



# Project Research Presentation

*Building Connections: A Group Intervention for Mothers and Children  
Experiencing Violence in Relationships*

# BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Responding to Family Violence and  
Child Abuse in Communities Across Canada



## ***Building Connections:*** National Dissemination of a Family Violence and Child Abuse Intervention

Building Connections: Responding to Family Violence and Child Abuse in Communities Across Canada

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# BREAKING the CYCLE

Building Connections: Responding to Family Violence and Child Abuse in Communities Across Canada

- An early intervention program that promotes the mental health and the development of infants and young children who are at risk for maladaptive outcomes due to maternal substance use and related issues, including trauma and intimate partner violence, and their mothers.
- Funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada – Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP)



**Speaker: Mary Motz, Mothercraft Society**

*Mothercraft's Breaking the Cycle program is an early intervention program that promotes the mental health and development of infants and young children who are at risk due to maternal substance abuse and other risk factors, including trauma and family violence. We see children together with their biological mothers. We are funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada's Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP).*

*What I am going to be talking about is one small component of the Breaking the Cycle program and that is our Connections intervention. Connections is a domestic violence group intervention that we developed about ten years ago in response to what we were learning through our evaluations. We have always evaluated and done research in the context of our projects, and our research has always been quantitative and qualitative.*

*What we heard from the mothers participating in the program is that making changes in their substance use is sometimes an easier change to make, and that the more difficult changes are around understanding the context of their relationships and making changes in their intimate partner relationships. We developed the Connections intervention group to help mothers reflect on their intimate partner relationships, and the impact of these relationships on their substance use recovery, their parenting, and their children's development and well-being. Connections is a manualized six week group but that we sometimes deliver in eight weeks. We did pilot evaluations of the group when we developed it in 2006.*

*About two years ago, the Public Health Agency of Canada funded Mothercraft/Breaking the Cycle to publish the Connections intervention manual in English and French. The intervention was also adapted for Aboriginal communities, and this manual was also published. All three manuals were disseminated to CAPC, CPNP and the Aboriginal Head Start in Urban and Northern Communities (AHSUNC) projects in Ontario in 2014.*

## Building Connections: Goal

Building Connections: Responding to Family Violence and Child Abuse in Communities Across Canada

**Project Goal:** To enhance the capacity of CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC projects to identify and respond to mothers and/or children (birth – 6 years) at risk for, or impacted by, family violence or child abuse.

**Research Goal:** To evaluate the activities and deliverables of *Building Connections*, using an associated multi-method, multi-informant, longitudinal research design.

*The goal of the Building Connections project is to enhance the capacities of all programs – CAPC, CPNP and AHSUNC – across the country (approx. 900 projects) to be able to identify and respond to the impact of family violence and child abuse on mothers and their children (0-6 years).*

*Our research goal related to that is to be able to evaluate the activities and deliverables of the Building Connections using a multi-method, multi-informant and longitudinal research design.*



## Building Connections: Objectives

Building Connections: Responding to Family Violence and Child Abuse in Communities Across Canada

1. To build awareness, capacity and confidence among CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC project staff regarding family violence and/or child abuse;
2. To develop a community of practice of certified trainers to deliver the *Connections* intervention across Canada through CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC sites;
3. To deliver the *Connections* intervention to community-based sites across Canada;
4. To translate and disseminate the knowledge developed from this initiative broadly and to a wide range of audiences.



## 1. Building Awareness, Capacity & Confidence

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Engage CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC staff in foundational training to build awareness, capacity, and confidence in responding to family violence and child abuse

- a. Disseminate the **training manual** (to 899 sites), entitled *Family Violence and Child Abuse: Building Connections to Support Children and Families in Community-Based Programs* (Sept 12).
- b. National **webinar** training in English, with video dub to French (Oct 5).
- c. Collect data from pre- and post-webinar training to assess participant Awareness, Capacity, Confidence, and Satisfaction (ACCS) across sites.
- d. Quantitative and qualitative analyses will be performed to assess the effectiveness of the manual and webinar training.



