



# On the Ground, In the Field

Applied Promising Practices (APP) Project  
Fraser Working Group



## Summary Report

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## Applied Promising Practices (APP) Project - Fraser Working Group

### Acknowledgements:

Thank you to the following people for the time, energy and wisdom you provided to this project.

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**Special thanks to the six FRP parents who participated in the parent focus group with such willing energy. We learned much from what you told us.**

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# Executive Summary

The Applied Promising Practices (APP) for BC Child & Family Services Project is an initiative of the Federation of Community Social Services of BC (FCSSBC). The purpose of the initiative is to support the identification, implementation and evaluation of proven or promising practices in child and family serving organizations in British Columbia. Rather than focusing on the one-time sharing of a specific intervention, the project supports a collaborative and iterative process for the ongoing identification and implementation of promising practices through the formation of communities of practice. In the first two years of the initiative, the Federation established four communities of practice in different geographic regions, each focusing on a specific type of service delivery to children and families. The Fraser APP project is one of these four.

The Fraser APP project focuses specifically on creating new and deeper knowledge and understandings of the staff practices within Family Resource Programs (FRP). The reflexive nature of this APP project and the overlapping results from the FRP parent and FRP staff focus groups resulted in more varied and valuable outputs than we could have expected. The project took place in two six-month phases over a two year period. A comprehensive content analysis of evaluation reports and a literature review were followed by focus groups and consultation with external 'expert' consultants. A series of development and planning meetings took place throughout the project.

Grounding the work in the experience of FRP practitioners was integral in that the results and findings became *their* results speaking to their own specific 'on the ground, in the field' experience rather than (or in addition to) aggregate or average experiences. The inclusion of both FRP staff and FRP parents in the focus group process enabled FRP practitioners to 'see' their daily practice from the perspective of the families they work with while providing an additional level of valuable feedback about their practice. Not only did 'getting outside of their own routine' help staff to better identify how their work makes a difference to families, they were also able to understand the personal intentions behind various different practices and could trace a path from those intentions through to the resulting outcomes for families.

We found that, among other things, by attending Family Resource Programs participants gained personal and social agency, grew their capacity to navigate the typically challenging periods of parenting and mitigate risk, and built community both within the program itself and out beyond the walls of the FRP. The Fraser APP project affirms the value of Family Resource Programs as a key piece in the array of services required in our communities. It shows in a clear

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and distinct way how parents and families are empowered through their Family Resource Program experience and how this empowerment improves relationships with their children, and within their neighbourhoods, schools and communities. In the language of child and family development this is called “increased family resilience and capacity-building with better outcomes for children.”

## Introduction

The Applied Promising Practices (APP) for BC Child & Family Services Project is an initiative of the Federation of Community Social Services of BC (FCSSBC). The purpose of the APP projects is to support the identification, implementation and evaluation of proven or promising practices in child and family serving organizations in British Columbia. Members of the project groups include service providers and key stakeholders where appropriate. Faculty and practicum students from BC universities and colleges as well as research experts from national and provincial organizations are engaged in the process to assist with the identification of proven and promising practices from academic literature.

Rather than focusing on the one-time sharing of a specific intervention, APP projects supports a collaborative and iterative process for the ongoing identification and implementation of promising and proven practices through the formation of communities of practice. In the words of Etienne Wenger, communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

The goals of the Federation's APP projects are to enhance service delivery to children and families in British Columbia, increase support for organizational cultures that value evidence-based service delivery and continuous quality improvement within the sector, and identify promising and proven practices that can be shared with other service providers.

In the first two years of the APP initiative, the Federation established four communities of practice in different geographic regions each focusing on a specific type of service delivery to children and families. Each APP group engages in an iterative process of: considering evidence from both practice and academic research; identifying promising practices; implementing those practices within a community context; evaluating the practices as part of a continuous learning process; and integrating new knowledge into agency practices and community initiatives.

The focus of this report is the Fraser APP project. This project has focused on the

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practice of Family Resource Program (FRP) staff, illustrating how they work on the ground and in the field. More specifically, the intent has been to explore further and better understand FRP staff practices that enhance family connectivity and communication, increase family resilience, and establish parents' belief in their own resilience. Our belief is that, achieving the three above points will lead to, among other things, better child development outcomes and reduced child vulnerability.

The summary and findings section of the report is divided into five sections mirroring the five iterative stages of this APP project. The first section focuses on what FRPs are already doing well, establishing a foundation and key markers to compare against subsequent findings. The next two sections discuss evaluation reviews and literature reviews respectively. The fourth section entitled 'Tell Stories' discusses the focus groups conducted with FRP staff and FRP participants. Finally, the fifth section aims to build on all previous sections summarizing and demonstrating the value of FRP programs.

This report also analyzes the dominant themes that emerged throughout the project and includes five useful appendices:

- Talking Points - a tool that emerged from the two focus groups
- Parent Quotes - quotes from FRP parents & participants
- Meeting Schedule - a summary of the working group meetings where the APP process developed
- Journey Maps - created by FRP parents in the focus groups; and
- Literature Review - undertaken during the project.

Due to the project's specific methodology, this summary report speaks to the process of the APP project as much as the project findings (the two are intricately related in such an emergent process). The first section of this summary report overviews the working group processes and findings, followed by an analysis of these findings and how they informed the later stages of the project. Additional analysis and select content produced during the project's focus groups is included in the appendices.

## Process

During Phase 1 of the project, from February 2009 to July 2009, the working group met twice, first to identify issues, develop the project arc, and give direction to the project consultant. Second, they reviewed the content analysis and literature reviews (focusing on staff practices and staff-client relationships) and discussed those findings in preparation for Phase 2.

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Phase 2 occurred between February 2011 and July 2011. Funding delays in the Fall 2009 postponed the project until late 2010. During Phase 2, the working group reviewed the project history, completed analyses and followed up with further hands-on research. This was reviewed and discussed in two focus groups and a meeting with the external 'expert' consultants, followed by the working group, project consultant and the Federation who compiled and shaped the project's overall results and findings.

The project began with an examination of the group's existing archive of evaluation data and completion of a comprehensive review of literature pertaining to FRP practices and policies. Participants then reviewed the documents and determined the ideal next steps - inquiring into various parental experiences and perspectives of Family Resource Programs and reviewing those findings with FRP staff themselves. The intention in using this process was to:

**1. Put a focus on parents.** We specifically endeavoured to capture the parent's perspectives of, and experiences with, various programs in order to analyze and map their journey into and through various FRPs (entry points, exit points, re-entry points), and to understand what it is that FRP practitioners do that helps parents make the shift from being reluctant to engaged, from being needy to giving, from being timid to courageous, and from being anxious about their child to feeling more relaxed and attached. The Parent Focus Groups are discussed in greater detail below. The journey maps created by parents describing their FRP experiences are included in the appendices.

**2. Put a focus on practices.** The follow up process asked FRP staff to review the parent's descriptions and journey maps, to reflect on what the participants said, and to describe why they might have done X with a participant instead of Y. The goal was to use specific staff practices as an entry point to uncovering and understanding how initial individual intentions connect to end results and outcomes. The Staff Focus Group is discussed in greater detail below.

## The Fraser Working Group as a Community of Practice

Fraser APP staff participants represented mature Family Resource Programs, having served Upper Fraser Valley families for between 15 and 30 years. Four agencies participated in the project. Six people served as core members of the working group, with seven other staff or managers involved at different points in the project. These agencies have embraced the FRP training in standards, practices and principles developed by the BC Association of Family Resource Programs.

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Some members have participated in regional and national research projects sponsored through FRP Canada and the participating FRPs have undertaken 15 years of CAPC evaluation overseen by the Public Health Agency of Canada (see note below). The programs also have a history of working together through the CAPC regional coalition model and other early childhood development initiatives in the region. The collective experience, history, and knowledge created a good fit for participating in this community of practice.

The Fraser APP project was grounded in leadership provided by the Federation of Community and Social Services of BC. Decision-making was shared between the Federation, the project working group, and the project consultant. The project also utilized external experts, and enabled open sharing of information and material produced by the project, including all meeting notes, reports, draft and final documents. Throughout the course of the Fraser APP project, the working group engaged outside expertise and insight through consultations with the BC Association of Family Resource Programs Executive Director, Marianne Drew Pennington and former Executive Director of the BC Council for Families, Carol Matusicky.

Coming into this project, the Fraser working group and FRP staff knew and understood that, as practitioners, they are charged with delivering low intensity family support in a timely way using evidence-based prevention and instrumental help giving practices. The Applied Promising Practices project and its community of practice methodology, enabled them to spend further time together in a structured manner deepening their knowledge and understanding of what successful and promising practices looked like on the ground, in the field.

*NOTE - Evaluation of Canadian Family Resource Programs has been undertaken by the national umbrella organization FRP Canada. Family resource programs funded or co-funded through the federal Community Action Program for Children, have had the Public Health Agency of Canada's CAPC evaluation process applied to them. Our APP project examined 15 years of the Fraser Valley Family Resource Program's CAPC evaluation reports looking specifically for results, descriptions and findings that described parents' experience of FRP staff work and methods. The findings align with external research on effective FRP staff practice and methods. See this APP project's content analysis of Upper Fraser Valley CAPC coalition evaluation results 1996 – 2009.)*

## Summary and Findings

The following five sections were created to mirror the five iterative stages of this APP project. An initial goal was to determine what FRPs are already doing well in order to establish a foundation for the project and develop key markers to compare against findings from the evaluation and literature reviews which followed. The section titled 'Tell Stories' focuses on the process and outcomes of

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the focus groups conducted with FRP staff and FRP participants. The following two sections aim to build on previous ones, summarize findings, highlight key themes, and reiterate the value of FRP programs.

## Identify what we are doing well

Some of the skills and practices that FRP practitioners self-identified as 'things we are doing well' included: relationship-building and connectivity; providing non-judgmental access to mentors; modeling; sharing knowledge and information supports; responsiveness and flexibility; creativity and innovation; and promoting and sustaining a forward thinking or long range view of family development (i.e. keeping the end in mind). Participants also identified themselves as: creating and following best practices; encouraging participants in networking with community; offering 'something for everyone, for every family' (i.e. a range of supports, tools and alternatives); being professional without being critical; and striving to build resilience in children and families.

## Analyze evaluation content

The working group reviewed and analyzed the qualitative content of FRP evaluations from the past 13 years of CAPC programming looking closely for information and comments about staff attributes and the particular impact of staff on participant/family. This analysis identified sixty-four unique key words used by participants to describe their experience of and with staff. These key words correlated with the findings that came out of the literature review as well as what staff self-identified as 'things that we are doing well.'

