

# *A Place to Go...*



## STORIES FROM PARTICIPANTS OF FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS

*PREPARED BY:*

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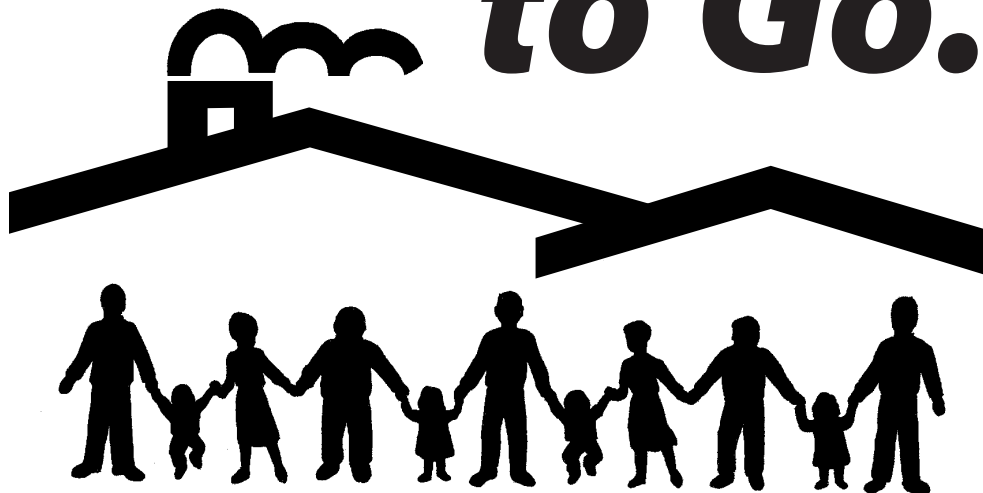
Associate Dean, Faculty of Community Services

*WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF*

Pariss Garramone (Ph.D. Candidate, York University)



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*AN MAFRP – RYERSON UNIVERSITY PROJECT*

*This report is also available on our website:*

<http://www.ryerson.ca/voices>



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# Preface

This project developed out of a partnership between Ryerson University and the Research Committee of the (Toronto) Metro Association of Family Resource Programs (MAFRP).<sup>1</sup> The goal of this partnership was to develop a research program to examine the benefits to children and families of participation in Family Resource Programs (FRPs). A pilot study interviewing participants of three Toronto FRPs was conducted in the spring of 1998. This study confirmed for Ryerson researchers what the FRP community knew well — that the stories participants told were powerful statements of what could be gained from involvement in an FRP. It also suggested the need to develop a way to evaluate FRPs that departed from traditional evaluations and was able to capture the unique contributions of these programs.

Further support for the present study was provided by another pilot study in 1999, in which staff and key informants were asked about their evaluation needs. Program staff indicated their frustration with traditional evaluation tools which did not capture the rich layers of the participant experience. Together, the two pilot studies confirmed the need to bring participant stories to a wider audience, and to develop an evaluation tool based on these experiences.

Cheryl Lajoie, then Executive Director of MAFRP, was instrumental in keeping the research team focused on securing funding to support the vision of an evaluation tool based on participants' voices. This vision was made possible when we received funding from the Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Development Canada (now referred to as Social Development Canada) in December 2002.

The study has been guided by a Steering Committee which includes members of MAFRP, the Ryerson research team, program participants, representatives of FRP Canada and the Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs, and the coordinator of the Ryerson Family Supports Certificate. While Ryerson was responsible for data collection and analysis and for writing final reports, the Steering Committee guided the research process throughout. Indeed, the completion of the study depended on the active engagement of the Steering Committee and their program connections. Community members of the Steering Committee were consulted in all decisions regarding sample selection, questions guiding interviews and focus groups, recruitment materials and strategies, coding and theme development, and the format of the final reports. We were also fortunate to receive feedback regarding the study from several hundred other staff and participants at a number of community consultations, conferences, and workshops.

<sup>1</sup> MAFRP has had a long-standing partnership with Ryerson's Schools of Early Childhood Education and Social Work. The School of Early Childhood Education has its own Family Resource Program, the Gerrard Resource Centre. Since 1989, MAFRP and OAFRP (the Ontario Association of Family Resource Programs) have worked with Ryerson's School of Continuing Education to develop a Certificate Program for Family Support practitioners.

We have produced two manuscripts: **A Place to Go: Stories from Participants of Family Resource Programs** (this volume) and **What Participants Value: Practices and Outcomes at Family Resource Programs**. They are intended to be read as companion pieces, although some readers will no doubt be drawn to one or the other by their professional interest. Each volume has a French version as well. These volumes and other project resource materials are available on the project website at <http://www.ryerson.ca/voices/> For any further information on the project, please contact us directly.

While our collaboration and consultations were far-reaching, the views expressed in this manuscript are those of the authors alone.

## *Acknowledgements*

The study could not have been completed without the help and support of participating FRPs in Toronto<sup>2</sup> and across Ontario, and from Alberta, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island.<sup>3</sup> We were warmly welcomed by the staff at all the sites and we thank them for their assistance in recruiting program participants.<sup>4</sup> We would also like to thank the programs that sent the pictures that bring a face to the story.

Participants were eager to speak with us and share their experiences. We thank them immensely and hope that we have represented their voices in a meaningful manner. To ensure confidentiality, all names used in this report have been changed.

We would also like to thank our funder, Social Development Canada, and specifically Kelly King, for recognizing the worthiness of our project and providing us with the funds to complete it.

There are many individuals at Ryerson that helped us along the way. Dean Sue Williams, Faculty of Community Services and Maura Estrada, Assistant to the Dean, made sure that we had a comfortable space to accommodate our ever-growing troop of RAs, provided working computers and above all, warm encouragement. We would like to acknowledge Rose Jackson and Denise Ramharry of the Office of Research Services. Not only did they keep our budget on track, but they also gave us a quarterly hug as well. We also received advice and guidance from Dr. Judith Sandys, Associate Vice President, Academic and Robert Dirstein, Director, Office of Research Services. Additionally, each of us have a different academic home and we

<sup>2</sup> All FRPs that were members of MAFRP were invited to participate in the study. All sites that volunteered were included in the study.

<sup>3</sup> Study participants were recruited by program staff. The only guideline given to staff in recruiting was that participants had been involved for at least one year. Both participants and programs were given an honourarium in recognition of their invaluable contribution to the study.

<sup>4</sup> A list of all participating organizations is appended.



would like to thank our colleagues for their generous input and support. We would also like to thank Ryerson's Digital Media Project office, and specifically John Hajdu, for helping us make this information available on the Web.

A participatory project such as this can only be realized through the ongoing work and commitment of the community representing the field of family support. We would like to thank the MAFRP Board of Directors and the Effective Practices Committee. We would also like to thank the Board of Directors of FRP Canada for providing a national perspective. Our Steering Committee played an essential role in getting this project off the ground and into the field. A special thanks to Shanaz Begg, Marg Cox, Lianne Doucet, Jasmin Earle, Martha Lee-Blickstead, Janice MacAulay, Pat Miller, Catherine Moher, and Linda Silver for their invaluable contribution as members of the Steering Committee.

During the course of this project, eight research assistants were hired at various times and for various tasks. It was indeed our good fortune to have begun this process by hiring M. Carmen Carrero de Salazar, our Project Co-ordinator. We thank her for her remarkable organizational skills, intellect, and grace. Pariss Garramone, you brought us portraiture, and we thank you for your sensitivity and commitment when working with the stories. We would also like to thank all of our RAs, Allia Karim, Debra Ramsay, Natalie Reale, Sophie Soklaridis, Lydia Thurton, and Leslie Wilson. Each of your contributions strengthened the project.

Once all is collected, analyzed, and written up, we relied on our publisher, Tom Scanlan at *is five* COMMUNICATIONS to take it to the next level. Tom, what a pleasure it was to work with you and your editor, French translator and lay-out staff. We would also like to thank Martha Lee-Blickstead and Marg Cox for reviewing earlier drafts of this manuscript, and Lianne Doucet and Betsy Mann for their review of the French translation.

Finally, we would like to thank Marg Cox, Jasmine Earle, Pat Miller, and June Pollard. You were our inspiration! You represent the values, commitments, and promise of working with children and families.

*Susan, Rachel and Sue*

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Our *Voices Resource Kit* is dedicated to the memory of Cheryl Lajoie who died on October 4, 2004 after a courageous struggle with cancer. Cheryl was an unwavering advocate for the well-being of children and families. It was her perseverance and commitment that impelled us to prepare the grant proposal which made this project possible.

# Introduction

*Family support programs are community-based organizations working with children, families and caregivers to enhance strengths, to build capacities and to promote healthy development.*

*Family resource programs in Canada are voluntary, not-for-profit, community-level organizations supporting families through services that include information, referrals, networking and material assistance.*

(FRP Canada. Retrieved Apr. 15, 2005 from <http://www.frp.ca/PDFDocuments/support-e.pdf>)

Family Resource Programs (FRPs)<sup>1</sup> offer a model of early childhood learning and care embedded within environments that offer multiple services that are universally accessible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of families. The services provided by FRPs are aimed at engaging families in pursuing states of well-being for themselves and their children. In contrast to the traditional service delivery approach, FRPs embrace empowerment practices where service providers see themselves as catalysts or facilitators rather than as experts, and clients are seen as participants rather than as recipients. As such, in a family resource environment, there is a non-hierarchical and participatory approach to family support. FRPs have deep roots in the community and are an integral resource for building networks of support for participants and their families. There are over 2,000 FRPs across Canada, reaching hundreds of thousands of families.

The everyday experiences of participating in FRPs reveal cascading levels of engagement, leading to multiple outcomes of value and significance. It is through these experiences, captured in the stories and dialogues voiced by participants, that we come to understand the essence of Family Resource Programs. These stories provide us with an appreciation of the far-reaching outcomes of this inclusive, community-based model of services for children and families.

Over 200 interviews (group and individual) were completed for this study.<sup>2</sup> The interviews were conducted in a manner that closely corresponds to principles of narrative

<sup>1</sup> The term Family Resource Program (FRP) includes all community-based Family Support Programs such as CAPC/CPNP (Community Action Program for Children and the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program), OEYC (Ontario Early Years' FRPs), Military Family Resource FRPs, Neighbourhood Houses, and Parent Link FRPs. Additionally "FRP" is used throughout the document to designate all terms used to describe Family Resource Programs, such as the centre, the drop-in, and the program.

<sup>2</sup> The interviews were used for this publication as well as for the development of the practice indicators. See *What Participants Value ... Practices and Outcomes at Family Resource Programs*.

analysis (Chase, 2003). As Chase outlines, “narration is a major way in which people make sense of experience, construct the self, and create and communicate meaning” (p. 79). Interview questions were structured to invite concrete, detailed stories about specific experiences and the meanings attributed to these experiences.<sup>3</sup> Using probes such as, “Tell me the story of ...”, “Tell me what it was like when ...” (p. 83), we were able to gather context-rich stories that chronicle the benefits realized for participants and their children, relationships developed, and forms of staff engagement most valued.

While each story is a unique and individual representation, personal narratives are also “social in character” (Chase, p. 79). The “social” context of our “stories” is situated within an environment of FRPs, allowing us to select individual stories that are most familiar and reflect common sets of experiences and outcomes.

The focus groups provide an opportunity for divergent interpretations and experiences to be shared in a group setting. The passages that we present demonstrate the struggles of some participants, particularly in relation to the social differences of class, gender, language, sexual orientation, and age. We have included these struggles, though voiced by only a few participants, to remind us of the immense ongoing work required to build inclusive environments of service.

**The Art and Science of Portraiture**, by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) has been used as a guide for creating a retelling of a participant’s story and focus group dialogue. As a method of qualitative research, portraiture seeks “to record and interpret the perspectives and experiences” of those that are being studied, “documenting their voices and their visions” (p. xv). These stories are illustrative, and many readers will be able to identify with the feelings conjured in the telling.

Rarely is there time or space for reflection, for sharing participant stories of everyday experiences, or for reflecting on the multiple meanings attributed to these experiences. This project creates such a unique space. Our hope is that as you read these stories you will be able to link these experiences with your own, either as practitioner or as participant or as both. This collection of stories provides a “reflective lens”, which both suggests and affirms the practices and outcomes most valued by participants.

<sup>3</sup> See appended *Interview Guide*, used for individual interviews and adapted for focus group interviews.



# The Stories

## Nicole<sup>1</sup>

Nicole is in her late thirties and is married with two daughters, Ashley who is 11 and Sara who is three. “I had been to FRPs before, in church basements and that kind of thing with my first daughter who is 11 now, but it was very sporadic at the time. I started coming here with my second child when she was about a year old. I had just left my job and decided to stay home to care for my children.”

Nicole was eager to tell about her first experience at the FRP with her daughter: “The first time I came here, it was a bit intimidating because it had been so long since I had been in a child environment. I found that compared to a private place that I had been to before coming here, this was much more friendly and comfortable. I didn’t have to talk to anybody at first and I liked it. The people here, both the staff and the other parents, are aware of what is going on with the children. They keep their eye on the children.”