**Speaker: Debra Pepler, Mothercraft Society**

*Our first objective is to build awareness, capacity and confidence among CAPC/ CPNP/AHSUNC project staff and we will do this through foundational training for all projects that will build awareness, as well as the capacity to identify and effectively respond to family violence and child abuse. I think the most important aspect of this is that we are reaching out to established programs that support children and their families in communities. Also, many of them have connections to other important support agencies in their communities. We have completed a literature review and are developing a resource manual that will provide current information on family violence and child maltreatment issues using a trauma-informed lens, including how community-based projects can support those families and children. We will disseminate the manual to all CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC projects, and also provide a webinar training for all projects. The webinar will be translated, and archived in English and French on the Mothercraft and PREVNet websites. We will collect data before and after the webinar to assess awareness capacity, confidence and satisfaction, which is the foundation of our assessment framework. The data will also enable us to start to consider which communities may be ready to consider being a part the second stage of the Building Connections initiative. In the second stage, we will work closely with thirty projects who will deliver the Connections group intervention in their communities. Not all projects and communities will be ready to do that. We are going to be starting to gather data on the communities, the connectedness within communities, and the capacities of communities. We will reach out to communities that we think are ready to move to the second stage.*

## 2. Train and Support Facilitators

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Train certified facilitators to deliver the *Connections* intervention in project sites, and develop a community of practice to support facilitators in the delivery of the intervention.

- a. Provide certification to 30 sites where facilitators report increased and sufficient awareness, confidence, and capacity, as well as satisfaction with the training and regular engagement with the CCP.
- b. Offer a week-long certified training module delivered at BTC.
- c. Engage facilitators in regular training of the Connections Community of Practice (CCP) model while they deliver the intervention.



*Our second objective is to train certified facilitators to replicate the Connections intervention in selected project sites, and to develop a community of practice to support those facilitators as they deliver the intervention. A week-long training will be delivered to potential facilitators through Mothercraft's Breaking the Cycle program in Toronto. The notion is that although this intervention is manualized, there are many aspects of it that require a deeper knowledge than that which is presented in the manual and requires the capacity to engage with families, not just in the tight context of the manual, but much more broadly. We will start the process by selecting and training facilitators from five demonstration sites with previous experience delivering the intervention in Ontario. We will pilot the training and community of practice processes with these demonstration sites. They will receive the training, deliver the intervention, and take part in the community of practice. We will conduct a pilot evaluation of the training and the community of practice processes with the sites, capture their comments and suggestions, and make adjustments to both the training and the community of practice process based on the feedback. Evaluation tools and intervention research processes will also be piloted in these demonstration sites.*

### 3) Delivering the *Connections* Intervention

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Deliver the *Connections* intervention to 400 participants in 30 CAPC/CPNP/AHSUNC sites.

- a. The selected **30 sites**, which meet inclusion and exclusion criteria, will deliver the intervention and intervention-related research activities:
  - **5 demonstration sites:** with previous experience of delivering the intervention in Ontario in 2014
  - **25 new intervention sites:** that are willing to receive the certified training and deliver the intervention
- b. Collect intake/family context data from participants prior to participation in the *Connections* intervention.



### 3) Delivering the *Connections* Intervention

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- c. Facilitators and participants will complete the *Connections* Knowledge and Satisfaction tool (CKS).
- d. Teleconference and in vivo focus group data of participants will be collected following participation in the intervention.
- e. Telephone interview data with facilitators will be collected after the intervention.



