



Affirming equity-driven and intercultural approaches in supporting immigrant and refugee families who have children with disabilities

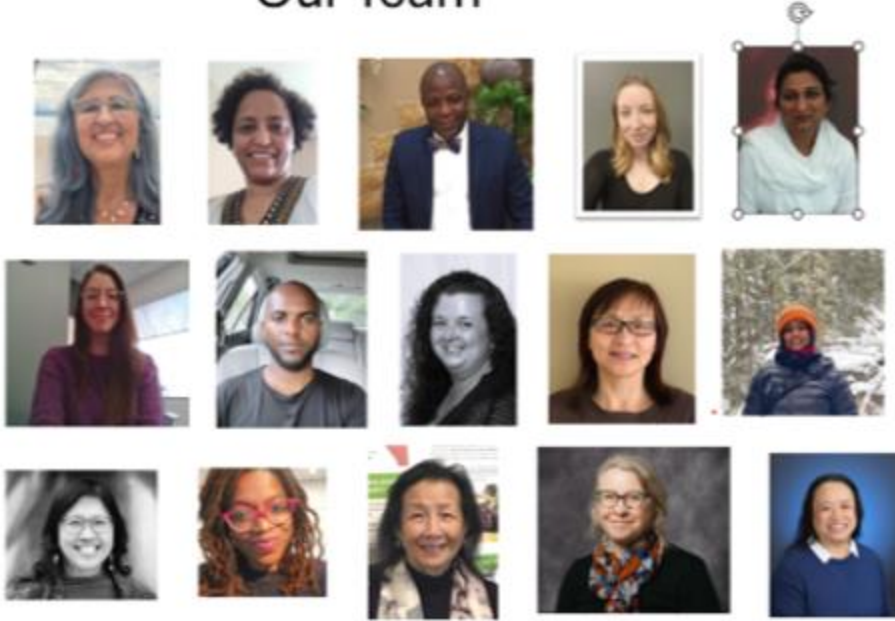
Rosslynn Zulla, Andrea MacLeod,
Lucero Vargas-Almeida, Kim Mayer

Land Acknowledgement



We acknowledge this land as Treaty 6 Territory on amiskwaciy-wâshahikan, of which many First Nations live on such as the Nehiyaw (Cree), Deneuliné (Dene), Metis, Iroquois, Nakota Sioux (Stoney), Anishinabae (Saulteaux/Ojibway), Inuit, and Niitsitapi (Blackfoot). As immigrants to this land, we recognize the history of colonialism that Indigenous peoples continue to face. We value the diversity of teachings, cultures, and languages that come from Treaty 6 territory, which have influenced our way of life.

