

CHILD STUDY


CHILD
COHORT STUDY 
NEWSLETTER
SUMMER 2025

Dear CHILD Cohort Study youth, parents & families:

Are you ready to do it all again?

Even as we wrap up our 12/13 year round of clinic visits with you wonderful people, we are ready to launch the next round!

Thanks so much to all of you who completed the last visit. We hope you are prepared to see us again soon.

Some information about the next visit is in this newsletter, but much more will be available on the website in a soon-to-be-launched new section being built just for you. Stay tuned!

I'm amazed and delighted that we are still building this world-class research platform together, so many years on.

Long live CHILD and its irreplaceable families!

Padmaja (PJ) Subbarao
CHILD Director



One from the archives



Huxley in Manitoba, across the years



Max, Lily & Brynn at a 2024 event

Meet CHILD's new Deputy Director

"I have a PhD in Microbiology and Immunology because I fell in love with decoding the secret conversations between immune cells and microbes."

"I first got involved with CHILD during my postdoc with Dr. Brett Finlay, drawn in by its incredible depth, size, and diversity of data."

"But it was as a researcher in Dr. Stuart Turvey's lab that my passion grew beyond the microbiota to include the amazing researchers, participant families, and staff who make CHILD what it is."



Dr. Charisse Petersen became Deputy Director of CHILD in February 2025, inheriting the role from Dr. Meghan Azad.

In this role, Charisse provides scientific leadership, strategic oversight, and research direction to the Study.

[Learn more](#)

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study

Why did you enroll your child in this study?

At the time, a number of my friends had young kids with allergies and they mentioned how challenging it was feeding their child, above and beyond the regular challenges of being a new parent. I wanted to support research that would help families better understand what causes allergies and how to mitigate them.

What's a hobby or activity you're passionate about?

Squash. I started playing competitively at 13. I began coaching in my late teens and am still very dedicated to coaching and facilitating courses. I am also motivated to increase the numbers of women participating and coaching in the sport. Young girls need role models and it's not a sport that currently has many female coaches.

If you had a time machine, which period would you visit and why?

I feel that we are in the period we are in for a reason: to learn and experience what we need most at this time. That being said, my later teen years into my mid-twenties was the best period for me. I lived life fully, exploring so many things: work, travel, learning about myself and developing great friendships. That was definitely my "the world is my oyster" period.

Tasha

CHILD Parent

If you could learn any new skill instantly, what would it be?

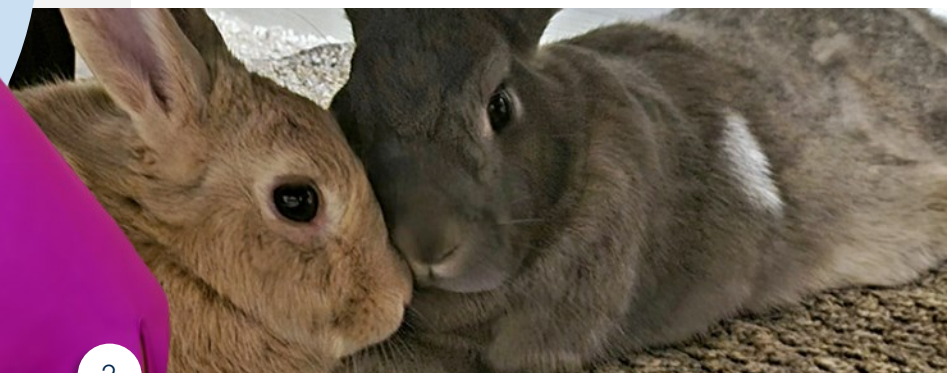
Hypnotherapy. Being a single parent to an older teenage boy, I think this would help better convince my son of the benefits of routines, healthy eating and sleeping, doing homework, and completing chores at home. LOL.

What's your favourite way to unwind?

If I am at my squash club, I will end an evening of coaching in the hot tub. On a cool night out, I put on my toque and allow some self-care for my body and spirit to unwind. At home, I'll go into my sauna for a detox or relaxation session. I am very centered around self-care and rejuvenation for my body. Last year, I invested in a sauna for home use and love it! Detoxing the body is a great way to foster better sleep and overall better health.

What is something about you that not many people know?

