e-VALUATiON
On-line evaluation for family resource programs

Summary of

2007 - 2008 Survey Results

FRP
CANADA

Acknowledgements

We welcome your questions or comments by mail, phone or email.

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INTRODUCTION

Family resource centres are community-based organizations working with children, families and caregivers. These centres promote the healthy development of families and children and encourage participants to use and strengthen their capacities. Family resource centres offer a mix of programming including drop-in play, parent education and family literacy activities in an atmosphere that is purposefully informal and nurturing.

Family resource centres have a long tradition of gathering feedback from program participants about the services they offer. In fact, the practice of reflection is embedded in the principles that guide their work (See Appendix A: *The Guiding Principles of Family Support*). Most centres gather feedback regularly and use a blend of formal and informal methods to evaluate their efforts. Often, this includes measuring the satisfaction of people who access their services. As a result, most centres have a solid understanding of how they are performing.

Some funders of family resource programs, such as the Public Health Agency of Canada which supports the work of Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) sites across the country, have implemented extensive evaluation regimes over many years. However, until now, there has been no universal evaluation system that could gather and analyse results from all types of family resource programs across Canada.

In the fall of 2006, the **Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs** (**FRP Canada**) launched a national evaluation system, called *e-Valuation*, which allows for local evaluations to be standardized and compiled into a single, comprehensive set of results. **This report presents findings from the second year of data collection (2007-2008)**. It reveals the experiences of families and caregivers, staff and volunteers who have participated in programs at family resource centres across the country. Their responses offer a glimpse of the depth of the impact that family resource centres are having on Canadian families and communities. Quotes from survey takers are throughout this document and serve to elaborate on, and give substance to, the data and resulting charts.

The summary of results for 2006-2007 can be found at:
http://www.frp.ca/_data/global/images/resources/eValReportfinal06-07.pdf.

About the e-Valuation system

In 2000, **FRP Canada** partnered with Dr. Peter Gabor from the University of Calgary to conduct research on the evaluation needs of family resource centres and to create practical tools for local, provincial/territorial and national family support organizations. Funding for this work was provided by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada. The initial focus of Dr. Gabor's work was to determine the current evaluation experience and needs of centres across the country. His report, entitled *The Evaluation of Family Resource Programs: Challenges and Promising Approaches*[1] describes a patchwork of evaluation practices and often heavy demands placed by multiple funders upon individual centres to measure the impact of their programs and services. Dr. Gabor noted that this expectation upon individual centres to *prove* their effectiveness was not appropriate, and that the purpose of centre-based evaluation should be to gather information to *improve* programs and services, leaving the matter of proof of effectiveness to large-scale, well-funded research projects.

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[1] Ottawa: FRP Canada, 2003

Over two years, Dr. Gabor worked with a group of experienced leaders in the family resource field who had extensive knowledge of evaluation. The goal was to develop an online system which would be easy to use, appropriate and meaningful to the centres themselves, their funders and other stakeholders. The *Guiding Principles of Family Support* (Appendix A) are at the heart of the *e-Valuation* system, since practices based upon a strengths-based approach are believed to be key to optimal outcomes for families. With input from the working group, core process and outcome indicators[2] were identified, survey questions were drafted, tested and revised, and a data analysis system was designed to produce real time reports. In October 2006, the *e-Valuation* system was ready for organizations to use. A manual entitled *e-Valuation: Building Evaluation Capacity in the Family Support Sector* was released at the same time.

Key products of the *e-Valuation* system include:

- Indicators and data collection instruments
- 'How-to' information and other supporting resources including a PowerPoint tutorial
- A database to manage, analyze, aggregate and report data
- Literature summaries to support evidence underlying survey items

Surveys: The data for the *e-Valuation* system is collected via two surveys, one for program participants—parents, grandparents, caregivers and others—and one for the staff and volunteers of the centres. The surveys can be completed either online or on paper to be later entered into the *e-Valuation* system. Besides English and French, the Participant Surveys have been translated into Spanish, Chinese, German, Hindi, Portuguese and Tamil and have been formatted to match the English/ French version, with Latin numerals, so that staff may enter the data with ease. The Staff/ Volunteer Survey is available in Hindi and Portuguese, as well as English and French. All of these are available to download at http://e-valuation.frp.ca/org/e/Resources.php.

Most of the survey questions used checkboxes with four ratings – no agreement, a little agreement, moderate agreement and strong agreement. This rating scale was developed after the national pilot test. The previous versions of the surveys used a more typical rating scale of strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree. However, analysis of the pilot test showed that virtually all responses fell into the 'agree' and 'strongly agree' columns. The decision was taken to increase the subtlety of participant responses by increasing options of agreement to three and reducing options of disagreement to one (no agreement). For each rated question, respondents had the option of choosing 'cannot say or does not apply.' They were also instructed to skip any question they preferred not to answer. In addition to 23 rated questions, participants were asked to provide some demographic information and had the option of completing three open-ended questions:

- How has this program or centre made a difference for you or your family?
- What would you like this program or centre to do differently?
- Please share any other comments or suggestions.

Selected comments from these questions are included in this report.

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[2] The core indicators can be viewed at http://e-valuation.frp.ca/org/e/Resources.php

There are two time windows throughout the year for survey data collection. System users gather survey data during a 3-week implementation period of their choosing within either the fall or spring data collection periods.

In the second year of implementation, 3360 respondents completed the Participant Survey and 280 completed the Staff/Volunteer Survey from 68 agencies. These numbers build upon data from Year One where 65 agencies entered responses from a total of 3031 participants and 387 staff/volunteers.

Data analysis and reports: Upon entering the data of a minimum of four surveys, organizations can access immediate reports showing the survey results for their own organization. They can also generate reports showing combined data by type of organization, province or territory, community size or type of funder (as long as there are data from at least four organizations in the group). Open-ended comments (which could have identifying information) are available only to the centre which collected the data. Raw data which allows further analysis at the site level are available to each centre upon request.

Research summaries: The *e-Valuation* system is strongly grounded in experience and supported by the literature from the field of family support and related areas of study. Ten short summaries link the survey themes and related concepts to findings from the academic literature, thus demonstrating the evidence base which supports the system. Each summary includes discussion, annotated references and an extensive bibliography. The ten themes (see Appendix B), identified with specific items on each survey are:

- Engaging Families with a Welcoming Atmosphere and Respectful Staff
- Enhancing Family Participation
- Diversity
- Transfer of Strategies for Increasing Family Well-being
- Parental Confidence
- Strengthening Family Social Networks
- Links to Other Services and Resources
- Worker Satisfaction
- Appropriate Policies
- Collaboration and Partnerships

See www.frp.ca/evidence for full text of summaries.

SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPATING FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES

System participation rate

This current report is based on data from 3360 families, representing approximately 6033 adults and children, and 280 staff/volunteers who entered surveys at 68 locations from October 2007 to September 2008. This represents the second cohort of the *e-Valuation* system.

In the previous year, a total of 3031 participant surveys were entered.

For a more detailed look at the total number of answered questions for both the participant and staff surveys in Years One and Two, refer to pages 36-37.

Location and geographical setting

In 2007-2008, the majority of participating sites were from Ontario (94%) with the balance from Alberta (4%), and Manitoba (1%). The higher participation rate from Ontario may reflect several factors: Ontario has a long history of providing family resource/support services; Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) were encouraged to use the system by their funders at the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services; and there is a greater diversity of types of family resource programs in Ontario than in some other provinces where the majority of centres operate under the auspices of a single government funder who may have its own evaluation system (such as CAPC/CPNP sites in Atlantic Canada or Parent Link Centres in Alberta).

Among the organizations that registered on the *e-Valuation* system in the second year, 46% identified themselves as rural/remote, up from 32% in Year One and 54% as located in urban or suburban communities, down from 68% in the previous cohort. This represents an increase in rural participation.

Type of organization

A full eighty-four percent (84%) of participating organizations identified themselves as OEYCs or OEYC satellites compared to sixty-two percent (62%) in Year One. The remaining organizations within Ontario were identified as Multi-Service Agencies and one as Community Action Plan for Children CAPC/CPNP. Sites outside of Ontario included Alberta with two Family Resource Programs and one Multi-Service Agency, and one Family Resource Program from Manitoba.

Number of FTE staff

The average number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff members per participating site was 9 for urban agencies and 1 for rural/remote agencies. The highest FTE's overall was 127 at an Ontario Multi-Service Agency with Family Resource Program followed by 25 FTE's at an Ontario Early Years Centre. Thirty-two (32) sites recorded 0 FTE; all of these sites were OEYC's. The highest service population did not, on average, equate to the highest FTE's.

Funding

Most organizations stated that their primary funder was the provincial government (88%). The remaining organizations listed federal government (5%), United Way or other community funding (1%) and "other" (6%).

Service volume

Each registered organization was asked to count the actual number of unique participants (adults and children) served during the previous three weeks. Thirty-seven (37) sites did not enter a number for this category. Of the 28 sites that did complete this question, the mean number of individual adults and children served by each organization during that time period was 915. Since this average includes some very large multi-service agencies, it is wise to look at the median number as well which was 666.

Since adults and children often attend centres more than once within a three week period (76% of the survey respondents reported attending programs 3 or more times per month), the average number of service *visits* per site would be a higher number.

> "To have an FRP in this long term care centre meets so many needs. We need to find more senior residences to have FRP's. There are so many similarities with seniors and children—we sing together, dance together, exercise together, read together…."

PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

"It allows me as a mother to bring my child to a social situation in which she can be stimulated by a variety of personalities, crafts, toys and learning activities. It gives me a chance to relax as I let her play more independently giving me more energy to care and provide for my family while I am at home. I also appreciate the information that is available regarding parenting, community activities and programs."