Our Team



Funders



SSHRC CRSH



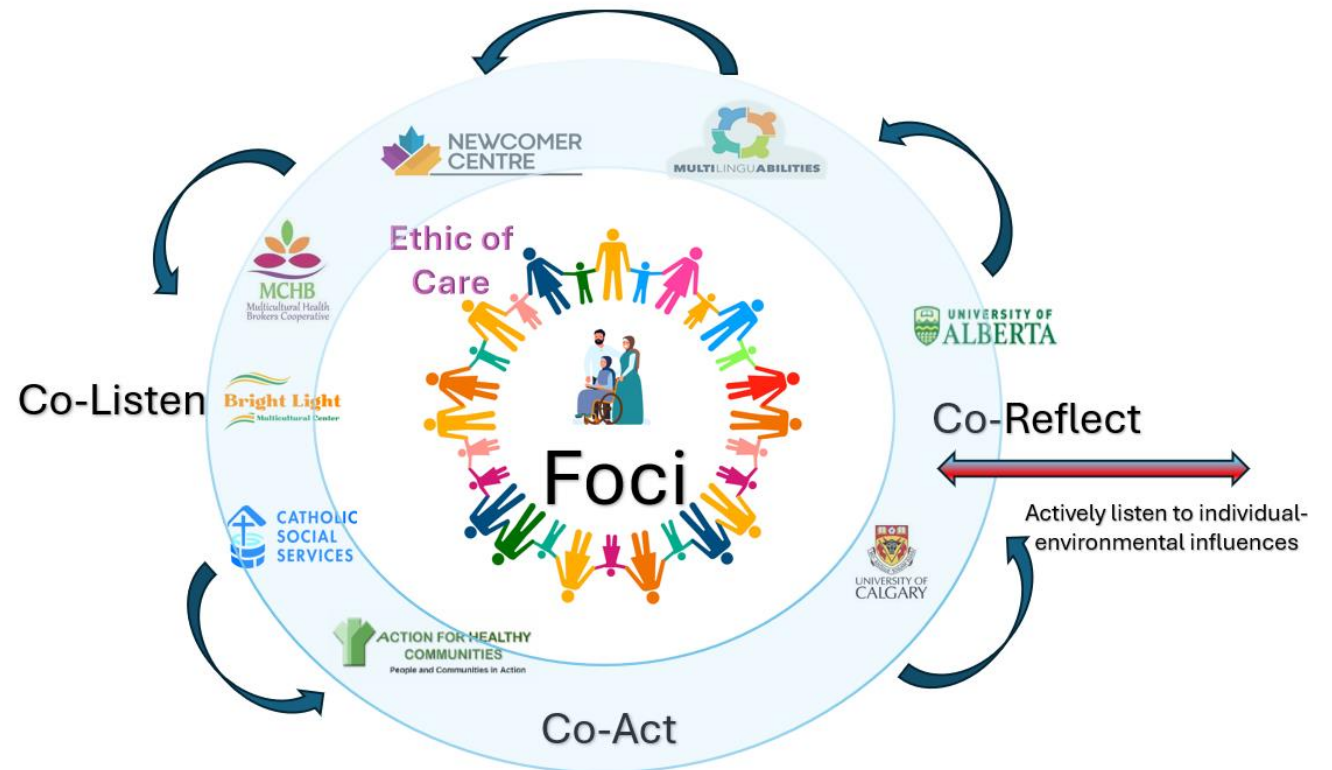
Families



Scope of Partnership

• Projects focus primarily on addressing service delivery inequities experienced by multilingual families who have a child with a disability. Projects include:

- Needs assessment of youth and young adults with a disability
- Experiences of navigating public spaces
- How provider-family-child dynamics adapt to the environment
- Building meaningful relationships in research



LANDSCAPE OF SERVICES

- Navigation through relationships

To support multilingual migrant families of children with a disability, as a service provider, you must

- Work alongside colleagues or other service providers
- Work with families

Navigate an array of services including structural factors (e.g., policies, administrative processes, ableism/racism)





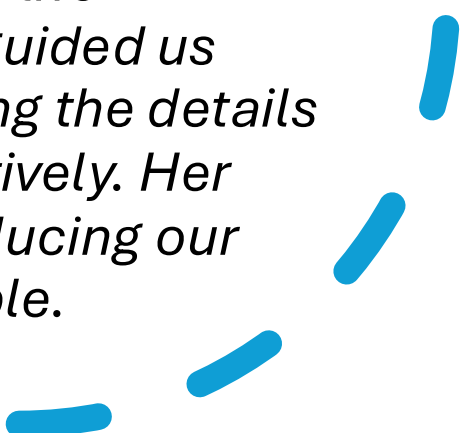
Unpacking the system to find how we can get supports

You have to know, just to start off, that the system that we work with, what we deal with every day is white supremacist, right? So, it's all about control. So, power belongs in these two hands, and the rest of us have to bear for time, right? So, that's one thing. Another thing that is real is that policies are written for the masses. When you go reading a policy... I'm not reading the whole part where they're kumbaya-ing a lot, I'm reading where they say, 'accommodating', and then that's one thing, so that's one thing, knowing where the policy says accommodation. So, then, now it's up to me to translate that, because when they say, 'accommodating', they're not telling you how, when, why, which. They're just telling you 'accommodating', so that's where your own advocacy comes in... For the parents...be your best advocate... You have to translate policies for yourself. So, you look for all the areas that is ambiguous and then you feed it. Because they're not going to write it like that for you.



