

# All Our Families Study

Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse

Spring 2017

## Greetings and happy Mother's Day!

On behalf of the entire All Our Families team, we wish all our moms a most wonderful day.



Spring has finally sprung and we have so many updates for you. Our sought after team of researchers have been busy crisscrossing the world to share our knowledge at a number of events, including the *Alcohol & Pregnancy: Exploring the Key Issues* seminar in Ulster, Northern Ireland, the Canadian National Perinatal Research Meeting (CNPRM) in Montebello, QC and the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) biennial conference in Austin, TX. We also launched our ***Eight Is Great*** survey and a sub-study to better understand resilience. We are beginning a new study on community resource use, which a summer student, Katelyn Deyholos, will help us with. Read a little more about Katelyn below.

Congratulations to our team's Dr. Nicole Racine who was recently awarded a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Postdoctoral Fellowship! This generous support will enable Dr. Racine to continue her research examining the long-term impacts of maternal stress on the social and emotional development of young children.

Some good news came out of Ottawa this spring as well. The federal government is introducing more flexible parental benefits, giving parents the option to extend parental leave to 18 months while maintaining job security. We welcome this new opportunity for those families who would like just a little more time before a potential return to work.



Speaking of babies, congratulations to three of our academic investigators on their recent – and very adorable – arrivals: Carly McMorris, PhD welcomed son Finn last July, Lianne Tomfohr-Madsen, PhD had daughter Kiara Skye in January and twins Gabriella and Alexander arrived in February to Sheri Madigan, PhD. Finn made an appearance at the office already and we are looking forward to meeting the other bundles of joy very soon.

For your interest we have included links to my recent [opinion editorial](#) on strategies to help children and the value of mentoring which was published by Huffington Post (and [in French](#)), and some information from Calgary Reads on 'the summer slide'.

As always, let us know what you think of our newsletter and what you want to read more about. We look forward to your thoughts and comments and invite you to [email us](#) or reach us on [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#).

Best wishes,

Dr. Suzanne Tough

## Research to Real Life: Continuing work on self-regulation in children

Reader response to our article on self-regulation in our last issue was very encouraging. Last fall, we told you about our work on self-regulation in children from birth to age three and our *Research to Real Life* consultations with the Early Childhood Development (ECD) community in partnership with [Calgary Reads](#) and the [First 2000 Days Network](#).



Self-regulation is the ability to monitor and manage emotions, attention, and interactions with others and the environment.

We presented how our research identified a number of risk and protective factors that influence self-regulation development, including risks such as gender, developmental delays, and maternal mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression or a history of exposure to adverse childhood experiences), and protective influences such as parenting styles, social support and formal child care. In return, the ECD community expressed interest in a variety of strategies that could be used to promote self-regulation and in what contexts these strategies would work, as well as to better understand the importance of the different protective factors for self-regulation.

We will now continue this work thanks to a new grant awarded through the Department of Pediatrics Innovation Awards Competition (University of Calgary). Led by Erin Hetherington, a PhD student with our team, this project will clarify the importance of different protective strategies for optimal development of self-regulation in children at age 5. This work will thus inform new actionable strategies for parents and frontline workers. A significant component of this will be the coordination of more community outreach initiatives to disseminate our findings.

### Why is this important?

The Alberta government has identified that early childhood development and school readiness are priority areas of concern for our communities, yet 29% of children in Alberta are experiencing great difficulty in one or more areas of development, and 15% are experiencing great difficulty in two or more areas. Good self-regulation skills can help children, with or without delays, make friends and experience learning success — key factors for school enjoyment.

A better understanding of what protective factors for self-regulation are most important, and ‘for whom’, is a gap that requires further research and that the All Our Families team will attempt to address. This study will yield new information that can be readily translated into programs and policy and inform program planners, decision makers and researchers — ultimately improving outcomes for children and families.

