Western Education

RE: Letter of Support for Bill to Extend ABA Funding to Children with Down Syndrome and Other Developmental Disabilities

To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed legislation that seeks to extend funding for Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services beyond children with autism to include those with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities. As a researcher with extensive experience in applied behaviour analysis and its effects on individuals with Down syndrome and intellectual and developmental disabilities, I believe it is critical to ensure that all children who can benefit from ABA interventions have equitable access to these services.

My research has consistently demonstrated the efficacy of ABA-based interventions for individuals with Down syndrome. In our meta-analysis of single-case research on ABA interventions for individuals with Down syndrome (Neil et al. 2021), we found that ABA-based strategies are effective in promoting skill acquisition, primarily communication skills, and reducing challenging behaviours in this population. This aligns with broader findings in early behavioural intervention research, which supports using ABA-based interventions to improve communication, socialization, and adaptive functioning in children with intellectual and developmental disabilities including Down syndrome (Neil & Liesemer, 2020).

Furthermore, my research on instructional pacing and intervention intensity has shown that the systematic and individualized approach of ABA leads to meaningful gains in learning and skill maintenance for children with developmental disabilities (Neil, et al., 2020; Neil & Jones, 2019). Specifically, our work on intervention intensity has provided critical insights into the dosage required for optimal skill acquisition in children with Down syndrome (Neil & Jones, 2019). This research underscores the need for structured, evidence-based interventions like ABA to improve functional outcomes in this population.

In addition, our systematic review and meta-analysis of communication interventions for individuals with Down syndrome highlight the role of behaviour-analytic approaches in fostering language development (Neil & Jones, 2020). Given the communication challenges faced by many individuals with Down syndrome, expanding access to ABA would provide them with essential tools to enhance their ability to interact with others and navigate their environments more effectively.

Beyond language and skill acquisition, ABA has been demonstrated as an effective approach to reducing challenging behaviours in children with Down syndrome. Our study on repetitive behaviour in this population (Neil & Jones, 2021) provides empirical support for using functional analysis and intervention strategies to address behavioural concerns that may otherwise hinder social inclusion and independence.

Given the overwhelming evidence supporting the effectiveness of ABA for children with Down syndrome and other developmental disabilities, funding policies must reflect this reality. Expanding ABA funding to include these populations would not only be a step toward equity in access to

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evidence-based interventions but also ensure that children with Down syndrome receive the supports necessary to reach their full potential.

I strongly urge you to support this legislation and help make ABA services accessible to all children who can benefit from them. Please feel free to contact me if you require additional information or references regarding this body of research.

Sincerely,

Nicole Neil, PhD, RBA (Ont.), BCBA-D
Associate Dean (Research) and Associate Professor
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Below is a brief list of research supporting the use of ABA with children with Down syndrome:

Bauer, S. M., & Jones, E. A. (2014). A Behavior Analytic Approach to Exploratory Motor Behavior. Infants & Young Children, 27(2), 162–173. https://doi.org/10.1097/IYC.0000000000000004

Bauer, S. M., & Jones, E. A. (2015). Requesting and Verbal Imitation Intervention for Infants with Down syndrome: Generalization, Intelligibility, and Problem Solving. Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 27(1), 37–66. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-014-9400-6

Buckley, S. (2006). Editorial. Down Syndrome: Research & Practice, 11(2), iii–vi. https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/621477997?accountid=15115

Feeley, K. M., & Jones, E. (2008a). Preventing challenging behaviours in children with down syndrome: Attention to early developing repertoires. In Down Syndrome Research and Practice (Vol. 12, Issue 1, pp. 11–14). http://www.down-syndrome.org/reviews/2076/

Feeley, K. M., & Jones, E. A. (2006). Addressing challenging behaviour in children with Down syndrome: The use of applied behaviour analysis for assessment and intervention. Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 11(2), 64–77. https://doi.org/10.3104/perspectives.316

Feeley, K. M., & Jones, E. A. (2008b). Strategies to address challenging behaviour in young children with Down syndrome. Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 12(2), 153–163. https://doi.org/10.3104/case-studies.2008

Feeley, K. M., & Jones, E. A. (2008c). Teaching spontaneous responses to a young child with Down syndrome. Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 12(2), 148–152. https://doi.org/10.3104/case-studies.2007

Jones, E. A., & Feeley, K. M. (2019). Off to a Good Start: A Behaviorally Based Model for Teaching Children with Down Syndrome. Book 2: Teaching Programs. Woodbine House.

Jones, E. A., Feeley, K. M., & Blackburn, C. (2010). A preliminary study of intervention addressing early developing requesting behaviours in young infants with Down syndrome. Down Syndrome Research and Practice, 12(2), 98–102. https://doi.org/10.3104/reports.2059

Jones, E. A., Neil, N., & Feeley, K. M. (2014). Enhancing learning for children with Down syndrome. In R. Faragher, B. Clarke, R. (Ed) Faragher, & B. (Ed) Clarke (Eds.), Educating learners with Down syndrome: Research, theory, and practice with children and adolescents. (pp. 83–115).

Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=psyh&AN=2014-05332-004&site=ehost-live

Neil, N., & Jones, E. A. (2015a). Repetitive Behavior in Children with Down Syndrome: Functional Analysis and Intervention. Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 28(2), 267–288. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-015-9465-x

Neil, N., & Jones, E. A. (2015b). Studying treatment intensity: Lessons from two preliminary studies. Journal of Behavioral Education, 24(1), 51–73. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10864-014-9208-6

Neil, N., & Jones, E. A. (2018). Communication intervention for individuals with Down syndrome: Systematic review and meta-analysis. Developmental Neurorehabilitation, 00(00), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1080/17518423.2016.1212947

Neil, N., & Jones, E.A. (2019). Effects of intervention intensity on skill acquisition and task persistence in children with Down syndrome. Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities, 32(5), 1163-1175. https://doi.org/10.1111/jar.12607

Neil, N., Anderson, B., Amicarelli, A., Liesemer, K. (2021). A meta-analysis of single-case research on applied behavior analytic interventions for individuals with Down syndrome. American Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities, 126, 114-141.https://doi.org/10.1352/1944-7558-126.2.114

Neil, N., Hansford, R., Young, K. , & Zwick, L. (2020). The effect of instructional pacing on skill acquisition and maintenance in children with developmental disabilities. Journal on Developmental Disabilities, 25(1), Online First. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.5032946

Neil, N., & Liesemer, K. (2020). Early behavioral intervention for young children with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Current Developmental Disorders Reports, 7,* 139-148. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40474-020-00201-1