



2015

The CIHR Chair in ASD Treatment and Care Research
3rd Annual Chair Stakeholder Report



10TH ANNIVERSARY 2006 - 2016



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The Chair in ASD Treatment & Care Research

2015 Newsletter Summary

I am happy to report on the third year of the accomplishments related to the Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research. We have continued to focus on research areas related to mental health of those with ASD, including studying the effectiveness of existing community interventions, identifying and developing treatments, and working with individuals with ASD, their families, and service providers in the research process.

Over the last year, the Chair collaborated on many projects related to mental health and ASD, with multiple community stakeholders. We have completed successful projects with Special Olympics Ontario, examining how youth with ASD are involved in sport and how this relates to their well-being, and with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, in developing health-related content for the online support app, MagnusMode. We have continued collaborations with the Toronto Catholic District School Board in the evaluation of their Program to Assist Social Thinking, the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance in the writing of the Autism In Canada report and the development of a follow up survey, and Autism Ontario and Integrated Autism Consulting, to evaluate their Transition to Life curriculum. We have started new collaborations with colleagues in NeuroDevNet, who are funding our evaluation of a mindfulness-based therapy group for adolescents with ASD and their parents. We look forward to updating you as we make further progress on these projects.

In 2015, we published many articles based on work funded by the Chair, continued to communicate and disseminate ASD and mental health research to academic and non-academic audiences, and have been helping to treat mental health problems in children and adolescents with ASD. Our ASD Mental Health Blog posted 21 lay summaries of research studies, 2 editorials, and 9 news articles, all focused on ASD and

mental health, and has expanded its reach through social media. We have involved undergraduate and graduate students from multiple universities across Ontario as authors for the blog, increasing their learning and experiences with knowledge mobilization. We authored 11 new peer reviewed publications in the year, 28 poster/paper presentations at 10 scientific conferences, and provided 2 lectures/workshops on ASD and mental health to community organizations. Three postdoctoral fellows and 10 graduate students (2 with research stipends, 7 with travel funding to conferences, 2 for clinical research involvement), and 1 undergraduate student were supported with funding from the Chair.

As always, the Chair in ASD Treatment and Care Research would like to thank the many partners who show such strong support for the program and the stakeholder groups who are involved in our ongoing efforts to conduct meaningful and impactful health-related research. We look forward to updating you at an upcoming stakeholder meeting about the progress. As always, at the heart of this program of research are Canadians with ASD and their families.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jonathan Weiss, Ph.D., C. Psych
Associate Professor, Dept. of Psychology
York University
Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and
Care Research

<http://www.asdmentalhealth.ca/>
<http://ddmh.lab.yorku.ca/>

The Chair in ASD Treatment and Care Research 2015 Annual Report

The Chair in Autism Spectrum Disorders Treatment and Care Research is dedicated to studying ways to improve the mental health and well-being of people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their families in Canada. It is a unique research position that aims to work with various stakeholder groups including people with ASD, their families, services providers, and governmental bodies, to:

- Translate research to inform stakeholders about mental health and ASD;
- Study ways of addressing mental health problems in people with ASD;
- Provide support to the next generation of Canadian ASD researchers and clinicians

The Chair is funded by the **Canadian Institutes of Health Research** in partnership with **Autism Speaks Canada**, the **Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance**, **Health Canada**, **NeuroDevNet** and the **Sinneave Family Foundation**. Additional funds from **York University** and **ORION's O3 Collaboration**.

Dr. Jonathan Weiss, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at York University, was awarded the Chair position in November 2012. He has since held two Stakeholder Advisory Meetings, the most recent one being in November 2014. The primary objective of this meeting was to update the community of stakeholders about past, ongoing and new research projects, and to develop an understanding of how to further work with the community to foster impactful research. You can read more about the meeting on the [ASD Mental Health Blog](#). Through group discussions, stakeholders provided the following recommendations:

- Explore needs and service use in adults, research intervention programs, and examine the impact of sport and active lifestyles for people with ASD
- Encourage partnerships among agencies to improve integration of services, connect with rural and smaller communities, and promote and develop Canada-wide collaborations
- Continue to increase accessibility of information, and expand beyond Toronto and Ontario audiences

In place of a Stakeholder Advisory Day, in May of 2016, we will be holding "Spectrum", our first TEDxYorkUSalon, as part of an integrated knowledge mobilization plan for individuals with ASD, their families, clinicians, and students. We will also be providing updates from the Chair at the CASDA Leadership Summit in Ottawa, in April 2016. Until then, we wanted to provide an update on what the Chair has been doing over the past year.

Here is a summary of the research, stakeholder engagement, knowledge mobilization, and teaching and training the Chair has been involved with from January through December 2015.