In terms of being made to feel welcome at the FRP, Nicole tells about the relaxed and pressure-free environment that the staff and parents have created.

“Some people might want to look around, listen to other people talk for a little while before they get involved, without being forced. I think that it’s nice. I think a lot of it has to do with the facilitator who runs the program. The woman here is very good, she finds out everyone’s name and your children’s names as soon as you come.”

As a stay-at-home mom who is now a caregiver for three other children, Nicole uses the program regularly. “After my daughter’s first summer, I started to come regularly. I come three mornings a week. It’s a resource for me, it’s a place to get out and speak to other women who are doing the same kind of work that I am. As a result of coming here, I now provide childcare for three other children. My best friend, who I met here, had been doing

*Reynolds (2000) found that compared to peers who attended other early childhood programs without the family support and involvement component, an adult who participated as a young child in a Chicago Child-Parent Center was 40% less likely to have been placed in a special education program, 40% less likely to have been held back a grade, 29% more likely to have graduated from high school, 33% less likely to have been arrested and 51% less likely to have been a victim of child maltreatment.*

<sup>1</sup> All names and FRP locations have been changed to provide anonymity.

childcare from her home for the past 14 years. After coming here regularly and seeing other women as caregivers it made me think that, you know, maybe I could do this because I really didn't want to go back to work. I really wanted to stay with my children, not just my small one, but I have an 11-year-old too. So I kind of asked around a little, found out a bit more and then I signed up and got my first child. I now have a great reputation for my business and I am always full."



By attending the program, Nicole has not only found a great network that has helped her create and maintain her new career as a caregiver, but she has also gained a place to interact and discuss difficulties with other parents and caregivers. "I've got a lot of benefit from other people's experience. I know a lot of the women here; I've been coming here for three years now, so when I get here we will talk about what has been going on in our lives. For parents who are at home with an infant on their own, you need to be able to come to a place like this where you can talk, ask others for advice, or help other parents out. It's great to have other parents to talk with; we share our experiences and it's better than going to a book. I think it makes you a better parent."

*"...improving child development is not simply a matter of fulfilling service mandates to targeted client populations, but of improving the environments where children grow up, live, and learn. The challenge is one of adopting an environmental perspective when agencies have traditionally understood their role to be limited to providing one-on-one client services. For example, our work supports recommendations for policies that encourage socio-economically diverse neighbourhoods and that increase community cohesion, trust, and a sense of belonging"*  
(Hertzman & Kohen, 2003, p. 5).

Nicole sees how this program has contributed to building a sense of community for her family. "My husband and I bought our first home in this neighbourhood. It was a new neighbourhood for us and with our daughter in school and a new baby, I wanted to find out who was in the neighbourhood and get to know my neighbours. We decided to move here because we wanted to be in a neighbourhood where people walked in the community, where people used the stores in their community and because of those reasons I wanted to find a way to get to know the people who live here. This program was a great stepping stone for that."

Being involved with the FRP has connected Nicole and her daughter to other parents and children. "My daughter made some great friends who she sees outside of the FRP now. When I first came with just my daughter, before I became a caregiver, there was another woman who also had a daughter and we would meet outside the FRP. We would arrange to go to the library together, or for our children to play together. That happens all the time here. Coming to the FRP has brought us into being part of the community. We know people in the

neighbourhood now. It was really a great introduction to becoming part of the community.”

The program has greatly benefited the children that Nicole brings to the FRP. “One of the little girls that I look after was very shy and had a hard time adjusting to daycare. Coming here regularly, it taught her to be a bit more independent. Now when she gets here she’s off running, talking, and playing with the other children. It has helped her to socialize and to get used to other places and to play with children in other settings, not just my home. The children learn skills before they get to school, it shows, you know. The children learn boundaries. I think it really sets them up for kindergarten.”

## Margaret

**M**argaret is a grandmother of three. Both Margaret and her husband, Jim, bring their grandchildren to the FRP near their home. “We’ve been in the same house for 48 years now. All of my children grew up there and now our granddaughter, who is ten, is going to St. Thomas. My husband and I and all of our six children went to this school too. So we’ve been here a long time. Now we have our grandchildren, and with them going to the same school in the area, we come by this FRP at the school on the way. We used to go to the FRP on Elm Street, that was the closest one, but the people changed and now we like coming to this one better. Victoria, our granddaughter, has a friend here, a neighbour that we have known for years, so they really like to come here.”

The staff at the FRP make Margaret feel comfortable and encourage her to participate. “Well, when I first came to the FRP I didn’t mix much. I just didn’t talk much to others, and I didn’t know too much about these places. After being here only a short while, they had made me feel good, really comfortable. The people that are here working with the children are very good to them. The staff really go out of their way to help the children and the parents — or the grandparents like us. When I first started coming here I was really sick. I had a bad cold that turned into pneumonia. For a good two or three months I was really sick. The staff at the FRP actually phoned me to see if I needed any help. They make you feel good.”

*“Intergenerational programs are activities or programs that increase cooperation, interaction or exchange between any two generations. It involves the sharing of skills, knowledge or experience between young and old” (United Generations Ontario, 2004).*

Margaret also sees how the staff make the children feel comfortable and develop a sense of belonging. “They have celebrations here for Thanksgiving, Christmas, Valentine’s Day and they have birthday parties. They will have a birthday for all of the kids in February, or all the kids in January. They will even get a cake, and put all of the names on it. I think it is really wonderful what they do. The staff are really good.”

Margaret and Jim have been bringing their grandchildren to the FRP for three years. During that time Margaret has seen how her grandchildren have benefited. “With Mark, who is five, we kept him home for the first two years. He had a lot of toys, but it is not the same as sharing the toys, you know. They really learn to share and they do what they are asked. The kids learn to say ‘please’ and ‘thank you,’ and Justin, who is two-and-a-half, is learning



how to use a spoon and eat at the table with other children. It is really good to have the teachers here reminding him of the things we are teaching at home. He is learning from other adults and he sees that it is not just Grandma, other people are telling him the same things too.”

*“Intergenerational support happens not only within families, but also within the wider community. Evidence of non-family support abounds between older and younger generations. One example is the interest and growth in intergenerational programming aimed at bringing together people of various ages in situations of mutual support. As well, older Canadians are known for their financial contributions and civic engagement at the community level. They often serve as volunteers in organizations that support younger generations, and they contribute millions of dollars every year to causes that aim to improve the lives of youth” (Keefe, 2004, p. 5).*

For Justin, the youngest of Margaret’s grandchildren, the FRP has helped facilitate learning motor and language skills. “Justin is learning the alphabet and nursery rhymes here; it is really good for him. I mean he knows some of his ABCs and if you are saying them he can say them along with you. And at the beginning he wouldn’t play with the glue or the paints, he didn’t like getting dirty. Now he is colouring and painting and really developing the use of his hands. He really enjoys it here; he likes playing with the other children.”

The FRP has also given Margaret the opportunity to interact with other parents, grandparents, and children. “Well, I am not a mixer, but I still get along with people. There are a few parents that come here that I talk with all of the time. My husband is very sick, he had open-heart surgery and couldn’t talk for the last two years. So if I’m upset or anything, I can talk with the people here and they will do anything they can to help.”

Margaret has experienced many situations where the staff and parents at the FRP have provided support for her and her family. “On Halloween, I don’t buy costumes or anything because my kids are all grown up, so I didn’t have any Halloween costumes for Justin last year. I was able to get a costume for him at the FRP, and we put it on him and took him out around the neighbourhood. It is very good that way. There are a lot of things that help. I had a form to fill in recently and I am not too good with spelling and writing. Now my reading isn’t too good either because I really can’t make out the words even with my glasses. So, I asked Sarah, the staff person here, and she helped me fill in the form. They help a lot of other people too. People come to the FRP and from here they learn about what places to go to for help. They are very good that way.”

Margaret is an active volunteer at the FRP and has developed connections with people in her community. “I feel very secure here. I want to stay involved with the FRP even after Justin goes to school. I will be volunteering at a lunch program at the FRP. It is only an hour a day, but it is something, and I would really like to do that, to help out. I’ll be 71 in March and you know it is the kids that really keep me going, I love being around them.” No doubt the children have benefited from Margaret’s presence as well.



## Anita



The children in the other room are sitting cross-legged in a circle and they have just begun to sing as Anita comes into the office for her interview. Her son, Tomas, who is four, is sitting on the lap of Kathy, one of the FRP staff. Anita turns and waves to Tomas before we begin our interview to talk about how Anita and her son have felt about the FRPs that they have been involved with.

Three years ago, Anita and Tomas began coming to this Metro Toronto FRP. It is in the basement of an apartment building, with open play areas, toys to share, and resources for parents. “The first time I came to the FRP was because the home visitor I had referred me to

this place. She told me how nice it was and how much Tomas and I would enjoy it here. When we started to come here, we used to come only one day a week, just to try it out.”

Anita describes how shy Tomas was when they started attending the FRP. “He was very tight to mommy. We don’t have much social life here, not many friends, so he was always with mommy. He hated going on the bus, sitting beside people he didn’t know. It’s probably because we didn’t socialize much. A year and a half ago Tomas would have been right here at my side.”

Anita and her youngest son Tomas now attend the FRP up to three times a week. “In the beginning, I didn’t feel that involved with the activities here. I felt my child was pretty shy and well, so am I. In the beginning I just came here and sat with Tomas in the corner. It was like I was still just with my son, just the two of us — but with people around — alone with people around.”

“In the first few days, I saw many people who couldn’t speak much English, and neither could I. I started to do some little things, like helping with the materials. Tomas didn’t want me to leave him, he would cry. The staff really helped me. I asked them what I should do since my son didn’t want to talk to anybody. They said to me, ‘He needs to socialize. This program is going to help him. Little by little when you bring him here, he will start making friends with the other kids and this will help him. Sometimes you have to leave him, he might cry a little but he is with us, so you can go to the nutrition class, or a cooking class and you don’t have to come out and check on him — he is with us, he’ll be fine.’ And you know she was completely right. The point is to bring your kids as much as you can. Little by little he has built up relationships with other children, and even with the other parents and the staff.”

*“The success of children’s peer relationships is linked to their later psychological development and to school success. It has been suggested that children with poor peer relationships may experience job-related and marital problems later in life” (Ramsey, 1991).*

Anita sees how this will really help Tomas with the transition when he goes to junior kindergarten next fall. “Tomas is very excited to go to school; my older son didn’t want to go.”

Anita and her husband moved to Toronto from South America in 1989. “Even though I was here for 12 years, it didn’t matter. I felt alone no matter what I did to try and fit into society here. No matter how hard I tried, it didn’t matter; there were so many differences. It feels like if you don’t come to the FRPs, you just don’t belong. It’s like you lose your identity. As a parent, I think everybody has the same needs. I mean, when you talk with others your stories are similar, and your kids are going through similar things. No one here treats anyone any differently. They don’t tell you that your child is bad, and if your child is having problems they let you know how you can talk with your child. That made me feel really comfortable here.”

*“... the nature of children’s environments within the family, and in their schools, neighborhoods, and communities, has a very strong effect on children’s cognitive and behavioral development and the prevalence of childhood vulnerability. This finding requires us to shift our thinking from childhood vulnerability as a problem stemming from poverty and single parenting to vulnerability as a problem arising from the environments in which children are raised. It requires us to focus less on ameliorating risk factors and more on creating environments to support children’s development”*  
(Willms, 2002, p. 366).

Anita’s husband has his own business and Anita not only helps her husband, but is a full-time mom of Lorenzo, who is nine and Tomas, who is just turning four. Anita is passionate about being a caregiver to her children, and attributes this passion to growing up in a very large family and her heritage. “As a traditional person, I believe that kids grow much better beside the parents.” Yet with her first son Lorenzo, Anita had to work two half days per week and depended on using a daycare. At the daycare, “Lorenzo didn’t get to learn the same way as the children do here. Tomas, my other son gets to learn so much here from other children, the staff, and with other parents too. He learned to listen to other adults, and things like how you eat at a table with other children.”

Anita is very concerned about her eldest son, Lorenzo. She feels upset that he did not have the same opportunities for learning that the FRP is giving to Tomas. “It’s his motor skills; even now at nine Lorenzo still is having trouble with some of his abilities. I wonder if things might have been different if Lorenzo had been coming to the FRP.”

Since becoming involved with the FRP, Anita has not only helped her sons, but through just being with other parents Anita has become more comfortable. Now she feels more confident. “We are all the same, we all have different problems, some like me have English as a second language, but it’s just getting to know people, talking with others and not worrying about if I am saying things right, just talking and being with people has made all the difference. I am learning so much about Canada. These FRPs are important because they are teaching both my sons and me how to be active in the community here in Canada. I didn’t know how education worked in Canada, but through being at the FRP I have learned so much and now know what to expect and how to help my sons. I have taken some parenting classes

at the FRP and the staff have given me some help as well, like suggesting to read a lot to my kids. Even reading in Spanish.”

