

Thesis title: Assessing options for the measurement of movement behaviours of pre-school children at scale.

Supervisors: Prof. Carolyn Summerbell, Dr. Frances Hillier Brown (Newcastle)

What is your current role, and what does your work involve?

I am a Canadian Institutes of Health Research Post-Doctoral Associate in the Child Health and Physical Activity Lab at Western University in Canada. My research centres on ways in which we can improve child health and development from the early years (ages 0-5 years) through healthy movement behaviour (physical activity, sedentary behaviour, and sleep). This includes examining measurement of movement behaviour of young children, associations between these behaviours on health and developmental outcomes, and developing interventions and resources to support parents and educators in promoting healthy movement behaviour of young children. I am also currently undertaking a body of work to better understand the nuances between sedentary behaviour and screen time on early childhood mental health.

My role involves designing, leading, and delivering research projects, including recruiting and interacting with participants, collecting, analysing, and interpreting data, reviewing and synthesising evidence, manuscript writing, preparing reports, presentations, and public-facing knowledge mobilisation outputs, as well as developing new ideas and writing grants. I work closely with colleagues across disciplines and institutions, as well as community partners. I also supervise and mentor students from undergrad through doctoral studies.

How did your PhD help prepare you for this role?

My PhD provided the foundation for everything I do in my current role, and while a PhD is the perfect pathway to a post-doctoral position, there are some other takeaways that I can now reflect on. Beyond subject-specific knowledge, my PhD trained me to think critically, ask meaningful research questions, and work independently, as well as to be responsive to change in the research process when things do not follow the perfectly planned path. My PhD also taught me how to design and manage research projects and communicate findings clearly to different audiences. Those experiences prepared me well for my current post-doctoral work, where subject knowledge expertise is essential, but initiative, adaptability, and collaboration are equally as important for success.

What knowledge or skills from your PhD do you use most in your work today?

The skills I feel I draw on most in my work today are critical thinking, evidence synthesis, communication, and academic writing. One thing I'm especially grateful my PhD taught me is how to conduct research rigorously, and that's something I carry with me in my current role. Communicating research findings to various audiences remains a key part of my work, and the

learning opportunities of my PhD including working with numerous community partners and preparing different knowledge mobilisation outputs helped me to develop these skills. This has been especially valuable with moving to a new city (and country!) in developing relationships and connections with important local child health organisations in Canada.

What advice would you give to current postgraduate research students as they think about their future careers?

I would encourage postgraduate researchers to recognise that a PhD develops far more than specialist knowledge in an area of research. It helps you build a wide range of transferable skills, including critical thinking, problem-solving, attention to detail, communication skills, independence, and adaptability, all of which are valuable across academic and non-academic careers. It is also worth staying open-minded about where your training might take you next. The path is not always linear, and sometimes things don't work out as planned but instead create space for new and exciting opportunities. Some very valuable opportunities can come from being willing to explore new environments, collaborations, or disciplines.