*NOTE - The 13 years of CAPC evaluation reports written for PHAC reflect the content of 2290 completed participant feedback forms from Upper Fraser Valley Family Resource Programs.*

The key words parents and participants used to describe their experiences with staff in the evaluations (i.e. the way staff behave/work with parents, child and family to support participant learning and behavioural change) can be divided into four sections or categories as outlined below. *(From CAPC evaluation content analysis, 1996 – 2009).*

### **Staff's way of being with the parents:**

Approachable, Available, Encouraging, Greet me every time, Helpful, Informative, Lend an ear, Listen, Make everyone feel at home, Non-Judgmental, Open attitude, Open to suggestions, Personalized support, Positive, Reassuring, Remember you, Relaxed, Supportive, Teach me, Treat us all the same, Validating, Warm.

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**General attributes of staff:**

Awesome, Accommodating, Big smile, Caring, Casual approach, Flexible, Friendly, Fun to be around, Fabulous, Love what they do, Love to laugh, Non-judgmental, Personable, Phenomenal, Unique, Warm, Wonderful

**Staff's service delivery attributes:**

Constant resource, Creative, Confidential, Educated, Fair, Informed, Involved, Knowledgeable, Non-Judgmental, Organized, Objective, Practical, Professional, Safe, Teach me, Validating

**Staff's way of being with/relating to children:**

Great with the children, Interacts with each child, Love for the children, Significant influence on my child's life, Take a personal interest in my child (each child), Value my child, Willingness to learn about each child.

The evaluation content analysis also identified a range of specific FRP testimonials and open-ended remarks that echoed much of what the FRP practitioners self-identified as things they do well. A selection of phrases related to staff attributes, practices and the varied impact that those engender include:

*"[Staff] gave me confidence... ways to build better relationships with my children [and] deal with parent insecurities."*

*"Staff were always willing to listen, give a positive outlook on the situation... made me feel comfortable."*

*"I can always find an answer from staff for my questions and not feel stupid for asking."*

*"When others turned the cheek, Family Place was always willing to help."*

*"Staff are an important sounding board for me."*

*"[The staff] offered objective advice and help solving behavioural challenges with my youngest."*

*"FRP staff welcomed me with an open heart when I was very lonely – the centre protected me from feeling homesick."*

*"No one is judged, everyone is welcome, staff make it feel like home."*

*"Staff listened when I needed it, supported me in any way possible and let me know I was not alone."*

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## Literature Review

The project also reviewed a substantial array of books, articles, and relevant websites in order to supplement the findings of the evaluation content analysis. The literature review (see Appendix 5) specifically focused on content addressing staff-client relationships, the qualities and characteristics of people doing FRP work, the impact of staff practice on participants/clients, the ways in which low key community based FRPs function as a therapeutic intervention, and the ways in which community connections and networks aid parenting.

The relationship-building (which staff self-identified as something they 'already do well') was noted throughout the varied literature as being a cornerstone of FRP staff practice. Dunst and Trivette (1988) spoke often of the importance of social relationships in both early intervention and ongoing support of families. The authors have since continued their investigation into this area (Carol Trivette spoke at the 2009 FRP Canada conference about this same topic) and their findings continue to resonate with this notion.

Numerous other FRP studies also spoke to the value of staff fostering respectful relationships with participants (Kyle, 1993; Kyle, Kellerman, 1998; Mueller, 1996; LA County Planning Council, 2001; Bruner, 2004; Silver et al., 2005) and recent Canadian-based reviews of FRPs, upon asking participants what such relationships look and feel like, found rich insights into the varied impacts and outcomes, both direct and indirect, that those relationships had on participants and clients (Silver et al, 2004, Mann, 2008).

Descriptions of FRP staff qualities and characteristics in the literature review matched the qualities and characteristics found in the content evaluation analysis and the working group's initial project descriptions. Specific key words related to the qualities and characteristics of the people doing FRP work that were found in the selected literature included: warm; empathic; caring; compassionate; able to share power; able to share control; welcoming; respectful; non-judgmental; positive; open; able to communicate clearly; and able to support in a non-directive manner (Best Start panel, 2007; FRP-BC, Ellis and Barbeau, 2008; FRP Canada, 2002, 2007, 2008; Healthy Families America, 2002; Hornsby, 2007; Kyle, 1993; Mann, 2008; Silver et al., 2005; Reilly, 2008; Kyle and Kellerman 1998; Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, 2001; Mueller 1996; Powell, 2007; Dunst and Trivette, 1988; Slaughter, 1988; Trivette and Dunst, 2005; Trivette, 2009).

Information contained in three recent Canadian studies also contained passages describing staff practice and its impact on participants and clients. Silver et al. (2005) identified four practice themes: engaging families; empowerment; social support and development of social capital; and building community. These

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encapsulate the varying impacts of welcoming, engaging, warm, respectful, supportive and inclusive staff practices on participants and clients. Mann (2008) developed a study based on contemporary knowledge of the things staff found most effective when working with parents of young children. Notably, all of Mann's findings neatly fit into Silver's four practice themes.

FRP Canada's 2008-2009 E-Valuation summary also speaks to the impact of staff practice on clients. The evaluation summary details responses to six questions asking specifically about participant experiences of staff. Certain key words and phrases were incorporated into questions about staff practices (such as: "welcomed," "accepted," "treat me with respect," "make it possible for me to participate," "available when I need them," "have opportunities to be involved in decision-making," and "welcoming to diverse groups") and the percentage of 'yes' responses made by participants correlating FRP staff practice to the above phrases ranged from 76% to 98%.

The literature review also spoke to the ways in which, and the extent to which, we can view low key community based FRPs as therapeutic interventions. Silver et al. explain how low key place-based FRPs act as a therapeutic intervention sites by providing resources "within an environment of participant empowerment within a stable and supportive community and where the whole family can be engaged with child and parent development and relationship-building" (Silver, et al. 41). Through the working group's analysis of content evaluations from the Fraser region, such contexts were found to be very much a cornerstone of the FRP work done in the Fraser Valley.

Brunner (2004) also spoke to the development of social capital through specific programs and strategies. In his words, relationships and practices (as much as or more than program structure or curriculum) are key to achieving success and effective family strengthening programs and strategies create social capital - which is not necessarily measurable through a subject/treatment/impact approach (Brunner, 2004). Similarly, the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council (2001) found that allowing families to take part in defining services builds the trust required to engage them at a much deeper level.

Much of the literature also spoke to how the community connections and networks built and enabled through FRPs can greatly aid and assist parenting:

*"The ecological approach proposes that there is an interconnection between individuals and the social groups in which they are embedded. One of its implications is that the well being of the children is dependent on the well being of their families. In turn, the well being of families and individuals is dependent upon the quality of life and resources available in*

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*the community where they live. Successful interventions must necessarily focus on children, their parents, and the wider community." (from Toward Experimental Evaluation of the Family, Infant and Preschool Program, Dunst 1988 - also cited in Silver et al. 2005)*

Dunst also posits a social support construct made up of five components related to various networks and connections. He calls them: relational (the extent and quantity of social relationships); structural (the characteristics of the social networks including durability, stability, feelings, reciprocity); constitutional (describing the individuated need for help, as well as the availability of help and type offered); support satisfaction (the extent to which assistance and aid are viewed as helpful and useful).

Dunst uses the construct to frame evidence showing how and where social supports like FRPs have positive influences on personal/family health, directly or indirectly influence attitudes towards parenting, parenting styles, parent attitudes/expectations and aspirations for their children), in addition to their children's behaviour and development. Dunst's evaluation also suggests that the perceived negative consequences often associated with rearing children with developmental problems can be lessened or even alleviated altogether when a family's informal support network and community connections are mobilized to strengthen personal and familial well-being and buffer negative effects.

## Tell Stories

Building upon the content analysis and the literature review, the working group developed a series of questions to help direct the next phase of the APP project:

*"What is it that you are doing in your work that is unique?"*

*"We talk about the intuitiveness of staff enabling them to build a relationship that strengthens families but can we get more concrete about that?"*

*"What is it that staff do – can we quantify and describe it?"*

*"How do staff make a difference and help participants move from being needy, to being able to give back to their family and community and actually doing so?"*

*"What is it that staff does that enables participants to be engaged and better parents?"*

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A two stage research process was designed to first enable a focus group of parents to share their stories and draw journey maps of their involvement in the FRPs. Subsequently, a second group of FRP practitioners, built on those responses by answering the same questions and overlaying their own perspective of how they related to and worked with those same parents thus creating a secondary level on the journey maps.

### **Parent Participant Focus Group**

The main goal of the parent focus group was to understand, from parent's perspective, the map or trajectory of their journey into and through FRPs and the specific experiences therein. While doing so, participants identified what they experienced practitioners doing that helped them build relationships, make connections and develop the parenting skills and confidence needed to cause substantial personal shifts.

*NOTE - Two parents from each of five FRP sites involved in the APP project were invited to the focus group. Participants were selected by staff. Initial criteria included: family connectivity and resilience; a participant that had engaged with staff; and staff knowledge of a parent making a 'shift' in their lives during their time at the FRP which resulted in an increase in parental confidence. Additional criteria factored in the desire to have equal representation of the typical range of clients/attendees (i.e. both long and short term clients, both experienced and new parents, people with varying socio-economic and marital status, people with varying lengths of time lived in their current communities). Nine parents accepted the invitation and six parents were actually able to attend. Each of the participating APP sites were represented.*

After the concept of a Journey Map was introduced with an example from the facilitator, participants were asked to take the following three points into account in their mapping and discussion:

- *What relationships and connections did you have when you started coming to the FRP, and what did you pick up from being here? What did staff do and say?*
- *What parenting skills, new information or knowledge aided or added to your level of parenting confidence? What did staff do and say?*
- *What might have inspired you or led to new ways of thinking or acting in the world (eg, making a decision to be a volunteer somewhere, getting involved in a new or different activity in the community, making new friends)? What did staff do and say?*

Participants were supplied with materials to complete their journey maps and did so guided by the above three points. Each participant then took turns walking others through their own journey map; clarifying questions were posed by

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facilitators as needed. The last portion of the focus group was spent discussing various ideas and themes that emerged in the journey mapping process.

### **FRP Staff Focus Group**

The FRP staff focus group was subsequently asked to reflect on what the parent participants had said, review the parents' journey maps, and use the parents' journey maps as a guide in tracking their own work with specific parent participants. In doing so, the intent was to uncover and understand the intentions behind the specific practices identified in the parents' journey maps and connect those to the various outcomes.

Each staff participant presented the map of their parent-staff engagement while describing their intentions behind the specific practices they engaged in with the parents. A general discussion about the intentions behind various practices followed. The following intentions arose and were analyzed further in relation their impact as described by the parent focus group: to help; to recognize we can't do the mothering or parenting journey for them; to act on the fact that we are a family resource program; to help her grow the way she wants; to have her be more self sustaining rather than dependent on staff/resource help; to make her feel she can be part of something not through need but her abilities; to walk alongside, share experiences, encourage friendships and link like mothers to one another; to bring out her liveliness which was under the depression.

