

Western



Centre for School Mental Health



The Centre for School Mental Health at Western University addresses the need for improved school-based promotion, prevention and intervention services for children who may be at risk for, or who present with, mental health challenges. Our team of researchers, educators, students and administrators is focused on the mental health, well-being and relationship development of children from kindergarten to grade 12. We use outcomes and lessons from nationally funded research projects to deliver evidence-based programs and training for educators in schools and communities.

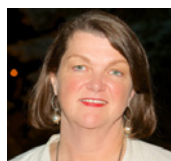
Why do we exist? Because when children learn how to develop healthy relationships it benefits their mental well-being and builds long term skills that help them avoid violence and substance abuse.

The Centre seeks to promote an expanded concept of School Mental Health (SMH) through innovative research partnerships, high quality training opportunities, and a commitment to knowledge mobilization. The vision of effective SMH is one where a multidisciplinary group of professionals can offer evidence-based services ranging from prevention to intervention, effectively removing barriers to learning and ultimately promoting well-being.

MEET THE TEAM



Claire Crooks
Director & Principal
Investigator



Susan Rodger
Principal
Investigator



Marcia Boyce
Centre Manager



Michelle Del Vasto
Administrative
Assistant



Carrie Waters
Administrative
Assistant,
The Fourth R



Susan Dale
Program Development
and Implementation
Coordinator,
The Fourth R



Andrea Lapp
Project Coordinator,
MindUP



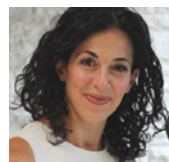
Mike Cywink
Student Mentor and
Program Liaison,
The Fourth R,
Uniting Our Nations



Nicole Bullock
Communications
Coordinator



Natalia Lapshina
Research Associate



Deb Chiodo
Research Associate



Alicia Lapointe
Research Associate

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OUR STUDENTS



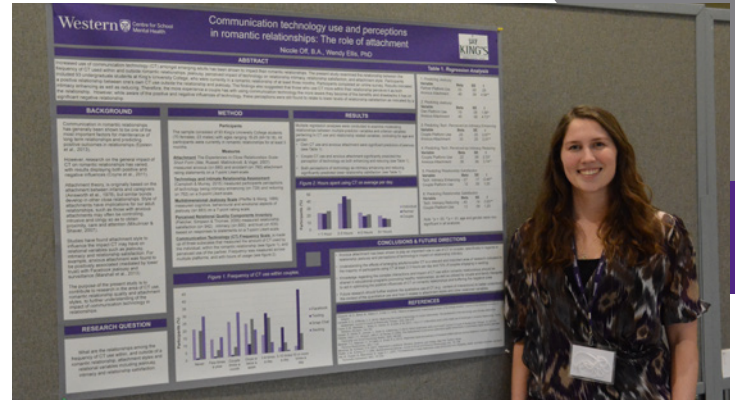
Melissa Coyne-Foresi
awarded the W.A.
Townshend Gold
Medal in Education

The W.A. Townshend Gold Medal in Education is in honour of the late Bishop Townshend of London, Ontario, and is awarded at each convocation

to an MA student who has achieved the highest academic standing in his/her program of study.

Melissa's research was supervised by Dr. Claire Crooks and is titled, ***A Mixed Methods Exploration of Benefits for Youth Mentors in an Indigenous High School Peer Mentoring Program.*** A summary of Melissa's findings are available [here](#).

Melissa will continue towards her goal of becoming a school psychologist as she begins her PhD studies under the supervision of Dr. Elizabeth Nowicki this fall.

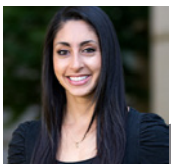


Nicole Off presents research she conducted as an undergraduate student with Dr. Wendy Ellis.

Nicole Off, Master's Candidate under the supervision of Dr. Claire Crooks presents research she conducted as an undergraduate student with Dr. Wendy Ellis. Her presentation, entitled, ***Communication Technology Use and Perceptions in Romantic Relationships: The Role of Attachment*** won the award for best student poster at the 2017 Canadian Conference on Promoting Healthy Relationships for Youth: Breaking Down the Silos in Addressing Mental Health & Violence.

