

Parental Alienation: A Strategy Used to Fight Intimate Partner Violence Claims?



by Kaitlyn Dyer

Parental alienation is a controversial concept that has gained attention not only by child development specialists and family violence researchers worldwide, but also by the media. For instance, recent media stories regarding



the acrimonious custody battle between Hollywood actors Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt suggest that Angelina is alienating the couple's children from Brad and "could be in danger of losing primary custody of the children if she doesn't take steps to improve their relationship with their father." Parental alienation is defined as occurring when one parent denigrates the other to the extent that the same negative or distanced behaviour is adopted by the child toward their parent. That is, the parent may expose the child to persistent negative talk regarding the other parent, or they may consistently blame and degrade the other parent until the child assumes the same attitude. Such behaviour most often occurs in high-conflict situations or in custody battles over the children.

In Spring 2019, hundreds of concerned family law academics, family violence researchers, child development and child maltreatment experts, and children's rights advocacy groups around the globe wrote a collective memo to the World Health

Organization (WHO) over their concerns of the WHO's revision of its International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), which could include parental alienation. The memo outlined critical key points and included the following:

- 1) The parental alienation concept has no support in credible scientific research;

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Bullying Ends Here



by Deb George

Prairieaction Foundation's

mandate is to fund research and initiatives that focus on finding solutions to abuse and violence. We accomplish this through partnership with universities and provide funds to the RESOLVE centres in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Funds are also made available to community agencies to address abuse and violence, along with recognition and reward of youth groups that demonstrate leadership in non-violence promotion. More information is available at www.prairieaction.ca.

Our latest initiative sponsors **Tad Milmine**, who provided his anti-bullying message to ten schools in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta during the 2018-19 school year. Tad is a police officer with Calgary Police Service and the person behind *Bullying Ends Here*. Since 2011, he has spoken against bullying at high schools and youth organizations across the country and around the world. He is internationally known as a dynamic and effective presenter in delivering his message to youth and was recently recognized and honoured for his dedication and exemplary commitment as a recipient of the Canadian Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers. Visit the Bullying Ends Here website at www.BullyingEndsHere.ca.

Tad began his Prairieaction Foundation sponsored tour in October 2018, with presentations to students in Argyle, David Livingstone and Ecole Stanley schools in Winnipeg. This was followed by presentations to three Edmonton schools—Father Leo Green, St. Elizabeth Seton and St. Dominic. November saw Tad back in Winnipeg to deliver the Bullying Ends Here message to students at Isaac Brock, Gordon Bell, Ecole George V, William Whyte, and Isaac Newton schools. Prairieaction Foundation is currently working with Tad to arrange seven additional presentations in Alberta, to be completed by the end of the school year.



BULLYING ENDS HERE

In December 2017, responding to the youth suicide crisis in the northern part of the province,

Saskatchewan's Advocate for Children and Youth released a special report. *Shh... LISTEN!! We Have Something to Say!* —found at saskadvocate.ca/sites/default/files/u11/listen_we_have_something_to_say_nov_2017.pdf — lists several *Youth Calls to Action*, with the first being Stop Bullying. The Prairieaction Foundation answered this call by focusing on the North when planning presentations for Saskatchewan. In mid-January, Tad spent two weeks presenting to students at Rossignol High School in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Valley View School in Beauval, Minahik Waskahigan School in Pinehouse Lake, Twin Lakes School in Buffalo Narrows, Dene High School in La Loche, Churchill High School in La Ronge, Hector Thiboutot School in Sandy Bay, and Creighton Community School in Creighton. He finished the two-week tour on January 16, with a presentation to students at Ecole McIsaac and Ruth Betts Schools in Flin Flon, Manitoba. In April, Tad also delivered his message of positive change and acceptance to students at Charlebois School in Cumberland House and Stony Rapids School in Stony Rapid—one of Saskatchewan's northern fly-in communities.

In speaking of the presentations sponsored by Prairieaction Foundation in the North, Tad said:

"I have met some of the kindest, most loving and resilient people. I don't think I will ever be able to describe my experiences with words. My eyes are open, ears are listening and I am going to do all that I can to help! My passion is stronger than ever before."

In reviewing social media responses from students, and speaking with teachers, it is evident that Tad's uplifting message is making a difference in the lives of many of our youth. Prairieaction Foundation is proud to be part of this change. ❀

Manitoba Update



by Cheryl Fraehlich

RESOLVE Manitoba Hosts Undergraduate Research Award Recipient

Each year the Office of the Vice-President, Research and International, in partnership with the University of Manitoba Student Union, offers an Undergraduate Research Award (URA) that provides students with the opportunity to be mentored full-time with a professor for the summer months and to gain valuable research experience in their field of interest. This year, **Kaitlyn Dyer** was one of 70 students selected to hold the URA. She will work with Dr. Kendra Nixon and assist with some RESOLVE projects over the summer.

