Summary of 2008 - 2009 Results

Acknowledgements

We wish to acknowledge the family resource centre staff, volunteers and program participants who completed the survey in the **fall 2008** and **spring 2009**. Thank you for your feedback. We hope that the *e-Valuation* system has served as a valuable tool to better understand and improve family support programs.

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

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Summary of e-Valuation Results 2008-2009
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INTRODUCTION

A family resource centre is a community-based organization where children, parents, grandparents, and caregivers can learn, play, and share together in an informal and nurturing environment. Family resource centres work with parents and children to build on strengths and promote the development of healthy and happy families. These centres offer a variety of programming including parent education, family literacy, drop-in play, pre-natal support, toy lending and other activities.

Family resource centres are community spaces where openness, interaction, and self-reflection are valued principles. Centres have a long tradition of gathering feedback from program participants. This feedback, collected using a blend of formal and informal methods, is used by centres to evaluate and improve their programs. Program assessment often includes measuring participant satisfaction.

In the fall of 2006, the **Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs** (**FRP Canada**) launched a national evaluation system, called *e-Valuation*, which allows local evaluations to be standardized and compiled into a single, comprehensive set of results. This report presents findings from the **third year of data collection (2008-2009)**. 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 impact that family resource centres are having on Canadian families and communities. Quotes from survey takers are shared throughout this document and serve to elaborate on, and give substance to, the data and resulting charts.

The summary of results for 2006-07 can be found at: http://www.frp.ca/2006-07results

The summary of results for 2007-08 can be found at: http://www.frp.ca/2007-08results.

About the e-Valuation system

FRP Canada has been committed to the provision of resources relating to program evaluation for many years[1]. In 2000, FRP Canada, partnered with Dr. Peter Gabor from the University of Calgary to create practical evaluation tools for family support organizations. Funding for this project 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 2002 report, entitled *The Evaluation of Family Resource Programs: Challenges and Promising Approaches,* 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

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[1] See, for example, Ellis, D. (1998). *Finding our way: A participatory evaluation method for family resource programs.* Ottawa: Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs.

information to *improve* programs and services, leaving the matter of proof of effectiveness to large-scale, well-funded research projects.

From 2004 to 2006, 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 on 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 (http://e-valuation.frp.ca/e-Valuationsystem.ppt)
- A database to manage, analyze, aggregate and report data
- Literature summaries to justify and support the choice of underlying survey items (http://www.frp.ca/literaturesummaries)

Surveys: The data for the *e-Valuation* system is collected via two surveys, one for adult program participants—parents, grandparents, caregivers and others—and one for the staff and volunteers of the centres. The surveys can be completed on paper and manually entered into the *e-Valuation* system or they can be directly administered online. Besides English and French, the Participant Survey has been translated into Spanish, Chinese, German, Hindi, Portuguese and Tamil and has been formatted to match the English/French version. The Staff/Volunteer Survey is available in English and French, as well as in Hindi and Portuguese. All of these surveys 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:

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

- 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 responses to these questions are included in this report.

There are two time periods 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 third year of implementation, 2899 respondents completed the Participant Survey and 290 completed the Staff/Volunteer Survey.

Data analysis and reports: Upon entering the data of a minimum of four surveys, organizations can immediately access 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 from the Participant Surveys, which allow further analysis at the site level, are available to each centre.

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 http://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 2899 families, representing approximately 5207 adults and children, and 290 staff/volunteers who entered surveys at 94 locations from October 2008 to September 2009. This represents the third cohort of the *e-Valuation* system.

For a more detailed look at the total number of answered questions for both the participant and staff surveys in years one, two and three, refer to Appendix C.

Location and geographical setting

In 2008-2009, the majority of participating sites were from Ontario (72%) with the balance from British Columbia (22%), Alberta (2%), Quebec (1%), New Brunswick (1%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (1%). The high participation rate from Ontario reflects the fact that Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYCs) were encouraged to use the system by their funders at the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, and that the OEYC network endorsed the system and encouraged colleagues to participate. Additionally, 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 third year, 46% identified themselves as rural/remote and 54% identified themselves as urban/suburban. These numbers are similar to previous cohorts.

Type of organization

Of the 94 participating organizations, 56 identified themselves as OEYCs or OEYC satellites. Seventeen organizations participated in e-Valuation as BC Capacity Grant Recipients. Multi-Service Agencies (8), Community Action Plan for Children CAPC/CPNP sites (7) and Family Resource Program sites (6) accounted for the next most typical type of organizations.

Number of full time staff

The overall average number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff members per participating site was 7.75. The average FTE for urban agencies was 10 and the average for rural/remote agencies was 4.8. The highest FTE's overall was 127 at an Ontario Multi-Service Agency with family resource programs followed by 90 FTE's at a BC based Multi-Service Agency. The highest service population did not necessarily equate to the highest FTE's.

Funding

While most organizations (71%) stated that their primary funder was the provincial government, the percentage citing the province was down from 88% in 2007-2008. Picking up the slack was the federal government which was the primary funder for 17% of centres (up from 5% on 2007-2008). The remaining organizations listed were the United Way/other community funder (2%) and "other" (10%).

Service volume

Each registered organization was asked to count the actual number of unique participants (adults and children) served during the previous three weeks. While many sites did not answer this question, those that did demonstrated a broad range of service. On the low side, a site reported a service volume of ten and, on the high side; a site reported a service volume of 3000.   Of the reporting sites, the mean number of individual adults and children served by each organization during the 3 week time period was 461.

Since adults and children often attend centres more than once within a three week period (77% of the survey respondents reported attending centres 3 or more times per month), the average number of service *visits* per site would be a significantly higher number.

PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

Overview of responses

"It provides an opportunity to interact and socialize with other families in a warm environment filled with many learning opportunities for both the children and the adults."

– 2008-09 Program Participant

Overall, participants have a very positive view of family resource centres, programs and staff. Participants feel that family resource centres offer invaluable support and ample opportunity for parents, caregivers, and children to learn and grow. Parents and caregivers appreciate the opportunity to widen their social network and interact with peers and staff. Many parents and caregivers also acknowledge that family resource programs are able to connect them with other services and help them overcome feelings of isolation. Further, they report feeling more confident in parenting their children. Parents and caregivers strongly believe that the activities and programs offered by family resource programs enhance child development, school readiness, socialization and parent-child interaction.

Participants also provided valuable suggestions for improvement. For example, participants suggested increasing program availability and/or adjusting schedules so that parents/caregivers would have more flexibility. Others suggested improvements included: better parking, the purchase of newer toys, and better communication/outreach concerning upcoming activities and programs.

Who are family resource centre participants?

Family resource centre participants come from all walks of life. Participants include women and men, young and old, rural and urban, low income and high income, and those established and those new to the community. That being said, family resource programs tend to serve certain communities disproportionately, for example, rural participants, new Canadians, and lower income families.

Connections between children and adults at family resource centres

The majority of family resource program participants are parents and their children. The survey taker's relationship to the child attending the program was as follows: 'parent' (86%), 'grandparent' (6%), 'relative' (6%), 'other' (2%) and 'caregiver' (1%) (see Figure 1 below). The 'caregiver' category is underrepresented due to the fact that the question gathering relationship information asks respondents to check 'parent' if they attended with one or more of their own children. Given that only one choice was possible, the survey does not capture the instances where a parent is also a caregiver of one or more children. In the 2008-09 survey, approximately 1 in 4 participants also bring at least one child who is not part of their family.

Gender

The majority of survey takers were women (94%). This reflects the fact that women are most frequently the ones who bring children to family resource programs. Of the children attending programs, more boys (57%) attended than girls (43%).   When all participants were considered (parents, caregivers, children), males accounted for 40% and females accounted for 60% of participants.

Age

Survey takers provided information about their own age as well as information about the age of the children attending family resource programs (see Figures 2 and 3). 52% of the children attending family resource programs are between the ages of 1-3 years old, 24% are between 4-6 years old, 16% are infants, and 7% are between 7-12 years old.

Most caregivers attending the centres are aged 26-40 years (74%). Sixteen (16%) of adults attending programs were over 40 years old. The age category that would constitute young parents as defined by most family support programs (25 years and younger) represents 10% of all adult participants. As in the last e-Valuation report (2007-08) this percentage is 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

Approximately 3 out of 4 respondents provided annual family income information. Of these respondents, 46% reported earnings of over $60,000. Twenty-seven percent reported earnings between $36,000 and $59,999, and another 27% reported earnings of less than $36,000 (see Figure 4).

According to Statistics Canada, in 2007, the average total income before taxes of two parent families with two earners and with children under 18 years of age was $99,500[4]. For lone parent families, male led, the average is $63,000 and female led $42,900. While survey data is not directly comparable, it is clear that family resource program participants report a lower than average family income.

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

Figure 1 - Survey Taker's Relationship to Child	
Parent	86%
Grandparent	6%
Caregiver *	1%
Relative	6%
Other	2%

*Approximately 1 in 4 participants bring one or more children in addition to their own relation

Figure 2 - Age of children attending centres

Age	Percentage
Under 1 year old	16%
1-3 years old	52%
4-6 years old	24%
7-12 years old	7%

Number of child participants

Figure 3 - Age of parents/caregivers attending centres

Age	Percentage
13-20 years old	3%
21-25 years old	7%
26-30 years old	21%
31-35 years old	33%
36-40 years old	20%
41-45 years old	7%
46-50 years old	3%
51 and over	6%

Number of parent/caregiver participants

Figure 4 - Annual income of families using centre

	Number of Families
under $12,000	5%
$12,000 to $23,999	9%
$24,000 to $35,999	13%
$36,000 to $47,999	14%
$48,000 to $59,999	13%
over $60000	46%

Immigrant participation

E-valuation participants were slightly more likely to be born in a foreign country when compared to the general Canadian population. In 2008-09, 22% of survey takers were foreign-born compared to 19.8% in the general population[5]. Of those who report being foreign born, a small group (4%) have resided in Canada for less than three years, 7% have lived in Canada for 3-10 years, and 11% have been in Canada for more than 10 years.

Length of time living in neighbourhood

The majority (61%) of survey respondents were established in their neighbourhoods, having lived there for three or more years (see Figure 6). A large minority (39%) are new to their neighbourhood. Since referrals from friends and family are the primary source of participation in family resource centres, it is likely that participation increases as people become more integrated within their community.