Overview of responses

Participants' comments and survey results confirm that family resource centres offer a respectful and warm atmosphere for all families. Parents and caregivers report how much they value the opportunity for socialization and the ongoing support from peers and staff. They also acknowledge and express appreciation for the activities and programs that enhance child development, school readiness, socialization and parent-child interaction.

Comments from participants offered feedback on areas for improvement and constructive suggestions. Two examples include the preference for more physical space in drop-ins or less volume of participants and suggestions for more efficient program registrations and communication/outreach about upcoming activities and programs.

Who are family resource centre participants?

Families are as diverse as communities. While most program participants are parents and their children, family support programs include all those that have significant relationships to the children that they bring.

Informal supports found in family resource centres seem to appeal to a significant percentage of families, children and parents/caregivers within the following categories:

- Immigrants
- Participants who speak languages other than English or French
- Low income families
- Rural participants

Connections between children and adults at family resource centres

The demographics on the survey takers' relationship to the child rates 'parent' at 85% and 'caregiver' at 1% of survey respondents. This later figure may seem surprisingly low; however, the question gathering this information asks respondents to check only one category (see Figure 1 on page 12) and thus does not capture the parent that is also a caregiver of another child. Question 32 of the participant survey follows up by asking respondents to indicate how many children, other than their own, they bring to the centre as a caregiver. Of the 2000 respondents who answered this question, 398 (20%) bring one or more children that are not from their own family and1602 (80%) do not bring additional children to the centre,

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Gender

The majority of participants who indicated their gender and completed surveys on behalf of their families or children in their care were females (90%). However this percentage is somewhat misleading since it is based upon the gender of survey respondents, not participants in general. When looking at the gender of all participants in family resource programs according to age, one sees that male participation in the 17 years and older category is at 26%.

It is of note that 22% from the total of survey respondents left the question of gender unanswered, thus the complete picture of the gender make-up of programs is somewhat incomplete.

Age

Respondents supplied information about themselves and other family members (adults and children) who visit the centre. Children aged birth to six years represented 47% of participants and adults aged 26-45 years were at 42%.

The age category that would constitute young parents as defined by most family support programs (25 years and younger) represents 3% of all participants. This percentage seems lower than might be expected. In 2004, Statistics Canada reported that 3% of young people aged 15-19 had children and 25% of young people between 20-24 years were parents.[3]

Family income

According to Statistics Canada 2006 census, the average total income before taxes of two parent families with children under 18 years of age is $66,300 with one earner. For lone parent families, male led, the average is $67,100 and female led $40,900[4]. There are however significant regional difference for these figures with Ontario averaging at $66,600, Manitoba at $58,700 and Alberta at $78,400[5] (provinces represented in the surveys for 2007-2008).

Of the 78% of survey takers that choose to indicate annual family income, 52% reported earning over $60,000, 23% between $36,000 and $59,900 and 25% under $35,999 (see Figure 3).

Statistics from the 2006 census indicated that 7.7% of two parent families in Canada are in the low income category and 9.5% of all economic families[6]. The comparison of annual income of participants in family resource centres with the general population reveals that family resource centres do accommodate a full range of economic families with a significant percentage in the lower income bracket.

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[3] Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Household living arrangements,http://www41.statcan.ca/2007/20000/ceb20000_000-eng.htm

[4] Statistics Canada, Census 2006 ,Average total income by economic family types before taxes, http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/famil05a-eng.htm

[5] Statistics Canada, Census 2006,Regional differences, http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/famil108a-eng.htm

[6] Statistics Canada, Census 2006, Family income groups expressed as percentage, http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/famil106a-eng.htm

Figure 1

Primary relationship of respondents to child(ren)

Parent	85%
Grandparent	7%
Caregiver	1%
Relative	5%
Other	2%

Figure 2

Age of all participants in centres
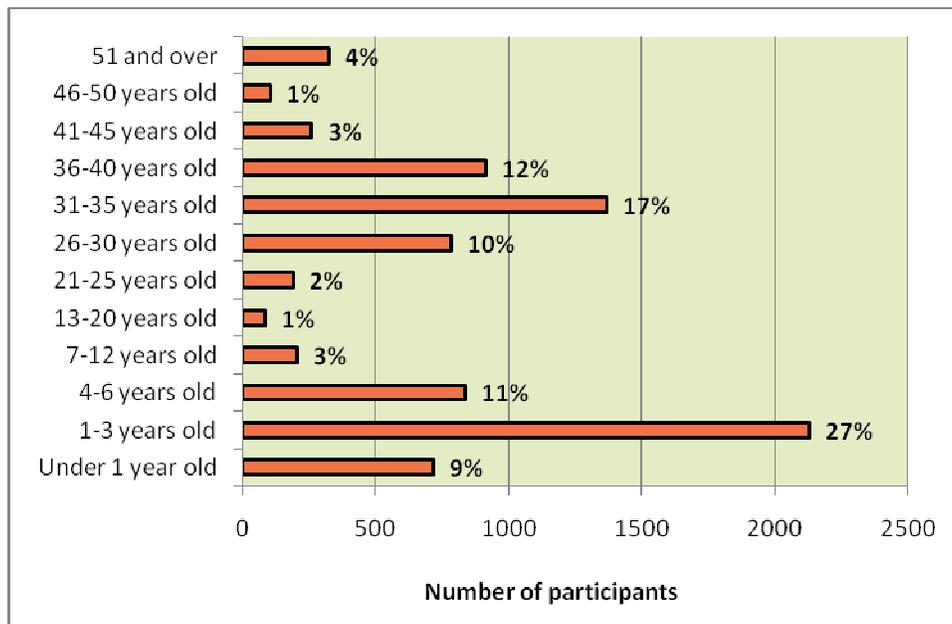
Figure 3

Annual income of families who use the centre
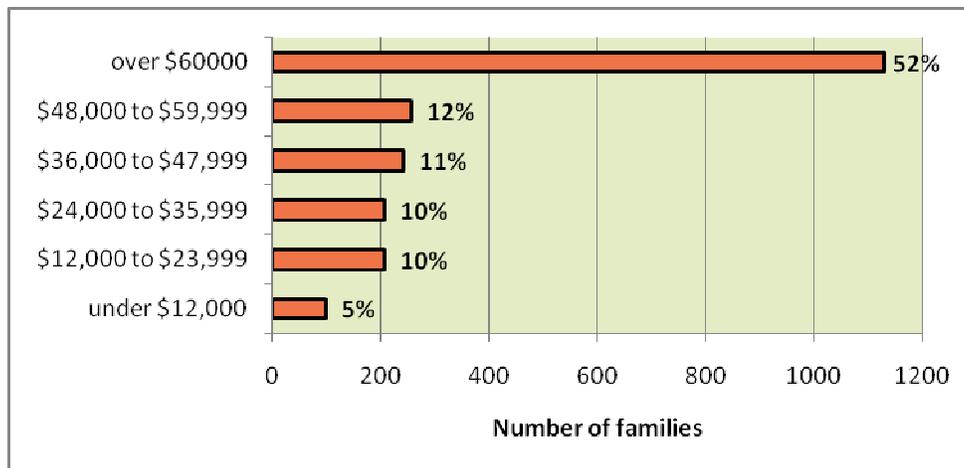
Canadian and neighbourhood residence

Statistics Canada's reports that the foreign-born population constitutes almost 20% of the Canadian population[7]. Of the *e-valuation* survey respondents, over 40% were born outside of Canada, 7% being in Canada for 3 years or less (see Figure 4). The number of survey takers indicating that they were born in Canada is significantly lower in 2007-2008 (56%) than in 2006-2007 (76%).

Culturally diverse and multi-lingual programs, resources and initiatives such as FRP Canada's *Welcome Here,* have become a priority for many family resource centres. *e-Valuation* survey takers' comments and the volume of participants born outside of Canada who attend centres reveals that families from various cultural backgrounds have found a welcoming and accommodating venue for social and practical family support.

Slightly more than half of survey respondents (53%) are well established in their neighbourhoods, having lived there for three or more years (see Figure 5). Since referrals from friends and family are the primary source of participation in family resource centres, it is likely that participation increases with the length of residency in a neighbourhood or particular community.

Languages spoken at home

According to Statistics Canada 2006 Census, 98% of the population can speak one or both of the official languages. English or French is spoken at least regularly at home by 94% of Canadians and most often at home by 89% of the population, sometimes in combination with a non-official language[8].

Of the 2927 of *e-Valuation* survey participants who responded to the question in 2007-2008, 2178 (74%) noted that they most often speak English and French, 26% indicated "other" (see Figure 6). The percentage in the "other" category is not only higher than the general population but also a significant increase from the 14% indicated in year one of the survey.

These numbers again speak to the success of family resource programs in adapting programming and resources to attract non-native English and French speakers that are increasingly a part of the Canadian milieu.

Participants survey results included 57 language groups, the most common being Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Arabic, Tamil, German, Portuguese and Punjabi. Some families reported speaking a combination of languages: French/German, English/Sign language, Ojibway/English, Portuguese/Czech, Spanish/Japanese, and Urdu/Punjabi /English.

Several family resource centres translated the Participant Survey so people could complete it in their first language, thus making it available to a larger number of participants. These surveys, in five additional languages, are posted online for others to use at: http://e-valuation.frp.ca/org/e/Resources.php.