Anita is enthusiastic to tell about her involvement with the FRP. “When I think something has to be added, like for example, the music teacher. We, for a little while didn’t have a person who really knew about music, and there has always been a music teacher. When we didn’t have one, this place felt empty. You know, the kids really love it, and with someone who really knows about music the kids enjoy it more. They are singing and playing their instruments nicely and they feel excited. It’s not just your kids, it’s all the kids, and you feel excited too.” Anita and the other parents at the FRP joined together to create positive changes at the FRP. In this case, they were able to bring a music teacher back to the FRP.

Anita is now working in the community as a volunteer with a language program for pre-school children. She speaks passionately about how the FRP has helped her become an active community member. “These FRPs help the children and the parents. Because of these places you can feel you are important and that you can serve your community much better. Toronto is made of people from different places, people with different cultures, and these places are important. They are free and this helps because you don’t have to struggle, and pay too much to find a place to take your children. We are new to Canada; we are learning and teaching our children as well how to be a good person for the future, a good citizen. So the government has to think about that. Whatever they spend here, they have to think is for their own good, the good of the country and this city.”

## Farah

**F**arah is a paid caregiver to a four-year-old who she brings to the FRP. “I have a child named Carly. I have been looking after Carly from the day she arrived home from the hospital. We had nowhere to go for the first nine months. We just walked around, went to coffee shops, but you can’t really take a baby to a coffee shop. One day I just saw the ‘FRP’ sign and we just walked in. We met Sandra, who runs the FRP. She’s very nice and we’ve been coming since then.”

Farah has been coming to the FRP three days a week for the last four years. “I was very happy coming to the FRP because everyone is so nice. Carly just loves coming here. We come to the FRP at 9:30, when it opens and we usually stay until 1:30, but they have cut the hours, so now we leave at 12:30 but no one really wants to leave early.”

For Farah, the FRP is a place where she can be involved with parents and other caregivers. She is very enthusiastic when she tells about the activities and the community celebrations that she and Carly take part in at the FRP. “We do all kinds of celebrations, Jewish, Muslim, even things like having a Florida Day in winter. Everybody, adults and children, enjoy it.

*“Empowerment means increased opportunities to control one’s own life.*

*It gives:*

- *power to make decisions*
- *power to have your voice heard*
- *power to put things on the agenda*
- *power to negotiate new issues*
- *power within yourself to challenge past customs”*

*(Skjønsberg, 2001, p. 2).*

We always do a birthday party here; Carly has one coming up on Thursday. Every year we have celebrated her birthday here. It's really nice. There is usually a cake that the regulars get and we all bring party things for the kids."

Farah is part of this community and is an active participant in both the programs at the FRP and the adult committees that plan and organize the events for the FRP. "We all have a say in the planning of the FRP, what is going to be happening, if we are going on a trip, if we are going to have a potluck or a garage sale, stuff like that." Like many participants, Farah feels that the FRP is like a family for her. "Everybody's my family here. Believe me; if I don't come to the FRP they will call me, even at home to see what's wrong."

Even beyond the time that Farah is at the FRP, she has the support of people in this community. "I have the contact number of the other caregivers from the FRP in case I need to call them or they need to call me. If I need anything for myself or my family I can also contact Sandra, she will give me the information I need. It really works out great. It's like a kind of support."

The information that Farah has found at the FRP has helped her with discipline issues with Carly. "I see other parents and caregivers setting rules with the children and being firm. If the child does something they are removed and they have to say that they are sorry. So now I give the handouts we get here to Carly's mom and I tell her about things to do a bit differently and she uses it."

The health information has been very useful for Farah and she has told others in her community about what she has been learning at the FRP. "The health nurse comes in once a month and they tell us what is going on with breast cancer and screening and things like that. I make copies of the handouts I get here and pass along the information to the other women at the mosque that I attend. I take five minutes in the mosque to organize the women's community there and I say to them, 'We have to take care of ourselves, a lot of these things we don't do,' you know, like the Pap test, breast cancer checks, stuff like that."

Farah has gained confidence and is using that confidence to positively affect her community. "Some people can't come here, so it is my job to pass along the information to those who need it. Since coming to the FRP I have confidence to talk with anybody. You know everybody has a voice. I wouldn't have done this without the FRP."

Farah has found the FRP to be very helpful in terms of dealing with her employer, Carly's mom. "I hate to see the hours cut because this FRP really does help the kids and even the adults. The kind of information I personally get through the FRP, I don't know of any place I could get it. Even when I wanted to negotiate my contract with Carly's mom, we had an argument so I came in here and they photocopied some information for me and called the Labour Department and they sent me some things in the mail. I showed these to Carly's mom and she didn't know about these things either. So we worked things out."

Farah is very worried about the future of this FRP and is active in taking these issues to City Hall. "We all made an effort to write things down so that we could take it to City Hall to try and save this place. I know now that we cannot sit around and let somebody do things

for us. Everybody has to get up and let your voice be heard. If I'm going to use this service I have to say I need this because I believe people don't know what you need unless you tell them."

Farah feels that she has made lasting and meaningful relationships from participating in the FRP. "I never thought I could be friends with a lot of the people that come here. Everyone was so different, but everyone is the same. People have to get out and know this. I have made friends here that are friends for life."

## Jocelyn

“I have lived in this neighbourhood for a lot of my life and I never noticed the FRP until a woman in my building who I was babysitting for told me about going there with her son.” Jocelyn is 22 and has a daughter who is one-and-a-half. “So I went one day to the FRP with the little boy, Josh, who I babysit and then I brought my daughter as well. Everyone is so friendly and they made me feel welcome as soon as we walked in the door. Now we come here every day that they are open, and we have been coming here just over a year now.”

Jocelyn has been involved in the various programs organized at the FRP for parents and caregivers. “I have taken some of the parenting classes that they offer here. These parenting classes are good for letting you get a better grasp on skills. I want to be able to potty train my daughter, so this is a good resource. I am going to start going to the afternoon program for caregivers. It will only be one afternoon a week, but it will help me do crafts with Josh.”

Jocelyn, her daughter, Caroline, and Josh, all take part in the summer trips that the FRP co-ordinates. “We are going on a few trips with the FRP. Tomorrow is the first one; we are going to the zoo, next week to Wild Water Kingdom, and the week after that to Ontario Place. If I had to do this on my own, I wouldn't be able to afford it. Through the FRP we only have to pay five dollars, so it is really great.”

Jocelyn also sees the time spent at the FRP as contributing to the children's learning skills. “When I first brought my daughter, Caroline, here she was pretty little. She was nine months. She was crawling, but when we started coming to the FRP she was very mad that she couldn't run around with the other kids. At about 10 months she started walking because she wanted to play with the other kids. She wanted to do all of the things that the other kids were doing. So I guess she started walking out of necessity.”

“I like to bring them on Mondays and Fridays to the FRP where they get to play in a

*“...empowering parents (i.e., increasing their knowledge, skills, competencies, resources) will increase their ability to advocate for their children across various entities comprising the child service systems. Such advocacy ... will increase a child and family's access to a broad array of services and, consequently, improve child outcomes” (Cunningham, Henggeler, Brondino, & Pickrel, 1999, p. 438).*

large group. They get to be involved with other children and that helps them be ready for school because they know how to act around other children. While they are playing, I get the chance to talk with other parents, you know, get some suggestions from them on how to handle things that come up with the kids. So it is good for all of us.”

Jocelyn values the time she gets to spend at the FRP and sees the sharing of stories as a way of learning. “When you talk with other moms, they have stories. It is really nice to get feedback; you have mothers of all ages. There are grandmothers that come with their grandchildren, new moms, young moms or moms who have a couple of kids. It is nice to have a variety of parenting experiences, you know, we share stories, give suggestions.”

Through spending time at the FRP, Jocelyn has developed friendships with the other parents. “You just sort of develop friendships. You sort of lean on some of the moms; those are your friends and you see them outside of the FRP. You can phone them if you need help. It’s nice.”



The children, Caroline and Josh, have also made friendships and connections by participating in the FRP. “As soon as Josh comes in he immediately goes and plays with the friends he has made here. Initially, my daughter didn’t do that; she would just stay with me. Now she is going and doing crafts. Josh and her have a really good bond; they really care about each other. Josh says, ‘I love Caroline.’ I like it that they play together so well. Caroline is now really participating in everything here, like the songs and circle time.”

Jocelyn, Caroline, and Josh are all connecting with the people in their community through the FRP. “We have friends, the kids have their little friends, the volunteers, and the childcare workers are all very nice and it just feels nice to come here. I think that is why I come here so much. Just because it is kind of like a home away from home. I am Native and grew up in a small town until I was 13. The city is not a small town, but here it does feel like when I was growing up. You have a place where you can go and say, ‘I need help and this is what needs to be done.’ It’s nice and they all help you access whatever resources you need in the city.”

For Jocelyn, the FRP became a source of critical help when she experienced an abusive relationship with the father of her child. “A couple of months ago my partner hit me. It’s hard for me to talk about this... He was threatening to take my daughter away. My friend, Josh’s mom, told me to come and talk with the women who run the FRP here. They were so helpful. They listened to me and they helped me find resources in the community. They tried to get me into Metro housing, helped me with assistance, and they tried to get me out of the situation I was in, but I didn’t leave and it escalated. Finally, the police had to intervene, and the next day when I came in they helped me. It was great. They said, ‘Whenever you need a hand, you come and talk with us.’ I have moved into my own apartment now, but they have helped me with food vouchers, bus tickets, and they were going to accompany me to the welfare office, if I had needed them. They even helped me fill out papers and work out court dates and childcare. If you give them 24 hours notice they will find childcare for you. So if I had a court date, I could call and ask for parent relief. They will organize the childcare for you



and provide the caregiver with an honourarium. It has been really good.”

Jocelyn is an active participant in the FRP. “Even in the FRP when snack time comes, or clean up time, you just sort of get involved and help out. It is kind of like that saying, ‘it takes a village.’ You know, all of the moms help and they help your kids. If the kids need to wash their hands, or handing out the food to the kids at snack time, you just help out. You feel like you are doing something. If one of the kids is doing something they are not supposed to, one of the other parents might tell me or the parents don’t mind if you just tell the kids that they can’t do whatever. You know it is more like a village here, it feels nice.”

By being part of the FRP, Jocelyn is motivated to become more involved as a volunteer in the community. “I would like to start volunteering at the Early Years FRP, mainly because they have a young moms program that I want to get involved in because hopefully I can work with young moms or in a Native community once I go back to school.”

Jocelyn has found that the staff at the FRP are very encouraging and positive. “I know that this FRP is just amazing. The staff just act like they are other moms here to play with the kids. I really thank Josh’s mom for telling me about the FRP because if I didn’t have the FRP I don’t know where I would be right now. They gave me enough strength to even call the police. They were there for me and Caroline at a time when really no one else was. My family really wasn’t there for me. I was adopted by a white family and my adopted mother always made fun of me for being Native.”

“This was a place to come and not be judged, just be helped. They are there for you on a daily basis, they are like friends. If I need anything, I can come here and I don’t feel embarrassed. They don’t make you feel that way. It is nice to feel like they are your friends. Like when I got fired from my job and didn’t know what to do, but didn’t want to go on assistance. They helped me; they told me that there is no shame being on assistance. They told me that they had been on assistance and they got off it and went to school.”

*“Children who have witnessed violence at home are at high risk of becoming perpetrators and victims later in life. Classes and activities that help children and adolescents learn anger management and conflict resolution skills can reduce their risk of involvement in violent situations later on” (Family Support America, 2001, p. 1).*

The experiences of being a mom that the staff have shared with Jocelyn are a great source of inspiration. “Both Maria and Adele, they both initially started coming here as moms; they were both pretty young when they had their kids. Then they started volunteering and then they went to school and now they both work at the FRP. As I got to know them, I told them I wanted to go back to school to be a social worker. So, they started telling me their stories. I kind of feel like they are my role models. They did it, and so I know I can do it. I know I can go to school with a kid and they have told me about subsidized daycare. It is really nice to go someplace where there are different kinds of moms.”

## Lynette

“**T**his FRP has almost made me feel like I was at home. I have been taking part in a lot of the ceremonies, speaking with elders, and well, I was brought up in a very spiritual home, and this place reminds me of that, which I really enjoy.”

Lynette is married with two sons, and for the last two years has been bringing her youngest to an FRP at a Native women's FRP. “I was going through some personal things from work and my health and I was unable to work. It was really bothering me and it was really getting me down. I was talking with the receptionist at my children's daycare who had a flyer for a Native women's FRP just down the street. So I came in and I spoke with the woman who ran the FRP. It sounded really interesting. This is a program for women, and it is very spiritual. It is just basically women bettering themselves and empowering themselves. I thought this is something, you know, I could really use right now. So I came to the FRP and I met a lot of Native women here and I was just learning a whole lot about bettering myself. It made me start feeling better about my situation. This was making me feel good.”