The parental journey maps and staff descriptions of engagement with parents yielded rich stories, reiterating what the FRP practitioners knew regarding good FRP practice. Staff discussions of the parent journey maps not only manifested as "my intent was X and so I/we did/suggested Y and this was the result," but also elucidated the more subtle and varied causes, actions and outcomes (who leads, who responds, who 'works' at any given time, and what happens) in different situations and different staff-parent dynamics. After extensive discussions probing for the things that were new and the things that were unique, the external 'expert' consultants offered their deeper analysis of the practices and the APP project members pulled out new and deeper insights about their work and better understood the full extent of what happens for and with participants/clients that attend the FRPs. Out of this process came an additional FRP tool entitled "Talking Points" (see Appendix 1).

### **Demonstrate value**

Another goal of the Fraser APP project was the development of a methodology that better demonstrates the value of the work done by FRPs by providing

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knowledge and analysis that deepens the picture of the way staff work with families. We wanted to provide a more detailed, layered understanding of the impact of various staff practices, and substantiate an effective case for the recognition of FRPs as valued and necessary partners within the mosaic of existing family services in communities. As such, we hope that this summary report and its appendices will be used in the following ways within in the FRP field and with policy makers, funders and the general public:

### **1. With the FRP field**

- Overall, the knowledge and information aid and enhance the validation of human resource practices - specifically in hiring, supervising and training FRP staff.
- Project data be used by FRP practitioners as they speak with colleagues in the early childhood field and continue to broaden the conversation about FRP practices and outcomes.
- The Talking Points be used to build presentations for regional, provincial and national meetings and conferences
- The material included in the report and appendices be shared with, and tied into early childhood initiatives such as United Way's work with Success by Six.
- The charts and journey maps be used as case examples for in-house and other training curricula.

### **2. With policy makers and funders**

- The project material provides new and different ways to present, frame, and talk about FRP outcomes to government ministries, policy makers, and funders.
- The Talking Points also provide new information for FRP practitioners to use when speaking to their community of social service providers to increase the understanding of the role FRPs play in the community.
- The project data will allow the Federation of Community and Social Services of BC to better inform members, colleagues, funders and government about the vital role played by Family Resource Programs in the community.

### **3. With the Public**

- The stories, charts and data provide rich material for media stories, communication campaigns, and advocacy.
- The Talking Points are a useful foundation for presentations and talks in various communities that FRP staff live and work in.

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# Dominant Themes

The reflexive nature of focus groups attended by FRP parents and FRP staff yielded useful insights into the nature of the FRP engagement above and beyond specific or individual issues and outcomes. Reflecting on the lifecycle of FRP engagement, tracing the various paths from intention to outcome, and mapping the array of overlapping points of entry and exit for parents brought to light a series of shared experiences and reoccurring themes.

## Temporality & Movement

Participants shared the understanding that all families with young children move through periods of sensitivity or challenge with different gradations of risk attached to those different periods. It is typical for most families to move in and out of such periods and parents choose to come to a Family Resource Program not because they have a problem per se, but because they have a family. Participating in a FRP provides families a normalizing context that for periods of challenge while helping them with those sensitivities and challenges (ameliorating isolation, lack of parenting skills, etc). Just by realizing that such periods are normal and that they come and go (in addition to the fact that all parents go through such periods), FRP parents become better able to cope and respond to those challenges and become open to shared learning, problem solving, and support.

Parents also seem to engage in a consistent form of movement or personal development while within the Family Resource Programs. Participants noted that FRP parents moved from "I" to "we" and gained an increased sense of community. They also moved from self-judgement to strength and formed a more holistic sense of identity (two factors in increased resilience).

## Agency & Engagement

The participants in the focus groups also noted how FRPs enable parents to gain and enhance their personal and social agency and increase their willingness and ability to engage in their community. In the words of FRP practitioners, parents became more able to both "look out to the community" and "look in to themselves." The personal agency and empowerment gained through FRP experiences were not only put to use helping their own families and their own children but also their neighbourhoods, schools, and communities.

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## Assets & Resources

FRP staff value the parents they work with as assets and resources for the program and for the greater community. Over time, the parents begin to see themselves in this way as well. As a result (and related to the above mentioned shifts), FRPs build community both within the program and beyond its walls. This is apparent through the reciprocity that develops in FRPs relationships, the voluntary contributions of FRP participants, the mentorships that develop with and between participants in addition to the participants own descriptions of their increased sense of worth, belonging, and community.

## Conclusion

The Fraser APP project was a collaborative and iterative process developed to identify and implement promising practices in a group of Fraser region Family Resource Programs. Due to the project's community of practice methodology, we learned as much from the emergent process of the project as we did from the final outcomes. Indeed, in such instances the two are intricately related. In this case, the specific experiences, history, and knowledge held and shared by FRP practitioners in the Fraser working group enabled the community of practice methods to work well - every stage of the APP project involved learning on the part of all participants and each piece of work and each discussion informed the next stage of the project and guided the ongoing analyses.

Grounding the work in the experience of FRP practitioners was integral in that the results and findings became *their* results speaking to their own specific 'on the ground, in the field' experience rather than (or in addition to) aggregate or average experiences. The inclusion of both FRP staff and parents in the focus group process enabled FRP practitioners to 'see' their daily practice from the perspective of the families they work with while providing an additional level of valuable feedback about their practice. Not only did 'getting outside of their own routine' help staff to better identify how their work makes a difference to families, but they were able to better understand the personal intentions behind various different practices and trace a path from those intentions through to the resulting outcomes for families.

Over the course of the project, we found that, among other things, by attending Family Resource Programs participants: gain personal and social agency; 'grow' their capacity to deal with the typically challenging periods of parenting, and mitigate risk; build community both within the program itself and out in the greater community.

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The Fraser APP project underscored the value of Family Resource Programs as key partners in the array of services required in our communities. It has shown how parents and families are empowered through their Family Resource Program experience and the ways in which this empowerment improves relationships with their own children, and within their neighbourhoods, schools, and communities. In the language of child and family development this is called “increased family resilience and capacity-building with better outcomes for children.”

Our hope now is that the information and experiences included in this report will enable staff, colleagues, partners, and stakeholders to better understand how FRP practices are experienced by families. We hope you can benefit from the insights we have gained into the varied journeys undertaken by families we serve, and can use such insights to guide hiring, training and support of FRP staff while utilizing this knowledge in ongoing discussions with our community and with funders. We hope that this report and its useful appendices will be shared widely within the FRP field and with colleagues and partners in early childhood care as well as with educators, funders and policy makers across the province.

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# Appendix 1

## Talking Points

The reflexive nature of this APP project and the overlapping results from the FRP parent and FRP staff focus groups resulted in more varied and valuable outputs than we could have expected. In addition to the actual Journey Maps created by parents, the focus groups also fostered the creation of this 'Talking Points' tool for ongoing use by APP project members and others engaged with, and connected to, Family Resource Programs.

*We are Family Resource Program practitioners delivering low intensity family support in a timely way, using evidence-based intentional relationship-building and instrumental help giving practices. The APP project data asserts Family Resource Programs as useful, valid and successful partners in the array of family services required in our communities.*

### **1.0 In our Family Resource Programs we see that all families with young children move through "periods of sensitivity, or challenge" with gradations of risk attached to those periods.**

1.1 Parents choose to come to a Family Resource Program not because they have a problem, but because they have a family.

1.2 It is typical, and a given, for families with young children to move into and through periods of sensitivity or challenge within, and related to, their families.

1.3 Such periods offer up single, and sometimes multiple, challenges. Depending on the initial family situation and other extenuating circumstances, periods of sensitivity or challenge can shift some families into times of (small or large) crisis, and/or can impact on the family's coping capacity.

1.4 Participating in a Family Resource Program provides families with a normalizing context for the typical everyday sensitivities and challenges they experience. This normalizing context helps parents ameliorate isolation, perceived or actual lack of parenting skills, need for child development knowledge etc. Parents tell us they learn, with relief, "I'm not the only one going through this," and become open to shared learning, problem-solving and support.

1.5 Families with consistently higher levels of risk benefit equally from participating with others in the normalizing and non-judgemental Family Resource Program context.

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## **2.0 Parents engage in consistent “movement” within the Family Resource Program.**

2.1 Movement from “I” to “we” along with an increased sense community.

2.2 Movement from “I as a mother/father” to “we, as mother, father and child/family.”

2.3 Movement from self judgment, to a sense of strength(s) and a more holistic identity or multiple identities – all factors in increased resiliency.

2.4 Movement from sensitive and challenging periods of family development to periods of coping and/or resiliency (along with improved outcomes for children and families).

## **3.0 As Family Resource Program participants gain and enhance their personal and social agency they also grow their capacity to engage in the community.**

3.1 Parents are more willing/able to “look out to community” as well as “look in to themselves.”

3.2 As they grow into this capacity, they carry the voice of their family with them.

3.3 We see the parents and families who are empowered through their Family Resource Program experiences put that empowerment to use with their own children, as well as in their neighbourhoods, schools and communities.

3.4 The language of child and family development calls such developments: “increased family resilience and capacity-building with better outcomes for children.”

## **4.0 Family Resource Program practitioners are intentional about prevention through their use of instrumental help-giving and intentional relationship-building.**

### *Maintaining a foundation for intentional prevention practice*

4.1 FRP practices and principles, and the FRP model provide the opportunity and milieu for parents/caregivers to safely, easily and consistently engage with staff and other participants about parenting and family life, its inherent joys and issues as well as arising periods of sensitivity or challenge.

4.2 The involvement of families in their community-based Family Resource Program over a period of time, (months or years of voluntary participation depending on the number and age of children) opens the door to staff/parent/participant conversations about the typical cycles of family and parenting challenges, support, follow-up, and resolution (and it keeps that door open).

### *FRP Intentional Prevention Infrastructure*

4.3 The intentional relationship-building of Family Resource Program practitioners' with participating families enables staff to respond effectively to

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these conversations (and, as appropriate, initiate them) using instrumental help-giving practices

4.4 The active use of FRP training, practices and principles by the Family Resource Programs involved in this project grounds the work of staff in holistic family support, with the child viewed within the context of the family.

*FRP Intentional Prevention supports resilience building*

4.5 FRP intentional prevention methods enable and support families in building and enhancing their personal and parenting resources and strategies. This ability to grow and utilize one's strengths to deal with life's challenges is called resilience - a cornerstone of prevention.

*FRP as Intentional Prevention Partner*

4.6 We understand clearly the difference between the use of intentional prevention practices by Family Resource Program staff and the practice of clinical intervention provided by others. Families need access to both.

**5.0 Staff view Family Resource Program parents as assets and resources for both the program and the community and, over time, FRP parents see themselves in this way as well.**

5.1 This important Family Resource Program practice builds community – both within the program as well as out in the greater community.

