



CCEC SUMMER WEBINAR SERIES

Summary - Resources - Links

**AUGUST 6 - AUGUST 13 - AUGUST 20
2020**

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Working with Vulnerable Populations in a Virtual Environment: Engaging with Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Lone Mothers

Our Presenters:

- Anna Przednowek – *Nipissing University*

- Anna Przednowek is an Assistant Professor with the School of Social Work at Nipissing University. Anna’s practice and research center on individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their informal support networks. She is interested in “community first” approaches to community-campus engagement.



- Lisa Whittingham - *Brock University*

- Lisa Whittingham is a PhD student at Brock University in the Department of Child and Youth Studies. She is also a Board-Certified Behaviour Analyst (BCBA). She is working as a research assistant on a project that is using mobile devices and specialized apps to increase independence in client-selected skills.



- Katherine Occhiuto - *Carleton University*

- Katherine Occhiuto is a PhD candidate with the School of Social Work at Carleton University. Her research in service provision, poverty and community practice pulls from her social work practice in community development and mental health at a community resource centre.



Webinar Recap:

Each presenter had their own research project that was affected by COVID-19:

Starting a Project During COVID-19 by Anna Przednowek

Research Project: “The View from Here”: The impacts of COVID-19 and associated social and physical distancing measures on the everyday conditions of life and care with adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD)-Rural Ontario Case Study.

- Entirely virtual research project that is university-funded and in collaboration with a community partner.
- Photo elicitation interviews were conducted using the virtual program ‘BlueJeans’ (similar to Zoom) to meet twice throughout the project, once for training and once for the interview.
- Research participants are asked to take their own photos of how their life and support have been impacted by COVID-19. Based on previous research done by Anna, artistic activities were seen as effective methods of encouraging individuals

with intellectual and developmental disabilities to actively participate in research studies.

- Ethical considerations were taken into account in order to ensure that research participants were not pressured in participating and that their photos and results would be stored securely in order to protect their anonymity.

Research Project Stopped due to COVID-19 by Lisa Whittingham

Project: Teaching persons with intellectual/developmental disabilities and their care providers to use mobile devices and specialized applications to promote independence and community inclusion.

- Resulted from pilot project recommendations in 2019 where individuals with intellectual disabilities were given an android and a pebble watch to promote independent skills such as time management, money sense, and coping.
- Recommendations were to include on-site support for any possible technical issues and have more data collection from the specialized applications in order for researchers to develop better results and improve.
- Specialized applications for individuals with intellectual disabilities were community-funded.
- The applied method for research that was used was the single-subject case design where researchers or clinicians were enabled to use experimental control and monitor and respond to individual progress.
- Research participants were provided with a device (iPad/tablet/iPhone) and a matched specialized application based on their target goal, on-site support and training from research assistants, and a direct worker.
- All research participants were able to achieve complete independence without requiring any support from research assistance or staff members and fulfill their target skills and tasks after 5 weeks of using their devices and specialized applications.
- Participant Example: An individual learned how to budget and manage money and spending through the use of the specialized application which offered visual and audio guidance and a step-by-step task analysis on how to spread out money within the week, count money, and categorizing money in different labelled envelopes.
- Research project was stopped March 2020 due to COVID-19 and universities stopping all community-based research in order to promote social distancing.

Pivoting a Project During COVID-19 by Katherine Occhiuto

Project: How do low-income mothers navigate complex networks of supports to meet their basic needs? And, what effects do these experiences have on them, and the interdependent communities to which they belong?

- Original project was structured into 3 phases:
 - Phase 1: 25 in-person interviews with mothers that actively access community support across Ottawa.
 - Phase 2: Research participants texted Katherine about their experiences accessing community support and services over a 6-week period after their individual interviews.
 - Phase 3: An in-person check-in with research participants to analyze whether Katherine had interpreted their experiences correctly and that they were understood. (Stopped due to COVID-19)

- Pivoting the Project and Phase 3:
 - Katherine replaced the in-person check-in with a bi-weekly email questionnaire that was sent to assess the new challenges and issues that proceeded from COVID-19. 15 out of the 25 participants responded.
 - Results from the questionnaires were summarized and given to a local community organization in Ottawa in order to better understand how to support low-income mothers in the community.

