



## **Report calls for improved coordination of community programs for children and youth with disabilities**

Toronto, January 19, 2012 – Community organizations are coming together today to discuss findings from a new report that suggest better coordination across the sector could improve social interaction and development for youth and children with disabilities. The report reiterates the need for children and youth with disabilities and their families to have a sense of community and suggests that while there are numerous programs available across the country, they are challenging to access and navigate.

Sally Jordan, caregiver to a 22 year-old nephew living with a disability, echoes the findings of the project. “It’s extremely important for my nephew to participate in activities in the community so that he doesn’t feel isolated, but finding information on what is available is a big challenge. Often I can only find programs and service through word-of-mouth. It would be great to have a reliable and accessible source of information where I can find everything in one place.”

Lead author, Dr. Anne Snowdon, will present findings and recommendations from the national Human Resources and Skills Development Canada-funded discussion document, *Strengthening Communities for Canadian Children with Disabilities*, at The Sandbox Project Conference 2012, urging key stakeholders to create community environments that strengthen social development for children and youth who face significant challenges due to disability.

“Through this initiative, we found that children and youth with disabilities and their families need and want to connect and engage with their communities in a meaningful, accessible, and accommodating way that enables social interaction and development,” said Dr. Snowdon, the lead author behind the project. “As a result, we have been able to identify opportunities to strengthen these community environments, and can now develop and disseminate tools and resources needed to foster supportive communities, so that the needs of this population can be better met.”

The project was implemented in three pilot communities across Canada (Toronto, ON; Regina, SK; and Fredericton, NB) and examined their respective capacities for supporting the social development and well-being of children and youth with disabilities. Three main recommendations have been proposed in response to the findings, including:

- Develop coordinated web-based navigation tools for families that can create a ‘single online reference’ resource for accessing community programs, services, and professional care.
- Develop integration-focused programs and services that will allow for children and youth with disabilities and their families to feel part of their community.

- Augment the social networks of children and youth with special needs using social networking tools to strengthen current and future community programs to actively engage and include children and youth with special needs as active members of their community.

“The project recommendations are a step in the right direction, and provide an opportunity to engage and connect service providers and families in new and different ways to work together towards meeting common goals,” says Jennifer Goosens of Special Olympics Canada. “We can enhance the support we provide to children and youth with disabilities, as well as their families, by working together.”

The *Strengthening Communities for Canadian Children with Disabilities* project was produced through the collaboration of a number of key stakeholder organizations, including: Special Olympics Canada, Community Living and Holland Bloorview.

### **About The Sandbox Project**

The Sandbox Project was created to improve the health of Canada’s children and youth. The goal of The Sandbox Project is to make measurable progress against international health indicators within the next five years, with a particular focus on improving health outcomes for Canadian children with respect to injury prevention, obesity, mental health, and the environment. Working directly with parents, business, health industry leaders, governments and non-governmental organizations, The Sandbox Project seeks to raise awareness, pursue research, and collaborate to develop solutions and better public policy.

Dr. Anne Snowdon will present *Strengthening Communities for Canadian Children with Disabilities* at The Sandbox Project Conference 2012, at TELUS House in Toronto (25 York Street, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor) on Thursday, January 19, 2012 at 12:30p.m.

For more information on The Sandbox Project, visit: [www.sandboxproject.ca](http://www.sandboxproject.ca)

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