



UNIVERSITY OF
CALGARY

Department of Community Health Sciences

Community Rehabilitation & Disability Studies

CONNECTOR 2025

Connecting students, graduates, and service
providers in our community

April 9, 2025

A Virtual Event via Zoom | Calgary, Alberta

cumming.ucalgary.ca/bcr

Welcome / Thank you / About

Welcome to our annual Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (CRDS) CONNECTOR!

This event has been organized by a dedicated team of students, faculty, and administrative staff. It's an exciting time for our program and the field as we continue to grow and adapt, and work to cultivate leadership development, innovation, community capacity building, and to encourage students to become allies who work towards improving the well-being of people with diverse abilities, promoting social change and building corresponding knowledge and theory.

Our faculty, students, and partners are dedicated to building and developing partnerships between the university and our community. The participation of each individual at this event demonstrates the ongoing commitment to develop reciprocal relationships. Today, students in the CRDS program who have completed practicums and research in community have the opportunity to share the work that they have completed throughout the year and engage with community partners, program graduates and faculty.

Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies and the field of disability is an exciting area in which to work and study. We hope that opportunities such as this allow all of us in this field to continue to meet and bring people together and to encourage growth, and innovation more widely.

The University of Calgary, located in the heart of Southern Alberta, both acknowledges and pays tribute to the traditional territories of the peoples of Treaty 7, which include the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprised of the Siksika, the Piikani, and the Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Goodstoney First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta (Districts 5 and 6).

The University of Calgary is situated on land Northwest of where the Bow River meets the Elbow River, a site traditionally known as Moh'kins'tsis to the Blackfoot, Wíchíspa to the Stoney Nakoda, and Guts'ists'i to the Tsuut'ina. On this land and in this place we strive to learn together, walk together, and grow together "in a good way."

On behalf of the CRDS Connector Committee, we would like to thank each of you for attending our event and bringing your experience to our gathering. Together we have the vision, the knowledge, the wherewithal, and the experience to help pave the future. We could not accomplish what we do without your support and leadership.

Sincerely,

The CRDS CONNECTOR Committee

Schedule

Wednesday, April 9

11:00 a.m.	Welcome and Land Acknowledgement Valerie Martin	Zoom Main Room
11:05 a.m.	Undergraduate Health & Science Education, Department Welcome Dr. Fabiola Aparicio-Ting	Zoom Main Room
11:10 a.m.	Keynote Presentation Kylah Wilson-Zelmer “Networking Change: Using Community Rehabilitation as a Foundation to Build Connections”	Zoom Main Room
11:50 a.m.	Student “Three Minute Thesis” Breakout Sessions	Zoom Break Out Rooms
12:40 p.m.	The E. Anne Hughson Change Makers Award Dr. Patti DesJardine Dr. Tiffany Boulton Dr. Glenis Benson	Zoom Main Room
12:45 p.m.	Closing Remarks Dr. Patti DesJardine	Zoom Main Room

Faculty Speakers & Guests

Dr. Fiona Clement

Professor and Department Head, Community Health Sciences

Dr. Clement is the Department Head of Community Health Sciences and the Director of the Health Technology Assessment Unit at the University of Calgary. She is an accomplished academic leader, health services researcher and expert in health policy. She has received numerous awards for her work with the most recent being named one of 2020's Most Powerful Women in Canada and selected for induction into the Royal Society of Canada's College of New Scholars, Artists and Scientists.



Dr. Fabiola Aparicio-Ting

**Associate Dean, Undergraduate Health and Science Education
Director, Bachelor of Health Sciences Program**

Dr. Fabiola Aparicio-Ting, MPH, PhD, is an Associate Professor (Teaching) in the Department of Community Health Sciences. As a social epidemiologist, her research interests focus on health inequities. Dr. Aparicio-Ting also has a program of scholarship of teaching and learning with a focus on applied educational research in health science education, curriculum development and evaluation, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary course development. Her work spans from local to global public health program development. She is currently the Associate Dean, Undergraduate Health & Science Education, Director for the Bachelor of Health Sciences Honours program, and co-Director for the Bachelor in Community Rehabilitation program.

Dr. Aparicio-Ting holds a Master of Public Health from the University of Texas Health Science Center (2001) and a PhD in Epidemiology from the University of Calgary (2010). She teaches a number of undergraduate courses in the areas of public health, epidemiology, global health and the social determinants of health.

Kylah Wilson-Zelmer, BCR '20

**Founder and Program Coordinator
Embrace. A Community Project**

During her bachelor's degree in Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, Kylah found inspiration to create her own program after evaluating current community-based services from her practicum and professional experience. Eager to expand her skills in community building, she is passionate about advocating for inclusion in the spaces her clients engage with. Looking ahead, Kylah is excited to build a meaningful career in community support as the founder of Embrace. A Community Project.



Student Speaker Order & Breakout Room Assignments

Room 1

Lindsay Paul
Sadie Kline
Jarrod Dyck
Hamin John
Ysabel Angeles
Alyssa MacPhail
Janessa Walker
Alisha Grashof
Winsome Chow
Raelene Mitts
Rachel Taylor
Brydon Bao
Madison Sae

Room 4

Cynthia Tran
Lauren Fortier
Anna Couillard
Kaitlyn McLeod
Anna Pushkar
Cassandra Cenek
Queenie Lacsa
Maria Palmisano
Sharmaine Rosal
Teryn Dodd
Grace Grant
Marie Crish Arugay

Room 7

Ruby Chao
Tianna Parsons
Jasper Domondon
Cheldynn Molnar
Nicole Koszte
Emma Walker
Hannah Cohen
Anna Furlong
Madi Loeppky
Jayvis Cadaweng
David Odetola
Rana Elbitar

Room 2

Kiera Hager
Courtnee Quigley
Suzane Abou Hussein
Caris Kelly
Noah Ulicki
Elizabeth Arquiza
Christian Pasion
Ali Sjolie
Mckayla Dalgetty
Ogoma Obiagu
Kate Frank
Mattie Cook
Juliette Matuguina

Room 5

Sydney Karpala
Nyekuar Tut-Yang
Karla Dioso
Anne Nitschke
Jessica Preus
Margaux Bangoy
Kendyl Kilpatrick
Katrina Parnacio
Brooklyn McKay
Shouko Charron
Gurasis Singh
Neha Mary Reji

Room 3

Manpreet Purewal
Larissa Flores Gonzalez
Nichole Cedilla
Luis Guzman
Laura Olivares
Lhanz Danao
Elizabeth Warren
Olivia Ory
Kallie Kroeger
Alaryz Gabelo
Chadler Tallo
Darlene Banaag
Taylor Hooper

Room 6

Prakriti Pathania
Jessica Funk
Melissa Trujillo Soriano
Cassidy Dekker
Kara Gustum
Annie Nguyen
Waliya Khan
Callie Manko
Cassidy Brown
Nyala Chaudhary
Hafsa Rao
Abidemi Ogunseye

Student Abstracts

ABOU HUSSEIN, Suzane

My Colorful Practicum Journey within the Disability World

Hello, my name is Suzie, and I am eager to share with you my practicum experience. My practicum is VRA Canada in which is Vocational Rehabilitation Association in Canada. This practicum involves a group of VRA members supporting individuals with disability in keeping or finding a job that meets their needs. VRA Canada provides professional designations including Registered Vocational Professional (RVP), Registered Community Support Specialist (RCSS), Registered Rehabilitation Professional (RRP). VRA Canada also has certifications including Certified Vocational Rehabilitation Professional (CVRP), Return to Work Disability Manager (RTWDM), Canadian Certified Vocational Evaluator (CCVE), International Certified Vocational Evaluator (ICVE), and International Certified Cost of Care Professional (ICCCP).

Throughout my practicum year, I have been honored to take a role in a major project in which is identified to be the Student Introduction Project. The purpose of this project is to support new graduate students is to learn more about the journey in VRA Canada and along with job opportunities.

This practicum has really brought me an opportunity to really understand what the world of disability is really about and the hardships individuals with disability face daily. For instance, as professionals we should be saying individuals with disability rather than disabled individuals as it should emphasize their character rather than their condition. It has also provided me with an opportunity to see how the real professional world can be like.

ANGELES, Ysabel

Bridging Radical Mental Health Doula Support & Social Work Values

In moments of uncertainty, many individuals are lost and unsure who to turn to. The Radical Mental Health Doula's (RMHD) aim to bridge this gap, upholding their values of comfort, support, education, and advocacy. Both the (RMHD) community and social work focus on how these shared values work together to recognize the importance of client-centered care, advocacy, and holistic support. Throughout my placement with RMHD, I practiced self-reflection, strengthening my active listening skills and through this, I learned the importance of carrying these values not only throughout my practicum placement, but also through my future career as a social worker. Both RMHD and social work emphasize empowering individuals to take control of their mental health journey, but they do so with a deep commitment to understanding and addressing the unique needs of each person while uplifting and empathizing with their experiences. This presentation highlights the importance of support workers being adaptable while remaining true to their core values, creating a safe environment where individuals feel heard, respected, and supported.

ARQUIZA, Elizabeth

The Intersection of Sport Management and Inclusive Practices: Developing a Para-Lacrosse Program

Many individuals in marginalized communities continue to face barriers to sports participation that limit their opportunities to stay active, develop skills and be a part of a community. Lacrossing Barriers (LB) aims to change that by providing adaptive and inclusive sports programs nationwide. During my time at LB, I was immersed in the field of adaptive sport, sport management and everything in between. We recognized the city's lack of sustainable para-lacrosse programs and have decided to put this idea into practice.

Spearheading an initiative of this magnitude was no easy feat. By collaborating alongside the dedicated staff of LB, we navigated the depths of program development and management. From grant writing and budget planning to meeting with potential collaborators, this behind-the-scenes experience deepened my appreciation of the complexity of launching an inclusive sports program. Given the scale of the project, progress over perfection was a key lesson throughout this process. Beyond its technical aspects, facilitating a few lacrosse sessions allowed me to strengthen my leadership skills and apply inclusive practices in sport. By emphasizing on creating a supportive, yet fun, environment, we provided participants with the opportunity to feel empowered and valued.

Our efforts will come to fruition as LB's para-lacrosse program officially launches in fall 2025, providing an opportunity for *everyone* to learn the medicine game and create meaningful connections. Lacrossing Barriers remains committed to ensuring that everyone has the chance to play, grow and belong, regardless of ability or support needs.

ARUGAY, Marie Crish

Integrating Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Principles into Workplace Public Folder

The Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging (EDIB) committee consists of employees from Providence Child Development Society and aims to provide educational resources and training related to the principles of EDIB. Another student and I created a folder consisting of EDIB educational information under the workplace's public drive, which is accessible to staff. This folder has the potential to be integrated into the onboarding process for new hires and provide staff resources they can utilize. Planning for this project involved contacting partner organizations such as the Sineave Family Foundation and using materials from the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion.

A critical aspect of this project is gaining insight into how Providence delivers educational and therapeutic services to children with disabilities. We recognize the importance of understanding how interdisciplinary teams collaborate and how this dynamic relates to EDIB principles. Therefore, as part of the practicum, I shadowed the site coordinator at one of the largest schools to deepen my understanding of Providence's foundational principles and participate in daily programming. This experience provided me with firsthand knowledge of the staff implementing strategies to meet the needs of the children. Overall, the practicum helped me develop my ability to actively listen to team members' experiences and understand the children's needs, which are two important concepts to include in the EDIB public folder. Additionally, this project emphasizes the importance of connecting

theoretical principles to real-world contexts and how adapting these policies can enhance service delivery by promoting greater accessibility and inclusion.

BANAAG, Darlene

Empowering Employment Through Hands-on Vocational Rehabilitation Tools

What does it really take to help someone get back into the workforce? At Lifemark Health Sunridge, I explored that question through hands-on projects that support vocational rehabilitation within the Re-Employment Services program. From building the Expected Job Demand (EJD) spreadsheet to co-creating a Training on the Job (TOJ) Essential Skills document, I worked on resources that help clients overcome job barriers. I also observed resume-building sessions, triage meetings, and mock interviews, learning how professionals guide clients toward success. In my presentation, I'll share the real-world impact of these tools—and how this practicum sparked my drive to make employment more inclusive and empowering.

