

# Family Day Care Services:

## Our great-grandmothers' quilt

Ontario, Canada

by Joan Arruda, Chief Executive Officer

It all began in a stately house on an acre of donated land with 30 orphaned children and a few matrons in 1851. Until old enough to go into household service or a trade, these children of misfortune were protected and cared for by benevolent Torontonians known collectively as the Orphan's Home and Female Aid Society. It was a time when the scourge of cholera, not reading readiness, determined a child's fate.

Today, we are known as Family Day Care Services — one of the largest nonprofit providers of licensed home and centre-based child care programs in the Greater Toronto Area with 400 staff serving more than 4,000 children and their families. We are also the lead agency for five Ontario Early Years Centres which are family development centres operated in partnership with the Government of Ontario. Like an heirloom quilt, our organization was created in another time but continues to be of value and service to successive generations of children, parents, grandparents, and caregivers.

The centre of our quilt has always been the child and family. Each program or service is a square positioned and balanced to form a whole, the sum of what we know about healthy child de-

velopment. Each stitch is a relationship that represents a tight connection to a community and the larger society, and a deeper sense of belonging. Timeless

values and beliefs form the border. They act as a container for the parts and integrate them into one, seamless design. Management experts Jim Collins and



PHOTOGRAPH BY DONNIE NEUFELD/ALIFE

### Statement of Values and Beliefs

**Primacy of Children and Families:** We believe that children and families are central to everything we do.

**Commitment to Quality:** We believe in quality at all levels of service delivery and management.

**Responsiveness:** We believe in understanding and responding to the needs of our community.

**Staff Contributions:** We value the commitment, expertise and creative thinking of our staff.

**Stewardship:** We believe in responsible stewardship and management of our resources.

**Advocacy:** We believe that we have an obligation to advocate in areas related to our services.

**Partnerships:** We value partnerships with organizations and providers in the community.

**Teamwork and Mutual Respect:** We believe in collaboration, support for each other and mutual respect.

### Family-Centred Child Care

Family Day recognizes the importance of the family and the community in child development. As a family-centred child care organization, we work to strengthen the relationships between children, their families, their communities and society. Family Day understands that culture, diversity, community and public policy affect child and family development.

We support our families, and recognize and respect parents as being the most important caregivers for each child. Parents and staff are partners in caring for children. Our commitment to family-centred care means:

- family members are encouraged to become involved in our programs
- we promote partnerships with families through communication such as newsletters and special events; programs, staff, and caregivers honour family diversity and values
- staff and caregivers support parents' efforts to advocate for their child
- we want to establish links between families and the community

Family Day parents, staff and caregivers are partners in caring for children. We work to develop relationships that build trust and confidence.

Jerry Porras would say that Family Day has been 'built to last.' Their 1997 study of companies that have prospered for a hundred years or more reveals the secret to longevity: preserve the core and stimulate growth. This revelation came as no surprise to us at Family Day who inherited our great-grandmothers' vision of a society that takes care of its most vulnerable members, helping them make transitions and adapt to changing realities.

For this reason, Family Day has been able to grow with the city. The Greater Toronto Area is now home to 5.5 million Canadians with more than half having been born outside the country. It has become known as one of the world's most diverse and multicultural urban centres. Our growing network of quality child care and early learning programs is a reflection of this extraordinary diversity. The network integrates services for families of every description and offers choices that respond to a full range of needs. It connects families and policy makers by showing how public issues begin with private troubles. In this way, we are their partners and advocates in dealing with these current issues. We are also collaborators with those in government, academe, and business who are committed to children and their well-being.

Within this vibrant Family Day network, you will find Afshaan Muhiuddin. She is a self-employed, Montessori-trained caregiver originally from Pakistan and one of 300 Family Day licensed home child care providers. With the support of home child care program coordinator Vita DiMartino, Afshaan cares for five children under the age of five including her own daughter in her own home. The children's parents are also relatively new to Canada and have become family to one another. Together, they are getting settled, raising their children, and connecting with the wider community.

Parkland Public School is also part of the network. There you will find Principal Veronica St. Pierre and Family Day Child Care Centre Supervisor Donna Cree. They are collaborating to create a full day learning experience to help children make the transition from child care to kindergarten successfully. Kindergarten teachers from Parkland and Early Childhood Educators from Family Day teach in teams to create an integrated learning experience for children based on system-wide assessments and indicators and building on their respective strengths as professionals.

One of five hubs for parents, caregivers, and their children in the network is the Don Valley East Ontario Early Years Centre. Supervisor Vilma Raymundo and her staff offer a range of programs and resources for children from infancy to six years to help them develop social, communication, and early literacy skills — building blocks for success in school and life. She also collaborates with her community counterparts to mount projects like an annual multicultural fair. The fair is a family event that attracts more than 1,000 people who are mostly newcomers to the country and finding their way through the maze of neighbourhood services. It is a tool for facilitating access, empowering families, and cultivating a healthy, child-friendly local culture.

Quilters who pride themselves in the quality and durability of their creations will recognize the challenges of leading such a complex, multi-service organization. My role as Chief Executive Officer involves piecing together the past, present, and future, reconciling clashing colours and patterns, and ordering the messy details of everyday life. It is about repairing, restoring, and renewing the original form so that it can make the transition from one generation to the next in one piece. And it continues to be about sharing the experience of leadership with others.

Gathering around the quilt frame to talk and taking the time to hand stitch may seem like a quaint practice of a slower era. However, I believe the art of collaboration is critical to realizing our desired outcomes for children and to our continued growth as an organization. My Family Day colleagues and I recently spent a year reflecting on the nature and practice of collaborative leadership in our effort to release latent organizational capacity. We rediscovered how every part of the network contributes to the whole just as every individual has a contribution to make to the group. If we are working to a similar rhythm and communicating effectively across the organization, we are more likely to thrive in turbulent times, not only survive.

In reflecting on our work, I am reminded of Tony Johnston's *The Quilt Story*. It is the story of two generations linked by a family quilt. It keeps the child for whom it was made warm and safe in a practical way and in the knowledge of her mother's love. It comforts her through the experience of moving in a covered wagon to a new homestead. Many decades later, it is found by another child whose mother repairs the damage caused by a family of mice and other creatures. When a moving van comes to pack up her household, the quilt continues to provide comfort and ease her transition to a new home.

This story reminds me that ours is not the only generation that has faced challenges and changes. It is, however, the presence of people who are prepared to care for us and wrap us in the work of their heads, hands, and hearts that differentiates those who thrive from those who barely survive. I think of Family Day as a quilt, a gift from our great-grandmothers to be treasured but put to good use. It is one that we are obliged to leave in good repair for our great-grandchildren — to demonstrate that this generation also had love for the next.