Lynette tells about her first day at the FRP. “I was a bit concerned because it said Native women's FRP. I asked if I would be able to attend, because I'm non-Native. But you know they were very welcoming. I saw other women that came here who were not of Native background. Actually, there is a lady who comes here who is from my island in the Caribbean. There is an Italian lady that comes here, some Hispanic ladies, and some East Indian ladies too. They don't discriminate against anybody. You know, that is not part of their culture. And just learning about their culture, I find that we're not that different. Even though I'm not of Native background, that doesn't matter to them. You know, I feel like I am part of a family. They don't treat me any differently, which I really respect. They are always telling me about different activities and stuff that is going on. They are always getting me involved. I really appreciate that. They never leave me out, in anything. I feel that it's great. I feel like I am part of a family. I feel, you know, very uplifted spiritually when I come here.”

It was the comfortable atmosphere and the welcoming staff that encouraged Lynette to continue attending the FRPs. “I'm going someplace that feels like home. You know, it's a home away from home. It's very welcoming; it's very warm and friendly. The climate is very positive and they are very welcoming. When I joined this FRP they never said, ‘Oh Lynette, you don't understand. You know, this is a native thing.’ They would always say, ‘We as women.’ It was always like that.”

For Lynette, finding the similarities in cultures has been rewarding. “Our cultures are very similar. You know, our histories are similar — types of foods and herbs we eat — and even some of the ceremonies we do are also very similar — they are just called different names. Some of the herbs my grandmother and mother used to use, we still use, and some of the things we do spiritually are very similar. So, it's like I feel no different. I feel really connected.”

Lynette is passionate about the FRPs. “With these FRPs, you are taking care of yourself and also your children. It has helped me to have a better relationship with my kids. I have been learning about community kitchens, different native foods and how to prepare them. We also



learn about different arts, and we go out and talk with elders in the community. We even go on weekend trips to join in community gardening and meeting with elders. I bring my children and my husband; we all love the outdoors. So these trips are great. I like to teach my children about different things, and different cultures and this is something we can all do together and really enjoy.”

The FRPs that Lynette has been attending three to four days a week for the last two years have helped both her and her children. “By coming here, it’s kind of made me, you know, really sit back and appreciate my kids more. Sometimes as a parent we forget that we were kids too. I am letting them explore different things, and I am also raising them in a very spiritual way. Teaching my children to appreciate and accept everyone’s differences.”

When Lynette has programs to attend at the FRP, she has involved her children in different kids’ camps and other instructional programs. “When the kids come here, they learn songs, arts and crafts. The kids really enjoy it. They always want to come. I even brought my cousin here one time because they had a March break camp for kids. She loved coming here.”

Lynette tells how the FRPs that she attends have changed her life. “I feel like I have more patience. Before, I was always on edge. I find that now I have more patience. I am more spiritual. I am more aware of my surroundings, of nature and I am more appreciative of things around me. I am taking more time with my kids, like walking together and feeding the birds. My kids really love it. They always want to go out and feed the birds or the squirrels or to look at the trees. I’m enjoying life more with my kids and that is making me more relaxed and less stressed.”

Lynette and her family are more involved with people in the community since she started attending the FRP. “I have met lots of friends through the FRP. This whole neighbourhood has opened up since I’ve been coming here. I am more open to people. I have a new zest for life, just by coming here. I love it here and I have been benefiting from it. So, I really appreciate them a lot. They give to me and I give back whenever I have things and stuff I can help out [with]. I give back any way I can. I volunteer my time here; I donate my clothes to the clothing bank. I am always here to help because they have helped me so this is my way of repaying them.”

Since beginning with the FRPs two years ago, Lynette has begun a 19-week program to help her start her own business. The program has helped her change careers by letting her find what she loves doing and by building contacts in the community. Lynette hopes that other women will be encouraged to get involved with these FRPs in their communities.

“I just wish there was a way to get more people involved with these FRPs. I almost

*“Specific stimulation, such as talking and play, are critical for the development of language and cognitive skills. Effective parenting practices are some of the most important protective factors in promoting early childhood development. Family (including socio-economic) stability, close and supportive relationships, and security are protective factors in the lives of children. The results from early childhood stimulation and support programs for disadvantaged children suggest that the payback in terms of adult outcomes can endure for a lifetime”*  
(Hertzman, 2000, p. 12).

missed out because I thought it was only for native women. I mean there are certain FRPs that are just for native women. They have a program for the women whose parents survived residential schooling. They are open to anybody coming in. All they are asking is that you take the time and you learn about their culture. 'Come on in; get to know who we are.' That is how we educate ourselves and how we become better and closer as people."

## Jen

“I didn't go for the longest time; I just didn't think it was my kind of thing.” Jen is 34 and has a seven-year-old and a five-year-old. Jen has been divorced for five years and is now a paid caregiver.

“Five years ago, after my divorce, I moved back to the area and a woman in my building told me about the FRP. I decided to come in one day. It was the winter and in a small apartment with two little kids, I thought it might be nice to get out for a change. We have been coming ever since, about three days a week. I really liked how relaxed it was here. The FRP co-coordinator, Sylvia, was just so friendly and everyone was just very accepting and there was a warm atmosphere. My sons love it. My older one, who is in grade two, doesn't come anymore but always wants to stay home from school so that he can come to the FRP. My other son is five-and-a-half and he goes to school in the afternoon. I specifically set up his school program so that he could come to the FRP in the mornings.”

Jen has found that by attending the FRP her sons have gained skills that they are now using at school. “With my older son, we used to live on a farm and he didn't get to socialize with other kids that much. When we first came back here, he was a little bit behind in things like knowing how to share and appropriate behaviour with other kids. So I found that the FRP really helped him. He was a bit more clingy, so this helped him sort of make that break.”

“It was hard at first; the first month of school was really hard; he would cry a lot at school. His kindergarten was just down the hall, in the same building as the FRP, so at the beginning I was down the hall every ten minutes. It was the FRP coordinator here that said to me that it is really common behaviour, and she explained it to me. You know, it helped a lot.”



Jen's younger son is also benefiting from the FRP. “He has made attachments to other adults which is really helpful as a single parent. He knows what he wants to do and he does his own thing, but I am still around. I'm here if he needs me, right there.”

By attending the FRP, Jen also feels that she has learned how to be a better parent. “It is really good being able to talk to other parents and to find out that your child isn't so different. You see other parents going through the same things. You pick up different ways of dealing with things. It has made a huge difference. It has totally changed my parenting. When

you read parenting books, all of the stages are so nice and clear. In your real life it doesn't work that way most of the time. Coming here lets you set more realistic expectations. You learn to relax, which lowers your frustration level."

Jen has found that the FRP has helped her in ways she could not have imagined. "When I was first divorced, coming to the FRP every day created a routine for myself and my kids. It really turned the tide for me in terms of the custody stuff I was going through. My ex-husband has wanted custody Monday to Friday, because he works on the weekend. Since we had created a routine of coming to the FRP, the judge didn't want to change that for the kids. It was a huge thing in my life."

The FRP has given Jen a place to interact with other parents and to make contact with the people who live in her neighbourhood and the other caregivers. "The FRP has helped me not only as a parent, but as a caregiver too. It has helped me to make connections as a caregiver and to meet people and let people see me with the children so that they know who I am. I have done daycare for years, but I never studied it formally. I worked as a teacher's aid for a while, but this has really helped me to learn more about the earlier developmental stages."

The resources available at the FRP have helped Jen with many different aspects of being a paid caregiver. "The FRP has helped me with the professional side of caregiving. Dealing with parents, negotiation, and contracts, I have learned a lot more about these things. I have learned some of this from just talking with other paid caregivers and also the FRP makes an effort to have professional information available for caregivers and lots of instructional tools and different resources to help set up a home daycare FRP and stuff to help you deal with it in a more professional manner. Even though I have been in childcare for years and felt I was prepared, there were lots of things I didn't know. I did get taken advantage of in previous situations. Now I feel like I am in charge. Right after my divorce I felt really timid and I would second-guess myself. Now I have no hesitation. I know what I am doing is right and how I am dealing with something is reasonable. I don't feel like I need to second-guess myself any more."

Since beginning at the FRP over five years ago, Jen has begun to volunteer at the FRP. "I started volunteering over three years ago now, and then I was asked to be a board member. I have done lots of volunteer work for them and now I am the vice-chair of the board. I really enjoy doing this work and I now have a new career path. I have become so interested in volunteering and fundraising that I decided to go back to school at night and got my certificate. I would have never known that I was good at fundraising if I hadn't been volunteering here and getting a lot of positive reinforcement. I wouldn't have even known that I could make a career of it either. So I am looking at changing my career when my kids get just a bit older."

For Jen, it was her experience with the FRP that was instrumental in this career change. "I had people saying to me, 'You should go for it!' It pumps you up and you feel like you can

*"Time and support issues are particularly serious for employed lone parents —usually women but sometimes men. Besides governmental assistance, lone parents could benefit from more community resources, including help from friends, neighbours, churches, and other organizations"*  
(Bibby, 2004-2005, p. 9).



do it. It had been 15 years since I was at school and I would never have gotten up the nerve to do it, you know. I would never have found a caregiver to look after my children at night either. The FRP just made it possible in several ways.”

The positive changes that Jen has experienced from participating in the FRP have also been reflected in her relationship with her children. “I am just much more positive now. I am much more optimistic about things and I feel more capable, just more relaxed. It’s really enabled me to take chances and to be more proactive. I was very temperamental before because I was under so much stress. Now I feel a lot more confident and a lot more relaxed, so things with the kids have become more relaxed. The FRP has helped the kids as well; they know it’s not just mom. Those rules go on in everybody’s house and there is a standard of behaviour that is expected. Seeing other kids their age with the same rules has made them realize it’s not just mom being mean.”

For Jen and her family, the FRP has been an essential way of participating in the community. “I’ve gotten to meet more of the residents in the neighbourhood and my children have made friends where they live. I have found out about other FRPs that are going on in the neighbourhood just from coming to the FRP. It has really changed our lives.”

## Ian

**M**any of the interviewees were very eager to tell their stories. Even before sitting down to the interview, Ian, a dad who works as a mechanical engineer from home and shares caregiving with his wife, started telling stories of being involved with an FRP. “These FRPs have so much resource information for new parents, and even for parents who

have been parents for a while. My wife and I found out about this FRP from the hospital where my son was born.”

Ian and his wife Lisa, come to the FRP with their three-year-old son, Michael, once or twice a week. As a family, they have been involved with the FRP for over a year. “Some parents will be watching children and helping out, while other parents will be sitting down and getting a breather from watching their child 24 hours a day. It’s more adult interaction. I can really see from my wife and myself that you start talking to a three-year-old and dealing with a three-year-old and you start to almost forget how to interact with other adults. It’s refreshing and I didn’t expect that.”

“There is a good schedule and everything for the children to do. Today is gym day so they get to go out in the gym and run around and scream and be little kids. They play with adults or not; it is up to the kids, which is nice. There is interaction with adults and the adults will intervene at times. But if you watch, you can see that the kids are pretty much left to organize themselves.”

Safety for his child at the FRP is very important to Ian. Not only does Ian feel that the FRP is a safe place for Michael, but Ian is also comfortable allowing Michael to play with the other children more independently. “Tuesday he was in the gym and I didn’t follow him around. I didn’t worry about where he was. I realize that he can handle himself and I knew he would come to me if he needed me.”

As Michael is learning independence, Ian is enhancing his parenting skills. “Myself and my wife are learning so many things by coming here. Learning how to, for me, learning how to let him go. I sort of smother him, and now I can let him go and do things at the FRP and I don’t have to worry about him.” Ian feels he can do this because, “Coming here basically, it’s me relaxing with the other people here and the other kids. And from that, getting a sense that no harm is going to come to Michael. Everyone is watching out for everyone else.”

For Ian and his wife, the FRP is a place that is comfortable and lets them know what is happening in their community. “It took a little while but we got used to everybody at the FRP and they got used to us! Monique, the staff person has been very nice to both my wife and I.”

Ian has found that the staff at the FRP actively involve the parents and share information about community events. “Monique is a great person. She will actively be there and let everybody know what is going on. You can see the difference. I don’t know how to explain it.”

Ian says that one of the most important ways that the FRP has affected his family is that it has given them the opportunity to interact with people in the community. “I have met a lot of different people here. Everybody is great. It’s a great bunch of people here. There

*Children with more involved fathers are “less likely to adopt stereotyped attitudes about gender roles. These children are more likely to demonstrate higher cognitive or intellectual skills than children whose father is less involved ... [including] a better adjustment to the school milieu. When a father is involved, the child seems to exhibit better social skills and is better adjusted psychologically” (Dubeau, 2002, pp. 16-17).*

are people from many different religions, countries and we are getting to interact with them and all of that is learning.”

Ian says that his wife Lisa has also made friends at the FRP that she visits on the weekends. She has made contacts with other mothers which has helped her to participate actively outside the home. “We interact a lot now with our neighbourhood. She started Avon from her contacts at the FRP and she does Regal for the FRP too. Lisa has even joined a gym in the neighbourhood and this has gotten her out and again it’s part of the FRP that’s gotten her to go out more.”

