



34th Annual NIDCAP Trainers Meeting Summary and Reflection

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Presented to the delegates on the final day of the meeting

Good afternoon,

Our NIDCAP work is all about seeing the lived experience of others, specifically the infant within the context of their family. As a NIDCAP Professional, I have both the privilege and the responsibility to function as the voice of the individual infant and to facilitate others to understand their vulnerability, strength, and effort to navigate this strange new world outside of their mother's womb.

It is through nurturing relationships that we strive to support each infant, family, healthcare professional, and one another within the global community of the NIDCAP Federation. For 34 years we have taken the time and energy to rededicate ourselves to this mission of improving the future for all infants in hospitals and their families with individualized, developmental, family centered research-based NIDCAP care.

Families are essential for the infant's wellbeing. This is true from a biological perspective, through the family's experience and in an effort to change our systems to provide a most supportive context to support families nurturing their infants. Rarely an infant does not have an identified family. That is true for us as grown-up infants, as adult family members, as Professionals who dedicate our careers to supporting infants and families – one infant at a time, one family at a time, one hospital at a time across the globe.

Families are complicated and made up of complex individuals. Therefore, being a member of a family as well as supporting one another through our growing relationships is far more easily said than accomplished. Many of you are aware of my somewhat unique family experience. My chosen family consists of myself and my husband of 47 years, in a multi-generational home with our son, his wife and their three amazing



gretchen with 11 of her 12 siblings

children. We honor the boundaries of our various relationship roles as parent, child and grandparent. We support one another through strong and close relationships nurturing one another through meals and childcare with mutual collaboration as we celebrate milestones of both young and old.

Then there is my experience of my family of origin – being one of thirteen adult children navigating our lives as individuals and family members beyond those of our deceased Mother and Father. We honor our parents' wishes and dreams by sharing an amazing lake property and coming together for a full week every summer—

And just as we the NIDCAP family are finding our way beyond our deceased fearless courageous leader Heidelise Als, we are struggling during the transition – trying to honor and be true to Heidi's mission and vision as our relationships understandably reconfigure. And just to complicate things a bit—both these losses in my family of origin as well as my NIDCAP family occurred within the context of the global pandemic.



In person participants at the 34th NIDCAP Trainers Meeting

Nonetheless, here we are for our 34th year of meeting. This is what I think of as the annual reunion of my professional family. We have been trying to reconnect and to nurture ourselves and one another – building and strengthening our relationships – both new and old. We have learned a style of didactic presentations interspersed with small group discussions where we share ideas and experiences in a more personal manner. We are nurtured by our local hosts with food, drink, and social gatherings to further facilitate shared experiences and building relationships.

Deborah Buehler (NFI President) provided the inaugural Heidelise Als Lecture reminding us that the origin of Heidi's work included the concept of integrating the technological advances for our most vulnerable infants with the affective humanness of infants and their neurobiologically expected environments of the womb, parents' body and family social group.

Throughout the first day not only did we have the joy of seeing PowerPoint introductions of each individual attending in person but also those joining us virtually. For myself, and no doubt many others, this time dedicated to acknowledging each person provides us with feelings of pleasure, pride, and joy.

In addition, Stina Klemming (Sweden) and Kaye Spence (Australia) provided us with not only a summary of our work over this past year, but also coordinated and put together an amazing array of every NIDCAP Center's individual accomplishments in the words, through video, of a representative of each center. For me, this was clear evidence supporting Heidi's statement that Deborah mentioned "that we are all connected, we mutually support, teach, learn from, and enrich one another". This speaks to me of relationships, both familial and professional. The other meaning, I took from our accomplishments was a strong sense that we have come out of the dark tunnel of the pandemic. As an organization, as a professional

family – not only have we survived the pandemic, but we are thriving with renewed interest, enthusiasm, and growth of the NIDCAP Federation.

Of course, with growth, there is some disorganization, sibling rivalry, and necessary, although sometimes painful, reorganization. Our membership meeting and small group sessions on nurturing NIDCAP and the next steps for the NIDCAP Federation provided a safe space for individuals to express some frustrations, sometimes courageous honest, yet difficult feedback which I believe will lead to much more valuable discussion with upcoming creative strategies and increased communication.

