

2026 Graduation Newsletter



Message from the Office

Research Director Update

Fitness Focused Fridays

Saturday S.M.I.L.E.

Tuesday/Thursday TnT

Snoezelen Room

Thank You Donors!



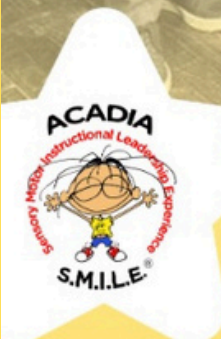
Congratulations Graduates!





Thank You Acadia Alumni

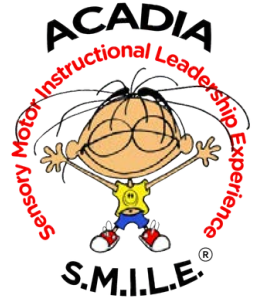
**Over \$9,000
Raised for S.M.I.L.E.**





From the S.M.I.L.E. Office

Rayona Silverman
Courtney London



Hello S.M.I.L.E. friends and family,

First, we would like to extend a HUGE congratulations to all of our graduates at Acadia, including the many graduating who have contributed to S.M.I.L.E.! Seeing you in action this past year with our participants and just coming in with a smile on your face every single morning, evening, or day you were working with S.M.I.L.E. has been incredible. It has been a pleasure to watch all of you succeed, and the S.M.I.L.E. family will be cheering you on wherever you go next. From Wolfville to beyond... Oh, the places you'll go!!!

What a year it has been! From our very first day to our very last day for the 2025-2026 year, it was so special all around. We started with a volleyball focus and a superheros welcome, before visiting a Western Carnival and exploring a safari! A few tricks, but mostly treats appeared in time for Halloween, before Pine Tree visited us and brought a camp theme, and we closed out 2025 with a winter holiday celebration! In the new year, we jumped right into a sports jamboree, where participants tried all kinds of sports and activities, before they launched on the S.M.I.L.E. Artemis Crew mission to space. Once we landed back on Earth, we shared some love over valentines, visited our favorite Disney characters, shared some high fives with current Acadia athletes and support teams, and ended the entire programming year with S.M.I.L.E.'s got Talent. During the talent show, we saw incredible performances from many participants, including singing, dancing, jokes, and a few surprise team performances!

We are so grateful to the S.M.I.L.E. team and participants for such a warm welcome and the memories, laughter, and smiles we have shared this year. There have been challenges along the way, but our team embraced these challenges with unique solutions and creativity which ensured future successes in the program.

We extend deep gratitude to Tidal Training Club, Supplement King Wolfville, Supplement King Greenwood, Halifax Kids Physio, The Allan Family and Noah & Olivia, alumni, supporters, and the entire S.M.I.L.E. family who have contributed in various ways through financial contributions to ensure the program can run, energy, grants, fundraisers, and overall support throughout the year. These contributions make a profound influence on S.M.I.L.E., without which we could not run the program and ensure its success! Thank you for being a part of something so special, and for working hard to help us foster future special moments.

A big thank you to our support staff who assisted with S.M.I.L.E. throughout the year, including Andrew, Alexa, Nick, Marcus, Taha, and Hannah.

We cannot wait to welcome everyone back to S.M.I.L.E. in September. We are hard at work preparing what next year will include – and a few fun surprises along the way!

Wishing you a joyful and wonderful summer filled with warm sun and adventures!
With smiles from the S.M.I.L.E. office,

Rayona & Courtney

S.M.I.L.E.

X.C. SKIING



In February 2026, Cross Country Nova Scotia and the Town of Kentville Parks and Recreation department hosted a cross country skiing try-it event for S.M.I.L.E. Everyone had a fantastic time, and we hope to continue creating opportunities like this in the years to come!

Thank you!





Research Director Update

Dr. Emily Bremer

Canada Research Chair in Healthy Inclusive Communities

As we roll into summer, I want to take the opportunity to thank each of our volunteers, participants, families, and educators for their enthusiasm and ongoing support of S.M.I.L.E.

I am excited to highlight a few of our research and educational initiatives from the Winter semester:

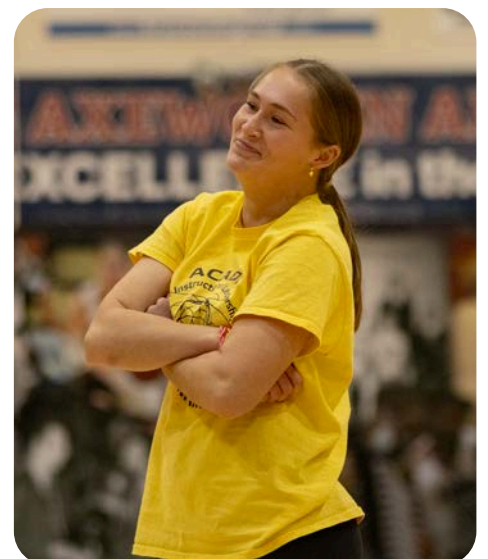
Heart Health Education and Monitoring

Our Fitness Focused Friday's shifted our attention to heart health for our adult participants. With the help of the School of Nursing, we monitored known risk factors for cardiovascular disease including blood pressure and heart rate. This work will help us better understand how S.M.I.L.E. can support the heart health of our participants and make program modifications, as needed. We also hosted an educational session in February titled "Caring for the Caregivers Heart", to provide insight into the importance of heart health education for those caring for individuals experiencing disability. The session was well-attended, and we look forward to hosting similar sessions in the future.