BANGOY, Margaux

Empowering Future Vocational Rehabilitation Leaders: The Student Ambassador Program

As seniors in the CRDS program, we have gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities through our CORE courses. By examining injustice through a critical disability lens and exploring social justice within the labour force, we have come to recognize the significant underrepresentation of disabled individuals in the workforce. We learned that this exclusion not only perpetuates economic disparities but also limits opportunities for a better quality of life.

Through my practicum with the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRAC), I had the privilege of raising awareness about vocational rehabilitation, a field dedicated to bridging employment gaps and promoting workforce inclusion for individuals with disabilities. My focus was on expanding the Student Ambassador Program at the University of Calgary where I led initiatives such as organizing committee meetings, coordinating campus engagement, and facilitating presentations to introduce vocational rehabilitation to students.

As student members bring innovative ideas to the table, we create opportunities to spread awareness of the field. Vocational rehabilitation holds the potential to improve lives and expand opportunities for those who need it most.

BAO, Brydon

Creating Places People Want to Be: Client-Driven Growth at Embrace. A Community Project

What drives individuals and families to choose one community support program over the other? My practicum at Embrace sought to explore this question through a financial and community lens. My practicum experience with Embrace, a community project dedicated to supporting adults with disabilities in life after high school, focused on understanding what made a program valuable and “worth it” for aspiring clients to choose. By conducting client surveys and networking with other comparable organizations in the community, I was able to collect valuable information from internal and external perspectives to identify reasons behind why clients and families chose Embrace, what made Embrace stand out and what needed to change in Embrace. The survey I created for the project had several responses that revealed strong emotional connections, meaningful activities and inclusive support as reasons why clients choose Embrace. This practicum not only deepened my understanding of the copious number of programs available for people with disabilities to choose from but also showed how meaningful relationships and receiving feedback from clients can improve these organizations. My project aimed to support Embrace in continuing to grow as a responsive, client-centered program while strengthening its ties with the Calgary community. Hopefully, my project is a seed for companies like Embrace to bloom into places where people with disabilities want to be a part of.

BROWN, Cassidy

Adaptive Mountain Sports for Women+

During my placement with Rocky Mountain Adaptive, I took the responsibility of coordinating two camps for women+ with disabilities, each consisting of four days of winter activities. By taking on this role, I was able to collaborate with a variety of team members to understand the logistics that occur behind-the-scenes when program planning. I also had the privilege of participating as a volunteer on other programs that supported people with disabilities in learning and developing their skills in adaptive alpine skiing. When volunteering on the alpine skiing days of each camp, I was able to implement the skills I developed volunteering on other programs and see my plans come to life.

Through these experiences, I was able to see how much of an impact running these camps had on the participants. Programs at Rocky Mountain Adaptive allow for flexibility and one-on-one support for people who need it, which is often difficult to find. Due to this difficulty, I have begun to understand the importance of advocating for minority groups to have access to adaptive sport. Every person should have an environment where they feel safe to learn, develop their skills, and, most importantly, have fun. This practicum has taught me how I can support people with disabilities in their endeavours of adaptive mountain sport, both in running and coordinating programs.

CADAWENG, Jayvis

Management and Service on an Adult Day Program

This practicum reflection explores my experience at an Adult Day Program (ADP) serving seniors, with a primary focus on developing leadership and managerial skills while maintaining direct client engagement. Throughout my placement, I worked closely with my manager, shadowing their role to gain insights into program coordination, staff supervision, and decision-making processes. This experience provided me with a deeper understanding of the responsibilities involved in managing community-based programs and the importance of adaptability, problem-solving, and effective communication in leadership. At the same time, my hands-on work with clients reinforced the significance of person-centered care, social inclusion, and advocacy in senior support services. By balancing both leadership training and direct client interaction, I developed a well-rounded skill set that will prepare me for future roles in community rehabilitation and disability support. This reflection celebrates the achievements, challenges, and transformative lessons that have shaped my practicum journey and my aspirations as a future leader in the field.

CEDILLA, Nichole

Creating an Inclusive and Empowering Space for Individuals with Autism

Inclusion and empowerment are essential in creating supportive and accessible environments for individuals with disabilities. Inclusion ensures that everyone has the opportunity to fully participate, while empowerment focuses on fostering confidence, independence, and self-advocacy. My practicum at Autism Aspergers Friendship Society (AAFS) has provided valuable learnings into fostering inclusion and empowerment for individuals with autism. This presentation explores the different ways AAFS create an inclusive and empowering environment, and how this practicum has strengthened my skills in adaptability, communication, and facilitation.

CENEK, Cassandra

Building a Student Community of Practice for Health Equity Research

As part of my senior practicum in Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies (CRDS), I developed and facilitated a student-led Community of Practice (CoP) to support peers engaged in equity-focused research through the Health Equity Hub. This initiative was created in response to feedback from students expressing a need for peer support while conducting community-based research, especially in navigating the unique challenges and joys of working through an equity lens.

The CoP includes undergraduate and graduate students from the Community Health Sciences departments, whose research projects span food security, inclusive research, and health equity. We meet weekly to share experiences, discuss research progress, exchange resources, and support one another through academic and interpersonal challenges. A key focus of our conversations has been

addressing the power imbalance between student researchers and faculty, particularly around communication, seeking support, and managing self-doubt.

Beyond peer mentorship, we are co-developing tools for knowledge translation, including templates for research summaries and policy briefs. To better understand the value and effectiveness of this initiative, I am currently evaluating the CoP through individual interviews with members. These interviews aim to explore student experiences and identify key factors contributing to a successful, equity-oriented CoP. This initiative enhances student research experiences and contributes to the emerging literature on communities of practice in higher education. By centring student voices, the CoP fosters collaboration, connection, and a supportive environment for those navigating equity-focused, community-engaged research.

CHAO, Ruby

The Role of Empathy, Flexibility, and Professional Boundaries in Peer Mentoring

During my practicum as a peer mentor in CORE 209 (CORE 594) and CORE 207 (CORE 595), I had the privilege of working with first-year students in the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program, guided by Dr. Edwards and Dr. DesJardine. Throughout this experience, I learned invaluable lessons about empathy, professional boundaries, and flexibility. In CORE 594, I discovered that empathy goes beyond just offering academic guidance. When I received a blank document from a student, it taught me to see the person behind the assignment and recognize that personal challenges can impact academic work. This lesson in empathy allowed me to offer compassionate yet constructive feedback. In CORE 595, I learned the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. When a student confided in me about experiencing bullying, I realized that while offering emotional support was important, I also had to remain objective and fair in my academic evaluations. Professional boundaries ensured that I provided support without compromising the fairness and integrity of my evaluations. Lastly, I learned the importance of flexibility when mentoring first-year students, each of whom had distinct needs and learning preferences. Flexibility, whether in the form of modified lesson plans or tailored comments, allowed me to foster an environment where students felt encouraged and empowered to succeed. These lessons in empathy, professional boundaries, and flexibility are not only fundamental to mentoring but will guide my future career as a psychologist, where providing a compassionate, ethical, and adaptable space for clients will be essential to fostering their growth.

CHARRON, Shouko

Beyond Teaching: Mentorship as a Path to Growth

Mentorship is often viewed as a one-way process, with an experienced individual guiding someone less experienced. However, it's truly a mutual learning journey where both mentor and mentee evolve together. As a peer mentor in my senior practicum, I have seen how mentorship extends beyond academic instruction. In CORE 209, I helped design tutorials and assignments, fostering student engagement with Disability Studies theories, critical thinking, and peer collaboration. I provided feedback, held office hours, and created a supportive space for students. In CORE 207, I guided students

through their first practicum, addressing challenges, answering emails, and leading reflective seminars. Mentorship was not just about offering guidance. At times, it meant advocacy. When a student struggled to secure placement hours due to communication delays, I recognized her efforts and reached out to our instructor to explore accommodations. Through these experiences, I've learned the importance of patience, flexibility, and meeting students where they are. The most rewarding aspect has been the ongoing communication. I now receive multiple emails every week from students, which reassures me that I have built a space where they feel safe to ask me for help. Mentorship is not just about teaching. It is about growth, advocacy, and connection. And in supporting others, I have grown alongside them.

CHAUDHARY, Nyala

Reflections on Radical Mental Health: Bridging Practice and Research

My practicum with the Radical Mental Health Doula (RMHD) Project at the University of Calgary was a unique blend of direct support and community-based research. I first trained as a Radical Mental Health Doula, working directly with individuals seeking non-traditional mental health support. This hands-on experience deepened my understanding of how doulas build relationships, offer care, and adapt to the needs of those they support. Later, I transitioned into the research phase, analyzing data collected from both working mental health doulas and the individuals they served. My initial research question, "What is a Radical Mental Health Doula?", evolved as I engaged with the data, uncovering key themes such as individualized check ins and the impact of peer-based, non-pathologizing care. This presentation will explore my key learnings from both practice and research, emphasizing the interplay between lived experience, qualitative inquiry, and the evolving nature of radical mental health support.

CHOW, Winsome

Embracing New Perspectives in Familiar Work

The Alzheimer's Society's Club36 Adult Day Program acts as a space for participants to engage in meaningful social interaction, while creating and fostering new friendships, in a safe and welcoming environment some call their second home. The significance of Club36 lies within its connection to the community. Having strong relationships with families, the staff exemplifies the importance and power of giving support to families experiencing and navigating caregiving those with a life changing diagnosis - a first for some. Having the opportunity to witness, interact, engage, and converse with front-line staff on supporting individuals with Alzheimer's, including interaction with members themselves, exposed me to new perspectives in what it means to be a service provider. Embracing putting oneself in uncomfortable situations provides opportunity to gain new perspectives and purpose in familiar tasks.

COHEN, Hannah

Responsive Research: Understanding Coercive Control through a Critical Disability Studies Lens

Coercive control, a pattern of behaviour that is fundamental to domestic violence, abusive relationships and cults, is not yet recognized as a criminal offence within Canada. Sagesse is an organization committed to abuse prevention, intervention and advocacy. Throughout this practicum, I have had the privilege of working with the Sagesse team on a research project led by Andrea Silverstone, examining experiences of the psychological impacts of coercive control across different contexts in order to enhance knowledge delivery for informing policy change in Canada. My role as a research assistant has included looking at how coercive control intersects with disability and applying a critical disability studies lens to the analysis of existing literature, lived experiences, and current coercive control legislation. This work aims to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay of personal, social, and political factors that contribute to the marginalization of survivors.

COOK, Mattie

Bridging Barriers: Navigating Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Readiness

Employment can be a crucial step toward stability and independence, yet many individuals face significant barriers in their job search. My practicum at Lifemark Health Group, specifically within the Empower program and WCB Re-Employment Services, has focused on addressing these challenges by providing job readiness support and essential resources. This experience gave me valuable insight into employment services, job search strategies, and vocational rehabilitation. This presentation will explore my practicum journey, the skills I have developed, and how I plan to continue supporting individuals in overcoming employment barriers and achieving long-term success.

COUILLARD, Anna

Inward Reflection to Outward Dissemination: A Radical Mental Health Doula Approach to Mental Health Care and Research

My practicum with the Radical Mental Health Doula (RMHD) Project was a reflective and personally growing experience. This project introduced me to a completely different approach to mental health care, centered around comfort, support, advocacy, and education. In my training to become an RMHD, I was challenged to subvert the power imbalances of traditional mental health support and lean into radically client-centred care. This involved recognizing my community's needs and creatively sharing the project with others on campus. In my second semester, this training led into research, as I took on a research paper and knowledge translation project to raise awareness of the RMHD approach. Not only was I encouraged to abandon prior mainstream approaches to mental health research, but I was also empowered to apply RMHD principles to the research process through the Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology. With the PAR framework, I was able to reflectively and critically analyze literature, data, and my own biases affecting my effectiveness as a researcher. With this knowledge, I created a draft research article exploring the applications of the RMHD approach to addiction support. I also

created a reflective knowledge translation project, in which I shared my experiences as an RMHD practitioner and researcher in this emerging field. Ultimately, the RMHD project supported me to analyze the blind spots in my own support and research strategies, thus allowing me to effectively disseminate the promising features of the RMHD project with the University of Calgary community.

