

**Project Title:** Building parenting capacity in families of children with disabilities: Understanding and resourcing fathers of children with ASD

The purpose of this collaborative project (funded by the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research as a \$40,000 one year investigator-driven project) is to build the capacity of Alberta families of children with disabilities. This will be done by contributing understandings that will inform practice, policy and research priorities that support fathers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Parents of children with ASD have distinct needs given the major communication and behavioural challenges associated with ASD. Response to the needs of parents of children who have disabilities, including ASD, has been aimed at partnership with, and support for, the whole family. Further work is needed however, to understand the impact and improve the outcomes of these practices within the context of changing needs of diverse families (Keen & Dempsey, 2008; Dodd, Saggars & Wildy, 2009). Roles within family are less clearly contained than ever before. Mothers' and fathers' roles in particular, continue to shift with increasingly diverse family forms (eg. step, foster, adopted and single-parent) as well as in conjunction with the changing family/employment interface (i.e. paid work is ever increasingly technology-driven, portable and pursued by both mothers and fathers). Yet much research, policy and practice is built on an assumption of traditional roles with mothers as the central care figures in the lives of children with ASD. So called family centered practice and related research tend to be either targeted at mothers or reflect mainly mothers' perspectives leaving us with limited understandings of the roles and needs of fathers. This study will contribute understandings of fathers of children with ASD by examining firsthand qualitative accounts of fathers' successes, struggles, needs and views of how and to what extent supports and services address their experiences and needs.

**Project team:**

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