Educator Professional Development

A huge congratulations to Meg Varden, TnT Student Director, who led Professional Development sessions for our TnT educators focused on facilitating quality physical activity experiences for students in the school setting. This work was completed as part of Meg's Honours Thesis and we are very grateful to each of our TnT educators who participated. Stay tuned for key findings from Meg's work, along with additional opportunities to participate in Professional Development in the coming year.





Research Director Update

Dr. Emily Bremer

Canada Research Chair in Healthy Inclusive Communities

I would like to highlight the significant work that went into transitioning our TnT program from the pool to the ice this year. Thank you to our Coordinators, Student Directors, Leaders, and Instructors for making this transition happen so smoothly; and thank you to our schools and participants for the enthusiasm they brought to our on-ice programming. A final huge thank you to the NHLPA Goals & Dreams Fund for helping to outfit us with new equipment. If you haven't already, check out the CBC coverage of our on-ice programming on Mainstreet NS.

Mainstreet NS

with Jeff Douglas



Acadia's S.M.I.L.E. program glides into new home on ice 15 mins



[Click here to listen to CBC coverage.](#)

[Click here to watch the CBC video](#)



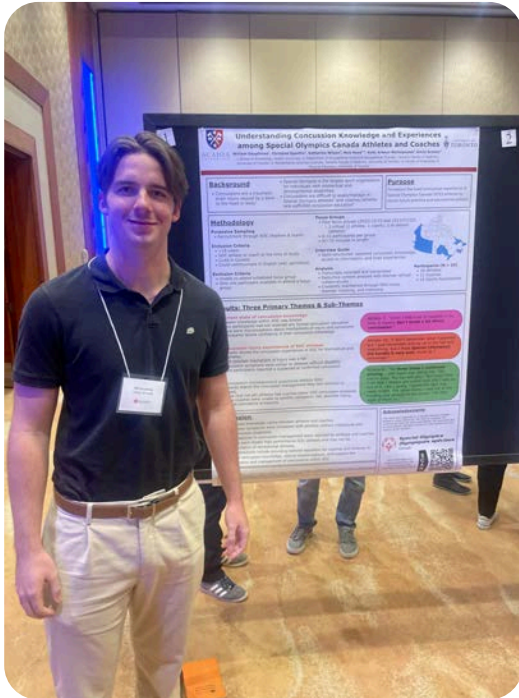
Researcher Highlight

Will Dauphinee

Recent Honours BKin Graduate
S.M.I.L.E. Friday Student Director



Along with being a '25-'26 Friday night Student Director, recent Bachelor of Kinesiology Honours graduate Will Dauphinee completed his thesis with Dr. Emily Bremer this past year.



Will's primary research has focused on concussion incidence and post-injury management among Special Olympics Canada athletes. This work includes both a qualitative focus group study and a retrospective analysis examining how athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience and respond to concussive injuries. Data collection involved traveling to Special Olympics Summer Games across Canada, where Will administered concussion surveys directly to athletes, capturing real-world experiences related to injury reporting, medical follow-up, and return to activity decisions. Manuscripts from this work are currently under review for publication in peer reviewed journals.

This research contributes to a larger funded initiative in partnership with Special Olympics Canada aimed at developing a tailored concussion assessment tool and improving concussion education modules for athletes with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



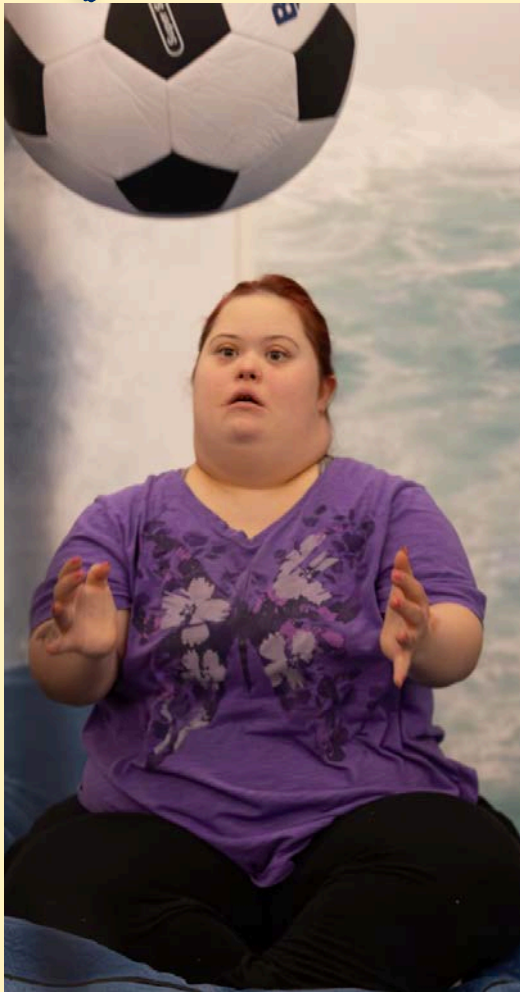
"Volunteering with S.M.I.L.E. has been one of the most impactful aspects of my undergraduate experience. Each session fostered a high energy, supportive environment that emphasized movement, connection, and fun.