The conference was for policy makers, researchers, youth advocates, educators, mental health, youth justice and social service professionals involved in the prevention of relationship violence and promotion of youth well-being in families, schools and communities.

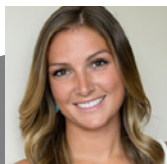
MEET THE STUDENTS



Amanda Kerry
PhD Candidate



Arely Rodriguez
Alcocer
PhD Candidate



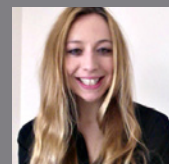
Caely Dunlop
PhD Candidate



Jessy Pandori-
Chuckal
PhD Candidate



Melissa Coyne-
Foresi
PhD Candidate



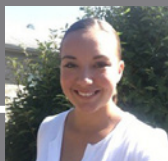
Richelle Bird
PhD Candidate



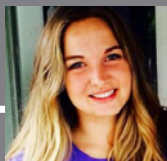
Robyn Masters
PhD Candidate



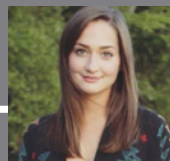
Cassandra Trevisani
Master's Candidate



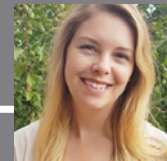
Courtney Cadieux
Master's Candidate



Devon Trower
Master's Candidate



Elsa Trovarello
Master's Candidate



Jessica Sommers
Master's Candidate



Melissa Read
Master's Candidate



Nicole Off
Master's Candidate

INVESTIGATOR SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Susan Rodger - *Principal Investigator*



The **Mental Health Literacy Course for BE.d students** at Western University is the first mandatory mental health literacy course in Canada for teacher candidates. The course was first released in September 2016 and is currently in its second iteration. Throughout the 10-week course, teacher candidates navigate various important topics including caring for students, self-care, behavioural and emotional concerns in the classroom, stigma, supporting diversity and promoting inclusion, among others. Through evidence-based school health promotion and research, this course is designed to assist teacher candidates in understanding the development of children, mental health, family dynamics, impact on student learning and well-being and other critical factors including developing and maintaining self-confidence in accessing resources and taking action to support their students. The course further aims to promote equal access to care and is intended to raise teacher awareness of signs that a student may be in need of support through early intervention and prevention. By utilizing evidence-based research including the teacher mental health national curriculum (Kutcher et al., 2013), the aligned and integrated model (AIM; School Mental Health Assist) and a comprehensive curriculum framework (Weston et al., 2008), Dr. Susan Rodger and her team hope to promote the inclusion of mental health literacy in initial teacher education to support teacher candidates with mental health understanding and advocacy not only for their students, families and their schools, but also for themselves.

RESEARCH IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Putting research into practice – For over ten years, The Fourth R has been examined as a skills-focused, relationship based approach to preventing youth violence and risk behaviours. New insight is now available highlighting not only the benefits to teenage relationships and cycles of violence, but also significant practical savings to our society.

Early research with The Fourth R involving 1,700 grade 9 students in 20 schools found that students who did not participate in The Fourth R programming had a rate of relationship violence 2.5 times greater than the students who did participate. They also had much higher rates of violent delinquency, especially among students who had experienced child maltreatment. These findings provided an opportunity to look at potential economic benefits of The Fourth R.

In May 2017, we released a study documenting the cost savings to society associated with The Fourth R impacts. These costs spanned numerous areas including health care, social services, the workforce and the justice system. Our analysis shows that an effective violence prevention program that is part of a school's curriculum is beneficial not only for teens, but can also save taxpayers millions. Practical results come from The Fourth R research-based program where substantial savings are realized from breaking the cycle of violence in teenagers which may stem from maltreatment at home as children. "Research shows that if prevention programs such as The Fourth R can deter just one 14-year-old high-risk juvenile from a life of crime, up to \$5 million can be saved in costs to society," says lead author Dr. Claire Crooks.

The cost to implement The Fourth R varies depending on the school's location, but overall this report shows that the program's costs per student are small compared to the savings to society in violence avoidance. For example, in one large Ontario school board, program costs were down to \$5 per student. In areas with smaller class sizes and larger geographic distances as seen in the Northwest Territories for instance, implementing the program is more expensive, but still only \$15-\$33 per student. There is still a highly positive return given the savings based on the avoided costs related to dating and peer violence was calculated as \$2,101 per student.



