



April Newsletter

International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation

Welcome to the newsletter from the International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation (ICDR)!

The goal of this newsletter is to appraise the members and stakeholders of the ICDR as well as the wider Rehabilitation Sciences Sector community of ongoing activities. We are hoping to publish this newsletter a few times throughout the academic year.

In this issue:

- *The ICDR-India group provides an update*
- *The ICDR-Cameroon students share their experience during a virtual placement*
- *The ICDR-Trinidad students share their testimonials*

Andrea Duncan, PhD
ICDR Co-director, Education

Tim Bressmann, PhD
ICDR Co-director, Research

ICDR India: News and Highlights

Chairs – Dinesh Krishna and Ramasubramanian Ponnusamy

Vice-Chair Education: Chamila Anthonypillia

Vice-Chair Research: Franzina Coutinho and Marie Brien

ICDR-India's Collaboration Overview:

ICDR-India has fostered a robust collaboration with [Handi-care Intl.](#) and [Amar Seva Sangam](#) to facilitate fieldwork placements and master's research projects in rural South India. Since 2019, the program has seen significant engagement from University of Toronto students, with a total of 37 participants, comprising 7 Physiotherapy, 26 Occupational Therapy, and 4 Speech Language Pathology students.

International Conference:

Amar Seva Sangam, in collaboration with University of Toronto and Manipal University, recently organized an international conference on the inclusion and integration of persons with disabilities across the lifespan. The event, held on February 12th and 13th at Manipal University Campus, attracted over 150 participants from across India. Dr. Andrea Duncan, Co-Director at ICDR, addressed the social construction of disability and mental health complications stemming from physical disability.



International Fieldwork Placements:

The fieldwork placements encompass diverse areas, including in-patient spinal cord rehabilitation, out-patient stroke and neuro rehabilitation, early intervention, school-age child rehabilitation, and community/home-based early intervention and child rehab. Students, supervised by professionals at Amar Seva Sangam, benefit from the guidance of Canadian volunteer therapists, both in-person

and virtually. The placements, priced at \$300 per week, cover accommodation, food, and placement-related travel expenses.

Students actively engage with clients in their chosen departments, assuming graduated responsibilities and client loads. Furthermore, each student undertakes a project aimed at producing manuals, resources, or presentations tailored to their field. Examples of such projects include initiatives focused on promoting hand function in adult post-stroke patients and children with cerebral palsy, as well as planning and digitizing interventions for infants at risk of developmental delay in [Amar Seva Sangam's Enabling Inclusion app](#).

Field placement students in India

The image shows occupational or physical therapy students guiding Indian patients during their field placement, practicing therapeutic exercises and techniques.



Research Projects:

In 2023, research projects delved into the impact of assistive technology capacity building for rehabilitation specialists and parental empowerment. Ongoing research endeavours in 2024 explore topics such as the impact of the College Awareness Program and caregiver perspectives on assistive technology provision. Additionally, investigations into tele-rehabilitation are underway, focusing on identifying factors that facilitate its implementation through participant interviews.

Ami Holden

Occupational Therapy Student, 2023

“Overall, completing a placement at Amar Seva Sangam was a unique opportunity to not only work in a completely new setting in a culture apart from my own, but also because of the wide variety of experiences that are offered. In this community clinic I was able to work in various clinical settings, such as stroke rehabilitation, spinal cord injury rehabilitation, and early intervention for children with intellectual disabilities. It was all these learning opportunities available that made this placement an especially enlightening experience. Amar Seva Sangam is an environment that encourages self-initiation, creativity, and independence. After completing this placement, I have a greater grasp on the occupational therapy competencies necessary for me to carry into my future practice.”

Upcoming Events / Plans

Preparations for OT, PT, and SLP student clinical placements and research projects for the 2024 and 2025 academic years are underway. Interested students are encouraged to visit the [program's website](#) and reach out for further information.

Andrea Duncan's Visit:

Dr. Andrea Duncan, Co-Director at ICDR, also conducted a visit to Amar Seva Sangam from February 18th to February 23rd, 2024. During her visit, she toured various programs, including the Special School, Spinal Injured Rehab Unit, Medical and Rehab Unit, Orthotic Centre, and village-based rehabilitation programs. Her visit aimed to further enhance collaborative efforts between ICDR-India and its partners and deepen understanding of the initiatives at Amar Seva Sangam.



ICDR Cameroon: Virtual Cameroon Placement

Kathleen Hennessy & Ayesha Khan

Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy, University of Toronto

From October - December 2023 we embarked on a virtual Occupational Therapy placement with the International Centre for Disability and Rehabilitation - Cameroon that was nothing short of amazing. As OT students, we have discussions regarding global healthcare, and cultural and resource differences but this opportunity greatly expanded our understanding and learning regarding global health challenges, health accessibility, cultural awareness, humility and communication. Gaining this understanding did have a learning curve, as it required reflection and research into both Canadian and global health policies and required us to find ways to immerse ourselves into learning about Cameroon even though we could not be there physically. We were very fortunate to be embraced by the exceptionally supportive and knowledgeable ICDR-Cameroon team, with special acknowledgement of our preceptor Lynn Cockburn. Lynn's dedication to fostering our learning, encouraging our critical thinking skills, facilitating our growth as future clinicians, and ensuring we received the maximum potential of this opportunity was truly invaluable.

