

# Mary J. Wright Research and Education Centre at Merrymount

## Helping All Children To Thrive

### Advancing Early Childhood Research and Interventions

Mary J. Wright was a pioneer and visionary in the field of child psychology. Western is proud to carry on her vision of nurturing children and helping them to thrive and flourish through the creation of the Mary J. Wright Research and Education Centre at Merrymount.

This unique Centre will drive state-of-the-art interdisciplinary research that examines factors impacting early childhood development, with the goal of fostering the health and wellbeing of society's most vulnerable children, and enhancing outcomes for all children.

The Centre will be housed at the Merrymount Family Support and Crisis Centre, allowing our researchers to test their theories and gauge the results of their interventions immediately. Overseen by Western's Faculty of Education, the Centre will:

- Lead to more advanced understandings of the relationship between childhood neurodevelopment and psychosocial factors;
- Foster the development of evidence-based prevention, promotion, and treatment programs for children and families;
- Bring evidence-based practices directly to the community;
- Allow researchers to share their findings and educate professionals who deliver children's services in other communities, nationally, and internationally;
- Nurture the next generation of childhood professionals through active involvement of Western students in internships and practicum placements in the community setting.

### Driving Transdisciplinary, Evidence-based Research

The Centre will be composed of an interdisciplinary team of basic and applied researchers from Western's faculties of education, science, social science and health sciences, who will work collaboratively across three signature areas of research:

- Environmental effects on brain development – toxic stress
- Cognition, language, literacy and numeracy
- Social, emotional and behavioural resiliency and wellbeing



“By generating new knowledge from research in areas such as cognition and brain development, and using that knowledge to develop interventions and programs designed to help children, we will be able to make an extraordinary difference in the lives of not only children, but their families and communities as well.”

- Vicki Schwean,  
*Dean, Faculty of Education*

# Extraordinary Impact

## Fostering the Health and Wellbeing of the Next Generation

The future of any society depends on its ability to foster the health and well-being of the next generation. Our researchers are committed to providing better outcomes for children by integrating an enhanced understanding of child development gained through basic research into evidence-based early childhood education and intervention programs and initiatives. This could have an extraordinary impact on Canada's social and economic future.

## Developing Early Childhood Researchers and Professionals

The Centre will help us to develop and maintain programs of services and supports for the next generation of researchers, scholars, and professionals.

- Graduate and postdoctoral students will benefit from collaborative research and publication opportunities, professional development, service learning, practicum, and internship programs.
- Undergraduates will be provided research opportunities in early child development through real-world child- and family-related projects.

## Building Capacity, Ensuring Sustainability

The striking shortage of well-trained personnel in the field of early childhood education indicates that substantial investments in training, recruiting, compensating, and retaining a high quality workforce must become a top priority. Our Centre seeks to be both a local and national source of capacity building in knowledge of early child development and to foster and develop evidence-based early intervention and education practices.

## Help Us Ensure the Most Vulnerable Children Thrive

Researchers within the Centre are fully funded. However, to support their work, share their findings and train our students, we need your help. We invite our alumni and friends to consider a gift in support of:

- Leadership: capacity building, community development, management of transdisciplinary research programs
- Research: publication costs, travel, workshop fees
- Students: internships, placements and research awards
- Knowledge translation and dissemination: named symposiums, seminar series and training programs

We would be pleased to discuss details of these initiatives in further detail. **Thank you** for your consideration.

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## Signature Areas of Research

### Toxic Stress

Children who are exposed to traumatic circumstances in the perinatal period are prone to lifelong problems in learning, behavior, and physical and mental health. We will investigate the impact of early adversity on brain functioning and develop interventions to help prevent these children from developing lifelong disabilities.

### Cognition, Language, Literacy and Numeracy

The development of interventions for learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, has been hampered by the variable nature of the disabilities, and the ways they can affect individual children. Our world-renowned cognitive neuroscience researchers will study the cognitive processes that support children's learning, and examine the key mechanisms associated with emerging, established and delayed skills in language, reading and math.

### Social, Emotional and Behavioral Resiliency and Well-Being

We will explore the cause and frequency of mental health problems in young children, and develop and evaluate tailor-made early childhood assessment measures and intervention programs to enhance mental health outcomes for children. Our studies will also focus on the role of individual differences in the development of psychological health and well-being in young children.



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