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Knowledge Bites Lunch 'n' Learn

May 18, 2021



Am I enough?

Exploring Alberta families' journeys parenting a child with mental health challenges through multimedia

Presented by: Dr. Dorothy Badry, Greta Gerstner & Melissa Appleton

“Being the parent of a child with a mental illness requires a precarious balance between the unpredictability of the present, while also preparing for the future.”

-CASA Family
Advisory Council,
2020





Canada's Mental Health Pandemic

Photovoice teaser released May 2020

27.400+ views



Link: <https://youtu.be/DwQunIA5xQU>



Objectives of the Photovoice Research Project



- Invite sharing of the experiences of Family Advisory Council parents and/or caregivers accessing, navigating and participating in the child and youth mental health system.
- Promote expression so that participants can share the meaning of their experience and join together in community through shared experience.
- Explore and develop potential areas of improvement in the areas of accessibility and service delivery of mental health programming and services.
- Inform health care, program and policy stakeholders of the challenges facing access and usage of pediatric mental health services.

Photovoice



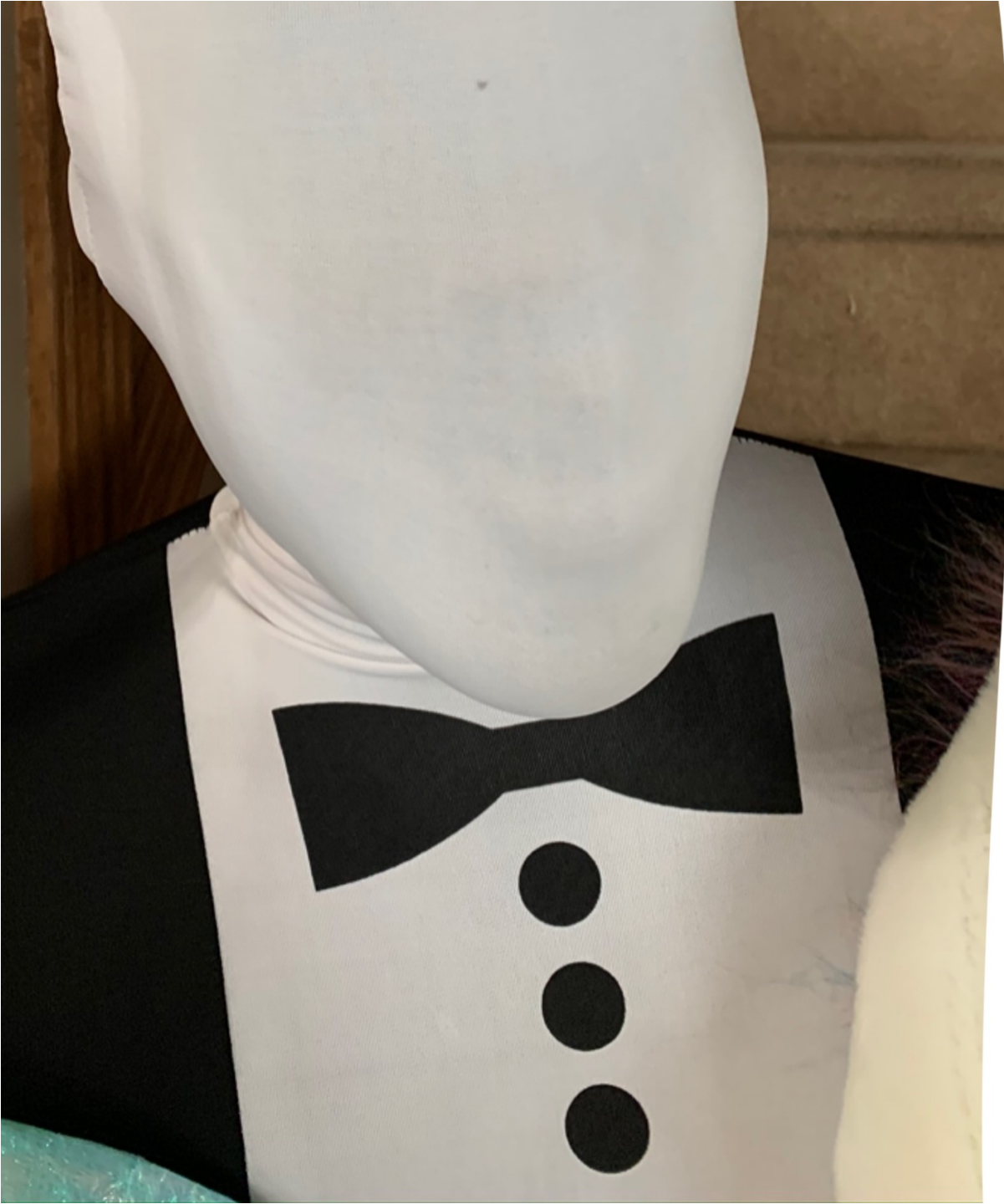
Photovoice is a participatory action research methodology.



