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# FAMILY SUPPORT: A NATIONAL PRIORITY

July, 2000

A Response to the Public Report  
“Public Dialogue on the  
National Children’s Agenda  
Developing a Shared Vision”



Canadian Association of Family  
Resource Programs

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L'Association canadienne des programmes  
de ressources pour la famille

707 - 331 Cooper Street  
Ottawa, Ontario K2P 0G5  
(613) 237-7667/fax: (613) 237-8515  
[info@frp.ca](mailto:info@frp.ca) / [www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Our vision for Canada is clear. Canada must be a nation that cares—  
for its children, its families and its communities.”

Dr. I. Kyle, *Strengthening Families, Cherishing Children, Building Caring  
Communities*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 1994, p.26

### PREAMBLE

On July 15 and 16, 2000, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs held a national consultation with representatives of over 2000 family resource programs/centres and related services and their users to develop this sector's response to the document entitled *Public Report: Public Dialogue on the National Children's Agenda Developing a Shared Vision*. This position paper clarifies the concept of family support, outlines the basket of services as a minimum requirement and makes recommendations to the National Children's Agenda.

### FAMILY SUPPORT: A NATIONAL PRIORITY

“All children and their parents require different combinations of economic benefits and social supports at various stages of the life cycle. ...social supports must include preventive community support and family resource services that work in concert with more traditional child welfare, family and youth services.” (Kyle, 1994)

“Family Support” is the key, overall principle at the heart of all family resource programs. The success of this innovative model of service delivery, a program of choice in primary preventive family support and health promotion strategies, is the systemic linkages between program categories. Coupled together, the program categories, such as Parent/Caregiver Education and Support, Family Preservation, Child Care and Children's Programs, Health Education and Care, Youth Programs, Literacy, Employment Support and Community Economic Development, offer a comprehensive framework for family and community support.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Increase recognition of the role and effectiveness of holistic supports to families.**
2. **Build on existing frameworks by recognizing the existence and expertise of a well-established, extensive network of family resource programs that is currently providing a wide range of family support services in large and small communities in every province and territory.**
3. **Recognize the value of research in family support by building on the existing knowledge and research which demonstrates the benefits of supports to families and by supporting future research in this sector to investigate questions of interest to the field.**
4. **Designate funds to stabilize and expand existing support to families rather than creating new systems and programs, and financially support the national, provincial/territorial infrastructure necessary to develop and stabilize the system needed to achieve and implement the recommendations of the National Children's Agenda.**

### HOW MUCH WILL IT COST?

To offer this comprehensive system of family support in Canada will cost \$76.58 per year per family with children.

**FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION OR TO RECEIVE THE POSITION PAPER, PLEASE CONTACT:**  
Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: 613-237-7667 and visit our web-site: [www.frp.ca](http://www.frp.ca)

## What parents have to say about coming to family resource centres:

"Coming here makes me realize that I can do more than what I actually think that I am limited to. In the group, people really encourage you and show you that it is not over yet. There is still a whole other lifetime to live."

"I know that every Tuesday morning there is going to be somebody there to talk to. You get free coffee, the kids can play ... just to get motivated. I don't have any money, I can't go shopping, I don't have anybody to be with. You know you don't want to spend any money. It's somewhere to go where it's free. There are no obligations, you don't have to bring anything with you to come. It makes a big difference to know there is somewhere to go."

"When I come here, even if I'm in the playroom with the kids, it helps me when I go home. I feel like I've got more energy to deal with the problems at home."

"I just can't stand it when people talk down to me. They used to do it in school all the time and I used to rebel against them. They don't do that to me here."

"I think without this centre I don't think my family would still be together. It was pretty rocky before we came. But now we deal with things differently, see different ways to do things and my mind is more open now. I can't really explain it. If you knew us, you'd really see that there is a difference now."

"I find that every time I go to something here [at the centre] it relieves a little more stress from me, and it takes a little bit more of the big block that is on my shoulder. It's supposed to be a chip but it's like a huge block. And every time I come here it helps get rid of a little bit more and a little bit more."

"It was so relieving to know that other people are dealing with the same things and it's okay for me to be that way. It makes me feel better and it makes me feel stronger. Even the little minor things that I have accomplished, the coordinator here makes them seem like they are really **big steps**. The way she words things makes it feel like such a big accomplishment. I think that is what the programs here do, they show you that no matter how small an achievement you have made, it's actually a large one that you **have done** it. I just think that."