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[7]Statistics Canada 2006 Census foreign born population, http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/rt-td/immcit-eng.cfm

[8]Statistics Canada 2006 Census languages spoken in the home, http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/rt-td/immcit-eng.cfm

Figure 4

Length of residence in Canada

- Less than 1 year (3%)
- 1-3 years (4%)
- 3-10 years (19%)
- More than 10 years but not born in Canada (18%)
- Born in Canada (56%)
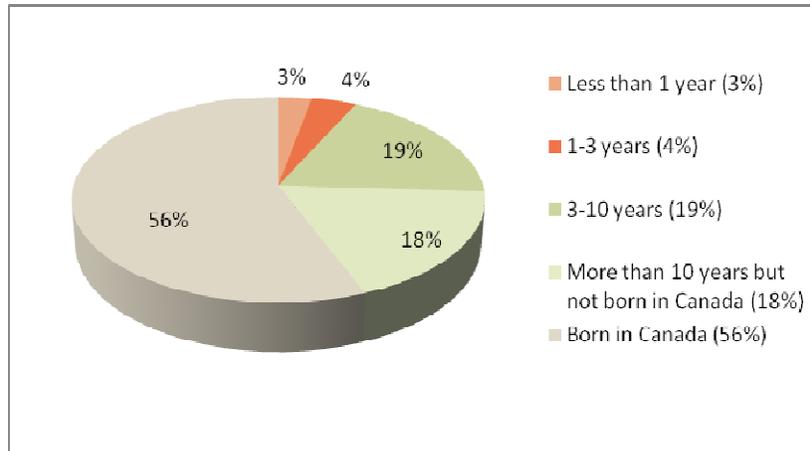
Figure 5

Length of residence in current neighbourhood

- Under 1 year (15%)
- 1-3 years (32%)
- Over 3 years (53%)
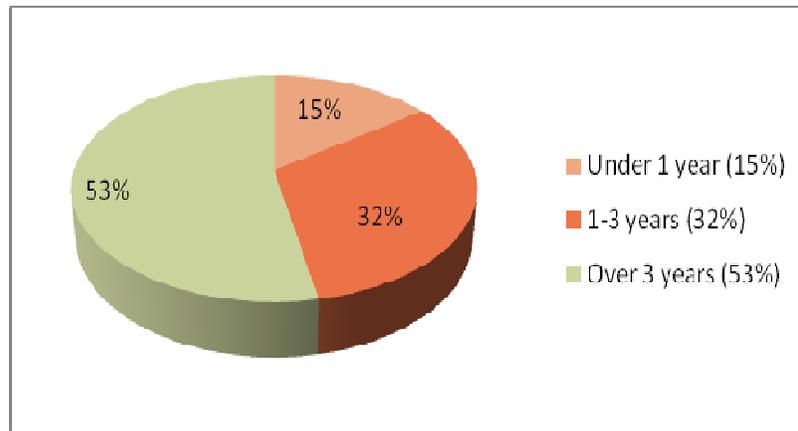
Figure 6

Languages spoken most often at home

- English (73%)
- French (1%)
- Other (26%)
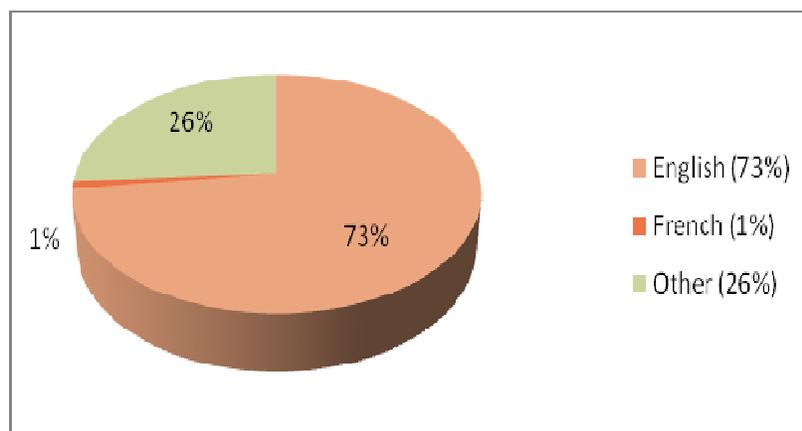
Frequency of family visits and total monthly visits to centres

About two-thirds of participants visit centres five times a month or less and approximately one-third attend more frequently, with 10% attending more than ten times a month.

As indicated in Figure 7, almost half (46%) of respondents reported that they and their family members attend centre programming on average three to five times each month. One quarter (26%) said that they visit the centre six to ten times per month.

The frequency of visits follows a similar pattern in both urban/suburban and rural/remote communities.

Figure 7   **Frequency of family visits to the centre**
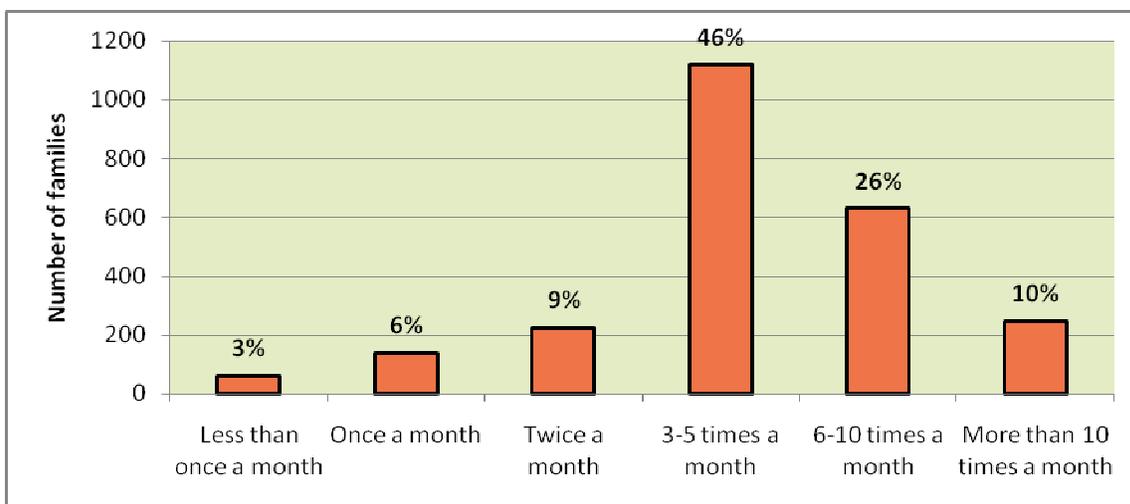
Information and referral sources

Family or friends continue to be the main information source about centres accounting for 43% of the responses with an additional 10% coming from other participants.

Only 3% of respondents indicated receiving information or referral from social services professionals and 9% from healthcare providers. These relatively low numbers may reflect an opportunity for increased collaboration and communication amongst sectors that support families at various levels.

"I would really like to see more ongoing outreach done with community members. As a mom I tell so many other mothers about the program and they did not know."

Figure 8

Source of information about the centre
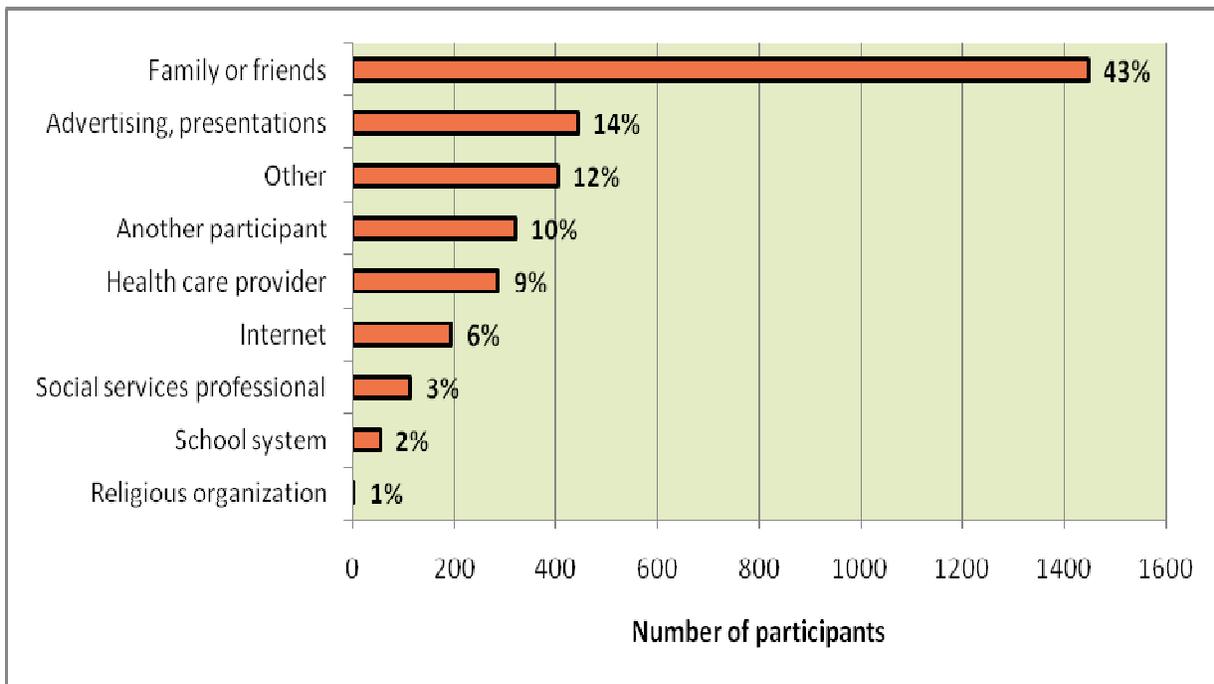
Questions about participants' experiences at family resource centres

Theme 1: Engaging families with a welcoming atmosphere and respectful staff

Effective practices in working with parents involve relationship-building and the creation of an atmosphere of belonging and connectedness with staff and other parents. *The Guiding Principles of Family Support* recognizes the significance of the voluntary nature of participation in family support programs and promotes the importance of relationships based on equality and respect.