I love animals. I am an owner of two rabbits right now. I had a Bearded Collie mix dog when growing up, and a pure-bred Golden Retriever while in university. In 2022, we got a therapy bunny, named Micah, from a shelter and a year later we got a female bunny, Sophia, for him to bond with. I love learning about their nature and watching them and how they react to things in their environment.



Canadian kids eat lots of junk food, increasing their risk of obesity

CHILD research shows that preschool Canadian kids are eating an alarming amount of ultra-processed food—basically, junk food.

The study also found that eating such foods when very young increases the risk of becoming obese or overweight, especially among boys.

“We know that junk food is causing a public health crisis worldwide, and is linked to obesity in adults” says author Zheng Hao Chen, a graduate student at the University of Toronto.

“This study using CHILD data is important for suggesting that this risk may begin early, among preschool kids, and especially among males.”



Read more about this research (click on the image).

Ultra-processed foods are convenient, ready-to-eat foods with a long shelf-life and low nutritional value, usually high in sugar, saturated fats and salt (like instant noodles, chips, soda, and flavoured yogurts).

The study found that, at age three, on average the kids in the study were getting nearly half their daily energy intake from ultra-processed foods. They also found that by age five, kids who ate these foods had higher body fat measurements and almost 20% higher risk of becoming overweight or obese.

What can we do about it?

CHILD researchers say Canada must promote healthier food choices in early childhood—through things like labelling, public education, dietary advice from family doctors, and nutritious menu design in daycare and school food programs.

RESEARCH UPDATES

from



Genes & environment affect baby's gut, influence asthma & allergy risk

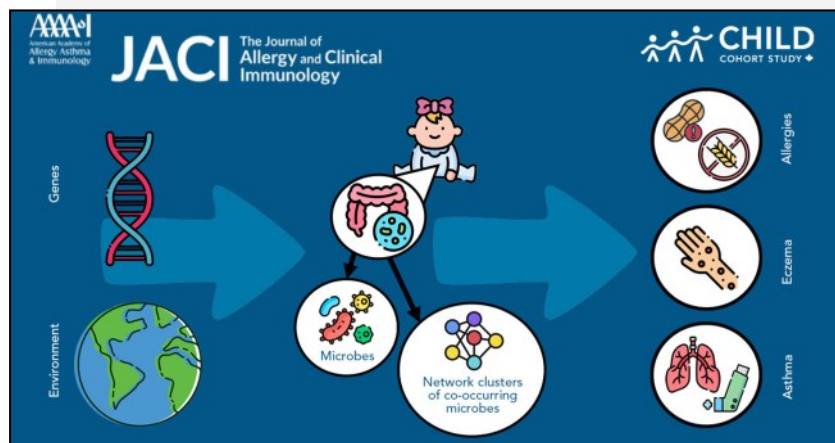
A recent CHILD study shed light on how interactions between our genes and early-life environment impact our gut microbes and risk of asthma and allergies.

For example, it identified a gut bacterium linked to a specific gene that reduces the risk of food allergy. It also found a gene associated with gut bacteria linked to asthma risk, and further found that breastfeeding seems to influence this gene.

These findings improve our understanding of what causes asthma and allergies. This could help us find better ways to prevent and treat them, the researchers note.

“We are so lucky to have a research platform like CHILD available to us, and to have families as generous as those involved in CHILD,” says researcher Dr. Qingling Duan, head of the Computational Genomics Laboratory at Queen's University.

“Few studies have collected so much data over so many years from so many people, allowing us to conduct such innovative and nuanced studies of factors contributing to complex diseases.”



Read more about this research (click on the image).

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study



What do you like about being part of the CHILD study?

I like being able to voice my concerns about things and have people listen to me and my opinions.

What is your favourite book or movie, and what makes it so special to you?

My favourite movie is probably *The Notebook* because I love romantic movies and something about it brings warmth to my heart.

What is an interesting hobby or pastime that you have?

Playing basketball competitively for various teams.

What is your favourite way to spend a weekend?

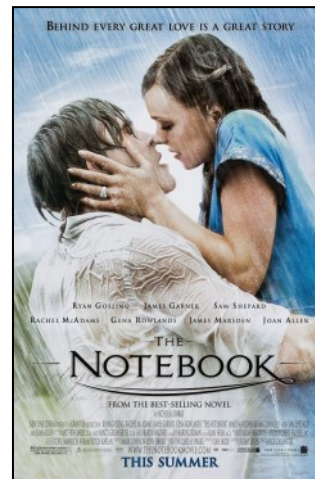
To sleep in, clean up around the house and spend time with friends and/or family.

