

# All Our Families Study

*Understanding Development Across the Lifecourse*

Spring 2022

## Greetings from the All Our Families Study

Dear Participants,

Welcome to the Spring of 2022! It is hard to believe it has now been a little over two years since the start of the COVID-19 Pandemic and all the changes that came with it. While I am certain there will still be some bumps along the road, as the restrictions ease I hope that this spring brings for you a renewed sense of 'return to normal'.

Since our Fall newsletter, you have helped us complete the third and final COVID survey. Thanks!!



We have included some interesting findings for you in this newsletter. We always appreciate the additional comments you provide as it provides insight and context on how families are coping with everyday life. For those of you who took a break from the surveys during COVID, we hope to welcome you back soon.

Earlier this spring, we were delighted to offer you a 'just because' gift card, and we were pleased that 68% responded with Tim Horton's and Walmart as the most popular choices! As always, the AOF team wants to acknowledge your tremendous contribution to the study when you fill in your surveys.

We have all felt the global disruption caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. More than 345,000 Albertans have Ukrainian heritage, representing about 10% of our population. Our prairie land was worked by many people from the Ukraine, and many of the cultural traditions are woven into our communities. Vegreville, Alberta is home to one of the world's largest pysankas- an intricately painted Ukrainian Easter egg which weighs over 5,500 pounds. I am sure that many of you are connected to friends, family and colleagues who have connections to the Ukraine, and have felt the distress more intensely. In such a time of turmoil, may we be reminded that no act of kindness is too small, and as mentioned earlier in a newsletter, there is great benefit to social snacking with those you encounter ([www.connectionsfirst.ca](http://www.connectionsfirst.ca)).

In this newsletter, Dr. Susan Graham will talk about an exciting new initiative through the Owerko Centre that supports research in Neurodevelopment Disorders (NDD). In Study Updates, we have included some interesting results from the Maternal and Child COVID Surveys. We have some new faces with our staff, and some fun tidbits about ourselves in our Staff News. For those of you who are interested in participating in additional research, we have provided some information and a link to an important National COVID-19 Vaccine study. We have some 'next steps' study updates, and finally, we look to you for some contributions – a 'call for art' from you!

And finally, a big Happy Mother's Day to all of you! May the day bring some fun to you and your family.

With appreciation,

Suzanne

## Study Updates

# Mental Health Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Calgary, Alberta, Canada



Look how far we have come together! In the early days of the study, around the time your babies were born, All Our Babies had 3388 participants. To date, the number of participants is 2,597, which means a 76% retention rate for the study. We have been through so much together. Thank you for continuing with this journey.

## 2x

### Maternal Mental Health

Compared to pre-pandemic data:

- Twice as many mother's were experiencing **depression** during the pandemic (15% → 33%)
- Three times as many mother's were experiencing **anxiety** during the pandemic (11% → 34%)

The number of women experiencing anxiety and depression remained high from May 2020 to Jan 2022.

**This suggests that resources are necessary to help families regain wellness during recovery.**

## 3x

"We are doing very well in comparison to others. But it has still been incredibly hard. Not getting to hug or spend time with my parents; not seeing my brother's family for over a year is so hard. The ever changing restrictions and not knowing if kids will have sports; sent home from school etc. is hard."

- Study Participant



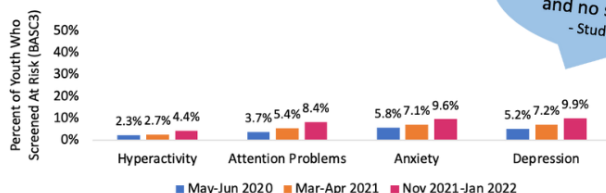
Our next step will be a return to our regular follow up surveys, this time for both you and your youth. We hope to launch this in the Fall of 2022. The survey will

come sometime within the year they will be turning 13 years of age, instead of close to your child's birthday. This shortened time frame reflects the stage of development that your child is at, as well as your own stage of life. This will allow a shortened launch for us; 18-24 months rather than over a 4-year time frame. We know that developmental milestones between a 12- to 13-year-old child are much closer than, for example, between a 24- and 36-month-old child. We will start with the oldest children this fall and should have captured everyone by the middle to late 2024.

### Youth Mental Health

During the pandemic, youth reported increases in:

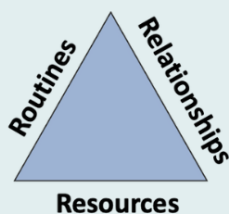
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Attention Problems
- Hyperactivity



"I have been bored at home without friends and no social media."