Photovoice supports the examination of social and health issues in communities that are often marginalized.



Through taking photos, participants can ascribe words to images which depict and/or represent their journey as a parent.



Child and Youth Mental Health

faceless, nameless, silenced

Until you have a child with mental health challenges, it remains a faceless, nameless area of need in our community.

For those of us who have lived experience and are navigating:

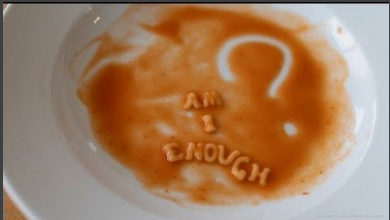
- ✓ assessments
- ✓ diagnoses
- ✓ and further referrals to agencies

This masked child represents the thousands of Canadian children, youth and their siblings who struggle.

They want to co-exist, be successful, receive quality mental health care, and not be bullied or ostracized. **Families deserve to have critical options available during mental health crises.**

CASA Photovoice Project – Short version

Released June 17, 2020
33,400+ views



Canada's
Youth with
Mental
Health
Challenges



Faceless.
Nameless.
Silenced.

©CASA FAC Photovoice Research Project

- Link: https://youtu.be/HF4Kbx_GWko

Blame, Shame, Repeat.

I have repeatedly come across the same claims disguised in various forms again and again:

I am to blame;

I am exaggerating.

This type of parent blaming language completely invalidates my expertise as my child's mother. When this type of language is used, my voice - my child's voice - is lost.



There *needs* to
be a change
from child
centered
model to family
centered.



The Antiquated Medical Model

There is a power dynamic of **expert vs caregiver/patient** that currently exists within our mental health care system.

It takes strength to speak out and attempt to shift this current system to a more inclusive model where **families** are heard and supported.

Are we enough to stand together and change the current system?

Pandemic Notes

- Our instructional meeting for the photovoice was days before lockdown. This was the only in-person meeting for the project other than an outdoor gathering to take photos for the teaser video. All other meetings were on Zoom or by phone.
- No one expected to be doing the project during the pandemic. Suddenly friends, neighbors, and family members or their children who had never been affected by mental health concerns were struggling with anxiety, depression and other mental illness due to the unexpected “living during a pandemic” world.
- The already scarce resources now had even longer waitlists. Other programs eliminated options for mentally ill kids who suffer from rages (physically aggressive) as hands-off was better for COVID-19 spread reduction. Caregiver PTSD increased as families lost hope for help.
- Meanwhile, families living with children affected by mental illness struggled to adjust to having kids home 100% of the time with no respite or reprieve. Respite workers/homecare workers were less available due to COVID-19 restrictions, illness, and close contact.
- Project release slated for in-person opportunities had to evolve. Initial release did not have the impact desired and was soon overshadowed by Covid news releases, and other news.





Our research project was presented to 110 members of the Alberta School Councils' Association as a webinar. Parents from across Alberta engaged in a conversation about their own mental health. Parents found they could identify with the photos, and thus felt less alone in their journey. Members were able to discuss what supports were currently available in their area of the province, and what additional supports were needed to help their families.



We were given the opportunity to present to a class of 32 first year social work students at University of Calgary. In sharing about our experiences of parenting our complex children, the students gained valuable insight into the challenges faced by families who are parenting kids with mental health concerns. This included the constant vigilance required of parents to ensure supervision, safety, adequate support, balance and self care.



Altogether, there have been more than 34,200 views of the CASA Photovoice Research Project on social media. By using social media, we were able to reach a wider audience and raise awareness about the struggles parents are facing when parenting a child with a mental illness. The project has highlighted the need for more family support, better communication, funding and awareness as well as the need to move to a family-centered model so all members in the family will have the support they need.

Outcomes

Research question:

Am I Enough?

As a Family Advisory Council, we hope this Photovoice project makes you see the reality from our side of the camera. We hope our images and voices have given you pause and thoughts towards change.