Shared Links and Resources

- Liegghio, M., & Caragata, L. (2020). COVID-19 and Youth Living in Poverty: The Ethical Considerations of Moving From In-Person Interviews to a Photovoice Using Remote Methods. Retrieved from https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0886109920939051?casa_token=flUv3AfE3IUA AAAA%3Au1NTjjrdpyaqtSzKKOezmyOe25TbUgtm8HQZJS3nsgliaOAgtGdlz_dQPC65z8iQ35hZZfftRQ
- Research can be an inaccessible term, and here's why <https://carleton.ca/communityfirst/2019/research-can-be-an-inaccessible-term-and-heres-why/>
- In conversation with Mr. Peter Park : "Nothing about us without us that means research" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFXNVrwCSVU>
- Maich, K., Rutherford, C., & Bishop, C. (2019). Phones, Watches, and Apps: Engaging Everyday Mobile Assistive Technology for Adults with Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities. *Exceptionality Education International*, 29(1), 116-135.

Questions and Answers Session:

At any time, did participants mention having this technology help them feel safer during the pandemic?

- Katherine: I wouldn't say safer, but it did help build a sense of community with the relationship aspect of texting one another and engaging online.
- Anna: Yes, some people feel really isolated and especially if they're living on their own. The use of technology and its practice has really brought us access to reach out and reduce the feeling of isolation with participants.

What are some ways that researchers and community partners can start with accessibility when planning any project and what have you learned from your research?

- Lisa: It's important to ensure that all stakeholders are included in the process. Constantly communicating with the agency from the beginning through putting the grant together, assessing how many devices (tablets/phones) are needed, and talking to staff on their opinions on the research process.
- Anna: Accessibility starts from the beginning of planning the research project in order to better understand what is the focus of the research, what are the capabilities and skills acquired, and what tools are commonly available to everyone.

Katherine, could you share more about the texting and emails, does this put the focus on you as a researcher to respond to each email in a way that acknowledges the weight of it or do you set clear boundaries about what kind of response people will receive from you?

- Katherine: Text and email are a little different. The texting phase was more structured ahead of time as it was 6 weeks of engagement and I had met with folks ahead of time to give them an explicit understanding of how the texting experience was going to happen. I also had the physical barrier of a separate phone that showed people there was a phone for work which was not on-hand all the time and another for personal use. For the emails, as I get them, I would reply with an acknowledgment of receipt and that I would be looking forward to reading them. I've had the benefit of already establishing relationships with everybody that I'm engaged with right now.
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We're Still Here: Enduring Research Needs for Communities Beyond COVID Concerns

Our Presenters:

- John Karau – *Ottawa Eco Talent Network*

- John Karau has extensive domestic and international work experience related to environmental conservation and protection for both the marine and freshwater environments. Internationally John has helped to advance integrated coastal zone management with the International Maritime Organization, the Arctic Council and the United Nations Environment Program. Domestically he has held several Director positions including Sustainable Water Management, Biodiversity Conservation and Oceans Policy. John retired from Environment Canada in 2011 and is staying active as a Board Member of the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority (Chair 2014-18) and the Ottawa Eco-Talent Network (Chair 2014-2020). He is also a volunteer river watcher with Ottawa River Keeper.



- Mary Hegan – *Ottawa Eco Talent Network*

- Mary is a long-term community activist in the Ottawa area especially in the fields of climate action, river/water quality, renewable energy, public health and environment. She has been a Board member of OETN since its conception. She also sits on the Carleton U. Committee for Community Engaged Pedagogy as a community representative.