- Study Participant

### What Can Families Do?



- **Routines**
  - Reduces decision making fatigue to help children thrive.
- **Resources**
  - Reduces stress to help build skills.
- **Relationships**
  - Increases oxytocin (the happy hormone) to improve mood.

### What Can Communities Do?

#### Have a social snack!

Brief, informal, positive interactions with others.



connectionsfirst.ca

**Mental health problems impacted about 30% of families during the pandemic, impacting more mothers and children than before the pandemic.**

www.allourfamiliesstudy.com

## Spring Activities

The smell of spring is here! Fields of buttercups and popping crocuses highlight the end of winter, enticing many of our team to start garden projects. If you are curious about Yard Smart plants for Calgary, check-out this [City of Calgary guide](#).

We were curious about fun events happening in Calgary for our own family adventures and would like to share what we found. We wish you all a wonderful spring full of adventures!

- Roller Skating! <https://www.calgaryrollerskate.com/>
- The RESCUE exhibition at Telus Spark <https://www.sparkscience.ca/rescue>
- ZONIGHTS at the Calgary Zoo over May Long (May 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>)
- Also, Sunday Safari Brunch occurs in Destination Africa every Sunday until November! <https://www.calgaryzoo.com/events/events-at-a-glance>
- The Royal Canadian Circus is in Calgary from May 27<sup>th</sup> to June 5<sup>th</sup>! <https://www.royalcanadiancircus.ca/2015/06/15/royal-canadian-circus-2015-spectac-survey-calgary/>



Recognizing that not all of our families are interested in such formal events, here is a list of other fun spring activities:

- Walk or bike along the river pathways in . One little-known gem is Ralph Klein Park. Named after our former Premier of Alberta, the park boasts 30 hectares of wetland park, a natural playground, and community orchard. It is a great staging area for bike rides along the canal, and also features a self-guided walking tour of the park area. Note: dogs are not allowed in the park. Plenty of parking, it is located at 12350 84 St SE, Calgary. <https://www.calgary.ca/csps/parks/locations/se-parks/ralph-klein-park.html>
- An outdoor picnic with family and friends.
- A mountain escape (e.g., Kananaskis, Banff, Lake Louise) to summit mountains, chase waterfalls, or just be present in nature.
- And finally, garden projects in one's home or community garden!



The All Our Families team sincerely hopes you all enjoy beautiful spring weather with friends and family.

## Ask an Expert: Susan Graham - The Azrieli Accelerator

In this issue of Ask An Expert, Dr. Susan Graham, Scientific Director of the Azrieli Accelerator, will talk about this new research initiative focused on neurodevelopmental conditions.

### What is the Azrieli Accelerator? Is it a 'thing', as in a piece of equipment, or a 'concept'?

The Azrieli Accelerator is a new initiative made possible by a generous gift from the Azrieli Foundation, developed to transform neurodevelopment research at UCalgary with a lifespan approach. With this funding, we will cultivate and launch research that can have a positive impact in the lives of children, teens and adults with neurodevelopmental conditions and their families.



**Dr. Susan Graham**, PhD, is a Professor in the Department of Psychology as well as Director of the Owerko Centre at the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute. Her focus is on language and cognitive development in children. Dr. Graham is also a Co-Investigator on the All Our Families Study.



Transdisciplinary research and potential for impact are core to the work that will be funded by the Azrieli Accelerator. With this initiative, we will enhance collaborations across the university, in the community, and throughout the global network.

Neurodevelopment research isn't a new focus at UCalgary. This initiative builds upon more than 50-years of research in this area, which has been supported by transformative investments by government, community partners and generous philanthropists, including the Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation and the Owerko, Cumming, Hotchkiss, Snyder, Mathison, and Fenwick families and many others.

## What are neurodevelopmental conditions, and how do they impact families?

Examples of neurodevelopmental conditions that are more commonly known include ADHD, autism, Tourettes, and language learning disorders. There are 35 conditions defined as neurodevelopmental disorders that each present differently but what is common to each is the notion that differences in how the brain functions give rise to these life-long conditions. The impacts of the condition on each person and their family vary greatly – each condition has different impacts, and even two people with the same condition can have different lived experiences. In general, individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions can face challenges that may affect their health, their mental health, social and economic well-being and have long-term implications for overall quality of life.



Up to 17% of Canadian children have a neurodevelopmental condition. The focus is often on children as families identify differences in health and well-being and developmental milestones when their children are young, but these conditions don't "go away" in adulthood. People live with their conditions their whole lives, and the progression of their conditions can vary greatly across their lifespan.