What you think is the biggest challenge for people your age today?

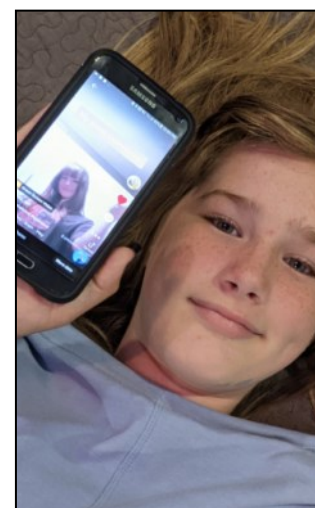
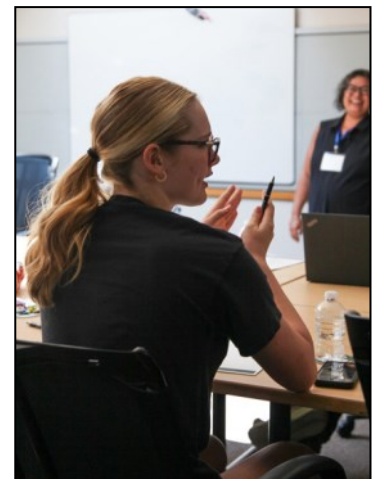
Mental health, because it's not taken as seriously as it should be. Suicide is one of the leading causes of youth deaths and I feel like people just brush it off like it's nothing.



Lily on stage with her mom at a 2019 CHILD research conference



Lily at a 2024 CHILD event (above R), showing her TikTok entry in the 2021 Arts Contest (below L) and enjoying a gold medal (below R)





CHEF'S CORNER

Healthy eating with CHILD

Welcome to Chef's Corner, where we make eating healthy *easy, fun, affordable, and something the whole family can do together!*

In every newsletter, we'll share a simple and tasty recipe to help you build healthy habits. Whether you're packing lunches, prepping after-school snacks, or cooking dinner together, time in the kitchen is a great way to build skills, boost confidence, and make lasting memories.

Ingredients:

- 1 can chickpeas (rinsed and drained)
- 2 cups mixed vegetables (fresh or frozen: bell peppers, carrots, broccoli, peas, etc.)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 teaspoon soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder or minced garlic
- ½ teaspoon paprika or curry powder (optional for flavor)
- Whole wheat tortillas or brown rice
- Optional: avocado slices or lemon

Veggie & Chickpea Stir-Fry Wraps

Contributed by **Anitha**



Directions:

- Heat oil in a pan over medium heat. Add chickpeas and stir for 2–3 minutes.
- Add veggies and cook until tender (about 5–7 minutes), stirring occasionally.
- Stir in soy sauce, garlic, and any other seasonings you enjoy. Cook for 1 more minute.
- Spoon the mixture into a wrap or over rice. Top with avocado or a squeeze of lemon, if desired.
- Roll it up or eat it as a bowl—your choice!

Whether you're a seasoned chef or just learning the basics, cooking together builds confidence and sets the stage for healthy choices. Look out for more recipes in the next newsletter!

Want to be featured in Chef's Corner?

Send us a healthy recipe your family loves!

child@mcmaster.ca

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

Meet the people behind the Study

What's your role on the study team?

I'm the Deputy Director of CHILD, which means I lead an amazing team at our National Coordinating Centre. We help make sure all the research from the study runs smoothly and has the biggest possible impact on kids' health in Canada and around the world.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Learning from passionate experts and seeing the results of our work. Every day is different, and I feel like I'm making a real difference.

If you could travel anywhere in the world, where would you go?

I am actually relatively new to British Columbia and Canada, so just traveling and visiting more of this beautiful country is number one on my bucket list.



What hobbies or activities do you enjoy outside of work?

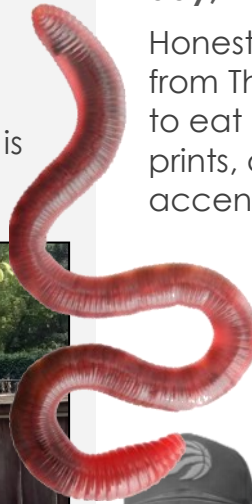
My favorite hobby is gardening, especially learning about native plants. I love supporting a tiny ecosystem of animals, plants, insects, and soil microbes. Each season brings something new, and when a plant returns in spring, it feels like I'm welcoming an old friend.

