



Fall/Winter Newsletter

Issue 25, December 2023

INCOMING CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE



Kaitlyn McCabe
Co-President

The season changes remind us of the ever-changing nature of life and the importance of embracing it. With this in mind, Kim and I are embracing our new role as Co-Presidents of AFCC-O and would like to thank our Board and membership for their continued service to the family justice community.



Dr. Kim Harris
Co-President

We take this opportunity to profoundly thank Maxine and Carolyn for their continued leadership as they transition to the role of past Co-Presidents. Their seemingly boundless energy and creative thinking led the Board through some of the most exhausting and transformative years of the organization and of the family justice system as a whole. Throughout, they did so with grace and an ever-present optimism which was infectious.

We also express our gratitude to the Board. The current Board membership reaches across the province and lends itself to perspectives and opportunities to help families in every corner of the province. We are thrilled to welcome our new board member, Gol Simaei (a family law lawyer in Toronto). We are confident that Gol will bring her warmth and energy to the Board as she did as a Committee Chair.

This edition celebrates the success of our 2023 15th Annual Conference: What's normal and what's abnormal: Best practices in the face of allegations of poor parenting, child abuse and family violence. The hybrid format facilitated participation from across the province. The Conference also provided an opportunity to congratulate this year's Dena Moyal Award winner, Justice Deborah Paulseth.

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CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE —*continued*

In addition, we take this opportunity to update you briefly regarding some of our objectives for the 2023-2024 period, which evolved from a Retreat and Strategic Planning session held by the Board in April 2023. These objectives include:

1. Continuing to look for ways to sustain and grow our interdisciplinary membership throughout the province and providing value for our members. We continue to utilize technology to allow us to provide educational opportunities through our webinars which are accessible wherever you are located in the province or in some cases the country or the world. We hope you enjoyed the 9 programs we offered during the 2022-2023 period, many of which qualified for Law Society accreditation. Upcoming webinar topics include the next segments of our series focusing on IPV issues, further exploring the impact of these issues on the family justice system and society and continued developments in family law.
2. Another objective is to facilitate mentorship for new family justice professionals through peer support and connections with post-secondary institutions across all disciplines. In this regard, we celebrate the success of the in-person Practice Skills program held on October 19, 2023. This program presented a unique and valuable opportunity for lawyers and mental health professionals to benefit from leading family justice professionals demonstrating how to conduct a *voir dire* regarding the admissibility of a child's statements in a court proceeding. The demonstration was followed by a lively exchange of views about different approaches to

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AFCC-O Board Members at the 15th Annual Conference

CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE —*continued*

preparing Voice of the Child Reports, which we see as just the beginning of a critical conversation among professionals in this field. This is an area that we hope to explore further in the coming year.

3. Our membership values research, and we have provided funding for a range of projects over the years to explore trends and inform best practices in the family justice sector. The current project, already underway, examines “Adapting the Trauma Informed Principles to Family Court.” The researchers seek to evaluate the adherence to trauma-informed principles within the Ontario family court system to develop recommendations for the creation of a trauma-informed environment within that system. We look forward to seeing what our researchers, Professor Michael Saini and graduate student Laura Spivak are able to discover.
4. We continue to pursue the advancement of access to justice through membership growth, a continuing relationship with like-minded organizations and advocating for legislative amendments or initiatives to advance access. The Board will explore how we can use technology to understand our membership, their goals and what value they see in their membership with AFCC-O. Stay tuned for more information and opportunities for input over the coming months.
5. In support of our mental health professionals, the organization is also embarking on a research proposal related to the concerning trend of regulatory body complaints against mental health professionals being used as a weapon in family law litigation. Our working group will embark on focus group discussions with a view to achieving regional representation across the province to explore the impact of this concerning trend. Clinical psychologists and social workers with a Master’s degree (with two or more years of experience providing parenting assessments or therapeutic services) who would like to participate in one of our focus groups are invited to find out more information by contacting us at info@afccontario.ca.
6. The Ontario Chapter of AFCC is the second largest in the world and has a very productive and strong voice both at home and within the Parent Organization. This year at the international conference in Boston, one of our very own members, Professor Michael Saini, will be elevated to the President of the Parent organization. We are very proud that Ontario will be represented at the highest level, and we hope that you will be able to join us in Boston to celebrate Michael’s success.
7. Finally, we are always looking for ways to strengthen the organization’s structure. We invite and encourage our members to consider volunteering for a Chapter Committee. We continue to have several active committees including Annual Conference, Walsh Moot, Finance, Communications, Newsletter, Membership, Education, and hopefully a renewed and robust Social Media Committee. If you are interested in lending your time and ideas to any one of these committees, please feel free to connect with any of the Board members or email us at info@afccontario.ca and we would be more than

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CO-PRESIDENTS' MESSAGE - *continued*

happy to discuss how you might contribute.

Kim and I look forward to an exciting year and in doing so are guided by this quote by Desmond Tutu; "*Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.*"

Save the Date

16th AFCC-O Annual Conference

Friday, October 25, 2024

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afccontario.ca

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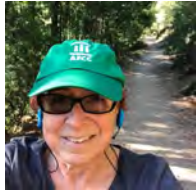
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On our 15th Anniversary,
we wish to acknowledge the
Presidents of our organization, with our
gratitude and appreciation, each of
whom has played a pivotal role in
leading AFCC-O through its
dedication to the resolution of
family conflict through
education, innovation, and
collaboration.

AFCC-O PAST PRESIDENTS

2009-2023



Patti Cross
2009-2010



The Hon. Craig Perkins
2010-2011



Dr. Barbara Fidler
2011-2012



Dena Moyal
2012-2013



The Hon. Justice Debra Paulseth
2013-2014



Dr. Rachel Birbnaum
2014-2015



The Hon. Justice Andrea Himel
2015-2016



The Hon. Justice Gerri Wong
2016-2017



Dr. Dan Ashbourne
2017-2018



Brian Burke
2018-2019



The Hon. Justice Phil Clay
2019-2020



Dr. Shely Polak
2020-2021



Maxine Kerr
2021-2022 and 2022-2023



Carolyn Leach
2021-2022 and 2022-2023

CHILDREN'S LAWYER ROLE: AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE POSITIVE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S LIVES



On May 1, 2023, on the recommendation of the Ministry of Attorney General, the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario appointed Dianne Carter ("Dianne") as the Children's Lawyer for Ontario.

Dianne gracefully accepted our request for an interview and we therefore had the opportunity to have in-depth conversations on various important topics including international trends around children's rights, importance of including voice of a child in decision-making and her vision for the role of Children's Lawyer.