Languages spoken at home

For most respondents, the primary language spoken at home was either English (88%) or French (2%). Ten percent of survey takers indicated that they spoke a language other than English or French at home (see Figure 7). The percentage in the "other" category is in line with the numbers found in the general population (11%)[6]. The percentage of respondents speaking non-official languages is down from the 26% reported in the 2007-2008 survey.

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

In the *e-valuation* survey, the "other" category included over 50 languages, such as: Spanish, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Arabic, Tamil, German, Portuguese and Sign Language. Several family resource centres have translated the Participant Survey into additional languages. These surveys are posted online for others to use at: http://e-valuation.frp.ca/org/e/Resources.php.

Figure 5 - Length of residence in Canada

- Less than 1 year (2%)
- 1-3 years (2%)
- 3-10 years (7%)
- More than 10 years but not born in Canada (11%)
- Born in Canada (78%)

Figure 6 - Length of time in current neighbourhood

- Under 1 year (12%)
- 1-3 years (27%)
- Over 3 years (61%)

Figure 7 - Languages spoken most often at home

- English (88%)
- French (2%)
- Other (10%)

2%
10%
88%
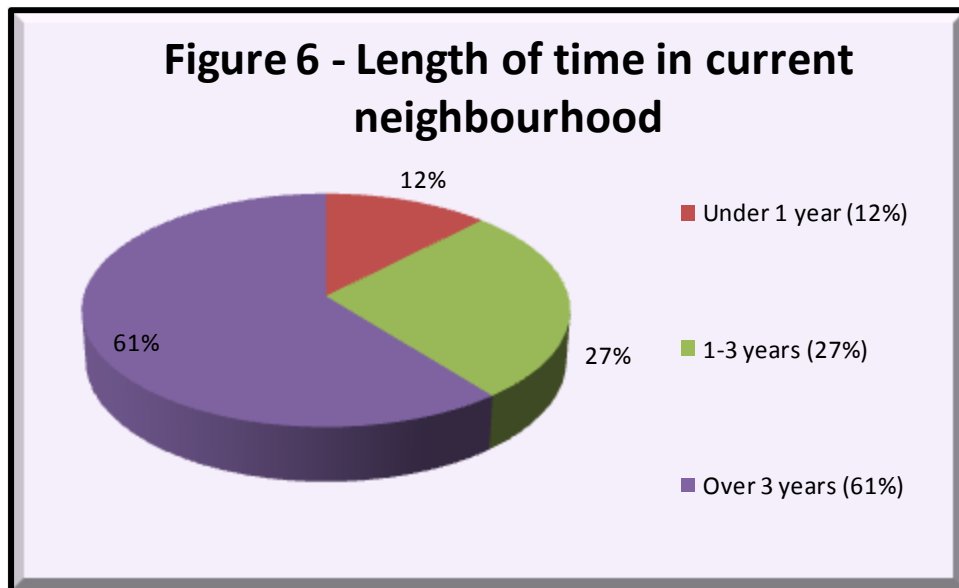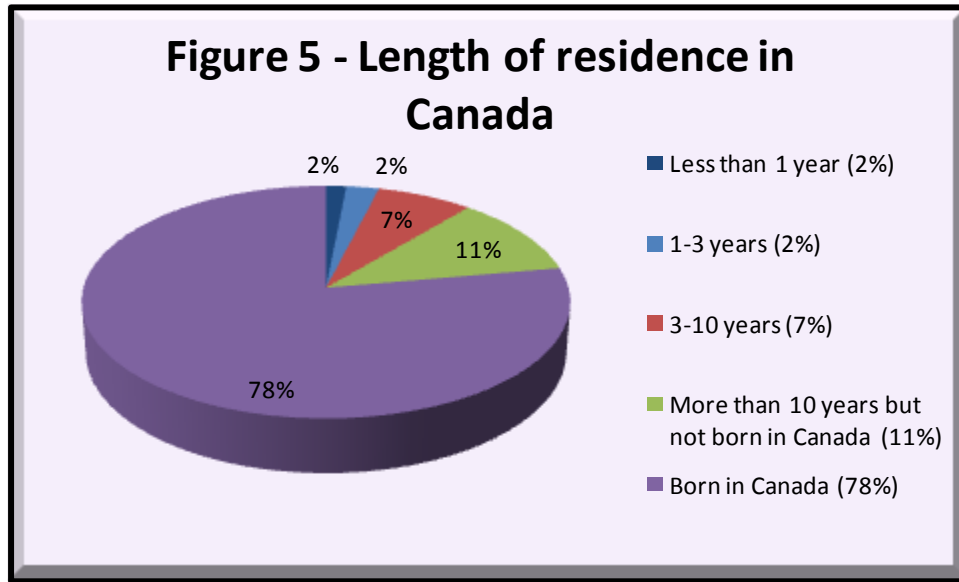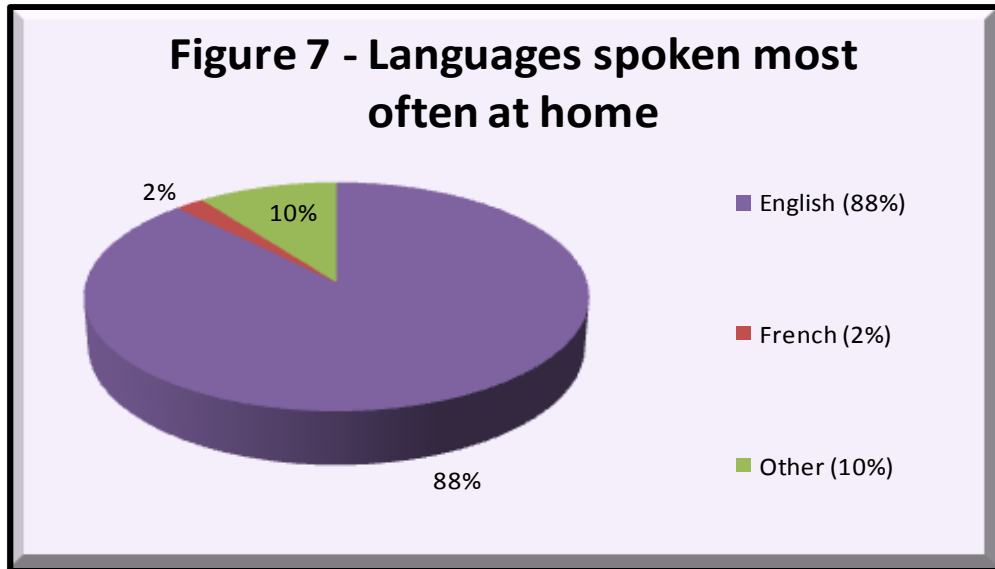
Frequency of family visits and total monthly visits to centres

A large majority (77%) of participants visit centres three or more times a month. In fact 27% visit centres six or more times a month. Only 12% attend one or fewer times a month. The frequency of family visits was similar in both urban/suburban and rural/remote communities. Clearly, family resource centres do considerable repeat business. This speaks to the integral role family resource centres play in the lives of many participants.

Figure 8 - Frequency of family visits to the centre (survey takers)

Frequency	Percentage
More than 10 times a month	8%
6-10 times a month	19%
3-5 times a month	50%
Twice a month	12%
Once a month	7%
Less than once a month	5%

Number of Participants
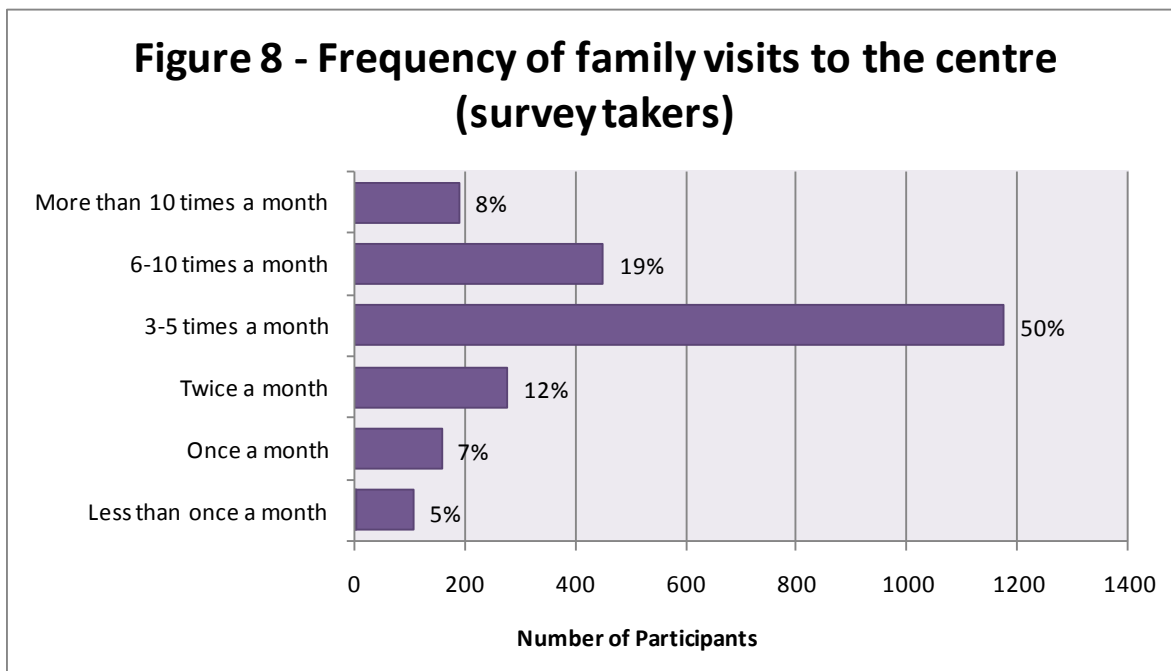
Information and referral sources

The main information source about family resource centres is family and friends. They account for 45% of all responses. Advertising and presentations account for 14% of responses with an additional 11% coming from other program participants. Several survey respondents cited the need for better communication of the availability of new and existing programs. Currently, only 5% claim that the Internet is their main source of information about programs. In the 'Other' category, respondents frequently cited sources such as the library, a public health nurse, a doctor, and the YMCA.