5.2 This is visible through: the reciprocity that exists in the program; the voluntary contributions of participants; the interdependence between participants and between participants and staff; the mentorship opportunities (linking parents with similar experiences to help transitions); participants' descriptions of their sense of belonging within the program and community

**6.0. From the project data we confidently affirm and speak to a deeper understanding of the following specific short and medium term outcomes for Family Resource Program participants (See diagrams in Appendix 4).**

6.1 Attending the Family Resource Programs enables participants to gain personal and social agency.

6.2 Attending the Family Resource Programs enable participants to gain resilience and grow their capacity to navigate the challenging periods of parenting, and mitigate related risks.

6.3 Participant commitment to the program, to their own and other families, and to their community is enhanced by involvement in volunteer and mentorship opportunities within the Family Resource Program.

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# Appendix 2

## Parent Quotes

*Sample range of participant testimonials about staff attributes, and impact of staff on themselves/family. From evaluation reports 1996 – 2009.*

"I was always worried that I wasn't being a good Mom. They gave me confidence that I am and ways to build better relationships with my children to rid of parent insecurities. I big thank-you to X and Y for teaching me different stages of different children, how to work with tempers – and to get on my knees and see the world from my children's eyes."

"At the time we first began visiting Family Place I really felt lost at times. I recall feeling overwhelmed – "what do I do?"- was how I felt. Today I usually feel very confident that as things change we can deal with new situations. I look forward to the challenges and rewards that raising children can offer instead of being afraid of the unknown. (Staff person) has been particularly helpful in this regard – thank-you so much."

"When I was first referred here by the Public Health Nurse I was very subdued about coming. Once I started and got to know the workers they made me feel comfortable. I have made some good friends who seem to go through the same things - nice to know that they and the staff are always willing to listen and try to give a positive outlook on the situation. If it wasn't for Family Place I don't know where I would be today. Thanks for everything."

"Family place is where I can bond with my son and other children. Activities, low cost lunches and staff that really care about me and my son. Free clothing exchange and lots of resources."

"I am going through post-partum with my second child and this place is wonderful. I didn't leave my house before, and now I look forward to coming here. The staff is very accommodating. They really help you by creating a fun atmosphere. They let you help too, if you want, which I find rewarding in itself. It feels good to contribute, it lets me feel a sense of accomplishment that makes me feel stronger and better for myself and my kids. They will entertain and hold my baby while I spend some positive quality time with my toddler one on one. Besides the friendly staff, meeting other families sure makes me feel connected."

"I like Family Place because I can always find an answer from staff for my questions and not feel stupid for asking it. How to also deal with my child's behaviour from negative to positive encouragement, what developmental stage

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my daughter was at. Even at rough times that I was struggling with I found still a lot of encouragement. When others turned the cheek, Family Place was always willing to help. Thank-you very much for making me a better parent for my child and community."

"Foremost, the staff make this facility great! I am a single mother of two children and place great value on the break I get when I bring my children to Family Place. This is a safe and healthy environment where I can let my children play or do a craft while I sit and enjoy a coffee and adult conversation. The staff here have been an important sounding board for me and have offered objective advice for personal issues in my life, and have been very helpful solving behavioral challenges with my youngest."

"Family Centre has always been there for me over the past 7 years when I first started another family and was dealing with being a single Mom and emotional. [Staff] were always there to lend a helpful ear. All my children (four under the age of 7) have attended programs and this allowed them to boost their self esteem. All due to the warm and caring staff. Thanks for being an essential part of my growing family."

"I really like this place – this Family Centre welcomed me with an open heart when I was very lonely. This centre protected me from being homesick. Staff is awesome, without their help I would still be prisoned in my home with the same old walls. I really appreciate what they are doing for us.

"I am inspired by the encouraging and enthusiastic staff. They are 'Mother Teresa's' in training! Always have encouraging words, helpful, resourceful, and willing to help and go the extra mile. I am so thankful I've moved to such a caring community."

"The staff have very much touched my life, especially (staff person). She listened when I needed it. She supported me in any way possible and let me know I was not alone. Thanks!"

## Appendix 3

### Meeting Schedule

In Phase 1 of the project lasted from February 2009 to July 2009. During this time the working group met twice, first to identify issues, develop the project arc and gave direction to the project consultant and second to review the content analysis

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and literature reviews (focusing on staff practices and staff-client relationships) and discuss those findings in order to give direction for phase two. Phase 2 took place between February 2011 to July 2011 (due to funding delays, the project was in hiatus from fall 2009 until late 2010). During this phase the working group first reviewed the project history and completed analyses and then initiated further, more hands-on research. This was then reviewed and discussed in two focus groups and one meeting with external 'expert' consultants. The working group then worked with the project consultant and the Federation to compile and shape the project's overall results and findings.

### **Preliminary Working Group Meeting. April 21, 2009.**

*Attendees: working group representatives from Family Resource Programs in Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Hope; facilitator Jennifer Charlesworth, Federation of Community Social Services of BC; project consultant Diana Ellis; consultant Carol Matusicky.*

**Process & discussion:** Exploration of structural and practical challenges faced in FRP services.

**Key Notes:** Lack of funding & space; inadequate understanding of FRP practices/program by ministries, funders, as well as the community at large.

**Process & discussion:** Discussion about what could we do more of.

**Key Notes:** The need to "develop our FRP case and learn more about sensitive periods of family & child development."

**Process & discussion:** Review of "what makes people proud in their service delivery?"

**Key Notes:** Relationship building, responsiveness, ability to be professional without being clinical, creativity, being innovative.

**Process & discussion:** Discussion about "what this work entails; who we serve and how do we serve them?"

**Key Notes:** Developed framework and diagram of the families served categorized: high risk, medium risk, low risk. Discussed the sensitive/challenging periods of development that occur at different child/family stages and the ways in which FRP staff are with families at all risk levels and as they move into/through different levels and those specific challenges.

**Process & discussion:** Examination of practices that we think or know to work well already

**Key Notes:** Belief in strengths based asset development; transference of knowledge/understanding; belief in parent's own capacity; belief in holistic, inclusive, and universal programs.

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**Process & discussion:** Discussion about “what else we need to know to make a stronger case for the value of FRPs and what else do we need to do to improve those practices.”

**Key Notes:** Desire to discover practices that: enhance family connectivity and communication; enhance family resiliency; increase parents’ belief in their own resilience (which all will result in better child development outcomes and reduced child vulnerability.)

### **Next steps?**

A review and analysis of existing regional FRP evaluation data to identify what participants claim to have learned and to determine the role of staff in that learning.

A comprehensive literature review on the qualities and impact of FRP staff practices.

### **Secondary Working Group Meeting. July 8, 2009.**

*Attendees: FRP representatives from Abbotsford, Chilliwack, Hope; facilitator Jennifer Charlesworth; project consultant Diana Ellis; consultant Carol Matusicky.*

**Process & discussion:** Review and analysis of 13 years of CAPC evaluations done by this group (incorporating 2,290 feedback forms).

**Key Notes:** Review of open ended comments shows 40% of participants discussed learning about parenting, 20% learned about “themselves,” 30% learned about community. Content re-affirmed discussions points from April 9th, 2011 meeting regarding pride in service delivery, practices that we know to work, as well as understanding and addressing parent-child attachment. Determined/uncovered sixty-four unique key words used by participants to describe staff – all of which aligned with literature review findings regarding staff attributes that “work” or are “required.”

**Process & discussion:** Literature review and discussion of findings.

**Key Notes:** Bronfenbrenner (1970's), Dunst/Trivette (1980's) and all Canadian/BC FRP studies speak of critical importance of relationship-building between staff & participants; however, evaluators concerned with rigor often express concern about how to measure social support and relationship development.

**Process & discussion:** What are the qualities and characteristics of FRP practitioners? How does and what is the impact of varying staff practice on participants?

**Key Notes:** Qualities and characteristics of FRP staff elsewhere match what we see in our own FRPs. Most of reviewed literature does not document impact of varying staff practice on participants.

**Process & discussion:** How can a low key community based FRP can act as a

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therapeutic intervention? How can community connections help parenting?

**Key Notes:** There was an important practice theme of 'Social Support & Social Capital' in recent Canadian studies. Affirmation from articles (including Dunst, 1995) speak to the value of ecological approaches: "the well being of children is dependent on the well being of the family – which is dependent on quality of life and community resources."

### **Next steps?**

Subsequent research should focus on parent-subjects: what do practitioners do that helps parents shift from reluctant to engaged, from needy to giving, from timid to courageous, from being more anxious about their child to being less anxious?

### **2011 Working Group Meeting. February 24, 2011.**

*Attendees: FRP representatives from Abbotsford, Agassiz, Chilliwack, Hope; project consultant Diana Ellis.*

**Process & discussion:** Review of project and proposed steps, tasks, and timeline. Next Steps for Fraser APP Research revisited and determined.

**Key Notes:** Agreement to proceed with parent/participant focus groups. Decisions made regarding date, selection criteria, confidentiality process, invitations, number of participants, site, food, childcare, transport, etc. Agreement to follow up with staff focus group to review participant "journey maps" for their observation and discussion of staff role. Agreement to set up consultation with outside experts. Agreement to review all findings June 2011.

### **Participant Focus Group. April 11, 2011.**

*Attendees: Parent participants from five different Family Resource Programs; project consultant Diana Ellis.*

**Process & discussion:** Participants mapped their involvement over time with the FRPs each had attended. Participants asked to specifically look at connections and relationships made with staff, what staff did to help them gain parenting skills and knowledge, and staff roles in helping and/or facilitating changes/shifts in their lives.

**Key Notes:** Participants presented journey maps to others in the focus group. Parent descriptions of how staff worked with them aligned with the sixty-four "descriptive staff words" determined in the evaluation content analysis, July, 2009. Participants detailed relationships, growth, connections to other participants and community, as was described in the literature review. Parents expressed how: "the number one skill that staff have is the ability to observe all of us and then adapt and tailor their responses and skill set to each person's observed needs."

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### **FRP Staff Focus Group. May 13, 2011.**

*Attendees: Staff from five FRPs located in Abbotsford, Agassiz, Chilliwack, and Hope; project consultant Diana Ellis.*

**Process & discussion:** Staff participants reviewed the various parents' journey maps and developed their own maps of the "what, when, why" of interaction with the parent from their perspective. Each staff participant presented what they had drawn/written, specifically looking at the intention behind their practice with this particular parent.

**Key Notes:** Staff described their intentions behind practice with more depth than they had expected or imagined, including intentional ways of setting up the physical FRP space, and being intentional in guiding discussion with groups of parents. All found commonality with and between parents regarding the first questions asked (i.e. "How are your children sleeping?" "How are you doing since we last saw one another?").

### **External Consultant Session. May 24, 2011.**

*Attendees: Marianne Drew Pennington, Executive Director, BC Association of Family Resource Programs; Carol Matusicky, former Executive Director of BC Coalition for Families; working group member Sue Khazaie, project consultant Diana Ellis.*

**Process & discussion:** External consultants review and respond to APP project material and recent focus group findings including parent journey maps and staff overlay/response maps.

