

NEWS RELEASE

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Conference to offer international look at child and family welfare *Seeks to identify philosophies and practices to strengthen delivery of services in Canada*

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WATERLOO (Ont.) – Leading service providers, policy developers and scholars of child and family services from around the world will outline philosophies and practices that could improve Canada’s handling of child and family welfare (CFW) during a conference titled *Positive Systems of Child and Family Welfare*.

The two-day conference, organized by The Partnerships for Children and Families Project at Wilfrid Laurier University for June 20 and 21, is designed to encourage dialogue on positive systems of CFW. A combination of large-group presentations and smaller discussions will explore common patterns, priority issues and future directions.

“Our hope is that an exploration of systems being used around the world will result in a greater understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the diverse practices in various settings,” says project lead investigator, Gary Cameron. “The next step would be to consider whether specific beneficial approaches now used in other settings could be adopted within a Canadian context.”

Rachael Hetherington, a researcher from England’s Brunel University renowned for her comparative international research on child welfare, will set the tone for the conference. She will share her understanding of the diversity of CFW services, then address the importance of looking beyond a country’s ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions to discover alternatives for working with children and families.

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Participants will then explore the philosophies and practices of eight distinct cultures: Canada, England, France, Sweden, The Netherlands and the United States as well as Canadian First Nations and New Zealand Maori. They are being encouraged to reflect on practices in their own settings, considering the desirability and feasibility of a positive CFW system.

Organizers believe the international scope of the conference offers a unique opportunity to:

- hear about the experiences of service providers from each country or nation and examine invited theme papers about their unique approach to child welfare/protection,
- encourage dialogue among scholars, policy developers and service providers from selected countries, and
- compare child welfare perspectives with representatives from each setting in smaller discussion groups.

Proceedings from the conference will be summarized in bulletins and bound in book format for distribution across the country.

The Partnerships for Children and Families Project is a three-year research project directed at understanding the lives and experiences of families and children who are served by children's aid societies and children's mental health services in Ontario. It aims to foster improvements in existing child welfare and children's mental health policies, delivery systems, administration and programming/interventions.

The project brings together community members, professionals and academic partners and provides a unique opportunity to initiate collaborative programs that will bring benefits to children and families and will lead to a new understanding of critical issues to the broader community.

The Partnerships for Children and Families Project is supported by the Community and University Research Alliance (CURA) initiative of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and is housed in the faculty of social work at Wilfrid Laurier University.