## Children’s Reading Place: Books Beat the Summer Slide

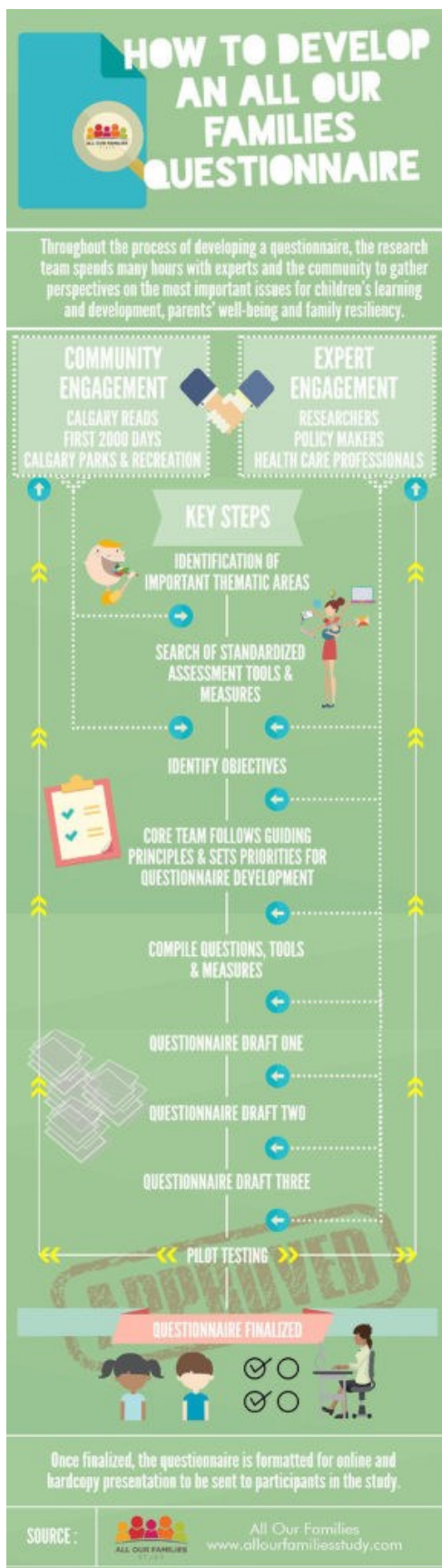


Time and again, research from AOF and others has shown that reading together with your child beginning in infancy is essential to their development, helping build language, thinking and communication skills, social competence and emotional maturity.

At school age, research shows that children lose up to three months of learning over the summer holidays. Reading a minimum of six books over summer helps maintain reading levels and children with access to books over the summer perform 35-40% better on reading achievement tests than those without. Children lacking accessible books are at greater risk of suffering from the “summer slide.”

To help combat the ‘summer slide’, this summer, Calgary Reads welcomes Calgarians to a new resource in the city: the Children’s Reading Place, opening July 1 in a heritage property in the community of Ramsay. The Children’s Reading Place will be dedicated to supporting childhood literacy by providing interactive literacy experiences, support, resources and free books to children in the Calgary area.

Easily accessible by transit, the Children's Reading Place is not a library: it's about book access and ownership. Children get to keep the books. Housed in the same space will also be the Calgary Reads Book Bank, and a Reader-in-Residence and House Hosts will welcome all visitors. Find out more at [Calgary Reads](http://Calgary Reads).



## Study updates

### Eight is Great arriving in your inbox

You've heard us talk about the study for a while and now, the wait is finally over. After many months in the works, our 8-year study *Eight is Great* is rolling out and we are so pleased to be seeing such a great response from all of you.

You may be wondering what it takes to develop a questionnaire and so we have created a helpful infographic to illustrate the process: we tap into the expertise of many stakeholders, including researchers, policy makers, health care professionals and community organizations before we identify thematic areas, assessment tools and measures, which lead to a number of drafts before the final questionnaire is released online.

What's new in *Eight is Great*: the questionnaire is primarily available online, which allows participants to follow along, stop/take a break when needed and return to the study when you have more time. The topics we are looking at this time around encompass your child's school life, activities, screen use, health, sleep, community, behavior/development, as well as parenting and maternal health and wellbeing. If you haven't received a link to the study just yet, watch your email around the time your child turns eight.