**Key Notes:** Material/findings show periods of [family/child development] sensitivity and challenges experienced by all families; materials/findings provide 'a picture of prevention'; materials/findings identify the gradations of risk experienced in/by different families.

### **Final Working Group Session. June 20, 2011.**

*Attendees: Staff from four FRPs located in Abbotsford, Agassiz, Chilliwack; facilitator Jennifer Charlesworth; consultants Carol Matusicky and Marianne Drew Pennington; project consultant Diana Ellis.*

**Process & discussion:** The group reviewed project process and findings. Discussed prevention, intentionality of staff work, use of instrumental help-giving practices, outcomes for parents, child, families, community, and gradations of risk.

**Key Notes:** Parents show forms of movement or shifts while attending FRP (from "I" to "we"; from low self-judgment to sense of strength; into, through, and out of periods of sensitivity and challenge within their family.) FRP staff accompany parents throughout these periods.

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### Next steps?

Identify and affirm deepened understanding of specific outcomes and practices; use parent journey maps and staff overlays to develop charts showing parent journeys and shifts, intentional practices, and instrumental help-giving, as well as outcomes; and use findings to develop “talking points” working group use and dissemination of findings.

## Appendix 4

### Parent Journey Maps

The illustrations that follow are the combined work of FRP practitioners and parent participants. The parent journey maps were drawn during the parent focus groups, and the staff focus group drawings and descriptions of their engagement with parents were added during the staff focus group.

The maps illustrate the self-described situations of a range of parent participants coming into and through the Family Resource Program and include observations by FRP staff and examples of intentional relationship-building and instrumental help giving methods provided by FRP staff to parents. The maps provide a holistic picture of the typical range of engagement between parents, staff, other parents, the Family Resource Program, and their communities as well as a holistic picture of the relationship between FRP staff practice and FRP participant outcomes. We hope that the maps will be used as a teaching and training tool within Family Resource Programs and as a basis for 'storytelling' about the work of Family Resource Programs illustrating the work of Family Resource Programs and resulting participant outcomes.

Upon review, the APP working group found the focus group results deepened their insights into other various project findings, most specifically relating to the following three outcomes: how/why participants gain personal and social agency; how/why participants have increased capacity to navigate the typically challenging periods of parenting; and how/why volunteering and mentorship opportunities within the family resource program enhance participant commitment to the program, the community, and their own and other families.

## Family Resource Program Outcomes Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example One



Mother's Situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff:

- new to community
- few friends
- felt unconnected
- several children under age 3, post partum depression experienced with each
- expresses feeling overwhelmed
- had linked with a Public Health Nurse
- "once I said I wanted to yell at my child..."
- "I'm not enough for my kids, I'm not crafty."

*Instrumental help-giving*

- FRP staff asked if she would welcome other Mums new to the FRP and help get them connected, especially those with PPD
- sit and talk with them
- she did this, and has gone on, with encouragement, to start a Parent Group.

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship  
building*

- FRP staff listened, encouraged her to attend parenting support group
- she felt good learning she was not alone in her PPD and she connected with other parents in this group

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship  
building*

- FRP staff said "FRP can be an outlet for you!" asked if she'd like to help with reading to children and at craft table – has done this and now helps lead child activities.

APP Outcomes::

1. Parent gained personal and social agency
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
2. Parent commitment to program, community, their own & other families enhanced by involvement in volunteer and mentorship at the FRP.

- now actively volunteers at FRP, and an FRP "booster"
- feels accomplished & useful as a helping "Mom" at the FRP, & contributor to community
- considering employment opportunities
- mentoring other mothers with post partum depression

## Family Resource Program Outcomes Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example Two

2

- FRP staff "would just sit and listen to me when I needed someone to talk to..."  
 - would let her stay while we cleaned up after others had gone because that's when she was comfortable talking, and we could ask questions."  
 - FRP staff "we listened, then talked about choices and I shared my own parenting story with her"

- FRP staff "helped me find outside support through another local agency to help with my older child."  
 - FRP staff "held & played with my little one so I could visit with others and have a break"

- FRP staff "asked her opinion about programs and she offered input – then asked if she'd like to volunteer"  
 - parent took on organizing FRP event, was "nervous but willing." Is still quiet, but "has so much fun doing activities together..."

- younger child enjoys FRP activities, has learned new skills, plays with others, separation anxiety decreased, older child receiving appropriate assistance  
 - parent a willing FRP participant & volunteer, advocates for FRP, has made friends  
 - found a parent to help with childcare

Mother's situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff:  
 - several children of varying age;  
 - concerns about older child's behavior and development; anxious toddler  
 - shy with staff & other parents, preferred to "talk only when just the staff are around"  
 - attended pregnancy support group, then bridged to FRP  
 - sole parent, "I needed someone to talk to"  
 - felt unconnected to community

*Intentional relationship building*

*Instrumental help-giving & intentional relationship building*

*Instrumental help-giving*

### APP Outcomes

1. Parent gained personal and social agency.
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
3. Participant commitment to program, community, their own & other families enhanced by volunteer and mentorship opportunities within the FRP.

## Family Resource Program Outcomes Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example Three

3

Mother's situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff:

- new to country, community, unconnected
- arrived with toddler, now several children
- one child is high spirited and active, staff observe her saying "he is trying to drive me crazy!"
- needed language support, wanted to learn Canadian customs and employment skills

*Instrumental help-giving*

- FRP staff introduced her to other mothers new to Canada, referred to immigrant services
- FRP staff observe parent's abilities, asked her to help lead a parent program
- parent asks about other agency programs, encouraged to take them, FRP staff strive to "help her grow the way she wants."

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship  
building*

- FRP staff engaged first child "he is learning new skills, loves staff, is having fun!" Mom relaxes at FRP.
- FRP staff encouraged involvement at pregnancy support program, parent made links with others, supported in parenting
- FRP staff spend time helping parent understand & normalize older child's high activity level "it is his temperament, not your fault...", provide information, encouraged parent to take respite time.

APP Outcomes:

1. Parent gained personal and social agency.
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
3. Parent commitment to program, community, their own & other families enhanced by involvement in volunteer and mentorship at the FRP.

- parent leads parent volunteer group in community
- parent finds "childcare mom" at FRP
- parent gets advice from child development centre, pre-school support
- gets educational assessment, now enrolling in degree program in profession "to help me give back to community"

## Family Resource Program Outcomes Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example Four

4

Mom arrives at FRP trying another community program that was inappropriate for age of child and for her own needs as parent

- finds FRP home-like set up welcoming, "I came regularly as it gave me a reason to get out of bed"
- describes FRP staff "pulling up a child size chair, with her coffee, and asking me if my baby was sleeping....which sure opened me up."
- FRP staff gave information to help normalize child's behavior, checked in at every visit, observed, encouraged.

- learned from observing others, met friends "that fit our style", asked questions
- learned about & went to parenting class, picked up parenting and care skills
- FRP staff learned parent has many skills & encouraged her to share them as a volunteer
- she was willing: "gives me more purpose."

- child settling in to family, happy to be with other toddlers
- parent responded to FRP's warm setting & non-judgmental philosophy
- encouraged to apply her many skills to volunteering at FRP, felt useful
- building her own community in and out of the FRP

Mother's situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff

- new entry to late motherhood and parenting after demanding long term career
- child new to Canada, getting adjusted to "new" parents
- recent move from city to rural area, no family, and partner's commute means long daily absence
- "feeling lonely, trapped in house," and thus "feeling brain-dead"

*Intentional relationship building*

*Instrumental help-giving*

### APP Outcomes

1. Parent regained personal & social agency.
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
3. Parent commitment to program, community, their own and other families enhanced by involvement in volunteer & mentorship at the FRP

## Family Resource Program Outcomes Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example Five

5

Mother's situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff:

- new to area
- at FRP throughout several pregnancies, one "late" and unexpected
- post-partum & self esteem issues
- child development worries for both children, anxiety

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship  
building*

- shared worries about child development with FRP staff who said "If you don't know what it's about, and I'm not sure, why not check with the Child Development Centre... she did, child eventually entered specific program to help prepare for school."

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship  
building*

- FRP staff encouraged:
- Attendance at Post Partum Support group, parent made connections with other mothers
  - connection to Health Programs and Public Health
  - attendance at Prenatal Support Program
  - going to Wellness Program "to work on self, get me back."

APP Outcomes:

1. Parent gained personal and social agency.
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
3. Parent commitment to program, community, their own & other families enhanced by involvement in volunteer & mentorship at FRP

- over time, FRP staff encourage and support parent to participate in range of FRP child and parenting programs
- with encouragement, parent makes connections to external assistance
- parent says "FRP is so connected to the community, like a hub, helped me find services & supports I needed"
- FRP staff ask parent to speak publicly/ advocate on behalf of Family Resource Programs because of her experience at FRP

## Family Resource Program Outcomes

### Parent 'Journey Maps' - Example Six

Mother's situation as described by her and observed by FRP staff:

- blended family, some with special needs
- at FRP through several pregnancies
- sometimes 'times were tough,' kids hungry
- no vehicle
- over time, experienced range of typical life challenges (deaths in family, crisis situations)

- transport provided in agency van,
- staff take opportunities to listen/talk 1 on 1
- FRP staff help with finding material support: hampers, trips to food bank etc.
- parent attends parenting program, finds assistance with special needs

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship building*

- parent says "FRP staff treat everyone equally, so we all learn about the free programs – there's no stigma"
- parents says "after I tell her something tough that's happened, she asks how the whole family is doing, makes me feel like a 'whole' person."

*Instrumental help-giving  
& intentional relationship building*

#### APP Outcomes

1. Parent gained personal and social agency.
2. Parent "grew" her capacity to navigate typically challenging periods of parenting.
3. Parent commitment to program, community, their own and other families enhanced by involvement in volunteer and mentorship at FRP.

- FRP staff provide emotional and resource support as appropriate, through listening, suggesting referrals, support parent's own pro-activity
- parent gets connected with range of assistance and other parents, goes to FRP parties, events, family outings
- parent says "FRP are like my family"

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# Appendix 5

## Literature Review

Over the past 25 years in Canada there has been continued, progressing, and progressive work in the FRP field. This includes research, development of curriculum/training, evaluation methods/tools, and FRP standards of practice.

Bronfenbrenner, in the 1970's, evaluated the first Head Start programs, and stated that although children made gains, these were lost a few years into school. He stated that parent involvement with children was more effective in achieving long-term gains in child development. He spoke of the ecological theory of families: development focuses on the child's capacity to understand and shape the world in which s/he lives (cited in Dym, 1988).