As in the first year of data collection, almost all survey respondents (98%) are in strong or moderate agreement that centres' make participants feel welcome and accepted. In addition to the welcoming atmosphere that centre staff cultivate, centres also take great care to create comfortable, inspiring spaces for both parents/caregivers and children. Within this atmosphere, 90% of respondents strongly agreed that the staff members at their centres treat them with respect.

The strong agreement rates for these questions and the effusive comments are evidence that participants value the time and energy centre staff devote towards nurturing relationships with adults and children alike and creating open and accepting environments.

"A place where my son and daughter feel safe, happy and acknowledged. We love the staff here."

"I cannot say enough compliments for Carol-she is a program provider with enthusiasm and she brought me to happy tears with her special touch."

"I am happy to come because this centre is friendly. Staff are excellent-very inviting!"

"It is a welcoming place to go. I am on maternity leave and I am new to the city."

"As a father it has given me the opportunity to spend time with my children on their own. I bonded well with my son who is very attached to his mom. He understands and enjoys coming to the centre with daddy. We enjoy the craft and the staff are terrific!"

"It is a wonderful centre with staff that cares about me and my child."

"It's a place where my children and I feel comfortable coming and interacting with adults and kids."

"I find it easy to pop in or if I choose not to, I am not made to feel guilty."

"The post-partum support group was very helpful and the associates very warm and understanding."

Theme 2: Enhancing family participation

Access to services and the lack of barriers to participating in programs such as user fees, the need for referrals and waiting lists, allows for easy participation for everyone and a feeling of belonging when choices and various opportunities for involvement are available.

Family resource centres offer a variety of structured and unstructured activities and programming to meet the varying needs, expectations and learning styles of participants. Figure 9 shows that 75% of survey takers show strong agreement that family resource centres design their activities so that people can participate in their own way.

While the majority of survey respondents (75%) strongly agree that centre staff and programs are available when participants need them, a small number of survey respondents commented that they would like to see their local centre extend its operating hours to include more evening and weekend programming. More often, the comments reflected the need for concurrent programs or childcare for the second child that does not meet the age criteria of the child-parent/caregiver program.

In family resource programs, the gathering of feedback and recommendations is often accomplished in an informal and indirect way by seeking verbal feedback and select workshop evaluations. Such methods suit the various language and literacy levels that family support centres accommodate; however, engaging participants in day-to-day decision making remains challenging. This indirect approach may account for the significant portion of respondents (40%) either choosing "Cannot Say or Does Not Apply" or leaving the question unanswered when asked if there are opportunities for them to become involved in decision making about the programming and operations of this centre. Those who did answer the question indicated less agreement then the other questions in this section (see Figure 11). While some centres may not be offering enough opportunities for decision making, it is also possible that some participants have no desire to become involved in such activities or that they are not aware that such opportunities exist.

Continuing to incorporate the use of the *e-Valuation* system, including the use of translated survey forms, may indicate to participants that they are indeed an integral part of selecting and improving programs and services.

"The parent programs offered by the centre look great but a lot of the time I cannot sign-up for them because of times they are offered. With 2 children at home, I cannot attend weekday programs. Some weekend programs would be nice so that I can attend and be attentive without worrying about my children."

"The only thing I can suggest is trying to have more programs where you can bring 2 kids of different ages."

"Provide classes for different age groups at once. Also provide, perhaps for a fee, childminding services so a parent can participate with one child while the other is being cared for."

"Offer email newsletters to give a heads-up on events and workshops."

Figure 9

**Programs and activities are designed in a way
that makes it possible for me to participate**
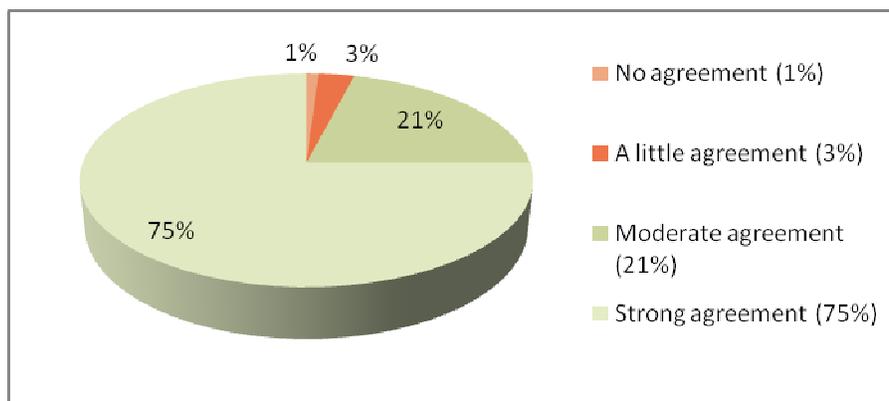
Figure 10

**Staff and services are available when I need them**
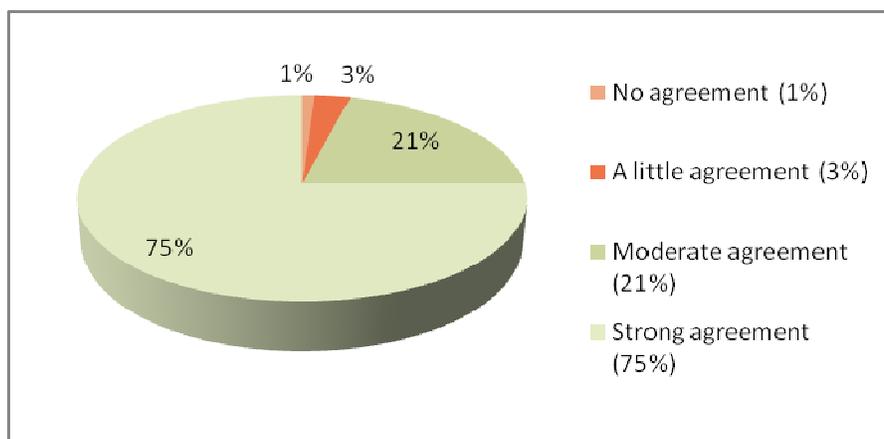
Figure 11

**There are opportunities for me to become involved in
decision making about programming and operations**
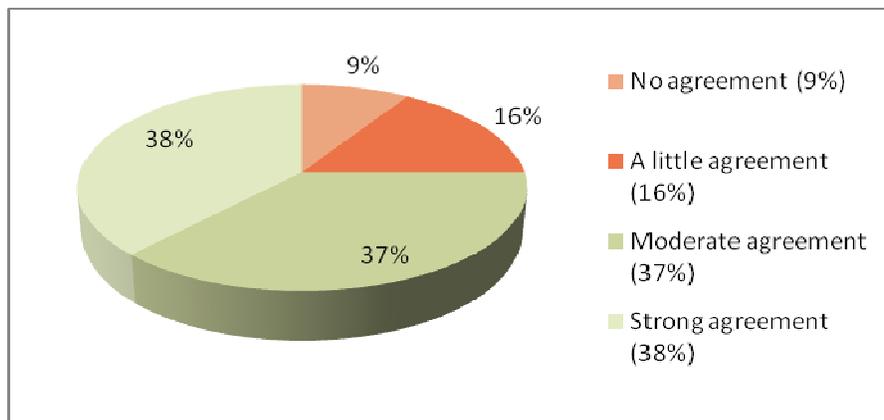
Theme 3: Diversity

The concept of diversity includes, among other things, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation and physical ability. Over the years, family support centre management and staff have embraced opportunities to increase their awareness of diversity issues and have worked hard to incorporate innovated programs and activities to reflect the communities that they serve. This desire to adapt and enhance programming and services necessitates collaboration with other community services such as immigrant services agencies and various advocacy groups.

Respondents moderately agreed (14%) or strongly agreed (84%) that family resources centres welcome and respect participants from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Moreover, comments made from staff and volunteers indicate that they too feel privileged to learn about and celebrate diversity through training opportunities and the sharing of experiences with participants and the community.

"I have discovered that there are facilities that do care and don't criticize your age, race, colour."

"This centre allows me to spend quality time with my mother, a senior at this program as well as have the children I bring interact and play with other children and individuals with special needs."

Theme 4: Transfer of strategies for increasing family well-being

Survey responses indicate that parenting and family support and skill building is a realized benefit of visiting their family support centres and one that transfers into the home environment.

Comments, such as those exampled below, were numerous and impassioned and served to elaborate on the depth of family support that is perceived by centre participants. In keeping with the volume of comments regarding social networking, peer and staff support, 84% of respondents indicated strong to moderate agreement with the statement that they feel able to deal more effectively with the day-to-day challenges encountered as a family since coming to their centre (see Figure 13).

"Since coming here I'm more confident and able to deal with anything that happens in my house. I feel excited to come and always go home with new things to try and new ways of handling stress."

"My kids no longer drive me up the wall thanks to the program."

"It has provided fun songs and rhymes that I can use at home. It has also given me a variety of feedback from other moms with the ability to network."

"Very big help on how to deal with children effectively and respectfully. I have learned when to not sweat the small stuff."