What is your favourite way to unwind?

Gardening again! When life gets stressful, nothing clears my mind like weeding, tossing grubs to the neighborhood crows, or finding some happy worms. I mean, who doesn't feel accomplished after that?

If you could swap lives with anyone for a day, who would it be and why?

Honestly? I'd probably swap with Pru Leith from The Great British Baking Show. She gets to eat cake, wear smart glasses and bold prints, and say what she thinks with a posh accent. Sounds like a pretty solid day.



Charisse Petersen

CHILD Staff



Want to be profiled in the Spotlight?

Or to request a profile of someone?

Let us know: child@mcmaster.ca



Youth Advisory Council

We're excited to invite applications to join the **CHILD Youth Advisory Council!** We're looking for passionate and curious youth who want to share their voice, help shape our research and make a difference in child and youth health.

As a Youth Advisory Council member, you'll have the opportunity to:

- Connect with other youth in the study
- Collaborate with the CHILD team to share ideas and create materials
- Develop leadership, communication, and teamwork skills
- Earn volunteer hours and gain valuable experience for your resume

Scan the QR code to access the application form, or use this link:

<https://rc.bcchr.ca/redcap/surveys/?s=4L94HK9M4FH99NEH>



16-year Visits

Starting summer 2025

We're excited to share that the 16-Year Visits will begin this summer! As our participants continue to grow, these visits are an important milestone in helping us understand how genetics, environment, and lifestyle shape health through adolescence. The 16-year visit will include updated questionnaires and health assessments, building on everything we've learned so far.

We'll be reaching out to you soon with more information about what to expect and when you can book your next visit. Thank you for being part of the CHILD Study



COMING SOON

CHILD Town Hall

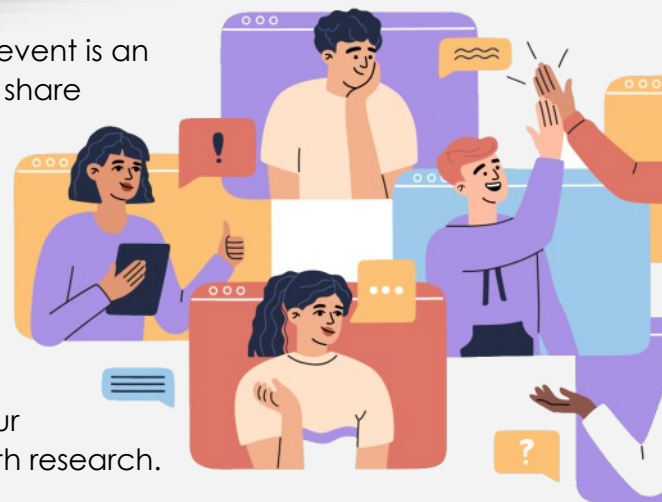
We're pleased to announce our first-ever nation-wide Town Hall, taking place this summer! This annual event is an opportunity for us to connect with our participants & families, share updates, & answer your questions.

At this year's Town Hall, we'll be:

- Introducing the 16-Year Visit
- Sharing recent study updates & progress
- Answering questions from participants & families

The Town Hall is a great chance to learn more about how your involvement is helping shape the future of child & youth health research.

Stay tuned for more details on the date, time, & how to join!



Changing faces at CHILD headquarters

Recently, some familiar faces left, and some new talent joined, the national headquarters of CHILD at McMaster University in Hamilton, ON.

[Ana Maria Ilicic](#) joined the team in March 2025 as Research Coordinator. She will facilitate the ethical use of CHILD data by researchers seeking access to CHILddb.

[Kristina Szabo](#) left her position in March 2025 after two years of advancing and refining the Study's data access processes and policies while attending to researchers' data requests.

[Xiao Xiao](#) left her position with CHILD as data analyst in April 2025, having played an important role in data entry and data quality control.



Ana Maria Ilicic
Incoming Research
Coordinator



Kristina Szabo
Outgoing Research
Coordinator



Xiao Xiao
Outgoing Data
Analyst

Questions?

If you – as a CHILD family youth or parent – have anything more you'd like to know about the Study, its researchers or the science involved, please send us your questions.

We will take your questions to CHILD researchers and include their answers in future newsletters.

Ask away!

child@mcmaster.ca

Subject line: "Ask CHILD"



From our Deputy Director's garden