

Child-care advocate in Australia ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

Cape Breton child-care advocate Dr. Sharon Irwin is in Australia to deliver two weeks of lectures and a training seminar in Melbourne.

She will address government officials, child-care consultants, early interventionists and child-care staff from all over Australia, and will train approximately 50 Australian consultants how to use her latest publication, "SpecialLink Early Childhood Inclusion Quality Scale." The quality scale is now considered the standard throughout Canada for measuring inclusion.

"We know from evidence the good reasons for having universal and fully inclusive child care," said Irwin. "While we wait for a national commitment to a universal program, child-care centres across Canada are still trying to achieve full inclusion of children with special needs. The new quality scale manual gives them a tool to measure their progress, to focus on their successes and on their continuing challenges."

Recently honoured with a doctorate from the University of Manitoba, Irwin is a 30-year veteran of the battle for universal child care and the full inclusion of children with special needs. She is founder of Town Daycare in Glace Bay, a child-care centre that has become the model for all of Canada for inclusion of children with special needs.

"As Cape Breton often does, we showed the world what could be done. Town Daycare is 250 miles from a children's hospital and from specialized training, our parents faced all the difficulties of hardworking, blue-collar workers and their families - and still we found a way to include blind children and children with cerebral palsy, brittle bone disease and many other children with special needs, long before most other centres."

Irwin went on to create SpecialLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion. Through books, symposiums and travelling across Canada, she took the message of Town Daycare's achievement on the road.

In Australia, Irwin has been invited to visit child-care centres that include children with special needs - centres that primarily include aboriginal children, centres, that cater mainly to recent immigrant and refugee families, as well as more typical centres.

- reprinted from the Cape Breton Post

Region: Nova Scotia ^[2]

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