### A new study looks at how we can better understand resiliency in children and families

The past couple of years have certainly been trying for many families in Calgary. Although we haven't experienced any new natural disasters like the 2013 Flood, the wild fires in Fort McMurray last year and the tough economic climate have been a challenge for many.

Led by Dawn Kingston, PhD, a new study on resiliency looks at a variety of adverse childhood and family experiences (e.g. flood recovery, family changes, residential move, job loss, financial concerns), child health and education records, as well as mother's health to help us understand how children "bounce back" and how a mother's health impacts her child's resilience.

There are three ways to participate in this one: an online questionnaire, a saliva sample collection from your child and a one-on-interview with a research assistant. Participants can choose to take part in one, two or all three portions of the study.

We are very pleased that the response to this study has been overwhelmingly positive, with most or all saliva and interview spots filled.



## Staff news: arrivals and departures

### Summer student Katelyn Deyholos joins AOF

This summer, we're excited to welcome Katelyn Deyholos, a third-year University of Calgary Psychology student, who will be helping our team on the project *Community resource utilization: Is it the person or the place?* Using data from the All Our Families (AOF) cohort, the project will investigate how community resource use in Calgary is associated with neighborhood characteristics, such as playgrounds, pathways, walkability, and public transit. For example, what are the qualities of the neighborhoods where moms are more likely to use the library? drop in child care? playgrounds?



"I'm looking forward to using my stats skills in a real life project," says Katelyn with enthusiasm. "I hope to pursue law after finishing my degree and this experience will be a great introduction to how public health, community planning and policy development intersect."

Being a full time student has forced Katelyn to cut her time spent on hobbies, such as dancing and reading for pleasure, but the summer offers an opportunity to enjoy a little respite. "I just got back from an awesome trip to New York," she says. "Now I'm ready to dive into my cool summer job."

### Congratulations, Suzanne!



We're proud to announce that our principal investigator, Dr. Suzanne Tough, has been selected as the recipient of the prestigious 2017 Geoffrey C. Robinson Award by the Canadian Pediatric Society.

The biennial Award recognizes outstanding contributions to child and youth health through research in the field of population health or health services research. The honour will be conferred at the CPS Annual Conference in Vancouver later this spring.

Dr. Tough is recognized for using scholarship and research to develop research programs that meet real needs and engaging policy and program leaders in government and partnering NGOs in using research data to improve health service delivery and low-cost community-based programming.

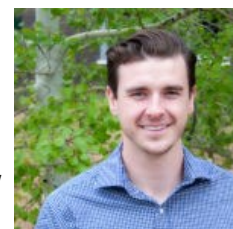
The All Our Families cohort study has been critical to generating this information for decision makers, including strategies for maternal mental health, prenatal care and child self-regulation. Particularly exciting for the AOF team has been our work on how well families cope with the challenges of family life through support from friends, family and community.

Rising rates of preterm birth in Alberta prompted Dr. Tough to investigate the risk factors. In response to discovering that low knowledge of reproductive health significantly influences risk behaviours, such as alcohol use during pregnancy and delayed child-bearing, Dr. Tough helped develop preventive guidelines on these very topics which are now widely used in Canada and elsewhere.

### Moving on



Congratulations to our research assistant Anika Winn and trainee Shawn Dodd who have completed their studies and will be moving on. Anika successfully defended her honours thesis exploring the social support of pregnant immigrant women in Calgary, and after spending her last summer with us, will be moving to Ottawa to pursue a Law degree. Shawn successfully defended his Master's thesis on factors influencing fine and gross motor development among 2 year-old children and is now ready for his next step in the field of medicine.



Read more about Shawn in a [recent article](#) about the student-led non-profit organization he founded, which aims to enrich the high school biology curriculum through hands-on experiments. We are so proud of both and excited about their achievements but we are sad to see them go.

More babies on the horizon: We are so excited that our program manager, Nikki Stephenson, will be welcoming a new addition to her family in September. Congratulations and we look forward to hearing more about the new arrival.