## **FAMILY SUPPORT: A NATIONAL PRIORITY**

“Our vision for Canada is clear. Canada must be a nation that cares – for its children, its families and its communities.”

Dr. Irene Kyle, *Strengthening Families, Cherishing Children, Building Caring Communities*, Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs, 1994, p. 26.

“The National Children’s Agenda can become the public focal point for new understandings and broader strategies to create better conditions of well-being for all children.”

“A society that values children will first focus on assuring families basic conditions of well-being in homes and communities.”

Dr. Marvyn Novick, *Fundamentals First: An Equal Opportunity From Birth For Every Child*, Campaign 2000, 1999, p. 50

### **PREAMBLE**

On July 15 and 16, 2000, the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs held a national consultation with representatives of the family resource/family support sector from across Canada to develop this sector’s response to the document entitled *Public Report: Public Dialogue on the National Children’s Agenda Developing a Shared Vision*. This position paper clarifies the concept of family support, outlines the basket of services as a minimum requirement and makes recommendations on behalf of over 2000 family resource programs/centres and related services and the families that use their services to the National Children’s Agenda.

The Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) is a national not for profit organization representing over 2000 family resource programs/centres and related services across Canada since its founding in 1975. Its Mission is to promote the well-being of families by providing national leadership, consultation and resources to those who care for children and support families. The services that family resource programs provide to hundreds of thousands of families with children are anchored in 25 years of experience, supported by a body of research proving that this model of social services delivery works effectively and efficiently, and by an infrastructure and network of national, provincial and municipal organizations.

FRP Canada is an active member of Campaign 2000, the National Children’s Alliance, and the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children. FRP Canada has participated in the development of their discussion and position papers on issues including the National Children’s Agenda, child poverty, and children’s rights, and has endorsed many of these documents.

## I. OUR VISION FOR CANADA'S CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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### A Country Where Family Support Is a National Priority

#### *How do we define family support services?*

The family resource/family support movement in Canada firmly believes that all families with children (regardless of their economic status) require support through their entire life cycle. "Parents never stop being parents, children never stop being children" regardless of age or circumstances.

"All children and their parents require different combinations of economic benefits and social supports at various stages of the life cycle. ...social supports must include preventive community support and family resource services that work in concert with more traditional child welfare, family and youth services." (Kyle, 1994)

"Family Support" provides parents and communities with the resources and supports they need to succeed in raising healthy, responsible, productive, joyous children. "Family Support" is a holistic approach to social services delivery "based on the systemic and interdependent nature of families' lives and the way families and their members are affected by the communities they live in." (Kyle, Kellerman, 1998).

"Family Support" is the key, overall principle at the heart of all family resource programs. The many ways in which family resource programs support families are described by the 11 general service areas listed in Appendix A.

