



## Summary of 2006 - 2007 Results



## **Acknowledgements**

To the family resource centre staff, volunteers and program participants who completed surveys—thank you for taking the time to share your experiences and impressions. Your feedback is invaluable.

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

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## INTRODUCTION

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #12*

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-Evaluation*, which allows for local evaluations to be standardized and compiled into a single, comprehensive set of results. This report presents findings from the first year of data collection (2006-2007). 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.

### About the e-Evaluation 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 Skill 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*<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> Ottawa: FRP Canada, 2003

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

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<sup>2</sup> 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
- 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 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-evaluation.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.

<sup>2</sup> The core indicators can be viewed at <http://e-evaluation.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 first year of implementation, 3031 respondents completed the Participant Survey and 387 respondents completed the Staff/Volunteer Survey.

**Supporting resources:** The *e-Evaluation* web site for organizations contains a comprehensive *Resources* page with *Frequently Asked Questions* (FAQs) and several documents available for download including a *User's Quick Start Guide*, print copies of the Participant Survey and Staff/Volunteer Survey in seven languages, and a PowerPoint presentation suitable for orienting colleagues and participants about the system.

**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 is available to each centre upon request.

**Research summaries:** The e-Evaluation 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), which are 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](http://www.frp.ca/evidence) for full text of summaries.

## SNAPSHOT OF PARTICIPATING FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES

### System participation rate

In the first year of data collection using the *e-Valuation* system, 102 individual program sites or centres registered to use the system. About two-thirds (65) of the sites had entered data by the time the data collection period closed in June 2007. This report is based on data from 3418 entered surveys completed at 65 locations.

### Location and geographical setting

The majority of participating sites were from Ontario (91%) with the balance (9%) from other provinces (Alberta, Manitoba and Newfoundland & Labrador). 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 first year, 32% identified themselves as rural/remote and 68% as located in urban or suburban communities. This high percentage of rural/remote may be accounted for by the fact that Ontario Early Years Centres are distributed by political ridings, and many have established satellite sites to serve less populous parts of the ridings. The strong representation of rural programs also demonstrates the success of family resource programs in serving smaller communities.

### Type of organization

Sixty-two percent (62%) of organizations using the system identified themselves as OEYCs or OEYC satellites. The remaining organizations are multi-service agencies with Family Resource Centres, stand-alone family resource programs, Family Places, Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC) programs and others. A small number of organizations described themselves as a combination multi-service agency or family resource program and OEYC.

### Number of FTE staff

The average number of full time equivalent (FTE) staff members per registered site was 9.2. This is consistent with numbers provided for the *2002 Status Report on Canadian Family Resource Programs*, where only 19% of respondents reported having staff or more than 10 FTEs. Many family resource program sites are staffed by just one or two persons.

### Funding

Most organizations stated that their primary funder was the provincial government (84%). Some organizations listed many funders who help make their operations possible including the United Way, federal government, municipal government, fundraising and *Success by 6*. One centre noted that it has 25 individual sources of funds. None of the participating organizations reported funding from foundations or religious organizations.

## Service volume

Each registered organization was asked to count the actual number of unique participants (adults and children) that they had served during the previous three weeks. According to their reports, the average (mean) number of individual adults and children served by each organization during that time period was 457. Since this average includes some very large multi-service agencies, it is prudent to look at the median number as well. The median average was 250 individual adults and children served in a three-week period per centre.

Since adults and children often attend centres more than once within a three week period (79% 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. When one considers that attendance is voluntary and that many sites are located in small communities, these high service volumes attest to the popularity of family resource programs.

## PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #1*

### The Big Picture

The feedback gathered from 3031 participants about their experiences at 65 family resource program sites was overall extremely positive. The depth of favourable responses indicates that participants appreciate and benefit from the approaches which family resource centres use.

Survey-takers expressed their satisfaction with family resource centres by often choosing the strongest rating, commonly exceeding 90% of all responses and never dropping below 40%. Such robust results are not surprising given the strong roots that family resource programs have in their communities.

### Overview of responses

Participants give family resource centres very high marks for their efforts to create a respectful atmosphere and welcome diverse groups. They report an increase in parental confidence and approval of the play and socialization opportunities their children have at family resource centres. Participants generously offered rich, personal comments about the positive impact that family resource centres have on their lives. A sampling of these comments appears throughout the report.

A few questions yielded results with more varied levels of agreement. For example, respondents were less sure about whether they knew about opportunities to contribute to decision making at the family resource centre.