Figure 9 - Source of information about the centre

Source	Number of Participants	Percentage
Family or friends		45%
Advertising, presentations		14%
Other		12%
Another participant		11%
Health care provider		8%
Internet		5%
Social services professional		4%
School system		2%
Religious organization		1%

Number of Participants
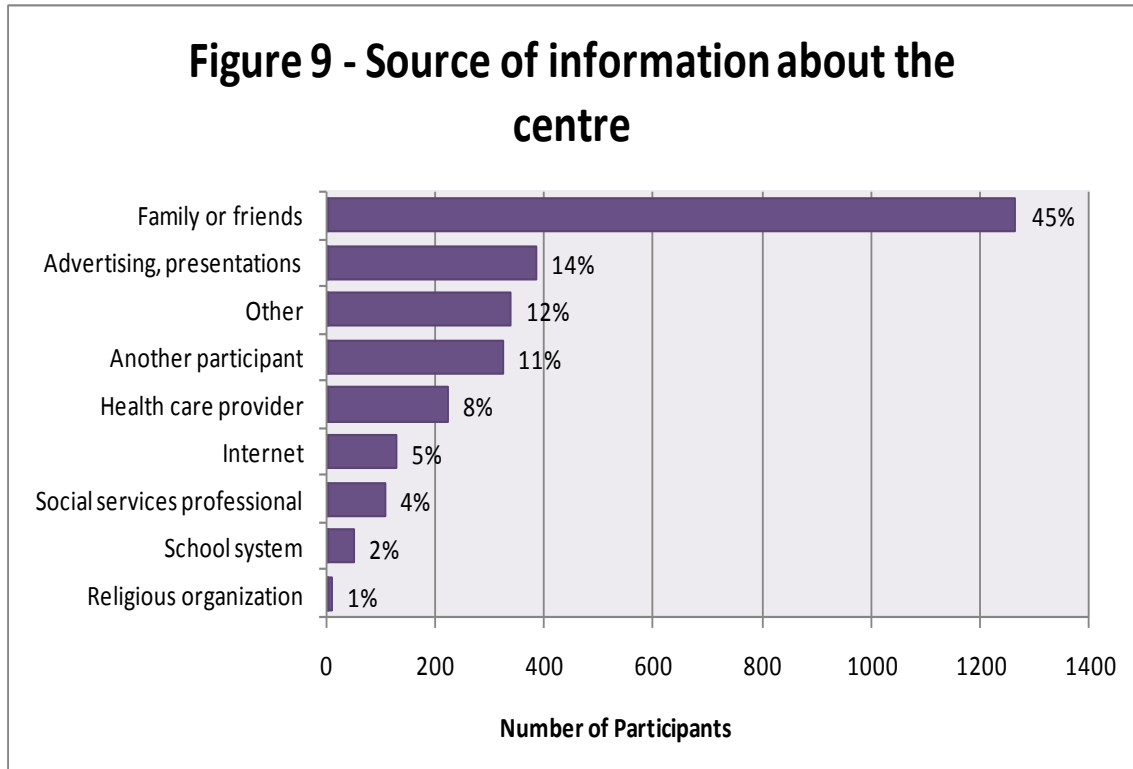
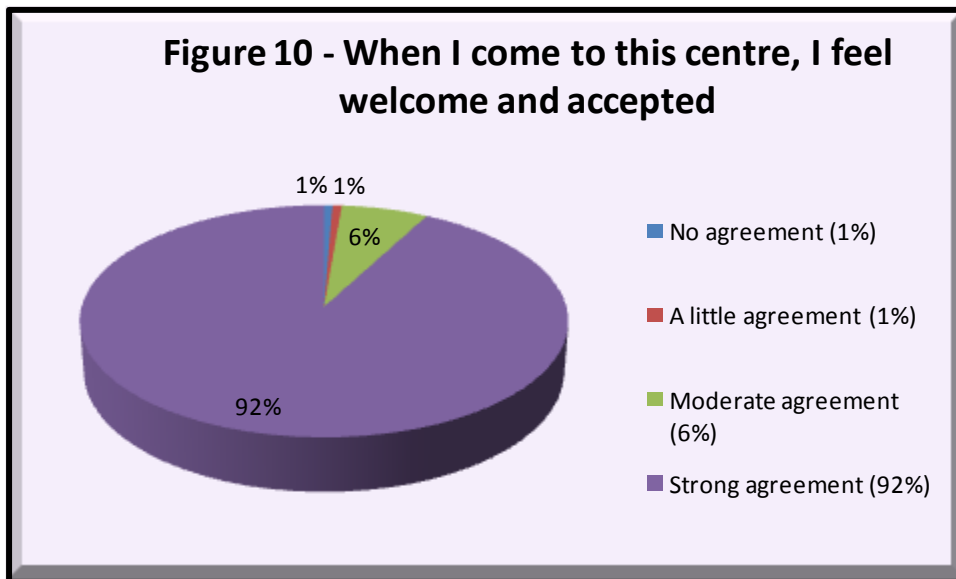# Questions about participants' experiences at family resource centres

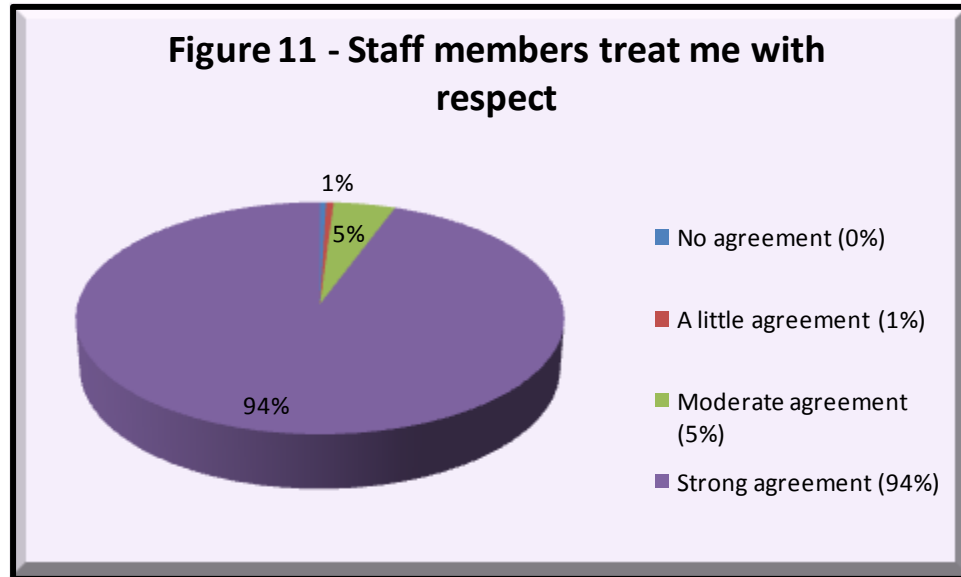## Theme 1: Engaging families with a welcoming atmosphere and respectful staff

> *"I felt welcome from the first day I walked in the door. I am so grateful that there was a place like this to come."*
>
> *– 2008-09 Program Participant*

Effective family resource programs offer a warm, welcoming atmosphere. *The Guiding Principles of Family Support* (see Appendix A) recognize that participation in family resource programs is voluntary. A welcoming atmosphere encourages parents and caregivers to take part in programs. In effective practices, participation is further promoted by a respectful staff that treats participants as equals.

Canadian family resource centres do a remarkable job in creating a welcoming atmosphere for participants. An impressive 98% of respondents are in strong or moderate agreement that centres' make participants feel welcome and accepted. Moreover, 99% of respondents strongly agreed that the staff at their centre treats them with respect. Considering the broad diversity of clientele, these results speak to the strong effort made by family resource programs to be adaptable to the needs of participants.

Figure 10 - When I come to this centre, I feel welcome and accepted

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (6%)
- Strong agreement (92%)

Figure 11 - Staff members treat me with respect

1%
5%
94%

- No agreement (0%)
- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (5%)
- Strong agreement (94%)

Participant comments on centre atmosphere and staff treatment are almost universally positive.

"It is an extremely wonderful place to go in a community with very few options for children especially in the winter. The staff is so friendly and welcoming and the programming is wonderful."

"Our children love to come here to play, create and sing. We always are made to feel welcome. It is great to know that there is a safe, fun place to take the kids and that they will learn something"

"The staff are always more than accommodating and very friendly. They take a personal interest in all of the children that are part of the programs."

"I love how friendly the staff are and how willing they are to listen to me go on and on and they never seem to judge me for anything I share with them."

"As a stay- at-home mother the OEYC has been a great resource for everything concerning my son and my soon-to-be next child. The staff is amazing! I have never met such supportive and understanding people."

Theme 2: Enhancing family participation

Building on the creation of a welcoming atmosphere, centres strive to remove as many barriers to participation as possible. The goal is to reduce or eliminate user fees, waiting lists, the need for referrals, and unnecessary bureaucracy. Family resource centres offer a variety of structured and unstructured activities on as flexible a schedule as is practical.

A strong majority (82%) of survey takers believe that family resource programs are doing a very good job designing programs that encourage participation. Another 15% were in moderate agreement that family resource programs make it easy for them to take part. The survey results suggest that family resource programs are sufficiently flexible to accommodate most people.

The flexibility of family resource centres was once again evident when survey takers were asked if services were available when needed; eighty-one percent of respondents were in strong agreement and 16% percent were in moderate agreement (see Figure 13). While a large majority feel the services are scheduled appropriately, those who disagree (3%) expressed some frustration in their comments. Two main concerns were 1) inadequate programming during evening and weekend hours, and 2) the need for concurrent programs or childcare for additional children that do not meet the age criteria of existing programming.

When asked if they were presented with opportunities to become involved in program decision making, respondents generally agreed, but the degree of agreement was not as high as on the other questions concerning participation. This difference has been observed in all three *e-Valuation* survey years. While 81% agree that they can become involved in decision making, 19% express little or no agreement. Moreover, this survey item registered a sizeable non-response rate (27%). These findings suggest that some survey takers may not be clear about what the question is asking, that they may not be aware that opportunities to get involved exist or that they do not choose to be involved in programming decisions. The informal atmosphere that exists in most family resource centres may also be a complicating factor in that it may be difficult for some participants to identify feedback requests as such.