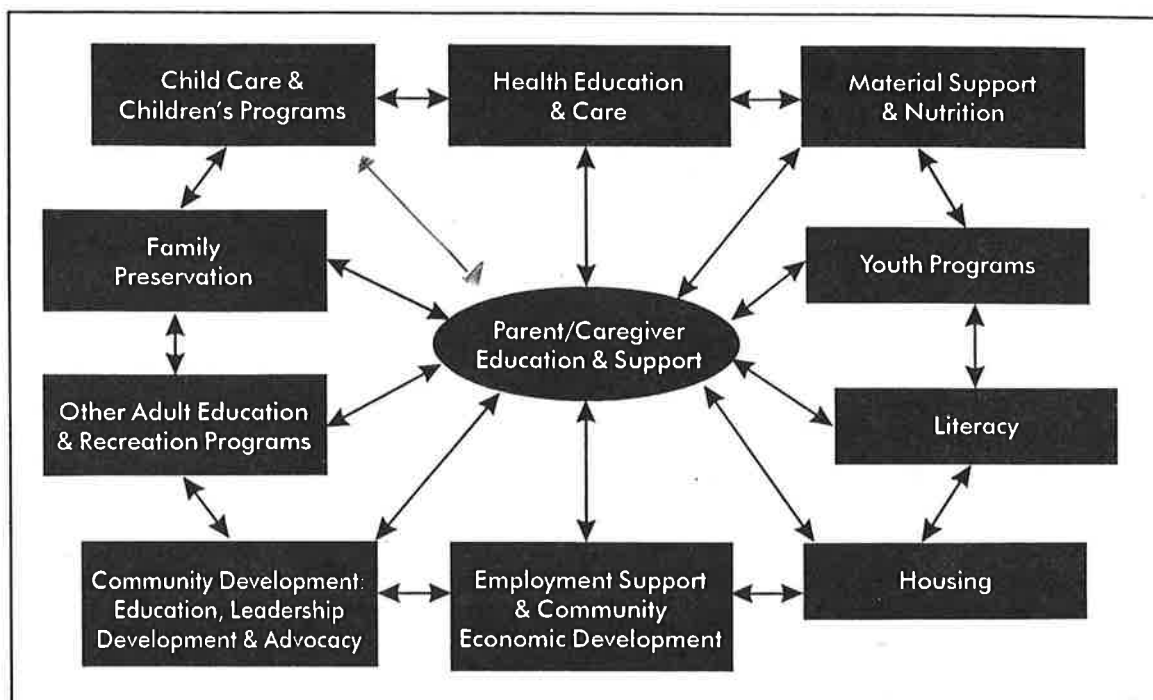
Within each of these general service areas are numerous program components developed in response to specific community needs. For example, at a typical family resource program, "parent/caregiver education and support" might include any or all of the following:

- parenting education courses and workshops
- activities with a focus on parent-child interaction
- supervised visiting for estranged families and those involved with child protection services
- warm line
- support groups for step and blended families, mothers, fathers, teen parents, grandparents
- information and referral to resources
- toy- and equipment-lending libraries

Similarly, a particular program might include components from a number of service areas. For example, a project to serve teen mothers might include parent education workshops, parent/child activities, home visits, nutrition supplements, participation in a collective kitchen, employment support, housing, and/or a life skills program.

The success of this innovative model of service delivery, a program model of choice in primary preventive family support and health promotion strategies, is the systemic linkages between program categories. Coupled together, the "program categories offer a framework for family and community support". (Kyle, Kellerman, 1998. p. 57)

## A Framework for Family and Community Support



**All Canadian families with children must be ensured easy, universal access to a continuum of family support services based on each family's individual needs in any given community across the country.**

## II. OUR VALUES: What do we believe about our families and children?

The family resource/family support movement in Canada believes that:

- “Children must not be viewed as separate from their families, nor families separate from their community, their culture, or the larger society.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 9)
- “Family resource programs are not simply an adjunct to child care services. They [family resource programs] must be recognized and planned for in their own right.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 16)
- “While families have primary responsibility for raising their children, they also require resources and support to enable them to fulfill their responsibilities. Healthy communities recognize and provide support for the basic needs of their members across the life course.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 15)

- There are important distinctions between child care and family resource programs that need to be recognized. “Child care services traditionally focus on children’s needs for supplementary care while their parents are working or studying, or for children with special needs.... [The focus on children is their primary work.] While we [family resource programs] share with child care services a basic concern for the well being and development of healthy children, and affirm the need for families to have ready access to public provisions for high quality, affordable, [universal] supplementary child care, the mission of family resource programs is quite different. Family resource programs focus on families’ needs for support across the life span, and on providing assistance to children, parents, grandparents and other caregivers in a number of areas which go beyond child care. Adult development is as important as child development.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 15)
- “Society, through its economic and social policies, services and institutions, must assist, not hinder, the capacity of families to raise their children. Policies which foster dependency, stigmatize, or undermine families’ efforts to meet their basic needs or to resolve their problems are unacceptable.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 9)
- “Family resource programs build on family strengths rather than deficits or problems and work to increase the opportunities for growth and change.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 9)

### **III. HOW CAN THE NATIONAL CHILDREN’S AGENDA REACH ITS GOALS THROUGH STRENGTHENING THE FAMILY SUPPORT SECTOR?**

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#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

##### **1. INCREASE RECOGNITION OF THE ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS OF HOLISTIC SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES**

“Community-based family resource programs are a fundamental building block in our social service system. They foster a sense of family self-sufficiency and competence, and mobilize neighbourhood support.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 2)

- Increase awareness of programs currently supporting families in communities across Canada
- “Children must not be viewed as separate from their families, nor families as separate from their community, their culture, or the larger society.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 2)
- “All children and their parents require different combinations of economic benefits and social supports at various stages of the life cycle.” (Kyle, 1994, p. 2)
- Ensure that families have safe entry into existing services and systems within their local communities.