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Figure 12

This centre does its best to be welcoming to the diverse groups of people who live in this community

1% 1%
14%
84%

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (14%)
- Strong agreement (84%)
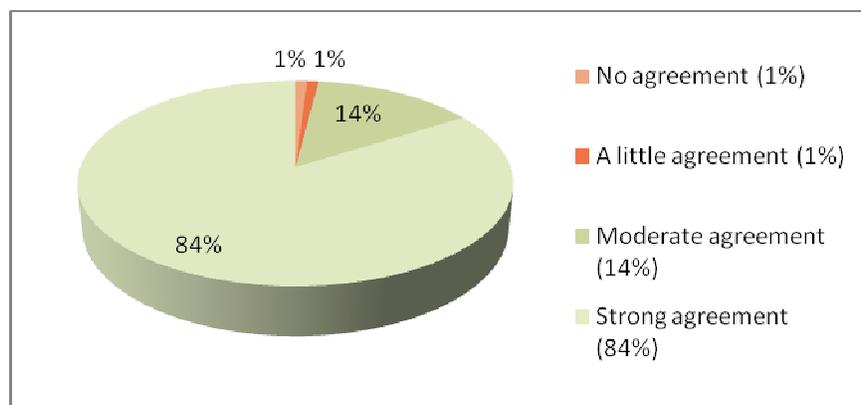
Figure 13

Since coming to this centre, I am more able to deal effectively with the day to day challenges we encounter as a family

4%
12%
38%
46%

- No agreement (4%)
- A little agreement (12%)
- Moderate agreement (38%)
- Strong agreement (46%)
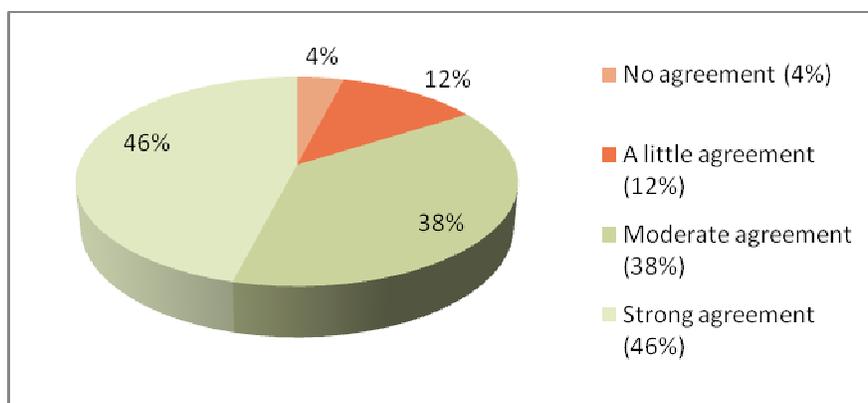
Figure 14

Since we have been participating in this centre, our family has more ideas and ways of getting along

4%
10%
37%
49%

- No agreement (4%)
- A little agreement (10%)
- Moderate agreement (37%)
- Strong agreement (49%)
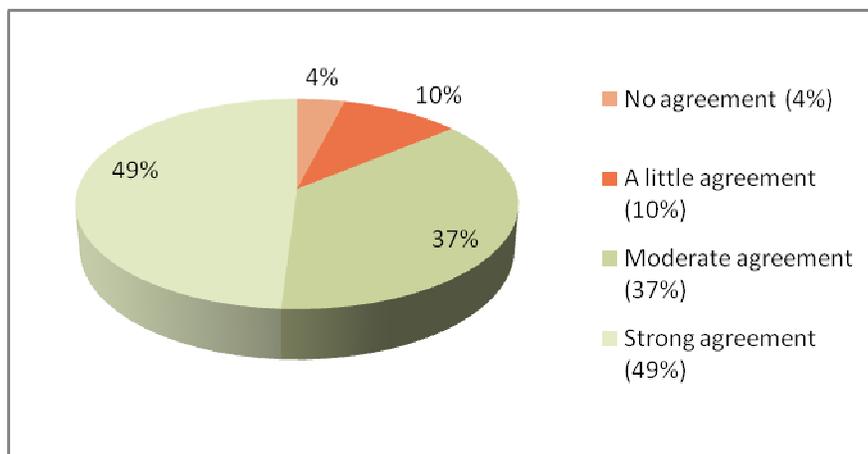
Theme 5: Parental and caregiver confidence

The everyday challenges and stresses of parenting/caregiving are numerous and unavoidable and can serve to call into question one's caregiving aptitude. Family support programs operate from a strength based approach to help parents navigate the demands and uncertainties by affirming that parenting is a life-long learning process. By supporting parents and caregivers to incorporate new learning and strategies into their caregiving skills, the developmental potential of children is also supported.

Family support centres and programs are a place to ask questions, share ideas and learn from one another in a non-judgmental atmosphere, all of which helps to nourish confidence and create an ethos of care among individuals and communities.

The capacity for centres to help bolster parental/caregiver confidence is reflected by 86% of participants reporting strong or moderate agreement that since coming to the centre, they feel more confident as a parent or caregiver.

"It was a lifeline when my daughter was first born–I knew very few other parents in my neighbour-hoods–I was a nervous mommy–the You and Your Baby program made all the difference. My confidence has definitely increased as a result of participating in CAPC programs."

"I started coming here when my first child was 4 months old. I was feeling isolated and desperate, completely convinced that I had made a wrong decision in becoming a parent. Coming to the centre gave us opportunities to socialize and the staff provided invaluable guidance."

"It has given me so much wonderful advice and the strength and courage to use it."

Theme 6: Strengthening family social networks

The families in which children grow need support networks. The establishment of strong family social networks is not only important for reducing the feelings of loneliness and isolation that many parents may feel, it is also directly linked to positive child outcomes including the concept of resiliency.

The comments and data from survey participants suggest that family support programs and centres provide a location for parent socialization and peer support and that once established, these relationships often extend to other non-participating family members and continue outside of programs and drop-ins.

Survey participants recorded that they were in strong or moderate agreement (76%) that they have made friends that they can turn to outside of the centre.

The opportunity to network with other families help parents/caregivers to realize that valuable knowledge and resources exist within social groups and are there to support them.

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"This centre has made the difference in making me feel less isolated in my community. I have lived here for 5 years and have not made social acquaintances in my community. I feel that I am establishing some relationships now due directly to the OEYC."

"...has kept me sane and connected to the world while I raise my son. I could not have survived as a full-time mom without the staff and facilities. I thank you, as I'm sure my husband and son do too!"

"It is a fantastic connection point for my child and myself, being new to Canada. This program gets a HUGE HOORAH from me."

"Met a wonderful group of ladies/babies at You and Your Baby who have become good friends."

"This community gives every child and all families opportunities to meet friends and to share joys and carry each others' burdens."

Theme 7: Links to other services and resources

Family support programs offer education and recreational programs to all children and families and strive to enhance what is available in the community through the collaboration with community organizations. An equally important part of the holistic nature of family support work is to find out about and provide information on community resources and services and to offer a link to such services.

More than 90% of respondents reported that they are more aware of the services and resources available in their communities because they had contact with a family resource centre. The success of family resource centres in linking parents and caregivers to other services and programs involves more than providing contact information. It is not unusual for family support workers to go so far as to accompany a parent in need to an outside community service or consultation or to invite outside agencies and resource people into the familiar and comfortable centre setting.

Reflecting back on where participants acquire information about family resource centres, it is curious that few respondents indicated receiving information or referrals to family resource centre by social services professionals, the school system or health care providers. It may simply be that family resource centres are accessed before other aforementioned services because of their neighbourhood presence, free services and accessibility to all families.

"It has provided me with resources on how to obtain cheap clothing and household items and any services in the community that I wouldn't know about without the centre."

"Staff are very helpful providing information about other programs and to get to know more about our community."

"I met all of my current friends there and found my childcare provider in the black book!"

Questions about parenting and child development

Family resource centres offer a wide array of supports for adults and children that adhere to the principles of child development. Depending on the needs of the community, centres may offer child care giving courses, parent-child interaction activities (e.g. *Mother Goose*), community kitchens, parent-child attachment programs, facilitated playgroups, etc. All of these programs are designed to provide modeling, education and experiential learning to help adults better provide and care for children.

Typical centre programming directed at children can include unstructured drop-in play as well as more structure craft, music and literacy activities and specific school readiness programs. These types of programs give children opportunities to develop their fine motor and language skills, use their imaginations and socialize with other children.

The survey data summarized below illustrates that participants have learned new things about parenting and child development as a result of participating at family resource centres.

- 92% reported that they have an increased awareness of activities that are appropriate for their children
- 90% were in agreement that they are more aware of what to expect from their child(ren) at different ages
- 88% of respondents said that the centre helped them to learn things that they now use at home, including strategies for guiding child behavior (81%) and new play activities
- 89% of participants reported feeling more supported in their roles as parents or caregivers
- 82% stated that they understand their children better since they started going to their centre

Survey takers also reported that their children's play and socialization behaviours have improved since attending programs at a local family resource centre.

- 91% reported that their children are more comfortable in social situations since going to the local family resource centre
- 87% agreed that their children have more opportunities to interact with people from other cultures
- 93% noted that their children have increased opportunities to play with age appropriate toys and equipment
- 95% stated that children have more chances to explore new environments

"It allows me to bring my child to a social situation in which she can be stimulated by a variety of personalities, crafts, toys and learning activities, I let her play more independently."

"It has made a big difference because I use to spank my child when she didn't listen. After taking classes I use my words now. I find it has opened communication and we understand each other."

"The most important for me as a caregiver is to give the child more opportunity to socialize. They are preparatory steps for her real school life."

"Being a young parent, the centre has taught me how to be a parent."

STAFF AND VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

"I feel that we need a male presence on staff to help with male role model concerns.
Generally there are male and female caretakers in each family and in this day and age, many families are increasing led by male homemakers."

Who are family resource centre staff, students and volunteers?

