

Connecting the Dots: Exploring the Intersection between Child Protective Services and Homelessness

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Outline of Talk

- “All my life I’ve slipped through the cracks:” The Social Organization of Youth Work
 - A single example illustrates the complex intersections between child protective services, social assistance, the homelessness sector, and education
 - Current Knowledge to Action (KTA) process at the Hospital for Sick Children
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My entire life, I've slipped through the cracks ... like, they've always lost my paperwork or they've forgotten about it or said 'you didn't hand that to me.' 'Well, yes, I did!' You know? ... I'd always fall through the cracks. I'm not even over-exaggerating or anything like that. Seriously, every single time, I've always fallen through the cracks. I don't even know how it happens. (Desiree, interview, 2007)



“All my life I’ve slipped through the cracks”

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- 27 formal, semi-structured interviews with young people
 - Policy and other workplace textual analysis
 - 13 formal, semi-structured interviews with practitioners (e.g., police officers, teachers, shelter workers)
 - Participant observation

Fieldwork

A story about how someone comes to use a youth shelter, is not simply a story about finding a safe place to sleep.





Young people and the practitioners with whom they work are participating in social relations that inextricably link their work together and hook them into complexes of coordinated social action that are organized across institutional settings.



“Youth Work”

- All of the things young people do in institutional settings as well as the activities of *any* practitioner who works with youth
 - The processes of coordination that shape educational and social outcomes for young people
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The research demonstrates a misalignment between the urgent needs of youth; the timelines and foci of institutions; and the professional orientations and accountabilities of practitioners.

Key Message



Nobody “signs out of care”

- Stories of young people’s involvement with child protective services became the point of departure from which I undertook an investigation of Ontario’s child welfare system.
 - I offer a single account, which reveals one layer of intersectivity between child protective services, the family court system, social assistance, youth homelessness, education, and to some extent, probation & youth criminal justice.
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“... once you’re 16 with CAS, you can sort of go to court and sign yourself out ... [but] you can’t really do anything. Like I’ve been going [to court] since I was 16 and I didn’t get out [of CAS custody] until last June [when I was 17].”



“I was all dressed up and stuff in case I had to go into the courtroom, but I didn’t have to. I just sat in the hallway and my lawyer was like, ‘yah, they’ve decided to let you out’”



“[OW] had to review [my eligibility] and stuff because they were like, ‘you were in CAS, so you had funding and housing and everything, and you left *willingly*, so we don’t know if we can accept you.’ So I was like, ‘well at the end of the year – because I was going to have the baby – they [CAS] were going to let me go anyway, right. They just let me go earlier because I requested it.’ Then they [OW] just overlooked it and were like ‘ok everything’s fine then.’”





In order for a young person to establish welfare eligibility, “the Administrator” must be “satisfied that special circumstances exist requiring the applicant to live outside the parental home”

(Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services 2009, p. 1).

“I wanted to move back up here, and [OW] said, ‘ok then once you move to Middlesbrough and get a place and everything, *then* apply.’ But I couldn’t because in order to get a house, I needed to be on welfare to get money for a house”



“I didn’t really even apply for welfare until I met Dean and got put on his cheque.”





“Participation in LEAP is mandatory for parents aged 16-17 who have not completed high school and who are Ontario Works participants or are part of a benefit unit receiving financial assistance under Ontario Works.”

(Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services, 2009, p. 9)

Learning, Earning, and Parenting (LEAP)

“What happens is that you kind of just have him crawling around doing his own thing with the other babies. He’s in a swing or you’re holding him”





In Keelyn's account we see how a single institutional process – in this case, the initiation & termination of a Crown wardship order– shapes institutional relations through which other aspects of a young person's life are organised.



The metaphoric cracks that people point to in their stories actually represent material instances where institutional process and knowledge do not line up effectively for young people, and often for the practitioners with whom young people work.