Dunst and Trivette (1988) speak of the importance of social relationships in early intervention and support to families. They remain consistent with investigation into this area – Carol Trivette spoke at the 2009 FRP Canada conference about this very topic. Their findings continue to resonate with the family support role of FRP's.

The FRP studies nearly always spoke of the value of staff fostering respectful relationships with participants. (Kyle, 1993; Kyle & Kellerman, 1998; Mueller, 1996; LA County Planning Council, 2001; Bruner, 2004).

Evaluators and researchers concerned about rigorous evaluation with control groups and strongly stated theories of change express concern about how to conceive or measure social support and relationship. (Cleary, 1988,; Connell & Kubisch, 1998; Peters, 2000, 2009).

For instance, recent Canadian-based reviews of FRP's actually ask participants what relationship looks and feels like, and get rich insights of relationship impact from participants (Silver et al, 2004, Mann, 2008).

### Method

This literature was undertaken to build on the findings of the completed content analysis of 13 years of feedback from parent/caregiver participants at family resource programs in 5 communities. The literature review focused specifically on certain aspect of FRP programs, clients and staff: relationship building; the qualities and characteristics of people doing FRP work; the impact staff practice has on participants/clients; how low-key community based FRPs can act as a

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therapeutic interventions; and how community connections help parenting. Certain key words were identified for literature review purposes: family support staff practices, early childhood staff practices, empowering families, family resource program staff practices, family resource programs, family resource centres, FRP/C evaluation. Key websites that were visited/utilized were: Harvard Family Research Program, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, Centre for Children at University of Chicago, Orelena Hawks Puckett Institute, Human Early Learning Program, Ryerson Institute, BC Association of Family Resource Programs, Ontario Early Years Program, Alberta Parent Link Program, ERIC. Researchers also reviewed relevant documents from personal and organizational resource libraries before preparing the following overall list (sorted by topic area), commentary and analysis.

## 1. Standards, Practices, and Methods in Family Resource Programs

Alberta Children's Services, *Parent Links Program Guidelines and Best Practices*, excerpted from *Parent Links: A network of resource centres serving parents, caregivers and children in Alberta*, 2004.

- 12 page basic list with a focus on community partnerships, referrals, coordinated, integrated community-based approach, and parent involvement.
- Only comments re staff skills are: "will have human services diploma and/or appropriate life experience and personal characteristics; understand theory and practice of family support service delivery and ECD, model appropriate interaction with children."

Best Start Expert Panel, *Early Learning for Every Child Today: A framework for Ontario Early Childhood Settings*, Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007. (This is the document that introduces the notion of all day Kindergarten/pre-school for Ontario children.)

- The "Into Practice" section gives four pages of examples of good practice and three pages of Guidelines for Practice.
- Practices pertinent to staff include: communication; involve and connect families; referrals; create sense of belonging and acceptance for children; ECD curriculum planning; focus on "Play as a means to learning."
- In the Statement of Principles section, the final principle states "Knowledgeable and responsive early childhood practitioners are essential to early childhood settings, and are reflective practitioners." Reflective means:
  - use an emotionally warm and positive approach;
  - integrate theoretical frameworks, research findings and their own daily experiences to guide their interactions;

- communicate to family/caregivers about what they are doing and why;
- understand and seek out opportunities to support interactions between young children and parents/caregivers that build on child's interests/skills,
- articulate how play promotes learning and optimal development;
- coach family/caregivers on how to participate in play that encourages exploration, language/numeracy;
- also know and respect that parents and families remain the experts on their own children;
- participate in play, guiding children's planning, decision-making, communication (a lot more here on guidance in children's play).

BC Association of Family Resource Programs, *Working to Make A Difference: Guidelines for Best Practices in Family Resource Programs*, BC Association of Family Resource Programs, 2004.

- Describes reflective practice, follows FRP Canada Guiding Principles of Family support, provides many varied examples of effective staff practice.
- Describes "Six Valued Practices:" in physical space and design; promoting engagement, promote and build relationships; promote family development; strengthen communities; governance and administration.
- Key words related to staff skills: facilitate connections, promote parent child attachment, promote child development, respectful, trusting, empowering relationships, respect diversity, well-trained, ecological perspective, stimulating creative play, neighbourly, accessible, flexible, engaging, strengths-based, build community capacity.

Ellis, Diana, Barbeau, Elizabeth, *BC Association of Family Resource Programs: Provincial Standards of Practice*, FRP-BC, 2009.

- Section B outlines standards for staff engagement with families, building relationships, encouraging family development and supporting families.
- Key words for staff practices:: greet, welcome, encourage, promote, nurture trusting respectful relationships with participants/clients, strengthen relationships, provide opportunities for children to learn through creative and imaginative play, help participants understand relationship between play/learning, warmth, acceptance, trusted communication and linkage, listen, assess, communicate respectfully, build on family strengths.

FRP Canada, *The guiding principles of family support*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 2002.

- Key words related to staff practice: open to all families, complement existing services, partnership, promote wellness, strengthen, ecological perspective, encourage mutual assistance/peer support, affirm parenting, voluntary, promote relationships based on equality and respect for diversity, advocate non-violence, reflect on practice.

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FRP Canada, *Certified Canadian Family Educator's Code of Professional Conduct*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, revised August 2007.

- Key words related to staff practice: Honesty, fairness, integrity, respect, mutual trust, positive attitude (non-judgmental climate, protect sense of safety and well-being of all families, treat all families impartially, equitably, sensitively, and respect rights and opinions of families.

Healthy Families America, *Characteristics of Effective Home Visitors*, 2002

- Key words related to staff practice: non-judgmental nature, compassion, ability to establish a trusting relationship with families, willingness and motivation to provide service.
- Usually paraprofessionals are “workers who do not possess formal educational credentials in their field of employment, a diverse group, typically have some college education, specialized training and experience.”
- “While programs should select the most qualified home visitors possible, educational credentials should not be emphasized over experience, interpersonal skills and other skills related to this work.”

Hornsby, Noreen, *A Guide to Best Practices of Ontario Early Years Centres*, Provincial Network – Effective Practices and Training Committee, 2007.

- Staff and family work together in a relationship based on equality and respect.
- Uses FRP Canada Guiding Principles of Family support.
- Key words related to staff practices: engaging in reflective practice, communicating effectively, providing welcoming environment, building relationships, providing support, role modeling best practice, collaboration, adapting to meet family needs, encouraging families to connect, engaging with families, play that supports child learning, that adults have a key role in children's play. (Strong focus on importance of child's freedom to play.)

Kyle, Irene, *Towards an Understanding of Best Practices in Family Resource Programs*, in *Canadian Approaches to Family Support*, A collection of papers by Irene J. Kyle, M.Sc., Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 1993.

- Early work (in Canada) on articulating what an FRP is, and how FRP's differ from other methods of supporting families. Key words related to staff skills: enhancing parental capacity, empowering parents, community-based, focus on “how” staff work with families.
- Cites work by others in the field also articulating values such as families as part of an ecological system, interdependence, strengths-based service, family empowerment (Weissbourd, Kagan, Dunst, Trivette.)

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Mann, Betsy, *What Works for Whom? Promising Practices in Parenting Education*. Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 2008.

- Talks about drawing on the “practice wisdom” of experienced practitioners to understand what works in parenting education.
- Key words for staff practice in doing parenting education effectively: empathy, warmth, caring, commitment, humility, respect for differences, ability to share power, able to build sense of partnership with participants, good knowledge, and facilitation skills.
- Describes two clusters of family help giving practice as named by Dunst and Trivette: Relational (active listening, compassion, empathy, strengthening mutual trust and interpersonal relationships), and Participatory (The extent to which parents are involved in deciding what knowledge they need and how they want to acquire it, i.e. giving choice, supporting participants' life goals, focusing family's view of their needs/experience, and including participants in decision-making and evaluation.)

Silver, Susan, Berman, Rachel, Wilson, Sue, *What Participants Value: Practices and Outcomes at Family Resource Programs*, Ryerson University and the Research Committee of the (Toronto) Metro Association of Family Resource Programs. (2005)

- Major qualitative study designed to capture unique contributions of FRP's. 40 individual interviews, 21 focus groups = 220 participants involved across Canada.
- Four practice themes emerged from the data collected: Family Engagement; Empowerment; Social support & Social Capital; Building Community.
- Project identified theme-based evaluation indicators and developed an evaluation tool (Keeping Track) consisting of 35 indicators, grouped by each practice theme.
- Key words re staff attributes/practices: welcoming, inclusive, generate sense of belonging to community, trustworthy, respectful, resourceful, engage and connect with children, open, non-judgmental, ensure confidentiality, supportive, establish non-hierarchical relationships with all participants, power-with (not power-over), shared decision-making, know the names of children and adults, accommodate to different comfort levels of participants

Reilly, Rosemary C., *Characteristics of Family Education, in Play and Parenting*, Newsletter of the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, Fall 2008.

- Key words re staff practices/attributes: educated in core knowledge areas of family education and have personal qualities to create a positive learning environment which include: empathy, warmth, caring, openness,

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positive regard, respect, compassion, communication competency.

## 2. Evaluations and reviews of other Family Resource Programs

Ellis, Diana, *Case Studies of Family Resource Programs in the Lower Mainland Area*, BC Association of Family Resource Programs and United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2000.

- What brings people in the door? Key words: warm, caring staff, comfortable safe environment, acceptance, welcoming,

Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, *Promising Practice Profiles*, Sydney Family Resource Centre, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2006.

- Describes separate (yet seamless) services of Resource Centre. Services are: facilitated playgroups, toy library with ECE teacher, individual family support.
- Strong focus on play and toys, belief that play "normalises family engagement with the program."
- Key words for staff practice: trusted relationship with participants, play-focused, trans-disciplinary, provide information, support positive parenting practices, affirm existing parenting practices, child-centred & family-focused.

Florida Partnership for Parent Involvement, *Family Empowerment Parent Tip 4 – Parents "Rights,"* Florida Centre for Parent Involvement, 1999.

- Tip sheet describes parents' bill of rights, which has implications for staff practice. The rights are: The right to feel, to be informed, to be empowered, to be accepted, to take care of themselves, to gather with other parents.

FRP Canada, *E-Evaluation ON-Line evaluation for family resource programs, Summary of 2008-2008 Survey Results*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 2008.

- Summary of 07/08 results of on-line evaluation process, with 3,360 FRP participant respondents, 280 staff & volunteer respondents. Participants located in Ontario (94%), Alberta (4%), Manitoba (1%). 84% are Ontario Early Years Programs. "FRP's" responded.
- Questions of participants focus on ten themes including these which are directly related to staff practices:
- Engaging families with a welcoming atmosphere and respectful staff (98% strongly/moderately agree this happened),
- Enhanced family participation (96% strongly/moderately agreed this happened),

- Opportunities for me to become involved in decision-making about programming/operations (75% strongly/moderately agreed this happened).
- As well, 89% reported feeling more supported in their roles as parents/caregivers.