Dianne was raised by her immigrant parents, who were founders of Jamaican Canadian Association in Toronto, which has actively advocated for immigrant and racialized people's rights over the last 50+ years. While growing up, her home was a 'community hub'. She recalls being the fly on the wall and listening to stories of various community members, as her parents tirelessly helped them in navigating challenges they faced.

This inspired Dianne to complete her Master of Social Work and she picked up the thread of community development for supporting the 'priority communities'. It also built the foundation of diversity, inclusion and anti-racism to her future extensive career. Her grassroots level work with diverse income communities further led her path to law school. She graduated from the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law and was called to the Bar in 1997 with motivation to advocate for people with intersectional vulnerabilities.

Dianne joined the OCL from her role as Portfolio Director in the Civil Law Division at the Ministry of the Attorney General. In this role, she provided leadership to a team of Legal Directors who provided legal services to several government ministries including Education, Colleges and Universities, Health, Long Term Care, Children, Community and Social Services and the Solicitor General.

Prior to re-joining the Civil Law Division in 2018, Dianne was the Executive Director and Chief Legal Counsel at the Ontario Human Rights Commission. In that role, she led the development of a 5-year strategic plan involving consultation with over 300 people representing over 80 organizations. Dianne also held a number of counsel positions through her 25-year Ontario Public Service career and worked as a lawyer in private practice with family law as one of her areas of practice.

Dianne brings the human rights lens to her role as Children's Lawyer. She believes that the mandate of the Children's Lawyer gives her an opportunity to create positive impact on children's lives.

These are the excerpts of Archana's conversation with Dianne.

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Archana: *What are the important trends around children's rights - nationally and internationally- that give you hope? Why?*

Dianne: With its almost universal ratification, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has proven to be a catalyst for law and policy reform, litigation, and advocacy at the domestic and regional level. In some instances, it has been incorporated into national legislation and there have even been recent efforts to “constitutionalize” the UNCRC in some jurisdictions (e.g. Scotland).



The increasing engagement of children, at both the national and international levels, in matters that affect them, also gives reason for hope. For example, children and youth all over the world have mobilized to protest climate change and are actively engaging in various climate justice initiatives. This represents an encouraging trend towards children taking ownership of their right to be heard, associate and express themselves freely to demand greater climate action accountability. In recent years, more attention has been paid to giving meaningful recognition to the voice of the child in decisions about them, consistent with the UNCRC.

Domestically, greater recognition of children's rights has been seen through reference or incorporation of the UNCRC into new legislation. In addition to the previous incorporation of the UNCRC into the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) (preamble) and the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (indirectly in the application section), the UNCRC and UNDRIP are now referenced in the preamble to *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*. The UNCRC is also specifically mentioned in the preamble to the CYFSA and informed the legislative amendments to the 2021 *Divorce Act*.

Legislators and the courts are placing greater reliance on the UNCRC.

There has also been increasing recognition of the importance of children's participation, and of children as rights-bearers more generally, by Canadian courts as evidenced in a number of significant appellate and other decisions.

Another hopeful development is the introduction by the federal government of a Child Rights Impact Assessment tool and online course intended to assist public officials at all levels of government in considering the impacts of new laws, policies, programs or other initiatives on the rights of children. (See <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/cria-erde/index.html>.)

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CHILDREN'S LAWYER ROLE— *continued*

In June 2023, federal, provincial, and territorial (FPT) ministers responsible for human rights attended a 2-day meeting where they discussed priorities related to Canada's international human rights obligations, including the recommendations Canada received in 2022 from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and efforts being taken to implement best practices and priorities across Canadian jurisdictions.

In advance of the FPT meeting, Ministers had the opportunity to speak with representatives from Indigenous groups, civil society organizations and human rights commissions about the progress and implementation of human rights in Canada and remaining challenges. They heard about a range of human rights

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related topics, such as diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism measures; the rights of persons with disabilities; domestic implementation of the UNDRIP and the UNCRC; strengthening implementation of human rights in Canada; and the important role of independent human rights institutions/commissions. The engagement of non-governmental stakeholders in the discussions prior to the FPT Ministers' meeting is a positive step, suggesting greater recognition of the importance of meaningful consultation in human rights implementation.

There is greater recognition of the child's right to be heard as well as the child's other rights under the UNCRC in general.

This means that children are more likely to be recognized as independent rights bearers who can have agency in important decisions affecting their lives. Treating children as individuals and considering their wishes, ideas and solutions provides hope for the engagement of the next generation.

Archana: *What is the importance of including the voice of a child(ren) in decision-making that impacts them?*

Dianne: It is important to include the voice of a child(ren) in decision-making from multiple perspectives including the following:

- It acknowledges children as individual rights-holders, and not just as extensions of the adults around them.

- It recognizes the centrality/expertise of children in their own lives.

- It recognizes the agency of children and the inherent value of their perspectives – which can lead to greater satisfaction with the process and “buy-in” regarding the outcome.

- It increases the accountability of decision-makers and mitigates paternalism.

Research clearly suggests that children's inclusion in the post-separation decision-making process is important to the promotion of their well-being.” (*Ontario (Children's Lawyer) v. Ontario (Information and Privacy Commissioner)*, 2018 ON-CA 559, at para. 62), see also *B.J.G. v. D.L.G.*, 2010 YKSC 44.

Dianne describes the benefits to such decision-making process that in obtaining information of all sorts from children, including younger children, on a wide range of topics, can lead to better decisions for children that have a greater chance of working successfully. They have important information to offer about such things

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CHILDREN'S LAWYER ROLE— *continued*

as parenting schedules, time spent with each parent, that work for them, extra-curricular activities and lessons, vacations, schools, and exchanges between their two homes which provides us with the opportunity to consider from the child's perspective what works best for them. They can also speak about what their life is like from their point of view, including the impact of the separation on them as well as the impact of the conduct of their parents.



Receiving children's input early in the process, and throughout as appropriate, can reduce conflict by focusing or refocusing matters on the children and what is important to them. It can reduce the intensity and duration of the conflict and enhance conciliation between parents so that they can communicate more effectively for the benefit of their child. When children are actively involved in problem solving and given recognition that their ideas are important and are being heard, they are empowered and their confidence and self-esteem can grow. They feel that they have been treated with dignity. In addition, children's participation in the decision-making process correlates positively with their ability to adapt to a newly reconfigured family.