Ian feels that by interacting with other children and adults his son Michael is learning how to develop friendships and how to interact with others beyond the family. “It’s fun to see Michael talk about his time at the FRP. All of his friends are here and he wants to play. He makes friends, you know, he has lots of girlfriends and boyfriends. He talks about them continuously. He wants to participate and do everything. Michael really likes it here and he has a fun time. It’s just really nice.”



Ian sees how Michael is learning from this experience. “He is getting the interaction even before he goes to primary kindergarten. He is already getting the interaction with other children and other adults. He gets a lot of interaction with other adults; it’s not just children that he gets to interact with. In school he’s not going to get that; he’s going to get to interact with mainly one teacher and well, maybe a handful of adults over his time in school and he’ll be with lots of children.”

Ian sees how the FRP has helped him to change how he interacts with people in his community and with his family. “I think that parenting is often associated with females, but I realized that it was important to me too. I realized that I should have interaction with my son more, more than I was and more than other fathers I’ve seen. I had a bad experience with my dad, so I don’t want to be like that. Coming to the FRP has allowed me to watch other parents and to see how they interact with their children. You know, I can see other ways to handle things. This place has really opened my eyes.”

Ian has also found that the FRP has allowed him to be calmer. “I have learned to calm down more, not to fly off the handle. This place has taught me that they are only children and don’t assume the worst. You know, don’t judge right away.”

Ian has found that the FRP has helped him to make friends in the community and to participate more with raising his son. “I could stay at home 24 hours a day, sit in front of my computer and work, but because of Michael and because of the FRP’s activities, it has made me want to go out and do more outside the house. We do interact more with our neighbourhood because of this place.”



For Ian, Lisa, and Michael, the FRP has helped to build their life together. “This place has affected myself, my wife, and Michael. Things have changed, there is a difference; it’s a better, healthier atmosphere. Lisa and I are not just reacting to each other, and family, but we are now interacting with our neighbourhood and this FRP has given us that ability. It gets us out of the house and we have a place to go.”

## Zara

“**T**hey don’t make you feel like a newcomer. Everyone is welcomed as if they have known you for years.”

Zara is a mom in her mid-thirties who has only been in Canada for two years. “When you come into the FRP the staff say, ‘Hi, I’m happy you made it,’ or if it’s raining they might say, ‘I didn’t know if you were going to make it today because of all this rain.’ They make you feel important, like they are happy that you come here. So in return, you are eager to come; again and again they show you how happy they are to find you here. So it really makes a difference. Even my daughter loves it. She gives everyone a hug when we are leaving the FRP. She is very comfortable here.”

Zara has been attending the FRP for three weeks, but she already feels very connected to the parents and staff. “By being at the FRP they see that everyone is washing their hands, and you want them to do this before they eat, but at home they would just ignore what mom said. Here at the FRP they see that everyone is doing it, so they will wash their hands too, and everyone is appreciating them. They like to do it, they actually want to do it.”

Zara is impressed with the access her daughter has to creative toys, like painting, drawing, and playdough. “Most of the toys here are creative, like painting. So at home now my daughter is interested in creating things, not just playing here and there. My daughter is getting into the habit of being creative. She is proud of what she has made and she wants to show it to everyone. It’s like, ‘I made this.’”

Zara brings her three-year-old daughter and her new two-and-a-half-month-old baby to the FRP three days a week. The FRP is a 20-minute walk from her home. Zara only found out about FRPs after the birth of her second child, from a public health nurse. “I didn’t even know that this type of program was out there. I have been in Canada for two years, and well, two years is a long time. Sometimes you miss something just because you don’t know about it.”

Zara wants her daughter to start building relationships with children so she feels more comfortable interacting with children her own age. “I don’t know why my daughter is so shy with kids; she is

*“...a key requisite for optimal child development is secure attachment to a trusted caregiver, with consistent caring, support and affection in early life. A child’s, adolescent’s and, ultimately, an adult’s emotional health and habitual way of reacting to new situations have their basis in the early relationships between the infant/toddler and the people primarily responsible for his or her care” (Hertzman, 2000).*

comfortable with adults. I asked the volunteers about this. They told me that most first-born children are like that. Second children have another child to interact with so they are comfortable with other kids. I thought, ‘Okay, there is not much wrong with my daughter.’”

Sharing experiences with other parents is one of the important aspects of community that Zara has at the FRP. “This kind of program is helping me. Every day I am learning something. ‘Oh, my kids are having this kind of problem today.’ The other mother will say that, ‘My kids were having the same kind of problem and I did this and that.’ You are sharing your experiences with other moms and the other moms are sharing their experiences with you, so it’s like you are involved with the community.”

*“...women with more social network resources delivered babies of higher birth weight... Having fewer prenatal network resources was also associated with depression after childbirth” (Collins, Dunkel-Schetter, Lobel, & Scrimshaw, 1993, p. 1254).*

Zara has already started taking parenting classes and has seen the positive effect of attending the FRP on her three-year-old daughter. “At the FRP, the children have to share the toys and it is great to see my daughter sharing with the other children. They get into the sharing habit. They get the habit of having turns, like, I have to wait, this is my friend’s turn now.”

By sharing her experiences with other parents and caregivers, Zara is developing new ways of interacting with her children that are positive and supportive. “I know everyone is not a perfect mom, and I am learning at every stage things I should be doing for her. Here I have learned more things on how to deal with a baby and a toddler.”

Zara is on maternity leave from a permanent part-time job. She has found that at the FRP she has a bit of extra help managing the new baby and her energetic toddler. The staff are really friendly and even the mothers of the other kids are very friendly and co-operative. “I have my baby and she is two-and-a-half months and when I am here busy with my three-year-old daughter, everyone is there to help me with my baby. Here at the FRP, it is like back home. There, you have so many family members who help raising the children, so you can get some time for yourself.”

Here at the FRP Zara has found that she can rely on staff and other parents, which allows her to relax. “When you come here, you feel easy because you know that wherever my kid is inside this room, there will be someone watching her. So you don’t have to always be keeping an eye on your child. It makes you feel at ease for a while.”

## Lauren

**A**s a child, Lauren attended the Sixth Avenue FRP. Now, a 31-year-old mother, Lauren brings her two boys to the FRP. “I actually have known about the FRP all of my life, cause I went to Sixth Avenue when it started. I also babysat kids whose parents took them to the original Family Time Resources, or whatever it was originally called. So I’ve known about it all my life. Then when I had kids I heard people talking about going to the FRP so I went.”



Even though Lauren had attended these FRPs as a child, as an adult and parent she found she needed time to adjust. “It was hard at first and I found going to Sixth Avenue even more difficult. This group of parents is really good. I like all of the parents here. I know the first couple of times I came here I kind of felt like a fish out of water. You see, I am not a chatty person and I tend to keep to myself. So it took me a while to warm up to it, but I kept coming since I knew I would get more comfortable after some time here.”

Even though Lauren had spent her childhood attending the FRPs at the Sixth Avenue FRP, as a parent she found that she needed to find the environment that felt the most comfortable. “I just felt that I didn’t fit in at Sixth Avenue that well. I don’t know. I know a lot of parents who go there and love it. I just knew I needed a different group of parents, and when I came to this FRP I knew I had found it. I met some really great parents and the staff were very welcoming. I am really lucky that both of these FRPs are the same walking distance from my home.”

Lauren and her boys have been attending the current FRP for three-and-a-half years now. They walk to the FRP three or four days a week. “They just really enjoy coming to the FRP. I mean Caleb, my youngest, looks forward to it. I tell him we are going to the FRP and it actually helps me get him ready in the mornings. If we pass the FRP on the days that they are closed, Caleb gets mad. They just really love coming here.”

Lauren tells how the FRPs have helped her with raising her two sons. “They just help me cope. The FRPs allow me to raise the best kids I can. By coming here I can talk with other parents and I can get positive feedback. They say, ‘I really like your son.’ You know that really helps, and you can do that for someone else. It just makes you feel better.”

Lauren likes how parenting at the FRP is a community effort. “You know, it’s very cooperative parenting. I find that we all have similar values and ideas on child rearing. It’s good to have your children get used to other adults saying, ‘You can’t do that.’ It’s not just you telling them all the time. When you are here you don’t feel like you are doing it all alone. The parents here understand how to interact with other people’s children, not yelling or spanking, just positive reinforcement.”

In terms of the FRP, Lauren likes the way the programs are organized. “I think it is the way that the programs are set up and some of the guidelines that they have for what needs to be done. They have pamphlets, things up on the boards on parent conduct and child conduct. They don’t like yelling. They don’t like running around. They don’t like boisterous play. They have a very set guideline on how things need to be done. Everyone is made aware of the kinds of things that need to happen. If you and your child really can’t abide by the guidelines, you know you aren’t going to come here because you just won’t feel comfortable. No one is ever turned away, and if you need help to manage your child, the staff that are here and the other parents will give you some good things to try.”

*“Being supportive has less to do with the ‘kinds’ of social support provided and more to do with how people interact with and relate to one another” (Taylor, Sylvestre, & Botschner, 1998, p. 4).*

For Lauren, the connections she has with the staff at this FRP are very important.

“Angie is awesome. She has been so good. She is just always there for you. She always has a good word for you; she is always positive. The other staff person, Jane, when she comes in she is a very good person for resources. She will help you out if you are interested in changing your approach to your children, or if you are having a real issue with something. Jane has older kids and has a lot of experience.



They will give you advice, but I mean no one is ever judging you on whether you take it or not. It's just good advice and support. I feel that I can pick and choose what works for me from the advice they give me. So, it's been really good.”

The FRP has helped Lauren find new ways to deal with the difficulties of parenting. “I think that this FRP has made me a better mom. My eldest son, Nick, his issues can be hard to deal with at times. So, I think it has helped me cope and learn new techniques. Nick would get to a point where you could tell that he was not coping well. The staff were great at helping me to recognize what was going on. They were able to help teach me how to kind of distract him if I was trying to remove him from a situation, which was something I was not particularly good at. Sometimes I would take Nick out for a bit of a break and that would work, and he could come back in and play. I learned that sometimes I would have to just put his coat on him and go home. We would come back another day to play.”

The skills that Lauren's boys are learning by attending the FRP are helping them adapt to a school environment. “Caleb is going to start the Children's Program. You drop off your child; the parent doesn't stay for this program. I think it will get him used to me not being there, and following directions from someone else.

“For Nick, he has made the step to school really well. I think coming here really helped him with that. It helped to make him a little more independent and a little more used to coping with other kids. It also gave us a chance to figure out that some things were going to be an issue so we have been able to teach Nick some coping skills. Like with noise levels, and to teach him that there might be times when he needs to go and find a quiet corner and sit down to regroup. Now he knows that he has to do that and it allows us to be able to tell his teachers that if you are starting to see certain behaviours just take him aside and give him a few minutes of quiet time. He has been able to get used to the idea that he has to sit. Nick had a hard time here sitting through a circle time, but I think learning that here really helped him get ready for school.”

For Lauren and her family, the FRP has connected them to the people in their community. “By bringing the boys here, they are getting to know some of the kids that they will be going to school with.”

Lauren has met many other parents at the FRP and has created a supportive network of parents that she meets with outside of the FRP. “I saw this other mother at the FRP and I would also see her at the park. Our kids would play together, so we set up a day when we would help each other out by minding one of our two children. So then we each get kind of a day a week where we are minus a child, which is kind of nice. You can make your phone calls without the kids screaming in the background or whatever you have to get done. I’ve met a lot of moms here and there are about three or four of us that could call each other if we ever needed a sitter or anything. Some of us get together and go out. It is nice. I tend to hibernate and not be very social so it is good for me to have friends.”

Even though Lauren thinks of herself as someone who does not socialize much, she is now involved as a volunteer at Nick’s school. “They had a fundraiser a few weeks back and I volunteered at that. I had some good feedback and I really enjoyed it. I am going to be a volunteer for a new program they are having, to help with the children being dropped off at the school. It should work out well. I like to put my name out there and only commit to the things I have the time for and can really make a go of.”

Both Lauren and her husband attend the FRP with their sons. “We have taken some of the classes on parenting that they offer here and they have been very helpful. My husband and I come from two very different styles of parenting. So the classes have been really helpful. My husband brings the kids here when he is off work. It has given him a chance to network. He wishes that there were more dads around. It has been really good for him because he has been able to talk to, and learn from, some of the moms. It has been good for my husband to come and watch the other kids. We are able to talk about things and see that it is just a stage that our kids are going through. It has helped us get through things by knowing it is just a stage and we know by seeing the other kids that our kids are normal. It helps alleviate some of those fears. We have other points of reference. We both feel comfortable coming here and talking to the leaders or the other moms. It’s really been good and it has made our relationship better.”

*“...our experiences of childhood have a crucial influence on how we perceive ourselves, how we relate to others and how we deal with problems and difficulties throughout our lives. Childhood has thus come to be regarded as of primary importance in the formation of a healthy identity” (Taylor, 2004, p. 226).*

## Shannon

Shannon is married with two children. She has been coming to the FRP for six-and-a-half years. Her oldest son is almost seven and her youngest is three. “I had been at home with a five-month-old, getting lonely and bored and not knowing whether I was going back to work. So someone said that I should try this FRP; it was a place where parents meet. The first day I came, a public health nurse was talking about nutrition, and I thought this was really great. I was having an issue with my child about how much to breastfeed and not knowing how much solids to give him. It was a really good experience. Then I saw the toy lending library and all of the pamphlets. I could just see how much support there actually was for parents.”