Figure 12 - Programs are designed in a way that makes it possible for me to participate

1% 2%
15%
82%

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (2%)
- Moderate agreement (15%)
- Strong agreement (82%)
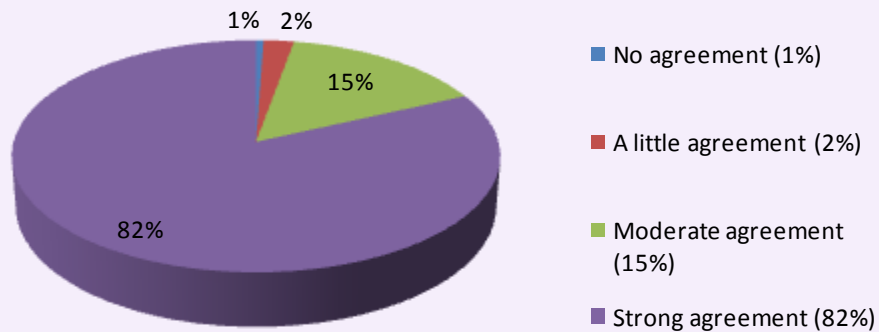
Figure 13 - Staff and services are available when I need them

1% 2%
16%
81%

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (2%)
- Moderate agreement (16%)
- Strong agreement (81%)

Figure 14 - There are opportunities for me to become involved in decision making about programming and operations
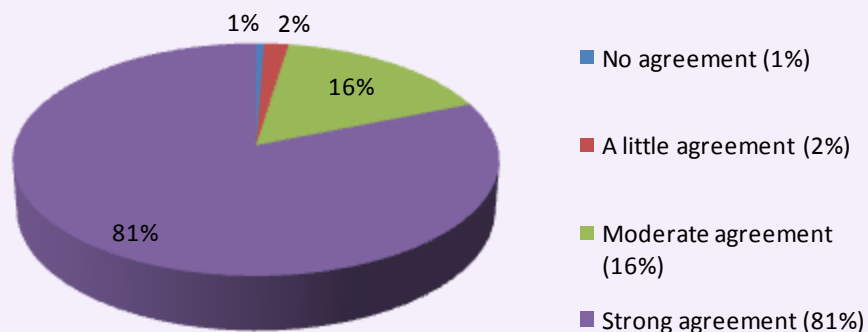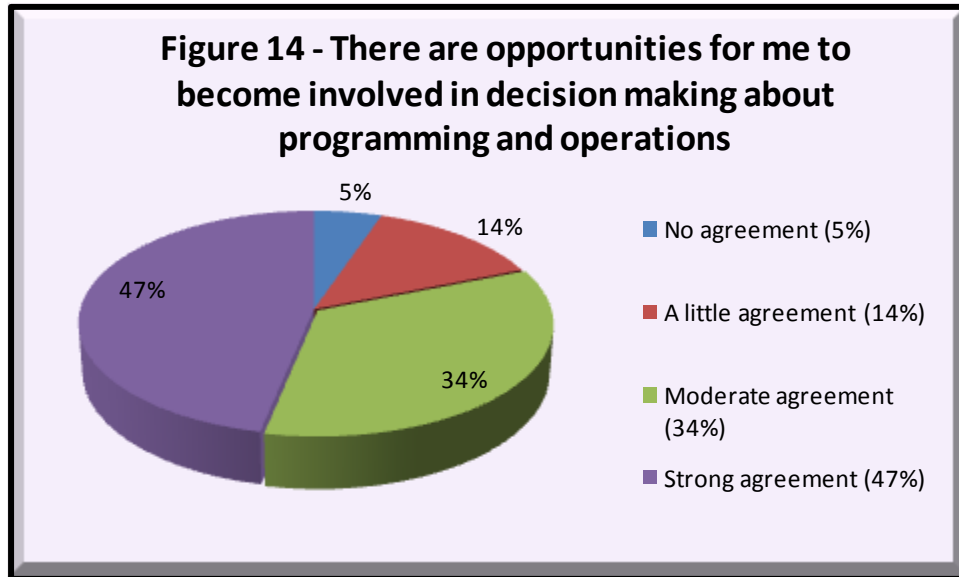
Comments suggest that family participation is an important part of many family resource programs.

"It also allows me to discuss topics with staff and other parents, and listen to differing opinions."

"This program has evolved greatly over the past 15 years into a wonderful drop-in. It is no longer viewed as for an "elitist group" but as a venue which welcomes the views of all members of the community who choose to participate."

"It allows us to share "special" family time since my husband and I work opposite shifts. We like to take our son and daughter out to play/interact with other kids since they spend the majority of time at home with one of us."

"Advertise the Dad and Me program more so I could get my brother out with the boys to see how fun it is. Maybe a special event that draws the dads out so they can see it's not a scary place to come."

"Allows us to participate in educational programs as a family. With both my wife and I working, it allows a place to go with the kids that is kid friendly and does not cost us anything but our time."

Theme 3: Diversity

Family resource centres strive to create an atmosphere that is inclusive and non-judgmental. One of the *Guiding Principles of Family Support* (Appendix A) is the promotion of relationships based on equality and respect for diversity. The concept of diversity includes, among other things, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation and physical ability. Over time, family resource centres have embraced opportunities to increase awareness and acceptance of diversity. This openness is reflected in the agreement amongst survey takers (98%) that their centre is welcoming to diverse groups.

Figure 15 - This centre does its best to be welcoming to the diverse groups of people who live in this community

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (11%)
- Strong agreement (87%)
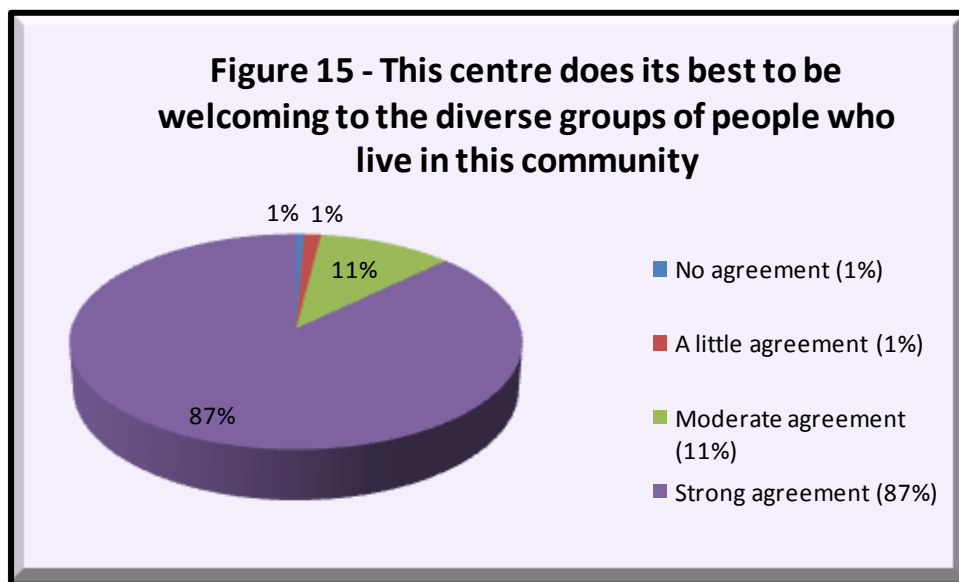
Comments made from participants further reinforce the view that family resource centres are responsive to people from all walks of life.

"My son has a disability and uses a walker to get around. The openness and accessibility of the centre as well as the helpful staff provide me a great place to come outside the home."

"It's a great program for me as a parent to interact with other parents- especially being new to this city. My son has developmental delays and the program allows him to interact with kids of various ages and ethnicities"

"It has helped my children integrate more into the community and into "english" life."

"It has helped us greatly in our expectations of our children and how to help them grow and learn at every stage. It has helped them to accept differences and enjoy many cultures."

"It appears that the majority of people attending the centre are from the same socio-economic background. Is there enough effort being made to reach to the lower income tax bracket community?"
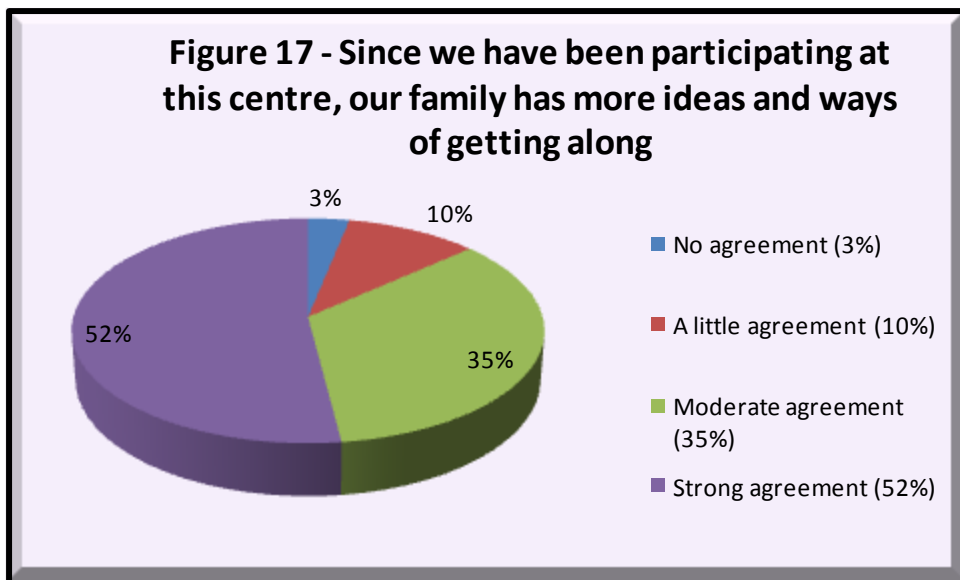
"We are immigrants here with no family support so it's good to come here, so we can meet other people."

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

"I feel like I am a better prepared and more patient parent"

– 2008-09 Program Participant

Family resource programming strives to create opportunities for the development of parenting and life skills. Successful strategies used at family resource centres can and do transfer to other settings. 84% percent of survey respondents believe that family resource programs have helped them manage day-to-day family challenges (see Figure 16). 87% percent say that participating at the centre has helped them to find ways to get along as a family (see Figure 17). Clearly, most respondents feel that family resource programs help them manage family challenges.

Figure 16 - Since coming to this centre, I am more able to deal effectively with the day to day challenges we encounter as a family

- No agreement (3%)
- A little agreement (12%)
- Moderate agreement (36%)
- Strong agreement (48%)

Figure 17 - Since we have been participating at this centre, our family has more ideas and ways of getting along

- No agreement (3%)
- A little agreement (10%)
- Moderate agreement (35%)
- Strong agreement (52%)

Respondent comments on this theme were particularly impassioned. Many participants feel that family resource programs taught them crucial coping skills.

"Has taught me how to appropriately react to my child's behaviour in certain situations."

"It has been a huge life saver! It gets you out of the house when your kids are driving you crazy. I can't imagine how I would have stayed sane without it."