Also, questions about parenting received a wider range of responses from program participants. While the responses to these questions were positive, further research could offer insights about how families view the connection between their parenting experiences and their participation in family support programming.

### Who are family resource centre participants?

When comparing data from this survey to Statistics Canada figures, we know that the population served by family resource centres is similar to the Canadian population in general, with several exceptions. For example, there is a higher percentage of:

- Women than men among the adult participants
- Immigrants
- Participants who speak languages other than English or French
- Low income families
- Rural participants

## Connections between children and adults at family resource centres

Figure 1 on page 12 shows that almost all children come to family resource centres with their parents (82%) but some also attend with their caregivers (8%) and grandparents (7%). Other relatives sometimes bring children to family resource centres to participate in programming (1% of all adults). The majority of caregivers typically attend with one to three children; a small number reported bringing five or six children along to the centre.

## Gender

The majority of participants who completed surveys on behalf of their families or children in their care were women (87%). This is not surprising, since women are more often primary caregivers of young children than men. 13% of the surveys were completed by fathers and other males, showing that over one in ten participants during this period were male. It will be interesting to track this number over the next few cohorts given the increase in various fathering initiatives and programs within family resource centres.

## 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 26-40 years were at 37%. Older parents, grandparents and caregivers are likely represented in the group of participants aged 41 to over 50, which accounted for 7% of participants.

## Family income

According to Statistics Canada, the median family after tax income for the year 2006 is \$70,400 a year and 59% of Canadians fall into the over \$60,000 a year income bracket<sup>3</sup>. As shown on Figure 2, page 12, 45% of *e-Valuation* survey takers who answered this question reported earning a total family income of more than \$60,000 a year<sup>4</sup>.

Figure 2 also indicates that 26% of survey takers earn less than \$36,000/year and 15% of survey takers earn \$23,999 or less.

These data show that family resource programs are engaging participants from all income levels, with a higher proportion of low-income families than the general population.

Statistics Canada uses \$27,210<sup>5</sup> as the highest net family income bracket in the low income cut-off for a 3-person family. Their calculation of total families in low income brackets after tax is 7.3%<sup>6</sup>.

Many family resource centres have a history of making their services accessible and attractive to lower income families by offering low-fee or free programs as well as help with transportation costs and basic material assistance (i.e. community kitchens, prenatal supplements, clothing exchanges).

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Censuses of Population, 1851 – 2001, <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/demo62a.htm>

<sup>4</sup> The survey question did not specify whether income levels were before or after taxes.

<sup>5</sup> Statistics Canada, Censuses, Summary tables, <http://www40.statcan.ca/101/cst01/famil19a.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Statistics Canada, Income Research Paper Series, Low Income Cut-offs for 2007 and Low Income Measures for 2006, Catalogue no. 75F0002M — No. 004, ISSN 1707-2840, ISBN 978-0-662-48901-6, <http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/75F0002MIE/75F0002MIE2008004.pdf>

Family resource centres also face many challenges in reaching lower income families such as:

- Lower income families often face transportation barriers.
- Some lower income participants could have less flexible work schedules that make it hard for them to participate during centre operating hours.
- Lower income families may have a different history of using community services. Some of these families may not be aware that family resource centres are different from more formal services or government programs and thus are hesitant to visit a centre.
- The *e-Evaluation* surveys have revealed that friend/family referrals are the most common way that families learn about resource centres. If lower income participants do not receive such referrals from their friends/ families, they may be unaware of or uncertain about visiting the centres.

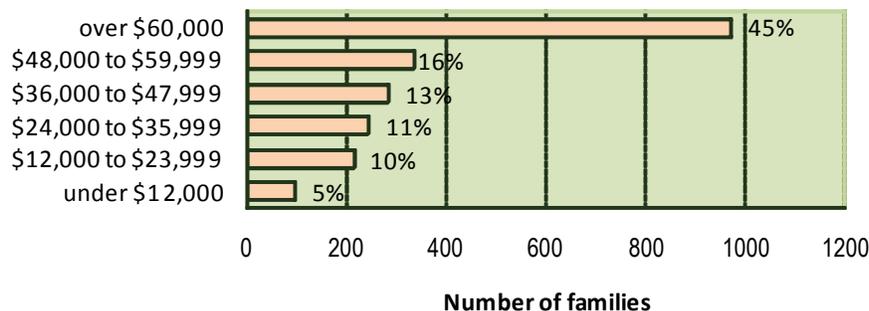
**Figure 1**

**Relationship of respondents to children**

Survey taker's relationship to child(ren)	(%) All Respondents
Parent	82
Caregiver	8
Grandparent	7
Relative	1
Other	2

**Figure 2**

**Annual family income of participants who use the centre**



## Canadian and neighbourhood residence

Statistics Canada's reports that the foreign-born population constitutes 19.8% of the Canadian population<sup>7</sup>. Almost one in four (24%) of the *e-Evaluation* survey respondents were not born in Canada. Of those 24% of respondents, 5% are newcomers to Canada (in the country fewer than 3 years), as compared to 19% that reported having lived in Canada for over 3 years.