Dianne states that there are short- and long-term adverse consequences of exclusion for children. Excluding children and adolescents may have immediate adverse effects such as: feeling ignored, isolated and lonely; experiencing anxiety and fear; being sad, depressed, and withdrawn; being confused; being angry at being left out; and having difficulty coping with stress.

Further, longer-term adverse effects of not consulting children and adolescents may include loss of closeness in parent-child relationships; continuing resentment if living arrangements do not meet their needs in time or structure; less satisfaction with parenting plans, less compliance, more "voting with their feet"; and longing for more or less time with the non-resident parent.

Archana: *What is your vision for the Office of the Children's Lawyer?*

Dianne: I envision an office that works with highly skilled counsel to represent the voice of the child in a holistic manner, providing representation that addresses the child's lived experiences in an intersectional manner.

I would like to see OCL panel members who are well versed in the law, using a human rights lens, speaking to our clients about the intersecting impacts on them that operate systemically and individually-i. e. racism, xenophobia, gender

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CHILDREN'S LAWYER ROLE— *continued*

identity, family violence, learning needs, etc.

I would like to see the OCL enable our panel members to advocate in ways that will help make the child's wishes a reality, wherever possible, using tools that recognize safety planning and the least intrusive options.

I would like to see the OCL continue to recognize trends and take steps to help address systemic issues impacting children.

That we promote greater recognition of the interdependence of children's rights and the need to consider the interests of the whole child, including the intersections with other areas of law (criminal, immigration, health, education, etc.) – developing greater expertise in these areas.

Dianne underlines the importance in prioritizing self-care and surrounding yourself with good relationships with friends and colleagues to sustain the high demands of work. From her extensive experience with community work and public service, Dianne raises the importance of recognizing work of non-lawyers and need for mentoring for lawyers and non-lawyers.

In her personal life, Dianne loves listening to live music and attends many concerts with her husband. She is the mother of two grown up daughters, which she believes to be her most important job. She is keen on focusing on physical health and well-being as she believes that maintaining her fitness gives her the energy to do the important work.

Humour keeps Dianne going and with a wide smile on her face says: "I share a laugh with somebody every day".



Archana Medhekar
*Certified Family Law Specialist and
practicing Family Law Lawyer-
Mediator*

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AFCC-O MEMBER SPOTLIGHT: JONATHAN PAYNTER



Jonathan Paynter is a Registered Social Worker and Accredited Family Mediator working in private practice in Durham Region, Peterborough and the surrounding areas. Jonathan provides psychotherapy, family mediation, Section 30 assessments, Voice of the Child Reports and collaborative family law, in addition to teaching in the Family Mediation Program at York University. Jonathan is involved in the sector including being a member of the Board of both the OAFM (Treasurer) and the Durham Region Collaborative Practice.

Let's get to know Jonathan better

Jonathan grew up living all around the world and before he finished his Social Work education, he had lived in 6 different countries. Jonathan's father was a Canadian diplomat, allowing him to travel the world, which was an incredible privilege.



Jonathan is an avid cyclist and just completed his involvement in the Great Canadian Cycle Challenge, raising money to support research, diagnosis, and treatment of childhood cancers at Sick Kid's Hospital. The longest ride he has ever done was 181 kms at the Hilly Hundred event in Bancroft.



Finally, Jonathan is a total outdoorsman and has taken his children on a canoe trip every year since they were 2 years old. Jonathan absolutely loves the outdoors and is hiking, mountain biking, canoeing, and kayaking at every opportunity.

Jonathan thinks the AFCC-O is a fantastic organization and his love of it stems from the excellent resources it provides to the public and to family law professionals. Jonathan says he consistently enjoys AFCC-O's Annual Conference, at which he always learns new things despite the fact that he has been working in family law for over 20 years. He notes that Board members are some of the most important family law professionals in the world and are providing critical direction and mentorship to mediators, lawyers, judges, social workers, and OCL clinicians/lawyers. Jonathan uses the *AFCC-O Parenting Plan Guide & Template* regularly with clients, who find it to be a very useful resource. He is a regular attendee at the webinars offered by the AFCC-O, which he considers to be of a consistently high quality. In the end, Jonathan is firm in his belief that he can't imagine doing this work and not being a member of AFCC-O.



Imran Kamal
Counsel, Ministry of the Attorney General

IN MEMORIAM: SHUAH ROSKIES



AFCC-O wishes to pay tribute to the legacy of Shuah Roskies, who tragically passed away on August 27, 2023. Shuah was renowned, respected, and deeply cared for by legal and clinical practitioners all across the child welfare sector. Her loss is deeply felt by those who worked with her, but the impact may be felt most by the vulnerable children and youth whose causes she championed throughout her career.

Shuah spent most of her legal career as counsel with the Office of the Children's Lawyer, where she advocated tirelessly for her child clients and provided guidance and support to her flock of OCL panel members, as well as numerous articling and summer students. Those around her were consistently inspired not only by her passion for improving the lives of children, but also by her unflagging commitment to integrity and excellence in the practice of law.

Following a secondment to the Motherisk Commission in 2016-2018, Shuah returned to the OCL and assumed responsibility for managing the OCL's Voluntary Youth Services Agreement (VYSA) program. In this role, she developed policies and best practices for OCL lawyers representing youth entering into VYSA's across the province, managed and mentored these lawyers, and formed key partnerships with professionals in government and social sectors connected to child welfare (such as education, health, youth justice, housing). During the pandemic, in response to her growing awareness of the lack of collaboration between these sectors, Shuah set up an informal network she labelled the Youth in Transition Peer to Peer Knowledge Exchange. Through a series of virtual workshops and presentations, Shuah brought together representatives from different sectors with the goal of identifying common problems and practical solutions. By the time of her death, more than 500 individuals had been looped into this network.

In May 2023, Shuah took a leave of absence from the OCL to take up the role of director of innovation, education and partnerships for StepStones for Youth, a non-profit organization that advocates for youth aging out of care. Tragically, this work was cut short by her death.

In every respect, Shuah's professional life reflected the guiding principles of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts: the improvement of the lives of children through education, innovation, and collaboration among professionals across the sector. May her dreams of a brighter future for children from care inspire those who continue to do this work.



Carolyn Leach
*Counsel, Indigenous Justice Division
Ministry of the Attorney-General*

VICARIOUS TRAUMA'S SILENT INFLUENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS

As family law professionals who work in high-stress and emotionally charged environments, lawyers, mediators, mental health professionals and even judges may experience vicarious trauma in the course of their everyday work. However, there is little opportunity to resolve or digest the experience because these professionals need to maintain confidentiality and a code of ethics while attending to their individual and collective need to process vicarious trauma and embody greater resilience and emotional health.