"I have a lot more respect for the people around me."

"The program has given me tools as a first time father, confidence in parenting"

"The support is very helpful. New ideas and support goes a long way in your day to day life."

*"Has helped me better understand the developmental stages of our child"*

"With my first child, it was a life saver. The baby clinic was an opportunity to meet other parents and moms. I could share and learn from other parents and staff."

"I have become more patient in how I react to problems at home".

Theme 5: Parental and caregiver confidence

Family support programs stress that parenting is a life-long learning process. Centres and programs are a place to share ideas and learn from one another in a non-judgmental atmosphere. Staff work with parents/caregivers from a strengths based perspective. Rather than focusing on individual and family weaknesses or deficits, strength-based practitioners collaborate with families and children to discover individual and family strengths. At the foundation of the strength-based approach is the belief that children and families have unique talents, skills, and life events, in addition to specific unmet needs. By supporting parents and caregivers to incorporate new learning and strategies into their caregiving skills, the developmental potential of children is also supported.

A strong majority of survey takers (86%) agreed that their family resource program helped them increase their confidence as a parent (see Figure 18).

Figure 18 - Since coming to this centre, I have felt more confident as a parent or caregiver
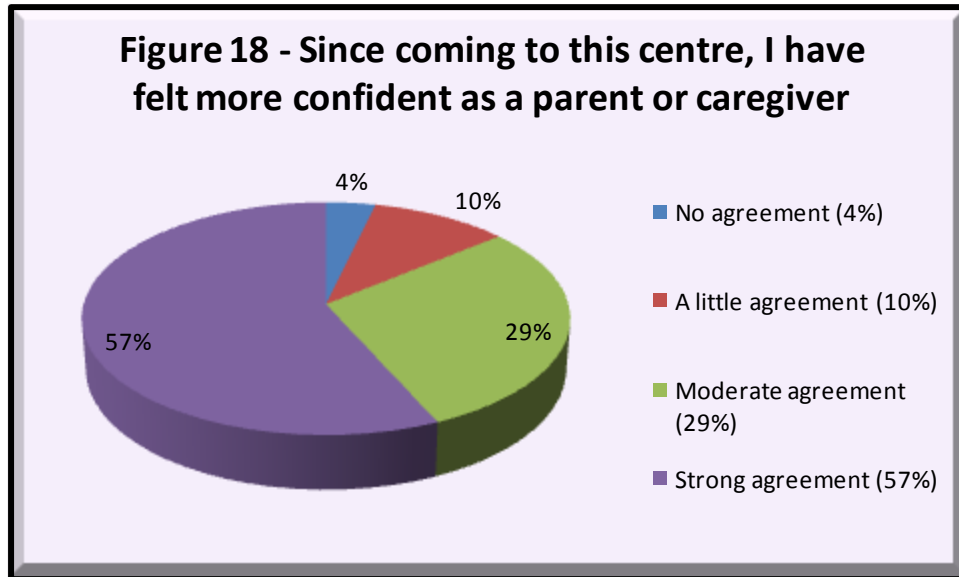
Increased caregiver confidence was perceived to be a very valuable outcome of participation in programs. Below are just a few comments that testify to this fact.

"As a new mother it has helped me to become more confident as a parent, cope with different stages/behaviours, got me through tough times. I understand my children better, met lots of moms and kids have benefited."

"The programs at the centre have helped to increase my confidence as a parent. The advice, support and encouragement from staff at the centre are also vitally important."

"I feel more confident bringing kids out in public knowing that I'm not judged here. I got help with discipline information when needed."

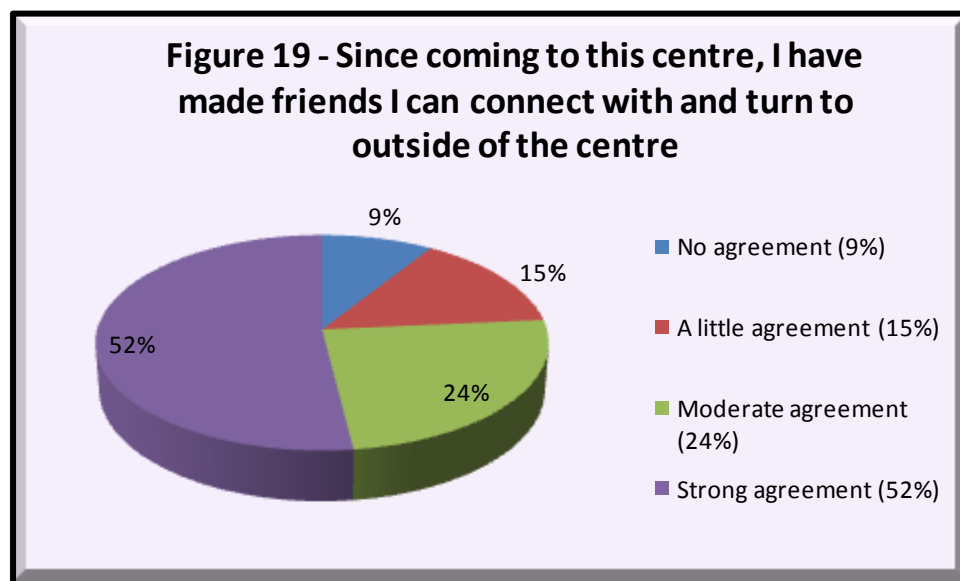*"Being a single mother of a brand new baby girl, I have so many questions and concerns with parenting. This center has helped me tremendously and eased my mind."*

"I have never had a positive family unit, my parents are abusive and controlling. Since coming to the centre I have made positive adult relationships and gained self-respect to stand up to my parents."

Theme 6: Strengthening family social networks

As the ancient African proverb states, "It takes a village to raise a child". This proverb stresses that parents and caregivers need support if they are to raise healthy, happy, and productive children. Strong family social networks can provide support in numerous meaningful ways. Social networks can help shoulder caregiving duties in times of stress, can act as a font of knowledge in times of uncertainty, and can reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation. Family resource centres help connect parents with others in their community, building networks of mutual assistance and peer support.

Most survey participants (76%) reported establishing supportive relationships with others due to their participation in a family resource program. This is an interesting finding because it suggests that family resource programs can help participants overcome social isolation. Participation in family resource programs can help parents expand their social network and strengthen their community.

Figure 19 - Since coming to this centre, I have made friends I can connect with and turn to outside of the centre

- No agreement (9%)
- A little agreement (15%)
- Moderate agreement (24%)
- Strong agreement (52%)

The comments and data from survey participants suggest that family support programs help participants expand their peer support networks.

"It has given me a chance to talk to other families going through the same thing. The Centre basically helps me see a light at the end of our tunnel. They encourage me and praise me on what a great job I am doing with my son."

"The program helped us make friends. When we moved here it helped the children feel accepted and it built a support group for moms."
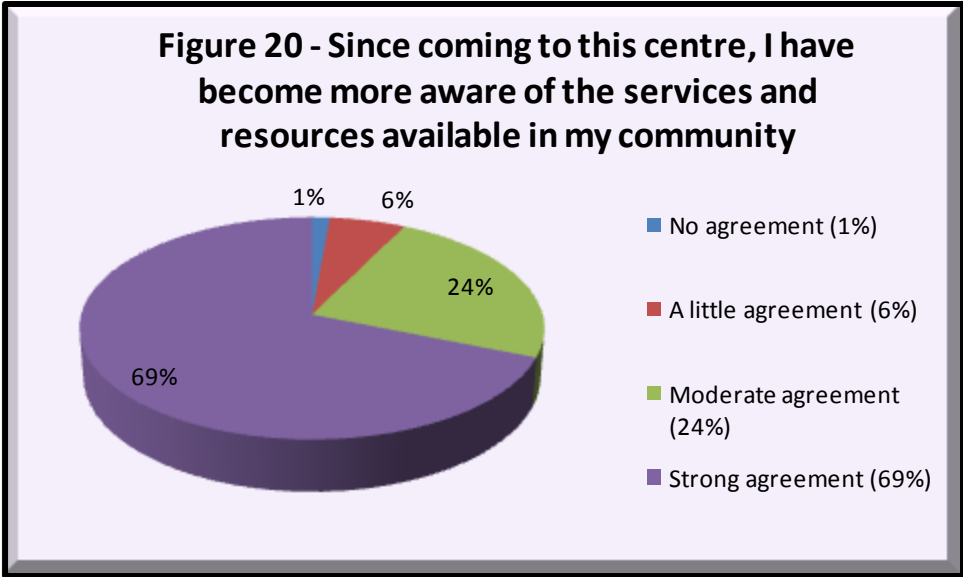
"It provides a place to go, a social outing – a chance to connect with others in community and get connected with events in community."

"I have had the opportunity to make a few great friends to hang out with and our kids play together."

"Great for me to meet other moms - hard because of our rural location."

Theme 7: Links to other services and resources

Family support programs operate from an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of families' lives. The holistic approach to family support work encourages practitioners to link participants to other useful programs within their communities. 93% of respondents agree that centres are doing a good job connecting participants to community services and resources.

Figure 20 - Since coming to this centre, I have become more aware of the services and resources available in my community

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (6%)
- Moderate agreement (24%)
- Strong agreement (69%)

Many participants commented on the family resource centres' role in connecting them with other useful services.

> *"A staff member at the center was able to identify our son's speech issues and got us involved with a speech and language program, Thank you."*
>
> *"It has given us tools to help our son and provided us with information on how to obtain help from the government."*
>
> *"As a newcomer to this city, I have learned through the centre what resources are available in the community."*
>
> *"The staff are wonderful and always take the time to listen to my concerns. If I need help in any area they provide lots of information to help me."*

Questions about parenting and child development

Family resource centres support the healthy development of parents, children, and families. To this end, centres offer a wide variety of community programs. These programs include: facilitated playgroups, child care courses, parent-child interaction activities (e.g. *Mother Goose*), community kitchens, parent-child attachment programs, etc. These programs are designed to provide modeling, education and experiential learning to help adults better care for children.

Typical centre programming can include unstructured drop-in play as well as more structured 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 results suggest that program participants acquire valuable knowledge:

- 91% reported that they have an increased awareness of activities that are appropriate for their children
- 88% 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 (79%) and new play activities
- 87% 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

Participants also reported increased knowledge of their child's play and socialization behaviours:

- 90% reported that their children are more comfortable in social situations since going to the local family resource centre
- 85% agreed that their children have more opportunities to interact with people from other cultures
- 94% noted that their children have increased opportunities to play with age appropriate toys and equipment
- 96% stated that children have more chances to explore new environments

"I've learned to parent my child appropriately, learned nutrition and car seat safety."