As all families, we as the NIDCAP family have some traditions when we come together. We enjoy sessions such as our NIDCAP Nursery small group exercise where we can look at a videotaped infant-caregiver interaction and discuss, evaluate, and assess, bringing our different disciplinary perspectives. Another regular session we had was to think about and share various ways our NIDCAP work is translated to foundational education. We heard from Diane Ballweg about her experiences in various hospitals in the USA as well as Nadine Griffiths' Australian experience and Graciela Basso's program for neonatologists in South America.

Woven throughout our three days were quite a variety of abstract presentations, a dozen of them which whet our appetite, generated further discussion and potential collaborations. This reminded me of being a child at the dinner table in my family of origin when it was expected that each of us would talk about our school day. Some abstracts were a bit provocative, some quite novel, and overall, both reinforce our NIDCAP work and suggest further avenues for exploration.

On Day 2, we were able to get into our small groups to discuss and share moments of joy experienced with infants, their families and healthcare team. This topic had been delayed from

last year due to our somber meeting with our first gathering since Heidi's death. It was wonderful to share the moments of joy found within our emotionally exhausting work.

On Day 3, our NIDCAP family welcomed friends and guests, both in person and virtually, to join us as we concentrated on the essential importance of families to the wellbeing of the infant. In my work as a clinical nurse scientist, I often share with families that the most influential variable in long term outcome of infants is a nurturing adult infant relationship.

With much appreciation Jacques Sizun (France) provided the tone for the day when he reflected on the legacy of Heidelise Als reminding us of how brilliant she was and so much ahead of time in her insights. We then had the opportunity to have Jeff Alberts enlighten us on the science of skin development and research on the development of touch, realizing that the most crucial containing touch has yet to be explored.

Joy Browne (USA) gave us a great deal of information on the importance of sensitive periods in both infants and parents beyond the newborn period through the first months of early development. Mandy Daly (Ireland) was incredibly generous in facilitating our understanding of the lifelong implications of prematurity from the family perspective.

The afternoon was such a treat to have the enthusiasm of Liz Rogers (USA) on creating the culture of care in her setting with numerous wonderful ideas for each of us to take to our clinical homes. Kiera Sorrells was an inspiration to one and all as she shared her own experience with her premature daughters and how she took that difficult experience and translated it into the creation of an organization to support other parents in the USA. Nick Conneman (Netherlands) shared his vision for achieving developmental care through the NIDCAP model

emphasizing the importance of trust in the process.

Debra Paul (USA) took her difficult situation of becoming a lone NIDCAP Professional in a busy clinical setting and managed to strategize ways to continue to move forward on her own. She inspired me and I much appreciated her practical approach. Saadieh Masri (Lebanon) finished our presentations with a very practical approach to how NIDCAP crossed frontiers – as she said, walk the talk.

So, as we leave the 34th Annual NIDCAP Trainers meeting in Chicago, what I call our professional family meeting, whether you have attended in person or virtually, for all three days or the open day, let us reflect on each of our own experiences. Despite my initial fear and trepidation in returning to this prestigious group, the same feeling I have when heading to my family reunion each summer, I have no regrets. I am so pleased to have met new people, reconnected with friends and colleagues from as long ago as 1980, and gained a much more positive sense of the accomplishments of this organization. I felt much joy in spending time with you all and building relationships. We strive to mentor caregivers and change hospitals and when we do this work as well as possible it may be emotionally exhausting. Let us go forth and continue to live the NIDCAP values of appreciating another's lived experience and to improving the future for all infants in hospitals and their families with individualized, developmental, family centered research-based NIDCAP care. Through our mutual support of one another, we can navigate our organizational transition successfully and continue to meet our mission. I hope to see each of you next year for our 35th Annual NIDCAP Trainers Meeting in Toulouse, France or what I call my professional family reunion.



Mission

The NFI improves the future of all infants in hospitals and their families with individualized, developmental, family-centered, research-based NIDCAP care.

Adopted by the NFI Board, June 29, 2022

Vision

The NFI envisions a global society in which all hospitalized newborns and their families receive care in the evidence-based NIDCAP model. NIDCAP supports development, enhances strengths and minimizes stress for infants, family and staff who care for them. It is individualized and uses a relationship-based, family-integrated approach that yields measurable outcomes.

Adopted by the NFI Board, October 20, 2017