AND CONSULTATIONS 2006-2007

2006

- **Creating a Place for All Children: Measuring Inclusion Quality in Early Childhood Programs.** April 6, Canadian Association for Young Children National Conference, Winnipeg, MB (Debra Mayer).
- **How To Measure Inclusion Quality - and Why** (full-day trainings). May 2, Prince George, BC (Sharon Hope Irwin); May 4, Smithers, BC (Sharon Hope Irwin & Debra Mayer); May 5, Terrace, BC (Sharon Hope Irwin & Debra Mayer); May 6, Prince Rupert, BC (Sharon Hope Irwin & Debra Mayer).
- **How To Measure Inclusion Quality in Child Care - and Why** (a full day seminar). Manitoba Child Care Association Provincial Conference "Soaring To New Heights" May 25 - 27 in Winnipeg, MB (Debra Mayer).
- **Inclusion Visionaries** (half day workshop). "Leading the Way to Quality" The Canadian Child Care Federation, the Early Childhood Professional Association of Alberta, the Alberta Family Child Care Association, and the Alberta Child Care Network. June 15-18 in Calgary, AB (Debra Mayer).
- **Being Universally Inclusive: Promotion and Practice** Summer Institute, 2006 — University of Winnipeg's Department of Continuing Education — July 10th - 14th Winnipeg MB (Sharon Hope Irwin & Debra Mayer).
- **Access Ability** National Research Conference for Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) "Policy & Research Priorities for Children & Youth With Special Needs" — August 21-24, Vancouver, BC (Sharon Hope Irwin).
- Federal Budget consultation on-line (Debra Mayer).
- Federal **Child Care Spaces Initiative** consultation – October 5, Ottawa (Sharon Hope Irwin & Debra Mayer).
- Federal **Standing Committee on Finance Prebudget** Consultation, October 6, 2006, Portage la Prairie MB, (Debra Mayer).

- **Keynote “Have You Got Attitude?”** and workshop **“Inclusive Circle Time Strategies”** (Debra Mayer); workshop **“Inclusion Successes”** (Sharon Hope Irwin & Dixie Mitchell) at “Inclusion in Child Care Settings Enhancing Programs and Practices.” St. John’s, NL — October 27-29, The Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL) and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Pre-conference sessions, October 25 & 26 in St. John’s, NL: **“Social Play in Inclusive Child Care Settings”** and **“Inclusion Visionaries”** (Debra Mayer) for Newfoundland Inclusion consultants and licensing staff; 2 pre-conference workshops for government staff **“Child Care Inclusion: Monitoring Progress in Policy and Practice”** and **“Evaluation of the First Cohort of PFI-NS”** (Sharon Hope Irwin & Dixie Mitchell).
- **Why Measure Inclusion Quality?** (Debra Mayer), workshop at the Saskatchewan Early Childhood Association’s annual provincial conference. "The Future Generations" November 3-4 in Saskatoon, SK.
- **How to Measure Inclusion Quality, and Why** (Angela Robertson and Sandra Mcdooling). Organized by Quality First in Halton Region, Ontario. Nov 13.
- **Special Health Care — Recommended Practices For ECEs.** November 22, Manitoba Child Care Association, Winnipeg, MB (Debra Mayer).

2007

- **Why to Measure Inclusion Quality — and How** (2-day advanced training). March 13-14, St. John’s, NL (Sharon Hope Irwin & Carolyn Webber, Manager, Partnerships for Inclusion- NS).
- **Social Play In Inclusive Child Care Settings.** March 17, Manitoba Child Care Association, Winnipeg, MB (Debra Mayer).
- **Have You Got Attitude? Keynote and Inclusive Circle Time Strategies** workshop (Debra Mayer) at “Developing Partnerships, People and Potential” - A conference for those who work with young children and families. Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement, March 24-25, Red Deer, AB.

CUSTOMIZED RESEARCH REPORTS AND ACADEMIC WRITINGS

Mitchell, D. & Mayer, D. (2007) *Celebrating Children: Planning for their Similarities and Differences*. Foundational paper prepared for the New Brunswick Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Project (English), New Brunswick Department of Family and Community Services

SPECIALINK PERSONNEL

Sharon Hope Irwin — Executive Director

Debra Mayer — Project Manager

Regular Contract Staff — James Fader, Jocelyne Tougas, Glenda Watt,

Bonnie Thompson, Dixie Mitchell, Donna Michal

SPECIALINK BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shirley Chernin, Sydney, NS – Chairperson

Members at large:

Vic Stone, Winnipeg MB; Dr. Phil Baker Winnipeg MB

Hubert Fenton-Smedts, Winnipeg MB; Reg Malanchuk, CMA, Winnipeg MB

Ruth Bancroft, Vancouver BC; Mary-Anne Bédard, Toronto, ON

Margaret Burke, Glace Bay, NS; Tracey Law, Fredericton NB

SpecialLink Website Stats

www.speciallinkcanada.org

The following charts indicate the website hits, visits and unique users in 2005, 2006 and 2007 (to July 31/07). *Care should be taken in interpreting these numbers. It may be more useful to view the fluctuations in website usage rather than the actual numbers.*

Hits

Every time a user sees a page, a file, or an image on the website, this is counted as a hit. I.e: if there are 20 images on any particular page then it will register as 20 hits.