## 2. BUILD ON EXISTING FRAMEWORKS

“The challenge in framing a national agenda for children is to build upon the strengths of current initiatives, act on what we know is important, and explore the development of new perspectives and strategies.” (Novick, 1999, P. 50)

- Recognize the existence of a well-established, extensive network of family resource programs that is currently providing a wide range of family support services in large and small communities in every province and territory.
- Recognize existing expertise within the family resource/family support sector
- Initiate research and evaluation studies on programs that have been in existence for more than 10 years

## 3. RECOGNIZE THE VALUE OF RESEARCH IN FAMILY SUPPORT

- Build on the existing body of knowledge and research which demonstrates the benefits of supports to families in the early years
- Support future research in this sector to investigate questions of interest to the field and those who are developing and implementing family policy
- Disseminate research findings and information on successful projects and approaches that support families.

## 4. DESIGNATE FUNDS TO STABILIZE AND EXPAND EXISTING SUPPORTS TO FAMILIES

“Between government cutbacks on the one hand and increased demands from the public on the other, family resource programs urgently require additional funding to support a wide range of program components.” (Kyle, Kellerman, 1998, p. 103)

- Rather than creating new systems and programs, invest funds in existing family resource centres to stabilize a national family support system and to allow communities themselves to determine and develop solutions to gaps in service
- Provide funds on an on-going, consistent basis to support the national, provincial/territorial and local infrastructure necessary to develop and stabilize the system required to implement the recommendations of the National Children’s Agenda
- Provide the necessary funds to ensure training and support for staff and volunteers who work with children and families
- Provide the funds necessary to develop and promote “best practices” and a common language for those supporting families across Canada.



#### IV. HOW MUCH WILL IT COST TO STABILIZE, STRENGTHEN AND DEVELOP A NATIONAL FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM?

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Family resource programs are cost-efficient, they build on strengths and resources of communities, and have a long tradition of fostering volunteer development which is integral to the model and practice of family support.

To offer this comprehensive system of family support in Canada will cost \$76.58 per year per family with children.\*

##### **What could this investment buy?**

This public investment in families and children would enable programs to provide strong, comprehensive programs both on and off-site to families in their communities. It would relieve the stress caused by instability and uncertainty that the family resource/family support sector lives with every day. It would allow programs to expand to fill gaps in services that are identified within their communities, including the development of multiple sites under the coordination of one program.

A range of services would be available to reflect the complexity of families' lives and the diversity of communities in which they live.

**Parent/Caregiver Education and Support**, which can include any combination of the program components described on page 2;

**Family Preservation**, which can include:

- short-term counselling
- mediation
- referral and support
- parent/family counselling (longer term)
- emergency and crisis intervention
- education and counselling about family law
- family violence programs
- separation and divorce education and support for adults and children
- outreach/home visiting by peers and staff
- in-home support and education, teaching various skills

\* Based on Statistics Canada's figures for number of families living in Canada and the budget of a typical medium-sized family resource program.

**Child Care and Children's Programs** which can include:

- nursery school and half-day child development programs
- child care centres for children of all ages
- school-based centres for teen parents
- regulated family day care
- registration, education and support of license-not-required providers

**Health Education and Care** which can include:

- pre-natal nutrition
- health screening
- early assessment, developmental screening
- well-child, family health clinics
- breastfeeding support groups
- postpartum depression support groups
- immunization clinics

**Employment Support and Community Economic Development** which can include:

- youth employment counselling and practical work experience
- adult work placements
- literacy programs
- community college and university practicums
- job search skills
- job creation
- life-skills, pre-employment counselling

"Don't stop whatever you are doing, we're proud of you even though it is tiring and stressful, we have someone to help us, don't quit."

REFERENCES

Kyle, I. *Strengthening Families, Cherishing Children, Building Caring Communities*. Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: Ottawa. 1994.