DALGETTY, Mckayla

Enhancing Accessibility for Autistic Individuals Through Sensory Guides

My presentation will review the work I accomplished during my time at the Autism Aspergers Friendship Society (AAFS). My project aimed to develop a comprehensive sensory guide to enhance the accessibility and inclusivity of outings organized by AAFS. Some activities can be overstimulating or unsuitable for neurodivergent individuals due to sensory sensitivities, making my project essential for the organization. The guide categorizes sensory experiences based on the five senses, including both a rating system and detailed descriptions of the expected stimuli. Additionally, it provides important information regarding cognitive and physical demands, such as the required attention span, endurance for activities, and the availability of quiet spaces for breaks from stimulation. It is designed to assist members, parents, caregivers, and community partners in making informed decisions about outings while fostering accessible environments. Ultimately, this project serves as a valuable resource for creating a more accessible and participant-centered approach to community outings, ensuring that every individual has the opportunity to engage in experiences that cater to their sensory needs. This presentation will further discuss my practicum experience at AAFS and my key takeaways throughout completing my CRDS degree.

DANAO, Lhanz

Aging with Connection: Why Social Opportunities Matter for Seniors

My practicum with the Calgary Seniors Resource Society has deepened my understanding of senior isolation and the importance of social connection. Through phone conversations, I heard how social isolation affects their well-being. Many seniors expressed a desire for companionship—someone to talk to, share coffee with, or simply enjoy meaningful interactions. These experiences reinforced my belief that fostering social opportunities is essential. The Programs offered by the organization like friendly visiting and phone friends can significantly improve seniors' quality of life. Connection isn't just beneficial—it's vital. Strengthening these initiatives can create a more inclusive and supportive community for aging individuals.

DEKKER, Cassidy

Autism Community Training: The Social Side of Embracing Neurodivergence

ACT – Autism Community Training is a not-for-profit research-based community resource regarding autism. ACT's supports, though intentionally targeting BC services, extend beyond provincial borders through their online presence. Hosting workshops, certifications, and seminars are few of the ways ACT addresses specific topics about autism; however, their many digital platforms also provide a multitude of free resources. My role with ACT began in digital accessibility and later transitioned into content creation and management of the company's four social media platforms. I furthered ACT's mission by creating digital content that highlighted ACT's values, specifically sharing neuro-affirming and informative posts, along with community-based event updates under the guidance of the executive director. This internship grew my appreciation for the Autistic community's lived experience, advocacy, and acceptance of diversity. Through ACT-hosted events I have begun to understand and develop my own executive functioning skills and have broadened my understanding of why language matters.

DIOSO, Karla

Fostering Inclusion for Learner with Diverse Learning Needs within a Tutoring Program

Inclusion in education goes beyond access, it is about ensuring that every learner has the support, strategies, and resources needed to thrive. At Kids Cancer Care, my practicum experience has centred on fostering inclusive learning environments for children with diverse needs, particularly those affected by cancer treatment. A key focus of my role has been developing the Pathways to Progress toolkit, a resource designed to equip tutors with strategies and tools to recognize and address learning barriers, fostering more inclusive and effective tutoring sessions.

In addition to resource development, I provided one-on-one tutoring for a young learner, adapting teaching methods to meet their individual needs. Through this hands-on experience, I gained insight into the importance of flexibility, empathy, and targeted support in education. I also participated in monthly Tutor Collaboration sessions, reinforcing the idea that inclusion is a shared responsibility that benefits from collective learning and problem-solving.

Key takeaways from my practicum include the importance of collaboration in enhancing educational outcomes, the need for adaptability when supporting learners with diverse needs, and the value of accessible resources in creating inclusive learning environments. Through this practicum, I have deepened my understanding of inclusive education, developed practical skills in resource development and individualized instruction, and strengthened my commitment to advocating for equitable learning opportunities for all learners.

DODD, Teryn

Education and Integration of Wellness Care

My time at Frami Chiropractic & Wellness has granted me the opportunity to immerse myself into the world of wellness care and the benefits it can provide. My target and main project for my practicum experience was to focus on education of the community and those around me as to how the different services at Frami could benefit people of the disability community. I primarily focused on addressing the stigma surrounding the services, particularly massage therapy, where misconceptions about vulnerability and discomfort prevent people with disabilities from seeking care. To address this, I worked with the massage therapist to build trust and connections with disability groups in Calgary, ensuring individuals felt comfortable and informed about how massage can be provided in a safe, respectful manner. This initiative aimed to empower people with disabilities to access services that could improve their quality of life. By utilizing education, we worked on providing insight to those who may not have access to proper information on the world of wellness care and the benefits it can have for them and their journey. Additionally, the practicum provided me with valuable insights into my future career path as a chiropractor by having the opportunity to follow and work alongside the Doctors on a daily to gain beneficial experiences on the practice.

DOMONDON, Jasper

Teaching is No Easy Business

Janus Academy is a school that provides high-quality education to autistic students through their well-trained staff and the modified Alberta curriculum. My project as a practicum student while working there was to help establish the Lego Lab as well prepare to implement the new Alberta Social Studies curriculum (K-6) for the upcoming Fall year. These two projects have opened my eyes as to how complex the school system is and how there are many different ways to contribute to a student's education outside of the classroom setting. My presentation will discuss what specific insights and skills I have obtained from this wonderful practicum opportunity.

DYCK, Jarrod

Literature Review of Bias in the Child Welfare System

Through my placement with Dr. Meaghan Edwards and Dr. Katrina Milaney, I, alongside Hamin John, were involved with several larger projects, including a literature review. The literature review focused on the biases that exist within Alberta's child protection services (CPS) and the intersections between CPS and families experiencing homelessness. Utilizing an institutional ethnography lens, we analyzed literature related to key Alberta policies, including the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, Child and Youth Advocate Act, Protection of Sexually Exploited Children Act, Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act, Drug-Endangered Children Act, Child First Act, and the Protection Against Family Violence Act. The goal was to understand trends and themes highlighting key biases in the current system, creating undesirable outcomes for many families and youth. We found that while these policies

aim to safeguard children, they often fall short in practice, disproportionately affecting Indigenous, racialized, and disabled children. There were several findings, but three key themes were required throughout the literature. The first significant issue is the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and families involved in the system. Second, vague and inconsistent policy language has resulted in suboptimal implementation and action by groups governed by those policies. Lastly, the literature highlighted limited support for youth aging out of care. In conclusion, we found that a greater investment is needed in sustainable and culturally appropriate proactive support, to help families before intervention is required.

ELBITAR, Rana

The Impact of Cultural and Community Connections in the Healing Journey of Indigenous Women

Indigenous individuals are overrepresented in the Canadian judicial system, with Indigenous women making up approximately 50% of the female prison population. The Elizabeth Fry Society is a community-based organization dedicated to supporting Indigenous individuals on their healing journeys, with a particular focus on criminalized Indigenous women and youth. Operating from a restorative justice lens, informed by Indigenous natural laws, the organization nurtures resilience, healing, and growth in its clients. During my practicum at the Elizabeth Fry Society, much of my work involved data entry for various cultural programs and supports. This provided insight into the clients' experiences as they navigated these programs and deepened my appreciation for the role of culture and community in promoting wellness and resilience. Additionally, I conducted a program review of SAGE, their emotional wellness and employment readiness program. Grounded in cultural values, SAGE aims to empower criminalized Indigenous women as they pursue employment, education, and training. Throughout my time there, I learned the profound importance of cultural and community connections in fostering identity, well-being, and pride in one's Indigenous heritage. This experience gave me the privilege of learning more about the Indigenous community in Calgary and reinforced the value of culturally tailored approaches in supporting individuals on their healing journeys.

FLORES GONZALEZ, Larissa

Adapting for Inclusion: My Role at Cerebral Palsy Kids and Families

This presentation highlights my practicum experience at Cerebral Palsy Kids and Families (CPKF), a non-profit organization that supports children with cerebral palsy (CP) and their families. CPKF is known for creating adapted programs for its members and providing families with resources they may need to navigate a CP diagnosis. One of CPKF's core values is inclusion, and I got to support that by participating in programs such as The Adapted Bike Program and Learn 2 Ride and helping coordinate events. The Adapted Bike Program modifies bikes to make them accessible, and the Learn 2 Ride program uses adapted games to help kids learn how to ride their bikes and have fun in a supportive environment.

Participating in these hands-on experiences led me to apply the social model of disability, which shifts the focus away from individual impairments to addressing environmental barriers. Additionally, my involvement in event planning allowed me to assess accessibility, implement inclusive games, and

gather family feedback to improve future programming. The programs demonstrate how adapted activities and environments can foster inclusion and empowerment. This practicum deepened my understanding of accessibility advocacy, inclusive program design, and family-centred care, which will shape my future career in occupational therapy.

FORTIER, Lauren

Creating Meaningful Spaces: Eric's House Day Facility

Inclusive spaces are essential in ensuring that individuals of all abilities have opportunities for growth, connection, and engagement. Eric's House is a day program dedicated to supporting adults with disabilities by providing a safe, structured, and enriching environment. My practicum experience focused on facilitating activities that promote social connection, independence, and personal development. I engaged with clients in a variety of adapted activities, including arts and crafts, music sessions, cooking, and movement-based exercises. Also assisting in community outings, which provided meaningful opportunities for clients to build confidence and interact with the broader world. A significant aspect of my practicum involved updating and organizing client profiles, which deepened my understanding of person-centered care. Beyond learning about each individual's diagnosis, preferences, and support needs, I came to understand them as whole individuals, their personalities, interests, and the unique qualities that make them who they are. This experience reinforced the idea that true support goes beyond accommodations, it involves recognizing each person's strengths and fostering an environment where they feel valued and understood. By focusing on meaningful engagement and individualized support, programs like Eric's House create spaces where individuals feel a sense of belonging and fulfillment.

FRANK, Kate

The Simple Joy of Riding a Bike: An Effort of Social Inclusion

During my CRDS Senior Practicum at Cerebral Palsy Kids and Families (CPKF) in Calgary, I had the opportunity to engage with their Adapted Bike program, which is designed to provide children with disabilities the chance to experience the joy of riding a bike. Specialized adapted bikes, which can cost upwards of \$600, are often financially inaccessible to families. CPKF addresses this barrier by offering these bikes for borrowing at a more affordable fee, ensuring that all children have access to the experience of cycling. The importance of the program goes beyond physical development; it's also about social inclusion. By providing opportunities for these children to participate in typical activities, we help foster a more inclusive and understanding community.

Throughout my practicum, I learned the importance of working closely with families to create tailored solutions and the need to evaluate the effectiveness of programs to ensure they meet the unique needs of each child. As I pursue a career in Occupational Therapy, this experience deepened my understanding of adaptation and collaboration, equipping me with the tools to help children with disabilities thrive.

FUNK, Jessica

Intersections of Period Poverty & Disability

Monthly Dignity is an organization working towards menstrual equity in Montreal. My work included conducting a literature review on the intersections of disability and menstruation, creating content to assist with disseminating this information, and collaborating with other similar organizations to increase accessibility of menstrual products and education. I've also been asked to speak on panels to highlight the unique needs of people who experience both disability and menstruation. Due to the remote nature of the placement, my student work has been highly independent and self-directed. This placement helped me see the scale of hidden obstacles faced by people with disabilities.

FURLONG, Anna

Modern Day Eugenics in Canada

In partnership with Dr. Alan Martino and the Disability and Sexuality Lab, this research explores the continuation of eugenic ideologies in the Canadian healthcare system. This study is conducted through the lens of current Canadian medical school students. Historically, Alberta and British Columbia enacted sexual sterilization legislation in 1928 and 1933 respectively, which resulted in the sexual sterilization of over 3,000 individuals deemed "genetically unfit." Both acts were repealed in the 1970s, though the question of whether these ideologies persist in the medical field today is still unknown. Most notably, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) stated that no forced or coerced sterilizations had occurred in Canada since 2010, this raises the question of whether these practices and beliefs are still ongoing today.