As you can see, the website usage has grown steadily with marked increases in 2006 and 2007 thus far. This pattern of increase is shown in the monthly Hits as well as by the Visits and Unique Users.

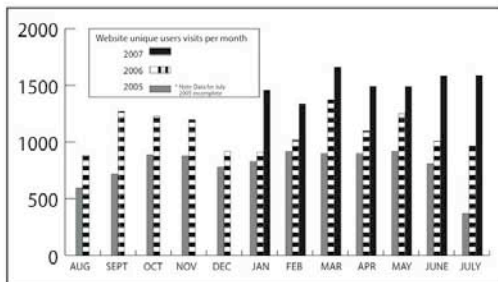
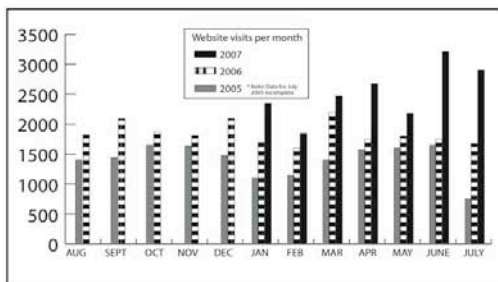
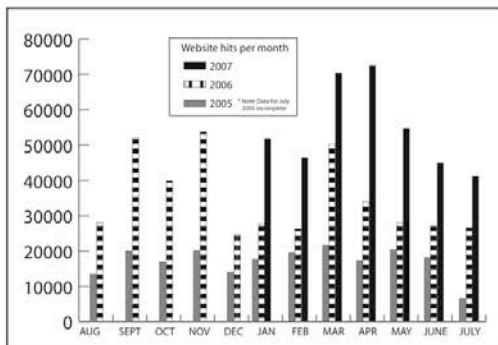
It appears that the spring time is notably the busiest time of the year for the site and also marks the greatest increases in growth, with over 70000 Hits in Apr. 07. The summer months are naturally quieter with a steady resurgence in the fall months. There appears to be a marked change as well during times when major updates are added to the site. Which signifies that many are monitoring the site on a regular basis thereby marking the need for continued updates of content. Many have commented on the ease of use and valuable content found.

Visits

Every time a user enter the site, browses through it (viewing any number of pages and files), and then leaves the site, this is counted as a visit. One user may return to the site several times in one month, each time being counted as a visit.

Unique Users

This measures the amount of different IP addresses accessing the site each month. For example, a home with one computer with internet access would count as one unique user, regardless of how many people use the computer or how often they visit the site. Offices and computer labs may have one IP address for several computers, so they may also be counted as only one unique user. Unlike "hits", "unique users" greatly underestimates the number of individuals who visit the site.



Income Statement

Speciallink: the National Centre for Child Care Inclusion Statement Income and Expenses, Accrued

For the Year Ended March 31, 2007

Income

Contract Revenue	\$	122,788.42
Membership	\$	670.00
Sales	\$	8,040.50
HST Rebate (50%)	\$	1,613.71
<u>Projects:</u>		
Partnerships for Inclusion	\$	30,000.00
Nova Scotia Employment	\$	3,546.45
SEED Grant	\$	14,071.52
TOTAL INCOME	\$	180,730.60

Expenses

Depreciation	\$	783.32
Administration/Overhead *	\$	12,128.02
French DVD	\$	9,407.20
Contract Expense	\$	65,034.64
Wages	\$	161,564.28
Printing	\$	428.56
Professional Fees	\$	1,000.00
Travel	\$	24,356.86
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$	274,702.88
TOTAL INCOME / EXPENSES	\$	(93,972.28)

(net loss for the year)

*Administration/Overhead includes:

Bank Charges, Donation, Supplies,

Insurance, Postage, Telecom, Telephone and Utilities

Balance Sheet 2006-2007

SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion Balance Sheet

For the Year Ended March 31, 2007

Assets	31-Mar-07	31-Mar-06
Bank		\$ 115,844.39
Accounts Receivable		\$ 2,862.80
HST Refund Due	\$ 15,605.28	\$ 19,864.96
Inventory	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 5,000.00
TOTAL	\$ 20,605.28	\$ 143,572.15
Capital Assets		
Computer	\$ 5,500.00	\$ 5,500.00
Projector	\$ 1,500.00	\$ 1,500.00
Display Panel Board	\$ 350.00	\$ 350.00
TOTAL	\$ 7,350.00	\$ 7,350.00
Accumulated Depreciation	\$ 5,018.52	\$ 4,235.20
	\$ 2,331.48	\$ 3,114.80
	\$ 22,936.76	\$ 146,686.95
Liabilities		
Bank Overdraft	\$ 162.09	
Loan - Linkage Research	\$ 9,060.00	\$ 39,000.00
	\$ 9,222.09	\$ 39,000.00
Equity	\$ 13,714.67	\$ 107,686.95
	\$ 22,936.76	\$ 146,686.95

SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion Statement of Equity

For the Year Ended March 31, 2007

	31-Mar-07	31-Mar-06
Balance, beginning of the year	\$ 107,686.95	\$ 111,422.95
Net loss for the year	\$ 93,972.28	\$ 3,736.00
Balance, end of year	\$ 13,714.67	\$ 107,686.95

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