

The Alberta Learning Journey

Since 1982, GRIT has been delivering fully inclusive, Early Childhood Services (ECS) to pre-school children with developmental disabilities and their families in Edmonton Alberta, Canada. Our itinerant educational teams provide support in the every day settings where children live, play and learn – their home, community and kindergarten in their neighborhood school. GRIT’s core values are grounded in the philosophies of: Community Inclusion, Family Centred Practices, Learning through Play, and being a Learning Organization. (<https://gritprogram.ca>)

It is through the lived experience of families that GRIT became increasingly aware of the gaps in families’ ability to access inclusive early learning programs. Recent Alberta research, *The State of Inclusive Childcare in Alberta*, (Wiat, et al 2015) provided timely insight into the challenges facing Alberta’s children, families and educators. Wiat and colleagues found that 36% of childcare centres refuse to accept children with special needs (citing lack of skill and confidence). Moreover, 36 % of the childcare centres do not know how to access support and approximately 20% of centres asked at least one child to withdraw from their program citing challenging behavior and lack of skills and confidence of staff.

The Pyramid Model – Alberta Style

With critical, local research in-hand, GRIT was poised to access funding to initiate ASaP (Access, Supports and Participation) in Spring, 2012. We adopted, enhanced and implemented the Pyramid Model (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006) and the accompanying Practice-Based Coaching framework. Through this, ASaP has created an integrated and responsive approach to early learning and care, to ensure equitable access to high quality early learning environments for all children regardless of ability, socio-economic, culture, or location (<https://asapgrit.ca>).

ASaP’s mission is to provide licensed child care programs **access** to the right **supports**, at the right time to build upon the skills, knowledge and confidence of early childhood educators to ensure the meaningful **participation** and inclusion of all children.



The ASaP logo thoughtfully illustrates the interconnectedness and equal importance of three essential elements of access, support, and participation that lead to the most successful outcomes for children, families and educators. In contrast, the absence of any element puts children’s development at risk, increases stress on families, and often leads to parents being asked to withdraw their child from an early learning and care environments.

Intended Outcomes

1. Capacity building of early childhood educators
2. Navigation of complex pathways to access cross-ministerial support
3. Leadership Development to build upon and sustain inclusive practices and policies

Implementation Science - As we reflect on ASaP's humble beginnings of supporting five centres, we see momentous growth in knowledge and leadership development. Applying stages of implementation science (Halle, T., Metz, A., & Martinez-Beck, I.) significantly contributed to our understanding of "implementation drivers" needed for continuous learning, data-based decision making, and leadership factors to successfully scale ASaP from 5 centres to 300 programs across Alberta. Additional outcomes include protocols for distance coaching using Swivl technology, e-learning modules for the most frequent Pyramid Practices, a video library of local educator's emerging practices, etc.

Community-Based Research - The most valuable asset of an organization is its people. GRIT staff are passionate learners seeking knowledge and discovering innovative practices for their work. Through constant dialogue, respect and trust, people and ideas evolve and grow. In partnership with Dr. Veronica Smith (University of Alberta), we are pleased to share research outcomes and knowledge (<https://asapgrit.ca/research/>) obtained through engaging in inquiries, including:

- Capacity Building and Coaching (2012-15)
- Coaching and Well-Being (2015-17)
- Navigation to Access Child Specific Supports (2018-19)
- Understanding impacts on social and emotional learning (2020- current).

Looking Forward – ASaP has sparked interest in the Pyramid Model across Canada. Our team is proud to have shared our journey, knowledge and lessons learned with so many Canadian provinces, as they too explore the Pyramid Model. We are thrilled to have engaged in a two-year partnership and Train the Trainer services with the Centre for Addictions and Mental Health, Ontario.

ASaP's demonstrated success led to the Pyramid Model being chosen as the evidence-based framework to inform Alberta's newly designed Inclusive Child Care model. This continued investment is critical in creating systemic change needed to ensure access to high quality, inclusive early learning and child care environments for all children.

With Gratitude: We are grateful for the incredible training, mentorship and continuous learning that has been provided to GRIT by the Pyramid Model Consortium team, including: Susan Jacks, Lise Fox, Mary Louise Hemmeter, Kathleen Artman-Meeker, Jacklyn Joseph, Phil Strain, and so many other wise, patient and gentle mentors.