

# Exhale: From Surviving to Thriving

## First Annual Niagara Children's Centre Parent Conference!



Saturday, November 3, 2018 | 10:00AM – 3:00 PM  
at Niagara Children's Centre

*A free networking event for parents and/or caregivers of children (ages 0-21) with a physical, developmental, and/or communicative delay or disability (diagnosed or suspected).*

### With Keynote Speakers:



**Donna Thomson**, parent and the author of *The Four Walls of My Freedom: Lessons I've Learned From a Life of Caregiving*. Donna blogs regularly at The Caregivers' Living Room ([www.donnathomson.com](http://www.donnathomson.com)) and is a family advisor in childhood disability research with Kids Brain Health Network and CHILD-BRIGHT.



**Darren Connolly**, parent and the President of Ontario Agencies Supporting Individuals with Special Needs. His volunteer work has extended to leading and participating in fundraisers for March of Dimes, Thames Valley Children's Centre, Easter Seals, and Community Living London. He is currently employed by London Health Sciences Centre as a Family Advisor in the Children's Hospital Paediatric Family Resource Centre where he provides information, resources and guidance to patients, families and staff.



### With Conference Moderator

**Sara Pot**, Online Support Parent for Niagara Children's Centre. Sara is the parent of four children, two of whom utilize Niagara Children's Centre services. Sara is a writer and a speaker committed to the vision of cultivating communities of belonging that provide, affirm and encourage best practice and sustainable plans that help children and families thrive.

**SKILLED CHILDCARE AVAILABLE!** A limited number of free childcare spots available during the conference, must be booked in advance. **REGISTRATION INFORMATION:** Register by **Monday, October 22** to qualify for a draw for a \$20 gift card. Forms can be picked up at reception or downloaded from our website and can be dropped off or emailed to [receptionist@niagarachildrenscentre.com](mailto:receptionist@niagarachildrenscentre.com), or completed over the phone by calling reception at 905 688-3550.

Proudly supported by:  
A Grow Grant from the  
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Lunch & Childcare supported by  
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**Turn over for full schedule** →

# Schedule

- 9:45 A.M. Registration
- 10:00 A.M. Morning Keynote Speaker: **Donna Thomson**  
***Creating Strength and Resilience within your Family:*** *Thriving within circumstances of adversity isn't easy. Belonging in the community when a child has disabilities is complicated. So, what are the elements of living well with challenges in the family? Donna Thomson will reflect on a variety of frameworks for thinking about strength and resilience that worked for her family over thirty years of parenting a child with severe cerebral palsy and medical complexity.*
- 11:00 A.M. Workshops (your choice A or B!):  
**A) Michelle MacIntosh, *Blending Mindfulness with your Busy Life:*** *Mindfulness allows us to pay attention to our lives in a way that allows us to respond with wisdom rather than react in emotion. Michelle will provide an interactive and practical session on how to blend mindfulness with your busy and complicated life. Michelle will focus on the unique challenges of raising a child with disabilities and ensure that you leave feeling supported and with manageable tools to put in place.*  
**B) Donna Thomson: Q & A and further conversation**
- 12:00 P.M. **Lunch & Learn** (Lunch is included. If you are accessing the conference childcare, your child will join you. At 12:30, childcare will resume, and we will continue our parent panel.) Also, check out the book display from the St. Catharines Public Library.
- 12:30 P.M. Post-lunch panel:  
**Jaymieson O'Neill** (panel facilitator), ***Integrating Recreation and Leisure into a Caregiving Lifestyle:*** *When busy lives become challenging to manage, leisure, recreation and self-care are often the first things to leave our routines. Using her current and local research, Jaymieson will share how self-care pursuits and leisure and recreation engagement can be modified, adapted and incorporated into a caregiving lifestyle. A panel of Centre parents will share stories and examples from their own lives to illustrate the real life impact of the ingredients to living well.*
- 1:30 P.M. Afternoon Keynote Speaker:  
**Darren Connolly, *Creating Connections and a New Normal:*** *Our own stories shape how we see each other and how we make sense of the world around us. The more we connect with each other, encouraging each other to keep going, allows us to strengthen that grip on hope. Darren will share his family's story within the context of their son's journey and engage in discussion about how families manage to find a new normal.*
- 2:30 – 3:00 P.M. Closing moderated by Sara Pot, with opportunity to engage in conversation and networking