*The third objective is to expand the delivery of the *Connections* intervention to 25 additional sites (for a total of 30 sites). We will develop inclusion and exclusion criteria for the selection of the additional sites, and will use the information collected through the survey associated with the national training webinar, and other questionnaires, to assess readiness and to confirm additional sites. We really want to know that the sites selected to replicate the *Connections* intervention have adequate internal capacity and the necessary community linkages to deliver the intervention effectively and ensure that families and children have the support they require. We hope that selected sites will provide representation of geographic regions across Canada and will include urban, rural, francophone and Indigenous projects.*

*The facilitators and participants will complete tools and measures related to knowledge, learning and satisfaction. We will also conduct qualitative focus groups to determine not only the facilitators' perspectives, but the participants' perspectives and follow that up with telephone interviews.*

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*We anticipate that, compared to reports collected prior to the intervention, the post-intervention measures will reveal that:*

- f. Facilitators report being satisfied with the intervention, and observe positive changes in the functioning and knowledge of participants.
- g. Participants experience improvement in their sense of self in relationships, social supports, mental health symptomatology, and parenting capacity, as well as decreased family violence.



## 4. Evaluation and Knowledge Dissemination

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Evaluation of the intervention and research components will continue in order to assess the implementation, fidelity, engagement, and progression over time.

- a. Qualitative and quantitative measures of change will be collected.
- b. Monitoring of data from the Mothercraft and PREVNet websites, as well as through the *Connections* project coordinator, will track and evaluate:
  - Online views and downloads
  - Requests for training / consultation
  - Requests for manuals, reports, papers, and tools
  - Requests for media appearances
  - Reports of participant improvement, engagement in community services, and reflections on the intervention
  - Facilitator reports on effectiveness, observed change, and the challenges/successes related to implementation



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Knowledge dissemination will proceed through evaluation reports, workshops and presentations, research, and policy forums.

- a. Continued facilitator certification training will ensure that *Connections* tools are used to support families by teaching skills and knowledge that meet their needs.
- b. Knowledge dissemination will occur on an ongoing basis in order to reach a wide range of audiences, nationally, and internationally.



*The fourth objective will include comprehensive qualitative and quantitative evaluation of the previous three objectives. This will include measures of change for program facilitators and participants, as well as a description and understanding of the implementation process of the intervention. Currently we are working on the development of a toolkit of measures that will help us to understand the readiness of community projects to utilize the intervention. We are fortunate to have already identified a number of agencies who are interested in implementing the *Connections* intervention, so we will reach out to them as pilot intervention sites. We will also reach out more broadly to other agencies who identify a level of readiness based on our toolkit measures, following our phase one webinar. We will begin our knowledge mobilization fairly early, as we start learn and as the communities help us learn about their experience of the intervention, on both the Mothercraft and the PREVNet websites. We will continually share our knowledge and make available our evaluation reports, research presentations, journal articles and policy forums regarding the benefits of ensuring that communities know how to support healthy relationships, both within families and within the community at large.*

## Questions & Answers

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**Linda Baker:** *I was just thinking about how 900 projects will benefit from the webinar in terms of awareness, comfort, etc. and then you need to go from 900 to eventually 30; first 5 pilot sites but eventually 30. Do you expect that this will be challenging in the sense of everybody wanting to be one of the 30?*

**Debra Pepler:** *This is where we are doing some very deep thinking about the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and what really makes a community ready to deliver this intervention. It has to do with, both the organization of the community program itself, how cohesive and well organized it is, but that's only part of it. The other part is that the project needs to be connected to other agencies in the community, such as Child Protection/Child Advocacy Centres, Social Services, Women's Counselling Services/Domestic Violence programs, Housing/Shelter services and all of the other supports that families require to move on a new path. It's really going to be a process of thinking about it deeply ourselves, working with our pilot communities to really document what they have in place, what's not working, and what barriers they are experiencing.*

**Margarete Leslie:** *We are going to use the evaluation of the broad webinar to ask some questions that will give us information about the level of readiness of certain communities, both within the program itself as well as through their connections to other community agencies. It will be very interesting to select sites that both demonstrate readiness and meet inclusion and exclusion criteria, but also represent different geographic regions, urban vs rural, and represent indigenous vs. mainstream communities. We will do some analyses to learn about effectively implementing Connections in certain communities vs. others and identify commonalities and differences across those sites.*