The role of a worker navigating different cultures

Before connecting with the ethnocultural co-operative (and the worker, May), my husband and I were quite anxious about raising a child with Down Syndrome. We had little information and felt isolated. The internet was our primary source of information, which was often overwhelming and not always reliable. Our interactions with May and the organization were consistent and supportive. We had regular monthly meetings, often via Zoom, where May would invite specialists to speak or conduct workshops... One memorable instance was when we were applying for government disability funding. I had no experience with the process and was unsure how to communicate our needs to the caseworker. May came to our home and guided us through the application process, explaining the details and helping us articulate our needs effectively. Her support made a significant difference, reducing our stress and making the process manageable.



Unpacking the System

Advocacy, Power, and Navigating Lived Realities

"Policies are written for the masses... but families must learn how to translate them into lived realities."



Advocacy

Empowering voices to bridge the gap between policy and daily life.



Power

Redistributing agency within complex institutional structures.



Systems

Navigating the intricate web of services and cultural barriers.

Navigating Different Cultures

The Vital Role of the Worker in Complex Ecosystems

"Before connecting with the organization, we felt isolated and overwhelmed."



Relational Support

Consistent and empathetic human connection.



System Guidance

Navigating complex institutional structures.



Culturally Responsive

Linguistic and cultural bridge-building.



Trust & Confidence

Building agency through safe accompaniment.

Intercultural Practice

Complex Realities & Systemic Challenges

"Families do not live in disciplines. They live in realities."



Family's Context

- What is the composition of the family?
- What are the pre-migration and post-migration experiences?
- What is the workload and intensity of caregiving?
- How do families navigate systems and belonging?



Systemic Challenges

- How does a family understand the structure of the nest of services?
 - How do families integrate into the public?
 - What support is given to families?
- How do services interact and support each other?

Intercultural Practice

Rethinking Care in Complex Systems



settings
The Intent

We are all working in systems
designed to care.



warning
The Reality

But many families **do not**
experience them as caring.

Relational & Biocultural Ethics

Inspired by the philosophy of Ricardo Rozzi

Shifting Paradigms

From **services**
→ **relationships**

Identity Evolution

From **clients**
→ **co-inhabitants**



Integration is Not Always Harmony

Barriers to True Interconnectedness



Fragmented Systems

Siloed structures that prevent a holistic approach to care and community support.



Silenced Voices

When the stories and experiences of those within the system are ignored or suppressed.



Cultural Disconnection

A lack of alignment between institutional practices and the cultural identities of families.

How Do We Live Interconnectedness?



Moving beyond words into practice

Living Communication

It is not just about talking; it's about active, ecosystemic intervention through daily routines.



Camouflaged Strategies Integrating therapeutic goals into the natural rhythm of home life.



Collaborative Partnership Co-creating goals with family voices at the center of the ISP.



Multimodal Expression Using art, sound, and textiles (Arpilleras) to bridge communication gaps.

Intercultural Practice

Rethinking Care in Complex Systems

We don't adapt families to systems

Instead, we focus on identifying joy and cultural anchors.

We build from daily life

Language and culture are nourished as the substrate for growth.

Families as co-creators

Insights are co-constructed through collaboration and trust.



Our Practice Philosophy



Language is Lived, Not Translated

Emphasis on authentic experience and cultural immersion over mere linguistic conversion.



Therapy Happens in Relationships

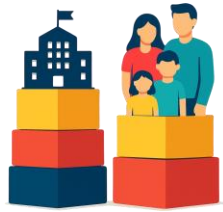
The healing process is rooted in the quality and depth of the connection between individuals.



Knowledge is Shared, Not Imposed

A collaborative approach where insight is co-constructed rather than delivered top-down.

Intercultural Practice in Real Systems



Different Definitions of Structure

Families organize life in different ways that may not align with institutional expectations.



Interdisciplinary Tensions

Professionals are trained within disciplines, but families live in interconnected realities.



Relational Adaptation

Intercultural practice requires flexibility, negotiation, and shared meaning-making.

Care as a Living Relationship



Human-to-Human Connection

"Not a system"

Communication flourishes when it feels understood, from heart to heart.