This study aims to answer the question, to what extent do eugenic ideologies persist amongst current Canadian medical school students. The target population size is approximately 150 students who are currently enrolled at accredited Canadian medical institutions. This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach, a focus group and an anonymous survey. The survey will collect demographic data, assess the participants knowledge of eugenics and assess beliefs towards sterilization and ethical practices.

The three main objectives of this study will be (1) to assess the awareness and understanding of eugenic ideologies amongst participants, (2) to identify potential biases and attitudes towards sterilization and healthcare ethics and (3) to explore the potential to implement eugenic education into medical school curriculum. Positive changes for marginalized communities begin at the foundation of healthcare providers education.

GABELO, Alaryz

Exploring Ability and Possibility: Enhancing Digital Accessibility in Marketing and Communications

As a practicum student in the Marketing and Communications department at Vecova with the motto *Exploring Ability and Possibility*, my primary role focused on Enhancing Digital Accessibility. Given that the organization's consumers have diverse abilities, I needed to approach all tasks with an inclusive and accessible mindset.

My work ensured that marketing materials, social media content, and digital communications were accessible to everyone, including people with diverse abilities. This meant paying attention to accessible design, direct and inclusive language, alternative text for images, captioned videos, and ensuring website content met accessibility standards.

Through this experience, I learned the importance of amplifying the voices of people with diverse abilities, aligning with the organization's mission to promote ability and possibility for everyone.

As a final thought, the core of my placement was advocacy. Ensuring that information is easily accessible to all. Breaking barriers means a space that is inclusive and equitable, where everyone can thrive!

GRANT, Grace

Faith and Empowerment: A Roadmap to Success for Families and People with Disabilities

The Disability Ministry within the Centre Street Church is dedicated to serving children, adults, and families who experience disability or whose lives have been touched by disability, offering support, skill building, and community connection. Each program is committed to providing participants opportunities to learn about religion and nurture a faithful relationship with God. Throughout my involvement at the church, I have strengthened interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication, recognizing the importance of building relationships informed by mutual understanding and empathy. I was challenged to take on leadership roles, building confidence and contributing to a greater sense of self-awareness. My practicum project focused on building a roadmap for families, outlining the stages and milestones of a child with a disabilities development and highlighting available funding, services, and supports at each stage, allowing me to gain a better understanding of the parents' perspective. In my presentation I will share how these experiences have contributed to my personal and professional growth, allowing me to engage more meaningfully in the community and be a better advocate for people with disabilities.

GRASHOF, Alisha

My Practicum Experience at VRA Canada

This presentation highlights my enriching experience during my practicum at the Vocational Rehabilitation Association of Canada (VRA Canada). Since 1970, VRA Canada has been a leading advocate for vocational rehabilitation professionals, supporting individuals facing employment

challenges. The organization is dedicated to fostering professional excellence through education, certification, and networking, while championing inclusive and equitable hiring practices.

During my placement, I had the opportunity to lead the Jobs Inventory project, a resource designed to help members explore diverse career paths in vocational rehabilitation. This project provides insights into employment-related roles, promotes networking, and encourages innovative approaches to supporting individuals with workplace barriers. Additionally, I participated in and facilitated Student Ambassador meetings and Membership Council discussions, further developing my leadership skills and understanding of VRA Canada's operations.

One of the most valuable aspects of this practicum was the opportunity to grow professionally in a self-directed, online environment. I honed essential skills such as time management, leadership, and creativity, all while gaining deeper insight into the field of vocational rehabilitation. Most importantly, this experience solidified my passion for helping individuals achieve their career goals. I am especially grateful for the support of my preceptor, whose guidance and encouragement made this journey even more impactful. This practicum has been transformative, reinforcing my dedication to vocational rehabilitation and inspiring me to continue making a difference in this field.

GUSTUM, Kara

The Importance of Social Networks in Providing Inclusive Experiences

My senior practicum placement specialized in community engagement specifically through outdoor tourism and adventure. I have been able to learn about the unique experience of individuals with neurodivergence and physical differences in outdoor recreation. I have also seen the importance of social networks in providing inclusive experiences. My learning experience has shown me that community engagement and social networks are essential in promoting inclusive opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Rocky Mountain Adaptive is a charity based out of Canmore that provides inclusive outdoor recreational activities to members of the bow valley community. Using adaptive techniques and equipment, RMA strives to provide people of all abilities equal opportunity to participate in activities beloved by many outdoor enthusiasts. As a person who appreciates the outdoors myself, as well as activities such as skiing, paddling and hiking, I was able to see how opportunities existed for me to use these passions of mine to harbor community development and connection.

It is important to recognize the financial strain participating in outdoor recreation can have on individuals. I recognized that often participating in outdoor tourism takes place due to financial privilege and within companies that provide outdoor tourism, few are accessible to individuals with disabilities. This practice has shown me the importance of social networks in economic support. Economic support is maintained through relationships with local businesses and members of the community. RMA hosts events like fundraisers to achieve this engagement and financial support. Local businesses will often sponsor events or make donations directly to RMA.

RMA also engages with their community in a social and educational way. RMA offers opportunities for members of the community to be present during activities such as ski lessons, paddling, hiking, and various camps. By providing opportunities for individuals to become involved in RMA, they are educating their community on disabilities and eliminating stigma that may be associated with people

with disabilities participating in certain activities. By doing this RMA is building a social network that supports inclusivity and individual differences.

GUZMAN, Luis

Bridging the Gap: A Guide for Families Navigating Disability Services

Navigating disability services can be overwhelming for families following a diagnosis. Many parents struggle with scattered information and unclear next steps, making it difficult to access the right support. My practicum at Renfrew Educational Services in Calgary has focused on addressing this gap by developing a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to help families navigate available resources more easily.

A key part of my work involved expanding Renfrew's existing cheat sheet of acronyms and definitions used in the social work model, ensuring both staff and families better understand complex systems and terms. I collaborated with Emily, and the social work team, to create a structured guide that simplifies service navigation, including funding applications, therapy options, and school accommodations. To enhance accessibility further, I researched online resource platforms, such as Children's Link, Easter Seals, FSCD - identifying best practices, formats, and sections for a digital extension of Renfrew's services on their website. Beyond this project, I've bonded with the children at Renfrew, witnessing both their challenges and victories. Seen how Renfrew operates on daily basis, the teamwork between staff, as well as the bond and impact they leave on the children.

This has deepened my understanding of what families truly need, not just services, but clarity, reassurance, and community support. This experience has reinforced my belief that healthcare must go beyond diagnosis. As a future family doctor, I aim to bridge the gap between medicine and disability support, ensuring families receive both medical care and the resources they need to thrive.

HAGER, Kiera

Strengthening Community Inclusion through Resource Development and Support

During my practicum placement with Inclusion Alberta, a family-based nonprofit federation advocating for individuals with intellectual disabilities and their families, I focused on resource development and creating recruitment and onboarding curricula for Family Managed Supports (FMS). Inclusion Alberta empowers families to navigate complex support systems and foster inclusive, meaningful lives for their loved ones. My work has addressed common challenges families face when hiring support staff, such as defining clear expectations, finding suitable candidates, and understanding their role in the recruitment and onboarding processes as employers. I contributed to improving job posting guidelines, interview strategies, and onboarding processes to help families confidently manage their teams. Additionally, I have worked to develop tools to assist families in planning for an inclusive life, including visioning worksheets and resources to define an inclusive life clearly. These tools help families create actionable plans for inclusion for their loved ones. To ensure the relevance of these resources, I conducted a thematic analysis of past family files to identify recurring concerns, such as difficulties in finding quality

staff, housing issues, and barriers to finding employment. This experience has been incredibly valuable in deepening my understanding of the complexities families face and the importance of well-designed support systems. The opportunity to contribute to these initiatives has been both enriching and eye-opening, deepening my knowledge of community engagement, strategic resource development, and the importance of accessible tools in creating lasting change.

HOOPER, Taylor

Supporting Children and Adults in Adaptive Sport and Play

Lacrossing Barriers is a community-based program which offers adults and children with disabilities a chance to participate in various sports. During the day program, activities include post-secondary learning, volunteering, and setting personal goals. Lacrossing Barriers offers various fitness opportunities during the evenings including boxing, dance, gymnastics, and lacrosse. As a practicum student, you can participate in all these different activities in a safe and comfortable environment.

As a student, my tasks included: assisting with evening events, supporting the visually impaired athletes in sport, conflict resolution, and interacting with the adults enrolled in the day program. If you are a student who wants independence, the day program offers various opportunities where you can host events, plan activities, and help with administrative duties. Some activities I participated in included: presenting, collecting equipment, applying for grants, creating employee forms, advertising, social media engagement, and networking. For my legacy project I created a “magazine” which is a handbook for employees, parents, students, and potential sponsors. This handbook includes the importance of adaptive sport, interactive play, and how Lacrossing Barriers is trying to accomplish this. This practicum has displayed the importance of community-based programming and grass-roots opportunities which I hope to carry into my future career as an Occupational Therapist.

JOHN, Hamin

Bridging Gaps: Policy and Budget Analyses Addressing Bias in Alberta’s Child Welfare and Homelessness Systems

For my practicum, I have been a part of a research project investigating systemic bias in Alberta’s child welfare system, particularly its intersection with homelessness. Indigenous and racialized families continue to be disproportionately represented in child protection services, raising critical questions about the role of existing policies and structural inequities. I worked alongside a multidisciplinary research team to examine these issues through a combination of policy and budget analyses. My contributions focused on reviewing eight policy analysis frameworks, with particular emphasis on the Social Determinants of Health and Cultural Competence frameworks. These perspectives helped illuminate how structural factors such as poverty, housing instability, and systemic racism shape family involvement with child welfare. They also highlighted the importance of cultural awareness and responsiveness in policy development and service delivery. In addition, I conducted a detailed budget analysis of financial documents and funding trends related to child welfare, child protection, and family services in Alberta. This component of the project asked critical questions about how and where

government resources are allocated: Are we investing in preventive, family-centered services, or perpetuating a system focused on surveillance and apprehension? This practicum has deepened my skills in critical thinking, policy evaluation, and knowledge translation. By engaging with complex policy documents and communicating findings with our research team and community partners, I have learned how evidence-informed advocacy can influence systems-level change. Ultimately, our goal is to support policy reform that is community-driven, culturally grounded, and equity-focused.

KARPALA, Sydney

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging for Inclusive Early Childhood Education

During my time at Providence Child Development, my classmate Marie and I have been tasked with creating an equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging (EDIB) training module for Providence's staff to easily find EDIB resources. Using our CRDS education and further research of EDIB we have been able to create a training folder that outlines who is on Providence's EDIB committee, educational resources provided by Sinneave Foundation, and accessibility features that each location of Providence provides such as universal design, gender-neutral washrooms, wheelchair lifts, and accessible seating options. Having this resource available to Providence's staff will be beneficial in the future to creating an inclusive and accessible work environment, and it can influence future policies or policy changes in the future. Throughout my practicum I have seen where each aspect of EDIB fits into the workplace. Equity is important to Providence ensuring that all staff get fair resources and support to succeed in the workplace. Diversity is important to Providence since this allows for an array of perspectives to enrich the workplace and help support their students who also come from diverse backgrounds. To bring all these diverse perspectives together and enrich the workplace, inclusion is an important aspect. Due to the stressful circumstances that Providence's staff can find themselves in, belonging is important to the community Providence has. Belonging creates a sense of support and safety amongst coworkers.

KELLY, Caris

The Bloom Experience: Your Guide to Adapted Dance

During my practicum at Bloom Wellness Collective, I gained valuable experience working with individuals with diverse needs through various programs to foster self-expression, connection, and personal growth. My primary focus was contributing to the adapted dance program, where I engaged directly with participants by providing 1:1 support. These moments allowed me to witness participants build confidence, improve social skills, and build resilience in an inclusive environment where they felt safe and supported.

