

Inclusion Alberta **Family** Conference

Families,
the **heart**
of community



April 11-12, 2025

Fantasyland Hotel, Edmonton, AB

Inclusion Alberta

WORKSHOP

Friday, April 11 | 9 am – 12:00, 1:30 – 4:30 pm

Joyful learning: Active and collaborative strategies to differentiate instruction in inclusive classrooms

Presenter: Dr. Paula Kluth, Educator, Consultant, Author, Advocate and Scholar

Too often a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is used to design lessons leaving some learners struggling to participate and leaving teachers feeling they have not reached all of their students. In this interactive session, participants will apply principles of differentiation by exploring a number of collaborative, active, and brain-compatible learning techniques aimed at engaging students and making learning joyful. The session is structured for participants to learn and experience the application of these active lesson planning techniques through demonstration.

Paula's work and research, and that of her colleagues, has found active and collaborative strategies to make classrooms more fun, and more interactive, are better able to meet the learning needs of a wider range of students and contribute to a more enjoyable experience for teachers. Active and collaborative learning strategies have proven to be one of the most effective means of teaching, and fostering learning and engagement of students within inclusive classrooms. Paula will share interactive and multi-level instruction activities that facilitate meaningful and authentic learning for all students. Supports for students with communication, social, and learning differences will be highlighted.

Paula's workshop, given she is one of the most sought-after speakers and consultants on inclusive education, will be of immense value to regular classroom teachers who are including students with cognitive and related disabilities and all those in schools and school systems who collaborate and support inclusive classroom teachers (e.g., inclusive education support staff, school consultants, school and school district administrators, educational assistants, etc.). We encourage, wherever possible, school teams, inclusive of parents, who are engaged in inclusive learning to attend.

Dr. Paula Kluth is a consultant, author, advocate, and independent scholar who works with teachers and families to provide inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities and to create more responsive and engaging schooling experiences for all learners. Paula is a former special educator, classroom teacher and inclusion facilitator. Paula has also been a university professor and has taught courses on both inclusion and disability studies.

Paula's work has centered on helping teachers and administrators educate all students in their schools and classrooms given her focus on Universal Design for Learning, co-teaching, differentiating instruction and educating students with complex support needs. She also frequently works with family organizations to support goals related to inclusion.

She is the author or co-author of more than 15 books and products including: [All In: 18 Ways to Include All Students in Virtual Classrooms](#) is Paula's newest book. She is also the author or co-author of 15 other titles including [Joyful Learning: Active and Collaborative Strategies for the Inclusive Classroom](#), [Universal Design Daily](#), ["Don't We Already Do Inclusion?": 100 Ways to Improve Inclusive Schools](#), and [You're Going to Love This Kid!: Teaching Students with Autism in Inclusive Classrooms](#). She is also the author of a few books for children including [Coaster](#), a story of a puppy with wonderful wheels. Paula is also the director of a documentary film titled ["We Thought You'd Never Ask"](#). [Voices of People with Autism](#).

For more information visit inclusionrules.com

President's Reception

Friday night, from 7pm – 10pm, Inclusion Alberta hosts its annual President's Reception. Join us as we honour individuals and organizations that have made extraordinary contributions to the lives of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Many find the President's Reception to be an inspiring celebration of community inclusion.

Children and teens welcome

Fully inclusive Childcare and Teen Club have been a part of the Family Conference since its inception. Each day will be a new adventure filled with fun, inclusive play, and hands-on experiences. The staff are quality caregivers/play consultants who will add a touch of magic to the day, while parents participate in sessions. A limited number of childcare spaces are available for children 12 and under and Teen Club spaces for children aged 13 to 19. When purchasing your Conference ticket(s) online, you will be able to purchase Childcare/Teen Club programming in the 'add on' section at a cost of \$25 per day per child or teen. Spaces are limited and will be filled on a first-come basis.



Friday, April 11 | 9 am – 12:00, 1:30 – 4:30 pm

WORKSHOP

Inclusive recreation: Creating a culture of welcoming, participating, and belonging

Presenter: Lisa Drennan, Founder, MERGE Inclusion Consulting, Author & Adjunct Professor

Recreation is a vital activity necessary to the well-being and development of each and every one of us, and to our communities; often contributing to our sense of belonging and the possibility of friendships. Yet children and adults with an intellectual disability are too often excluded or perceived as not being able to meaningfully participate. The consequence is not only the lack of pleasure and personal growth experienced through recreation but the devastating impact of loneliness and exclusion.