So what... now what?



Self-Reflection

Where are you in your practice?



Inclusivity

What voices are missing?



Perspective

What would change if you saw families as co-inhabitants?

A Model That Leaves a Trace / Un modelo que deja huella

"Learning ways, holding roots, living better"

We are a **living forest**, a vibrant jungle of connection, interconnected, interdependent...

Where the child's silence becomes a song, a clear voice, an embrace.

"Aprendiendo caminos, manteniendo raíces, viviendo mejor"

Somos un **gran bosque**, una selva viva, interconectados, interdependientes...

Donde el silencio del niño se convierte en canto, en abrazo.



MULTILINGUABILITIES

Case Study Questions & Answers

- **Format of questions**

- **WHAT**

- What is the situation? What is the group observing that speaks to accessibility and/or usability issues?
- What are observations that you have that are informed by your professional role?

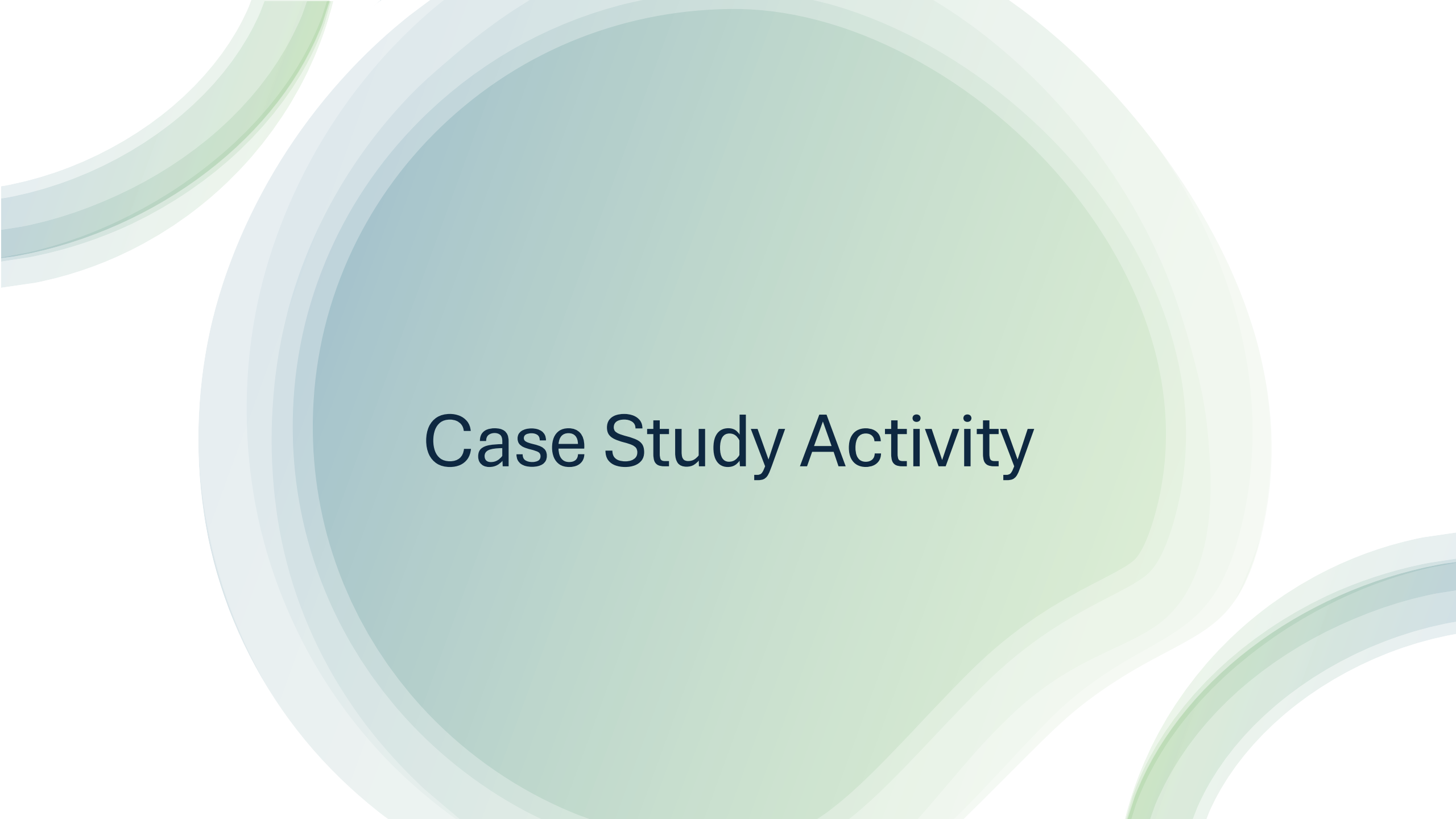
- **SO WHAT**

- Based on the group's observations, what are the collective's thoughts/assumptions?

- **NOW WHAT**

- Based on your collective observations, what actions should be taken?





Case Study Activity

THOUGHTS TO SHARE?

Discussion





THINGS TO
CONSIDER...

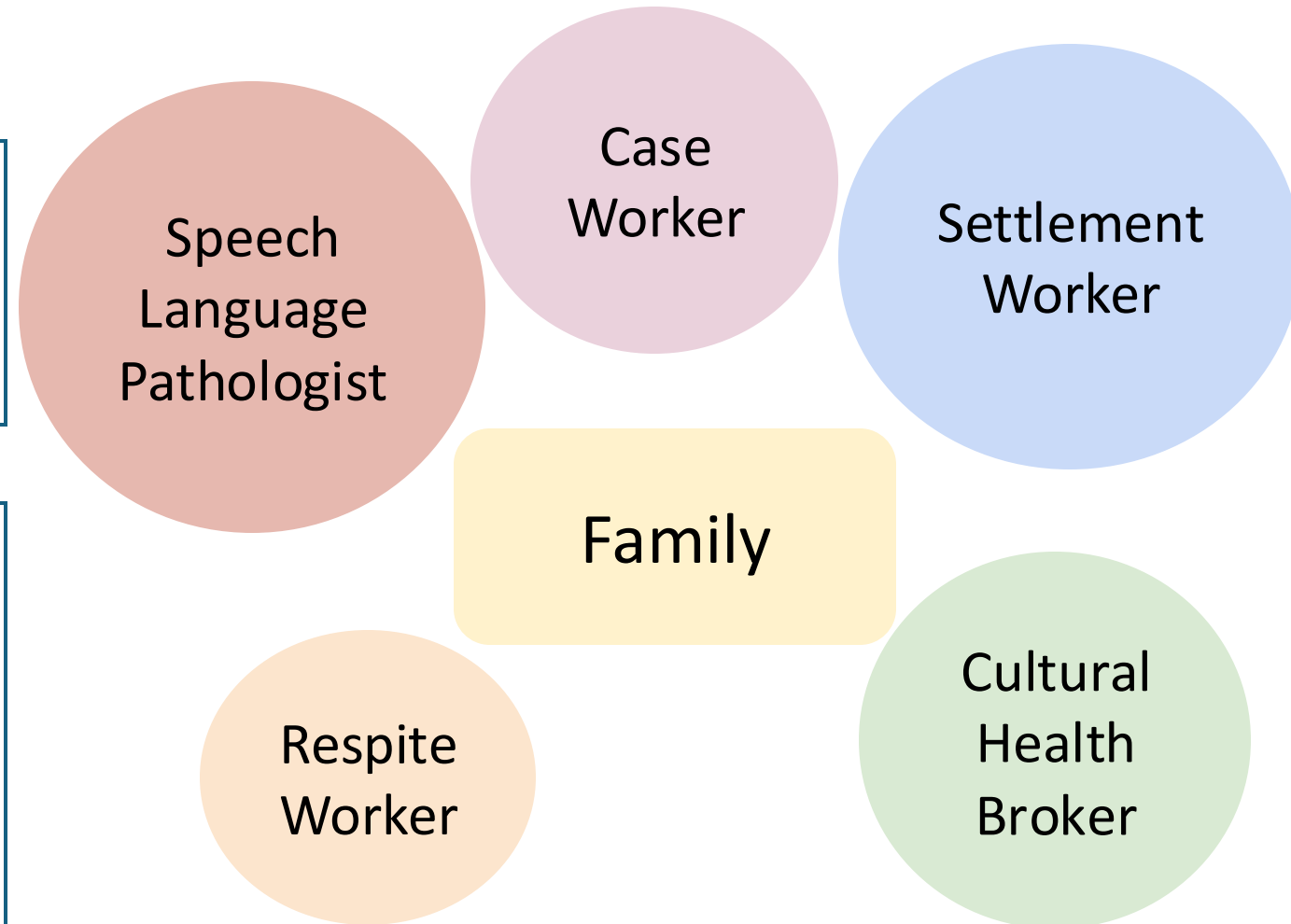
A Common Reality...