"It is a great and comforting place to go. They often have answers to many of my parenting questions as well as resource questions. My children have benefitted greatly from the many programs we have attended."

"I have learned a lot of developmental things for my baby. It is also nice to get her weighed every week."

"It's a great place to socialize children and introduce them to new things."

STAFF AND VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

Who are family resource centre staff, students and volunteers?

I feel like this organization walks the talk, not only do we support families, I feel that we support the staff and their families too. I feel heard and part of a team and I am very privileged to work with such wonderful people.

– 2008-09 Staff & Volunteer Survey Participant

Family resource centre workers come from many walks of life. They bring with them an enthusiasm for their work and a wealth of experience and knowledge. Self-reflection and professional improvement are an integrated part of their work. Staff shares a commitment to treating each other and program participants with respect and dignity.

For the 2008-2009 survey year, 290 staff and volunteers responded to the survey. Of these respondents, 96% were female. Respondents included paid full time staff, paid part time staff, volunteers and students. The distribution by employment status is presented below in Figure 21.

Figure 21 - At present I am...

- Full time staff member (49%)
- Part time staff member (29%)
- Volunteer (17%)
- Student (5%)
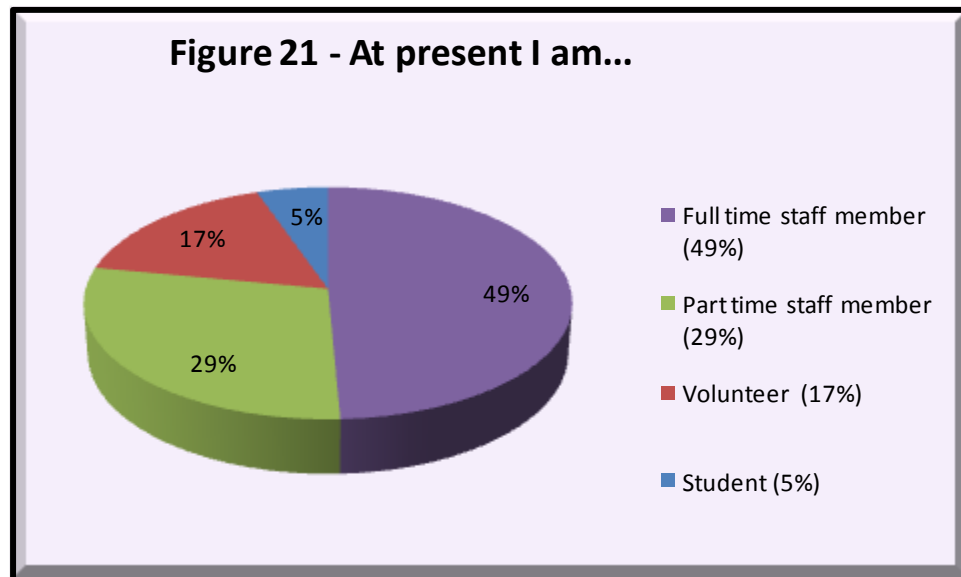
Levels of education

Family support workers increasingly have post-secondary educations. In this survey year, 4% of respondents had a postgraduate degree, 23% of respondents had a university degree and 55% had a college degree or diploma. The number of workers with post-secondary education has increased in each survey year. Once out of school, family support staff continue their education through professional training. Respondent comments provide ample evidence of staff commitment to continued learning and development.

Age

Survey responses demonstrate that family support workers are well represented across the age spectrum. Responses indicate that 23% of staff, volunteers and students were under the age of thirty, 29% were between thirty and forty, 30% were between forty and fifty, and 18% were over fifty years of age.

Figure 22 - What is your age… (staff, volunteers, students)
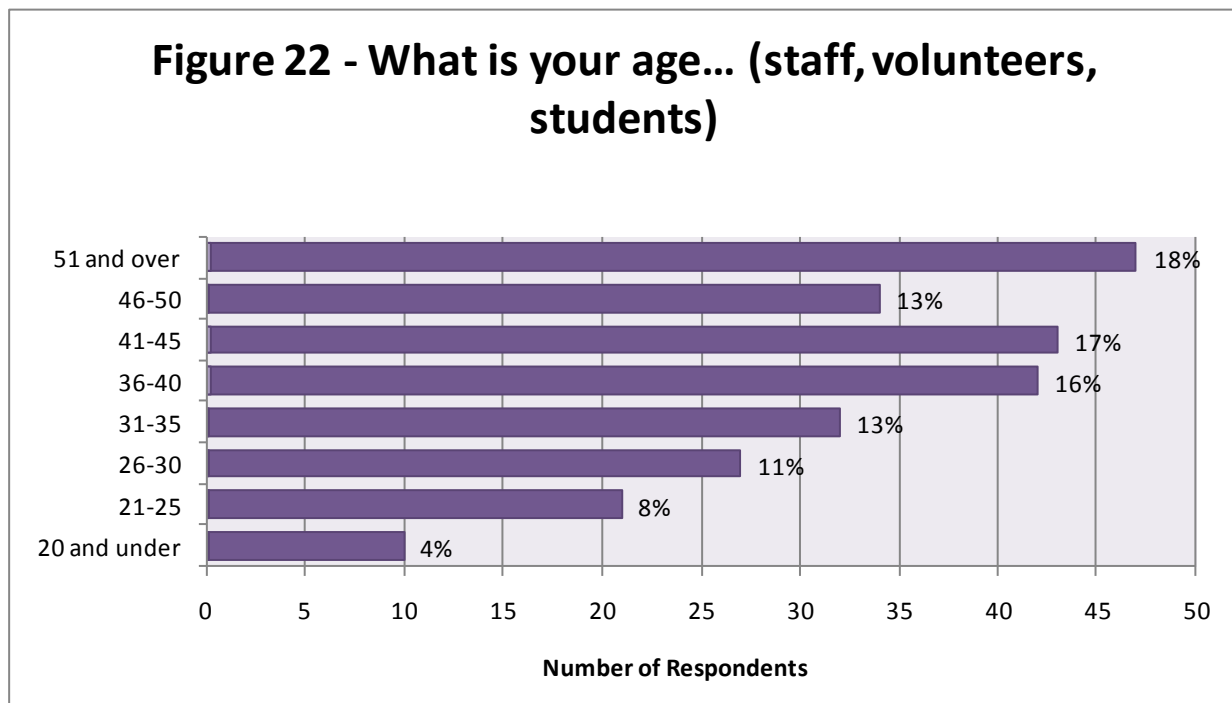
Years of experience in the field

Given the broad age distribution it is not surprising to see a range of professional experience within the field. Paid staff (full and part-time) had considerably more years of experience than did non-paid staff (volunteers and students). 58% of non-paid staff had less than 5 years of experience, while 59% of paid staff had more than 10 years of experience. Figure 24 indicates that many paid family support workers have been working in the field for a considerable amount of time.

Figure 23 - Years of experience in the field (volunteers, students)

Figure 24 - Years of experience in the field (paid staff only)
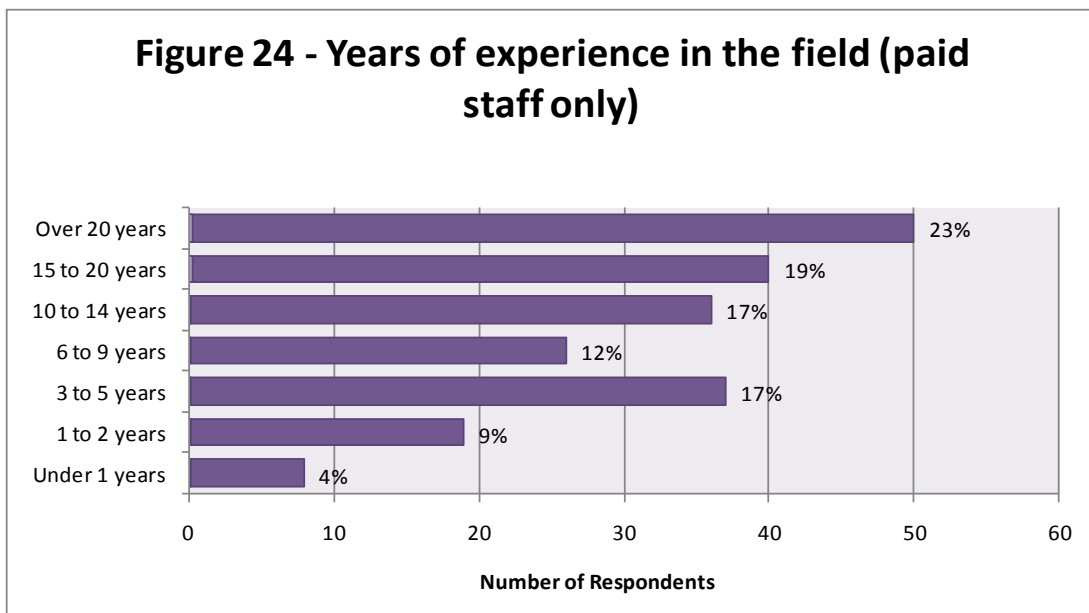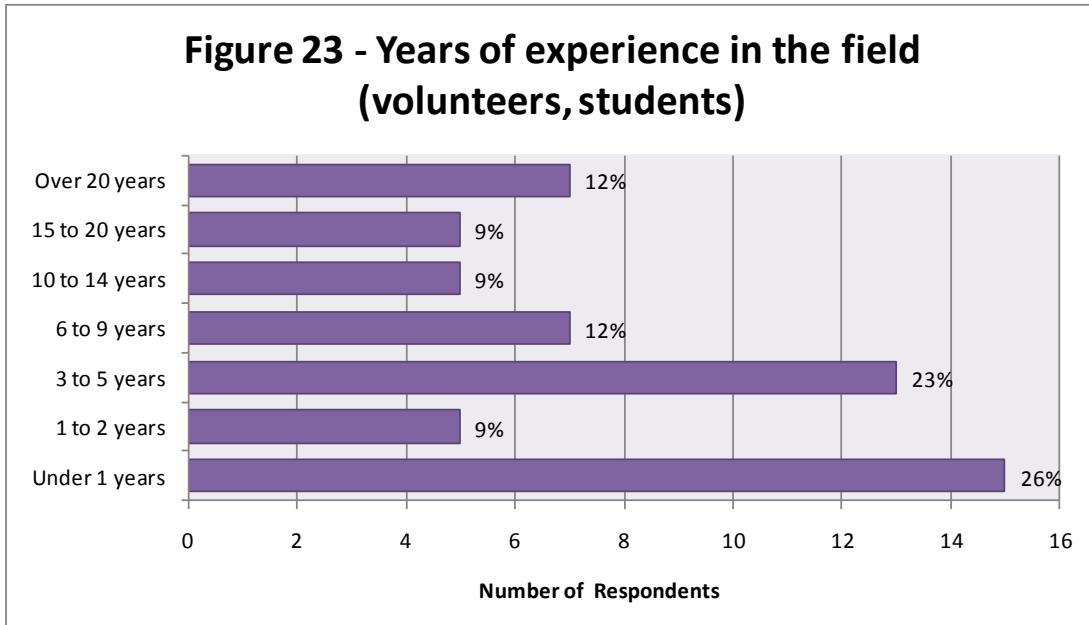
Years working or volunteering at the centre

Of respondents, including student and volunteers, 37% have been with their current centre for less than two years, 46% for between five and nine years, and 17% for ten or more years. When the numbers for paid staff only are examined (Figure 25), 31% have been with their current centre for less than two years, 48% for between five and nine years, and 21% for ten or more years.

