

All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Fall 2019

Greetings, and Happy Fall!

Greetings, and welcome to the All Our Families 2019 fall newsletter! The team here at AOF hopes you had an enjoyable summer and are now well into fall activities. As always, I extend a thank you to AOF study participants and families; the information you share as you are busy guiding your growing children has been so valuable.

We continue to work on the **12-year questionnaire**, carefully choosing questions to make the information beneficial to learning new things about how adolescents and families are navigating in contemporary society and without taking up too much of your time. We want the questionnaires to be as easy as possible for you and your child to complete. We are less than a year before our first wave of participants' children turn 12!



In our **Ask an Expert** section, we have invited Pam Krause, President of the Centre for Sexuality, to provide some tips and strategies for those parents whose children, as part of their school curriculum, may be learning about sexual health. We have profiled some **team building** events we enjoyed with our staff and students. Finally, we have overviews of our **summer student projects** on natural supports and the economic downturn.

We hope you enjoy this newsletter. We draw on the comments you provide on your returned questionnaires to form the content. Please let us know how we are doing, and if there are other topics or resources you would like to read about.

Finally, a reminder that our newsletters are published twice a year, but you can find past newsletters, study updates and other information on our website, or by following us on Twitter and/or Facebook.

Suzanne

Halloween Memories



In our Spring 2019 newsletter, we asked readers to share some of their favourite Halloween stories. Here are our top picks!

My husband has an anaphylactic allergy to peanuts; so very early in our toddler's life, we instilled in him the importance of checking for peanuts in everything that he ate. We realized that perhaps we were a little too careful when, during his first ever Halloween at age 3, he earnestly asked, at each and every home, whether the treat had peanuts, because he was allergic to peanuts. And, at each and every home, his mom (me!) quickly added, "But I'm not, so we'll take it!"

I think our most effective family costume happened last year when we realized our dog looked a lot like Toto... So, our youngest daughter, currently in grade 4, decided she would be Dorothy. With the goal of limiting expenses, my middle daughter and I went to a local second hand store and sourced costumes for us to be the Scarecrow and Tin Man, as well as a Lion costume for my eldest daughter. We found a great cape to turn Daddy into The Wizard of Oz and we were ready to trick-or-treat down the Yellow brick Road!

My two young girls both wanted to go as characters from "The Incredibles". I had their costumes and masks all ready, but when it was time to get dressed, I discovered that the masks were far too large to be safe. My children were so upset! To salvage the situation, I used all of my very expensive eye liner to draw masks on their faces. Little did I know, the eyeliner was smudge-proof and therefore extremely difficult (impossible, actually) to wash off later that night. Therefore, the "Halloween Day 2" costume was a raccoon.

October Fun Facts

In Canada, Thanksgiving wasn't always celebrated in October – early Thanksgivings were celebrated on November 6th. Following World War I, Thanksgiving was held on the Monday of November 11th week along with Armistice Day. In 1957, Parliament announced Thanksgiving to be recognized the second Monday in October.



For most of us here in western Canada, Thanksgiving is a statutory holiday. However, folks in Atlantic Canada do not enjoy a day off for Thanksgiving.

The goal of Thanksgiving is to celebrate and give thanks together with friends and family while enjoying a feast of your liking! While historical Canadian thanksgiving meals include turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes and pumpkin pie, more contemporary cultural variations may include tofu, rice, latkes, braised purple cabbage, curry, spiced nuts, olives, stuffed mushrooms, perogies, samosas, tiramisu ... the list goes on! We wish you all the best for a wonderful Thanksgiving celebration with family and friends.

An old Celtic festival was the origins of what we now call Halloween. On the last day of October, the Celts celebrated end of harvest and start of winter with a festival, as they believed it was the day of the weakest boundary between the living and the dead.

If you like statistics, in Canada Halloween is second only to Christmas in money spent. What is the money spent on? [Candy!](#)

Spiders at Halloween are lucky! Some myths believe that a spider means someone who loves you is watching over you.

Predictions on popular Halloween costumes for 2019

Children: Characters from Descendants, Avengers Endgame, Lion King, Toy Story, Captain Marvel, along with the usual pirates, princesses, witches and ghosts.

Adults: Captain Marvel, Harry Potter, Pennywise (the clown from "It"), characters from Game of Thrones, along with the pirates, fairies, witches and generic monsters.

12-Year Questionnaire Update



The first wave of participants' children will begin to turn 12 years old in August 2020, and our progress on the 12-year questionnaire continues to go well.

The Maternal questionnaire is almost complete; once a few final adjustments are made we will begin pilot testing for length, flow and clarity.