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- Early research findings were used to build capacity at the youth shelter
 - An individualized program to support young people's sustained transitions out of the shelter
 - Professional development opportunities for staff who participated as mentors in the program we develop

Making Change



SickKids: Knowledge to Action Process

- Family-centred care requires ongoing input and participation from a diversity of families
 - Mixed-methods research project that seeks to generate knowledge about family healthwork
 - Knowledge mobilization, research impact, and social innovation as well as current design thinking in the area of interactive technology development
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- focus-group discussions
 - one-on-one interviews with parents
 - online survey

The Research

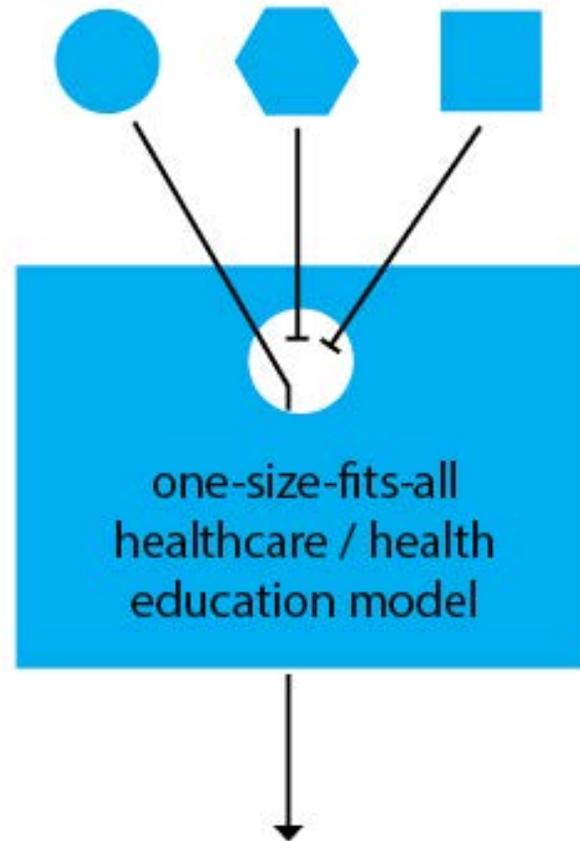


Family health work is shaped by a number of inter-related factors:

- people's social networks
- their own and their children's educational experiences
- their knowledge of the healthcare system
- information seeking strategies
- housing situations
- proximity to services
- the emotional needs of the family

Findings

Existing user experience



Better health outcomes
for some

The key message

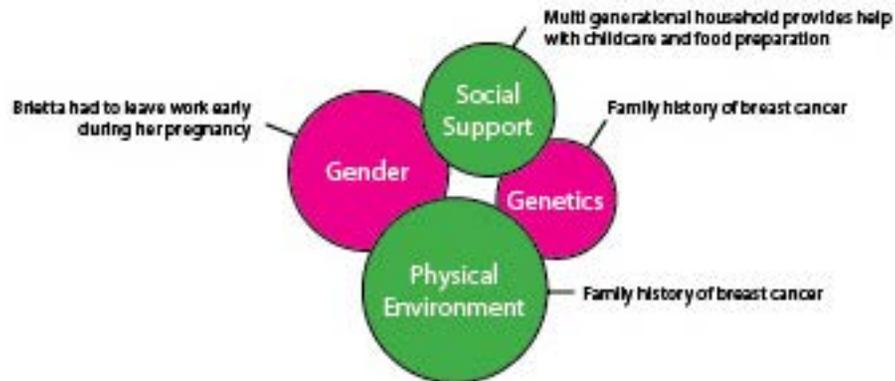
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- Transform research findings into a range of health systems user personas (or profiles)
 - Use personas as tools to ensure that systems-level change efforts reflect the needs/strengths of diverse Canadian youth and families

Action

Brietta | Empowered Parent Advocate



Determinants of Health | Detractors & Contributors



“ But I would look things up and send her into her oncologist with questions to ask. But I also went to the medical journals.”