Kyle, I., Kellerman, M. *Case Studies of Canadian Family Resource Programs*. Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs: Ottawa. 1998.

Novick, M. *Fundamentals First: An Equal Opportunity From Birth For Every Child*. Campaign 2000: Toronto. 1999.

## APPENDIX A

### DEFINITION OF FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS

Based on detailed case studies of fifteen diverse family resource programs across Canada, researchers Irene Kyle and Maureen Kellerman proposed the following working definition of a family resource program:

*Family resource programs are multi-service, non-profit, community-based programs that promote social support, cooperation, collective responsibility (civic mindedness) and citizenship through offering a mix of education, information, activities, material support and other resources to family members and groups of families across a number of service areas.*

*These service areas may include:*

1. *parent/caregiver education and support*
2. *family preservation*
3. *child care and development*
4. *health and safety*
5. *food and nutrition*
6. *recreation*
7. *life skills*
8. *employment support and community economic development*
9. *housing*
10. *literacy*
11. *community education and leadership development.*

*The range of services offered by family resource programs depends on their stage of organizational development, their specific community context, assessment of needs and available resources. Not all services are offered by every family resource program, nor are they necessarily provided directly, but may be offered in cooperation and collaboration with other local groups and services.*

*Family resource programs are concerned as much with how they work with families, as with the specific programs they deliver. They strive to work in a holistic way that takes into account the systemic and interdependent nature of families' lives and the way they are affected by the communities in which they live. Programs are also characterized by their conscious attention to family support principles which focus on prevention and the promotion of well-being, and seek to foster individual, family, and community strengths. Through advocating with or on behalf of families, and actively taking part in or facilitating local social planning and community development efforts, family resource programs work to strengthen community life. (Kyle, Kellerman, 1998)*

## **APPENDIX B**

### **THE FAMILY RESOURCE/FAMILY SUPPORT NETWORK BELIEVES THAT:**

- All families need and are entitled to supports and resources. These supports and resources will build on the strengths of families, enhance the capacities of parents and foster the optimal development of children.
- Seeking supports and resources is a sign of family strength.
- Supports and resources should be provided based on families' identification of needs.
- Every child has a right to equal "best starts".
- All families have the potential to grow and change.
- Relationships between programs and families should be based on equality and respect.
- Family resource programs should be sensitive to the diversity of family types and the multicultural aspects of a community.
- Play fosters children's development.
- All family resource programs need supports and resources which will enhance their capacities to work with children, parents and other caregivers.

### **FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS REFLECT THE FOLLOWING GUIDING PRINCIPLES:**

- Family resource programs focus on prevention and the promotion of wellness and optimal development, especially during children's earliest years. They seek to build on family strengths rather than on deficits or problems and work to increase opportunities for growth and change.
- Parenting is viewed as a development and growth experience. Knowledge about child development is an essential factor in helping parents to become more effective. Parents are also multi-dimensional beings; they have other roles and responsibilities beyond that of parenting.
- Family resource programs emphasize interdependence and mutuality and recognize that at various times in their lives all families may need help. At the same time as they are receiving help, family members may also be able to contribute support to others in their own family and in their community.
- Family resource programs are consumer-directed, designed with parents and community members to meet their expressed needs and to enhance individual and family strengths.
- Services are holistic and not narrowly targeted and thus do not stigmatize or alienate individuals or groups with special needs.
- Services are collaborative; they seek to complement existing community organizations and institutions and to establish cooperative linkages with them.
- Services are responsive to cultural, individual and community traditions and values, especially concerning child-rearing.
- Participation is voluntary. Family members who choose to take part in programs are more likely to experience control over their lives and to be more open to change. In the long run, coercion only perpetuates dependency. (Kyle, I., Kellerman, M. *Case Studies of Canadian Family Resource Programs: Supporting Families, Children and Communities*, 1998, p. 28.)