Professionals working in the family law system face some unique challenges. Decisions based on the law are by necessity definitive, but this does not always allow for the nuances associated with the complexity of peoples' lives and circumstances. Professionals may struggle with moral and ethical dilemmas as they witness the suffering and inequity experienced by those they are trying to help. They are left holding the disparity and resulting emotional stress. We are all human and desire human solutions. Navigating the constraints of the legal system can take a toll on mental health and lead to moral distress and a sense of powerlessness. Professionals may deal with this and the exhaustion of work by numbing themselves to their emotions.

According to Peter Levine, a world-renowned expert on trauma and the developer of Somatic Experiencing Therapy, "Trauma is perhaps the most avoided, ignored, belittled, denied, misunderstood, and untreated cause of human suffering." While vicarious trauma is a normal response to ongoing exposure to other people's trauma, there is hesitancy to admit vulnerability or mention trauma to coworkers for fear of being seen as weak or compromised professionally. There is a lot of pressure on lawyers and other professionals in the justice system to negotiate high stakes contracts, make powerful legal arguments, win cases, and deliver results for clients. The stakes appear too high to reveal an emotional vulnerability in an environment that is driven by facts and the law.

Trauma is typically not well understood outside of the medical and mental health professions. When we hear the word trauma, we automatically think of catastrophic events such as war, gun violence or large-scale accidents. However, even smaller events can be traumatic because trauma is not what happens to you but what happens inside you in response to an event. Individual responses to potentially traumatic events vary. Trauma occurs when a situation is experienced as overwhelming and triggers a neurophysiological response. Long term exposure to vicarious trauma can overwhelm an individual's ability to cope, leaving them with emotional and psychological scars. The symptoms of vicarious trauma are the body's response and a means of coping¹. Symptoms may include:

- **Intrusive reactions:** Dreams/nightmares, flashbacks, obsessive thoughts, physiological reactions, and re-experiencing. For example, feeling more irritable with clients and colleagues, dreaming about work, feeling hopeless or doubting your abilities.
- **Avoidant reactions:** General numbing in responsiveness and avoidance. For example, avoiding clients, increased sick days, blaming others, comfort eating, increased alcohol use.
- **Hyper-arousal reactions:** Hyper-vigilance and difficulty concentrating. For example, difficulty falling or staying asleep, losing sleep over work, distractibility, difficulty retaining information, fatigue, emotional exhaustion.
- **Relational problems:** Inability to be relationally attuned impacting both professional and domestic relationships.

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VICARIOUS TRAUMA'S SILENT INFLUENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS—*continued*

It is tempting to dismiss or ignore the symptoms and try to push through, burying oneself in work. Nevertheless, it's important to reflect and pay attention as vicarious trauma is a very real experience for all those involved in troubling cases, particularly cases with disturbing or traumatic content such as child abuse, sexual assault, or murder. The legal profession has, by and large, been particularly silent when it comes to discourse on how to deal with vicarious trauma. A study on Vicarious Trauma in Attorneys published by Andrew P. Levin, MD and Scott Greisberg, MA in the PACE Law Review² revealed that compared with mental health providers and social services workers, attorneys surveyed demonstrated significantly higher levels of secondary traumatic stress and burnout. This surprising difference appeared related to the attorneys' higher caseloads and lack of supervision around trauma and its impact. It's time to open the conversation and find solutions.

One recommended strategy that any professional can adopt is the ABCs of Managing Secondary (Vicarious) Trauma: Awareness, Balance, and Connection (Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L. 1996.)³ We can't always avoid witnessing trauma in others but those involved in the justice system can take steps to mitigate its harmful effects. Listed below are some ways to decrease the risk of experiencing the impact of vicarious trauma.

Awareness:

- Know your own "trauma map." Acknowledge your own history of trauma and be aware that it can affect how you view and do your work. This may mean stepping away when a client is triggered or working with a colleague or mentor when aggression or other trauma responses are anticipated. To be effective with clients, professionals need support. This may not be possible in solo practices. Professional associations may be of help.
- Inventory your current lifestyle choices and make necessary changes. Do you get enough sleep? Do you allow yourself downtime? Do you exercise regularly? Try to do these things.
- Take care of yourself. Create a self-care list of activities that you enjoy and post it prominently in your home or office.

Balance:

- Give yourself permission to fully experience emotional reactions. Do not keep your emotions "bottled up."
- Maintain clear work boundaries. Avoid working overtime and do not spend all your free time socializing only with coworkers, discussing the negative aspects of your job.
- Set realistic goals for yourself. Know your limits and accept them.
- Learn and practice time management skills. These skills will help you achieve a sense of balance in both your professional and personal life.
- Seek out a new leisure activity. Choose a leisure activity unrelated to your job.
- Recognize negative coping skills and avoid them. Substitute these coping skills with the

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VICARIOUS TRAUMA'S SILENT INFLUENCE IN PROFESSIONAL SETTINGS—*continued*

more positive coping skills included in your self-care list.

Connection:

- Listen to feedback from colleagues, friends, and family members.
- Avoid professional isolation. While it is best to not spend all your time with coworkers, it is beneficial to be connected with and supported by your coworkers.
- Debrief after difficult cases. Now is the time to talk to and connect with another coworker.
- Develop support systems. Start an informal peer support group, seek out a mentor, or be a mentor to someone else. Examples of support systems include models such as “Digestion Hubs” where legal professionals can process their experiences in a safe, non-therapeutic professional space to process toxic stress and vicarious trauma. This helps to regulate individual and collective nervous systems to regain emotional homeostasis. Small group settings such as these hubs, led by trained facilitators, can offer professionals the opportunity to process emotions and toxic stress through techniques adapted for the unique constraints and structures of the legal system. Participants become aware of vicarious trauma and learn how to process their work experiences in a healthy way.
- Seek professional help when needed.

Exposure to vicarious trauma can, over time, impair professional judgment and put undue pressure on all individuals in the justice system, which may lead to errors in judgment or even magnify unacknowledged implicit biases. This is why family law professionals are owed the opportunity for education, support, and resources to mitigate the impact of vicarious trauma.