- Emily Eaton – *Assistant Professor at University of Regina*

- Emily Eaton is an associate professor in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at the University of Regina. Her research concerns the power and influence of the fossil fuel industries and the possibilities for energy transition. She has two books: *Fault Lines: Life and Landscape in Saskatchewan's Oil Economy* (together with photographer Valerie Zink), and *Growing Resistance: Canadian Farmers and the Politics of Genetically Modified Wheat*.



Webinar Recap:

What is Ottawa Eco Talent Network and what services do they provide?

The Ottawa Eco Talent Network is a non-for-profit environmental organization dedicated to mobilizing talent to achieve an environmentally sustainable city of Ottawa. The network provides two key services; a network of pro bono advisors and a brokering service for campus community partnerships. For example, an Ottawa Eco Talent Network advisor would support a community partner and post-secondary student in collaborating on a project from beginning to end. The network has also successfully supported 35 projects by providing free expert advice on research, project design, and delivery.

Active Projects:

- Climate Change Adaptation
- Energy Efficiency
- Clean Technology
- Waste Management
- Urban Design
- Environmental Conservation

Mary Hegan believes that the transition to a post-COVID-19 environment has changed how environmental research will be conducted and approached. Instead of focusing on the traditional environmental sustainability issues in the community, researchers will now expect environmental research to be linked to public health, mental health, social justice issues, and the climate crisis. It was further stated that environmental sustainability was often viewed in the climate crisis lens, but the public health lens has become the main focus and the new challenge that arises is how the Ottawa Eco Talent Network can work with post-secondary institutions to redefine common community issues.

Renewable Regina: Putting Equity into Action by Emily Eaton

Project: The research project was conducted for a motion that passed at the City Council in October 2018 that aimed to make Regina's energy 100% renewable.

Community partners that were involved in the project are the EnviroCollective and the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (The Saskatchewan Office).

- Research Method: 4 focus groups with 29 representatives from 25 community organizations & 1 group with 13 representatives from organized labour (private and public sectors)
 - Each organization was picked based on their experience in dealing with people who experience marginalization. (Security organizations, Community associations, shelters, disability groups etc.)
- Research Questions:
 - What are the energy needs of your organizations and the people you support?
 - How could energy transition (and investments made by the city) impact your organization and the people you serve?
 - How could union members be affected by transition?

- What kinds of conversations are unions having with their members about transition?
- Key Findings:
 - Phase in fare-free public transit
 - Increasing the safety and accessibility of walking, biking, and public transit
 - Increase green space in marginalized communities and core neighbourhoods
 - Generate renewable power by and for communities – working with SaskPower
 - Work with the province and SaskPower to finance renewable energy and retrofits for organizations and individuals who can't afford upfront costs.
- Recommendations:
 - 1. City of Regina strike an equity committee on sustainability that conducts research and consultations to guide the development of their energy and sustainability framework and
 - 2. City of Regina strike a just transition committee that conducts research and consultation to guide the development of the city's energy and sustainability framework while involving the labour sector in the conversation.

Emily believes the way forward for community organizations and university researchers is not by only doing research for community problems, but by also reporting it to city councillors and city administration in order to advance equity and for action to be taken in the community.

Shared Links and Resources

- Eaton, E., & Enoch, S. (2020, June). *Renewable Regina: Putting Equity into Action* (Rep.). Retrieved from <https://www.uregina.ca/arts/assets/docs/pdf/renewable-regina-report-final.pdf>
- Great example of how people are linking recovery from COVID with climate and enviro justice: www.justrecoveryforall.ca/faq

Questions and Answers Session:

What do you see as pros and cons of attempting to link your environmental research to current public health and COVID-19 concerns?