Research Collaborations in 2015

Project Updates

Toronto Catholic District School Board - The Program to Assist Social Thinking

The Program to Assist Social Thinking (PAST) is a strengths-based socio-emotional intervention currently offered to students with high functioning ASD in the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). Developed and implemented more than eight years ago by a team of educators with expertise in the area of ASD, PAST is currently provided in five TCDSB schools. PAST has received positive support from educators, families, and students. Through our community-engaged research partnership with TCDSB educators, we are evaluating PAST to study its potential to improve the socio-emotional well being of students with ASD in elementary school. We have been working collaboratively with educators since Spring 2014. We are currently continuing with data collection at a number of schools, using qualitative and quantitative methods.

Special Olympics Ontario - Sport Participation in Youth with Intellectual Disabilities

Youth with intellectual disabilities struggle to access typical recreational activities, and are less likely than typically developing peers to get involved in community sports or be physically active. In 2013, the Chair began a partnership with Special Olympics Ontario to identify factors that lead to involvement and retention in sport for youth with intellectual disabilities by having Special Olympics athletes and their caregivers complete an online survey. Approximately one third of these young athletes had a diagnosis of an ASD. In 2014, we travelled to different parts of Ontario, and interviewed 58 of these athletes to understand how they feel about themselves, about others, and about doing different types of activities. This past year, we have followed up with all the families to see who has continued to participate and examined the factors that relate to athlete retention. These findings were submitted to one international and two national research conferences. A paper reporting on this work is currently in development. Before this work, no research had examined sport retention in this population. In addition to Chair support, this work is funded in part by Sport Canada and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorders Alliance - National Service Needs Assessment of Individuals with ASD

In Spring 2014, the Canadian ASD Alliance (CASDA) worked with the Chair to develop and administer the National Autism Needs Assessment Survey, which received more than 5300 respondents from across the country provided input on service use, service needs and barriers to access for individuals with ASD. In August 2014, CASDA submitted the "Autism in Canada: National Needs Assessment Survey for Families, Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder & Professionals" report to Public Health Agency of Canada, identifying the range of services needed to provide adequate support, and the steps that need to be taken in order to improve the lives of Canadians affected by ASD. Currently, the data from the survey are being analyzed to understanding some of the factors that may influence service use, community participation and other outcomes that are meaningful for families and policy makers. The report has served to help guide Autism Speaks Canada's recent grant funding for community projects and the formation of the Canadian Autism Partnership Working Group.

Secret Agent Society: Operation Regulation – An Emotion Regulation Intervention for Youth with ASD

Youth with ASD often experience emotional difficulties, like anxiety, depression, or anger, which can be related to difficulties with regulating their emotions when faced with stressful situations. The Secret Agent Society - Operation Regulation program, developed by Dr. Renae Beaumont, is a cognitive behavioural program to help youth with ASD cope with their emotions and handle day-to-day stressors by teaching tools and strategies.

Children learn these strategies through numerous spy-themed activities like an emotion-focused computer game, cue cards, session games, and parent and teacher handouts. As of December 2015, 38 children have successfully completed the trial, which is projected to increase to 60 children by the end of Summer 2016. SAS-OR has also operated as a training opportunity for 16 graduate students who have learned to provide therapy to children with ASD. These students have worked as the program therapists under the supervision of Drs. Weiss, Thomson, Burnham Riosa, Salem, and PhD candidate, Ms. Wincentak. We completed our feasibility trial showing that SAS-OR is a clinically useful program to delivery, and look forward to assessing its effectiveness when our randomized trial is completed.

Autism Ontario and Integrated Autism Consulting - Transition to Life Program

The Transition to Life Program was developed by Integrated Autism Consulting to help address the needs of young adults with Asperger Syndrome, and provide support as they transition from secondary school into adult life. In 2013, the two organizations approached the Chair for assistance in designing an evaluation framework for the 12-week pilot/demonstration course that began in the summer of that year. With funding from the Ontario Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure, the program is now being provided in Barrie, Kingston and Ottawa for adults between the ages of 18 and 28 with Asperger Syndrome. For more information about Transition to Life, visit the Integrated Autism Consulting website at www.integratedautismconsulting.com or the Autism Ontario website at www.autismontario.com/adults. The Chair continues to support the program's evaluation efforts.

NeuroDevNet - MYmind: Mindfulness Training for Adolescents with ASD

Previous research has shown that mindfulness not only helps to improve attention and focus, but can also be effective in reducing stress, increasing control over negative feelings, and improving quality of life. This research project is examining whether participation in MYmind: a mindfulness-training program designed for adolescents between the ages of 14 and 21 with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and their parents is related to improved outcomes. Originally developed and tested by researchers in the Netherlands, this program aims to have families experience the benefits of mindfulness meditation and cognitive therapy techniques while learning to relate to one another in a new way.