In this dynamic and interactive workshop Lisa Drennan will share practical information, processes, and tools to advance authentic inclusive recreation that applies to recreation providers, families and individuals seeking inclusive experiences and those who support the inclusion of children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Lisa

will share the 6 key principles that guide inclusive recreation and detail the foundation to inclusive recreation "IN ALL - FOR ALL - BY ALL". She will share inspiring stories of the difference created in the lives of children and adults with intellectual disabilities by their peers, coaches, and recreation leaders. Lisa, through her experience and expertise, will share a range of strategies that can be employed for inclusive recreation to be welcoming and successful.

***Lisa Drennan's** career has been centered on empowering individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to reach their wellness and enrichment goals and to meaningfully belong as valued members of their communities. She was one of the first Directors of Inclusion for a YMCA where through her innovative program development, and creation and execution of comprehensive staff training, she was recognized as a leader in the field of social and recreational inclusion for persons with diverse abilities. This led to Lisa being appointed as the National Co-Chairperson of the Y-USA Diverse Abilities Working Group providing a platform of learning and sharing of best practices for YMCAs across the country. Lisa was also a principal author of the Pathways to Friendship toolkit, The ARC, Massachusetts.*

In 2018, she founded MERGE Inclusion Consulting, where she provides consultation, staff training, and systemic implementation of inclusion to a wide variety of community organizations — all with the goal of helping individuals with disabilities achieve greater societal participation and social value through inclusive environments. Lisa's career trajectory showcases her evolution from a hands-on professional to a national advocate for disability inclusion. Her work has not only impacted the lives of individuals with disabilities but also influenced organizations and communities to adopt more inclusive practices. She supports and advises a wide variety of community organizations including YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, sports teams, leagues, scouts, schools, etc.

Lisa is an Adjunct Professor in Adaptive Physical Education, University of Massachusetts. Her career reflects her commitment to helping people with disabilities not just participate but thrive in roles that foster their unique contributions and abilities.

For more information visit
www.mergeconsulting.org

This session is
a must for all
those engaged
in organizing,
leading,
providing, and
participating
in community
recreational
activities.

Family Celebration Dance

Join us on Saturday evening from 7pm - 11pm pm in the Fantasyland Hotel Ballroom for a fun and casual celebration for family members of all ages! Music will be playing all evening and even if you don't like to dance, it's an opportunity for Conference-goers to connect, celebrate and enjoy some snacks. There will be entertainment for children (including face painting and the famous 'freeze-dance' and 'limbo'), but please note that parents are responsible for their supervision – Childcare and Teen Club are not provided. If you wish to attend this event, please add a free ticket for each person in the 'add on' section when purchasing your Conference ticket(s). Dinner will NOT be provided but snacks, finger foods and soft drinks will be available along with a cash bar. For dinner, there are numerous restaurants and food courts in the mall if you'd like something to eat before the Family Celebration Dance.

Register at inclusionalberta.org



OPENING PLENARY

Saturday, April 12 | 9 am – 10 am

Inclusive pathways to learning and friendships

Presenters: Dr. Paula Kluth – Educator, Consultant, and Author, and Lisa Drennan – Founder, Merge Diverse Abilities Inclusion Consulting, Author and Adjunct Professor

Our two keynote presenters will create a bridge from the importance of inclusive learning and belonging in schools and classrooms to inclusion in community, in particular in recreation and leisure activities and settings. What is experienced in

the inclusive classroom, in fostering learning and belonging powerfully aligns with inclusive recreation. Inclusion in the classroom and recreation are both essential to enabling a good and meaningful life.

YOUTH FOR INCLUSION

Saturday, April 12 | 9 am – 4:30 pm

(ages 16-22)

Youth for Inclusion is a youth initiative committed to elevating the voice and experiences of youth with intellectual disabilities while advancing the broader agenda of inclusion through community-based advocacy and leadership. The Youth

Forum will provide opportunities for participants to learn about the impact of collective action and leadership in advancing inclusion. Participants will co-create a resource tool for youth-led community groups to consider important topics

such as ableism and unconscious bias. We welcome youth with and without disabilities committed to social justice, action, advocacy, and inclusion to join us for this day!

Lunch is provided but space is limited so please register early.

The Closing Plenary will follow the Afternoon Sessions (see page 6).

CLOSING PLENARY

Saturday, April 12 | 3:15 Pm – 4:30 pm

Inclusive education: Stories of commitment, collaboration, teaching, and learning

Moderator: Trish Bowman, Inclusion Alberta CEO

Inclusive Education is one of the primary means to an inclusive life, yet for many it remains elusive. As such we believe it is essential to appreciate and celebrate those educators, schools and school divisions who remain committed to

inclusive education ensuring every child is valued as a learner and classroom member.