- Emily: The silver lining of the COVID-19 cloud is that we were seeing real gains being made by the climate movement going into 2020, but with the crisis and lockdown people have really had to rethink a lot of issues like how the government has claimed to have no funding for the past few years, but the pandemic led to them generating large sums of money within a short period of time. Although the crisis has produced some setbacks for environmental research, it has also linked the research to social injustice issues like racial inequality and the health of citizens

- Mary: I think we're in a great phase of opportunities to not only pursue the traditional environmental issues, but to also do it in a different way that touches more on public participation for example. Our communities are working together especially now in order to cater for one another and make sure that people's health is primal, this opened the door for more social connections and more engagement within the community.
- John: I don't disagree that times have changed and that people need to take new approaches, but there's also the reality of human nature and politics. If it's all just going to be revolution where everything done in the past was wrong, I think that is too much, too far, and too fast. I believe we need to transition but on an incremental scale since there are some people who are comfortable with the traditional approach. Climate change adaptation is revolutionary and people need to adjust their approaches in research slowly in order to achieve a better long-term result.

Have you tried to engage with academic partners over the last few months and what do organizations such as yours need from academic partners right now over this next unusual year?

- John: We certainly have tried and have been successful where we had a few projects that were close to completion when the pandemic officially started so we had to transition quickly to complete them. Students especially stepped up to the plate when we went virtual and operations went well, but we also experienced problems with research projects that required field work or site visits.
- Mary: Over the past few months, the Ottawa Eco Talent Network has made definite connections with academic partners and we plan on continuing in the upcoming weeks. There is a desire to get more research from post-secondary institutions on how communities are defining and putting community action plans into existence. I recently received a community action plan from the city of Halifax where the community gathered together for a climate action plan that was later proposed to the government to motivate a 'greener' life.

Emily, what do you see as next steps in your research and are there any ways in which these next steps have changed due to the pandemic?

- Emily: We were going to release our report in May with the press conference and that was cancelled due to the pandemic but it is planned to happen in the fall in a physically distanced manner as of now. We want the organizations themselves that participated in the research to speak to the findings of the research and the importance of those findings to their organizations. There were also key meetings with city councillors in the summer that had to be cancelled as well. We're also trying to change the narrative around climate change policy and show that individuals and communities will benefit from programs and actions that positively impact their environment.

Do you think there are any opportunities that have opened up from the pandemic situation for environmental organizations?

- Mary: I would flip the question: are there new opportunities within post-secondary institutions on how they're going to work with communities and their projects on environment, climate, and social justice? Are there going to be new ways that the universities are going to be recognizing and re-structuring in order to do that?
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Planning Virtual and In-person Gatherings: How to Meaningfully Connect in Remote and Social Distancing Environments

Our Presenters:

- **Gina Babinec – *Programs Lead, Impact Hub Ottawa***

- Gina is the Programs Lead at Impact Hub Ottawa, a community and collaborative co-working space designed to support people working to build a more just and sustainable world. Passionate about bringing people and ideas together for impact, Gina works with leaders across sectors to design inclusive programs that empower change-makers to address social and environmental justice in their communities. Building on a background in gender and social policy, Gina is committed to creating brave spaces for connection and collaboration across diverse perspectives and sectors, both in-person and virtually.



- **Amanda Wilson – *Assistant Professor, Saint Paul University***

- Amanda Wilson is an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Innovation at Saint Paul University. She holds a PhD in Sociology, with a Specialization in Political Economy. Her areas of research include the food movement and carceral food systems, co-operatives and collective organizing, and questions related to prefiguration and enacting a politics of possibility. Outside of academia, she has worked with several non-governmental organizations in the areas of policy analysis, research, network coordination and popular education, and is a long-time community organizer and activist in Ottawa.



Webinar Recap:

Planning in-person and Virtual Gatherings by Amanda Wilson:

- Technology and accessibility:
 - We often take these two for granted and they are not a given for everyone. For international students, we had to re-plan our timing schedule to suit a time that works for both local students and international students.
 - We have to pace our meetings online and remember that breaks are essential.
 - Inclusion and collectivity in online meetings are also important to note where attendees should be involved in discussion and fluidity of communication should be apparent in online meetings or classes.
 - It is important to reach shared collective experiences in the social distancing environment in order to create meaningful experiences and relationships.