Figure 25 - Years worked at centre (paid staff only)

Category	Value
Over 20 years	2%
15 to 20 years	10%
10 to 14 years	9%
6 to 9 years	22%
3 to 5 years	26%
1 to 2 years	20%
Under 1 years	11%

Number of Respondents
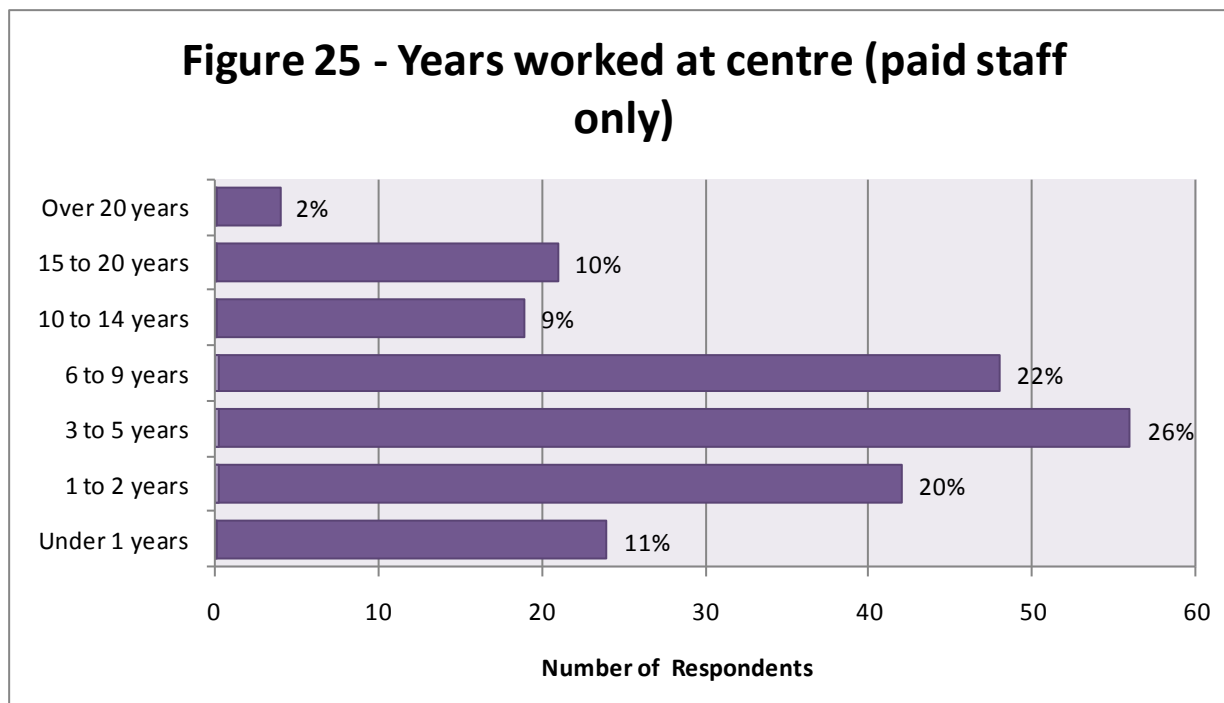
Questions about staff and volunteer experiences at family resource centres

Theme 8: Worker Satisfaction

Studies have demonstrated that the most reliable indicators of worker satisfaction include: respectful co-workers, interesting work, workplace influence, time for skill development, job security, freedom to do the job, and work-family balance[7]. Family resource workers responded positively on these indicators. For example, 99% are in agreement that their work is meaningful, 81% say that they have an opportunity to become involved in decision making, and 94% claim that they have opportunities to develop their skills.

Despite the fact that many family resource centres operate with limited and uncertain resources, the results of this survey show that the large majority of centre staff and volunteers (94%) feel that stakeholders and community partners support their organizations. Most also agree that they get appropriate training support from their organizations. Ninety-six percent of respondents indicated that their centre supported their professional development. This is an encouraging result given that staff training is critical to the delivery of quality programming.

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[7] Please see: http://www.jobquality.ca/indicators/indicators_main.shtml#source

Figure 26 - My work at the centre is meaningful to me and contributes to the organization

- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (6%)
- Strong agreement (93%)

1% 6%

93%

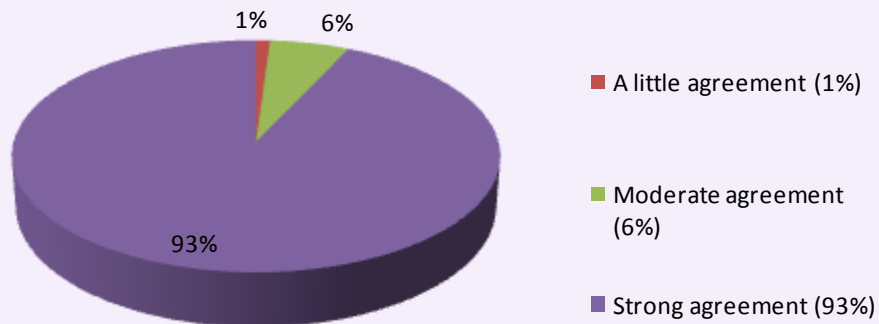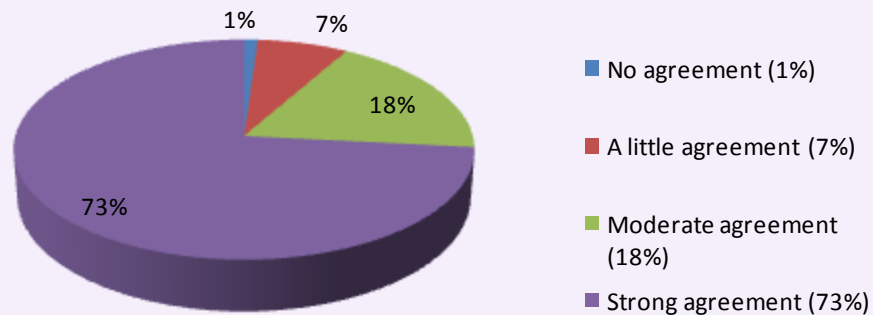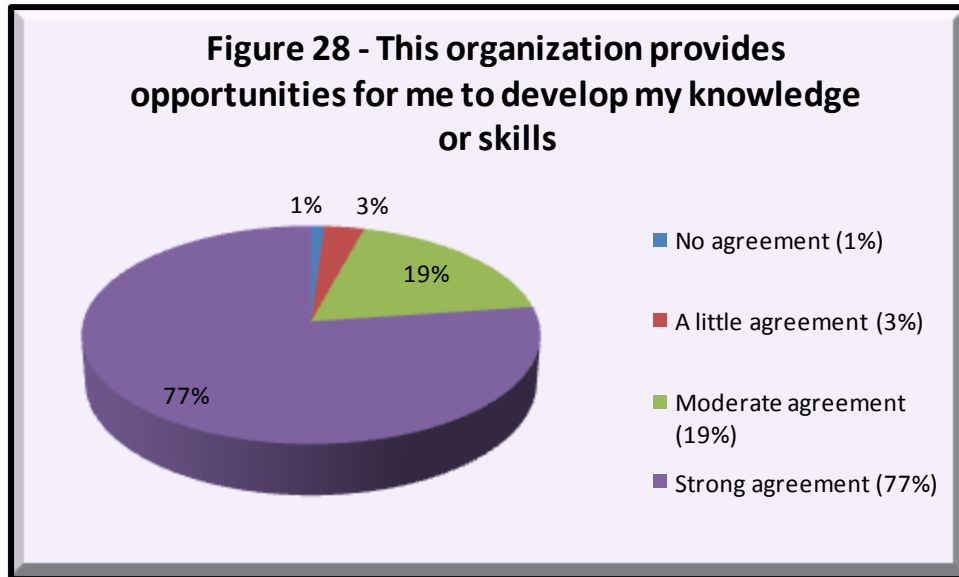**Figure 27 - When I wish to do so, there are opportunities for me to become involved in decision making, planning and development**

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (7%)
- Moderate agreement (18%)
- Strong agreement (73%)

1% 7%

18%

73%

Figure 28 - This organization provides opportunities for me to develop my knowledge or skills

- 1%
- 3%
- 19%
- 77%

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (3%)
- Moderate agreement (19%)
- Strong agreement (77%)

While staff was generally positive, their comments highlighted many areas for potential improvement. Numerous survey takers commented on the low wages in the sector. Some respondents felt strongly that inadequate wages made it difficult to balance work/life stresses. Some survey respondents felt that there were insufficient opportunities to influence the direction of programs and that improvements could be made in staff/management communication and in team building.