### How will the Azrieli Accelerator help families and children with neurodevelopmental conditions?

Across UCalgary, there are many researchers, Centres, and Institutes focused on using their research to discover new knowledge and translate their discoveries into applications to benefit our communities. For example, the researchers at the Owerko Centre for Neurodevelopment and Child Health at the Alberta Children's Hospital Research Institute, and the researchers at the Hotchkiss Brain Institute, are both dedicated to understanding brain development and differences in brain function and how those manifest in neurodevelopmental conditions. With the Azrieli Accelerator, we will be able to launch new research projects made of transdisciplinary teams, with researchers drawn from across all of UCalgary's areas of expertise in neurodevelopmental conditions, across the lifespan. Our aim is to launch new research projects and collaborations that have the potential to develop new interventions, new treatments and enable improved outcomes for those living with neurodevelopmental conditions, from childhood to old age.



## Why is this research important?

At UCalgary, we have unique research expertise that can be harnessed to: better understand the origin of neurodevelopmental conditions with a focus on brain circuitry; understand the connection between the microbiome and brain development and the impact of the microbiome on co-occurring health conditions that are common to people with neurodevelopmental conditions; and to bring more supports into the community that will support neurodiverse individuals of all ages and their families. With the Azrieli Accelerator, we want to identify those projects, and bring together the right teams of collaborators to advance our understanding of neurodevelopmental conditions, to make a positive difference in the lived experiences of individuals and families across the life course.

## Where can I find more information about this?

Please check in at <https://ucalgary.ca/azrieli-accelerator> for more information and updates. For a video featuring Dr. Graham, please check out this link: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/news/story-behind-launch-azrieli-accelerator>

## Staff News

### What are All Our Families team members looking forward to this spring and summer?!

**Suzanne Tough** (PI): I enjoy my time outdoors with hiking and running and have been exploring our urban trails and Kananaskis Country. I am looking forward to a summer filled with gardening and adventures with my grandsons.



**Sheila McDonald** (Co-PI): I love to visit BC in the summer, however this trip was to Waterton, Alberta and we hiked a lot. Here I am at a summit! I am looking forward to more trips in Alberta and BC as we move into Spring and Summer. In fact, I am heading to Kelowna soon to pick up my daughter from UBC Okanagan and will take in the many sights there.

**Muci Wu** (Research Program Manager): One of my favourite things to do is to make pottery, I love getting my hands muddy and creating something that's art and functional at the same time. I'm hoping to set up a space at home in the coming months so I can create more often.



**Rose Swansburg** (Research and Knowledge Translation Coordinator): I love to hike mountains. I am looking forward to summiting new peaks and exploring new passes (hopefully full of wildflowers) in just a few months!

**Mary Canning** (Data Research Assistant): I love outdoor activities and am looking forward to lots of hiking and biking this summer. And maybe seeing a Stanley Cup back in Canada this year!



**Tona Pitt** (Research Analyst): I took up golf during the pandemic, so I am looking forward to going out and playing more this spring. Hopefully the conditions are better than they were last year!

**Kristan Kushlyk** (Research Analyst): As a former swimmer, I'm a big fan of all things water sport-related. While I wait for the weather to warm up to test out my surf legs on the coast, I'm hoping to use my longboard to work on my balance, get some fresh air, and use it as an eco-friendly way to get around the city this spring.



## AOF Practicum Students Wrap Up

We were lucky to have two wonderful practicum students work with us this past year. Leigha and Vanessa, you will be missed!

### Leigha Grise



#### What was the focus of your practicum?

The main focus of my practicum was related to maternal and youth health and well-being regarding the impact of COVID-19. During my time with AOF, I created comparison documents that showed how COVID-19 had impacted families 3 months into the pandemic and then 1 year into the pandemic, as we are better trying to understand the long-term effects of COVID-19 on maternal and youth mental and physical health, lifestyle, and relationships. Something surprising to me was that even though maternal stress, anxiety and depression levels have essentially doubled compared to pre-pandemic rates, mothers showed high levels of optimism (82%)! Incredibly, even a global pandemic has not diminished mothers' hopefulness and confidence about the future. I look forward to better understanding how this outlook will continue to impact maternal, youth, and family capacity and well-being moving forward.

#### What was the greatest learning challenge you encountered during your practicum?

During practicum, my most significant learning challenge was figuring out how to incorporate and relate my academic in-class research learnings into a real-world setting. However, this challenge helped me better understand the importance of population health research, how different methodologies can benefit and work off one another, and see how academic research can impact policies, programs, and services for the betterment of the public's well-being.