### Practice example: A holistic approach to offering family support

A refugee family (a mother, father, and a 2 ½-year-old child) arrived in Calgary from West Africa, after spending four years in a refugee camp. The young mother had been seriously ill in the camp, during which time she was unable to care for her child. In Africa, prior to being in the refugee camp, the parents had lived in a rural area and so were unfamiliar with the customs and expectations associated with living in a more modern urban environment. The following is a description of the variety of services offered to the family over a period of years and outlines some of their contacts with the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) as the agency helped the family adjust to their new life circumstances and settle in Canada. The family support worker attached to the Cross Cultural Children's Centre and the Family Place played a central role in helping the mother overcome a number of difficulties and helped to ensure that the children born after the family arrived got off to a healthy start. In this example, CCIS staff worked at the individual, family and community levels, offering a variety of material, educational and emotional supports. Not only was there constant co-operation among CCIS staff working in different service areas, there was also continuing collaboration with other community agencies.

On arrival in Calgary the family was housed at the agency's Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Centre, where they took part in a two-week orientation session. During this time their language skills were assessed, and more permanent accommodation was arranged in public housing. Both parents were referred to ESL classes. The father, who had the equivalent of a community college education in Africa, attended ESL classes offered at CCIS and went on to complete upgrading courses that allowed him to study at university. Eventually he was able to qualify as an accountant. During his studies, CCIS helped him to find a part-time job, as well as to obtain a student loan to help finance his studies.

The mother, who had no formal education prior to coming to Canada, had difficulty with the ESL classes, and so was referred to more informal pre-literacy classes at CCIS. While she was attending classes, her child was cared for in the Cross Cultural Children's Centre on a part-time basis. Because of her illness and the trauma associated with life in the refugee camp, the mother experienced more problems adjusting to her life in Canada. She was feeling lonely, depressed and isolated because she couldn't speak English. The family support worker made a home visit to assess the

family needs and identified a number of areas where the family could benefit from support. She offered orientation to living in an apartment in Canada, basic help with budgeting, nutrition, health, child discipline and safety. She also helped the mother to obtain clothing that was more appropriate to Calgary winters. The mother was encouraged to volunteer in the Cross Cultural Children's Centre—not only because it helped to reduce her isolation and to improve her language skills, but also because it gave her a chance to feel that she could give back to the agency. The family support worker also helped the mother to get connected with a collective kitchen in her neighbourhood, and with a nearby church, where she could take part in the singing.

After her second child was born, the mother experienced a serious bout of post-partum depression requiring her to be hospitalized for a time. The family support worker, together with the public health nurse, helped the family arrange for a friend to come and stay with them until the mother was well enough to manage. During this time the first child began to attend the child care centre on a full-time basis. Once the mother was feeling better, the family support worker helped her to link up with a family resource centre in her neighbourhood, and to attend a children's drop-in storytime offered by her local library (furthering both her own and her children's literacy skills). By the time a third and fourth child arrived, the mother had successfully overcome a number of her initial adjustment problems and started work on a part-time basis as a child care provider. Her years as a volunteer at the Cross Cultural Children's Centre had given her the confidence to try this work.

All of the family's children eventually attended the Centre, which has done pioneering work in developing programs for preschool children learning a second language. When the oldest child was ready to attend kindergarten, the family support worker met with the local school (where there were also other children from refugee families) to share information about the children's cultural background and to offer the school support in working with immigrant families. At an even broader community level, CCIS has provided space for newcomers from West Africa to meet as a group. They formed an association which met regularly and sponsored a number of social activities. This helped to reduce the isolation of newcomers and provided opportunities for them to build their own support networks and to help one another.

## APPENDIX D

### WHAT WILL IT COST NOT TO RECOGNIZE AND INCLUDE FAMILY SUPPORT IN THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S AGENDA?

*The following story was published by Family Support America, a national organization in the United States with a similar mandate and mission to the Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs. Although this story describes the fate of an Iowa resident, its message has relevance for Canadian policy-makers.*

#### "The Million-Dollar Iowan"

At age 48, John Smith has become a million-dollar Iowan. He did not win the Iowa lottery or become a millionaire. Rather, he has now cost Iowa taxpayers over \$1 million for his care and for society's protection. John Smith has spent 20 years of his adult life in correctional institutions (most for reasons of burglary and robbery but also for violent actions) and over three years of his adolescent life in training schools and residential treatment programs. His prison time has cost the state \$450,000 (25 years times \$18,000), his juvenile treatment an additional \$175,000. Probation services during the time John was not locked up have amounted to \$40,000. Court expenses for his prosecution and his appeals have amounted to over \$150,000. Special medical bills for preventable neurological disorders have cost another \$175,000.