Kaitlyn has just finished her fourth year as a student at the University of Manitoba and her first year in the Concentrated Social Work program. This is Kaitlyn's second year as a URA recipient and she chose to work with Dr. Nixon at RESOLVE because of her interest in the impact of trauma, such as domestic violence on mental health. Additionally, Kaitlyn's volunteer work with individuals who have often experienced family violence and other high conflict situations corresponds with the research experience she will gain over the summer. She has already proven to be a valuable addition to the RESOLVE Manitoba team and has worked on a number of projects conducting literature reviews, helping with an environmental scan, and doing data entry and data analysis. She expects to graduate Spring 2020, and after a few years of work experience, Kaitlyn would like to pursue a Master's degree in Social Work and specialize as a mental health social worker or clinician. ❀



Meet Our Steering Committee: *Heather Leeman*

Heather Leeman joined the RESOLVE Manitoba Steering Committee in 2018. She has over 15 years experience working within and leading community-based organizations in Manitoba. She began her career in direct service work as the Outreach Coordinator and Compulsive Coping Counsellor at the Fort Garry Women's Resource Centre. From there, she transitioned into leadership roles working as the Executive Director of the Tupper Street Family Resource Centre in Portage la Prairie, followed by the North End Women's Centre in Winnipeg. In 2013, Heather took on a new challenge and became an independent contractor, leading the Government of Manitoba's Block



by Block Community Safety and Wellbeing Initiative, focusing on multi-sector collaboration for system and service delivery change. In April 2018, Heather returned to the non-profit sector as the Executive Director of The Laurel Centre/Men's Resource Centre of Manitoba. She has a Masters in Social Work from the University of Manitoba, where she focused on and developed a passion for non-profit organizational development and evaluation. Heather is a strong advocate for the non-profit sector and the individuals, families, and communities whom with she has had the privilege of working.

When she is not working, Heather enjoys spending time with her family and camping. ❀

Saskatchewan Update



Responding to Intimate Partner Violence: Challenges Faced Among Service Providers in Northern Communities

by Melissa Wuerch, Kimberley Zorn, Darlene Juschka, and Mary Hampton

We are excited to announce that an article was recently published in the *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, based on a subset of findings from the *Rural and Northern Community Response to Intimate Partner Violence* project. The research project was funded by the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council's Community-University Research Alliance (SSHRC/CURA) and involved collaboration among several academic and community-based organizations with the overall umbrella being RESOLVE. **Elder Betty McKenna** provided ongoing wisdom and advice to ensure that the team remained sensitive to Indigenous culture.

Research findings continue to reveal that women who live in geographically diverse regions are at higher risk for intimate partner violence, more severe violence, and intimate partner homicide. Dawson and colleagues (2018) recently published a report that details the number of domestic homicides in Canada from 2010 to 2015. This report indicates that of the 476 victims of domestic homicide during the stated time period, 22% lived in rural, remote, and northern communities, with most victims being female (78%). Furthermore, roughly two-thirds of the identified Indigenous victims (59%) lived in geographically diverse communities. With intimate partner violence being pervasive, complex, and preventable, these numbers are devastating. Research that seeks to further understand intimate partner violence in northern communities within Canada is strongly needed.

The journal article *Responding to Intimate Partner Violence: Challenges Faced Among Service Providers in Northern Communities* details findings from a focus group conducted in a northern community within Saskatchewan. A focus group

was chosen as this method allows participants to interact with each other and to engage in knowledge exchange. A focus group also treats experience as knowledge, which was in-line with our goal of learning from and with each participant. Eight individuals participated in the focus group. All were demographically varied in terms of cultural background, gender, age, and occupation. The focus group was guided by the question of "What do you think are some of the needs of women coming through your services with regard to intimate partner violence?"



Melissa Wuerch

Narrative inquiry was chosen as the method of analysis, as we wanted to convey a rich and meaningful representation of the stories told by each participant. We strived to allow the wisdom of the group to guide the discussion and to show readers a story, with the hopes of encouraging individuals to gather their own responses. Participants detailed various challenges to providing support, as well as suggestions for improvement, for service providers working with women survivors of intimate

partner violence in northern communities within Canada.

We encourage anyone who is interested to please read our journal article. Participant quotations are included throughout the results section to further highlight the complexity of intimate partner violence and service provision in northern communities. We hope that these results will inform future research and encourage the creation of effective programming.