It truly felt like a celebration every Friday night, and I would always leave having laughed out loud multiple times. Through this experience, I developed adaptability, empathy, patience, and strong interpersonal skills, while learning how to effectively engage and support a diverse group of participants."



Looking ahead, Will aspires to pursue a career in medicine with the goal of addressing healthcare disparities faced by individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Will's academic, research, and community experiences have shaped a commitment to inclusive care and advocacy for underserved populations.

FITNESS focused FRIDAYS



This year at S.M.I.L.E. was filled with so many memorable moments and meaningful experiences. One thing that really stood out was how much the participants embraced our fitness-focused Fridays. Week after week, it was incredible to see the energy, enthusiasm, and willingness to try new activities while encouraging one another along the way. The excitement and confidence in the room made it such a special evening for everyone involved. One of my personal favourite memories from this year was serving as the MC for the talent show. It was amazing to watch participants share their unique talents and personalities through everything from tug of war and comedy skits to storytelling and singing. Moments like these are such a great reminder of the joy, connection, and community that make SMILE so special.

- Will, Friday Student Director



This S.M.I.L.E. year was a huge blessing for me. So many new experiences and firsts for our participants, especially on the ice. We are very thankful for all the amazing volunteers and leaders who make this program come to life each week.

- Ryan, Friday Student Director



Heart Health & Valentine's Dance at Fountain Commons



SATURDAY SMILE.

If you've overheard us at S.M.I.L.E., you'll know that we never stop talking about how grateful we are for the involvement and care that each person brings to this program. It has been so special to watch the bond between instructors and participants grow and develop. The excitement that came through the door each Saturday, with arms wide open, further demonstrated just how valuable and influential our student volunteers are. Our instructors never hesitated to step up to cover absences, support each other, and bring unshakable energy. Each participant brought their own light and spark each Saturday, it has been such a beautiful experience getting to know each and every one of you, and the amazing people you are.

- **Nick, Saturday Student Director**



This semester, S.M.I.L.E.'s got talent was one of those bittersweet moments. We got to see so many participants, instructors, leaders, and other volunteers, stand up on the stage and show off their skills; dancing, singing, math, and much more. We shared so many smiles, laughs and of course a few tears shed knowing that it was the last programming day until next fall.

S.M.I.L.E.'s got talent acted as a celebration of the wonderful year we've had. Getting to know each and every one of you involved in this program meant the world to us. We can't wait to see what next year brings, have a safe and fun summer, and don't forget... You always have a home at S.M.I.L.E.

- Maria, Saturday Student Director





Tuesday/Thursday

TnT!



Our leaders have come up with some super creative games and activities on the ice to keep S.M.I.L.E. fun! This year we played basketball, soccer, bowling, volleyball and baseball on the ice! Participants also got to try out activities on the ice such as obstacle courses, this or that questions, puck shooting drills and theme specific activities each week. TnT also saw some fun group games this year, from noodle tag to furthest shot competitions and sled races! My favourite activity was the talent show during the last week of SMILE where participants showed off the new skills they learned this year along with some singing and dancing! I can't wait to get back to the fun on the ice in the fall!

- Meg, TnT Student Director



It has been so amazing to watch our TnT participants improve their skating and sled skills this year! The TnT group was so eager to learn how to skate, sled, and to play standing and para hockey. Each week participants worked hard with their buddies to try new things, face their fears and develop their skills, their hard work has definitely paid off! I loved seeing the progression from the first time participants got on the ice to the last day where they were flying around on the ice and showing off their skills!

- Aidan, TnT Student Director



The Jack Scholz Snoezelen Room

Over the course of this year, our team has been very intentional with the programming implemented in the Snoezelen room, aiming to support participants' motor, cognitive, and social goals while aligning activities with each week's programming theme. Our leadership team did a great job adapting activities throughout the year to fit the interests and needs of each school and community group while still encouraging engagement, exploration, and different forms of physical activity.

- **Makenna, Snoezelen Student Director**



One example of these adaptations was seen in the waitlist sessions that were offered on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings. These sessions created a fun and welcoming environment for participants to become familiar with the S.M.I.L.E. program environment while also working towards personal movement, social and engagement goals through sensory-based activities.

- **Parker, Snoezelen Student Director**

Thank you!



Noah & Olivia



The Allan Family



In loving memory,



Susan Weaver

1968-2026

Susan will be deeply missed by her S.M.I.L.E. family, but will be fondly remembered for her incredible laugh, love of dancing and singing, and keeping our S.M.I.L.E. volunteers in check!