For more details, access the full report on our Centre website, [here](#).

PROJECTS



The Fourth R

continues to be a priority area of programming and research for our Centre. For more than ten years,

The Fourth R has been available nation-wide as an evidence-based program developed to promote healthy relationship skills and to target risk behaviours through encouraging safe decisions about substance abuse, sexual relationships, bullying, and violence. Over the years, various program implementation phases have promoted a major scale up of The Fourth R program and has afforded evidence to inform new adaptations to meet the needs of various geographic and cultural communities. In particular, this past year has seen greater international expansion increasing program presence in the US following the availability of US adapted and Spanish versions of program materials. Our team remains committed to following the feedback and needs of educators working within different contexts including particular Indigenous groups, geographic settings, linguistic groups (English, French and Spanish), and different school settings.

NEW PROGRAM MATERIALS AVAILABLE:



Grade 7, 8 and 9 French Catholic



Alberta and Northwest Territories Catholic Bishop Approved

EDUCATORS! - Learn more about the Health and Physical Education Curriculum available for Grades 7, 8 and 9 and other materials from The Fourth R online, [here](#).

ADMINISTRATORS! - The Fourth R Master Trainers are available to bring The Fourth R training experience to your teachers. For more information, click [here](#).



The MindUP for Young Children

project is implementing and evaluating a mindfulness-informed, evidence-based social and emotional learning intervention within a trauma-informed framework.

Led by Dr. Claire Crooks and Dr. Karen Bax, during the 2016-2017 school year, the program was implemented in 15 kindergarten classrooms in the London District Catholic School Board. In addition, the project is being enhanced for a community-based setting through partnership with the Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre and the Mary J. Wright Centre for Research and Education.

To implement MindUP, teachers and early childhood educators lead 15 lessons that include things like; How Our Brains Work, Mindful Listening, Perspective Taking, Choosing Optimism, and Expressing Gratitude.

At the community site, there is a group for children who have been exposed to domestic violence. There is also a parallel group for parents to help them learn the same skills as their children and be able to promote good self-regulation at home. The goal is for children and parents to transfer the skills learned to their everyday lives and for educators to be responsive and meet the needs of children even if challenged with external stressors and adversity.

The Trauma-Informed Framework provides training for educators and facilitators to understand the impacts of trauma and adversity on children, and how MindUP activities can help counter some of these negative effects.

In the 2017-2018 school year the project will include an expanded number of classrooms and the addition of comparison schools. This project is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada. For more information about this project and to review preliminary results, click [here](#).



When children engage in an activity they enjoy, their amygdala relaxes, cortisol levels decrease, and positive neurotransmitters are able to replenish; allowing the brain to return to a state optimal for learning.



The **Healthy Relationships Plus Program**

applies the same core principles of skill building and awareness as The Fourth R classroom-based programs, but it is delivered in small groups of 6-25 youth. The program targets the prevention of violence through promotion of positive, healthy relationships and is well suited to community-based youth groups between the ages of 12 and 18. Program content and strategies have been specifically selected for this age group to include a strengthened focus on mental health and suicide prevention, and drug and alcohol use. Program adaptations and enhancements have also been developed to meet the needs of specific youth groups. Dr. Claire Crooks and her team are beginning our third year working with youth and educators on a version specific for LGBTQ+ youth. Currently we are developing youth-led videos and making further enhancements to better support the needs of LGBTQ+ youth. New research is also informing a program adaptation for youth correctional facilities.

For more information about the Healthy Relationships Plus Program, click [here](#).

For more information about the Healthy Relationships Plus Program adaptations and research, click [here](#).

Uniting Our Nations

includes a range of programs for Indigenous youth developed in partnership with Ontario's Thames Valley District School Board. These programs have the same focus on healthy relationships as The Fourth R, but they are delivered within a culturally relevant context. The programs range from one-day conferences to year-long weekly sessions. Common themes include a focus on healthy relationship development, the provision of culturally-relevant experiences and an emphasis on mentoring. The Uniting Our Nations programs were developed in collaboration with Indigenous educators, students, counsellors, and community partners and we continue to explore new avenues to expand the reach and impact for existing resources and the need for more support tools.