This initiative has provided training to two graduate students and two post-doctoral fellows from our lab, who are learning how to provide mindfulness therapy to adolescents with ASD; building capacity of trained professionals for the future. Pilot groups for this program began in January 2014, and a second group is currently underway. To date, 9 parent-teen dyads have completed the intervention, and another 9 are currently participating. According to the participant's feedback, the MYmind program seems to have some benefit for both parents and youth. Most of the youth believe that there was at least some improvement in their own ability to manage stress and negative emotions, and that the family member had at least some improvements in these areas following the program. Most participants also had some improvements in quality of life relationships.

In addition to the work in our lab, we coordinated and provided a week long intensive training in mindfulness-based therapy at York University to 26 clinicians in June 2015, most coming from across Canada, but others from around the world. The feedback from clinicians was excellent; they reported more confidence, more knowledge, and improved skills in delivering mindfulness-based therapy. We are already seeing the benefits of the Chair funding and working with partners like NeuroDevNet. A number of organizations have begun to run these same groups in the community, which means that our efforts are directly leading to improved capacity in mental health services.

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health - Magnus Cards by MagnusMode Ltd.©

In collaboration with the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH), the Chair developed content for a number of health-related Magnus Cards for the MagnusMode app, which was launched successfully in December 2015 and is now freely available to the public. The free app is used to create e-flashcard decks that serve as easy to understand how-to guides for everyday activities such as cooking, grocery shopping, going to the dentist and picking up prescription medication. Magnus Cards are designed to empower and promote independence in individuals with developmental disabilities through the use of training cards that cover fundamental life skills. Card deck topics were selected based on health services research conducted at York University and CAMH with individuals with ASD and their families. For example, in the card deck about dealing with anxiety, the first card asks, "How do you feel? Is your stomach feeling nauseous or queasy?" The cards progress to more specific questions about the intensity of mood and emotions, and end with a card suggesting how best to get help in such situations. The Health card decks can be accessed by creating a free account at www.magnusmode.com and downloading the MagnusCards app for tablets or smartphones.

New Collaborations & Sources of External Funding

Centre for Addiction and Mental Health - Transitions in ASD Services

Funding Agency: Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services

Principal Investigators: Dr. Yona Lunskey & Dr. Jonathan Weiss

While clear service needs exist in community and health domains for adults with ASD, we know almost nothing about changes that occur over time and the factors that might drive such change. In collaboration with CAMH and funded by a Developmental Services Research Grant Fund from Ontario's Ministry of Community and Social Services Community Supports Policy Branch, this research project will examine the changing support needs and service delivery in adults with ASD in Ontario. We plan to conduct a follow up study of two past surveys to examine the changing community support needs and service use. We will collect information on a number of important individual, family and sociodemographic factors and on current experiences with receiving services, to see how the situation changes over time and how that influences service use patterns. We also plan to examine how subgroups within the ASD population differ in terms of their change in service needs. This study will inform policy and service planning to address the community supports and health needs of individuals with ASD.

Université du Québec à Montréal - Understanding and Assessing the Risk of Suicide in People with ID or ASD

Funding Agency: Canadian Institutes of Health Research

Principal Investigator: Dr. Brian Mishara

Co-Leads: Dr. Julie Mérideneau-Côté, Dr. Daphné Morin, Dr. René Proulx, Dr. Cécile Bardon, Dr. Diane Morin, Dr. Jonathan Weiss

Led by Principal Investigator, Dr. Brian Mishara, Dr. Weiss is part of a team aiming to understand the characteristics of suicide in people with ID or ASD. This first phase of this research, a clinical file review, has been completed, and consultations with stakeholders is underway to develop a tool to measure suicidal risk to assist with prevention efforts.

Knowledge Mobilization

The Chair's mandate includes making research on mental health accessible. This can happen in many ways: through publications in peer reviewed journals that are openly accessible, through presentations at scientific and lay conferences, and through online posts about research topics.

Publications

In 2015, Dr. Weiss co-authored 11 peer-reviewed publications. There are also a number of manuscripts currently in press and under review that will come out in 2016, based on the research that has occurred in 2015. The following are brief summaries of the articles published in the past year – Dr. Weiss' students and trainees are underlined:

Weiss, J. A., Cappadocia, M. C., Tint, A., & Pepler, D. (2015). Bullying victimization, parenting stress, and anxiety among adolescents and young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder. *Autism Research*, 8(6), 727-737.

Both bullying victimization and anxiety occur more among youth with ASD than in the general population. The research team looked at factors that relate to anxiety and bullying victimization in youth and young adults with ASD. They found that youth that were bullied had more anxiety if mothers reported high levels of overall stress.