Service providers often

- Working in silos
- Feel “burnt out” as they feel alone in supporting the family

Family often feels:

- Conforming to the service providers’ structure
- “Bouncing” between service providers and managing this work
- Feels isolated and not supported
=> even if they are “accessing” the services



How do you see yourself in supporting the family and other providers?

Speech
Language
Pathologist

Lucero

Case
Worker

Roz

Settlement
Worker

Kim

Cultural
Health
Broker

Respite
Worker

Family

Re-framing practice...

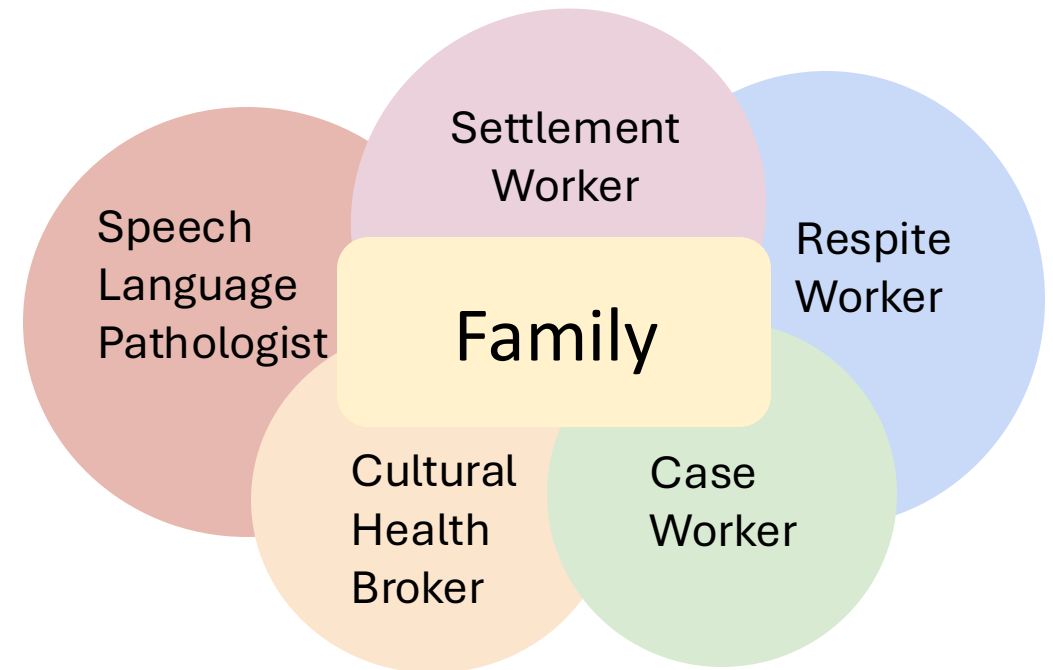
Central Focus

- Family is at the center
- Overlapping supports
- Collaboration across service providers

Goals:

- Support family goals (parent + child with disability + sibling)
- Attentive to family challenges
- Leverage family strengths
- Collective advocacy for family

Lots of work short-term to ensure long-term benefits



Who else creates added value in this collaborative?



Questions & Feedback, please connect with me:

- Rosslynn Zulla,
rzulla@ucalgary.ca