Heather Thalheimer BSc,
*Partner, WholeHearted LLC, Certified Transparent Communication
Practice Group Leader, Co-Creator of “Becoming Trauma Informed
& Trauma Responsive in Professional Settings”*

1. <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/children-and-families/adoption-kinship-and-foster-care/therapeutic-resources/vicarious-trauma-self-care-to-manage-the-impact-of-other-peoples-trauma>

2. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Vicarious-Trauma-in-Attorneys-Levin-Greisberg/-https://digitalcommons.pace.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1189&context=plr>

3. Adapted by <https://education.mn.gov> from Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L. (1996). *Transforming the Pain: A Workbook on Vicarious Traumatization for Helping Professionals who Work with Traumatized Clients*. New York, New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

THE SHORT-LIVED TORT OF “FAMILY VIOLENCE” IN *AHLUWALIA V. AHLUWALIA* AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In February 2022, the Ontario Superior Court of Justice in *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, 2022 ONSC 1303, created the tort of “family violence” on the basis that existing torts did not completely encompass the successive harm resulting from the pattern of coercion and control which is at the centre of family violence cases. The trial judge ordered the husband to pay the wife \$150,000 in damages for the pattern of violence that he committed on her during their marriage of 16 years.

However, this new tort was short-lived as the Court of Appeal rejected its creation in July 2023 (*Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, 2023 ONCA 476). The Court of Appeal was of the view that new torts should only be introduced where the existing remedies are insufficient, and that claims of domestic abuse and coercive control are already covered by established and existing torts.

Below, we provide a brief summary of the trial and appellate decisions and some practical considerations when dealing with intimate partner violence cases, in light of the Court of Appeal’s decision.

The Trial Judgment

The trial judge concluded that the 16-year marriage in this case was marked by a history of emotional, psychological, physical, and financial control abuse. In addition to spousal and child support, the court also ordered \$150,000 in damages for “family violence during the marriage” as well as creating a new tort of family violence.

The trial judge ruled that the *Divorce Act* does not establish a comprehensive statutory framework for dealing with all the legal concerns that arise in instances of alleged familial violence. The trial judge accepted that creating the tort of family violence provides for a remedy that properly accounts for “the extreme breach of trust” occasioned by the husband’s violence and that “brings some degree of personal accountability to his conduct” because the *Divorce Act* does not give the victim a direct avenue to obtain reparations from harms resulting directly from family violence and that go beyond the economic fallout of the marriage.

(Continued next page)

WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

We are interdisciplinary and international

- ⇒ Members include sitting judges, lawyers, psychologists, and other professionals who work with family conflict
- ⇒ Our conferences and events are innovation incubators and friendly networking opportunities
- ⇒ AFCC-O members may attend frequently offered AFCC International webinars and conferences

AHLUWALIA V. AHLUWALIA AND PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS—*continued*

The trial judge further concluded that a plaintiff should prove that they were the victim of familial violence when establishing the criteria of this new tort. In this regard, the plaintiff is required to prove that the family member intended to engage in aggressive and threatening behaviour under the first mode of culpability and that the family member participated in coercive and controlling behaviour to establish liability under the second theory of liability. The plaintiff must also prove, under the third theory of liability, that the family member engaged in behaviour about which they would have known, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that it would raise the plaintiff's subjective dread.

The Appellate Decision

At the Ontario Court of Appeal, while the husband acknowledged his responsibility for the damages, he objected to the novel tort on the grounds that it was poorly written, too simple to establish, would apply to a large number of situations, and would open the door to a wave of litigation that would fundamentally alter family law. Additionally, the husband claimed that the trial judge's ruling largely ignored recent *Divorce Act* modifications made to address domestic violence and that it should be respected that the legislature did not eliminate the prohibition on taking a spouse's misconduct into account when determining spousal support awards or include family violence as a consideration in such an award.

In response, the wife argued that the new tort was required because the cumulative pattern of harm brought on by family violence is not covered by current torts. She also submitted that the appellate court create a more specific definition of the tort of "coercive control" that would allow for a more nuanced and proven acknowledgment of domestic violence "where a person in the context of an intimate relationship inflicted a pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour that, cumulatively, was reasonably calculated to induce compliance, create conditions of fear and helplessness or otherwise cause harm."

A unanimous panel of the Court of Appeal overturned the trial judge's judgement and declined to uphold the new tort, concluding that existing torts had sufficient latitude to address the fact that abuse can take many different forms. Intimate partner violence was acknowledged as a "pervasive social problem" by the appellate court, and that it is "axiomatic" that family violence must be recognized, denounced, and discouraged. However, this did not, in and of itself, support the judicial formation of a new tort.

The Court of Appeal was also concerned that adopting the notion of "family violence" for a new cause of action in family law litigation disregarded the legislature's explicit desire to limit the application of the concept only to parenting. The existing tort of intentional infliction of emotional distress already provided an appropriate remedy and eliminated the need to show obvious and demonstrable injuries, thus the court disagreed with the wife's proposed new tort of coercive control.

As a result, the Court of Appeal decided that adding punitive damages in the amount of an additional 50% of the total claimed was unreasonable and that "the compensatory and aggravated damages are sufficient to accomplish the objectives of condemnation." The total damages were reduced by \$50,000.

(Continued next page)

Practical Considerations Flowing from the Court of Appeal Case

36 municipalities in Ontario have already declared intimate partner violence an epidemic. As family law practitioners, we face the complexities of dealing with intimate partner violence and coercive control in our work. We must ensure that we are informed and equipped with the legal and social tools when servicing clients who have suffered intimate partner violence. Being able to identify that your client is a survivor of abuse is a first critical step. Some survivors of intimate partner violence may not recognize themselves in this way or even be able to recognize that the relationship was abusive. While survivors can share their stories and experiences with us, they may not be able to define, for various reasons, what it was that they experienced, and it is unlikely that they will be able to identify their experience in legal terms. Therefore, being knowledgeable about the different types of abuse, the patterns of abuse, and the impact of the abuse is critical so that you may identify and explore these issues with your client and determine the next steps you will need to take on your client's behalf.

As legal practitioners, it is important to be able to advise your client about, and explore, the legal issues arising from the abuse and intimate partner violence, including what legal recourse they can seek to protect themselves (in terms of, for example, a restraining order) and what relief they can pursue in terms of claims and damages. In this regard, consideration should be had to what claims already exist, including tort claims that can be pursued in the context of a family law action. For example, consideration should be had to the existing tort claims of assault, battery, internet harassment, defamation, and intentional infliction of mental suffering, keeping in mind that each of these claims has different tests and facts to prove. It is important to gather the facts and evidence early in the case so that you can properly define the claim on behalf of your client and ensure that evidence is preserved. Legal practitioners should be mindful of limitation periods that may apply to certain tort claims and causes of action, and that it may be negligent not to properly advise your client of potential claims that they can pursue.