Fung, S., Lunsky, Y., & Weiss, J. A. (2015). Depression in youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders: The role of ASD vulnerabilities and family –environmental stressors. *Journal of Mental Health Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 8, 120-139.

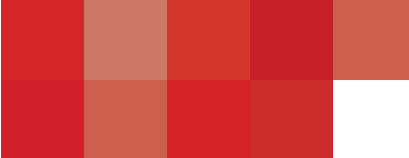
Depression is a common mental health problem among individuals with ASD. This study explores how parent distress, negative life events relate to depressive symptoms in youth with ASD (7-25 years old). The research team found that high parent distress and exposure to 3 or more negative life events were associated with symptoms of depression in individuals with ASD. Younger individuals or ones who have average or above-average intellectual functioning had higher depression levels.

Thomson, K., Burnham-Riosa, P., & Weiss, J. A. (2015). Brief Report of preliminary outcomes of an emotion regulation intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder: The Secret Agent Society: Operation Regulation. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(11), 3487-3495.

Children with ASD often have problems with emotion regulation. In this research, the team reports on progress with SAS: OR (see above for full description of the project), a cognitive behavior therapy (CBT) intervention to improve emotion regulation in youth with ASD 8-12 years of age. The participants and parents that participated reported high satisfaction with the activities and program. The pros and cons of using this intervention are discussed.

Perry, A., Taheri, A., Ting, V., & Weiss, J. A. (2015). The GO4KIDDS Brief Adaptive Scale. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, 28(6), 594-597.

Adaptive behaviour is an important outcome to measure in individuals with ID at all ages, although none have been developed for specifically for children and youth. The research team reports on the psychometric properties of a tool they developed (GO4KIDDS Brief Adaptive Behaviour Scale) and compared the results from it with other existing scales. The new scale was consistent and reliable when compared with an existing scale that measured adaptive behaviour (i.e. Scale of Independent Behaviour – Revised Short Form).



Lunsky, Y., Paquette-Smith, M., Weiss, J. A., & Lee, J. (2015). Predictors of emergency service use in adolescents and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders living with family. *Emergency Medical Journal*, 32(10), 787-792.

Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are more likely to use emergency services than the general population. This study examines factors that may contribute to more visits. The research team found that a combination of need and enabling variables predicted emergency service use – specifically, previous ED use in the last year, a history of hurting others and having no structured daytime activities being the strongest predictors.

Weiss, J. A., Viecili, M., & Bohr, Y. (2015). Parenting stress as a correlate of cognitive behavior therapy responsiveness in children with Autism Spectrum Disorders and anxiety. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 30(3), 154-164.

Cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) is an intervention used to treat the high rates of anxiety in children with ASD. This study examined the effectiveness of a 12-session “Coping Cat” intervention for children with ASD. The research team found that 50% of children had clinically meaningful improvements. In addition, changes in parenting stress and child anxiety from pre- to post-treatment were related. These results are applicable to the community service sector, where the Coping Cat program is commonly utilized.

Weiss, J. A., & Burnham-Riosa, P. (2015). Thriving in youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Intellectual Disability. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 45(8), 2474-2486

Most research on mental health in individuals with ASD and intellectual disability (ID) has focused on deficits. In this study, the research team examined individual and contextual factors of thriving in youth with ID, with and without ASD. Youth with both ASD and ID were reported to thrive less than peers with ID only. Differences in sociocommunicative ability and school participation mediated the relationship between ASD and less thriving. This article is freely available for download through YorkSpace at <http://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/28474>.

Viecili, M. A., & Weiss, J. A. (2015). Reliability and validity of the Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities*, 120(4), 289-301.

The Pediatric Quality of Life Inventory (PedsQL) measures health-related quality of life, a growing area of research, particularly among individuals with disabilities. In this study, the research team looks at the reliability and validity of the PedsQL in individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including individuals with ASD. The researchers found that the PedsQL was reliable and distinguished healthy individuals from those with chronic health conditions, as well as individuals with ASD from those without. This article is freely available for download through YorkSpace at <http://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/handle/10315/30136>.

Weiss, J. A., MacMullin, J., & Lunsky, Y. (2015). Empowerment and parent gain as mediators and moderators of distress in mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorders. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 24(7), 2038-2045.

This study examines the distress in moms of children with ASD using a model that describes distress and crisis in families. Specifically, the research team examined how parent empowerment and positive gain (perceived benefits) are related to maternal distress and child problem behaviours and aggression. The research team found that child problem behaviour was related to maternal distress and less parent empowerment. Child aggression was not related to distress in moms who have positive gain.

Minnes, P., Perry, A., & Weiss, J. A. (2015). Predictors of distress and well-being in parents of young children with developmental delays and disabilities: The importance of parent perceptions. *Journal of Intellectual Disability Research*, 59(6), 551-560.