Staff and volunteers in family support work bring with them a wealth of knowledge both from formal and experiential learning. Ongoing training and development are a priority for staff along with a deep regard for equality and respect for fellow staff and for the families they serve.

For the second survey year, 2007-2008, 280 staff, volunteers and students responded, down from 387 in year one.

Of these respondents:

95% were female
27% were paid full time staff, 37% were paid part time staff
24% of respondents were volunteers and 12% were students

Levels of education

In recent years there has been a focus on a range of options for training and credentials in the family support field. Short and long-term training, in-service training and partnerships with college and university departments provide innovative and current information and practices.

In total, 79% of staff who responded to the survey have post-secondary training. Of these, 36% have completed college and 43% university and higher.

Respondents favour on-going training and education opportunities and also highly value life experience that contributes to the qualifications and skills of a family support practitioner.

Figure 15

At present I am...

- Full time staff member (27%)
- Part time staff member (37%)
- Volunteer (24%)
- Student (12%)
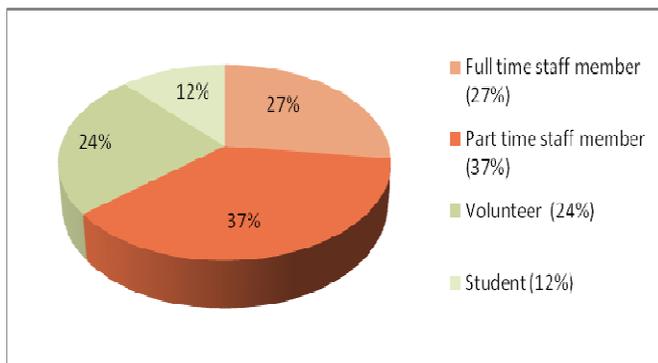
Figure 16

Highest level of education completed by staff

- Secondary school (21%)
- College diploma (36%)
- University degree (31%)
- Postgraduate degree (12%)
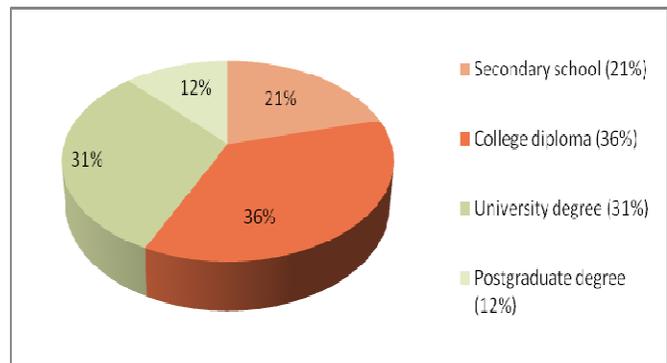
Age and years of experience in the field

The results show that 52% of staff, volunteers and students were under the age of 40, while 17% were over the age of 51. For paid staff only, the chart shows that the majority of respondents have over five years experience in the field and a full 35% have over 15 years experience.

This wide range of ages and years of experience brings to family resource programs a wealth of experience and knowledge. Adequate remuneration and benefits may help attract those newly entering the workforce to ensure that experience and knowledge can be garnered and the quality of service maintained as workers retire.

Years working or volunteering at the centre

Of respondents including student and volunteers, 71% of have been with their current centre for five years or less and 45% of respondents have been working at their centres for two years or less.

When the numbers for paid staff only are examined (Figure 19), 58% appear to have been at the centre for five years or less and 42% over 6 years. Of those who responded, 37% have been at their current centre for 5 years or less and 27% two years or less.

Given the age of survey takers and their years of experience in the field, the data suggests that the respondents have been employed in the field longer than they have worked at their current centre.

Figure 17

Age of staff, volunteers and students
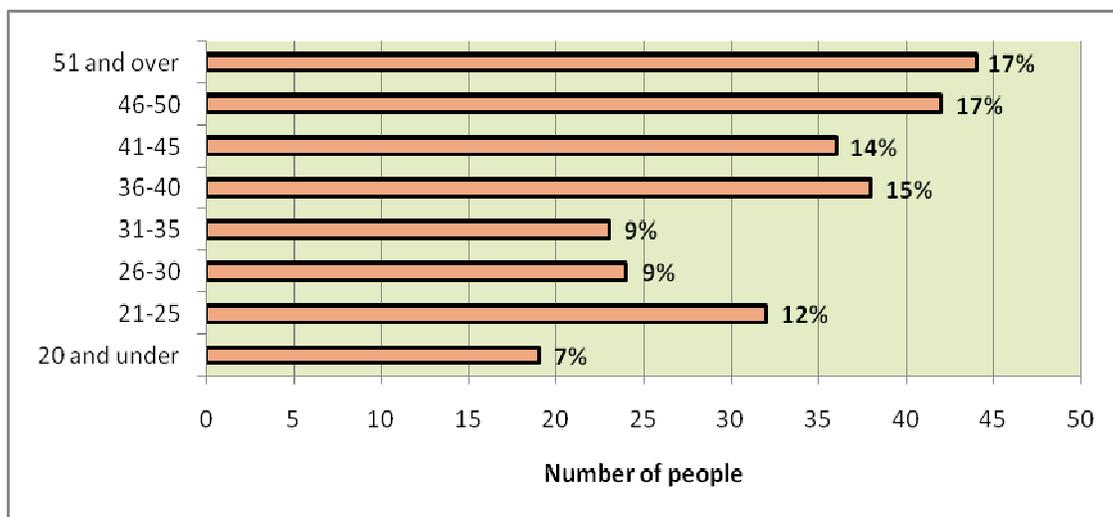
Figure 18

**Years of experience in the field, staff only**
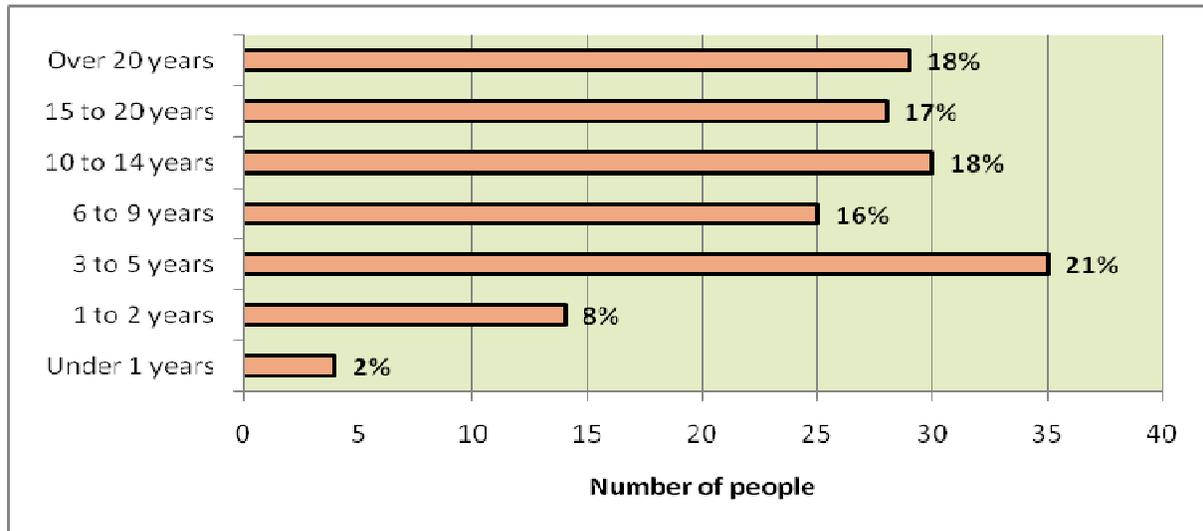
Figure 19

Years working with this centre, staff only
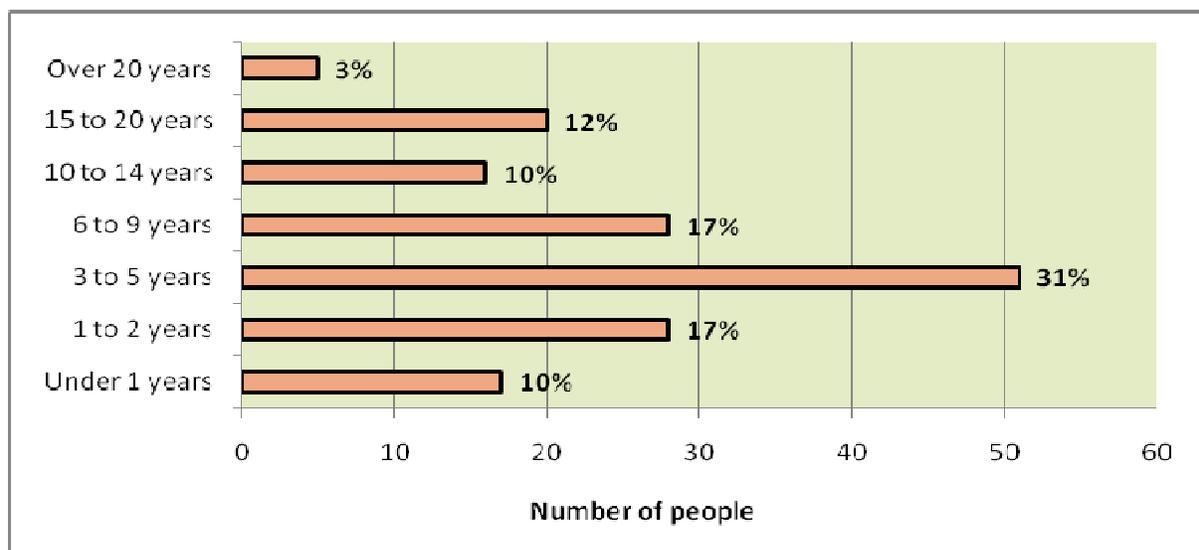
Questions about staff and volunteer experiences at family resource centres

Theme 8: Worker Satisfaction

In 2000, the Canadian Policy Research Networks conducted a survey on job quality indicators. The top ten indicators included respectful co-workers, interesting work, time for skill development, job security, freedom to do the job, and work-family balance[9]. Comments and ratings from the survey respondents indicate that these top ten indicators were for the most part reflected in the organization that they are a part of and the position that they assume. Eighty seven percent (87%) of respondents strongly agreed that their work is meaningful and contributes to the organization.