Throughout the year, I took on multiple responsibilities, including creating and enhancing volunteer orientation materials, organizing community outings, and developing resources for newsletter and social media content creation. Collaborating with team members to ensure volunteer orientation materials were accessible, informative and engaging allowed me to refine my communication skills. I was particularly proud of my role in Bloom's volunteer orientation video. I contributed to content creation

and editing, highlighting key strategies and techniques to help future practicum students and volunteers feel better prepared to support participants.

This experience has strengthened my organizational skills and taught me to adapt my communication strategies to meet the diverse needs of participants. I have learned the power of connection; witnessing participants express themselves, form friendships, and celebrate their achievements has been incredibly rewarding. My time at Bloom has reinforced my passion for inclusive programming and deepened my commitment to fostering supportive environments where everyone can thrive. This experience has further inspired me to pursue a career where I can continue making a meaningful impact in community-based settings.

KHAN, Waliya

Building a Supportive Environment for First-Year Students' Growth and Success Through Peer Mentorship

During my practicum experience as a peer mentor for CORE 209 and CORE 207, I learned the connection between mentorship and student growth. These past two semesters I collaborated with instructors and four peer mentors to support academic development for first-year CRDS students. By modifying my teaching approach to align with each student's personal learning goals, I was able to offer individualised support to the students, while also advancing my leadership skills. I learned that the value of mentorship extends beyond the academic environment, impacting personal development and well-being. This practicum strengthened my understanding of the linkage between mentorship and student advocacy. My experience showed me the valuable role mentorship has in connecting students with instructors, resources, and tools for both academic and personal success. This was explored through the positive shift in student growth throughout the semester, including improved quality on assessments, increased engagement in class, and insightful discussion of CRDS teachings. My objective was to encourage creativity and a sense of community by providing a supportive learning environment. My practicum experience shaped my understanding, teaching me how mentorship promotes student growth, success, and well-being.

KILPATRICK, Kendyl

A Radical Research Project

The Radical Mental Health Doula (RMHD) project contrasts traditional, medicalized approaches to mental health care by offering peer-led, community-based support rooted in advocacy, education, and lived experience. For my practicum, I focused on the research side of the RMHD project. Specifically, how RMHDs could provide alternative addiction support, which we determined was a gap in the current literature. Drawing on qualitative data from interviews, we analyzed how doulas engage with clients experiencing addiction. Our preliminary findings suggest that RMHDs could fill a healthcare gap in addressing the stigma and structural barriers in addiction treatment by emphasizing relational, non-judgemental support over traditional clinical interventions.

This research has direct implications for my pursued career in Speech-Language Pathology (SLP). Effective communication is central to both addiction recovery and mental health support, yet individuals in crisis often struggle to express their needs due to trauma, impairments, or stigma. The RMHD model's focus on active listening, validation, and advocacy aligns with core SLP principles, truly highlighting the importance of accessible, inclusive healthcare. By integrating Radical Mental Health principles into my future practice, I can better support individuals with addiction and mental health challenges, ensuring their voices are heard when planning out treatment that directly impacts them. Through this practicum, I have gained insight into how interdisciplinary approaches can bridge gaps in healthcare. Moving forward, I aim to apply these learnings to the helping profession I enter.

KLINE, Sadie

Sustaining Care: The Intersection of Funding, Hands-On Support, and Community

At FACE Alberta (Families of Alberta for Conductive Education), I gained invaluable insight into the practice of Conductive Education and its profound impact on people with neuromotor disabilities. I not only learned about this unique program, but I also had the opportunity to directly support participants, learn new communication skills, and lead social programs. Through this, I built meaningful relationships and witnessed the importance of these programs that foster community, confidence, life skills, and a sense of belonging. Additionally, I went behind-the-scenes and learned the process and challenges of running a non-profit organization. I took on leadership in running a fundraiser event and writing grant applications, which opened my eyes to the harsh realities of securing funding - an essential element for FACE to continue to grow. Grant denials, high service costs, and financial uncertainty are constant obstacles. However, despite these difficulties, I saw the passion and dedication of families, staff, and the community. Parent testimonies, volunteer-driven collaboration, and the tangible growth in participants reminded me that there is still hope and abundant joy at FACE, and it's only going to continue to thrive! The resilience of this organization, fueled by the people it serves, highlighted the power of community support in sustaining and expanding essential programs like Conductive Education.

KOSZTE, Nicole

Inclusive Employment: Making Workplaces Accessible for individuals of all Abilities

Inclusive employment is about more than hiring diversely—it's about creating workplaces where all employees, regardless of ability, feel valued, supported, and empowered. This requires removing barriers, implementing accessible policies, and providing resources that enable every employee to thrive. Inclusive workplaces harness diverse talents, enhance team dynamics, and drive innovation.

MilkJar, a Calgary-based company, exemplifies this commitment by hiring individuals with disabilities and making yearly donations to inclusive non-profits supporting employment initiatives.

During my practicum, I contributed by researching employment barriers across Canada, the USA, Europe, and Australia and assisting in selecting the recipients of MilkJar's annual donation. I also developed a website section with tools for employers and job seekers, and helped staff implement

strategies for workplace independence. This experience reinforced the value of inclusion and its benefits for employees and organizations alike.

KROEGER, Kallie

Bridging Care and Development: Supporting Children with Disabilities Through Hands-On Learning at Pacekids

The word “disability” can feel overwhelming, especially when it concerns your child. At Pacekids, we provide the support, resources, and guidance families need to navigate this journey with confidence. Through early intervention, specialized therapies, and inclusive learning environments, we empower children to build essential skills while feeling valued and supported.

At Pacekids, I played a key role in planning the annual Care Conference, ensuring a seamless event that provided valuable professional development for staff. I also assisted in updating FSCD contracts, helping to streamline service agreements for families. Additionally, I had the opportunity to shadow occupational therapists, gaining firsthand insight into therapeutic interventions and multidisciplinary collaboration. These experiences deepened my understanding of disability services and reinforced my commitment to supporting children and families in meaningful ways.

LACSA, Queeniea

Discovering the Art of Teaching: Learning through the Students and Teachers

My journey at William Aberhart High School's ACCESS program shifted my perspective from disinterest to a deep passion for teaching. In an environment dedicated to inclusivity, I engaged with a diverse student body using various communication methods such as American Sign Language common phrases in languages like Somali, Mandarin, Cantonese, Spanish, and Tagalog, and various communication devices. This experience laid the groundwork for my development as an educator. I crafted lesson plans tailored to teach essential life skills, which were aligned with the students' Individualized Program Plans and focused on fostering independence after high school. Key projects included a grocery play setup for teaching money handling and a safety board for kitchen safety, both designed to promote practical skills and autonomy. Through close collaboration with teachers and education assistants, I ensured that my teaching strategies were effectively tailored to each student's learning needs. The impact of these efforts led me to compile all my lesson plans and activities into a comprehensive folder for future reference. This transformational experience solidified my commitment to education and highlighted the profound impact teaching has on students' lives. Motivated by these insights, I will now be pursuing an after-degree in elementary education, eager to continue making a meaningful difference.

LOEPPKY, Madi

Moving with Joy: Adaptive Dance for Cerebral Palsy Kids & Families

Throughout my practicum at Cerebral Palsy Kids & Families, I had the opportunity to develop my leadership skills while simultaneously embracing and experiencing the joy that accompanies the opportunity for kids with disabilities to participate in meaningful movement. As the volunteer dance team lead for the adaptive dance program, I played a pivotal role in volunteer coordination, program facilitation, and administrative support. I cultivated leadership within this role by providing coaching and training, communicating with families, and evaluating program effectiveness.

The most fulfilling element of my role was witnessing the pure joy and growth of the participants as they engaged in movement through dance, gained confidence, and fostered meaningful connections with volunteers. I facilitated the classes by creating pairings between volunteers and children based on their personalities and individual needs, which enhanced my behaviour management and inclusive programming skills. Beyond my position within the adaptive dance program, I contributed to various community initiatives through CP Kids & Families which were also of great importance to my learning of leadership and collaboration skills.

During my time with CP Kids & Families, I learned that leadership requires more than managing tasks. It also requires a commitment to fostering an environment where both participants and volunteers feel empowered and valued. This practicum shaped my perspective on leadership as a tool to create meaningful impact, leaving me with a deep appreciation for relationship building and shared joy found in accessible and engaging experiences for children and families.

MACPHAIL, Alyssa

Sensory Guide and Community Outings

My time at The Autism and Aspergers Friendship Society (AAFS) has been incredibly valuable and significant to my learning. I gained first-hand experience working alongside and with individuals on the neurodivergence spectrum. During my time there, I participated in weekly community outings with individuals ages ranging from 4 to 54 years old, focusing on meaningful interactions and intentional physical movement within society and organizations. These community outings have provided insightful lessons on the sensory stimulus that neurotypical individuals, like me, might overlook in daily life. Sensory stimuli can significantly impact an individual with autism's well-being and cause dysregulation of their nervous system. Community outings provide a safe and positive environment for members to experience and improve social skills within society. This enables myself and others to engage, facilitate, and observe meaningful experiences for the members.

MANKO, Callie

Rethinking Learning: Inclusive and Tailored Curriculum for Engaged Learning

Janus Academy is a school for children with autism, aimed toward lifelong community integration and the maximization of each student's individual potential. When I began my practicum at Janus Academy, I was unsure of what to expect and had limited experience in technological demands used in the project, but immediately dove straight into curriculum adjustment. This included bringing research-supported supplementary material that was tailored to each students' interests and needs for teachers, and adjusting assessment language at my judgement to meet the needs of Janus Academy students. In my time at Janus Academy, I had the opportunity to make meaningful relationships and build trust with staff in collaborating to produce new curriculum assessments. These assessments were built based on material provided by the Alberta government, and later evolved the addition of engaging in class activities that inspired students to learn. I gained an abundance of knowledge in the area of curriculum adjustment and modification, and the countless steps taken at Janus Academy to ensure students have learning resources tailored to each of them for their best success. The systems used at Janus Academy in educating students follow Alberta Education Curriculum, all while making learning fun, engaging, and accessible to all students. Through this, I learned to think outside the box and give a new meaning to education and learning, with a focus on each individual student and their personal goals.

MATUGUINA, Juliette

Enhancing Accessibility: On-Demand Video Modules for Family Resource Support

In collaboration with the Family Resource Centre at Easter Seals Alberta (ESA), I developed accessible, AI-assisted step-by-step video modules designed to assist families and caregivers in navigating applications such as PDD, AISH, PUF, equipment donation, programs, and specialized services. After speaking with several families on the waiting list to become clients, many of whom struggled with the jargon and complexity of application forms, I decided to create on-demand video resources that provide clear guidance to help bridge information gaps. This project hoped to offer families a convenient resource they can access anytime, whether in preparation for a workshop or as a refresher afterwards. As a practicum student with little prior knowledge of the challenges families face after receiving a diagnosis, I initially felt overwhelmed. However, through this project, I aimed to simplify the process and reduce the stress families experience when seeking crucial support. These video modules will be especially beneficial for newcomers to Canada and families navigating a recent diagnosis, empowering them with clear, accessible guidance.

MCKAY, Brooklyn

Insight into a Nonprofit Organization's Operations: Event Planning, Activity Preparation, and PECS Cards

Have you ever wondered what goes on behind the scenes at a nonprofit organization? Throughout my practicum at the Autism Aspergers Friendship Society (AAFS) I had the privilege to learn about how they

operate. I was able to work behind-the-scenes, getting to learn how they put together events and programs. Over the course of my practicum, I assisted AAFS in planning three events: The AAFSies (staff award ceremony), Emerging Artism (celebration of neurodivergent visual artists, performers, and AAFS Movie Project), and World Autism Awareness Day in Cochrane (raising awareness and celebrating autism). The 'bread and butter' of AAFS is their programs. However, there is a lot of work that goes into these programs to make sure they run smoothly. I was able to prepare various activities for rural programs in both Cochrane and Airdrie. Additionally, I worked on improving their Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS) cards for their workout program Stepping Out. In my presentation, I will dive into more detail about the behind-the-scenes operations I worked on at AAFS (event planning, activity preparation, and PECS cards) and discuss the skills I learned from them.