Programming for newcomers to Canada has become a priority for some family resource centres. Meeting the needs of such families offers many opportunities as well as challenges. Newcomers are occupied with immediate settlement needs such as finding housing, work, arranging child care or schooling for their children, finding employment and learning English or French. These key settlement activities, in their first year or two in Canada, may be given priority over parenting questions, socialization for children and learning about community services. Difficulty speaking and reading in English and French may pose a barrier to attending centre programs if interpretation or language supports are not available. Moreover, family resource centres may not exist in a newcomers country of origin so the challenge becomes reaching this population with information about what family programs have to offer to all families and about programs specific to newcomers.

*e-Evaluation* participant comments reveal that those newcomers that have accessed family resource centres have found practical, social and emotional support to help them in their settlement and transition to Canadian life.

*"Being still new to Canada this centre was probably the main place to start to socialize with other people and get to know other programs therefore it was very important to us."*

Most survey respondents (60%) are well established in their neighbourhoods, having lived there for three or more years. Since referrals from friends/ 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

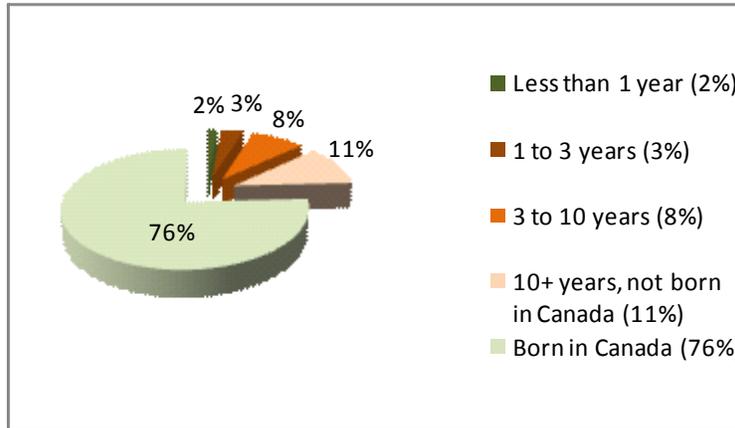
Of the 2,674 people who responded to this question, 379 (or 14%) noted that they most often speak a language other than English and French at home. This is a revealing measure of the success of family resource programs in adapting programming and resources to attract non-native English and French speakers 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.

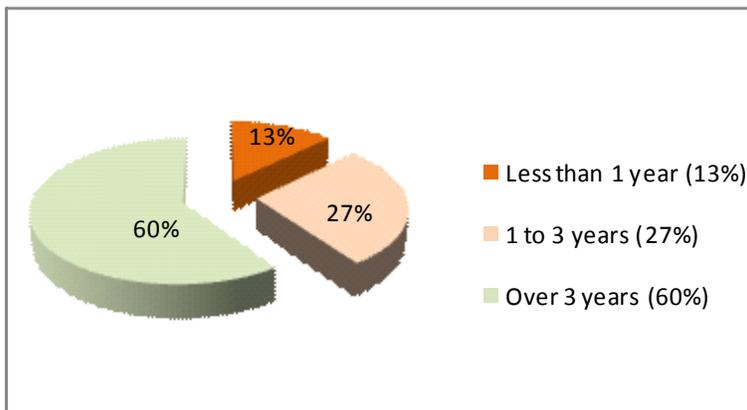
Several family resource centres translated the Participant Survey so people could complete it in their first language, thus making it available to a larger number of participants. These translated surveys are posted online for others to use at: <http://e-evaluation.frp.ca/org/e/Resources.php>.

