

# Family Resource Programs in Canada

“This program is great. We had just moved here when I started going. I met new people, got out of the house, my kids met their first friends which they still play with. I felt welcome from the first day I walked in the door. I am so grateful that there was a place like this to come.” - Parent<sup>1</sup>

“Family resource programs” or “FRPs” are generic terms for a prevention model of service delivery which emerged during the 1970s as a result of several independent community initiatives<sup>2</sup>. These informal programs enhanced child and family well-being by reducing the isolation of parents with infants, toddlers and preschoolers, by providing information and resources that encouraged healthy child development and positive parenting, and by acting as friendly access points to more traditional community services. Participation was voluntary and open to all families from diverse backgrounds and life circumstances<sup>3</sup>. The goal was not to fix problems, but rather to offer the kinds of supports which had traditionally been available within extended families and close-knit communities. The holistic approach to service delivery acknowledged the complex and ever-changing needs of families<sup>4</sup>. Many of the first family resource programs continue to provide services to families in their communities, and thousands more have been established during the intervening decades. Although the majority of family resource programs are independent not-for-profit organizations, some operate within large multi-service organizations such as YMCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs or community health centres.

Family resource centres aim to be welcoming and inclusive. They are located in settings such as community centres, schools, church basements, storefronts or neighbourhood houses, where parents and others in the parenting role can spend time with their young children and with each other. Over time, staff and participants develop mutually-respectful and trust-based relationships. Staff members are often hired from the community and bring to their work a range of formal and informal credentials; personal warmth and people skills are highly prized. By enhancing the capacity and confidence of parents and caregivers, family resource programs endeavour to strengthen families and communities. The well-being of both children and adults is attended to.

Family resource centres are responsive to participants’ diverse needs. For example, babies, toddlers and preschoolers can explore stimulating and safe environments, manipulate materials, play alongside other children of different ages, learn songs and rhymes during Circle Time and share the pleasures of picture books with their parents. Parents or caregivers are able to talk with other participants and staff about the joys and challenges of child rearing, chat with a public health nurse, borrow high quality and age appropriate toys, books and equipment, or access resources on a myriad of topics from car seat safety to understanding temperament. Specific program components are developed in response to identified needs. They may include fathering groups, family literacy activities, clothing exchanges, cooking groups, parenting sessions and workshops on topics of interest. Activities are designed to increase capacity in many domains

including physical and mental health, parenting, lifelong learning, and community development.

The high degree of flexibility and responsiveness found at family resource programs is facilitated by their relatively independent status and their governance structures. As community-based not-for-profit organizations, family resource programs are usually governed by volunteer Boards of Directors comprised of community members; program participants often serve as Directors. With Board support and guidance, decisions can be made quickly in response to emerging community needs. Power-sharing and collaboration with other community groups is a natural aspect of this work. Frequently, family resource programs act as honest brokers to help create new partnerships and initiatives within their communities<sup>5</sup>.

Today, thousands of family resource programs across Canada operate according to similar, but not identical, mandates; they offer different program components; they are known by many names<sup>6</sup>; and they are supported through many kinds of funding.<sup>7</sup> They are not organized into a single, hierarchical system. However, the family support field has a strong sense of cohesion. Centres and practitioners are closely linked through shared values and holistic, strength-building practices which set the family support sector apart from traditional systems such as education, health and social services<sup>8,9,10,11,12</sup>. See The Guiding Principles of Family Support in Appendix C.

Research at FRP Canada and elsewhere has focused on many aspects of family support practice; those who wish to learn more about this unique approach to service delivery are invited to access FRP Canada's publications ([www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca), resources).

FRP Canada has developed evidence-based tools<sup>13</sup> to help its members assess the impact of their programs and services. The online *e-Valuation* system was launched in 2006. To date, over 15,000 participant surveys have been inputted and analyzed. Parents report positive outcomes for themselves, their children and their families associated with their participation at family resource programs<sup>14</sup>.

## References

<sup>1</sup> Participant comment, FRP Canada's *e-Valuation* system, 2008-2009.

<sup>2</sup> Kyle, I., & Kellerman, M. (1998). *Case Studies of Canadian Family Resource Programs*. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

<sup>3</sup> Many family resource programs focus primarily on the needs of families with young (pre-school aged) children. Some also offer programming for school-aged children such as homework clubs, recreation programs, camps and babysitting courses; some have programs for youth and/or seniors as well.

<sup>4</sup> Smythe, S. Understanding Family Support Programs in FRP Canada's *Perspectives in Family Support*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2004, 5-14. <http://www.frp.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=4&documentFormatId=450>

<sup>5</sup> Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs. (2004). *Synergy: Integrated Approaches in Family Support*. Ottawa, ON: author.

<sup>6</sup> For example family resource centre, family place, maison de la famille, organisme communautaire à la famille, Community Action Program for Children (CAPC), Parent Link Centre, Ontario Early Years Centre, neighbourhood house, parent-child centre and military family resource centre.

<sup>7</sup> Federal funding includes CAPC (Community Action Programs for Children), CPNP (Canada Pre-natal Nutrition Program), Military Family Resource Centres and Aboriginal Head Start. Many family resource centres are funded by provincial and territorial programs; others are funded through a combination of donations, community service groups, United Way, their municipalities etc. Typically, family resource programs rely upon multiple funding sources.

<sup>8</sup> Malcolmson, J. (2002). *Putting the Pieces Together: A Conceptual Framework for Family Support Practice*. Ottawa, ON: FRP Canada, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

<sup>9</sup> Sullivan, D. A. (2002). *Discovering Our Capacities*. Ottawa, ON: FRP Canada.

<sup>10</sup> MacAulay, J. (2002). *Tensions & Possibilities: Forging Better Links Between Family Resource Programs and Child Welfare*. Ottawa, ON: FRP Canada.

<sup>11</sup> Trivette, C., Dunst, C., & Hamby, D. Influences of Family-systems Intervention Practices on Parent-Child Interactions and Child Development in *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, May 2010 30:3-19.

<sup>12</sup> Dunst, C. (2004). TrAAveling the TransCanada Highway: Mapping the Adoption, Application and Adherence to Family Support Principles. *Perspectives in Family Support*, Vol. 1, 2004, 41-48. Ottawa, ON: FRP Canada.  
<http://www.frp.ca/index.cfm?fuseaction=document.viewDocument&documentid=7&documentFormatId=1729>

<sup>13</sup> FRP Canada. *Evidence for Family Support: 10 themes*. [www.frp.ca/evidence](http://www.frp.ca/evidence).

<sup>14</sup> Annual summaries of e-Valuation data can be found at [www.frp.ca/e-Valuation](http://www.frp.ca/e-Valuation).