Kyle, Irene, Kellerman, Maureen, *Case Studies of Canadian Family Resource Programs*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 1998.

- Good practices as described by staff in this review are: holistic approach, respecting diversity, nurturing families and children, strengthening family bonds, promoting reciprocity and mutuality, responsive/flexible/accessible programs, building trust, politically aware, create safe, caring place for families to come.

Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council, *Family Resource Centres - L.A.'s Opportunity to Strengthen and Support Families: A report to the Los Angeles County Children's and Families First Proposition 10 Commission*, 2001.

- Review of 17 family resource centre sites to document methods and lessons.
- Lessons learned (and these all apply to staff practices) are:
  - FRC's exist on a developmental continuum;
  - Supporting and strengthening families requires a non-traditional approach. (Non-traditional words included responsive, empowering, strengthen, support, community-based, family-focused.) This was noted as setting them apart from traditional public services for families and further said this finding was consistent with the professional literature they reviewed.
  - Relationships matter most.
  - Allowing families to define services builds the trust required to engage them at a deeper level.
  - Authentic inclusion of consumers in an FRC governance structure requires substantial financial and other investment.
  - No single long-term funding exists for FRC's, most depend on funding patchwork to help sustain themselves.
  - Results of FRC programs and services are difficult to measure.
- Key words related to staff practices: strengthen, respectful, holistic, community-based, family-focused, empowering, responsive, strengthen, support, welcoming, willing to engage at participant level, staff do not assume they know best what families need.

Mueller, Marsha R., *Immediate Outcomes of Lower-Income Participants in Minnesota's Universal Access Early Childhood Family Education*, Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, 1996.

- Extensive evaluation of state-wide Early Childhood Family Education program from late 1980's through to report date of 1996. Widely cited.
- Some conclusions include family improvement, effectiveness of universal approach for many different low-income families.
- Recommendation related to staff practice states: "Work on building meaningful relationship based on understanding and trust with every parent. The time, interest and attention focused on study families improved their involvement in ECFE as well as staff knowledge of families. In-depth staff understanding of families and parent participation supports children and parent change. Relationship-building between parents/ children/staff and families is the central premise. Reacting with interest, (their emphasis) as soon as possible, to each and every family, is vital."

Powell, Robot, Seaton, Nia, *A Treasure Chest of Service: The Role of Toy Libraries within Play Policy in Wales*. Slough, National Foundation for Education Research, 2007.

- Research undertaken to uncover breadth and depth of work that Toy Libraries actually do. In fact, they are (as we well know in Canada) the precursor to fully-fledged Family Resource Programs. Services offered as well as lending toys include: play work and support/outreach play sessions ; family support and advice ; targeted support to specific groups; providing resources for a variety of practitioners.
- Key success factors, as related to staff practice: partnership work with other services and organizations; provision of non-threatening and welcoming services ; flexibility in service delivery and approach; commitment and enthusiasm of staff and volunteers; high quality resources and experiences.

Waddell, Bruce, Shannon, Michael, Durr, Rea, *Using Family Resource Centres to support California's young children and their families: Building Community Systems for Young Children*. UCLA Centre for Healthier Children, 2001.

- Report provides policymakers and others with working information about Family Resource Centres.
- 13 Attributes and core competencies named, those directly related to staff practice: Empowerment (conscious effort to provide users with knowledge, tools, coaching to enable them to take more responsibility for their lives, and permits users to participate in planning and operation.); trust relationships (bedrock for development of an effective centre); Context (children are served in the context of their family and community); collaboration, competence, and developmental focus to the activities.

### **3. Theories and Analysis of Family Support and Family Strengthening**

Bouffard, Suzanne, Weiss, Heather, *Thinking Big: A New Framework for Family*

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*Involvement Policy, Practice and Research*, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume 14, No. 1 & 2, Spring 2008. Harvard Family Research Project.

- This was read and included only because it reflects the shift in thinking in places like the Harvard Family Research Program, which used to provide much research and evaluation guidance on family support, and has now moved largely towards investigation of Family Involvement Policy, especially in education and what is called Out of School Time (OST).
- Theory is that families play a crucial role in children's school success and that parent behaviour, beliefs and attitudes affect children's cognitive development, behaviour and even the establishment of achievement gaps.
- They identify three components for a framework of effective family involvement policies and practices:
  - Family involvement occurs in all the contexts where children and youth live/learn and should be part of a broader complementary learning approach.
  - Family involvement matters from birth through adolescence but changes as children mature.
  - Family involvement must be co-constructed and characterized by mutual responsibility among families, schools, other institutions and stakeholders.
  - Also note recent research that demonstrates benefits of family involvement during transitions.
  - Co-constructed relationships between stakeholders (and this is where staff skills come in) are characterized by: trust, shared values, ongoing bi-directional communication, mutual respect and attention to all parties needs and expertise.

Bruner, Charles, *Rethinking the Evaluation of Family Strengthening Strategies: Beyond Traditional program Evaluation Models*, The Evaluation Exchange, Volume X, No. 2, Summer 2004, Harvard Family Research Program.

- Oft-cited piece notes danger of focusing only on outcomes in family strengthening efforts. There is a need to conduct evaluations that will build a body of credible evidence of what factors contribute to success in strengthening families, under what conditions, for what types of families.
- Points to recognize related to staff practice: Relationships and practices, not program structure or curriculum, are key to achieving success. And, that effective family strengthening programs and strategies create social capital (which is not measurable through a subject/treatment/impact approach).
- Key words related to staff practice: trust building, nurturing human growth and development, genuine relationships.

Connell, James P., Kubisch, Anne C., *Theories of Change: A Powerful Approach to Evaluating Family Support Programs*, Family Resource Coalition of America – Report, Vol 16, No. 4, Winter 1998.

- Describes (and cites others in doing so) the difficulty of evaluating Family Support Programs because of their complexity, flexible and evolving nature, need for a wide range of info for continuous learning. States that the "theory of change" underlying such complex programs is poorly articulated, thus they are difficult to evaluate.
- Notes that a theory of change asks that program planners be clear about ultimate outcomes but also the avenues used to achieve those ends.
- Theory of change approach to evaluation requires specifying, evaluating and revisiting the "pathways of change" - that is, the relationship between activities and outcomes.

Cleary, Paul D., *Social Support: Conceptualization and Measurement*, in *Evaluating Family Programs* (Ed. Weiss, Jacobs), Aldine de Gruyter, 1988

- Makes points made about "the provision or facilitation of social support is frequently a central goal of family programs, but there is little consensus as to how it is best conceived or measured, or what the processes are by which it promotes families."
- Describes ample evidence that shows social support makes a difference, but that evaluation does not look at what/how. Describes difficulty in understanding just what social support is and variation of experience for each person attending a program.
- Cites House (1981) identifying four major types of support: instrumental (actual assistance with a chore etc), informational (teaching etc), appraisal (i.e. reassuring someone that their feelings are 'normal'), emotional (expression of love and concern.).

CYFERNET Evaluation Team (Peterson, Marek, Mancini, Collins, Brock, Betts), *Research to Support Programs for Children, Youth and Families at Risk*. 2009  
<http://www.csrees.usda.gov/nea/family/cyfar/philosophy.html>.

- This group did extensive research/literature review and identified six key components of successful and effective programs re children and youth at risk. Successful and effective programs are:
  - Guided by program theory in their development, implementation, evaluation and sustainability. (Sustainability elements: leadership competence, effective collaboration, understanding the community, demonstrating program results, staff involvement and integration, program responsiveness. Mancini & Marek, 2003)
  - Involve participants and their families in meaningful ways. (meaningful 1-1 relationships between participants and staff, providing services 'respectfully, ungrudgingly, collaboratively' (Schorr/Both, 1991),
  - Are comprehensive to meet the multiple needs of individuals, families and communities. (Programmers must understand the impact of society upon the individual and conduct programming that simultaneously provides services to participants, their families and peers, schools, and or larger

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communities.)

- Create supportive environments for children, youth and families. (critical components of supportive environment include nurturing consistent relationships between program providers and participants, and participants; well trained staff able to communicate effectively and are knowledgeable about child/human development, physical and psychologically safe environment. A supportive environment is one in which participants feel welcome, safe, valued for their unique characteristics and strengths, and are challenged to develop new skills and competencies.)
- Promote resilience in individuals, families and communities (identify and support the strengthening of existing protective factors and assets of program participants – at individual, family and community level, and encourage building of new assets and skills that will aid individuals and families at times of stress).
- Are characterized by collaboration among individuals, agencies and organizations. (Staff collaborative working relationships reduce duplication of efforts, bring multiple resources to address multiple needs, create higher quality programs, lead to comprehensive system of care, info exchange and support for kids, youth ,families and communities.)

Dunst, Carl J., Trivette, Carol M., *Toward Experimental Evaluation of the Family, Infant and Preschool Program*, in *Evaluating Family Programs* (Ed. Weiss, Jacobs), Aldine de Gruyter, 1988.

- Describes an evaluation of Family/Infant and Preschool Program providing early intervention to families with physically or mentally disabled children or developmentally at risk children.
- Puts forward a social support construct of five components: relational (existence and quantity of social relationships); Structural (characteristics of social networks including durability, stability, feelings, reciprocity); constitutional (individuated need for help, availability of help, type offered); Support Satisfaction (extent to which assistance and aid is viewed as helpful and useful).
- Speaks of evidence showing that social support has positive influences on personal/family health, directly and indirectly influences attitudes towards parenting, parenting styles of interaction and parent attitudes/ expectations and aspirations for their children, child behaviour and development.
- Leads to Dunst's broader based definition of early intervention as "provision of support to families of infants and young children from members of informal and formal social support networks that impact both directly and indirectly upon parent, family and child functioning."
- Results of their evaluation suggest that the negative consequences often associated with rearing of child with developmental problems can be lessened or even alleviated when the members of a family's informal support network are mobilized to strengthen personal and familial well-

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being and buffer negative effects.

- IMPACT for staff practice: a primary staff responsibility is “making a family’s social support system work” – not replacing or supplanting the functions that others provide, but helping to mobilize those functions. And, to focus on what the children/families can do, rather than not do.

Dym, Barry, *Ecological Perspectives on Change in Families, in Evaluating Family Programs* (Ed. Weiss, Jacobs), Aldine de Gruyter, 1988.

- Long discursive piece on ecological theory of families. “Development is a lasting change in the way a person perceives and deals with his environment...a person’s evolving conception of the ecological environment and his relation to it, as well as a person’s growing capacity to discover, sustain or alter its properties.” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I.e. Bronfenbrenner’s concept of development focuses on the child’s capacity to understand and shape the world in which she lives.
- Implications for staff practice: “Ecological notions of change require a capacity for a flexible response from professionals...a second kind has to do with timing...the ecologically oriented change agent learns to observe and wait for ‘natural’ opportunities for change to arise and when they do, professionals should be positioned to help so that individuals and families develop their own resources, in their own way, as much as possible.”