Even though many family resource centres have small budgets and operate on short-term funding, the results of this survey show that the large majority of centre staff and volunteers feel that stakeholders and community partners support their organizations and that in turn, stakeholders and partners seem satisfied with the services offered by the centre. Although staff demonstrate remarkable commitment by providing outstanding service to their community, several comments from the staff survey indicates that remuneration for their work falls short of their expectations both for wages and benefits particularly for contract staff (see comments below).

Family support programs consider training and development to be one the most important ways to ensure quality in their programs. Sixty seven percent (67%) of respondents indicated strong agreement that opportunities for the development of knowledge and skills exist. However several comments indicated that staff felt the need for increased access to workshops and conferences. Other areas identified that could use improvement include staff and management communication and team building. Moreover, while the sense of staff empowerment and ownership expressed seems overall quite high, the ratings for opportunities for involvement in day-to-day program decisions, strategic planning, policy making and program reveals room for improvement (see Figure 21).

"This is a great place to work. I feel as though I am appreciated and respected. The organization places great value and importance on my family and I feel supported as a mother and as an employee. I truly enjoy working here and I believe that enjoying who I work for and with, translates into a positive experience for clients."

"This centre has helped me grow in my knowledge of family support and child education. As a volunteer I am blessed with many opportunities to be involved when I am asked. The centre is a huge stepping stone to becoming a teacher and to raising a family when the time comes."

"As a manager I feel we could do more for our staff in terms of professional development and adequate/appropriate remuneration."

"..front line contract staff have less opportunity to be involved in decision making and do not have the same support in terms of paid sick leave, holiday leave and staff development. I realize this is a budgetary issue but appreciation of their contribution by providing benefits/security would help eliminate staff turn over."

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[9]CPRN (Canadian Policy Research Networks). What workers want in a Job. Retrieved July 7, 2008 from http://www.jobquality.ca/indicators/rewards/

Figure 20

**My work at the centre is meaningful to
me and contributes to the organization**

- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (12%)
- Strong agreement (87%)
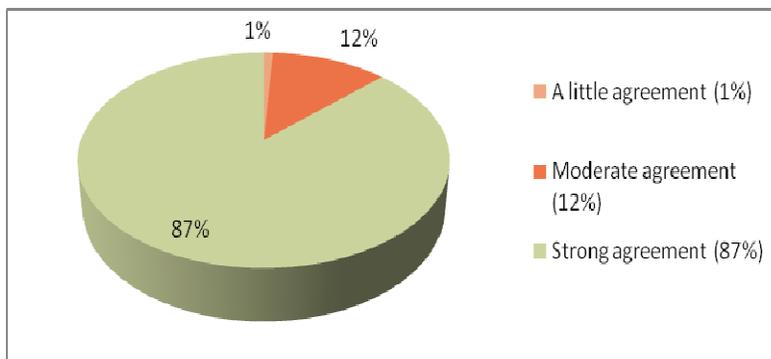
Figure 21

**When I wish to do so, there are opportunities for me to become
involved in decision making, planning and development**

- No agreement (2%)
- A little agreement (12%)
- Moderate agreement (32%)
- Strong agreement (54%)
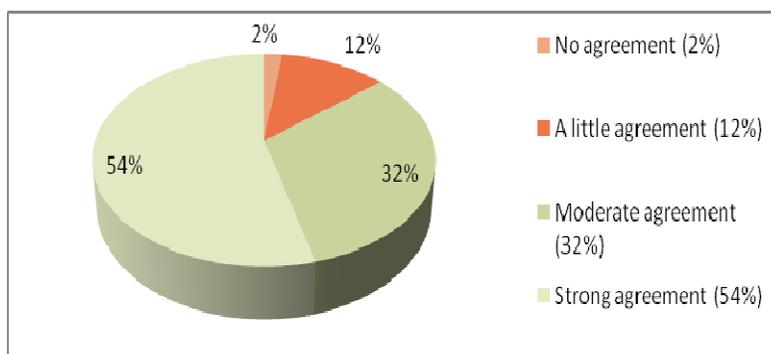
Figure 22

**This organization provides opportunities
for me to develop my knowledge or skills**

- A little agreement (6%)
- Moderate agreement (27%)
- Strong agreement (67%)
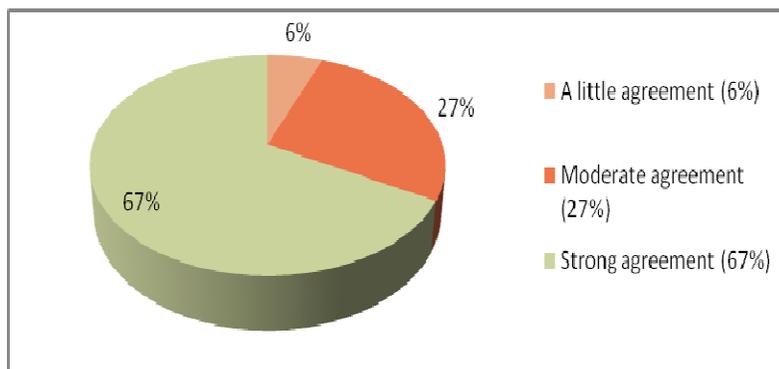
Theme 9: Appropriate policies

In 2002, FRP Canada published the *Guiding Principles of Family Support*, a document based on cross-country consultations with family resource programs. These principles provide a framework for quality family support programs and remains the cornerstone of family support practice. They reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the field and describe the values that centres and family resource programs have been using for decades to guide the development of their organizational policies (see Appendix A).

Appropriate policies reflect the development of a quality practice framework including the formulation of a staff training and development strategy and program evaluation.

Figures 23-25 indicate that survey respondents believe that family resource centres for the most part have appropriate policies in place to encourage effective human resources management, to support principle-based practice with program participants and to promote meaningful evaluation. Staff and volunteers expressed strong agreement (88%) that their centre's policies reflect family support principles. Moreover, a significant percentage of respondents said that family resource centre policies are adequately designed with the needs of staff and volunteers in mind.

Finally, 96% of survey takers strongly to moderately agreed that centres have policies that provide clear direction to staff about their work. Several comments from respondents did however suggest that part-time and off site staff sometimes lack direction and information on centre policies and procedures.

"We attempt to support families in all ways and integrity and respect are core values in all that we do. It is immensely satisfying to be part of this support system and contribute to strengthening families."

"As a staff member I feel I am also supported to be a dedicated mother to my own children. This centre has really put their money where their mouth is in supporting staff to put families first."

"The board of directors is a professional, dedicated group who are concerned with offering quality programming and support to families in the riding. The management staff is approachable, caring people who believe in family values and are cognizant in providing quality service to the community."

Figure 23   **Workplace policies and procedures take the needs of staff and volunteers into account into account**

A little agreement (3%)

Moderate agreement (25%)

Strong agreement (72%)

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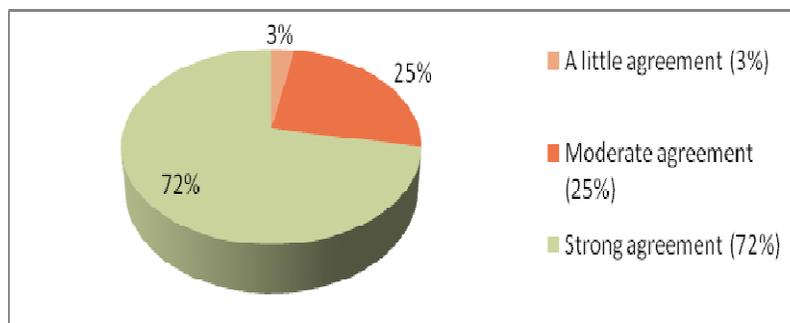
Figure 24

The policies of this centre reflect family support principles
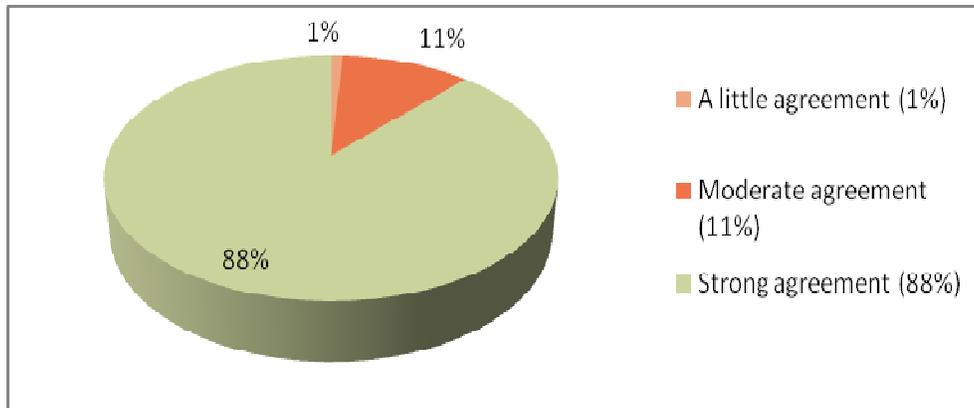
Figure 25