John Smith's mother did not have a high school diploma, and lived most of her life in poverty, sometimes on public assistance. When she gave birth, she had no prenatal care, and her son was born prematurely and at low birthweight. John suffered from hyperactivity and a chaotic home environment. His mother was unable to control him by the time he was seven, and John was abused by his stepfather. John was a disciplinary problem in school, and never completed 10<sup>th</sup> grade, although he finally got GED in prison, aided by the completion of some training programs in the prison school.

John estimates that, in addition to the costs to taxpayers, he has robbed Midwestern residents in the vicinity of \$300,000 in goods. During the times when John has lived in society as an adult, he has fathered two children, one of whom has been in five foster homes and now is a candidate for the state training school. John may well have helped to ensure Iowa has a new generation of million-dollar Iowans.

In John Smith's case, one can find points at which actions could have been taken which could have resulted in a better outcome for both John and society.

*IF* John's mother had received support, counselling, and pre-natal care during pregnancy, she might have given birth to a normal birthweight baby, without any neurological disorders.

*IF* she had received enhanced training and family development opportunities, she might have provided a more economically secure home.

*IF* health care had been provided on a primary and preventive basis while John was an infant and toddler, he may not have needed so much medical attention as an adult.

*IF* John's family had been involved in parenting programs and home visiting, he might not have been abused as an infant and angry as a teenager.

Finally, *IF* John had been encouraged, he might have completed high school and developed his own career.

*[In short, preventive investments (in the thousands, rather than the hundreds of thousands of dollars) in the early years of John's life might have helped him to become a contributing member, rather than a threat, to society. If he had earned even three-quarters of the median income for his age group during this period, he would have paid in Iowa taxes, over a thirty year period, more than \$50,000. Most importantly, his children would be on a path to success, not dependency. Overall, John would have contributed hundreds of thousands of dollars to society, rather than draining society of these amounts.]*

Source: *Making the Case for Family Support*, Family Support America, Chicago.

**For additional information please contact:**

Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs

Alla Ivask, Executive Director (613) 237-7667, ext. 223 [aivask@frp.ca](mailto:aivask@frp.ca)  
Janice MacAulay (613) 237-7667, ext. 222 [macaulay@frp.ca](mailto:macaulay@frp.ca)

FRP Canada Board of Directors

Sue McCormack, President (905) 812-3533 [suemcc@interlog.com](mailto:suemcc@interlog.com)  
Barb Cunningham (403) 320-3849 [fcentre@telusplanet.net](mailto:fcentre@telusplanet.net)  
Anna-Marie Leblanc Hayes (506)325-2299 [valfamily@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:valfamily@nbnet.nb.ca)  
Sue Khazaie (604) 852-5278 [skhazaie@ssrv.gov.bc.ca](mailto:skhazaie@ssrv.gov.bc.ca)  
Colette Bédard (450) 466-2538  
Marianne Drew-Pennington (604) 738-2819 [frpofbc@istar.ca](mailto:frpofbc@istar.ca)  
Bev Kirby (709) 643-4891 [bkirby@nf.sympatico.ca](mailto:bkirby@nf.sympatico.ca)  
Sarah Le François (450) 435-2530  
Louise Moody (905) 853-5514 [roseofsh@neptune.on.ca](mailto:roseofsh@neptune.on.ca)  
Marie Rosset (204) 233-8615

BC Association of Family Resource Programs

Marianne Drew-Pennington (604) 738-2819 [frpofbc@istar.ca](mailto:frpofbc@istar.ca)

Ontario Association of Family Resource Programmes

Pat Fannon (416) 463-0793, 910-7747 [saoirse@look.ca](mailto:saoirse@look.ca)  
Catherine Moher (416) 925-4363 [cmoher@acs.ryerson.ca](mailto:cmoher@acs.ryerson.ca)

Metro Association of Family Resource Programmes

Cheryl Lajoie (416) 463-7974 [mafrp@web.net](mailto:mafrp@web.net)

CAPC Coalition of Manitoba

Waltraud Grieger (204) 268-2360

Atlantic Alliance of Family Resource Centres

Anna-Marie Leblanc Hayes (506) 325-2299 [valfamily@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:valfamily@nbnet.nb.ca)