Too many parents lose hope in the promise of inclusion due to ongoing resistance to inclusive education within schools and school systems. However, the teachers, principals and school division leaders who are committed to inclusion and creating welcoming spaces of learning and belonging for students with an intellectual

disability and their parents, are a powerful source of hope. Their commitment to excel as educators for all children provides hope and encouragement and stands in stark contrast to those who resist inclusion. They are living testimony that not only is inclusive education thriving in their classrooms, schools and divisions but that it can flourish in every Alberta classroom. Join us in this closing plenary that highlights what should be, and can be, the reality for every child.



Saturday, April 12 | 10:30 am – 12 pm

MORNING SESSIONS

Dwelling in possibility: The values, beliefs, & habits of inclusive schools

Presenter: Dr. Paula Kluth, Educator, Consultant, Author, Advocate and Scholar

This session is inspired by the words of celebrated poet, Emily Dickinson, who wrote, “I dwell in possibility.” In

this session, Dickinson’s reflection will be applied to our work in inclusive schools. In this session, Paula will explore the history and current state of inclusive schooling. Paula will also discuss a vision for the future for this social justice movement and specifically what beliefs, values, and practices associated with inclusion will help educators succeed in educating, challenging, motivating, and supporting all learners.

The power of relationships – Supporting your family member to make friends and find love

Presenters: To be announced

For over 65 years, families have championed inclusion in all areas of life—education, work, recreation, and community—creating opportunities for individuals to experience true belonging. While access to these spaces is a milestone, the real value lies in the friendships, romantic connections, and overall sense of belonging that are nurtured within them.

From a young age, our sense of belonging is shaped by the messages we receive about who is valued, who can form deep connections, and who deserves friendship and love. This session will consider how these early influences impact individuals with intellectual disabilities as they navigate friendships and romantic relationships throughout their lives.

Our panel will discuss the joys and challenges of building and maintaining meaningful connections across the lifespan. We’ll explore natural pathways to friendship, how families can support relationship-building, and the unique needs that romantic partnerships may require. Together, we aim to illuminate how supportive relationships can enhance well-being and foster a lifelong sense of belonging and connection.

The advocacy landscape: Trends, challenges and opportunities

Presenters: Trish Bowman, Inclusion Alberta CEO and Bruce Uditsky, M.Ed., Inclusion Alberta CEO Emeritus

This annual session will explore the advocacy issues and trends currently impacting individuals and families, discuss possible and needed responses, and identify opportunities to improve the possibilities for inclusion to be more readily realized.

We see increasing resistance to inclusive education, and while this is not the case everywhere, this trend is cause

for alarm and a call to action. As our FSCD and PDD surveys confirmed, access to funding has become more challenging leaving an increasing number of families and individuals waiting longer for less support. Canada’s assisted suicide regime is continuing to threaten the lives of persons with disabilities in multiple ways. We’ll explore needed advocacy strategies, the actions you can take in addressing these threats, and upcoming provincial and possibly federal, elections.

These challenges can feel overwhelming, which further emphasizes the importance of individual and collective advocacy and family leadership as a movement for continuing needed social change.

Using FMS to create employment

Presenters: Kate Hughson, Community Engagement and Development Coordinator; Sydney De La Mare, Provincial Coordinator, Darrell Cook Family Managed Supports Resource Centre; and others

In Alberta, many individuals with intellectual disabilities face significant challenges in finding employment due to lengthy waitlists for employment programs and limited opportunities. These barriers often lead to unemployment, yet stories from families show that meaningful and inclusive employment is achievable.

From leveraging individualized funding through FMS to building connections within the community, many families have successfully overcome obstacles. This session will share inspiring stories from families who have used their networks, FMS funding, and partnerships to create and maintain jobs. Attendees will leave with insights and strategies to maximize employment opportunities with support from FMS staff and their own personal networks.

Register at inclusionAlberta.org



AFTERNOON SESSIONS

Saturday, April 12 | 1:30 pm – 3 pm

Belonging through inclusive recreation: Creating pathways to friendship

Presenter: Lisa Drennan, Founder, MERGE Inclusion Consulting,
Author & Adjunct Professor

Recreation provides a natural platform for friendships to form, but inclusion goes beyond access. This session explores how both families and recreation staff can

support authentic connections through meaningful participation in recreational spaces. Discover practical strategies to foster belonging, where individuals feel welcomed, supported, known, and accepted. Learn how to facilitate conversations, encourage involvement, and create environments where friendships thrive for people with and without disabilities.