It is also critical to assess and determine what social and community services are available to your client to help them deal with the abuse and trauma they have experienced and may continue to experience, particularly as they unpack the abuse and deal with the legal issues after separation. It is important to remember that victims of intimate partner violence and coercive control often have a loss of decision-making ability and find it challenging to make decisions for themselves. Your role in informing, guiding, and providing resources available to your client is critical throughout the entirety of your client's case.

Note: AFCC-O would like to recognize that Archana Medekhar, one of our Board Members and on the Editorial Board of our Newsletter, acted as Co-Counsel for one of the intervenor's in this case before the Ontario Court of Appeal.



Imran Kamal
*Counsel, Ministry of the
Attorney General*



Gol Simaei
*Family Law Lawyer
Simaei Law Professional Corporation,
and AFCC-O Board Member*

A LOOK BACK AT OUR 15TH AFCC-O ANNUAL CONFERENCE: A MILESTONE TO REMEMBER

On October 20, 2023, AFCC-O marked a commemorative Annual Conference and Annual General Meeting in its 15th year!



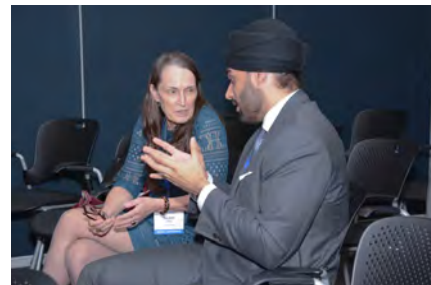
The Annual Conference was preceded by a Practice Skills program the day before, on October 19, 2023, at The Advocates Society, followed by a pre-conference evening social. The program included a demonstration of a cross-examination of a mental health professional who had prepared a Voice of the Child Report (“VOCR”) in the context of a *voir dire* to determine the admissibility of the children’s statements. **The Honourable Justice Fred Myers**

presided over the proceedings, with **Dr. Barbara Fidler** (Psychologist), **Julie Hannaford** (J K Hannaford Barristers) and **Shawn Richard** (ASR Family and Estate Law) (pictured above) playing the roles of witness and counsel.

The demonstration was interspersed with an engaging and informative panel discussion moderated by **Professor Rollie Thompson**, which addressed several topics relevant to VOCRs: the type of model to be followed when conducting a VOCR, the limitations of a VOCR, and the types of statements in a VOCR that could be disputed (such as the opinions of the professional conducting the VOCR, triple hearsay statements, and discussion of issues that are outside the scope of a VOCR). We were encouraged to see the audience participate in a lively debate after the panel demonstration, which showcased the diverging views on this important topic.



Our panelists with Maxine Kerr and
our Sponsor, Andrew Feldstein



Attendees at the Practice Skills Program



Maxine Kerr

(Continued next page)

2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE—*continued*

The Annual Conference was provided as a hybrid format as we did in 2022, giving our members the opportunity to attend virtually and in-person at the Toronto Reference Library. We were thrilled to see registration (in-person and virtual) return to pre-Covid levels. A delicious lunch with healthy treats throughout the day was provided for our in-person attendees.



At our Annual General Meeting, we had the opportunity to express our sincerest and deepest gratitude and appreciation to our outgoing Co-Presidents, Carolyn Leach and Maxine Kerr, and welcome with open arms and excitement our new Co-Presidents, Kaitlyn McCabe and Dr. Kim Harris (*pictured left*).

As part of our 15th Anniversary address, we were honoured to have **Professor Michael Saini** (Assistant Professor at the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work), who is the incoming AFCC President for 2024-2025, and **Professor Stacey Platt**, who is the current AFCC President, both of whom provided us with warm and encouraging remarks.

At the Annual Conference, we had the privilege of having a roster of leading experts in the field of family law and child protection join us for a day of riveting and informative discussion. Our speakers provided the most up-to-date research and cutting-edge practice perspectives on child development in high conflict situations, factors affecting children's memories, and children's statements contained in a Voice of the Child Report.

(Continued next page)

WHY JOIN AFCC-O?

We fund research that matters

- ⇒ We created the flagship Parenting Plan Guide and Template for use throughout Canada
- ⇒ We funded an extensive review and evaluation of court-based family mediation services throughout the province

2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE—*continued*



We also presented the Dena Moyal Award for Distinguished Service at the Conference, which is awarded to a recipient each year by the AFCC-O. This year, the Award was presented to the **Honourable Justice Debra Paulseth** (*pictured left with Maxine Kerr and Carolyn Leach*) of the Ontario Court of Justice, in recognition of her multifaceted and sustained contributions to Ontario's justice system over the course of her career.



We were honoured to have **Barbara Finlay**, Deputy Ombudsman for Ontario and **Diana Cooke**, Director of the Children and Youth Unit (*pictured left*), to deliver the Keynote Address. The discussion focused on two recent investigations relating to services provided by children's aid societies, one called "Missing in Inaction, Misty's Story" and the other called "A Voice Unheard: Brandon's Story".

Both of these investigative reports can be found on the Ombudsman Ontario website and we encourage you to read them. The link is also available here: <https://www.ombudsman.on.ca/resources/reports,-cases-and-submissions/reports-on-investigations/2023>

In terms of our panels, below we provide a summary of the topics for your review and in recognition of the commitment and dedication of our presenters in making our 15th Annual Conference such a success.



The first panel was on the topic "Child Development Primer: Decoding child and parent behaviour in high conflict situations", with our speakers **Dr. Pushpa Kanagaratnam** (Clinical Psychologist and Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto, Department of Psychiatry) and **Dr. Catherine Horvat** (Clinical Psychologist, Founder and Executive Director of the Ottawa Center for Resilience) (*pictured left*).

Drs. Kanagaratnam and Horvat discussed normative child and parent behaviours, social-emotional development (including discussion about the debunking of the idea that self-regulation is the ultimate sign of emotional maturity, as we co-regulate life-long), the different stages of the child's developing brain, and how culture

(Continued next page)

2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE—*continued*

impacts on parenting and child behaviours. What was most poignant about this panel discussion was the view that relationally well-connected lives help children navigate diversity and this is why it is particularly important for parents to take the ‘high road’ in high conflict parenting relationships and focus on the relationships in the child’s life that work instead of focusing on what does not work.



Our second panel was on the topic “Factors affecting children’s memory: What research tells us and implications for practice” with our speakers **Dr. Kim Roberts** (Wilfrid Laurier University, Child Memory Lab) and **Meredith Kirkland-Burke** (Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect Program, The Hospital for Sick Children) (*pictured left*).