During our placement, we dedicated ourselves to developing a Basic ADL (Activities of Daily Living) Module aimed at improving rehabilitation services for stroke survivors in low-resource settings. This task involved a rigorous evidence-based approach, starting with us researching and understanding the current best practices and tailoring them to meet the unique needs of the Cameroonian community. Our journey through the creation of this module was both challenging and rewarding, as it required us to adapt our knowledge to a context vastly different from our own. Collaborating closely with the ICDR-Cameroon team and utilizing the Rehabilitation Treatment Specification System framework, we drafted and refined our module to ensure it was both practical and effective for health workers to follow and stroke survivors to benefit from (Van Stan et al., 2019).

“These interactions emphasized the importance of cultural humility and adapting healthcare interventions to the specific needs of the community.”

In addition to developing the ADL Module, our placement included meetings with rehabilitation professionals and residents from Cameroon and the surrounding regions. These discussions gave us insight into the local healthcare environments and the challenges faced in low-resource settings. A unique and enriching experience was a video call with an individual in Bamenda, Cameroon, showing his home and street, and discussing his life working and studying with a vision impairment. These interactions emphasized the importance of cultural humility and adapting healthcare interventions to the specific needs of the community. This placement has contributed to our professional growth, giving us a better insight of global health disparities and the skills to address them creatively and effectively. Developing the ADL Module and interacting with local professionals and community members have improved our ability to customize healthcare interventions for different cultural and resource settings. It has shaped us into more compassionate, socially conscious individuals and clinicians, dedicated to lifelong learning about social justice both in Canada and globally. We will apply the lessons on cultural humility, interdisciplinary collaboration, and client-centered care in future placements and clinical practice, focusing on each client's unique context and needs.

For other students who might be hesitant of completing a placement like this virtually, it is important to know that this opportunity allows you to truly grow your creativity, reflexivity, and knowledge of global health and with a few good habits and tips would be an amazing learning opportunity for any student to complete!

Below are our top 5 tips for future students interested in completing a placement like this, to help maximize your learning and success!

5 Tips For Virtual Placements:

1. **Use your resources** - There are lots of great YouTube videos, newsletters, blogs and social media posts that can help build your understanding of other regions and cultures when you can't actually be present there. Spend time accessing these resources to begin to develop an understanding of the culture/context.
2. **Be flexible** - Meetings may be long or short, connections may cut out, people may prefer cameras on or off, people may ask to reschedule. Be prepared and ready for last minute changes that may be out of your control.
3. **Take every opportunity to connect with community members** - Lots of great, helpful, and passionate individuals, both healthcare workers or community members, are willing to talk to you. Be prepared with questions to help guide your learning but also allow them to share their stories, ideas, and expertise to get the most out of the experience and learn more about healthcare and life in general in Cameroon (or other contexts).
4. **Have a contingency plan** - Oftentimes connecting with individuals in other countries can result in poor connectivity or loss of connection. Make sure to have their contact information readily available and decide early on in the conversation what to do if a connection is lost.
5. **Open Communication and Feedback** - Maintain open and regular communication with your preceptor and peers. Embrace the learning curve with an open mind, actively seek feedback, and be mindful of the cultural and resource nuances of the community you're engaging with.

ICDR Trinidad: Student Testimonials

Jordan

FW 2 Student, Fall 2023

“My favorite memory of my time at the Immortelle Centre in Trinidad was organizing and participating in the sensory day for the students. It was a unique and enriching experience to see the students engage with the different sensory stations we set up. Witnessing their joy and curiosity as they explored the various textures, smells, tastes, sounds, and sights was truly unforgettable. It was a reminder of the importance of creating inclusive and stimulating environments for individuals with disabilities to participate and thrive. It was a day filled with learning, growth, and most importantly, a lot of fun for everyone involved!”



Emma

FW 2 Student, Fall 2023

“One of my favourite memories of my time at the Immortelle Center was the Christmas play. Watching the students work so hard on their individualized roles during our time there was really inspiring. The progression and growth each student displayed were nothing short of amazing! Being involved in supporting the students and contributing to their growth in their roles, such as refining their jumping skills and boosting their confidence, added an extra layer of enjoyment to the experience!”



Charlotte, Madison, & Jill

FW 3 Students, Spring 2023

“Our experience in Trinidad will always hold a special place in our memories. The students, staff, and parents at Immortelle were all a joy to work with and welcomed us so warmly into their incredible school. Some of the highlights of our experience include building connections with each of the students and exploring their strengths with them. We also had so much fun blending our passions with OT practice in our student led projects. We are hopeful that Immortelle keeps on dancing! Each of our learning was enriched by the opportunity to collaborate with the teachers at Immortelle, our preceptors, and one another on creative therapeutic approaches. We will continue to reflect on our experiences at Immortelle and use what we have learned to guide us in our future careers. In addition to missing the wonderful school and people who are a part of Immortelle, we also miss exploring the vibrant island, hiking Lady Chancellor Hill, and the endless beach days.”





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