#### Which opportunity did you most appreciate during your practicum?

In September, I had the opportunity to contribute to creating a briefing for the Associate Minister of the Status of Women, which was related to women's mental health during COVID-19 and pre-pandemic. I really appreciated this opportunity as it was my first-time receiving authorship, and helped me grow confidence in my work. Additionally, this project was the catalyst for the rest of my work related to maternal health and COVID-19, and inspired me to shift some of my personal academic interests toward investigating gender inequalities within the domains of health and home.

This shift in my personal academic interests was inspired by the fact that the longer I continued to work with AOF, the more invested I became in maternal health and led me to investigate worldwide research regarding maternal health concerning COVID-19. Unfortunately, many mothers worldwide continue to shoulder the majority of domestic labour within the home compared to their partners due to traditional gender norms, making them more likely to experience increased mental distress before and during the pandemic. I hope to continue contributing to research and strategies to decrease and hopefully eliminate maternal health inequalities by promoting more equitable and less gendered role sharing within families, and progressive work policies such as mandatory paternity leave.

#### What are you planning to do next?

I will be continuing with AOF for the remainder of the summer and will continue to work on COVID-19 related data. Then, come Fall, I plan to relax a bit and spend time with my family before starting graduate school applications for 2023.

## Vanessa Dang



### What was the focus of your practicum?

As part of my final year in the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program at the University of Calgary, I completed my senior practicum with the All Our Families study. The main task that I was given was to help the study progress its data access process, by inputting the study's 8 year follow up, COVID-1 intake and COVID-2 intake data into one large database. I did some smaller tasks along the way as well such as contacting participants to follow up about the third COVID-19 intake survey and I also helped the study formulate a tables report utilizing the study's 8-year follow up data. Although I did a lot of different tasks, my main tasks focused on working to organize the data that the study has collected to ensure that it is more easily accessible for those that are interested in utilizing the AOF data.

### What was the greatest learning challenge you encountered during your practicum?

During my time with the AOF study I did not encounter any major challenges, although with this practicum being my first exposure to working with a large and established longitudinal research study, I found that I needed a lot more guidance at the start. With the support of the AOF team, I feel that I have a lot more knowledge and confidence toward conducting research, although coming into the study it took some time to get the hang of things and become more comfortable with engaging in research.

### Which opportunity did you most appreciate during your practicum?

With the AOF study being the first research study that I have ever worked with, I appreciated every opportunity I was given during my practicum. Every task, no matter how big or small was a new learning experience for me so I really appreciate the knowledge and guidance that I was provided during my time with the study.

### What are you planning to do next?

After graduating in May, my plan is to take a year off before pursuing a master's degree in occupational therapy. During my year off I will be conducting research alongside one of my professors at the University of Calgary, and I plan to continue working in my current role as a Student Recruitment Assistant at the University of Calgary.

## Research Opportunities Outside of All Our Families

### Canadian National Vaccine Safety (CANVAS) Network

Dr. Jim Kellner, a Calgary Pediatrician and Pediatric Infectious Disease Specialist, is Co-Principal Investigator on a National COVID-19 vaccine study. This study is currently looking for participants, specifically parents and guardians whose children (under the age of 12) have not received a COVID-19 vaccine.

See the link [<here>](#) for more information and to register for this study.

If you or your family are interested in taking part in other research studies, the University of Calgary has a general website that allows you to search for Research Ethics Board approved studies that are actively recruiting participants: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/research/participate/>





## Alberta Children's Hospital Turns 100!

Look who is having a birthday! The Alberta Children's Hospital turns 100 years old on May 19, 2022. This hospital has been a cornerstone of care for Calgary and Southern Alberta's pediatric community and their families. Many of you may know it in its current location along Shaganappi Trail NW, but ACH has a rich history in our city. Check out the link below to see the evolution of the Alberta Children's Hospital.

[Then + Now - Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation \(childrenshospital.ab.ca\)](https://childrenshospital.ab.ca)

## Call for Art!

All Our Families is building a new website and would love your help! If any of our wonderful families would like to send us art to showcase on the new website, we would love to include your wonderful creations. For example, Rose recently created this watercolour of her unicorn, can you guess which mountain?!

We are very inclusive of all types of art including photographs, paintings, drawings, pottery, origami, woodwork, sewing, baking etc. Both parents and children are welcome to share! If you would like to share your artwork with us, please email photos of your creations to [allourfamilies@ucalgary.ca](mailto:allourfamilies@ucalgary.ca) and tell us if you prefer the artwork to be posted with a first and last name, just a first name, or anonymously. Thank you!