As the Child Questionnaire is new for All Our Families, we are taking great care and attention to create a finished product that will engage our new young participants without being too long or technical. Additionally, the team will be working with a Mount Royal University student to develop a short, viewer-friendly video introducing the questionnaire concept to the 12-year olds in the study .

Short Reader Survey

Over the years, we've given gift cards to our participants as a way to thank them for completing our surveys. As we roll into our next phase of follow-up, we would love to hear from you the type of gift card you would like to receive for completing the Twelve Year Questionnaire.



Study Updates

These opportunities allowed our work to be shared internationally and we couldn't have done it without our participants!

This fall, our research was presented in London, UK and Potsdam, Germany!

These opportunities allowed our work to be shared internationally and we couldn't have done it without our participants!

Nikki Stephenson
PhD student, was accepted for an oral presentation in to showcase her research on "Differential attrition rates and informed consent: the All Our Families Cohort Study" in **London, UK** at the Optimising Multistudy Integrative Research Conference.

Results from this project argued that multiple retention strategies and thoughtful consent requests to participants promoted trust in the research program and aligned with participant's communication preferences.

Suzanne Tough
Principal investigator of AOF, presented at the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies in **Potsdam, Germany** on:
A. The persistence of developmental challenges among infants born preterm, results from the All Our Families cohort, and
B. Does the Maternal Separation Anxiety at 1 year influence outcomes at 2 years? Results from the All Our Families cohort.

Results: Now We Are 5!

From our five year follow-up survey, we put together a few results around play, reading, and activities.



Staff News



This past summer, our AOF team visited Steacy Collyer, CEO at [Calgary Reads](#), in their Children's Reading Place to explore and learn about this amazing and welcoming space for children and families. Calgary Reads (an Early Literacy Initiative) Society is a Calgary based non-profit organization with the vision of a thriving community where all children read with confidence and joy. Calgary Reads' mission is to improve the confidence and ability of struggling young readers and to actively promote literacy by working together with schools, families and businesses.

For over two decades, Calgary Reads' core literacy development programs, community initiatives, and school programs have promoted early literacy, love of reading, and community support. Calgary Reads also offers several other informational and educational programs that complement their core programs.

Thanks Steacy for having us, we are inspired!

Team-Building & Locked Room

In the summer, our team attended a workshop to "Make Sense of Your Strengths" to help us understand ourselves and the team collectively, and we applied what we learned to help each other in the escape rooms activity. What an insightful day! Thanks Locked Room Calgary!



Ask an Expert: Pam Krause



We invited Pam Krause, President of the [Centre for Sexuality](#), to provide some tips for parents in talking with their children about sex and sexuality.

Talking to your kids about sexuality can feel like tricky terrain. The Centre for Sexuality has been providing sexual health education and support to Calgarians since 1972. We get lots of questions from nervous parents about how to answer questions that can feel uncomfortable.

Sexuality is an integral part of what makes us all human and is vital to living a full life. However, mass media bombards us with explicit, unrealistic and often undignified sexual images and messages. If you want to counteract the confusing messages that are out there around sex and sexuality, then start talking and keep talking with your children about these important topics.

You are your child's first sexual health educator. Studies show, time and again, that children want to learn about sex from their parents. A [survey released by the Canadian Association for Adolescent Health](#) demonstrated that 63% of teens considered their parents to be a major source of information on sex and sexual health and 43% thought their parents provided the most useful and valuable information.

So, how does a parent talk to their kids about sex and sexuality? Honest, straightforward answers in simple language can help equip children with correct information and a strong sense of your family's values. Letting your child know you are willing to listen and answer their questions is really the most important thing you can do as a parent. Here are some of the tips for discussing sexuality with your child.

1. **Reflect on your own upbringing** - How did you learn about sexuality? What was good, bad or missing? How do you want your own children to learn about sexuality?
2. **Use the correct language for body parts.** From birth use the correct words: penis, vulva, breasts. After all we don't call our elbows 'bend-bends'. This is the first and most important thing you can do. If you are comfortable using these words, your children will be too.
3. **Communicate your values.** Look for opportunities to share your values about sexuality. Keep in mind that not saying anything allows others - like the media or peers - to form your children's values.
4. **Listen and stay calm.** Whether your children come to you or you start the conversation, stay calm and listen as much as you talk. Show them they are worthy of your time and attention and they will know they can ask you anything.
5. **Be honest.** You don't have to be an expert - your answers can be simple. Prepare yourself for questions like "Where do babies come from?" As your children get older, the questions will become more complicated and you can seek out answers together.
6. **Repeat. Repeat. Repeat.** Expect your children to ask questions repeatedly. Your answers are reassuring to a small child and help teens get the right message at the right time.
7. **Look for everyday opportunities.** Chances to talk about sex are easy to find! Start a conversation by sharing information as well as your opinion or values. As a question to start a conversation: "What did you think of that music video?"
8. **It's never too late to begin talking.** Even if your children are in their teens and you haven't talked much about sexuality - find a place to begin. Look for a teachable moment and dive in.
9. **Look to your community.** Support the sex education provided in your child's school. Ask your family doctor to be involved in talking with your teen about sexual health issues. Make sure your older teens know how to access community supports.
10. **Have fun.** As with all aspects of parenting, it always helps to have a sense of humour.

