

northern child and youth

AN ELECTRONIC PUBLICATION OF THE UNBC TASK FORCE ON SUBSTANCE ABUSE,
THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
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THIS ISSUE:

Research - a community guide

- Doing research - I have an idea! Now what?
- Participating in research – oh, no, not another survey!
- Interview with an expert – doing Community Based Research

The Centre of Excellence is committed to ensuring that young people with special needs living in rural and northern communities receive the best services Canada has to offer. Established in 2000, the Centre is centralized at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario. The national partners are: Memorial University in Newfoundland, Mount St. Vincent University in Nova Scotia, University of Northern British Columbia and the Government of Nunavut. The Centre is also involved with over 200 community, government and corporate partners across Canada.

Substance abuse is a problem for many young Canadians. The Task Force at the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC) researches the issue of substance abuse, particularly how it related to a variety of special needs. Alcohol, drugs, and solvents are a primary concern. In rural and northern communities, substance abuse programs for youth are often limited or unavailable. We need to make available programs that are specific to the needs of youth living in these remote communities.

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND THE CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS



You can contact any Task Force in the Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs by visiting the National Website at <http://www.coespecialneeds.ca/>.

You are also welcome to directly contact the UNBC Task Force on Substance Abuse.

Our website is www.unbc.ca/centreca

Our email address is special@unbc.ca

You can mail us at

Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs, the UNBC Task Force on Substance Abuse
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Participating in Research

Whether it's a telephone marketing survey or a focus group for someone's Master's thesis, we've all likely been asked to participate in research at some point. With the increasing attention that is (finally) being paid to those living in northern and rural communities, many of us are feeling a little overwhelmed with the continued requests to take part in these projects. The following questions are some things to consider when the next request to be a 'participant' comes your way:

Who is doing the research and why? Some of the groups that do research include private organizations doing marketing research, university students, non-profit agencies, public opinion pollsters, and university research institutes and university faculty. All research is done under the guise of 'improving' something, whether it is knowledge, policy, services, or hair products. It is up to you to decide what is worthwhile.

How will participating in this research help me or my community? At the end of the day, research is a very indirect policy-changing process – no one can guarantee that there will be positive results in the end. Who is doing and funding the research will have a lot to do with who will end up reading the results (at first).

If the research is primarily an 'academic' endeavor, it will primarily be read by academics in that field. If the research is performed by an 'activist' organization, then consider what other reports they have written that other people have read; for results in the short-term consider who the researcher's 'captive' audience is. Maybe more people will have access to a report written by an activist or non-profit group, however, there often is an additional long-term payoff for academic research as it can often be circulated and read for years to come- until finally it 'trickles-down' to become common-knowledge. Research is also done within organizations to determine program needs - this can have a very beneficial and immediate impact within a program or in a community.

What about privacy?

When participating in research that is performed out of a university, there will be specific guidelines for confidentiality and anonymity, but many other groups (such as non-profit organizations) follow the same or similar guidelines as well. There are essentially two things to consider here, (1) what are they saying they will do to protect my privacy? and (2) based on how they present the issue of privacy, and what mechanisms are in place for protecting it, do I believe they will hold true to what they are saying? If you are participating in a project that includes sensitive or very personal information you should take these issues very seriously. The researchers should be able to tell you exactly who will see the information you provide and in what 'format' the data will appear. For example, for some projects a group of five to ten researchers may know exactly what you specifically said, for other projects, only one person will see the information before your name and other identifying information is removed. If you are participating in research with someone that isn't from a small community, they should demonstrate that they know of other 'identifiers' that will compromise anonymity, for example identifying 'a public health nurse in Mackenzie' – when there is only one public health nurse in that town.



Doing Research

You've got a great topic, now what do you do?

Research is something many of us 'non-academics' are interested in. When working on the front line we often observe many things we want to document and share with others—deciding to take on a research project can be one way to transform what we have been experiencing or seeing into something concrete. But where does one begin? You have an idea, but now what? The following are some ways a 'non-researcher' can become actively involved in doing research.