MCLEOD, Kaitlyn

Better Late Than Never: A Late Diagnosis of ADHD

This project, developed in collaboration with Bonnyville's Family and Community Support Services (FCSS), focused on supporting individuals with a late diagnosis of ADHD. Originally designed as an in-person program, the group was adapted into a virtual format due to low rural attendance. The new structure consisted of pre-recorded educational sessions paired with an anonymous group chat, allowing participants to engage on their own time while fostering community and connection.

The group follows a three-phase approach: Educate, Relate, and Validate. The educate sessions provide foundational knowledge on ADHD, executive functioning, and emotional regulation. The relate sessions explore personal experiences, including relationships, workplace challenges, and undiagnosed childhood struggles. The validate sessions focus on the importance of self-compassion and self-care, reframing ADHD as a strength, and embracing diagnosis as a form of liberation.

What makes this group unique is its balance between science-backed research, professional expertise, and real-life experiences, providing not only practical tools but also emotional validation. By sharing and including my own lived experience with a late diagnosis of ADHD, I have been able to create a space that prioritizes both understanding and empowerment. This project highlights the importance of community-based support, the value of lived experiences, and accessible approaches to neurodivergent education.

MITTS, Raelene

Neurodiversity Initiative: Supporting U of C Students with Resources that Support Them

In my practicum, I identified the current limitations of study spaces that do not meet the needs of neurodivergent students who use voice-to-text tools and brought this to the attention of the Neurodiversity Initiative connected to the Taylor Institute and was supported. One of my main roles was working and connecting with staff, faculties and student services to illustrate and inform the barriers and hardships of open spaces and voice-to-speech technology. I saw the need for change and was able to act on bringing forward a network that allowed me to be connected with Kendra ... , from the kinesiology alumni class of 2022. I was able to use her product, ZenZero Study Pods to focus on adapting

technology for our campus and better support neurodivergent students. I addressed the combined problematic issues of over 157 different types of study spaces on campus, yet none of them allow for voice-to-text, as our environments are either quiet zones or open study, which are both met with limitations. During my time on this project, I was able to inform and make an impact on current and future students and how this method of learning is needed and provides greater success for them to meet their educational goals. I brought forward research that shows there are many barriers to overall accessibility on post-secondary campuses. Currently, my involvement with this initiative examines accessibility for neurodivergent students to have more awareness and support provided to them from the main university campus.

MOLNAR, Cheldynn

AdaptAbility brings the Spirit of Inclusion: A Model for Family-Centered Support

AdaptAbility serves as a unique center where individuals can interact with tools and equipment that have the potential to transform their daily lives. The store removes traditional barriers by creating an environment that promotes exploration and education. It makes access to essential accommodations and products more manageable for those navigating the complexities of disability.

A perfect example occurred during the busy Christmas season when AdaptAbility hosted its first-ever Sensory-Friendly Santa event. This event allowed children with complex needs and their families to participate in a cherished holiday tradition in a stress-free and understanding environment. They were able to experience the magic of Christmas without the overwhelming stimuli or pressures that often accompany such events.

This project underscored the importance of creating inclusive spaces that acknowledge and address the challenges that are largely misunderstood. Seeing the parents' quick relief in this environment reaffirmed the need for more intentional spaces that accommodate individual needs. Inspired by this experience, I am committed to exemplifying the principles of family-centred care, fueled by a genuine enthusiasm for bringing people together.

NGUYEN, Annie

Identifying Priorities from Alberta's Disability Service Providers on Sexuality and Disability

Sexuality is a fundamental human right, yet for individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, it is often overlooked or inadequately supported. This research sheds light on the barriers that disability service providers face when addressing sexuality and relationships in Alberta. Through a survey of 16 service providers, we uncovered startling gaps: many organizations do not offer formal training on sexuality, and policies around sexual expression and relationships are unclear or nonexistent. This leaves staff unprepared to navigate sensitive conversations about consent, sexual health, and privacy. Major challenges include discomfort discussing sexuality, balancing individual rights with family concerns, and the absence of expert resources. However, providers were clear on what they needed: more structured training, clearer policies, access to sexual health professionals, and peer support

networks. By addressing these gaps, we can empower service providers to help individuals with disabilities explore their sexuality with dignity and autonomy. This research not only highlights the urgent need for better education and policies but also offers actionable recommendations to improve support, ensuring that individuals with disabilities have the same opportunity to experience healthy, respectful relationships as anyone else.

NITSCHKE, Anne

Focusing on Accessibility in Technology

Technology has improved quickly and significantly in the last few decades. It is hard to keep with new technology as someone who has grown up with it and has the resources to understand how to use it. Now imagine that you didn't grow up with it and don't have the resources to understand how to use it easily. March of Dimes Canada (MODC) has tech programs and projects that are trying to mitigate this situation. There are many programs through MODC that help people with or without disabilities who need help with most anything related to making technology more accessible to the individual. This could mean, teaching them how to use Email, Microsoft Word or how to make a device useful to fit someone's disability. Throughout my year with MODC I have learned about how to make technology not only usable to people unfamiliar with technology but also accessible.

The projects I have worked on this year have helped me to learn how programs and devices that are advertised as accessible are not always accessible for many people. Our society is modernizing quickly and it has been important to see, learn and understand who we are leaving behind by modernizing this quickly. My practicum with MODC has taught me that we need programs that make technology inclusive if we are going to insist that it be a major part of our lives.

OBIAGU, Ogoma

Navigating Funding Challenges in the Charitable Sector

Programs for people with disabilities are constantly underfunded, however, there continues to be challenges in securing funding and grant opportunities for disability-specific programs. Without the appropriate funding, people with disabilities can experience a lack of important services and resources such as, employment, recreation, and community engagement. Additionally, a decrease in essential programs or a building closure can also occur. The lack of funding can be due to overreliance or lack of government support, as well as more competition for grants due to an increased number of applications. It is evident that funding is key for the longevity and maintenance of programs for people with disabilities and it is challenging to navigate the complexities of securing regular funding and grants.

Through research, analysis and outreach, charities and nonprofit organizations like Vecova, can diversify their funding sources to include local businesses and other organizations by creating collaborative partnerships that can benefit both parties. It is crucial not to over rely on government funding and instead seek other creative funding alternatives. Furthermore, it is important to maintain and expand the donor relationships that have already been established and create more opportunities for donors to

support initiatives that are offered at Vecova. Having a good relationship with donors can also encourage them to donate more often and support Vecova's programs. Ultimately, securing funding requires collaborative relationships within the community, as well as alternative external support.

ODETOLA, David

Building a student led community of practice

Community is an integral part of student well being. In building our community of practice we aimed to not only give students a space where they felt welcome and accommodated, but to also have an opportunity to share ideas and struggles with people who understood their unique perspective. Our community of practice consists exclusively of undergraduate students conducting health equity research at the O'Brien Institute and was created as a means of addressing the support needs of undergraduate students. In order to better understand what aspect of the community of practice could be improved we decided to conduct interviews with the students in the community of practice. Our reasoning for interviewing the students as undergraduates ourselves is to address the power imbalance between students and professors which I hypothesize can constitute a form of hermeneutical injustice. After conducting the interviews, we will conduct a thematic analysis that will either falsify or fail to falsify the hypothesis. In either case, we hope that the thematic analysis will allow us to provide valid suggestions for student led communities of practices going forward.

OGUNSEYE, Abidemi

Best Practices in Collaborative Client Care Documentation – Ensuring Accuracy, Clarity, and Completeness

Above and Beyond Care (ABC) is a residential home that supports individuals with disabilities, helping them develop greater independence through various activities, including volunteering. During my practicum, I had the opportunity to work with the client care department, which involved extensive documentation. This documentation serves as progress reports for parents or guardians, ensuring that clients are receiving proper care and attention.

Collaborative client care documentation is crucial for maintaining high-quality, efficient, and safe care across multiple providers and disciplines. It acts as a legal record, facilitates continuity of care, enables research, and serves as a communication tool among professionals. Proper documentation ensures that clients receive consistent, high-quality care while also protecting both the organization and the professionals involved.

One of my key learnings throughout this experience has been the importance of a structured daily care plan and weekly reporting. A well-organized daily care plan allows for personalized and consistent care, while weekly reports offer valuable insights to enhance long-term outcomes. Together, they contribute to improving the quality, efficiency, and effectiveness of client care services.

My experience at ABC pushed me to be more assertive, detail-oriented, and prompt in my documentation practices. The relationships I built with the staff have made a lasting impact on me, shaping how I approach my professional practice moving forward.

OLIVARES, Laura

From Peer to Leader in Disability Studies

My practicum experience as a peer mentor within the Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies program provided an opportunity to bridge academic gaps and foster inclusive learning environments for first-year students. Initially, I focused on offering support through university transitions, but I quickly realized that mentorship is more than simply offering academic guidance; it is about adapting to meet students where they are and scaffolding learning to make complex concepts accessible and relatable. A defining moment came during a tutorial where my fellow peer mentors and I recognized the gaps in students' understanding of disability studies concepts. By overcoming our academic biases, we implemented structured writing tools and mind maps to enhance student engagement and comprehension.

This experience shaped my personal goals as I entered the next phase of my practicum journey: strengthening public speaking, refining constructive feedback, developing conflict resolution skills, and stepping into a broader leadership position. In the winter semester, I expanded my responsibilities by supervising students as they entered their first practicums, standardizing grading rubrics, facilitating practicum evaluations, and leading student check-ins. These tasks deepened my understanding of mentorship as a process centered on connection, inclusion, and understanding. Ultimately, this practicum solidified my passion for fostering supportive learning environments, an approach I plan to carry forward into my future career as a speech-language pathologist. Through guiding others, I found my own footing by realizing that education is not just about gaining knowledge, but about meaningful connections.

ORY, Olivia

Creating Inclusive Opportunities in Adaptive Sports

During my practicum at Lacrossing Barriers, I had the opportunity to combine my passion for sports with the organization's mission of making sports more accessible and inclusive for individuals facing barriers to participation. My role was dynamic, allowing me to work on various aspects of program development and community engagement. I assisted in sports activities and a day program focused on building confidence and social skills. As a lacrosse player, I was eager to introduce this fun sport to more communities and athletes of all abilities. Having this goal, I led and planned a 6-week lacrosse program, gaining hands-on experience in the operations of a not-for-profit. I learned to create an inclusive environment using flexible coaching styles, adaptive equipment, and modified drills. Additionally, I recognized that program development is a gradual process and that focusing on small milestones along the way is just as important as achieving the final goal. Lacrossing barriers have broadened my understanding of adaptive sports and inclusion, giving me insight into both the behind-the-scenes

logistics and direct engagement with participants. It laid a strong foundation for my future endeavours, allowing me to grow my leadership skills while advocating for accessible sports and therapeutic practices.

PALMISANO, Maria

Designing with Empathy: Creating a Meaningful Program for Seniors with Dementia at Club 36

For my senior-level practicum, I had the privilege of working at Club 36 Seton, an adult day program for seniors living with dementia. Throughout my experience, I came to understand the profound importance of communication and empathy in caregiving. By closely collaborating with the team, I learned that caregiving isn't just about speaking to individuals, but about truly listening and responding with compassion. This approach deepened my connections with the seniors and guided my program development.

Inspired by this understanding, I designed a game-based program to engage seniors while addressing their unique cognitive, physical, and emotional needs. Given the challenges dementia presents in terms of memory, cognition, and emotional regulation, I focused on creating a program that would stimulate minds, evoke positive memories, encourage physical activity, and promote a sense of connection. In developing the game, I conducted research on dementia-specific activities and tailored it to the diverse needs of the members at Club 36. This included considering factors such as memory, motor skills, and emotional triggers. I designed the game to incorporate trivia, memory questions, and appropriate physical tasks to ensure it was both engaging and accessible.