“It was really great to come in here on a Saturday morning and have a cup of coffee and just talk to people. Reese, my baby would keep me up most of the night, so it was nice to come in here and have people who support you.”

Shannon felt that she could not take her son many places. “Reese cried all the time and I just felt that I couldn’t take him places because people would look at you like, ‘Can you make him stop crying!’ In here they were very supportive. I had been coming here for about eight weeks at the time and Reese was about six-and-a-half months old. We came in one day and Reese was just not having a good day. He just wasn’t consolable; he just screamed. It was one of the parents who come in all the time that came up to me and said, ‘Can I hold him for a while?’ It was really great, I got to sit down and relax for a few minutes.”

*“Family child care is a vital part of the overall early childhood care and education system for several reasons, two of the most important are:*

- *the fact that it is the preferred child care choice of many parents, not only for infants and toddlers but also for school age children as well; and*
- *the fact that it accommodates a substantial proportion of the children who regularly receive out of home, non-relative care”*

*(Doherty, 2002, p. 2).*

It was the support that she experienced at the FRP that allowed her to make a career move. “I had a high profile job in Human Resources to go back to after my maternity leave, but it had long hours and that was not going to change because I had a baby. My husband was also advancing in his career and so we were deciding who would stay home if one of us decided to. By coming to the FRP, I was able to bond with the nannies, to see what it would be like if I had my child stay with a nanny. I also got to see that through the FRP there are lots of resources that would help me out if I decided to stay home and raise my child. What I ended up doing was opening up my own home daycare. I took in three other children and I did that for a year and a half. I would come to the FRPs here. They were very helpful.”

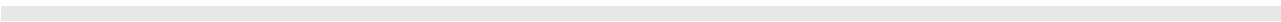
Shannon has found that the FRP offers her resources and a sense of community. “The sense that there are things going on, that there are resources and by coming to the FRP you get that information. You get to know what is going on in the community. That is what has really helped to keep me motivated over the years. You know, having others with the same issues. My youngest isn’t totally toilet trained at three-and-a-half and there is another woman here and her child is the same. It is good to know that I am not the only one. We talk about it together. It helps.”

The idea of connecting with other parents is important to Shannon. “Connection is one of the major things. Connecting with people who are at home or nannies or anybody, just the community in general. This is a community; it’s not just run by a facilitator. FRPs really are, ‘Come on in and do your own thing’ and it is amazing how you can see people who have been in very high-level jobs or they are doing different kinds of work and they come in here with a sense of shyness. It is interesting to see that melting pot.”

Shannon sees how her boys have also gained a sense of community. “I think my kids have a sense of community too. I know my seven-year-old has friends here that he has known since he was six months old. They aren’t friends from school, but we make a point to see as much of them as we can.”

Since Shannon started attending the FRP six-and-a-half years ago, she has built friendships and feels that she can help other parents when they come to the FRP. “You meet a lot of people here and maintain the friendships outside of the FRP. I try to give back what I have gotten. You can just see by the look on people’s faces when they come in here. They just look like, ‘What is this?’ You can just tell the look, new to the whole thing. They need someone to say, ‘Well, come on in!’ Then they get comfortable and are ready to sit down and they feel, ‘Okay, I’ll come back.’ It is really nice to see them come back. You know, no matter where they are from, what income bracket or whatever, it is just a place where we all share the same concerns and the same feelings about parenting.”

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## Focus Group Dialogues

“... going out of your way to touch someone”

**F**or Ally, the FRP is very accessible because it is free. “There is nothing out there in the community for our kids. And once they hit age five that is it. You know, they have school, but there is nothing for them to go and do. Unless you have money.”

Another mom, Leigh, builds on Ally’s comments. “One thing I do really appreciate about the FRP is that it is free. When I lived in West River, they did have a moms and tots group and all of that, but it was \$50 a month to participate which cut a lot of people out ... So the fact is, this is free and funded. That is something we should appreciate as well.”

Everyone in this focus group agrees with Leigh’s and Ally’s points. Tamara, another mom, mentions how fees cause exclusions and limit access to only those families who can finance their own participation. “And the FRP is available to everyone. If you have a lower level of money in your household, it is very difficult for these moms that have no financial or social support systems.”

Another mom, Stacey, mentions the other local program that is free, but for some is seen as having drawbacks. “And you have to pay for preschool, unless you go to the other FRP. It is like a preschool, but it is free and it is in the basement of a church across town. The people who attend the church staff these programs. The three ministers in town have their wives facilitate it. It is devotional and a lot of moms don’t want that. They just want to come and forget about the stresses of having to talk about God and all of that. We don’t have that here at the FRP.”

Joyce mentions the difference between her children’s experience with the FRP and her niece’s

*“...we believe that a strong, Canada-wide program of early learning and care for our children is the single best investment we can make in their future and in ours” Prime Minister Martin’s Response to Speech From the Throne, October 6, 2004 (Campaign 2000, 2004, p. 7).*



experience at an expensive preschool. “Yeah, my sister-in-law has her daughter in the most expensive preschool there is. She lives in the same community as I do and at Christmas she was complaining because at this preschool that she pays for they didn’t really do anything special for Christmas. When my sister-in-law was looking at my scrapbook and my pictures, she was surprised — ‘Oh my goodness! Look you have a Santa Claus that came in for the kids.’ They had really nice pictures that they gave to the kids and someone in to play music. They do so much for the kids here. At her expensive preschool they just didn’t even bother.”

Tom, the father of three boys, attends an FRP. In terms of paying to attend programs, Tom mentions the field trips that parents and children can participate in through the FRP that he attends. These are day trips to zoos, or other places that children will enjoy. “You do pay a small fee, a sliding scale is available. It is not very much anyway. The whole day is like \$7 or something.”

*“A key to empowerment is participation, which is a developmental process. The key to this process is the extent to which participants are able to exercise power in decision-making. In other words, participation and power must be a part of the same process” (Whitmore, 1991, p. 2).*

Kathleen, another mom in the focus group, explains more about the trips. “It depends on where you go. I mean, like the zoo. There is that price of admission for the adult, since the children get in free. It is not closed to those who can’t afford it. Basically, there is always a sign-up sheet posted. This is the price, you know, and we pitch in a little for the bus and we get a group rate to get in. But if you can’t afford it, then you don’t pay it. The whole point of the outings is that they are available for everyone, and that is kind of the point; that everyone benefits.”

For Tom and his family, the trips were an expense that they could not cover. “Oh, man! There were so many times when I couldn’t possibly afford those trips and went on it anyways. It was great. I mean we never would have been able to go to the zoo if I hadn’t come to the FRP! It was like a \$10 fee or something like that. I would throw in a twoonie because that was all the money I had to give. My kids and I had to pack sandwiches; we didn’t buy our lunch at McDonalds. It was really great; we never would have gone to the zoo on our own.”

Yet another mom, Marta, felt differently about not being able to afford the trips. “A lot of times when I couldn’t afford to pay, I just, you know I wasn’t — I just didn’t feel comfortable. Not at all. Not at all.”

Although Tom and Marta might be unable to contribute financially to the trips, another mom in this focus group, Denise, explains how the participants of the FRP work together to make the trips happen in a way that allows everyone to participate. “Then again I have seen it go the other way too. You know, this program means so much to so many people that I have seen them, when it is just them and one child — they will put in double of what the fee on the sheet is. The fact is that people are taking the energy to organize the trip and go out with the kids. I just would never do this on my own. You know, all I have to do is get on the bus with this trip. The other thing about the program committee is it is responsive to the changing needs of the group. Like sometimes there are a lot of babies, so people don’t want older kid stuff. Sometimes it is the opposite. The program is responsive; we will drop the stuff that doesn’t work for the group.”





For rural FRPs, the distance participants travel to attend is great and there is often no public transportation. These issues can make access to FRPs very limited. Ally mentions this problem. “Like with transportation. We live in town; there are times when my husband isn’t using the car so we pick people up to come to the FRP. We do that personally, ourselves. The staff are not allowed to, simply because of insurance problems, which makes getting here an issue for a lot of families. I mean, like Christa travels up from the Point. There is probably well over a vanload of people that she could pick up along her way. But she is unable to do that because there is no funding for the insurance to allow her to do that. So there are so many more people out there that could be reached if transportation wasn’t an issue. I think this is just a rural issue.”

Joyce is a mother of five. She and her children have been attending the FRP for the past five years. Joyce notes how important the FRP is in their lives. “I think the most beneficial part of the whole FRP is not only the resources, but it is the emotional guidance, the friendships you make here, those kind[s] of things. Just people extending out to one another.”

Another participant in the focus group, Carrie, adds to this: “We can help set people up with anything. We have a list for the clothing bank. If anybody needs anything, anything at all we can normally find it. And we even have other people, just from the school, come in to use it because, you know, they need size four boots for their boy or whatever. And we can find those because some stuff you really need, and we are really picky. You need a purple shirt to go with your purple overalls, we’ll get you a purple shirt.”

Louisa, another participant, also remembers how the FRP was there to help her. “I think one of the special [things] that I’d like to share is that, this Christmas was the first Christmas that we had a Christmas tree, like a real Christmas tree. I mean we’ve been married for four years, but this is the first year we’ve been able to afford anything. I didn’t have any decorations or anything, and so I was kind of wondering, “What am I going to do?” Natalie brought in some of her old ornaments and Gillian brought a bunch of lights and stuff for me; and I didn’t ask for anything like that. I just was excited about my tree and then they realized that. They recognized the fact that I said, “I don’t have ornaments and I’m wondering, do you have any ideas of different things I could do?” It was great for them to get rid of some of their old ornaments and they’re doing me a big favour and I just thought that was one of the perfect examples of a way of go[ing] out of your way to really touch someone’s life, outside of your regular job.”

Many of the participants mention that they had initially thought that the FRP was mainly a resource centre. Ally, the mother of three, says that she did not know that the FRP had playgroups for children. “I have to admit, when I first heard about this place I thought it was just a place to get information. I really did not realize that they had playgroups. I thought it was okay if you needed information on breastfeeding, or to talk to someone.”

For Joyce, the FRP has been helpful in her search for resources for her children. “They also have a speech therapist there. And they can assess how your child interacts with other parents or children and that helps you a lot. If you’ve got any concerns they can help you find what you need.”

*“...we know there is a strong connection between personal and collective well-being ... Poverty and inequality are major barriers not only to the healthy development of children, but also to the social and economic well-being of Canada as a whole”  
(Freiler, 2000, p. 19).*

Joyce has found that the FRP is well connected to the other community services. “Having older children, like our oldest two, they are both special needs children and I can get resources through the FRP here. There are people that I have talked to who have been involved with the FRPs that my children now attend. Like our oldest one, we had to put him in a group home. Well, there was somebody that actually worked with that program who we got to know while coming to the FRP. Now there are people who have met my daughter through the learning program at her school and who now come to the FRP. So, the FRP is really well-integrated in the community. The people at the FRP are also out in the community. So, yeah, pretty much anything you could want, they’ll help you out. And they don’t ever expect anything back.”

For Doris, a paid caregiver of two girls, the FRP offers programs to caregivers that help with job-related issues. Even though many parents attend, the FRP has programs specifically geared to helping caregivers. “They cover a lot of stuff. For first aid, we just don’t have any other place to get the information and we haven’t got training. Here they offer it at least twice a year. It is very important to know it and to have the training. A while ago they used to have a group that comes in and would speak to the nannies about job-related issues and labour rights.”

Another caregiver, Lucy, builds on this. “Personally, I had some problems a few years ago with an employer and if it wasn’t for the staff I wouldn’t have survived. I had a problem with

the employer and a staff member. I talked about this with Carol, the FRP coordinator here, and she helped me sort it out. I left that family and with the help of people here, I got through it.”

Another caregiver, Janet, also shares her experience. “Once I had a problem with a child I was taking care of who had ADD, and I really didn’t know much. The FRP provided me with books and the information that I needed to know. I could also help the parents.”

Doris is quick to explain how helpful the FRP is for the social development of the children she looks after. “I am one of the lucky ones; I work for five families. It is good to get out of the house, especially in the winter and the kids and I get to socialize. There are no TVs or computers for them to sit in front of. They come here and play with each other. I have one child who has been in the middle of a separation for the last two years. So, he was alone and his mom was taking care of him alone. He didn’t have any friends. Now that he comes here he has a lot of friends — little friends and big friends; the adults here, too. I find the staff very inspiring. They have great ideas for things to do with the children. I am continually learning from them.”

In terms of social support, Ally and the other participants see how sharing stories with each other builds bonds. “For me, the FRP has really helped me out by giving me the support I just don’t get anywhere else. Mothers coming to the FRPs are looking for support. They are searching immensely for social support and emotional support. You know, someone to say, ‘Oh yeah, that is me too.’ You are not going to go to your mother and talk with her about some of the things that you would talk to somebody here about.”