Wuerch, M. A., Zorn, K. G., Juschka, D., & Hampton, M. R. (2019). Responding to intimate partner violence: Challenges faced among service providers in northern communities. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 34(4), 691-711. ❧

Alberta Update: Working for Kids™



by Amelia Potter & Jelena Komanchuk

The first objective of the *Working for Kids* study is to examine relationships between cognitive and social-emotional function on sleep problems in preschool-aged children; secondly, to evaluate development of language, cognitive and social-emotional skills, as well as urinary oxidative stress markers in children whose primary caregivers receive Working for Kids: Building Skills™ training. Working for Kids: Building Skills™ is an educational program developed by **Dr. Judy Cameron** and colleagues at the University of Pittsburgh. This program provides information to caregivers of preschool-aged children about stages of brain development and how a child's environment impacts this development. The Working For Kids: Building Skills™ curriculum is designed to support caregivers with children—three to five years of age—in decreasing their children's stress levels and promoting healthy brain development.

The Working for Kids study team collaborated with Calgary and Strathmore community agencies to recruit families to receive this supportive program. Many of these families have been affected by toxic stressors including poverty, trauma, and abuse; 52 families were enrolled from Awo Taan Healing Lodge, ASPEN Family and Community Network Society, CUPS, and Discovery House. An additional 19 families were enrolled from the University of Calgary Childcare Centre Society.

Training sessions aim to support caregivers in promoting resiliency in their children through reviewing information on how early experiences shape brain development, highlighting the importance of supportive environments, and providing strategies to support development in caregiver-child interactions. Specifically, the curriculum teaches caregivers:

- how a child's environment shapes brain development;
- which critical components of the environment promote healthy brain development;
- how areas of the brain develop from the prenatal period until about age 25;
- how activities strengthen the development of specific brain circuits;



- how adversity weakens brain development; and
- how caring adults can buffer the negative impacts of adversity on children's brain development.

Program efficacy is assessed through analysis of information obtained through validated measurement tools at three time points; children are assessed shortly after consent is attained (baseline) and six and twelve months after their caregivers receive the educational sessions or written materials. At the appointments caregivers report on their child's sleep patterns, behaviour, and developmental milestones. In addition, children provide a urine sample, which is analyzed for isoprostane levels to provide an indirect measurement of oxidative stress in their body. Children's executive functioning is measured through iPad "games" which are validated and psychometrically sound assessment tools that assess cognitive flexibility and language development.

The study team is grateful for the support received from the Calgary and Strathmore agencies and for the enthusiasm and commitment of the families who have chosen to participate. In preliminary analyses, it was observed that children exposed to multiple adverse childhood experiences (e.g. parental divorce, domestic violence) are more likely to have difficulties with social-emotional development than children with fewer adverse experiences. Baseline analyses of this sample indicate that high parental adverse childhood experiences are associated with high adverse childhood experiences for children. Further, children whose caregivers report higher educational levels and income are more likely to have higher scores in social-emotional development than caregivers with lower income and educational levels. Program efficacy will be evaluated following the completion of the six and twelve month assessments. This study has the potential to provide invaluable insight into the benefit of a community-based intervention on health outcomes for preschool children experiencing vulnerability and may contribute to lifelong health improvements for these children. ❀

Parental Alienation... continued from Page 1

2) Risk factors for children and child harm have explanations other than those provided by parental alienation;

3) Therapies and attempts at reparation for parental

alienation cause more harm to children than good; and

4) Research on family breakdown and violence in the home clearly outlines that the views of children need to be listened to, not ignored.

Considering how easily children are influenced, especially by their parents, parental alienation has potential for severe consequences. These consequences may result in removal of the child from their preferred parent and—in order to repair the relationship between the child and rejected parent—placement with the parent who claims alienation. This method not only adds to the trauma children experience during their family breakdown but also exposes them to potential abuse and manipulation. Exposure to potential abuse and manipulation occurs because parental alienation is often a tactic used by estranged fathers to divert attention away from allegations of domestic violence. Therefore, allowing this claim to take responsibility for the poor relationship a child may have with a rejected parent ignores the possibility of domestic abuse and family violence, as well as the powerful manipulation tactics the non-custodial parent may employ. Parental alienation rejects the possibility that a child may have a valid reason to assume negative or isolating behaviours toward the alienated parent and, instead, places sole blame on the preferred parent.