The program was met with enthusiastic participation from the seniors. Participants remained mentally stimulated and emotionally connected, reinforcing the value of empathetic care in designing activities for individuals with dementia. This experience highlighted how thoughtful program design can support cognitive abilities while also fostering moments of joy and meaningful connections for those living with dementia.

PARNACIO, Katrina

Enhancing CRDS Practicums and Processes to Foster Accessibility: A Learning Experience

For my senior practicum, I collaborated with the Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) for Neurodivergent Students Initiative at the Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning. Using an exploratory student-as-partners approach, we identified and analyzed the unique challenges, barriers, and successes all students face in mandatory placements, beginning with CRDS practicums as a pilot. Practicums are an essential part of the CRDS journey. However, like other experiential learning opportunities, they come with challenges and areas of ambiguity that act as barriers to students. Through my personal experience, feedback from current first-year students, and insights from CRDS staff consultations and peer mentor focus groups, we were able to identify existing gaps surrounding accessible resources. To bridge this gap, we utilized a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) lens to develop a resource for system

navigation and early recommendations to enhance accessibility and create supportive learning environments that improve CRDS students' experiences.

My practicum experience with the WIL for ND Students Initiative was two-fold. While the primary focus of my project was to create a tangible resource, its development was a non-linear process involving backtracking, adapting, and overcoming challenges, for example, navigating how to gather insights in alignment with the university's ethical policies. This journey also provided a series of positive learning experiences and growth opportunities. Beyond benefiting CRDS students and the program, this collaboration has significantly contributed to my professional, academic, and personal development.

PARSONS, Tianna

Growing Through Support: My Practicum Experience at Eric's House

My practicum at Eric's House has been a valuable opportunity for professional growth, allowing me to develop essential skills in disability support. My primary role involves assisting staff and encouraging client engagement in activities, fostering a positive and inclusive environment. Through this experience, I have enhanced my leadership skills, learned strategies for de-escalation, and contributed by creating a personalized cookbook to support cooking activities. Observing the strong bonds between clients and staff has reinforced my understanding of the importance of support workers in enhancing the well-being of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, I have overcome personal challenges, including stepping into leadership roles and improving communication with staff. While I have gained confidence in my abilities, I recognize the need for continued development in handling behavioral challenges. This practicum has solidified my passion for disability support, preparing me for a future career in the field while emphasizing the importance of day programs.

PASION, Christian

Empowering Individuals with Developmental Disabilities Through Education and Employment

At the Integrated Post-Secondary Education Society of Alberta at the University of Calgary makes it part of their strong commitment to ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities have the opportunity to experience and fully participate in their post-secondary education and employment experiences. During my practicum placement, I had the opportunity to observe the education and employment programs they offered and how they helped support individuals in developing skills necessary for securing meaningful employment while maximizing their overall post-secondary experience both inside and outside of the classroom. I also had the opportunity to be involved in various projects for both respective programs of the organization. My practicum experiences working with the organization have helped me better understand more about how they strive to help support individuals with developmental disabilities in building a sense of belonging and inclusivity in the community.

PATHANIA, Prakriti

Understanding the social factors behind the use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures amongst women: a media analysis.

Non-surgical cosmetic procedures are increasing in popularity, accompanied by an increasing presence of “influencers” on online social media platforms to promote the normalization of these treatments. Cosmetic enhancements have often been labeled as “spa treatments” or “self-care,” although they are used to alter a person’s natural appearance and produce beauty norms. This research-based practicum was a media analysis that aimed to explore the social factors that encourage women to undergo non-surgical cosmetic procedures and how women’s intersecting identities impact these decisions. Bridging this work with theoretical lenses such as critical disability studies and feminist intersectional theory helped draw connections between the popularity of these procedures and the construction of beauty standards and social norms. Analyzing the experiences of women through social media videos exposed me to power dynamics and prevailing societal narratives that influence women to seek these treatments and helped me become aware of the intersections in these experiences.

PAUL, Lindsay

From Peer Mentor to Pro Learner: Lessons I Didn’t See Coming

In the context of Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies, practicums provide hands-on, experiential learning where students apply theoretical knowledge to real-world situations. Unlike traditional clinical placements focused on individual impairments, this practicum emphasizes broad systems and approaches related to disability, inclusion, and community-based support. It challenges students to think critically about the societal structures that impact accessibility and participation.

As a peer mentor, I guide and support first-year students as they navigate their first practicum experiences. Rather than directing their actions, my role is to empower them—helping them build confidence in applying their learning. Through this process, I’ve seen firsthand how their one-on-one interactions serve as the foundation for dismantling barriers, advocating for systemic change, and enhancing inclusion in social, educational, and professional settings. Witnessing their growth reminds me that small, everyday actions can lead to broader change.

What I didn’t expect, however, was how much I would grow in my own understanding of mentorship, advocacy, and inclusion. Engaging with students from diverse backgrounds and perspectives has deepened my appreciation for the complexities of accessibility and allyship. The peer mentorship experience, combined with the community-based practicum, fosters a dynamic environment of mutual learning. It reinforces that learning and unlearning are lifelong processes.

This collaboration between mentors and mentees highlights the power of shared experiences in driving meaningful change. It is through these relationships that we continue to build more inclusive communities—together.

PREUS, Jessica

Fostering Inclusion Through Social and Recreational Programs

Between Friends is a one-of-a-kind organization that offers social, recreational, and development programs that cater to individuals with disabilities. Their vision is to create a community where people with disabilities can reach their potential and are recognized as valued citizens, and that is exactly what they do. Between Friends challenges the negative perceptions of disability and aligns with CRDS in fostering and advocating for social inclusion and social justice for marginalized communities. Their programs range from weekend getaways in Banff to evenings hanging out at bars. They even provide employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities to get involved.

Throughout my practicum, I have observed and experienced the transformational impact of social and recreational on individuals with disabilities. Participants attending Between Friends programs have been able to gain independence, build lasting relationships, and engage in meaningful activities. I have had the privilege of taking on a few projects during my time at Between Friends, but the most significant has been program planning and staff and volunteer recruitment. I have been able to utilize my knowledge as a CRDS student to plan safe, accessible, and adventurous trips for participants to explore the city and province. I have also applied my passion for working with individuals with disabilities in my volunteer and staff recruitment project, in finding students like myself who are passionate about helping the community, want to work with individuals with disabilities, and will make excellent additions to the Between Friends family.

PUREWAL, Manpreet

Empowering Communities: A Journey of Inclusion at AdaptAbility

AdaptAbility, a unique store that supports individuals with special needs through the use of adaptive products and valuable community resources. Throughout my placement, I had the opportunity to engage in community outreach events, with a particular focus on community engagement and event coordination. These initiatives were aimed at fostering inclusion and support for families and individuals with special needs. Key projects included Sensory Santa and Sledge Hockey, an adaptive sports event in which I played an active role in participation. These experiences highlighted the significance of accessible recreational opportunities for promoting inclusion, empowering communities and building confidence among participants. Through this practicum, I gained practical, hands-on experience in event management and strengthened my understanding of the challenges and rewards associated with creating inclusive environments. Additionally, the opportunity to apply the skills learned in my academic program to real-life situations has solidified my passion for community engagement and advocacy.

PUSHKAR, Anna

Growth Through Connection and Creativity at NaAC

My practicum at the National accessArts Centre (NaAC) has been an incredible learning experience, allowing me to work closely with artists while researching ways to improve their access to professional opportunities. NaAC is a disability arts organization that provides a safe and inclusive space for artists with disabilities to explore their creativity and share their work. A key focus of my practicum has been working in the studio to build relationships with artists and staff while refining my own artistic skills to better support artists in their individualized creative processes. This hands-on experience has taught me that leadership in the arts is about support, flexibility, shared creativity, and fostering self-expression. Alongside my studio work, I have researched the barriers artists with disabilities face when pursuing professional opportunities. Many existing professional resources, such as grant applications and career development tools, are complex and inaccessible. To address this, I have been developing a resource guide that simplifies these processes and highlights pathways to paid artistic opportunities. This practicum has shaped my understanding of accessibility in the arts and the importance of advocacy in creative industries. I hope my work will help artists expand their careers and creative independence.

QUIGLEY, Courtnee

Transitional Vocational Programs and Inclusive Post Secondary Education

Mount Royal University's Transitional Vocational Programs and Inclusive Post Secondary Education offer a variety of programs that include individual courses, auditing of degrees, and vocational training programs for adults with developmental disabilities. The Transitional Vocational Programs (TVP) offer two programs including the Employment Preparation Certificate Program which is a full-time vocational training program and Part-Time courses that focus on computer literacy, basic adult education, and self-development. In addition to these programs, MRU also offers the Inclusive Post Secondary Education initiative, which has students audit a degree over four years in a program of their choice. The practicum's primary projects have focused on interdepartmental collaborations to increase alumni engagement and inclusion in policies. While raising the profile of the program through community engagement and seeking out information that would assist students with brain injuries and developmental disabilities in our programs.

RAO, Hafsa

A World To Be, A Testament to Empower

Join me as I share my transformative practicum experience with Empower, a vocational program under Lifemark Health Group, where I developed a comprehensive and accessible resource directory for single mothers facing barriers to employment and education. This presentation explores how access to essential services like childcare, housing, financial support, and more as well as a deeper understanding of systemic challenges, can be enhanced through coordinated research, strategic partnerships and collaboration at career fairs and meetings, as well as personalized, supportive client sessions which

empower individuals. These experiences have shaped my personal and professional growth, reinforcing my commitment to advocating for accessibility and inclusion in all fields. If you are committed to fostering equity and breaking down barriers, this session will dive more deeply into some practical approaches that will drive change in all communities!

REJI, Neha Mary

Bridging the Gaps: Supporting Seniors in Daily Life

Aging should be accompanied by comfort and care, rather than the persistent challenges of loneliness and unmet needs. My experience at Calgary Seniors' Resource Society opened my eyes to the fact that in Calgary many seniors still face challenges to live a comfortable and fulfilling life. During my practicum placement at Calgary Seniors, I focused on enhancing support for vulnerable seniors by conducting a client survey to assess their needs and identify gaps in available resources. Additionally, I updated the Resource Guide, ensuring it remained comprehensive and accurate while identifying resources that could help bridge some of the existing gaps in senior's life. Through the annual client survey we conducted, we found Housekeeping and Transportation are the biggest concerns for the seniors in Calgary. However, Calgary Seniors' Resource Society actively works to minimize service gaps through initiatives such as Essential Transportation, Practical Kindness, Shopping Companion, and the internal Resource Guide, ensuring seniors have access to essential support. We can improve seniors' safety, independence, and quality of life by closing these gaps, ensuring that they continue to be involved and active members of the community.

ROSAL, Sharmaine

Navigating The Role of Radical Mental Health Doula

The Radical Mental Health Doula (RMHD) project applies the doula model of care to the mental health field. Doulas provide a safe space while meeting people where they are. As part of RMHD, I got certified and provided peer support to a student on campus while enhancing my research skills through qualitative interviews and transcription of previous doula cohorts. This semester, my focus has shifted toward critically evaluating how doulas have been supported throughout their training and practice. Collaborating with a partner from Cohort 3, we conducted a thematic analysis of Cohort 2 doula transcript data, alongside reflecting on my own lived experiences. We developed a systematic worksheet to code recurring themes, allowing us to explore the broader implications of peer support, mentorship, and structured check-ins in shaping doulas' experiences. This thematic analysis identifies concepts, ideas, direct quotes, and emerging themes, deepening our understanding of the RMHD role.

Our work has highlighted commonalities among doulas, particularly their commitment to offering comfort, support, education, and advocacy. We have gained a greater appreciation of this project through understanding the vital role of doulas and their impact on their clients' lived experiences. I have realized the importance of enhancing my skills, particularly coding interviews, and how these shape my contribution to the project's progress. This experience has reinforced the value of detail-oriented

research work in sustaining long-term projects. Overall, my practicum has strengthened my ability to bridge practice and research.