Family Strengthening Policy Centre, *Policy Brief No. 1, Introduction to Family Strengthening*, Family Strengthening Policy Centre, a Program of the National Human Services Assembly, October 2004.

- Work funded by the Annie E Casey Foundation, concerned about challenges faced by families caused by changing family structure (single parents), changing roles (dual parent earners), changing demographics (more immigrants), plus poverty, high cost of housing, lack of savings, lack of health insurance.
- Implications for staff practice: Defines family strengthening as a “deliberate process of giving parents the necessary opportunities, relationships, networks and supports to raise their children successfully, which includes involving parents as decision-makers in how their communities meet family needs.
- Underlying principle – children do well when their families do well, and families do better when they live in supportive neighbourhoods.
- Core characteristics of family strengthening programs: they are family centred, place-based collaborative, focus on family self-sufficiency, accountable to families, preventative and promotional.

Shonkoff, Jack, *Evaluating Early Childhood Services: What’s Really Behind the Curtain?*, in *The Evaluation Exchange*, Volume X., No. 2, Summer 2004, Harvard

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## Family Research Program

- Provocative reflection on difficulties created by highly politicized environment of program evaluation.
- Describes early childhood evaluation of past 40 years in three stages . (1) "don't just stand there – do something" (need for action rather than value of research). (2) "don't just do something, stand there" (step back, reflect why programs do what they do and what they are trying to accomplish). (3) how do we know what is really making a difference?
- We should be in this third stage, but the questions are hard to answer (requiring randomized controlled studies, etc), and main problem is the two different pursuits of knowledge, which are: "knowledge for understanding" (science, focussed on what we don't know) and "knowledge for advocacy" (lobbying, focussed on how much we DO know).
- Most evaluation seeks knowledge for advocacy because it is linked to funding/continuance of programs. Thus reflective thinking is minimized, status quo is reinforced, critical thinking is stifled.
- Argues there must be a fundamental change in the culture of program evaluation that creates a safe environment for honest investigation and redefines what we mean by positive and negative findings. A positive result would be defined as an insight or conclusions that advance our knowledge, not a finding that simply affirms what we are already doing.
- As for children, "the healthy development of the early childhood field requires a safe and nurturing environment that provides opportunities for exploration, builds on previous experiences, promotes judicious risk taking and learns from mistakes...promoting collaboration and partnership among parents, service providers, evaluators and funders..."

Slaughter, Diana T., *Programs for Racially and Ethnically diverse American Families, Some Critical Issues*, in *Evaluating Family Programs* (Ed. Weiss, Jacobs), Aldine de Gruyter, 1988.

- If program designers are to sustain and support family strengthens in low-income minority populations, at least three minimal criteria must be met. (1) Parents must be respected for how they cope with mundane stresses. (2) families must be encouraged to express their beliefs about how a program can help them improve their lives, (3) Program content must be based on developers considered judgement and knowledge of the group's cultural history and immediate social context...parents cannot dictate program content nor can uninformed prospective program developers.
- Implications for staff practice: Staff attitudes include self-respect and enthusiasm, a belief that people can and do change for the better, and desire to be part of instigating that change and a genuine commitment and camaraderie among workers with a shared mission. And, staff can model a sense of feeling in control of their own work...when they do

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so, participating families are more likely to feel that they too can be in control of their own lives.

Trivette, Carol M., Dunst, Carl J., *Community Based Support Programs, Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development, Centre for Excellence for Early Childhood Development, 2005.*

- Community-based parent support programs are defined as community-based initiatives designed to promote the flow of resources and supports to parents that strengthen functioning and enhance growth and development of family members.
- When such services are delivered in a family-centred manner, parental confidence and competence is enhanced & parents are more likely to interact with their children in ways that promote the children's social and emotional development.
- Implications of working in a family-centred manner re staff practice: practitioners see themselves as agents of the parents, helping families obtain necessary individual resources, supports/services, support and enhance parents' capacities to promote the development of their young children, work with parents in a way that enhances rather than diminishing parent capacity.
- Relational practice key words: compassion, active listening, positive staff attributions about participant capabilities.
- Participatory help-giving practice key words: involve participant choice and decision-making and meaningfully involve participants in actively procuring or obtaining desired resources/supports. Actively involve parents in deciding what knowledge is important to them and how they want to get it. These help-giving practices have a greater influence on parent functioning than do relational help-giving. So, its not just what staff do, its how they do it.

(NOTE: the difference between this definition of participatory and the meaning that the Public Health Agency of Canada has given to it over the years – i.e. that participants are involved in decision-making about the program.)

Trivette, Carol M., *Family Support: The Importance of How We Provide it When Building Parenting Capacity*, presentation made at Welcoming Communities FRP Canada Conference, Niagara Falls, Ontario, May 2009.

- Capacity-building paradigm: Promotion (focus on enhancement and optimizing competence and positive functioning). Empowerment (increase opportunities for people to use existing capabilities as well as develop new ones). Strengths-based (recognize abilities and interests, help people use their capabilities to strengthen functioning). Resource-based (define practices in terms of a broad range of experiences and opportunities afforded by different people, programs and organizations). Family-centred (emphasize the pivotal role families play in decisions about those

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- resources and supports needed to improve life circumstances)
  - That participatory help giving practices have the most impact (those that engage people in activities facilitating their active engagement in producing desired effects and consequences.)
  - Key words for staff practice: dignity, respect, family-identified desires, sensitive, responsive, flexible, capacity-building,
  - Definition of family-centred help giving practices: are those that treat families with dignity and respect; that provide them with information needed to make informed decisions and choices; that involve active family involvement in procuring resources and supports; and that entail practitioner responsiveness and flexibility to family requests and desires.

Weiss, Heather, Klein, Lisa, *Changing the Conversation About Home Visiting: Scaling Up With Quality*. Harvard Family Research Project, 2006.

- Home visiting reaches 400,000 USA families/yr, costs up to one billion dollars. 37 states in 2001 had such programs. Research asks if it should increase.
- This paper examines the evidence and concludes that home visiting is a promising strategy to promote early childhood growth and development. The question is, is there the national capacity to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate early home visiting so they can be delivered with the quality necessary to achieve the promised child/family outcomes.
- Positive factors related to staff practice: well trained and competent staff, establishing lasting relationships between home visitors and families, high quality supervision..." (and that's all that was said about HOW home visitors do their work.)

#### **4. Staff Training and Family Resource Programs**

Malcolmson, John, *Professional Development Opportunities for Family Support Practitioners*, FRP Canada, 2002.

- Essential FRP staff skills and attributes identified as: understanding core values and principles which guide the field, understanding what it means to facilitate growth and change, having appropriate background and life experience, good communication skills and ability to empathize, flexible in work style and approach, cross-disciplinary exposure to range of educational programs and experiences in relevant areas.

Malcolmson, John, *Putting the Pieces Together: A Conceptual Framework for Family Support Practice*, FRP Canada, no date.

- States that principles of family support guide practice, and thus help to identify outcomes. Family support programs strive to build family skills and capacity. They develop partnerships with families, community groups,

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others. They promote wellness through an emphasis on prevention and by building on family assets and strengths.

## 5. Other work on early childhood education and care

Goelman, Hillel, Anderson, Lynell, Kershaw, Paul, Mort, Janet, *Expanding Early Childhood Education and Care Programming: Highlights of a Literature Review and Public Policy Implications for British Columbia*, Human Early Learning Partnership, 2008.

- Mention of the role of FRP's in early childhood support is referred to one footnote that states "the increased understanding of early human development has led to the introduction or expansion of a number of other parenting support programs, for example, parental leave, parenting resources, parent/child drop-in programs etc in many jurisdictions including BC. While these policies and programs form an important component of a comprehensive early human development strategy and in fact may be linked to or integrated with early childhood education and care services, other parenting support programs were not examined in detail in this review.

Hertzman, Clyde, *Making Early Childhood Development a Priority: Lessons from Vancouver*, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2004.

- Mention of role of FRP-like programs is made in one comment: "access to quality child care and developmental programs and services, both those that include parents and those that do not, can and do provide important developmental benefits for Canadian children.) (p 5)
- Policy implications of improving child development:
  - focus on improving the environments where children grow up, live and learn not just fulfilling specific service mandates to narrowly defined client populations.
  - Improve inter-sectoral collaboration
  - Equalize access to quality childcare
  - Enhance universal access (to environments that will support healthy child development) across neighbourhoods, not just in targeted high-risk neighbourhood.
- Also note (p 11) "turning schools into centres for human development, from the time of birth onward is the sort of intelligent use of public resources that we need...using freed up classroom space to offer expanded early childhood development programming."

McCain, Hon. Margaret Norrie, Mustard, J. Fraser, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain, Early Years Study Final Report*, prepared for the Government of Ontario. The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, The Founder's Network, 1999.

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- This document led to the formation of the Ontario Early Years Centres and brought the discussion about children's brain development onto the "ordinary person's" radar screen.
  - Notes that competent ECD program staff are crucial to implementing programs sensitive to needs of young children and their families in the child-oriented parts of the centres (that they want to see developed). Staff practice (competency) named as ability to:
    - establish partnership with parents that supports their responsibilities to their children
    - plan play-based problem-solving activities that promote optimal brain development to establish coping and social skills and other competencies
    - promote crucial early base of literacy, numeracy and science learning through the children's language and play experiences and promote development of positive behaviour and good social skills
    - develop a responsive relationship with individual children and with the group; respect family and ethno cultural diversity and multiple of strengths available to each child;
    - identify problems and difficulties early and provide or connect to appropriate early interventions
    - facilitate adult learning and parenting capacity
    - work with others in the community to support children's well-being.

Peters, Ray, *What we know and don't know about prevention/early intervention programs for young children*, in Better Beginnings, Better Futures, Short-Term Findings Report, 2000.

- Author was major researcher involved with setting up and carrying out evaluation for Better Beginnings/Better Futures program in Ontario.
- Concludes there has been no change over the ten years since a 1989 program and literature review (carried out in conjunction with the Better Beginnings Better Futures model in Ontario) concluded that no adequately evaluated prevention program for young children incorporated a truly ecological model of child development, i.e. a program focusing on the child and his or her family and the neighbourhood.

Peters, Ray, *Searching for Effective Canadian Early Childhood Learning Programs*, in Bulletin on Program Evaluation, Canadian Council on Learning, Early Childhood Learning Knowledge Centre, Vol 4, No. 1 January 2009.

- Peters notes that "although there are a wide variety of parent training/ education/support programs offered across Canada, few have been well evaluated...improving practice and policy for young children in Canada requires better evidence...potentially valuable Canadian programs remain un-evaluated or under-evaluated...the evidence that matters most is whether individual children benefit once a program is disseminated.

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To this end, organizations and practitioners need evaluation tools and resources to monitor ongoing efforts."