

## Spotlight on Success: B.C. Family Resource Programs

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As any new parent learns, it's not easy being a mom or dad. It's lonely, isolating and sometimes downright baffling. And it's great to have someone to talk to and a place to go on days when it all feels a bit much.

That simple premise is at the heart of the 276 Family Resource Programs operating in B.C. Their work is centred on a grassroots concept developed in the 1970s that still thrives today.

Wherever you live in B.C., chances are there's a Family Resource Program (FRP) nearby. Housed in family service agencies, neighbourhood houses, schools and non-profit agencies, FRPs quietly carry out the important community work of strengthening thousands of B.C. families.

The FRP model essentially creates a supportive neighbourhood for families of young children—one with five core areas of service guiding its efforts.

These core services are the essence of the model. A genuine FRP will provide Family Support; Play-based Learning; Early Learning and Literacy; Parent Education and Learning; and Information and Referrals to other community services.

All FRPs are shaped around the five core services, says Marianne Drew-Pennington, executive director of the BC Association of Family Resource Programs. But specific programs and supports reflect needs of the individual communities.

For instance, an FRP will have a drop-in centre as part of its family-support mandate, says Marianne. But it will also have a variety of other family strengthening supports such as supportive counselling or food security programs.

"Supports can be as mild as creating opportunities for families to meet, or as intense as strong intervention for a parent with significant challenges," she says.

"A Family Resource Program provides a wrap-around service for families. It would never be *just* a drop-in."

Families connect to FRPs for all kinds of reasons. Once there, they also end up connecting to each other. Wrap a healthy and supportive "neighbourhood" around a family and all kinds of good things can happen.

Parents who are struggling suddenly discover they're getting help to work through their challenges. They find better ways to parent—sometimes due to a program they're in, but often just because they're spending more time learning in a community of parents.

Meanwhile, their children are helped along in their development through creative play and early learning opportunities. They make new friends, too.

The association formed in 1989 to promote and support the FRP model. That includes maintaining a high degree of professionalism in all FRPs.

To that end, an eight-course Family Resource Program Certificate launches this fall at the Justice Institute of BC. Although the certificate is designed for practitioners working in parent/child engagement programs, many of the courses are relevant for childcare providers or child and youth-care workers.

The association has recently developed provincial standards for FRPs that it hopes agencies will voluntarily adopt. Twenty already have.

With a growing concern at all levels around children taken into provincial care, FRPs go back to the basics to give families the support they need to raise their children and keep the family together. They build on people's strengths, acknowledging that virtually all of them want to be good parents.

"We really feel the family-resource approach can have a tremendous impact on strengthening families," says Marianne. "They're very cost-effective, and they bring a lot of people through the door."