As children with developmental disabilities transition to school, distress may occur as service delivery shifts from being family-centred to child-centred. This study looks at predictors of both distress and well-being in 155 mothers during this transition period. Parent coping variables such as parental perception (reframing) and empowerment influenced both positive gain (perceived benefits) and parental distress.

Lake, J. Vogan, V., Sawyer, A., Weiss, J., & Lunskey, Y. (2015). Psychotropic medication use among adolescents and young adults with an autism spectrum disorder: Parent views about medications and health care services. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology*, 25(3), 260-268.

Psychotropic medications are frequently used to treat mental health and behavioral issues in adolescents and adults with ASD. In this study, the research team found that young adults (18-30 year olds) were more likely to use psychotropic medication and not try non-pharmacological services first compared to adolescents (12-17 year olds). Also, parents of young adults were less satisfied with the perceived expertise and monitoring of medication use than parents of adolescents.

In addition, Dr. Weiss was a co-author on a technical report that was submitted to the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services:

McGarry, C., Chiu, A., Brown, H. K., Wilton, A., Weiss, J., Lunskey, Y., & Isaacs, B. (2015). Young adults with autism spectrum disorders: Health profiles and service utilization. *Applied Health Research Question Report* prepared for the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services by the Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities Program.



Academic Presentations

The Chair's research collaboration resulted in 28 poster presentations and one paper presentation at peer reviewed, scientific conferences across North America in the last year. Presentations were on a variety of topics such as emotion regulation in individuals with ASD, electronics use in youth and young adults with ASD, sexual knowledge and victimization in adults with ASD, and the evaluation of interventions for individuals with ASD. These posters were presented at the following 10 conferences:

- **Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD) Biennial Meeting**, March 19-21, Philadelphia, PA
- **48th Annual Gatlinburg Conference on Research and Theory in Intellectual and Developmental Disability**, April 1-3, New Orleans, LA
- **Ontario Association on Developmental Disabilities (OADD) – Research Special Interest Group (RSIG) Conference**, April 8, Thorold, ON
- **International Meeting for Autism Research (IMFAR) 2015**, May 13-16, Salt Lake City, UT
- **International Association for the Scientific Study of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IASSIDD) Americas Regional Congress**, May 21-22, Honolulu, HI
- **41st Annual Conference for the Association for Behavior Analysis International**, May 22-26, San Antonio, TX
- **Canadian Psychological Association 76th Annual Convention**, June 4-6, Ottawa, ON
- **American Psychological Association Annual Convention**, August 6-9, Toronto, ON
- **NeuroDevNet Brain Development Conference**, September 19-21, Ottawa, ON
- **Health and Wellbeing in Developmental Disabilities Conference**, October 27-28, Toronto, ON

Non-Academic Presentations and Workshops

Media Features

Over the past year, Dr. Weiss gave 3 talks about mental health and ASD to individuals with ASD, clinicians, educators, family caregivers of individuals with ASD, and policy makers in different branches of government. These talks were titled:

Cognitive-Behavioural Intervention to Address Emotion Regulation in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Workshop presented at the 47th Banff International Conference on Behavioural Science, Banff, AB in March.

Supporting Mental Health in Students with ASD

Keynote address at A Professional Learning Day for Educational Assistants presented by Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network, Kingston, ON in April.

Thriving in ASD: What Does it Take?

Workshop presented at the Autism Community Training, Vancouver, BC in October.

In addition, Dr. Weiss' research was featured in various news and media outlets, including the following:

What does wellbeing look like in families raising children with ASD?

NeuroDevNet News & Publications, May 11, 2015

The unexpected transformation of Aaron Pearlston: He is now Douglas Pearson, white supremacist

National Post, July 3, 2015.

Social communication skills and meaningful inclusion best predictors of thriving in youth with autism

NeuroDevNet News & Publications, December 10, 2015.

York U-CAMH team creates app-based health education tool for people with autism

Y-File, York University's News Source, December 16, 2015.

Autism may strain family life even before children are diagnosed

Reuters Health, December 18, 2015.

The ASD Mental Health Blog



ASD
Mental Health

The ASD Mental Health Blog was launched in January 2013 to inform families, service providers, and individuals with ASD about research surrounding ASD and mental health. The blog also offers editorials and news segments on relevant topics and issues, interviews with leading ASD researchers from across Canada, and upcoming research projects from Dr. Weiss' team and collaborators. This past year, we developed a feedback form to ask our readers about the topics they would like us to focus on. We're looking forward to engagement and input from our readers.

At the end of 2015, we had 138 subscribers and an astounding 16,706 unique page views. As well, our Twitter account grew to 728 tweets and 824 followers as of December 31st, which is continuing to increase.