"I love working with families and hearing their success stories. What I find difficult is trying to provide ongoing consistent programming when we are always trying to piece things together with small grants from this and that (many are one time). CORE FUNDING FOR FAMILY RESOURCE PROGRAMS IS NEEDED."
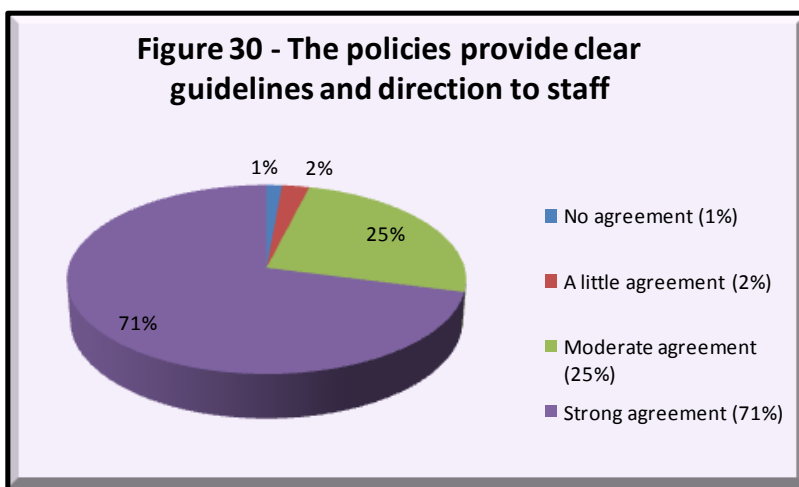
"I have always felt very supported at this centre. The working conditions are wonderful, the coordinator is very open to ideas and suggestions that staff may have, and I feel we are making a difference in the lives of the families we serve."

"I feel that I put a lot of effort and time into my job. I have been in the field of ECE for over 10 years now. My wage does not reflect the work that I do here…I am seriously considering a career change because I make $12 an hour and I am a single mother raising two girls. I need to make more money for myself and my girls and for my future."

Theme 9: Appropriate policies

In 2002, FRP Canada published the *Guiding Principles of Family Support*, a document based on cross-country consultations with fami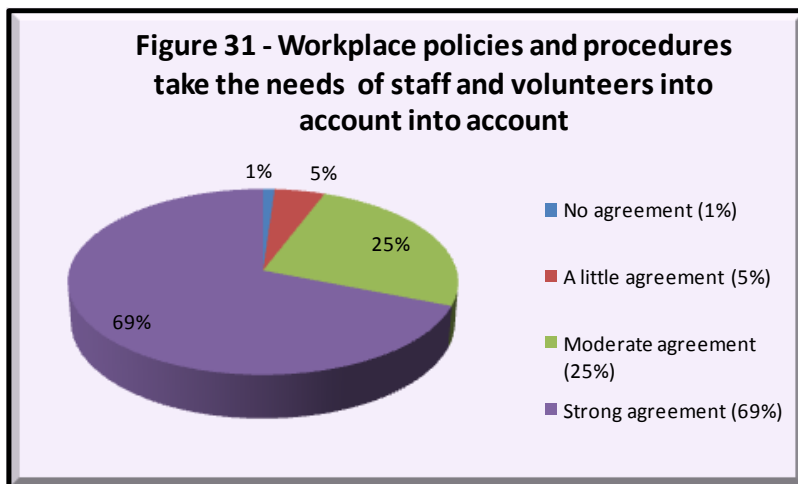ly resource programs. This document reflects the philosophical underpinnings of the field and proposes a set of core values that centres and family resource programs can use to guide the development of their organizational policies (see Appendix A). Appropriate policies provide a crucial framework for the encouragement of quality practice.

Clearly, most respondents believe that their centre has an appropriate policy framework in place. An impressive 98% of survey takers agree that their centre's policies accurately reflect best practice. Ninety-six percent agree that their centre's policies provide clear direction to staff. These strong results suggest that family resource centres are clear about their role in the community and that they communicate their mission effectively to staff.

Figure 29 - The policies of this centre reflect family support principles

- No agreement
- A little agreement (1%)
- Moderate agreement (12%)
- Strong agreement (86%)

1% 1%
12%
86%

Figure 30 - The policies provide clear guidelines and direction to staff

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (2%)
- Moderate agreement (25%)
- Strong agreement (71%)

1%   2%
25%
71%

Figure 31 - Workplace policies and procedures take the needs of staff and volunteers into account into account

- No agreement (1%)
- A little agreement (5%)
- Moderate agreement (25%)
- Strong agreement (69%)

Comments were generally positive.

"Staff are given many opportunities for professional development."

"I believe that front line workers understand what the needs of families using the centre require and will benefit from. I think that those staff should be consulted more often in decision making."

"There are few opportunities to enhance knowledge or skills."

"I have grown professionally while employed here and look forward to many more challenges and opportunities in the future."

"Smaller Hubs do not have the advantage of accessing many professionals for workshops."

Theme 10: Collaboration and partnerships

Family resource centres complement other existing services and work to build networks of support for families. Centres recognize that family life encompasses many areas including education, health, child development, community development and other factors. Centres reach out to other support organizations and attempt to create synergies and reduce barriers to access for families.

According to survey takers, family resource centres are doing an excellent job engaging and working with partners. 97% of respondents agree that their centre works effectively with partners to deliver enhanced services to families. Their perception is that partners seem to

"We continue to provide quality service in spite of no increases in either our provincial (OEYC) or our federal (CAPC/CPNP) funding. Staff are adept at finding other funding sources and building community partnerships. Our community works well together and this has expanded community capacity."

-2008-09 Staff & Volunteer Survey Participant

"We are very lucky to have great partnerships with local agencies to refer families in need. Working in the OEYC environment is very rewarding as we are continually helping new parents and existing families grow each and every day."

-2008-09 Staff & Volunteer Survey Participant

be almost universally satisfied with the nature of the cooperation. These results suggest that family resource centres are effectively integrated with the broader support community.

Comments from the staff/volunteer survey suggest that community outreach is an area where family resource centres are very effective.

Figure 32 - Stakeholders and partners seem satisfied with the services offered...

- Moderate agreement (19%) — 19%
- Strong agreement (80%) — 80%
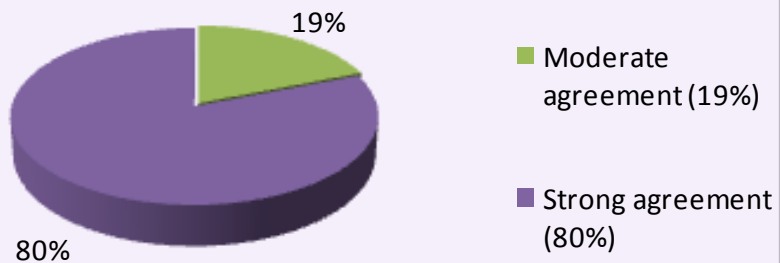
Figure 33 - The organization engages in partnerships that enable it to provide enhanced services

- No agreement (1%) — 1%
- A little agreement (2%) — 2%
- Moderate agreement (17%) — 17%
- Strong agreement (80%) — 80%
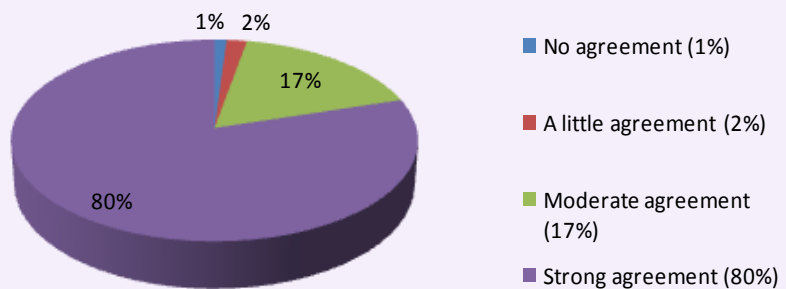
CONCLUSION

The ancient Greek aphorism states, "Know thyself". For without self-understanding, it is very hard to chart a course towards self-improvement. The *e-Valuation* survey is an important tool whereby family resource programs demonstrate their commitment to self-reflection and improved practice. As a method of program evaluation, the *e-Valuation* system offers a practical, structured, and theory-based approach to assessing family support programs. The *e-Valuation* system continues to be the only pan-Canadian evaluation tool for the sector.

The results from the third cohort of the *e-Valuation* survey demonstrates that family resource centres are successfully supporting parents, caregivers, and children. Centres received an overwhelming endorsement from participants who praised their role in social support, caregiver empowerment, child development, and community building. Participants offer consistently positive comments concerning program staff and centre atmosphere.

The responses from staff and volunteers demonstrate the commitment practitioners have for their work. Virtually all practitioners see their work as being very meaningful. This is a remarkable result that speaks to the fact that, for many practitioners, working with families is a calling. Staff strongly endorse the policies of their centres and is generally supportive of management practices. Family resource workers continue to voice concern about inadequate compensation within the sector. Funding limitations continue to put pressure on staffing, programming and services. These challenges are at least partially offset by effective partnering with other support services.

FRP Canada will continue to encourage family resource centres to use the *e-Valuation* system. The *e-Valuation* system provides a practical and meaningful method to undertake evaluation. Results from the system can be used for accountability and to help improve programs and services. We encourage family resource centres to continue to use the *e-Valuation* system and to the share their results with participants, funders and other stakeholders.

"It is the strong commitment both personal and profession from the staff and families that have allowed the centre to grow and meet the ever changing needs of the community. The economic decline of the area makes our centres more and more of a nucleus for family support."

-2008-09 Staff & Volunteer Survey Participant

APPENDICES

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.

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

For literature summaries relating to the ten themes, see www.frp.ca/evidence.

Appendix C

Aggregate Participant survey results from 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009

Experiences at the Centre (Questions 1 to 11)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008	Yr 3 2008-2009
Number of Surveys	3031	3360	2899
*Mean value	3.56	3.53	3.59
Standard deviation	.73	.76	.72

Parenting (Questions 12 to 17)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008	Yr 3 2008-2009
Number of Surveys	3031	3360	2899
Mean value	3.31	3.37	3.37
Standard deviation	.82	.79	.81

Child Development (Questions 18 to 23)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008	Yr 3 2008-2009
Number of Surveys	3031	3360	2899
Mean value	3.56	3.56	3.59
Standard deviation	.70	.70	.69

* 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, 2007-2008 and 2008-2009

Experiences (Questions 1 to 4)

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008	Yr 3 2008-2009
Number of Surveys	387	280	290
Mean value	3.65	3.63	3.72
Standard deviation	.63	.63	.58

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

	Yr 1 2006-2007	Yr 2 2007-2008	Yr 3 2008-2009
Number of Surveys	387	280	290
Mean value	3.71	3.72	3.74
Standard deviation	.52	.50	.54