Our speakers shared their in-depth knowledge about what children can reasonably remember at different phases of development and growth, how children can remember more than they can recognize, and how children learn how to describe their memories through conversations with their parents. Relevant to the discussion that we had the day before during the Practice Skills program about VOCR, the panelists also spoke with us about the factors that should be considered in children’s memory reports, children’s language skills, and how to pose questions to children to ensure neutrality and the last impact on their responses.



Our third panel was introduced by **Dianne Carter**, The Children’s Lawyer, with panelists **Justice Nicole Tellier** (Ontario Superior Court of Justice), **Katherine Kavassalis** (Legal Counsel and Deputy Legal Director, Personal Rights Department, Office of the Children’s Lawyer), and **Shaista Durrani** (Regional Clinical Supervisor, Officer of the Children’s Lawyer) (*pictured left*) on the topic “Children’s statements contained in Voice of the Child’s Reports: pros, cons, risks and limitations.”

Overall, the panel delivered the message that while VOCRs have a place in a Judge’s toolbox, there are pros and cons to this model. On the one hand, a VOCR helps us to understand how a child is feeling, addresses key issues, and is a cost-effective approach; on the other hand, it may not provide a full picture, there can be issues of reliability, and issues about whether questions were appropriately posed to the child. If you have not done so already, we invite you to read Justice Tellier’s decision in *Byers v. Byers*, 2023 ONSC 297, wherein Her Honour addressed the need

(Continued next page)

2023 ANNUAL CONFERENCE—*continued*

for a standardized approach/accepted methodology for VOCR moving forward.

Our last, and certainly not least, panelist was Aaron Franks who provided us with his typically captivating parenting caselaw update, keeping us all relevant.

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our warmest and sincerest appreciation to our 2023 Annual Conference Committee Co-Chairs, The Honourable Justice Julie Audet and Chantel Carvallo, to the hardworking members of the Annual Conference Committee, and to all of the sponsors who supported our milestone 15th Anniversary Annual Conference.



*Attendees at the AFCC-O Conference
Toronto Reference Library*



*Archana Medhekar
AFCC-O Board Member*



*Anisa Ali and Justice Heather Mendes
AFCC-O Board Members*

*We thank Pierre's Photography for photographing our 15th Annual AFCC-O Conference.
Pierre's Photography for all your events and professional portraits - Call Lloyd at 905-617-1959 or
email: pierresphoto@gmail.com.*



Gol Simaei
*Family Law Lawyer
Simaei Law Professional Corporation,
and AFCC-O Board Member*

**Our 15th Anniversary
Annual Conference
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possible without
the generous support
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we recognize below...**

CONFERENCE LUNCHEON AND KEYNOTE SPEAKER SPONSOR



Ron Shulman is the Founder and Managing Partner of Shulman & Partners LLP. Ron obtained his law degree (LL.B.) from Osgoode Law School in 2004. Ron was called to the bar in 2005 and immediately established himself as a sole practitioner primarily in the area of Family Law. Over time, his sole practice grew into a respected family law firm, consisting of talented family law lawyers and skilled support personnel.

Ron's approach to family practice is to ensure that lawyers and staff take the time to listen to and communicate with clients so that they can create a custom plan that accommodates their needs and wants. They pride themselves in being able to de-escalate conflict, implement stability and reach a resolution for clients. Their aim is to always make sure that clients can confidently move on with their lives and leave the divorce behind them.

Ron is a frequent contributor to various news media outlets lending his knowledge and experience to the public.

Shulman and Partners offers a robust law student and articling program and is a supporter of the Walsh Family Moot.

In addition, Shulman and Partners has a strong commitment to community support. They make regular financial donations to a variety of causes and donations of food, toys, money and time in an effort to make a difference where they can.



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In 2010, Andrew was honoured with an inaugural appointment to the Dispute Resolution Officer (DRO) Panel for Newmarket. Lawyers appointed to this Panel function to support the family law court process by aiding couples in attempts to resolve their issues before their case proceeds before a Judge. Andrew was selected for this appointment because of his vast experience with and successful ability to resolve complex family law issues using alternatives to the traditional court methods, including the collaborative family law process.

Andrew also actively supports current law students, education, and the legal profession by volunteering as a mentor for the Osgoode Hall Law School Mentor Program and as the Chair of the Articling Committee at Feldstein Family Law Group.

In addition, Andrew has served as Executive Member at Large for the Family Law Section of the Ontario Bar Association, Past member of the Ontario Bar Association Council, Member of OBA committee on family law reform that made submissions to the Law Reform Commission of Ontario (2009), Past member of the Canadian Bar Association National Council, AFCC Public Information Forum Working Group, Chair of the AFCC Partnership Subcommittee of the Public Information Forum Working Group, York Region Law Association Member.

Andrew enjoys an active lifestyle, which includes time with his family, skiing, and playing tennis. He loves attending a variety of live sporting events, especially professional tennis, the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Toronto Blue Jays.



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Bill Carty CYW, MBA, is the president of Brayden Supervision Services Inc. and the owner/operator of a number of companies that provide care and treatment services to people who have special and unique needs. For the first 28 years of his career he worked in children’s mental health and child welfare with not-for-profit organizations. He has taught, both full-time and part-time, in two Child and Youth Work programs in Ontario. Currently he is a member of the Advisory Group of the Child and Youth Work Department at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario. Bill is the father of seven children and grandfather of eight.

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2023 AWARD IN MEMORY OF FIRST CANADIAN AFCC PRESIDENT JOHN VANDUZER GIVEN TO WESTERN LAW STUDENT

The late John VanDuzer was one of the founding judges of the Unified Family Court in Hamilton and long-time AFCC member and supporter. In 1983, he was elected AFCC's first Canadian President. The AFCC's Distinguished Service Award is named after him. The John E. VanDuzer Scholarship Award for Family Law was created by his family to be given annually for a paper on a family law subject by a student at an Ontario law school as a way of encouraging family law scholarship by students. The Award includes a \$2,000 honorarium.

In October, the 2023 winner of the Award was chosen by a committee consisting of Justice Suzanne Stevenson, Professor Emeritus Rollie Thompson of Dalhousie University and Hamilton lawyer Pat Mackesy. They selected a paper by Nicole Dietz written while she was a JD student Western Law for Professor Noy Naaman's course, Assisted Reproductive Technologies Law.