The Uniting Our Nations - Literacy Test Preparation



A resource for teachers providing English lessons that use Indigenous materials to increase literacy skills which **support the requirements of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT)**.

Available [here](#).

Mental Health First Aid First Nations

Dr. Claire Crooks and her colleagues recently completed a CIHR-funded national evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of Mental Health First Aid First Nations. This initiative is a result of numerous partners coming together over a four-year period to develop a culturally relevant and safe version of the Mental Health First Aid course. The program development was led by the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) Basic course was originally developed in Australia to build capacity for individuals to offer immediate intervention for mental health emergencies at a community level. MHFA Basic applies a population health approach to mental health promotion by training people to recognize and respond to mental health problems and crises in others.

Our culturally-relevant evaluation included 10 site visits to First Nations communities spanning the country, from British Columbia to Nova Scotia. Evaluation results show that a culturally safe mental health promotion program coupled with safe evaluation can serve a function of cultural renewal and resistance against colonization in First Nations communities. Participants reported positive gains in mental health knowledge, self-efficacy and skills, and a reduction in mental illness stigmatizing attitudes.

For more information about this project, including a plain language summary, click [here](#).



Andrea Lapp and Claire Crooks from the Centre for School Mental Health in partnership with Kim van der Woerd and her team at Reciprocal Consulting

As our Centre is primarily focused on the mental health of youth in the classroom, we also recognize the mental strain that translates to educators working with the youth. Dr. Susan Rodger champions efforts to address educator burnout and works to create resources and strategies for both student *and* teacher resiliency.

teachresiliency

Teach Resiliency is an online resource designed for teachers, with teachers that Dr. Rodger has helped deliver to educators free-of-charge. Dealing with mental health in the classroom can feel isolating, frustrating and

overwhelming so Teach Resiliency offers an opportunity to access searchable and relevant evidence-based resources and strategies to support mental health at school and work and connect with people in the know and gain practical tools to support your own journey in the classroom. Teach Resiliency uses language that teachers use when describing behaviour and emotions to search for resources. Teachers often don't have a diagnostic label for a child or youth, but they do know what they see in the classroom – so using search terms like “stress” or “fatigue” can be more helpful than the name of a disorder or illness. Dr. Rodger and colleagues Dr. Alan Leschied and Dr. Kathryn Hibbert have worked with a dedicated team of educators, school leaders and mental health professionals to turn research into evidence-informed resources that are now widely available. The resources are presented in a variety of formats to respond to the information and access needs of teachers- from podcasts to videos and books to short articles, users of the site can filter the results by media type, age group, and audience and choose the resource that fits their needs in the moment. Teach Resiliency continues to develop and will soon feature a community of practice component and blog, and the companion site for French language users will be available in late 2017. Supported by Physical Health and Education Canada, a national professional teacher association and working in partnership with CAMH, TeachResiliency.ca is designed to be innovative, relevant and responsive to the needs of today's teachers as they support their own – and their students- mental health and well-being.



Dr. Rodger presents an overview of the TeachResiliency online resource to educators from the Thames Valley District School Board and the London District Catholic School Board at the Faculty Research Partners Day at the Faculty of Education on October 20, 2017.

The **Let's Talk in the Classroom (LTIC)** project is a collaborative initiative in partnership with Bell Let's Talk, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), Kid's Help Phone, School Mental Health ASSIST, Queen's University and Western University. The aim of the LTIC program is to better prepare Grade 7 and 8 teachers to effectively and confidently teach and talk to their students about mental health. More specifically the LTIC program is comprised of an interactive, online guide containing background information, resources and supports to prepare them to teach three lessons to their students. The three lessons are focused on destigmatizing mental health information, and teaching students how and where to find reliable mental health information and help for mental health concerns. Teachers will have the opportunity to work through the online modules engaging in the material through a variety of media formats, reflect on their learnings in an online journal, and share their learning experience with colleagues in the online community of practice, both before and after teaching the lessons. Interested Grade 7 and 8 teachers at participating school boards should reach out to the Mental Health Leads at their board for more information, or to participate in the project!

