

## INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH STUDY

**Study Title:** Integrative Stakeholder Engagement in Child Mental Health: Utilizing Focus Groups to Inform the Development of the Whole Circle Resilience Program for School-Aged Children

**Principal Investigator:** Caroline Buzanko, Ph.D. (Athabasca University, Graduate Centre for Applied Psychology, Assistant Professor, [carolinebuzanko@athabascau.ca](mailto:carolinebuzanko@athabascau.ca))

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### INFORMED CONSENT

This form explains the rationale behind this study, provides information about what happens in the study, possible risks and benefits, and your rights as participants.

Please read this form carefully and ask questions as they arise. Please ask me to explain anything that you do not understand or would like to know more about regarding the study. It is essential that your questions are answered to your satisfaction before deciding whether to participate in this research study.

### INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

You are invited to participate in a research study exploring how educators and parents/guardians can best support children aged 7 to 15 in developing emotional regulation and resilience. The insights gained will directly inform the development of the Whole Circle Resilience (WCR) program, which aims to create a practical, accessible prevention program for schools and families.

Your participation will contribute valuable perspectives that help shape mental health strategies for children in Canadian communities.

### WHAT PARTICIPATION INVOLVES

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take part in a focus group discussion lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes.

- The session may be held in person at a local school.
- The discussion will cover your experiences, challenges, and suggestions regarding supporting children's emotional well-being at home and in school.

Additionally, immediately after the focus group, you will be asked to complete a brief survey (~15-20 minutes). This survey will gather further information on perceived barriers and facilitators in supporting emotional resilience and any additional thoughts you had after participating in the group.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY**

### **Confidentiality**

We take every precaution to protect confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used in groups. However, participants should be aware that others in the group may recall shared information. Complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group discussions. Nonetheless, at the beginning of the focus group, all participants will be asked to verbally agree not to discuss any information shared during the session outside the group.

Confidentiality will otherwise be maintained throughout the research process, and all data handling procedures will comply with relevant privacy laws and institutional guidelines. Survey results will be anonymous. For the focus groups, we will use pseudonyms in place of real names in transcripts and final reports. No identifying information (such as school names or locations) will be disclosed. Any identifiable information, such as your email address, will be stored separately in a secure, encrypted database and will only be accessible to myself for purposes of scheduling the focus group and follow-up (e.g., sharing study results if you are interested). You may withdraw your email and opt out of future communications aside from scheduling the focus group at any time.

### ***Limits of Confidentiality***

While every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of all participants, there are circumstances under which researchers may be ethically or legally obligated to disclose certain information. For example:

- If a participant discloses information that indicates a child is at risk of harm or abuse, researchers are required to report this to the appropriate authorities.
- If a participant indicates they or someone else is in immediate danger of harm, researchers may be obligated to intervene or report to relevant authorities.
- Participants will be notified if a disclosure is made, except in situations where notification might pose additional risks (e.g., where disclosure could exacerbate harm to a child).

## **POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION**

### **Risks**

There is minimal risk in participating. Some participants may feel discomfort when discussing challenges related to children's emotional well-being. You may skip any question or leave the session at any time without any consequences.

Before the focus group, you will receive an information sheet that will include:

- A list of local counselling services (e.g., community mental health organizations, employee assistance programs).



- Information about educator-specific resources, such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) or teacher wellness programs.
- National crisis hotlines and online resources.

While on-site, facilitators will have immediate access to the support information sheet to share if you indicate distress during the session. These resources are available for you at any time, regardless of whether their distress is directly related to participation in the study. Further, using the resources is entirely voluntary and confidential.

### **Benefits**

By participating in this research, you will have the opportunity to share ideas and experiences with others, which will help shape the development of a preventive mental health program that can positively impact children in schools and homes.

While there are no guaranteed benefits from participating in this study, you may gain:

- ***Practical Insights.*** Learn strategies and tools to better support students' emotional regulation and resilience, which can be immediately applied in your teaching practices.
- ***Professional Development.*** Gain valuable insights that enhance your professional knowledge, and receive a certificate of participation for your portfolio.
- ***Personal Contribution.*** Contribute to the development of a program that could improve mental health outcomes for students and families in your community.
- ***Community Engagement.*** Participate in meaningful discussions with other educators and caregivers, sharing experiences and learning from peers.
- ***Empowerment.*** Feel empowered in your role as an educator by identifying challenges and solutions to better support children's emotional growth.
- ***Access to Study Findings.*** Access study findings that may help you implement effective practices in your classroom.

### **VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION AND RIGHT TO WITHDRAW**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate and can withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. If you withdraw before focus group data is transcribed, your contributions will be removed. After transcription and anonymization, data cannot be withdrawn as it will no longer be identifiable. Survey responses are anonymous and cannot be withdrawn once submitted.