Ways you can do it:

Do it yourself-- you can make your issue/question it into a master's degree or convince your organization to let you take it on as part of your work. Doing it yourself is not easy, even the smallest projects (for example a survey) will take hours and hours to design, hand out, collect, do the data entry, give meaning to the results, then write it up and get the word out to others. There are a lot of user-friendly books on how to do participatory and community based research, but at some point you are probably going to need a bit of help and advice from someone who has done it before.

Find someone at a university or college that is interested in looking at the same things. A community-university partnership

often embraces the best of both worlds- real life experience and research expertise. University faculty or research centres will have access to a lot of funding, expertise, equipment, and research credibility (useful for when you actually want people to read your final report) that you may not otherwise have.



Find a contractor to do it for you-- there are many knowledgeable and capable people out there that can take on small (or even large) research projects. If you have funding and know exactly what you want to do, this can be one of the easiest and fastest ways to get the information you are looking for. However, the 'researcher for hire' can have many draw backs—what will be the end quality of the project and report? Will you be able to ensure this 'contractor' will uphold the research ethics you expect? Are they capable of taking on such a project, what other projects have they done in the past? Who 'owns' the data, who gets authorship and copyright, and who has the right to present the materials at

conferences? Will you have an ongoing relationship with the contractor until you feel the project is fully complete to the standards you expect?

Things you will need:

Know what else is being researched on this issue.

Maybe someone else is already looking into this idea and you can partner up with them. Even if you don't partner up with others, you need to know who else is out there... there is nothing worse than getting one year into your project and hearing that "someone from UBC was just here six months ago asking the same thing".

Funding—everything costs money. There is funding to be had for just about any research project. Getting the funding and which type of funding to go for depends on how you would like to do your research. Some places to look include CIHR- Canadian Institute for Health Research; SSHRC- Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council; Status of Women Canada; and the National Crime Prevention Council; the Vancouver Foundation, and other charitable organizations.

A **research question** is to a research project as a mission statement is to an organization—if you have a good, clear research question

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you will always be able to answer (in 30 seconds or less) the question “what is your research about?” The research question will provide guidance when you are lost, frustrated and feeling pulled in different directions by twenty relevant issues.

Patience and perseverance—research is a slow process. It will often take years just to go from idea, to research question, to partnership, to funding—and by then the research hasn’t even started!

Ethics, respect and good working relationships—for yourself, for your research participants, and amongst your research team. All members of the team contribute something valuable to the project; while you may not be a ‘researcher’ you are bringing in expertise, knowledge and contacts to the team—your contributions should be valued and (if at all possible) your (or your organization’s) time compensated.

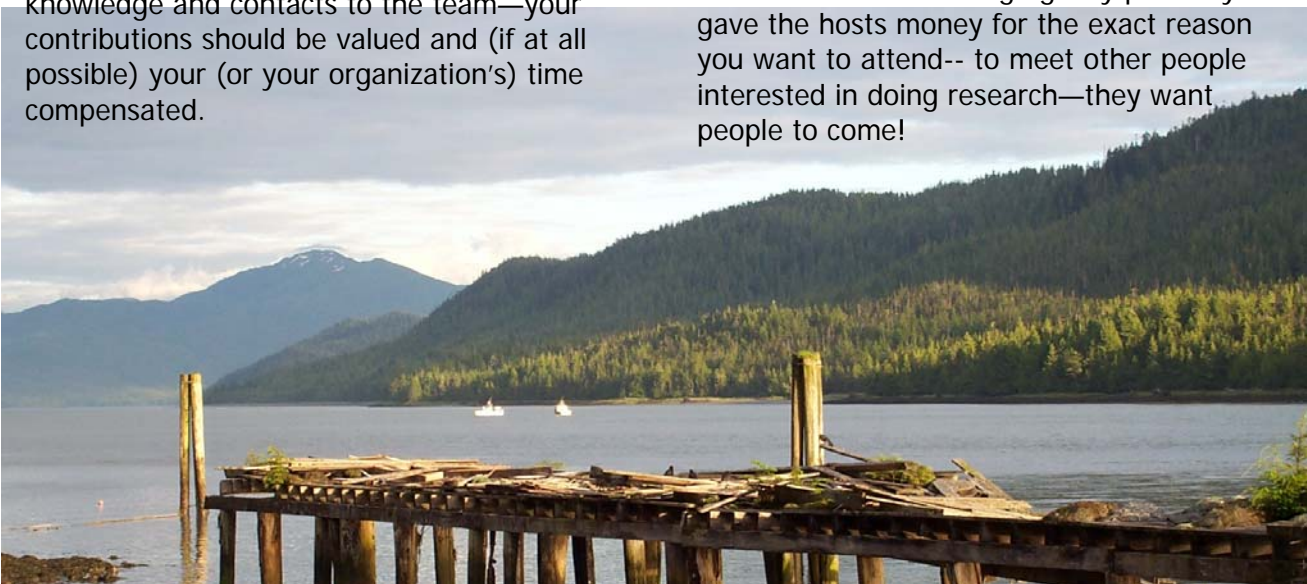
Where to begin:

Check out the bios for faculty members at your nearest college or university-

you may not find someone who does exactly what you are looking for, but find two or three people that do something *like* what you are interested in... call or email them, tell them what you are interested in, and at the very least get from them some other names to look into, and ask them to pass your topic and contact info around. (Hint: community partners can be a boon for academics... you bring ‘hands on’ expertise, community contacts, and in general the link to ‘the real world’ that academics really need). It will probably take months to even get your first conversation with a ‘researcher’ that may want to take on a project; patience and perseverance are critical.

Attend a research ‘networking meeting’, ‘symposium’, or ‘forum’—

There are usually at least few of these a year for the social and health sciences that take place at UNBC. Whether they appear to be so at first or not, they usually are quite *inclusive* rather than *exclusive* (both for research areas and for who attends); remember some funding agency probably gave the hosts money for the exact reason you want to attend-- to meet other people interested in doing research—they want people to come!



Interview with an Expert

Mary Clifford speaks on Community Based Research

I spoke with Mary Clifford (BJ), Director of Health Services of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, about doing research from within an organization. In 2001-2002 this Friendship Centre did a participatory research project to develop a model for their early childhood development project.

Could you tell me a bit about this community based research you did?

Working within the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, we wanted to develop a model for an early childhood development project. We would then submit this model as a proposal for funding for the project itself. We were lucky in that we had a bit of funding to do the research and develop the model. So we hired four Aboriginal women who were parenting, and they were trained and supported to do focus groups and surveys, and how to input the data and perform the analysis. Basically we wanted to look at what families with children from infants to age six wanted for services, particularly cultural services. It ended up that this information was used to develop the Wazdididalh program, and the research is part of our evaluation framework, so the research is well used within our program.

Thinking about this community research project, what motivated you to take it on?

Well, we wanted to do the best community development we could for this program, which meant going directly to the source, the people who would use the services. Participatory research works especially well

for the Aboriginal community, it's a real partnership model. I was familiar with the participatory process from another proposal we had submitted for another organization but it ended up that we didn't get the funding for that project. For this project we already had a bit of funding so we could pay our researchers and could afford to do site visits. So it all just worked out, with the funding and being familiar with the process.

What do you think about doing research from within a more service based organization, rather than from within a university or a more academic institution?

The people who live the experience are really the experts when it comes to this type of research, and to make the best program you can, you need that layer. If you don't, and you get consultants or academics or someone else to come in, you are going to miss out. It's interesting because the people living the experience really are the experts, and the others become more like allies.

What advice would you have for other community organizations that may be thinking about doing their own research?

I encourage it completely. It's very doable, and it brings a lot of excitement and growth. I would say to get some advice, find a mentor, but it can be very hard to find people who have done this type of research, it's a fairly new thing. But it really is the best way to find out what is best for people. It was a very rewarding process and our organization still uses the information. It was really empowering for the women who were the researchers as well. Actually, to this day Linda Reid, the Minister of State for Early Childhood Development, brings up the project as something that really stood out from the other projects that were done. It was just a good way to do things all around.