However, this is where there were differences amongst members of the focus group. Some of the participants had mothers or other family members that they talk with about personal issues and others did not. Ally mentions this difference. “Yeah, I guess some people have more family support or social support outside of the FRP than others.”

“Lots of people are accepting and very positive, but ...”

**M**rs. Ling<sup>2</sup> is a grandmother of a seven-year-old boy and three-year-old girl. She now only brings her granddaughter daily to the FRP. Mrs. Ling started attending the FRP in her neighbourhood seven years ago, when she had just arrived in Canada to help her family with childcare.

“After I came to Canada, I spent the first month or so wandering in the park with my grandchild. I didn’t know about such an FRP. Later on, after meeting some Chinese people, I found out about this FRP. They said, ‘Why don’t you take your grandchild there? In the activity room they have toys and it is a good place to meet people.’ So I came here the next day.”

<sup>2</sup> Mrs. Ling’s interview was conducted in Mandarin.

Mrs. Ling enjoys the atmosphere of her neighbourhood FRP, and has found that she has met other grandparents, also from China, with whom she has become friends. "I find it is quite a good community FRP. There are a large number of Chinese people coming here. Initially, I didn't know too many people. Now, we get to know each other and discuss things like how to better educate the children and other things. The staff are excellent — very warm — and whether it is a Chinese or non-Chinese staff person they are all very nice. The kids love it."

Katie, a mom from rural eastern Canada, tells about her experiences with the FRP that she commutes to as often as she can per week. "I found that I didn't have much self-esteem, but just by joining the group here and being able to come in and get the support of other women, has really helped me. Like there was a time, just after we had adopted Ashley that I stopped working and the thought of going to a group this big would have terrified me. The group here, and I am sure it is the same everywhere else, was so accepting, so open, and so willing to bring me and my daughter into the community."

*"Supportive relationships are those in which each participant shows that he/she is sensitive to how the other would like to be treated ... being supportive means signaling a shared understanding of one another's preferred identities"*  
(Taylor, Sylvestre, & Botschner, 1998, p. 6).

Rich is the dad of two boys and has been attending the FRP in his neighbourhood for the last three years. He has recently 'come out.' During the focus group interview, Rich mentioned how he enjoyed many of the educational programs and services offered by the FRP. "I have really enjoyed the programs that they bring in, like the adult education programs. I took advantage of the early years literacy and stuff like that. It is really enjoyable to participate and have something educational. I used to really enjoy lectures and stuff at university, so this is my first chance in a long time to be in a class."

Rich agreed with Helen, another parent at the focus group, that the FRP is a wonderful resource in the community for bringing people together. "It is big, it is happy, it is a relaxed atmosphere. Whereas sometimes when you are at home, you are not that relaxed."

In addition to the positive experiences, Rich also mentioned that he had encountered some difficult situations at the FRP as well. "I forget now what one of my kids was doing, but I was sitting him down and trying to get him to focus. One of the other parents came over and said, 'You have no right to talk to him like that.' I overreacted, but you know I just didn't need someone to say that to me. But it didn't stop me from coming back."

Even though this situation did not impede Rich's participation, he also discussed a situation that did. "One of the staff really pissed me off and that did slow me down from coming to the FRP. I came in and it was circle time. I saw a woman that I work with and I went to talk to her. All of a sudden the staff person came up to me and said, 'Are you here to socialize? Or are you here to take care of your child?'"

After Rich's story, Helen also shared her experience of feeling different and excluded because of her sexual orientation. "I love the FRP, but I wouldn't say that my time here has been easy. I have been yelled at by two of the moms here too. So, we don't come as often as we used to. I go to an FRP downtown that has a different approach. Ben, my son, bites.

All kids bite, and I know that. But I am just kind of waiting for someone here to say, 'Your kid's weird because you're weird.' Right? You are just always sort of waiting for it."



Both Rich and Helen travel outside of their neighbourhood to attend another FRP that "has a different approach" to diversity issues. Rich talks about how the FRP he attends offers him time with other dads.

"Yeah, I go there too. I go to a 'Dads Only' program every second Saturday. It's for gay dads. I think as a man I often get the sense from others that I don't know what I am doing with my child. And because there is no woman in the household, the more you sense that perhaps they think that you really don't know what the hell you are doing. By being around other same-sex parents, I don't think you have to answer why there is not an opposite-sex person in your family. You get a lot of people wondering, and some people are very bold in asking. I don't mind

sharing and I think it's important for us to share and be out there. I want my kids to never feel different. So, therefore I have to not be different. I have to be out there and exposed to life. But with same-sex families you don't have to explain that. What you are telling is the exciting part of your story; how you became a parent and perhaps why you became a parent rather than how you are as a parent. You may get into that, not initially, maybe a lot later."

When Rich, Helen and others at this focus group were asked to explain how the downtown FRP approach was "different" they mentioned that the FRP created an atmosphere that was anti-heterosexist, had resources reflecting same-sex families, and used language that is inclusive.

"Lots of people are accepting and very positive, but you come out to them and you don't know how they are going to take it. I come out to them and they just seem fine, which is great, but then I am still left questioning should I come out to this next person in the program? What is their reaction going to be? I don't like not coming out, but there is nothing in the FRP that is really positive in creating an anti-heterosexist environment. When I look at the books here, there are no same-sex kind of books, or even different family kinds of books. They are all very mainstream."

Helen also added to this: "The language that is commonly used too; it is common to talk about husband and wife. There isn't an effort to use inclusive language which would give signals to everybody that we have same-sex families here, and that it is okay. I feel it says that they are working to create an accepting environment here and to create an awareness of the different kinds of families. The FRP isn't taking the onus, so the atmosphere just isn't being created."

*"Language is not neutral. Our language (and therefore our discourses) will be an expression of a particular attempt to make (or impose) meaning in a situation. Language is therefore about much more than words — it is about power. The language we use is therefore an indication of which value system or which group is dominant. Power, in this sense, is exercised through the control of discourses" (Fook, 2002, p. 66).*



However, Katie and the other parents at the FRP that she attends have experienced a very supportive environment. Katie shares her experience bringing her daughter to the FRP. “For the children here, they don’t find anything a barrier. Like with my daughter Ashley, she is Native and we adopted her. For the kids, it never occurs to them to think that she is adopted or that she is any different. You know, I think that it has a lot to do with the staff. With Melanie, the staff person here, you can tell that she does control the atmosphere. She is the one who brings new people in and makes them feel welcome. Her actions really set the tone for how somebody who is different is going to be accepted into the group.”

Shirley, another mother from the FRP Katie attends, shares her experience: “Even if there are children, like mine, who have special needs, they fit in. They are not excluded from things like the circle time, they include them in everything. The staff help my son Adrian do everything with the kids. He cannot make his own crafts, so either one of the staff or another child helps make it with him.”



By feeling included, Katie has found that her daughter has acquired important skills for adjusting to the transition to school. “They have a preschool here for the three- and four-year-olds. If I hadn’t started going to the playgroup with Ashley first, she would never have wanted to go alone to the preschool. She was very clingy, and never wanted to let me go. Now I take her to the classroom and she is quick to go off on her own, like, ‘Bye mom! See you later.’ That would have never happened before. So, coming here has really helped her to socialize and be with other kids. It has put my mind at ease. It won’t be a big worry when it comes time for her to go to school. I won’t worry if she is going to be able to adjust.”

For Mrs. Ling and the other parents and grandparents at the FRP that she attends, the staff have been instrumental in creating an environment that allows non-English-speaking grandparents to participate fully in the FRPs. “We older folks barely know any English, so we use a lot of gestures and body language when the English-speaking staff members talk to us. They will ask us, ‘How are the kids?’ When some of the young moms are here they can translate for us.”

Another grandmother, Mrs. Chung, corroborates Mrs. Ling’s story: “That is why they hired Xiao Mai later on. After she joined the staff, it even got better, as she could translate whatever the other non-Chinese staff were saying. Now, whenever they offer a program in English, it is translated for us. They also disseminate any materials in English and Chinese. When the staff give a lesson to the kids, she also gives a brief of what has been talked about in Chinese. In fact, the kids are very smart; they can understand the English much faster than we do. So they get the gist in English most of the time. So, when she translates some part of the lesson, it will help the children to make a better language transition.”

In terms of language learning for the children, the FRP provides essential experience. Grace, a parent from this FRP, shares her story: “Both of my children are growing up here in Canada. It is quite nice here, all of the children play together and that is good for building character. The staff teach them singing and read them stories in English. At home, we all speak Chinese, so this environment is good for their language acquisition.”

Mrs. Ling sees how the actions of the staff contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive environment. “From my own experience, I feel that this kind of resource FRP is great. All the people here impress me. One of the staff members, Jenny, she learned a lot of Chinese just to communicate with us better. She tried very hard to learn from us and we tried to learn from her too. Now, I regret that my English is still not good enough, but I can say a few words. Jenny is very hard working. She treats all of the children as if they were her own. I didn’t find such affection even back in China, the kind that she presents to the children and the parents.”

Yet Mrs. Ling, who has attended the same local FRP for the last seven years, feels that this FRP has lost many of the participants who are not Mandarin speakers. For her, the struggle to communicate, to reach out to others in the community from different cultural backgrounds, religions, and sexual orientations was how strong bonds were formed.

“When I first started coming here, there was a good mix of people from many different cultural backgrounds. Whenever I think about that time I feel happy. It was people from all walks of life, all kinds of cultural backgrounds; they came together. This was a very rich kind of cross-cultural communication. We all learned from each other. It was wonderful. Although we didn’t use each other’s spoken language, those of us with a similar age would just hug each other. Back home, we would never hug each other! We couldn’t say much, but we managed to communicate with our body language and our eyes. In this respect, I feel it is like China; we had a deep connection to each other. There are less non-Chinese now; maybe people have moved.”

## “This FRP is an essential resource”

**A**nnie is a young mother of two girls. Her eldest daughter is four and the other is two. Annie is a stay-at-home mom who has been attending the FRP on and off for the past four years. “I have had a good experience here and I think it is a very valuable resource for mothers and fathers.”

For Annie, the FRP has been a place where she has felt comfortable, and encouraged by staff and other parents to not simply attend, but to participate as an active member of her community. “This FRP is an essential resource. It’s about people caring about people. That is what it is about.”

In terms of access to the FRP, Annie describes herself as both a young mom and being from a low-income family. She is aware of how important free FRPs are in her life. “I mean, we

are in a low-income bracket, and I mean, because I'm a young mom, I'm just starting to realize that everyone that you come in contact with, any organization that you need, they are always asking for money, money, money. It is always about money. You know, everything costs money. When you have this sort of a resource, it just benefits people in so many different ways. And I think my children just wouldn't have been able to develop these social skills that are so essential. So it really does make a difference. It is like a family here."

Annie has found that staff and other parents at the FRP encourage her to participate in various programs by calling her and telling her what is happening and reminding her if she has enrolled in a program that is just starting up. "They ask you if you are interested in a new program, or they just remind you and ask you if you need childcare. They also always ask you how you are doing. They don't just call for that purpose, but they give you a chance to talk if you need to and are too shy to ask for advice in person. They just really encourage you."

*Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand. (Proverb)*

Derek is the young father of a two-year-old girl, who attends an FRP in central Canada. Derek sees the FRP as both providing help for himself and his wife, and at the same time he feels the FRP is judging his parenting. "I find that as good as the help is here, it is a double-edged sword. It is like everything that was helping you is now sort of against you. I have to go back to work. Well, I get to go back to work and now all of the parents and staff who were telling my wife and I what a good job we were doing are now telling us that me going back to work is going to extremely affect my daughter, and that my wife can't take care of our child. With me going back to work, we won't be coming to the FRP as much. So it is like they can't supervise us as much."

Derek feels that the phone calls the FRP makes to encourage participation or to check in with people when they are away is a form of supervision. "You know, as soon as we stopped coming to all the lessons, because we have other things to do, they started to call us. They were calling our house every two hours, each time a different worker. That is annoying, it is not about caring. I am here three to four days a week and I get really annoyed when they decide to call me at home. 'Would you like to attend this program?' I wonder why they didn't tell me this when I was there this week, or at least wait until I came in the next time."



Amanda, another young parent, agrees with Derek's story, while an older parent, Judy, who attends the same central Canada FRP as Derek, sees the phone calls as helpful and encouraging. "I really don't feel like that at all. I have a regular routine with my daughter. Sometimes the staff person will call me if we were sick or something. Usually I just find it to be a concern thing. If I were to stop coming just suddenly, I would expect them to call and find out why the drastic change. They just want to be informed. They probably just want to know why you aren't coming: is it that you are not getting what you need from a particular group, or did you have a confrontation with someone? Maybe it is just that your child is sick."