Despite the fact that there is little evidence to strongly corroborate the concept of parental

alienation and, despite the overwhelming evidence pointing to the contrary, many judges and courts still accept the claim and “experts” on the subject will testify to its validity. This is of concern, as the claim can be incredibly damaging for the families and children who are subjected to the experience. Parental alienation essentially diminishes the severity of intimate partner violence claims by suggesting that mothers allege domestic abuse to turn the children against the other parent. The truth, as based on empirical research and qualitative case studies, suggests that such a circumstance is very rare. It is much more common to see alienation claims leading the court to ignore the evidence of domestic violence, an incredibly damaging circumstance that has been shown to have a large impact on both parents and children involved. To view the Collective Memo of Concern in its entirety, please visit the RESOLVE website at umanitoba.ca/resolve (under *RESOLVE News*).

As RESOLVE’s research on gender-based and family violence continues, it is important to understand such subjects as parental alienation. Adoption of concepts that lack empirically valid research evidence (such as parental alienation) suggests that acts of violence perpetrated in the family can easily lack merit and should not need to be taken seriously. This not only puts abuse survivors and their children in danger but also undermines the work that has been done to support them. ✂



Announcements, Conferences and Events



RESOLVE HAS GONE DIGITAL!

We are excited to announce that the RESOLVE Newsletter will move from print-based to digital media this Fall and will be sent to you via email. Sign up for our digital newsletter on the RESOLVE Manitoba website at umanitoba.ca/resolve.

RESOLVE Manitoba is also on Twitter and Facebook. Visit the RESOLVE Manitoba website for more information.



Prairieaction Foundation is pleased to announce the 2018-2019 Youth Leadership Award (YLA) Recipients. YLA recipients are recognized for their leadership and commitment to raising awareness about violence and abuse, promoting healthy relationships, and/or developing approaches to violence prevention: **Peer Support Volunteers**, Churchill Community High School, La Ronge, SK; **GSA – Gay Straight Alliance**, Valley View School, Beauval, SK; **What's Your Frequency – Understand Us**, St. Gregory Elementary School, Regina, SK; **Project 104 Graffiti Team**, Prairie South School Division, Moose Jaw, SK; **Survivor 101: Navigating Adolescence**, Catholic Family Services, Saskatoon, SK; **Mindful Creative Writing**, Sheldon-Williams Collegiate, Regina, SK; **Student Leadership Team**, Mother Theresa Middle School, Regina, SK; **Clearwater Project Venture Youth Mentors**, Clearwater River Dene Nation, SK; and **Youth Revolution Valley View Team: Recess Guardians**, Valley View School, Brandon, MB. Visit our website to learn more about the YLA and other programs supported by Prairieaction Foundation www.prairieaction.ca.

November 15, 2019 - RESOLVE Research Day 2019: Calls to Action, Truth and Reconciliation, presented by Awo Taan Healing Lodge Society and RESOLVE Alberta. Our morning keynote features **Ms. Kimberly Murray**, Deputy Attorney General for the Province of Ontario and former Executive Director of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Our afternoon features **Dr. Betty Bastien**, Professor of Social Work at the University of Calgary.

Cheryle Chagnon-Greyeyes, of the Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, will be our Master of Ceremonies. Presentations will be made for the annual RESOLVE awards, focusing on exceptional Indigenous community leaders working on eliminating violence.

Much like our last successful RESOLVE Alberta Research Day in 2016 on Indigenous Healing and Trauma, this conference is an opportunity for Indigenous people and allies to learn about programs, services and best practices to reduce and address violence and abuse in our communities, Indigenous and otherwise. There will concurrent sessions on activities addressing the TRC calls to action, with research and best practice and education examples from RESOLVE partners and networks across the Prairies and Canada.

Call for proposals will go out over the summer months, so stay tuned! For more information refer to www.ucalgary.ca/resolve.

RESOLVEnews is a newsletter published by RESOLVE Manitoba. Any submissions, announcements and inquiries can be directed to the RESOLVE office in each of the three prairie provinces or to the editor, Ilze Cepelis, at RESOLVE Manitoba - telephone 204-474-8965; fax: 204-474-7686; e-mail: [newseedit\[at\]umanitoba\[dot\]ca](mailto:newseedit[at]umanitoba[dot]ca)



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Prairieaction Foundation (PAF) is Excited to Announce Our CARE Grants and Tri-Provincial Research Call-Outs!

PAF is committed to funding research that leads to meaningful change for individuals, families, and communities who experience violence and abuse. We are specifically interested in research that engages community partners, is solution focused, and produces outcomes that lead to better programs that help to keep our communities safer. Through our grants program, we have provided funds that have supported a variety of research projects that have made a difference. Please see our website at www.prairieaction.ca for further information on the CARE and Tri-Provincial grant opportunities. ✂

RESOLVE Manitoba

~ Dr. Kendra Nixon ~
Director (RESOLVE)

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