Nicole's paper, "Parenting vs Parentage: An Analysis of the Role of Intent in Ontario's Parental Determination Regime and *Jacobs and Coulombe v Blair and Amyotte*, 2022 ONSC 3159" examines 2016 amendments to Ontario's *Children's Law Reform Act* that require intended parents who are not legal parents to demonstrate specific pre-conception intent in order to be granted a declaration of parentage. Through an analysis of *Jacobs and Coulombe v Blair and Amyotte*, Nicole's paper critiques these requirements as excessively rigid and failing to take into account how families can develop post-conception. She proposes that law and policymakers reconsider the current parental declaration requirements.

Nicole's paper will be published in an upcoming issue of the Canadian Family Law Quarterly.

Fittingly, Nicole already has an association with AFCC-O - she and her teammate Samantha Sutherland were awarded third place in the 2022 AFCC-O Walsh Family Law Negotiation Competition.



Tony VanDuzer
Professor, Faculty of Law
Common Law Section,
University of Ottawa

SAVE THE DATE

WALSH FAMILY LAW MOOT & NEGOTIATION COMPETITION

Saturday, March 9, 2024

For more information, visit
afccontario.ca/walsh-family-law-moot-negotiation-competition/

RECOGNIZING THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF AFCC-O MEMBERS

We would like to take this opportunity to recognize the achievements of our AFCC-O Members. We are incredibly proud to have such accomplished and talented family law professionals as part of our membership. On behalf of the AFCC-O, we wish to congratulate our members below on their accomplishments which we share with you below.

Archana Medhekar received the Top 25 Immigrants Awards, which is the only national awards program that celebrates the achievements of Canadian immigrants. Through her own law firm, Archana provides legal services to people from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds facing barriers to access to justice. She is also the co-author of books and research papers on domestic violence, sharing the stories of immigrant women, youth and children. Archana also co-chairs the Women in Mediation Action Group of Mediators Beyond Borders International, co-leading its delegation for the Commission on Status of Women at the United Nations in New York. She is also a dedicated Board member of the AFCC-O and the Ontario Association for Family Mediation.

Please read the official announcement for Archana's award here:

<https://canadianimmigrant.ca/canadas-top-25-immigrants/canadas-top-25-immigrants-2023/archana-medhekar>

and check out her video acceptance speech here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuNOKfhaCtc&t=4s>

A hearty congratulations to **Dr. Rachel Birnbaum** on her recent retirement, following a long and illustrious career. Until very recently, Rachel was a Professor at King's University College at Western University in London, Ontario. Her primary areas of teaching focused on children and families, ethics and the law, and research methods. Rachel has extensive clinical practice and research experience in working with children and families of separation and divorce. She presented and published both nationally and internationally on parenting assessments, child legal representation, children's participation in family disputes, and on the intersection between law and social work. Rachel published well over 100 articles and several books with co-authors over the course of her career.

Finally, she was involved with AFCC-O from inception, culminating in her term as President of the Board in 2014-2015. Rachel's exemplary contributions to the field of family law and justice in Ontario were recognized by AFCC-O at our 10th Anniversary celebrations in 2018. Congratulations Rachel! Don't be a stranger!

We are always looking for opportunities to celebrate the accomplishments of our members, and we encourage you, our readers, to let us know of any other awards/recognitions that we can include in our future newsletters.

CHILDREN RESISTING CONTACT POST-SEPARATION: CONCEPTS, CONTROVERSIES, ASSESSMENT & INTERVENTION

Small Group Virtual Training - April 4, 11 & 18, 2024

Barbara Fidler, Ph.D., C.Psych, AccFM, FDRP PC & Shely Polak, Ph.D., MSW, RSW, AccFM

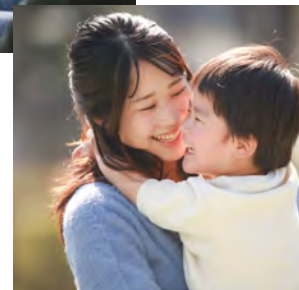
This small group virtual training opportunity (Zoom "meeting" format) is suitable for therapists, parenting plan evaluators, mediators, parenting coordinators & child protection workers. Using case examples, interactive exercises, and small group focused discussion, topics covered include:

- o differentiated spectrum of parent-child contact problems - affinities, alignments, justified rejection (realistic estrangement), alienation & hybrid cases
- o research on the impact of alienation on children, adolescents & young adults
- o clinical screening, intake & assessment using multi-factor model
- o differentiated clinical & trauma-informed interventions for mild & moderate cases
- o role of the court, legal remedies & necessary components for court orders for therapy interventions
- o nuts & bolts of family systems-based interventions (Multi-Faceted Family Therapy) for mild & some moderate cases, including initial query & referral management, clinical screening & intake protocols, informed consent process & service agreement, psycho-educational tools & clinical interventions, strategies & techniques.

Registration Fee: \$1,275.00 + \$165.75 (HST) = \$1,440.75 (CAD)

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Please contact fidlerassistant@gmail.com to register or for more information



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We provide opportunities to connect

Chapters provide members access to a local network and educational offerings tailored specifically for professionals living and working in Ontario. Opportunities include:

- ⇒ Free or discounted access to live and archived webinars
- ⇒ Discounted fees for AFCC-O's Annual Conference
- ⇒ Involvement in chapter committees, and board of directors

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AFCC-Ontario is a chapter of AFCC International

To join AFCC-O:

1. Join [AFCC International](#), then
2. Elect to join the Ontario Chapter

If you are not a member of AFCC and AFCC-O, now is a great time to join!

AFCC International provides resources on issues that are important to family law professionals, as well as debates, dialogues, and discussion on ground-breaking research.

Membership includes:

- Webinars and conferences that are free or discounted for members; member-only access to webinar archives
- Free subscription to the quarterly journal, [Family Court Review](#)
- Access to the Member Directory and the Parenting Coordination Network (PCNet) discussion group



Are you a member of AFCC but not AFCC-O? Consider this: your membership benefits both *you* AND *others in Ontario*. How?

- You will be part of an Ontario-based interdisciplinary group of family justice professionals that allows you to be involved at the local level and supports you in your career and the profession;
- You will recoup the membership fee with free and discounted rates for participation in webinars and conferences that focus on family justice issues in Ontario; and
- Your membership fee helps fund local research projects and policy efforts to benefit families and family justice professionals in Ontario.

To join, visit <https://www.afccnet.org/Membership/Member-Categories> and select Ontario Chapter!

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VOLUNTEER

AFCC-O encourages members to be part of our committees. Often the pathway to board membership is through committee participation.

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