Mary is a great-grandparent and is also a paid caregiver. Mary has been bringing children to the FRP in central Canada since they first opened. Mary has always found the





FRPs to be very accessible for her whether she was attending as a caregiver or as a grandparent. “The FRP is not just for and about the kids. It is about the adults with the kids. It has got to be; you have to be in with it, you know. It doesn’t matter if it is grandmothers or mothers, or caregivers or whoever.”

In terms of participation, Mary feels that whatever her relationship is with the children she brings to the FRP, she is always encouraged and supported by the staff and other parents. “I have grandchildren and great-grandchildren; it is completely different from having children. I know it sounds silly, but you learn through your different generations and mistakes you made with your own children and the mistakes you made with your grandchildren and then your great-grandchildren. You know, it is like I am trying to be different with my great-grandson than I was with his mother. I have learned not to be so demanding on my great-grandson. Like, you know, I don’t discipline as much as I did with my granddaughter and my children. Now if my great-grandson does something wrong, we will sit and talk it over. And the FRP has helped me with this.”

Another grandmother, Joan, who attends the same FRP, agrees with Mary. “At the FRP they show you how to be a better parent; you reason more with the kids, I found. We were raised, you know, if you didn’t do what you were told you got a slap. I raised my two older ones like that, but when I started coming here you learn how to talk to them more and explain what they have done wrong. That is a big difference.”

Bethany, another young parent, who attends the same FRP, agrees with Derek: “I understand that it is their job. They have a legal responsibility; you know, if they think that the child is being neglected or beaten, I understand that. But usually it just seems like they are super worried and it turns out to be nothing.”

Both the staff and the parents who attend create the

*“...studies of intergenerational education projects report that programs lead to greater tolerance, increased comfort and intimacy, partial dissolving of rigid stereotypes, and less fear of the other group” (Manheimer, 1997, p. 85).*

atmosphere of the FRP. By developing a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere people are encouraged to return and participate in the programs being offered.

Derek and another young parent, Ruth, who attends the same FRP, recognize the staff's contribution to creating the FRP's comfortable atmosphere. They agree that the staff at the FRP are helpful in terms of connecting participants with other programs or resources. Derek agrees with Ruth as she says, "The staff will go out of their way to help you. If you run out of cash one month they will give you a voucher to go out and buy groceries. They help as much as they can. Like, I got stuff from Yvonne, the staff person here. She wanted to get me a microwave and a couch for my apartment."

Annie sees how the FRP has helped her develop social and emotional support. "I think that the most beneficial part of the whole FRP is not only the resources, but it is the emotional guidance, the friendships you make here, those kinds of things — just people extending out to one another." Annie has found that her involvement in the FRP has fostered a desire to give back to her community. "One day I got my mother-in-law to watch the girls and I came in here and volunteered for the day. I sanitized the scissors and I helped clean up. You know it did more for me than it did for anyone else, because it gave me a chance to kind of give back. They don't ask for anything from us and it was just a way for me to say thank you."

Annie also feels that she now plays an active role in developing programs for her community. She is encouraged to give back to the community through her work at the clothing bank and at the FRP. She is also active in developing programs to help parents fully understand the role of child welfare. "You know, let them prove to us that we don't need to be scared of them. What are the guidelines? We are helping the staff set up a program for us, but we have to put some work into creating these programs." Through being involved with the FRP Annie is building bonds with others in her community. This connection has allowed Annie to feel supported and to take risks to initiate a program on child welfare guidelines.

Mary and the other grandparents who attend the FRP find that they have made friendships and become more connected with their community. "We live in the same building and didn't really know each other until we started coming here. We're not sitting at home in a rocking chair with our knitting needles." For Lenore, a grandmother who also attends the FRP, the programs have been equitable. "We are all treated equally here, whether you are young or old."

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# *Practice Reflections*

The stories that participants told, and that we have retold, are powerful affirmations of the contributions of Family Resource Programs to the well-being of children, parents, caregivers, families, and communities. Most striking is the significance placed on the relationships developed through participation. As we read the stories, the supportive and empowering nature of these relationships unfold and reveal the opportunities and benefits that are generated. Stories told by a first-time mother, a grandmother, a dad, a paid caregiver or a parent new to Canada, all confirm the importance of the relationships that they have formed with each other, with the staff, and with the children.

As suggested by Woolcock (2001), “how we associate with each other, and on what terms, has enormous implications for our well-being” (p. 15). The stories provide remarkable evidence of the capacity of Family Resource Programs to promote engaging and inclusive service environments in which dense social networks are formed. These social networks, in supporting the day-to-day tasks of parenting and processes of child development, also become pathways to success for participants and their children. For some, success is expressed in relation to their own personal growth, leading to career changes, strengthened relationships with their children and their partners, and increased community involvement. Success is also attributed to their children’s outcomes, particularly in relation to the child’s sociability, capacity for independence, and the ease of transition to kindergarten.

These stories of “success” substantiate the importance of “family engagement” as a model of early childhood development and care. Through the many programs, activities, and volunteer opportunities, relationships are formed between adults (staff and participants), adults and children, and children with children. Participants describe this myriad of relationships as constituting a “community” in which members are valued and respected. This environment is expressed as exciting, comforting, and liberating. Children and their parents are “free” to enhance their capacities, discover their talents, and pursue beneficial outcomes.

These are indeed strong endorsements by participants and speak to the commitment and caliber of the staff at FRPs. While we did not directly ask participants to comment on the staff, prominence was given to the role of the staff. The stories are replete with descriptions of how the staff extend themselves to promote the well-being of all. The far-reaching capacity of the staff gives new meaning to the contemporary term of “multi-tasking.” The staff provide information on a broad range of topics, facilitate referrals, and engage with participants as they navigate through institutions and services in their

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community. Further, the staff assume an instrumental role in meeting immediate needs such as a crib, public transit fares, and other urgent necessities.

The focus groups created a space where personal experiences could be shared with others. As participants told individual stories, others in the focus group were able to remember similar experiences and reflect on the meaning of these experiences in their own lives. However, not all of the participants shared similar experiences, and it is through the differences in the stories told by participants that issues of diversity could most clearly be heard. It is within this “space” that we heard how the social differences of class, age, gender, sexual orientation, and language present challenges to creating an inclusive environment. The dialogues allowed us to “unpack” and move beyond the categorical approaches to understanding social differences.

For example, the dialogue with young parents reveals the different meanings attributed to the practice of calling participants at their home. Some young parents welcome this practice and feel it is a form of social care and of inclusion. However, other parents find this practice intrusive, recreating the “regulatory” approach to young parents in the broader society.

Another example is of a Chinese grandmother who does not speak English, but laments the fact that the FRP has lost the “mix” of people from different backgrounds due to the increase of Mandarin-speaking participants.

We heard different meanings attributed to the “hidden” costs of participation. Some low-income participants pay what they can to go on field trips, others do not feel comfortable and do not participate if they can’t afford to pay the full costs.

Further, we heard from a gay father who has recently “come out” and now struggles with being perceived as “different” by the other non-gay parents. He fears that the other parents will attribute this difference to his children. While he also attends an FRP for “gay dads” and feels much more at ease there, he still comes back to the “other” FRP hoping to carve out a positive gay space for other same-sex families. The fact that there is an FRP for “gay dads”, does not sufficiently meet this dad’s needs.

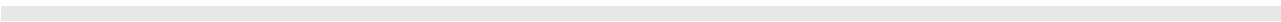
Each of these examples challenges our assumptions of what constitutes inclusive strategies and practices. These examples highlight how inclusive practices need to be continually evaluated so that the intentions and the experiences are congruent. Introducing narrative analysis into practice can help create the space for evaluation and reflection. As we tell stories we “discover new things about ourselves and our world” (Richardson, 2001, p. 37) and “extend the possibilities for understanding and action” (Healy, 2000, p. 62).

In our companion volume, **What Participants Value ... Practices and Outcomes at Family Resource Programs**, we provide a set of practice indicators, derived from the stories and corroborated with the social science literature. These indicators reflect the key practice themes of engaging families, social support /social capital, empowerment, and building community. Working with these indicators will assist in creating a reflective space shared by staff and participants.

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In summary, this collection of stories unequivocally “speaks” to the importance of Family Resource Programs in enhancing the well-being of children and families. FRPs are able to achieve these remarkable outcomes with abundant commitment but limited stable funding. With an adequate funding base, the far-reaching promise of the FRP model can be realized. FRPs have the capacity to become the “voice” of children and families in communities across Canada, encouraging a spillover to other institutions and services for children.

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# Appendices

## List of Participating Organizations

NAME	CITY	PROVINCE
Adventure Place	North York	ON
Alexandra Park Community Centre	Toronto	ON
Birchmount Bluffs Neighbourhood Centre	Scarborough	ON
Bowcroft Family Resource Centre	Calgary	AB
Brighter Futures Play Group/ Drop-In	St. John's	NL
Central Eglinton Community Centre	Toronto	ON
Centrepointe Early Childhood Resource Centre	Nepean	ON
Chances Family Resource Centre	Stratford	PEI
Creating Together	Toronto	ON
East End Children's Centre	Toronto	ON
East York, East Toronto Family Resources	Toronto	ON
Edgewood Connection, Applegrove Community Complex	Toronto	ON
Family Resource Connection	Toronto	ON
Gerrard Resource Centre, Ryerson University	Toronto	ON
Jane/Finch Community and Family Centre	North York	ON
L.A.M.P. Family Centre	Etobicoke	ON
Macaulay Child Development Centre	Toronto	ON
More Than Child's Play Family Resource Centre	Toronto	ON

<b>NAME</b>	<b>CITY</b>	<b>PROVINCE</b>
Native Women's Resource Centre	Toronto	ON
Next Door Family Resources	Etobicoke	ON
OEYC Niagara Centre	Welland	ON
Parent Resources	Toronto	ON
Parent Resource Centre	Ottawa	ON
Restigouche Resource Centre for Parents	Campbellton	NB
Rural Family Resource Centre	Thunder Bay	ON
South Riverdale Child-Parent Centre	Toronto	ON
Toronto Military Family Resource Centre	North York	ON
Valley Family Resource Centre	Fredericton	NB

# “Voices” Interview Guide

## Participation

1. Let's start by telling me about the very first time that you came to this Family Resource Program (FRP)?  
What was that experience like for you?
2. What was that experience like for your child(ren)?
3. So what happened after that first time?  
*Probe: Why did you come back? Have you had any experience with other FRPs?*
4. Can you tell me about what you and your child(ren) do when you come here?
5. What does it feel like for you when you are at the FRP?  
*Probe: Can you think of a specific example or situation in which these feelings emerge? How does it happen?*
6. Can you tell me about a particular experience that was helpful to you and/or your child(ren)?  
*Probe: How unique is this experience? Are there other helpful situations?*
7. Since you have been coming here what has changed for you?  
*Probe: The number of activities, type of responsibility assumed (participant, organizer, leader, etc.); Socially, educationally, emotionally.*  
*Probes: What made that possible? How did it happen?*
8. Since you have been coming here what has changed for your child(ren)?

## Relationships with others at the FRP

I would like to move now to more specifically talk about the kinds of relationships that you have made with people at the FRP.

1. Can you tell me about the kinds of relationships that you have made?  
*Probe: with other parents, caregivers, staff, other child(ren)?*
2. Can you tell me about the kinds of relationships that your child(ren) has/have made?
3. How have these relationships changed over the course of your participation?
4. How have these relationships helped you?
5. How have these relationships helped your child(ren)?
6. Can you tell me about a particular relationship that has been very important to you?  
*Probe: Can you recall a situation that would help me understand the importance of the relationship?*
7. Have there been relationships that have disappointed you, which you have not felt positive about? Can you tell me about these?

## *Relationship with Your Family*

I would like to move on to your relationship with your family.

1. Can you tell me how your relationship with members of your family might have been influenced by your participation in the FRP?
2. Can you tell me about a particular family experience that was made possible by your participation in the FRP?
3. Can you tell me how your participation may have been helpful to members of your family? Can you tell me about a specific situation?

## *Relationships/Linkages in the Community*

I would like to now move on to talk about any involvements that you may have in the community.

1. Can you tell me how the FRP reaches out and connects with the community?  
*Probe: Referrals, etc.*
2. Can you tell me how the FRP has influenced your involvement in the community?
3. Can you tell me about an experience you have had in the community that resulted from your involvement in the FRP?

## *Recommendations*

In concluding this interview, I would like to talk about ways in which FRPs can be strengthened.

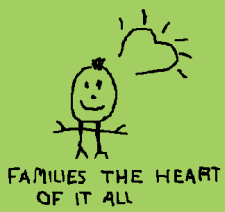
1. Have there been any disappointments for you or your children at the FRP?  
*Probe: Has anything made it difficult for you to participate in the FRP?*
2. What would you recommend to us that would strengthen the FRP?

Thank you for answering all these questions and for sharing your experiences with us. As we put together a report of the many experiences described by participants, is there anything of particular importance to you that you hope gets attention in the report?

*Thank you for completing these questions!*

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**MAFRP**

METRO ASSOCIATION OF  
FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS

**RYERSON UNIVERSITY**

*AN MAFRP – RYERSON UNIVERSITY PROJECT*