### **HOW DATA WILL BE USED**

Data collected will be used to develop the WCR program and may be published in academic journals or presented at conferences. Findings from this research may be shared with educational stakeholders, including school boards and community organizations, to inform policy and program development. All

data shared will be anonymized and reported in aggregate form, meaning that no individual participant or their specific responses will be identifiable.

## **DATA STORAGE AND RETENTION**

### ***How and Where Data Will Be Retained***

The data collected during this study, including anonymized transcripts and survey responses, will be securely stored on encrypted and password-protected servers at Athabasca University, accessible only by the research team. Any identifiable data, such as email addresses, will be stored separately in a secure database and deleted upon the completion of the study.

### ***Survey Data***

Survey responses will be anonymous upon submission, as no identifying information will be collected alongside the survey responses.

### ***Recording and Transcription***

Focus groups will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy. Only the research team will have access to these recordings. The audio recordings from the focus group sessions will be transcribed using Amazon Transcribe, a transcription service licensed by Athabasca University (AU). AU's license agreement ensures that this service does not collect or retain any data for any purpose. All ethical obligations, privacy standards, and institutional data management and security policies will be adhered to during the transcription process.

Data transfer to Amazon Transcribe will occur through secure and encrypted channels to protect your confidentiality. Once transcription is complete, all identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms. audio recordings will be permanently deleted. Any references to names, specific locations, or other identifiable details will be generalized or removed. After transcription, these recordings will be permanently deleted.

### ***Retention Timeline***

Identifiable data (your name and email) will be stored separately from research data until the completion of the study. After this time, we will erase your identifiable data (name and email) using a software application (e.g., Eraser) that overwrites data to completely remove it from the computer and any other places where the data is stored.

Anonymized data will be retained indefinitely for the purpose of ongoing and future research related to child emotional regulation, resilience, and mental health.

### ***Future Research***

All de-identified data (anonymized transcripts and anonymous survey results) will be securely retained indefinitely for future research conducted by the Principal Investigator related to building student resilience.

- The data will remain stored securely in a password-protected and encrypted server accessible only to the Principal Investigator and their research team.

- Any future research using the de-identified data will undergo review and approval by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board.
- Identifiable data (e.g., email addresses) will not be shared and will be deleted upon completion of the study. If aggregate or anonymized findings are shared publicly (e.g., in academic publications or presentations), they will not include identifying information.
- The data will not be shared with third parties, external organizations, or collaborators outside this research team.

## **PARTICIPANT RIGHTS IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

You have the right to receive all information relevant to the study, including your rights as a research participant, to help you make a well-informed decision about participating in this study. You also have the right to ask questions and receive answers to your satisfaction prior to and throughout your participation in this study. You have the right to be informed of the results of this study once the entire study is complete. If you would like a copy of final results, please indicate this at the end of this form.

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board has reviewed this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or any ethical issues related to this study that you wish to discuss with someone not directly involved with the study, you may contact the **Research Ethics Officer at 780-213-2033 or email [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca)**

## **QUESTIONS AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you are encouraged to contact the Principal Investigator: Dr. Caroline Buzanko, Athabasca University Email: [carolinebuzanko@athabascau.ca](mailto:carolinebuzanko@athabascau.ca)

## DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

**Study Title:** Integrative Stakeholder Engagement in Child Mental Health: Utilizing Focus Groups to Inform the Development of the Whole Circle Resilience Program for School-Aged Children

- I would like to receive a copy of the results (please check)
- I would like to receive any publications that result from this study (please check)

Please read the following statements carefully and check each box to acknowledge that you have read and understood each item. Then, indicate your agreement to all by signing below:

- I have read and understood the information provided above, including the purpose of the study and the requirements of participation.
- All my questions are answered to my satisfaction.
- I understand I can ask any additional questions about the study before continuing and that I may contact the Principal Investigator if I have further questions or need clarification at any time.
- I agree to participate in this research study and that my participation is voluntary.
- I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.
- I understand that all information I provide to the research team will be kept confidential.
- I was informed of the risks, benefits, and my rights as participant in this research study.
- I understand that my email address will be collected for scheduling and follow-up communications related to this study.
- I understand that there are limits to confidentiality and that disclosures indicating a child is at risk or someone is in immediate danger may be reported to the appropriate authorities.
- I understand that data will be anonymized to ensure confidentiality. My name and any information that could identify me will be removed from any information I provide.
- I understand that my anonymized data may be included in aggregate findings shared with stakeholders or in academic publications, and my identity will not be identifiable.
- I understand my de-identified data may be used for future research related to child resilience.
- I consent to the audio recording of the focus group discussion.
- I understand that the focus group will be transcribed by Amazon Transcribe.



**Participant's Name (Print):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Participant's Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your valuable contribution to this important research.**