<sup>7</sup>Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, Summary tables, <http://www40.statcan.ca/l01/cst01/demo47a.htm>

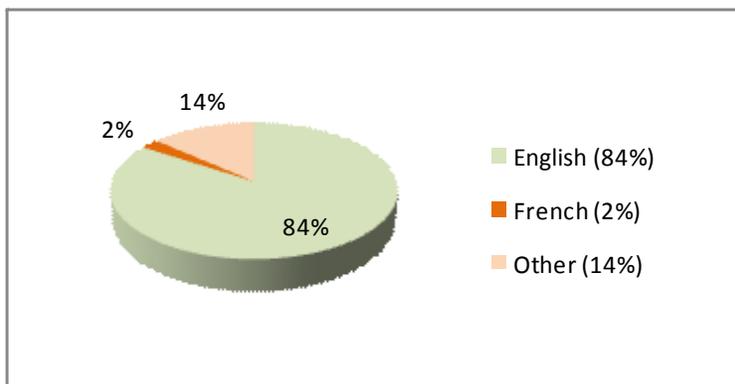
**Figure 3** Length of residence in Canada



**Figure 4** Length of residence in current neighbourhood



**Figure 5** Languages spoken most often at home



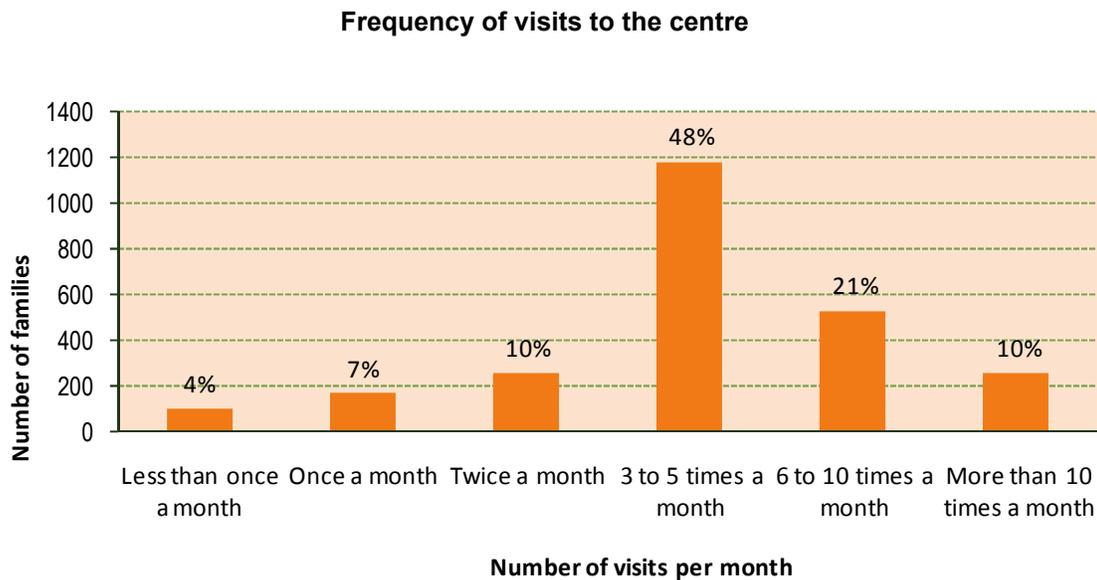
## Frequency of family visits and total monthly visits to centres

As indicated in Figure 6, 48% of respondents reported that they and their family members attend centre programming on average three to five times each month and 31% said they visit the centre more than six times per month.

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 10 times a month.

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

**Figure 6**



## Information and referral sources

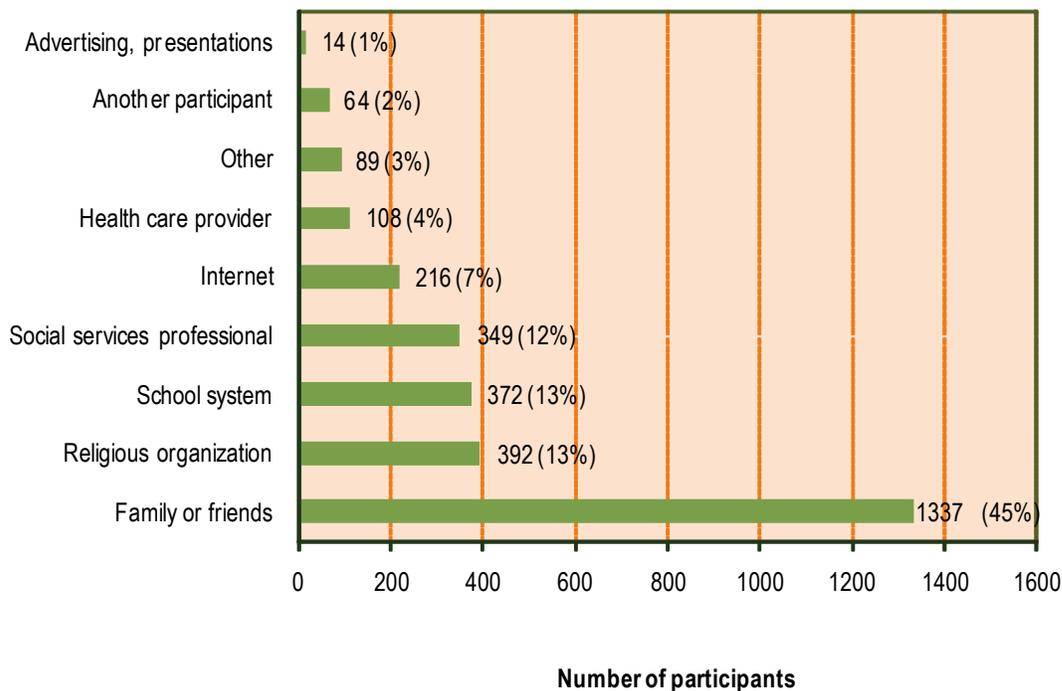
A large percentage of families, comprising 45% of the survey takers, first learned about a local family resource centre from their family and friends.