The policies provide clear guidelines and direction to staff
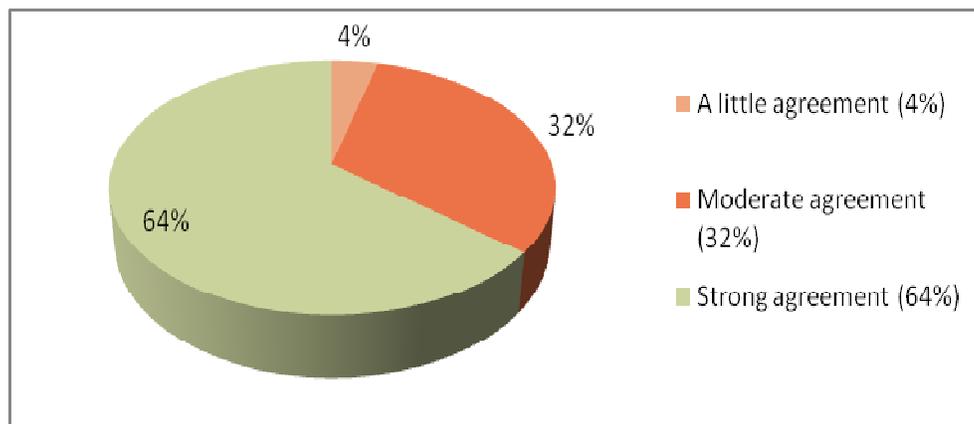
"...because there are so many staff who work out of a centre (part-time and full-time) there should be a memo/newsletter or some type of communication that makes all staff aware of any new policies, program changes etc."

"As part-time staff who works off site some days I sometime feel out of the loop on policies and procedures."

"Some of the policies of the centres need to be explained in more detail and become standardized so that they are followed amongst all (OEYC) centres. New staff and students who are hired should be made aware of the policies and procedures so that they are prepared for certain situations and are informed when making decisions."

e-VALUATiON
On-line evaluation for family resource programs

Theme 10: Collaboration and partnerships

Family resource centres work to promote a holistic perspective of family life by linking education, health, child development, community development and other factors essential to family well-being. Centres strive to create and maintain a web of relationships and agreements with other community-based organizations who can offer families other types of support. Not only is collaboration with existing organizations more cost effective, it allows for the combining of resources and skills and reduces barriers to access for families.

Two survey questions address collaboration from the view of support and satisfaction of stakeholders and community partners with the organization and the ability to provide enhanced services. One hundred percent (100%) of staff and volunteers survey takers noted that stakeholders and partners strongly or moderately support the local family resource centre while 99% feel that stakeholders and partners seem satisfied with services offered by the centre (Figure 26).

Finally, 78% of staff and volunteers reported strong agreement that their partnerships and collaborations allow their centres to offer enhanced services (Figure 27).

Some comments from both staff/volunteer and participant surveys suggest that community outreach is an area that can continue to develop to inform the community of services and resources available at family support agencies.

Figure 26

Stakeholders and partners seem satisfied with services

- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (27%)
- Strong agreement (72%)
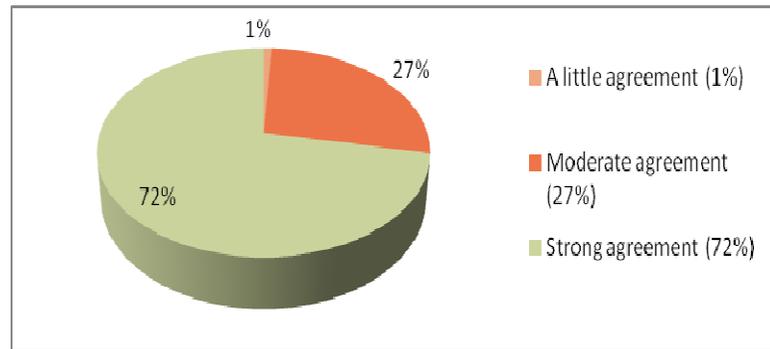
"I would like to see more initiatives that provide outreach programs for the community as a whole. Some people are unaware of the purpose of an OEYC, therefore having programs in various public places would provide more awareness and would likely gather a lot of volunteers who would like to contribute to such a community service."

Figure 27

This organization engages in partnerships that enable it to provide enhanced services

- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (21%)
- Strong agreement (78%)

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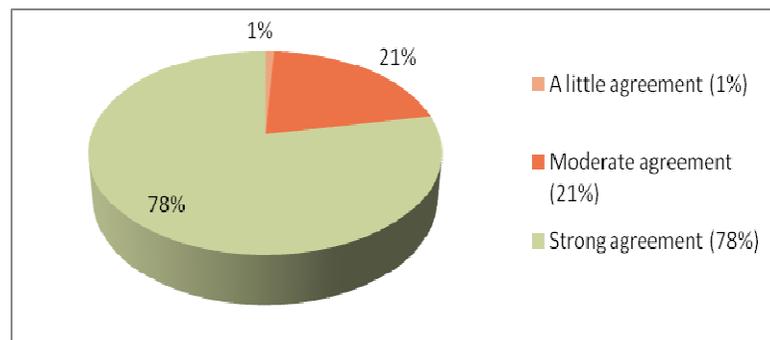
CONCLUSION

Appropriate evaluation that is reliable and meaningful is an important way to ensure quality and reflective practices in family support programs. The *e-Valuation* survey provides a tool for ongoing evaluation that involves staff/volunteer and participants in a confidential and user friendly format for the purpose of improving programs and services and highlighting strengths and successes.

The results from the second cohort of the *e-valuation* surveys show that family resource centres are successfully supporting parents, caregivers, children and the well-being of families and communities.

The responses from parents and caregivers illustrate that social support, empowerment and child development are a focus of family support programs that provide adults and children alike with a sense of community, opportunity and growth.

The responses from staff and volunteers expressed strong satisfaction with their workplaces independent of remuneration and a delight in being a part of the strengthening and building of capacities in families and communities. A respect for diversity and family values is clearly seen as being a foundation of the centre's operation.

Family resource programs vary depending on their geographical location, mandate and funding source. Limitations to staffing, programming and services due to funding restrictions and logistics continue to be a challenge, yet centres are known to have the flexibility and creativity to continue to offer a range of services in an accessible and informal atmosphere.

FRP Canada will continue to support family resource centres in using the *e-Valuation* system to enhance the building of an evaluation capacity which allows for accountability and provides an opportunity to involve staff and participants in the shaping of quality programs and services that reflect the changing needs of families and communities. We encourage the sharing of results with participants, funders and other partners and stakeholders to continue to promote ownership, transparency and community involvement in family support programs.

> *"Over the years I have seen a lot of growth and change within the program and the services we provide. The Guiding Principles of Family Support have always been a big part of our program planning and the way we run our programs. It has been a wonderful experience to be a part of such a great program and to work with the parents/caregivers and children and to see the positive impact programs like ours have on the families and the community as a whole."*

APPENDIX A

The guiding principles of family support

1. Family support programs are open to all families, recognizing that all families deserve support.

2. Family support programs complement existing services, build networks and linkages, and advocate for policies, services and systems that support families' abilities to raise healthy children.

3. Family support programs work in partnership with families and communities to meet expressed needs.

4. Family support programs focus on the promotion of wellness and use a prevention approach in their work.

5. Family support programs work to increase opportunities and to strengthen individuals, families and communities.

6. Family support programs operate from an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of families' lives.

7. Family support programs value and encourage mutual assistance and peer support.

8. Family support programs affirm parenting to be a life-long learning process.

9. Family support programs value the voluntary nature of participation in their services.

10. Family support programs promote relationships based on equality and respect for diversity.

11. Family support programs advocate non-violence to ensure safety and security for all family members.

12. Family support programs continually seek to improve their practice by reflecting on what they do and how they do it.

Source: Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (2002). http://www.frp.ca/_data/global/images/resources/guiding-e.pdf

APPENDIX B

Survey themes

Participant survey themes	Survey question(s)
1 Engaging families with a welcoming atmosphere & respectful staff	1, 2
2 Enhancing family participation	3, 4, 5
3 Diversity	6
4 Transfer of strategies for increasing family well-being	7, 8
5 Parental confidence	9
6 Strengthening family social networks	10
7 Links to other services and resources	11

Staff/Volunteer survey themes	
8 Worker satisfaction	1, 2, 3
9 Appropriate policies	4, 5, 6
10 Collaboration and partnerships	7, 8, 9

APPENDIX C

Aggregate Participant survey results from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

Experiences at the Centre (Questions 1 to 11)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008
Number of Surveys	3031	3360
*Mean value	3.56	3.53
Standard deviation	.73	.76

Parenting (Questions 12 to 17)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008
Number of Surveys	3031	3360
Mean value	3.31	3.37
Standard deviation	.82	.79

Child Development (Questions 18 to 23)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008
Number of Surveys	3031	3360
Mean value	3.56	3.56
Standard deviation	.70	.70

* Mean value represents the average response where:

1 = no agreement

2 = a little agreement

3 = moderate agreement

4 = strong agreement

Aggregate Staff/Volunteer survey results from 2006-2007 and 2007-2008

Experiences (Questions 1 to 4)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008
Number of Surveys	387	280
Mean value	3.65	3.63
Standard deviation	.63	.63

View of the Centre's Operations (Questions 5 to 9)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008
Number of Surveys	387	280
Mean value	3.71	3.72
Standard deviation	.52	.50