Belonging in Alberta: Pursuing inclusion as a newcomer

Presenter: Yan Cheng, parent, and others

Alberta has long attracted people from elsewhere in the country and the world seeking the good things in life, whether they be career or educational opportunities, a chance at homeownership, proximity to natural beauty like the Rocky Mountains, or simply as a place to find home. Whether arriving from another province or another continent, newcomers also come to Alberta in hopes of achieving their inclusive vision for their loved ones

with intellectual disabilities. Whether seeking inclusive education or recreation, inclusive employment, inclusive post-secondary studies, or a home of one's own, Alberta promises possibility to persons with intellectual disabilities and their families like nowhere else.

Join us to hear stories of hope and possibility from newcomers and immigrants to Alberta including the obstacles that families face and strategies to overcome them. In this session we will hear about how families' vision of inclusion allows them to sustain hope and effectively navigate the systems and resources to achieve their vision.

Culturally based learning for indigenous youth with disabilities

Presenters: Kelly Provost, BHSc, M.Ed., Executive Director
Piikani Children's and Family Services; Eldon Preston, MBA,
MWD, Thrive Pixels New Media, software/web designer

Educational VR environments that showcase traditional lands provide immersive experiences that help our youth with disabilities connect to their cultural heritage in ways that may otherwise be inaccessible. These apps allow users to explore sacred sites, traditional practices, and community stories through a sensory-rich medium, fostering a sense of belonging and identity.

For youth with mobility or sensory challenges, VR offers a barrier-free way to engage with their cultural roots, promoting emotional well-being and cultural pride.

Additionally, VR apps enhance learning by providing interactive, visual, and experiential education tailored to different abilities. They support skill-building, like spatial awareness and critical thinking, while accommodating diverse learning needs. By bridging gaps in access to traditional knowledge, VR empowers youth to form meaningful connections with their heritage and fosters resilience, confidence, and a deeper understanding of their cultural identity.

Vision of home

Presenters: Catherine Oakleaf, Inclusion Alberta Director of
Advocacy & Calgary Team Lead; and others

A place to call home is a universal human need. While its shape and expression can vary tremendously across time and culture, the essence of home, a place of security and belonging is understood as fundamental to our wellbeing. This is no less true for individuals with

intellectual disabilities and their families. In this session, we'll explore how individuals and families can realize the vision of a truly inclusive home, even in the face of challenging economic realities. Despite the prevalence of segregated group home models being presented as the only option, we know there is a wide range of inclusive living options that honor each person's individuality and right to belong fully in their community.

Through real-life stories, resources, and expert insights, this session will equip participants with the knowledge and inspiration to champion inclusive housing options that respect the autonomy and dignity of people with intellectual disabilities. Let's envision a future where home is not just a place to live, but a place to truly belong.

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Register at inclusionalbarta.org

FAMILY CONFERENCE PRICING

Ticket options

There are several individual ticket options available, for either a full Conference or single day experience. Additional attendees in a family or group are \$50 per person. Please contact info@inclusionalbarta.org for group pricing inquiries.

Discounted Early Bird ticket pricing is in effect until February 28th.

Barrier-free Conference experience

Please contact info@inclusionalbarta.org if you require assistance or are experiencing any barriers in attending the Inclusion Alberta Family Conference, in areas such as (but not limited to) access to technology required to register or financial barriers limiting your ability to cover Conference fees.

Hotel Information

For attendees coming from out of town and needing a hotel, Inclusion Alberta has secured a limited number of rooms at Fantasyland Hotel at a special Conference price, which are available on a first-booked basis. Please note that these rooms fill up fast. For rates and reservations, please call the hotel at 1-800-737-3783. Callers must mention that they are attending the "Inclusion Alberta Conference" to receive the negotiated rate or provide the group code number 2607556 by March 11th, 2025. For other hotel options in the area, please contact mail@inclusionalbarta.org.

Early Bird Full Conference General Admission (until Feb. 28)	CA\$250.00
Full Conference General Admission	CA\$300.00
Friday Workshop - Dr. Paula Kluth	CA\$210.00
Friday Workshop - Lisa Drennan	CA\$210.00
Saturday only	CA\$210.00
Additional admission (for either single day or full conference)	CA\$50.00
Support person admission*	FREE
Youth for Inclusion Forum	CA\$30.00
Child Care/Teen Club (per day per child/teen)	CA\$25.00

Register online at inclusionalbarta.org

Grant application

Inclusion Alberta has a limited number of grants available to individuals and families to assist with costs associated with attending the conference. To apply for a grant, please visit inclusionalbarta.org.

IF YOU ARE APPLYING FOR A GRANT, DO NOT PURCHASE YOUR CONFERENCE TICKET(S) YET. Grant application deadline: February 28, 2025. Applicants will be notified of their grant status by March 15, 2025.

*Persons attending to support another registrant are not charged registration fees. Please add a 'support person' ticket in the 'add-ons' section to add a free support person ticket.

Register at inclusionalbarta.org