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 **Bell**
Let's Talk

camh
Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Kids Help Phone 


SCHOOL MENTAL HEALTH-ASSIST
ÉQUIPE D'APPUI POUR LA SANTÉ
MENTALE DANS LES ÉCOLES


Queen's
UNIVERSITY

Evaluating culturally-relevant programs for Indigenous youth: Challenges and strategies

What you need to know:

A balance must be found between a strict research design and honoring the requirements of a community-based partnership when evaluating programming for First Nations youth. The researchers found that community-based research partnerships are essential to engage FNMI youth and partners in the evaluation culturally-relevant programming.

What is this research about?

This research identifies the challenges in evaluating the Fourth R Uniting Our Nations programming for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) youth. In general there has been a move towards evidence-based practice and the need for increasingly rigorous research designs. The researchers identified the tensions between these rigid research guidelines and the required relationship-based partnerships with the program partners, including FNMI youth, community members, and educators. Uniting Our Nations is a culturally-relevant program for FNMI youth that emphasizes skill development and healthy relationships. The program is delivered within a culturally-sensitive and strengths-based framework and incorporates the knowledge of Elders and other community members as contributors to FNMI education.

"Community-based research partnerships have emerged as a new model for achieving an equitable, respectful approach to research that honours the autonomy of the FNMI community and leads to clear benefits for Indigenous people."

What did the researchers do?

The researchers identified pressures faced to conduct stringent research, as illustrated by the conditions for establishing rigor put forth by the American Psychological Association (APA). The researchers identified areas of poor fit between this model and the cultural and logistical realities of evaluating the Uniting Our Nations program.

Some of the APA guidelines include the use of randomization, a comparison group, and a large sample size, all of which were difficult to produce for the small group of FNMI youth in the study. Additional challenges in satisfying the APA requirements included defining the specific problem, finding validated measures, and using treatment manuals. Instead of identifying a specific problem to be addressed, the researchers adhered to a strengths-based perspective and reframed the overarching program goal to build skills in the FNMI youth. Furthermore, these challenges exist within a context of the historical practices of research that resulted in the exploitation and maltreatment of FNMI peoples, contributing to a mistrust of governing agencies.

Researchers are encouraged to:

- ensure the research is relevant to the needs of the community
- demonstrate respect for community codes of practice and cultural protocols
- take a strengths-based approach

What did the researchers find?

Through their experience with the Uniting Our Nations youth program, the researchers identified eight success factors in seeking a balance between research requirements and community-based research partnerships:

- **Recognizing and engaging complex authority structures.** Evaluators must respect the codes and customs of FNMI people. Often authority for granting research approval does not sit with one individual in a community.
- **Recognizing the importance of the Elder engagement process.** Evaluators should become informed of the practices unique to each community.
- **Emphasizing cultural competence in the partnership process.** Evaluators must be able to communicate with an understanding of the FNMI worldview and be able to balance the competing research priorities.
- **Working from the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2nded).** This document outlines requirements for research with FNMI people, and prioritizes respectful relationships.
- **Utilizing a strengths-based approach.** Recognizing that many challenges for FNMI people have stemmed from colonialization, evaluations should emphasize positive mental health and well-being.
- **Educating research assistants.** All researchers on the project should be trained to work from a culturally sensitive framework.
- **Planning for longer timeframes.** Compatible with the FNMI worldview, consideration should be given to the pace and deadlines of the project.
- **Developing appropriate measures.** Effort should be placed in creating assessment measures that are reflective of the FNMI peoples and experiences.

How can you use this research?

Researchers must recognize FNMI codes and customs and honour community-based research partnerships as foundational in appropriately evaluating FNMI youth programming. At the same time, there is external pressure for building the evidence base about what works for whom, so navigation between rigor and community-based research partnerships requires an ongoing balance.

Original Research Article:

Crooks, C. V., Snowshoe, A., Chiodo, D., & Brunette-Debassige, C. (2013). Navigating between rigour and community-based research partnerships: Building the evaluation of the Uniting Our Nations health promotion program for FNMI youth. *Canadian Journal of Community Mental Health*, 32, 13-25.

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About this Summary:

This summary was written by Melissa Coyne-Foresi, MA Candidate at Western University.

Find this research
snapshot and many more
available at:



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www.csmh.uwo.ca • www.youthrelationships.org



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