Planning in-person and Virtual Gatherings by Gina Babinec:

- **Bringing people together in a post-pandemic world:**
 - Communicate with care: take the time to receive feedback on your methods of communication and engagement through emails, polls, or surveys.
 - Experiment with different communication methods: Look for a platform that suits your work and has an effective outreach and keeps participants engaged. (e.g. Slack)
 - Lean into honesty: we often experience unexpected events during online meetings like loud noises at home; keeping a positive environment and being transparent will lead to better online communication.
 - Allow time for off-camera and asynchronous engagement and try scheduling live events and meetings at different times of the day.
 - Go the extra mile to be inclusive: be aware of who you're bringing in and who's being left out of the conversation. Find ways like using closed captioning on videos to keep everyone engaged and included in the conversation.

Questions and Answers Session:

If we are talking about community engagement, how would we know the basic know-how and resources available to older and less tech savvy community members?

- Amanda: Thinking about low-tech or no tech options is important and in an environment where Zoom has dominated meetings, we need to find alternatives. For example, using mail services or phone call conferences to communicate with each other. Although technology allows for a more interactive experience with online live chats, applications, and comments, the scalability of outreach needs to be considered to include all community members in community engagement.

How can you make the rural community more comfortable with the transition to an online environment and online engagement?

- Gina: I think prepping people as much as possible beforehand is important and an example of how you would do it is by sending a one-page tutorial document on how to navigate and engage in the online environment. Creating a safe and healthy environment is also beneficial where members are welcomed and informed that technical difficulties often happen with solutions to those problems.

As with many issues arising in this moment, this may be an opportunity to revisit the intention of gatherings in the first place. Who do they serve and who benefits from these gatherings?

- Amanda: In some ways this present moment has caused us to reconsider whether or not we need to gather, but at the same time it's also made us feel like the barriers to get together are so low that we've seen an explosion of Zoom meetings and webinars. For our general annual assembly, we were discussing how we can host it either on Zoom or have shared documents where all members simultaneously contribute and work on it together.

I work in Northern Ontario with a number of First Nations and Indigenous communities. For many of these communities online meetings is not an option and in some cases can be quite problematic. How might we collectively address issues of equity in this new reality considering not just technical issues but also cultural realities?

- Gina: Creating brave spaces is a great way to address this issue where creating guidelines from the beginning that allows people to be vulnerable and safe. For example, thinking about your privilege and how much time you're taking up in a conversation. These are important points to think about in order to setup a healthy and open conversation that's respectful and acknowledges people. One solution I've also seen is to create a slack channel that happens at the same time as the video conference where people can go in and engage during the conversation as well as afterwards and sometimes the speakers stick around to answer questions and discuss topics. Having platforms like these where engagement is encouraged in a healthy environment is one example of how we can address the inaccessibility of online meetings to some communities.

How do we replace the fellowship we develop in person and all the things we learn about people when we see them in person?

- Amanda: I think that a lot of us are at a sense of loss when it comes to replacing the fellowship and we're trying to figure out how we build relationships and that's not to say that we need to be in-person to build meaningful relationships. If we're trying to build community and fellowship, we cannot replicate the same things we would do in-person in an online Zoom meeting. Similar to what Gina said, I think creating brave and vulnerable spaces for conversations to take place and allowing for people to freely express themselves online is a big step towards easing the process of building meaningful relationships online.
- Gina: I agree with Amanda that we cannot replicate the same methods of communication in-person in an online environment. There's an interesting moment where we had a project launch a few weeks ago and our meeting host who is the creativity expert throws a curveball by starting the online meeting with a YouTube video of a campfire and telling camp stories for an hour. I was initially petrified at the idea of speaking for an hour, but those who attended really talked and engaged, and found it to be a safe and healthy environment.