The Centre for Sexuality provides "Talking to Your Kids About Sexuality" workshops for parents to provide parents with the information, resources, skills, and confidence to effectively talk with their children about sexuality as they grow and develop. We discuss how to address sexuality at each developmental stage, and talk about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Centre
for Sexuality



Research to Real Life

Connections First Policy Fellowship Survey

In the Spring 2019 AOF newsletter, AOF members were invited to participate in a 10-minute survey about their perceptions of natural support opportunities and connectedness within your neighbourhoods, and how these natural support opportunities could be promoted. Natural supports refer to reciprocal mutual and close connections, and include relationships such as family and friends, as well as neighbours and coaches. Evidence shows that natural supports can buffer the effects of stress by providing an opportunity for support and encouragement, as well as enabling skill development in areas such as communication and resiliency.



Results from the All Our Families Study

UNEMPLOYMENT AND FINANCIAL STRESS



Research has demonstrated that unemployment and financial stress are associated with various negative health issues that impact families.

Purpose of Project

To describe the perceived impact of the recent Alberta recession on families in **Calgary, Alberta**, and to identify factors that helped families cope with challenges such as unemployment and financial stress.

Question for Participants

We used data from the open-ended question on the All Our Families "Eight is GREAT!" questionnaire that asked participants to tell us if they have been influenced by economic changes in Calgary.

Families in our study have experienced tremendous changes in economic and social changes in Calgary. How have you been impacted and what has been the outcome?

RESULTS FROM RESPONSES

Responses were organized into categories and subcategories based on recurring themes.

Finances



Coping & Response Strategies

- Budgeting
- Spending changes such as cost cutting, prioritizing essential costs over non-essential costs (e.g. eating out less and cooking at home more)

Income

- Decreased income
- Change in number of income earners
- Worry due to job insecurity

Employment

Changes in Work

- Increased, decreased, and fluctuating workloads
- Job loss and unemployment
- New employment opportunities (usually after a job loss)



Health & Well-Being



Transitioning Family Dynamics

- Moving away for work
- Adapting to adjusted budget
- Change in family dynamics due to a stay-at-home parent returning to paid work

Optimism & Coping

- Gratitude for not being impacted
- Hope for economy to improve

Mental Health Challenges

- Job-related negative mental health
- Stress, worry, depression, anxiety

Coping Strategies



Social support



Time off work



Faith

Social support included emotional or practical support from immediate or extended family, friends, community, and health professionals, as well as use of community services. **Taking time off** meant not looking for work immediately after a job loss. Using **faith** to cope was cited in the context of personal religious beliefs, praying and meditation; or believing that situations will change.

IMPORTANT POINT!

The findings of this study provide insight into the first-hand experiences of AOF families during the economic downturn, which is important in guiding policy and program development to support families experiencing challenges during economic changes.



Survey data collection closed on August 5, 2019 and data analysis was recently completed. **Results highlighted the importance of developing both informal and formal opportunities to foster neighbourhood-based supports.** There was a strong positive relationship between neighbourhood connectedness and participation in opportunities. The most common barriers to accessing community events included limited opportunities, associated costs, and personal lack of time. Findings from this project will inform practice and policy related to natural support opportunities within neighbourhoods to enable the creation of supportive environments for children, youth, and families.

Results from this opportunity will be compiled in a report supporting the Max Bell Foundation & Burns Memorial Fund Connections First Policy Fellowship, and have already been presented in a poster presentation at the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute Summer Student Day on August 23, 2019. Further details regarding the policy fellowship can be found at www.connectionsfirst.ca.

Thank you to all of those who participated!

Economic Recession in Calgary

Research has demonstrated that unemployment and financial stress are associated with various negative health issues that impact families. One of our exciting summer projects this year aimed to understand the impact of the recent economic recession on Calgarian families, check out our infographic summarizing our results.

Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our gratitude to AOF participants for sharing their experiences regarding the economic changes in Alberta and we look forward to conducting further analyses as we continue to receive responses to the 8-year questionnaire!

All information taken from:
Singh, S, Grew, N, Stephenson, N, Walsh, B, Singh, S. "Family perspectives of the economic downturn: A qualitative study of the All Our Families research cohort in Alberta, Canada."

[allourfamiliesstudy.com](https://www.allourfamiliesstudy.com)

