

Spring 2016
Issue 3



CAN ATTACH News

After successful completion of our First and Second ATTACH pilot studies, our Third ATTACH pilot study is successfully underway!

If you are interested in finding out more information about the ATTACH Intervention, ATTACH manual and/or protocol, please email

Dr. Nicole Letourneau @ nicole.letourneau@ucalgary.ca
or **Dr. Martha Hart** @ mhart@ucalgary.ca.

Follow Principal Investigator **Dr. Nicole Letourneau** on Twitter @**NicoleLynLetour** or visit the www.childstudies.ca website for details on the ATTACH Pilot Studies and other exciting research. Feel free to share the newsletter with friends and colleagues!



Apple Magazine interviewed the Principle Investigator, Dr. Nicole Letourneau -the Change Agent!

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<http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/apple.aspx>

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CHANGE AGENTS

Health is a deeply held value in Alberta. And Albertans have a strong desire to improve both their personal health and the province's health-care system. Kathryn Ward looks at how four leaders in health—change agents—are advancing research, understanding and front-line care



NICOLE LETOURNEAU

The change agent

Dr. Nicole Letourneau, PhD, is a professor with the University of Calgary's Faculty of Nursing and the Cumming School of Medicine in Pediatrics and Psychiatry. She is the Palix/Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation chair in Parent-Infant Mental Health and director of RESOLVE Alberta. She has published more than 80 articles and contributed to 13 books on child development for health-care professionals, including *Scientific Parenting: What Science Reveals, About Parental Influence* and more.

The change

Early support of children's mental health can help prevent problems throughout life, build resiliency and coping skills and reduce addictions and other harmful influences on health.

"The brain of someone who's been

stressed throughout life functions differently," Letourneau says.

For example, some people haven't learned how they see or react to a situation. This is called limited reflective function. When people have a higher reflective function, they're more sensitive to people's needs and have healthier relationships. They're also better able to support their children's healthy development.

Letourneau's recent study with the Calgary Urban Project Society (CUPS) showed parents with limited reflective function how to tune into babies' thoughts and feelings. Both researchers and CUPS staff saw positive results, including more responsive children and more sensitive parents.

"A child's development is directly related to a strong and sensitive relationship with parents or key caregivers," Letourneau says. "The child's needs must come first

whenever possible."

She is also leading a project that focuses on children from homes with violence.

"Women's shelters are now seeing the children of moms who were clients 30 years ago," she says. "Back then, the focus was solely on the mothers. Today we know we need to also help the children."

Going further

"We have overwhelming evidence showing the link between the parent-child relationship and lifelong mental health," Letourneau says.

We need to take that knowledge into our communities and use it to support children and families, she adds.

Letourneau's other research is looking at the long-term effects of stress, anxiety and depression before and after birth on parenting and childhood development.

PHOTO: ERIN WICKERSON

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ATTACH PILOT STUDY #3:

WE ARE HAPPY TO BE WORKING WITH SONSHINE COMMUNITY CENTRE!



Sonshine Community Services has been bringing healing and hope to families in need since 1978 when individuals from Calgary's River Park Church set out to serve homeless families in their community.

Over the years, Sonshine's services have evolved into a full range of residential and outreach programs specializing in developing healthy families and helping families impacted by family violence in Calgary and area.

SNAPSHOT OF OUR ATTACH INTERVENTION!



Action Team on Triadic Attachment and Child Health (ATTACH): A Parental Reflective Function Intervention

- **Background:** Parents suffering from violence, depression and addictions create a toxic stress environment for their children leaving parents unable to respond sensitively to them (Center on the Developing Child, 2010). Secure attachment is also influenced by parental Reflective Function (RF); parents' capacity to understand and thus regulate their own feelings/behaviour toward their child (Shai & Fonagy, 2014). Few RF interventions exist and typically focus on mothers' understanding of their own psychological caregiving representations but do not promote learning RF skills via practice and ignore co-parents (Cassidy, 2011; Suchman 2010).
- **Objectives:** Building on this research we have developed and pilot tested a RF intervention called ATTACH, designed for high-risk mothers and their co-parents, and plan to evaluate the effects of ATTACH pilot studies on mothers' RF and maternal-child interactions.
- **Methods:** The ATTACH project is community-based employing integrated knowledge transfer via partnering with community agencies serving vulnerable families. ATTACH completed two 10-12 week pilot studies (randomized controlled trial & quasi-experiment) with 20 families.
- **Results:** Data are currently being analyzed. Attrition was very low (<5%); several factors explained high retention: (1) developing strong therapeutic alliances between mothers and ATTACH facilitators (2) offering a nurturing environment.
- **Significance:** Understanding associations between parental RF and child development, and determining the effectiveness of programs like the ATTACH, contributes to environments that support healthy child development.

We are thankful to our community partner, Sonshine Community services for their support in accommodating us to do our third pilot study!

***We wished
all the
ATTACH
families
Happy
Easter!***

EASTER BUNNIES ☺



***We
distributed
bunnies to
our ATTACH
families on
Easter!***

TAKING ATTACH TO THE HIGHEST LEVELS WITH LEADERS IN THE FIELD!



ATTACH Team Presenting at the International Attachment Conference in New York City, NY (Summer 2015) Hosted by Dr. Howard Steele (Leader in Reflective Functioning & Attachment).



Dr. Alan Sroufe (Leader in ABCD Attachment Theory) centre, with Dr. Nicole Letourneau and Dr. Martha Hart at University of Minnesota, Aug/15

International Association for the Study of Attachment (IASA) Conference Miami, Nov 2015



Dr. Peter Fonagy (Leader in Reflective Functioning) centre, Dr. Pat Crittenden (Leader in DMM Attachment Theory) left, with the ATTACH Team, including from left Dr. Martha Hart, Dr. Nicole Letourneau, Virginia Xavier (RA), and Dr. Lubna Anis.

Dr. Nicole Letourneau and Dr. Martha Hart
will be presenting at the World Congress of
the World Association of Infant Mental
Health on the ATTACH project!

15th World Congress of the World
Association for Infant Mental Health

May 29 – June 2, 2016
Prague براغ ڤراڠ Czech Republic

*"Infant Mental Health in a rapidly changing
world: Conflict, adversity, and resilience"*



What would you like to see in future newsletters?

If you have a **suggestion, question** or **comment**,
please send them in.

We appreciate any and all feedback!

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