Answer:

Yes, fundamentally we are enough.

But...

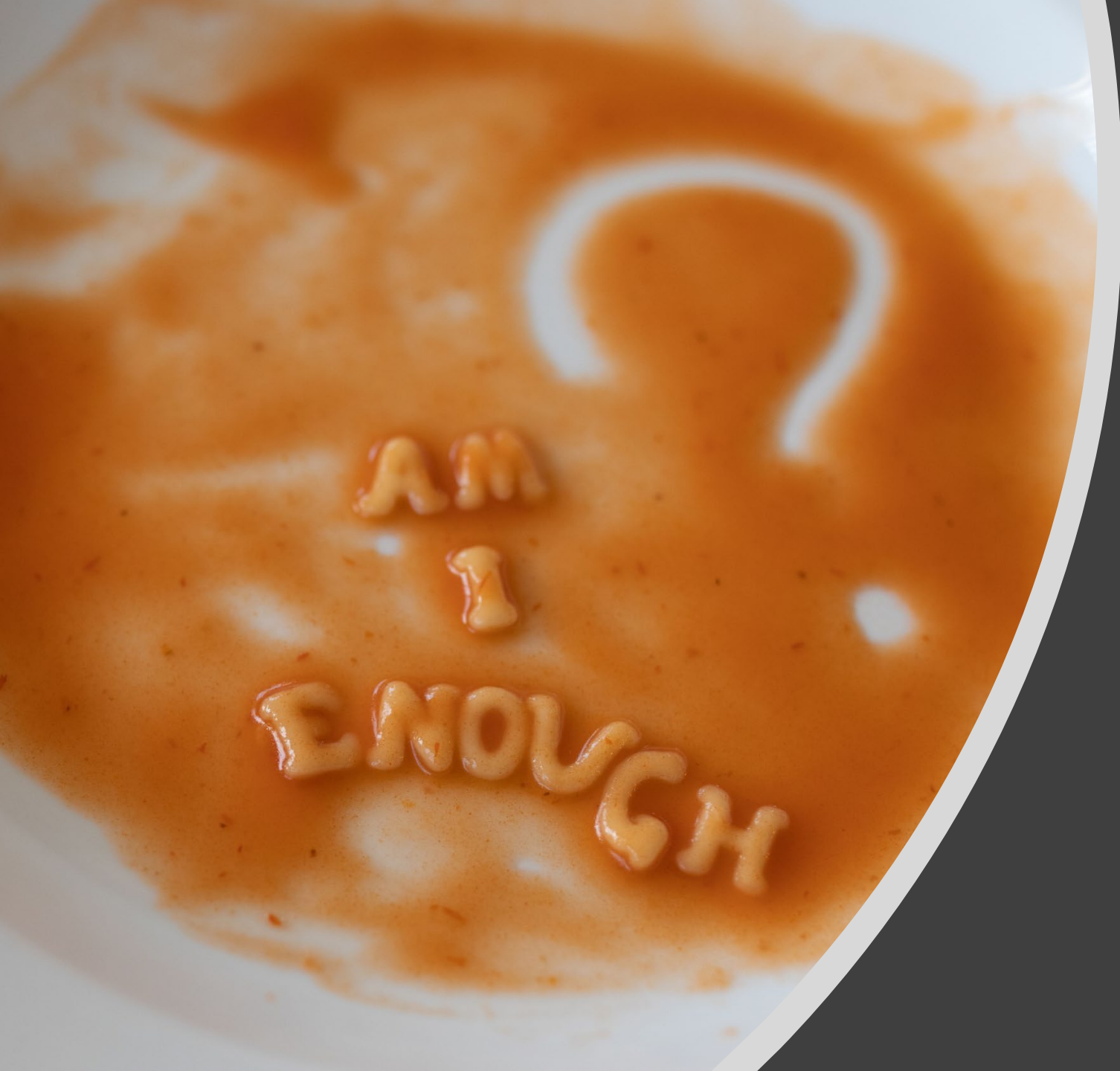
We are burnt out from trying to find appropriate help for our children.

Our provincial and federal governments need to do more for children with mental health disorders.

There needs to be funding and supports for services - not cuts. We cannot do it without supports and help.

There are too many children needing help and not enough programs or services available.

Canada needs to help us to be enough.



Lunch & Learn

Q & A

Thank You

For further information please contact:

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The complete research project is available upon request.

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