SAE, Madison

Building Confidence in Facilitation

During my practicum with the Friendships and Dating Program (FDP) at Calgary Alternative Support Services (CASS), I helped people with intellectual disabilities (PWID) develop healthy relationships and communication skills. My role involved facilitating discussions, leading activities, and assisting with program development (such as activities accessible to PWID). Initially, I aimed to build confidence as a facilitator by learning to guide conversations and adapt to participants' needs. However, over time I was able to take on a more active role of leading activities, asking open-ended questions, and ensuring discussions remained structured yet open for expression.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned was how to navigate sensitive topics with impartiality and respect. Observing my supervisor handle challenging discussions taught me how to validate participants while maintaining a judgment-free space, as well as thinking quickly on my feet. As the program came to an end, we saw a continued interest in learning, which led to the creation of the FDP Alumni Club. I helped structure the club by facilitating icebreaker activities and sourcing discussion materials.

This experience enhanced my confidence in leading discussions, managing group dynamics, and creating inclusive learning environments. I learned the importance of patience and adaptability, especially in moments of silence, I learned to trust the process instead of feeling the need to immediately fill the gaps. My practicum at FDP has been a journey of growth, and I look forward to applying these skills in future roles while supporting inclusive and engaging educational spaces.

SINGH, Gurasis

Importance of Empathy, and Collaboration to promote an inclusive environment

My placement was at 4Seasons Transportation, a transportation company that drives students with disabilities to school with supports such as attendants or nurses to further accommodate the needs of the students. This placement has allowed me to promote inclusion within the education system. Working alongside the student care department, I aided in monitoring and supporting drivers with the diverse needs of students, ranging from behavioral, physical and intellectual disabilities. This has helped me develop values such as empathy, collaboration and a strong work ethic that has reinforced the commitment to inclusive education that student care representatives share. Poor communication can create barriers between different parties; hence it is important to have effective communication between families, teachers, drivers and other staff members to ensure students receive the necessary supports to be successful. Empathy is crucial, especially for students who are non-verbal, because it fosters a respectful and caring environment, while also supporting the drivers in their daily stressors. For my practicum project, we created a staff workshop that addresses common stereotypes about disabilities and aims to motivate the participants by initially recognizing their effort and the impact their

roles make. This will help students build a strong trusting bond, confidence and develop social skills through an inclusive school bus environment. My time at the practicum has allowed me to further strengthen communication, leadership, and advocacy skills, which are crucial to creating an accessible educational environment, promoting changes through the social model of disability, and empowering these students to pursue education.

SJOLIE, Ali

Fund Development: Fundraising for a Non-Profit Organization

At G.R.I.T. Calgary Society, my practicum project was to understand, plan, and take part in the process of fundraising for a non-profit organization. Fundraising is crucial for G.R.I.T., as although they receive grants from Alberta Education, such as program unit funding, it's not enough to cover all program and equipment costs, meaning additional funds need to be acquired elsewhere. At G.R.I.T., I took on many different roles and jobs surrounding fund development. In September, I began with prospect research and developing a prospect research summary. I was tasked with identifying potential organizations that could support a capital campaign and then compiling and documenting my data in a prospect research summary so my research could be applied to the planning of a capital campaign in the future. In the second semester, I took on various roles during the preparation for the G.R.I.T. Calgary Society's gala. I was involved in securing sponsorships for the gala and donations for the silent auction by contacting and interacting with various companies via email, over the phone, or in person. Additionally, I was in charge of the marketing of the gala through creating posters to be used during the event. Through this practicum, I learned about the different aspects that are simultaneously occurring when it comes to planning and executing a fundraiser for a non-profit organization, as well as how vital fundraising is for a non-profit organization, like G.R.I.T., to ensure they can continue to provide support, equipment, and programming to the kids they work with.

TALLO, Chadler

Delivering Impactful Activities: Supporting Springboard Centre's Day Programs

Springboard Centre (SBC) is a day program for adults with developmental disabilities, and I was fortunate to work with them as part of the frontline staff last summer. For my practicum, I served as both a frontline staff member and an administrative assistant, supporting the receptionist, room supervisors, and clients. I was first integrated as a member of the frontline staff, where I learned how the activities offered by SBC help clients find meaning in their lives while also providing opportunities for social engagement with their peers. I later transitioned into an administrative assistant role, where I participated in clients' ISP meetings, job hiring interviews, receptionist duties, and more. My experience at SBC highlighted the many aspects that day programs must manage—both at the frontline and managerial levels—to support adults with developmental disabilities in finding purpose and improving their quality of life. Additionally, this experience redefined my professional values and beliefs while enhancing my self-confidence.

TAYLOR, Rachel

Empowering Futures: Elevating G.R.I.T.'s Transition Support for Children and Families

For many families of children with disabilities, the transition to kindergarten or Grade 1 can be a daunting process, often complicated by intricate registration procedures and a lack of easily accessible information. During my practicum at G.R.I.T. Calgary Society, I sought to bridge this gap by developing a transition and self-advocacy guide. This guide was designed to empower families with the knowledge and tools necessary to navigate this critical transition with confidence. By incorporating acronyms, planning sheets, and a comprehensive checklist detailing registration steps, the guide provides families with a clear roadmap, reducing confusion and fostering informed decision-making. Beyond my work on the transition guide, I also played a role in preparing for G.R.I.T. Calgary Society's annual gala, specifically assisting with the silent auction. My responsibilities included securing donations, organizing and inputting data on a silent auction Excel sheet, and creating unique posters for all silent auction items. These fundraising initiatives are crucial in helping G.R.I.T. continue delivering essential, individualized services for children and families.

TRAN, Cynthia

Assumptions vs. Reality: The Importance of Client Feedback

My practicum experience at Calgary Seniors' Resource Society highlighted the significance of annual client surveys in improving services and programs. During my experience at Calgary Seniors', I realized that our assumptions about what seniors need may differ from what seniors are actually seeking. These surveys allow us to directly gather feedback from seniors, providing insights into whether the programs are meeting their needs or if these programs are less crucial. This data enables Calgary Seniors to focus their efforts on improving the most impactful programs for seniors.

This process of active listening also builds trust and a sense of community between Calgary Seniors' and its clients. Through these surveys, we have gathered evidence of how this client-centred approach has improved the lives of seniors. These programs have also helped to promote their independence and enabled them to thrive in the comfort of their own homes. This experience has reinforced the value of client feedback in service-driven roles and underscored the need to challenge assumptions and biases. Moving forward, I am committed to prioritizing client perspectives and adopting collaborative strategies to create more inclusive, responsive services.

TRUJILLO SORIANO, Melissa

Empowering Individuals Through Vocational Services

Gaining insight into the work behind the scenes at Lifemark Vocational has deepened my understanding of vocational rehabilitation. My experience was enhanced through participation in two key programs: ReadySetWork (RSW) and Empower Calgary. RSW introduced me to vocational services and allowed me to discover how tailored workshops help clients enhance their skill sets. The Empower program,

designed specifically for single mothers in Calgary and surrounding areas, goes beyond employment support by fostering a welcoming community where moms can connect and share their lived experiences. These experiences have broadened my perspective on the vital role vocational programs play in empowering individuals toward meaningful employment.

TUT-YANG, Nyekuar

Enhancing the Disability Service Sector through Training and Development

For my senior practicum, I had the incredible opportunity to be placed at the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS). ACDS is a non-profit organization that advocates for and supports service providers working with adults with disabilities across Alberta. ACDS plays a vital role in the sector through accreditation, research, policy advocacy, and training. I had the opportunity to work alongside the Training and Development team. My primary focus was on revising and enhancing the Foundations in Community Disability Studies training. Through conducting needs assessments and identifying content gaps, I applied the academic knowledge I've gained over the years in Community Rehabilitation and Disability Studies to ensure that frontline workers receive up-to-date, comprehensive training. The Foundations Training course is designed to equip professionals, especially those new to the disability sector, with a strong foundational understanding of disability studies that they can carry forward in their roles. My work aimed to improve the quality and consistency of educational materials, ultimately strengthening the capacity of disability service workers.

ULICKI, Noah

Patient and Family Centered Care at The Summit: Engaging Service Users to Improve Client Experience

The Summit: Marian & Jim Sinneave Centre for Youth Resilience is a child and adolescent mental health facility operated through Recovery Alberta. After accessing programs and services at The Summit, youth and caregivers are provided with the opportunity to complete a client experience survey. This validated tool asks questions on several different dimensions of the care received, including barriers to access, perceptions of respect and communication, and elements of the programs and services that youth and families feel could be improved. As a student with the Patient- and Family- Centered Care (PFCC) team at The Summit, I evaluated the results of these client experience surveys, including a thematic analysis of written answers. Following analysis and synthesis, youth and caregivers were consulted on if and how the results were meaningful to them, as well as desired methods and formats of knowledge translation. These consultations revealed that youth and parents want to see how their information is making a difference, with youth also wanting to be able to find information on the results before seeking out programs at The Summit. Additionally, parents and youth want the information to be available in a variety of formats, including digital signage, physical posters, and information on the website. This information gathered through the client experience surveys and consultations will inform program delivery and future knowledge translation projects.

WALKER, Emma

Connect, Grow & Belong: A Between Friends Experience

Between Friends has been an integral part of the Calgary community for nearly sixty years. In that time, the organization has created lasting legacies for members, staff, and volunteers alike. Through recreation and social programming, Between Friends offers youth and adults with disabilities the opportunity to interact with peers, develop skills, engage in accessible activities, and experience complete inclusion. By breaking down barriers to participation, offering support, and celebrating all abilities, Between Friends is continually working towards a diverse, inclusive society where people with disabilities are valued, respected, and embraced in all facets of life. It is through these efforts that everyone can truly connect, grow and belong.

Throughout my practicum, I have been involved in projects such as fund management research, scheduling, resource design, information compilation, and program planning. However, my most powerful experiences have stemmed from my time attending programs and getting to know Between Friends members, staff, and volunteers. Offering support to participants as they engage in recreation activities has equipped me with valuable learnings, practical skills and fond memories that have left a lasting impression on me. These experiences have been invaluable in preparing me for my future career and allowing me to develop a deeper understanding of my place in the disability community.

WALKER, Janessa

Empowering People with Disability Through Adaptive Snow Sports

My senior practicum with the CADS Calgary, we have had a successful season of empowering people with disability through participation in snow sports. The organization has eight different disciplines of adaption that focus on different types of disability. Students can find a group that best fits their needs and ability, choosing from sit ski's, cognitive delays, ¾ track, snowboarding, deaf, blind and visually impaired. CADS aims to build the skiing or snowboarding ability of its students while simultaneously boosting their confidence in the sport. The over 300 volunteers helping run program, see over 150 students a season and build bonds, trust, and friendships. I worked as inside volunteer, organization registrations, recruitment of volunteer, and connecting with community partnership. This practicum provided me with opportunity to expand my skills and work behind the scenes of the organization. I am extremely grateful for my experience with CADS and my year learning about non-profit organization operations.

WARREN, Elizabeth

Future Implications of Radical Mental Health Doula Support

The Radical Mental Health Doula (RMHD) project is an innovative, grassroots based practice focusing on support, education, comfort and advocating with and on behalf of individuals experiencing mental health crises. This project utilizes hands on research to analyze the way the current mental health

supports are working against individuals and how a holistic approach can benefit clients to reach their goals with their mental health. This project is not meant to replace a therapist or counsellor, but to act as an in between during times when therapy may not be accessible. Participating in this project has allowed me to gain a more thorough understanding of mental health supports and the lack of client centered programs there are. I gained first-hand experience with my own client and also participated in research analytics to create a working academic paper about the future implications of the RMHD project, and the potential of a multidisciplinary doula program where individuals can access all kinds of doula supports within the same area. The potential this project has is exponential and the hope is to have this role take off with the public in the next few years. By participating in this program, I have grown my skills in multiple different areas and anticipate this being beneficial for future success as a social worker.