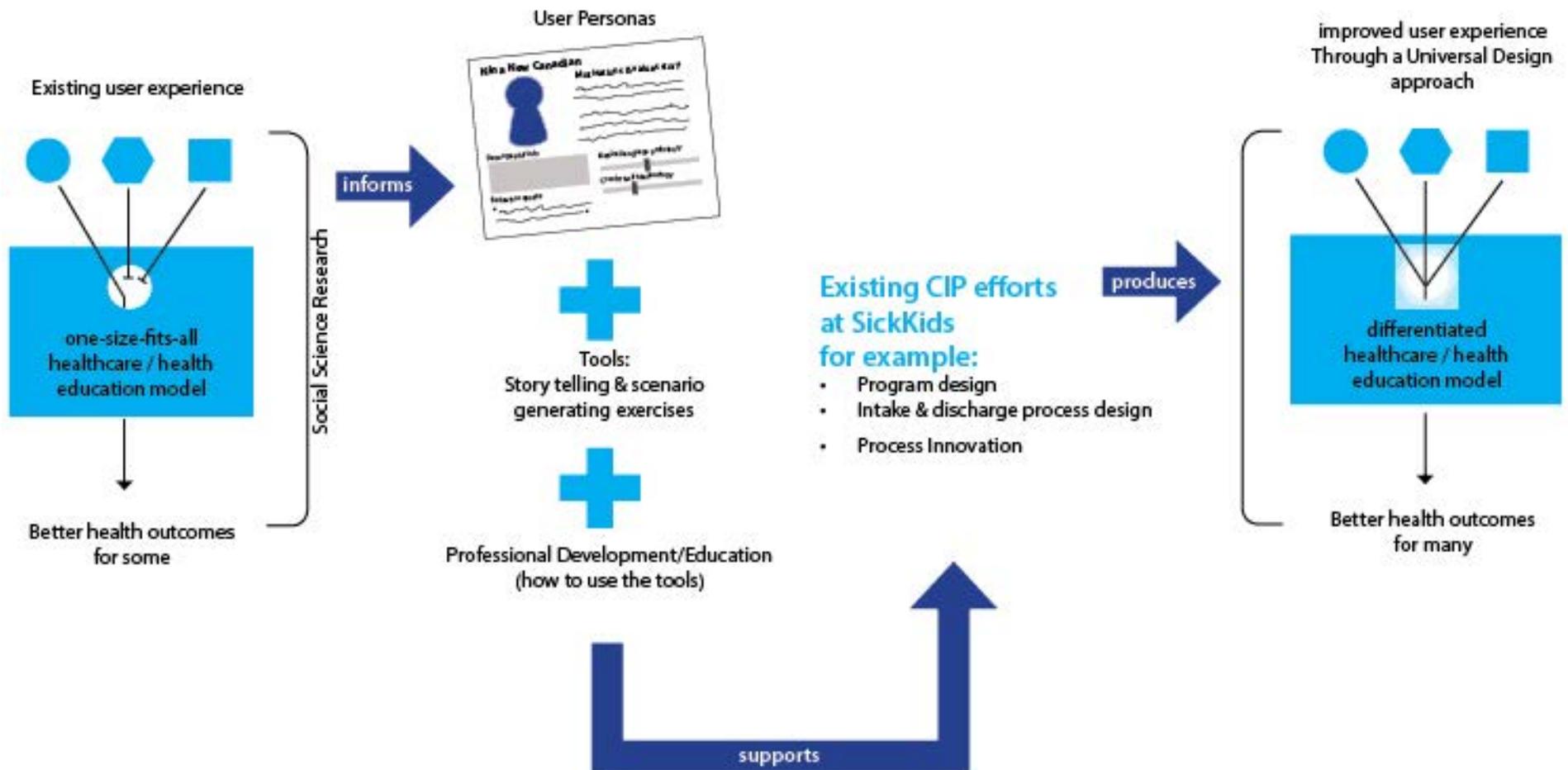
Demographic Information at a Glance

Age: 35 years old
 Gender and sexuality: woman, straight
 Race: White
 Ethno-cultural Heritage: Western European descent
 Currently lives: Toronto, Ontario
 Language Proficiency: English, some French
 Citizenship Status: Canadian

Family at a Glance

- Dual-parent heterosexual family, Brietta (woman) and Dale (man)
- One male child (Noel, 6 years old). Noel is a high energy child, who has some difficulty focusing in school. His overall health is good, but doctors have recommended that he have his tonsils removed.
- Dale's mother and father live in the home as well, and the two families share on housing costs
- Live in the City of Toronto (centrally located)

Persona Sketch



Application



Inter-professional Learning and Planning



My current program of work at SickKids suggests one way to use sociological research to guide workplace – and ultimately inter-organizational – learning and planning in support of coordinated and equitable systemic change.

Linking the KTA Process with my Earlier Work