To subscribe to the ASD Mental Health Blog, visit www.asdmentalhealth.blog.yorku.ca. You can also receive updates on blog activity by following us on Twitter ([@ASDMentalHealth](https://twitter.com/ASDMentalHealth)) and liking us on Facebook ([ASD Mental Health Blog](https://www.facebook.com/ASDMentalHealth)). You can also follow Dr. Weiss on his personal Twitter account ([@DrJonathanWeiss](https://twitter.com/DrJonathanWeiss)).

Here's an update on each of the different sections:

Research Summaries:

Each month, the ASD Mental Health Blog shares numerous ResearchSnapshots, which are clear language summaries. The template and format were developed by ResearchImpact and have been adopted by Dr. Weiss for summarizing research on ASD and mental health that would be of interest and/or most helpful to stakeholders. These articles are based on peer-reviewed published research studies and provide a two-page summary, covering 5 key areas: what the research is about, what the researchers did, the main findings, how the reader can use this information, and the take-home message. Each summary also provides a brief biography about the researchers and citation for the original article.

In 2015, we posted 21 new research summaries, which can be downloaded and shared freely by visiting the Research Summaries page on the blog. In total, the Blog features 56 research summaries with a new summary being added every two weeks.

Editorials:

We've also produced a number of editorials that evaluate and discuss research findings, pertinent issues, and resources related to ASD and mental health. In 2015, we posted 2 editorials.

In the News:

These posts outline and link to news items that feature the work of the Chair, as well as topics and upcoming events that may interest the many different members of the ASD community. This year, we posted 9 new articles, including the following headlines:

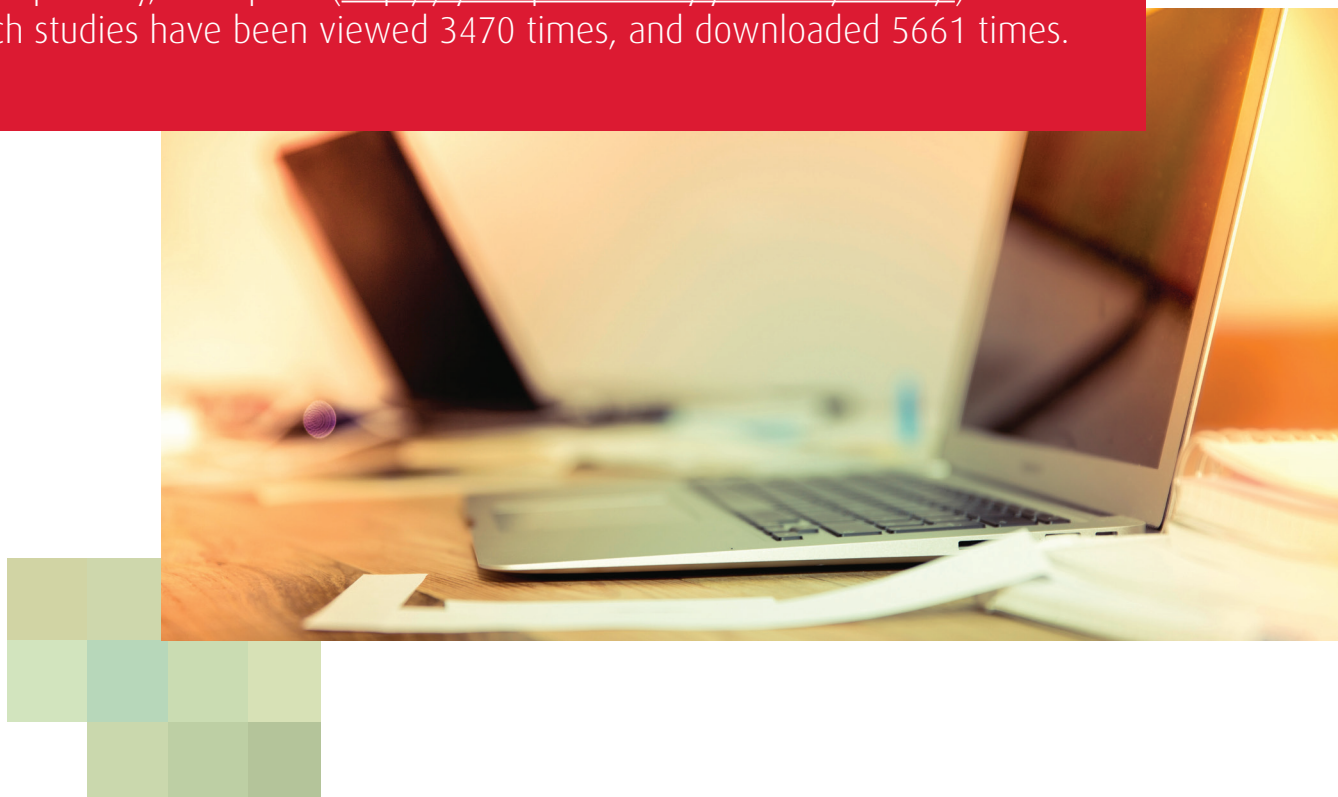
- What Does Wellbeing Look Like In Families Raising Children With ASD?
- A Scan Of Crisis And Suicide Prevention Services For Children And Youth In York Region
- Yellowcard Campaign For Special Olympics

