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Final Report - 2024 Asper Centre Fellowship

This summer, I was privileged to receive the Asper Centre Fellowship to fund my work with three organizations: the Hospital for Sick Children ("SickKids"), the Fraser Mustard Institute for Human Development Policy Bench ("Policy Bench"), and the David Asper Centre for Constitutional Rights ("Asper Centre"). SickKids Legal is the in-house counsel for the corporation, responsible for work concerning the hospital's research projects, corporate obligations, and day to day hospital operations. The Policy Bench responds to specific inquiries to create toolkits synthesizing literature and expertise to support beneficial outcomes for children and youth. The Policy Bench aims to assist decision makers, practitioners, and relevant stakeholders in making informed policy decisions by synthesizing and disseminating knowledge across various disciplines. The Asper Centre's work is multifarious, aiming to realize constitutional rights through advocacy, research and education.

My time this summer was primarily dedicated to supporting the SickKids Legal, where I was involved in supporting lawyers' case files and contributed to high level hospital policy reform. This work involved expansive areas of the law, and specifically included analyzing legal issues such as "Saviour Siblings", the capacity for hospitals to deny patients, physician's duty to report to Children's Aid for cases of prenatal child abuse, and justifying transgender youth medical care. Additionally, SickKids Legal exposed me to the process of contract negotiations, allowing me the opportunity to draft, review and revise agreements to mitigate legal risk. This work allowed me to refine my legal research and writing skills, and emphasized the importance of effective communication, attention to detail, organization and operational foresight.

Further, my role with the Policy Bench required me to support the lead researcher in composing a toolkit on corporal punishment against children. In this role, I conducted research on the legal parameters surrounding corporal punishment in Canada through legislation and case law. I also considered the legality of corporal punishment globally, various national and international organization's guidelines on corporal punishment, along with Canada's national and international obligations to end all allowances of corporal punishment. This work culminated in my drafting various sections of the toolkit to articulate the holistic scope of Canada's position in permitting corporal punishment. Additionally, once the toolkit was finalized, I compiled a fact sheet to support easy distribution and dispersion of the information to a wide audience.

Finally, my responsibilities with the Asper Centre involved compiling fact sheets for various finalized briefs previous summer students had completed. These briefs all involved child advocacy issues, specifically openness in adoption, without notice removals and parenting capacity assessments. These fact sheets were intended to support easy distribution of

information, thus mobilizing the work the Asper Centre has done to support education and extending its potential for positive impact.

Working in these three positions has been an excellent experience from beginning to end. I was able to engage with child advocacy work and therein expand my academic interest in the area of practice, while simultaneously developing my legal research, writing and communicative abilities. Being accountable to three different roles entirely separate from one another also enhanced my time management skills, and allowed me to learn how to prioritize deadlines and work more efficiently on tasks. I am grateful to have been given both significant autonomy in my work while also receiving support in terms of consistent feedback and suggestions on how to improve. Finally, the balance I was offered between client facing legal work with SickKids, research-based tasks with the Policy Bench, and synthesis assignments for the Asper Centre allowed me to hone various skills that I think will benefit me in the next stages of my legal career.

I feel very fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from experts established in the field, specifically Megan Evans at SickKids, Barbara Fallon, Dr. Ashley Vandermorris and Genevieve Sansone at the Policy Bench. While the voices of children are often disregarded and minimized, acting as an advocate for their safety, security and rights in various capacities is a key part of developing a better, more humane society. Having the opportunity to learn from these established experts while contributing to this goal has made this fellowship a very rewarding experience. This opportunity confirmed my interest in a legal career in child advocacy, and enhanced my excitement to take the next step in the journey to do so.

I could not be more grateful to the Asper Centre for offering me the opportunity to contribute to this important work and learn about the area of child advocacy as well as the legal field more generally. I look forward to developing the skills I have acquired this summer throughout my legal career.

Thank you,

Ariana Zunino

JD Candidate 2026

Summer Fellow, The Hospital for Sick Children