Upcoming Conferences:

To encourage knowledge mobilization and the sharing of research findings, the ASD Mental Health Blog provides updates about upcoming research conferences taking place in Canada and the United States. Each conference listed has a link to the conference website, where stakeholders can receive more information, register or submit abstracts.

YorkSpace

In 2015, the Chair upheld the commitment to improving the accessibility of information through the use of open access repositories. In accordance with the CIHR Open Access Policy, 20 research studies produced by the Chair are currently available to view and download through the York University open access repository, YorkSpace (<http://yorkspace.library.yorku.ca/xmlui/>). These research studies have been viewed 3470 times, and downloaded 5661 times.



Teaching and Training

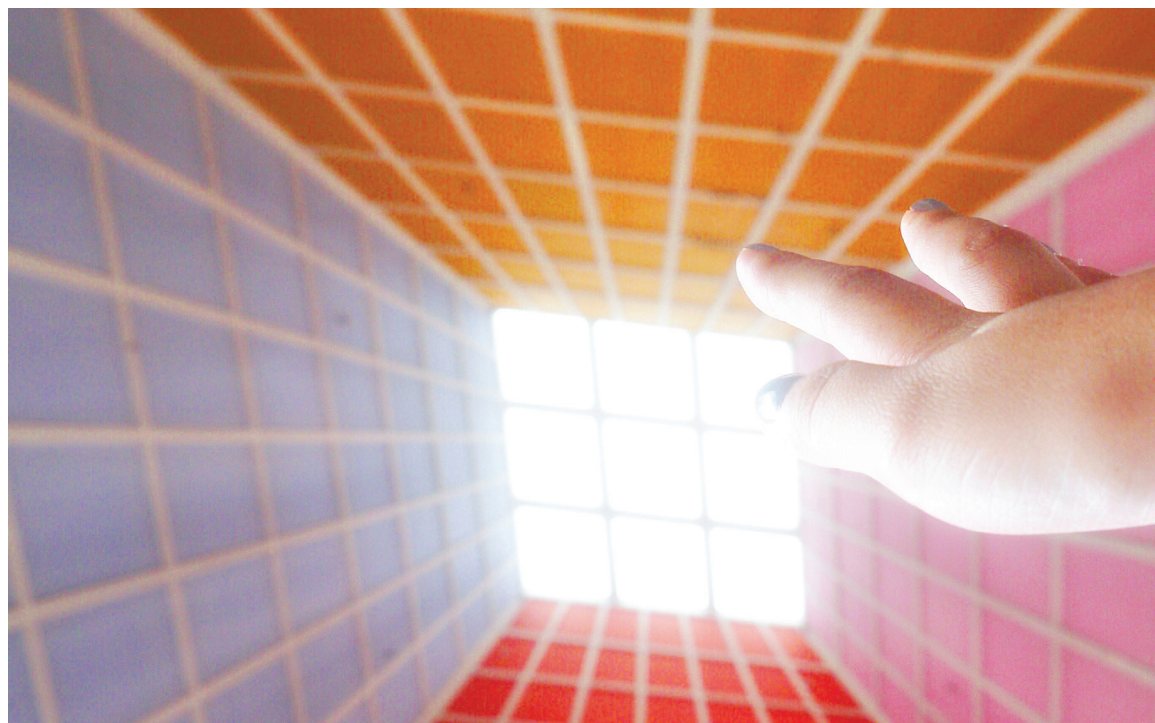
Part of the Chair's mandate is to support the next generation of ASD researchers. In 2015, the Chair continued to fund three postdoctoral fellows and a number of graduate students:

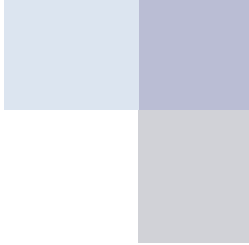
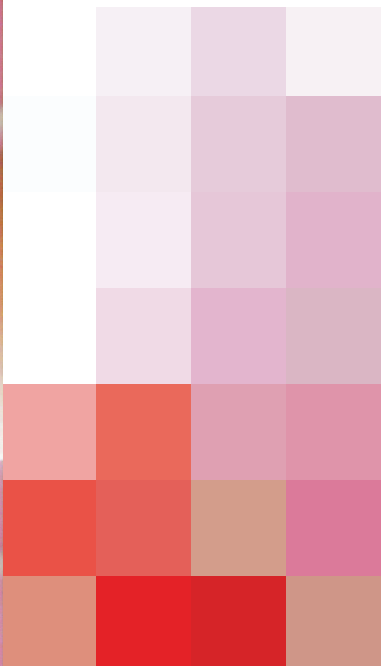
- **Dr. Priscilla Burnham Riosa's (PhD, BCBA-D, University of Guelph)** research interests are in understanding the impact of ASD on the individual, the family, and other social contexts. She and Dr. Weiss are collaborating with educators from the Toronto Catholic District School Board to examine the Program to Assist Social Thinking (PAST), a school-based intervention designed to support students with ASD. Dr. Burnham Riosa also recently began exploring therapeutic alliance in the Secret Agent Society: Operation Regulation intervention, and the impact this may have on program outcomes.
- **Dr. Sandra Salem-Guirgis's (PhD, BCBA-D, University of Manitoba)** research at York University focuses on the effects of different types of interventions including mindfulness based therapies and cognitive behaviour therapies with children and teenagers with autism and their parents. She is interested in the evaluation of behavioural and clinically based interventions that target not only behaviour and performance but also socio-emotional functioning and family functioning with the ASD and developmental disability populations.
- **Dr. Jonathan Lai's (PhD, McMaster University)** research focuses on knowledge mobilization, specifically: 1) understanding health and service needs of individuals with ASD and factors that influence service utilization and community inclusion, and 2) knowledge translation through social media (the Blog) and stakeholder engagement events. In addition, he is a NeuroDevNet practicum student working with Autism Speaks Canada on the implementation of Worktopia, a pre-vocational training program for youth with ASD. He is interested in bridging the gaps between brain science, mental health and society-at-large through moving research into evidence-based policies and programs
- **Andrea Maughan (MSc, University of Massachusetts Boston)** entered the Clinical-Developmental Psychology graduate program at York University in September 2014 under the supervision of Dr. Weiss. Her research is funded by the Chair and an Ontario Graduate Scholarship. She is interested in how families best adapt to and support children with developmental disabilities and the impact of family involvement in mental health interventions for children with ASD.
- **Victoria Ting's (MA, York University)** current research is focused on emotion regulation in individuals with High Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorder, specifically, looking at the effect of parental emotion awareness and coaching on children's emotion regulation skills and physiological arousal. Her research is funded by the Chair, and through a Canada Graduate Scholarship and the Lillian-Wright Maternal-Child Health Scholarship.

The Chair additionally funded a number of graduate students with research stipends and travel funding to present research at scientific conferences, including: Jennifer MacMullin, Ami Tint, Michelle Fardella, Suzanne Robinson, Stephanie Ryan, Katherine Wincentak, Rebecca Shine, and Azin Taheri.

In addition to the existing members of the research team, a new lab coordinator, a project coordinator, three additional research assistants, and a social media correspondent began working with Chair in the last year:

- **Carly Albaum** has been working as Lab Coordinator for Dr. Weiss since May 2014. She received her BA in the Specialized Honours Psychology Program, completing her undergraduate thesis under the supervision of Dr. Weiss. Carly will be beginning her Masters in Clinical-Developmental Psychology in September 2016.
- **Maria Khan** has been a Research Assistant for Dr. Weiss since June 2015, working on the Secret Agent Society: Operation Regulation program. She received her BA in the Specialized Honours Psychology program, completing an independent study under the supervision of Dr. Weiss. Maria intends to pursue graduate training in Clinical Psychology.
- **Andrew Goodwin** worked as a Research Assistant for Dr. Weiss since August 2014, working on the Secret Agent Society: Operation Regulation research team. Since working under the Chair, he has gained valuable experience in conducting ASD research, and has had the opportunity to develop skills related to working with children with ASD. Andrew is now completing a graduate degree in Psychology at OISE/U of T.
- **Rachel Grant** worked as the Project Coordinator for the MYmind project since October 2014. She recently graduated from McMaster University with an MSc in Global Health where she focused on global disease and spent time developing a mental health based initiative in Sierra Leone. Rachel is now completing a medical degree at the University of Calgary.
- **Emily Guertin** began working as a Research Assistant on the PAST project in October 2014. She obtained a BSc in Psychology from McMaster University and she is currently pursuing her MA in Applied Disability Studies at Brock University.
- **Jordan Cleland** continued to work as the Social Media Correspondent until August 2015. She is currently working on her Master's of Social Work at the University of Toronto. She hopes to continue research and work with individuals with disabilities, and strives to make the world a more inclusive place.





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