As indicated in Figure 7, some families got information about centres through religious organizations and schools (13% for both), others heard about the centre from social services professionals (12%).

Only 2% of respondents indicated that they got their information from another centre participant; however, it is likely that some of the numbers captured under 'family or friends' also are participants of the centre.

**Figure 7**

**Source of information about centre**



## Questions about participants' experiences at family resource centres

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

#### ***Family support programs value and encourage mutual assistance and peer support.***

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #7*

Family resource centre staff are known for their ability to develop meaningful and positive connections with program participants. Almost all survey respondents (90%) give family resource centres top ratings for the centres' efforts to 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 participants. Within this atmosphere, 93% of respondents strongly agreed that the staff members at their centres treat them with respect.

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

*"It has provided a great environment for my child to learn new things. The flexibility & the warmth of the staff makes the experience extraordinary."*

*"I find the staff informative and friendly and are usually the reason why participants return to the program."*

*"A fun happy, relaxed room to visit. We are never rushed out. Children are always provided with snack/drinks if they need anything. My family has always felt welcome - and will continue to come."*

*"Staff very easy to talk to, tonnes of resources."*

*"Welcoming playgroup to come to. The kids and I feel very comfortable and part of the community."*

*"Skilled, considerate and helpful, caring, etc. 90% of success is the wonderful staff. Programs are great. Bravo! Love It!"*

*"I like the interaction the staff have with the kids and are very friendly and helpful."*

*"The staff are incredible. They actually interact and care about the children."*

## Theme 2: Enhancing family participation

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #3*

Family resource centres aim to develop their programs so that participants with different learning styles, personality types and parenting/caregiving approaches can all benefit. Figure 8 shows that 97% of survey takers show moderate or strong agreement that family resource centres design their activities so that people can participate in their own way.

Family resource centres recognize that the rhythm of life with children can be unpredictable so they design flexible activities at different points throughout the day and week. This helps adults to modify their participation at centres to the ever-changing needs of children. The majority of survey respondents (80%) strongly agree that centre staff and programs are available when participants need them. These responses show that family resource centres are successful, as far as responding participants are concerned, at adapting their schedules and programs so those who wish to participate can do so. That said, a number of participants commented that they would like to see their local centre extend its operating hours. It would be of value to determine if “after hours” programming increases the level of participants in general and the number of male participants specifically.

The *Guiding Principles of Family Support* state that family support programs continually seek to improve their practice by reflecting on what they do and how they do it. Most centres demonstrate this principle by gathering feedback and ideas from program participants. Figure 10 illustrates that respondents have varied impressions about the opportunities available for them to become involved in centre decision-making. Moreover, 738 survey takers (24%), did not answer this question. It’s possible that some participants have no desire to become involved in centre decision-making or that they are not aware that such opportunities exist. In family resource programs, the gathering of feedback and recommendations, such as the use of the *e-Evaluation* system, is often an integral process of the programming.

*“I feel affirmed and appreciated for my participation in the community as a parent. Sometimes leading activities or coming up with craft ideas, sharing snacks or reading a story at circle time.”*

*“The Centre provided many different ways to accommodate my older daughter whose speech is delayed. All the staff members were very kind and supportive.”*

*“Great toy library, lots of accessible playgroups, fantastic centre space, friendly helpful staff, flexibility to use the space for our own needs, ongoing changes in programming to better meet the needs of the community.”*

Figure 8

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

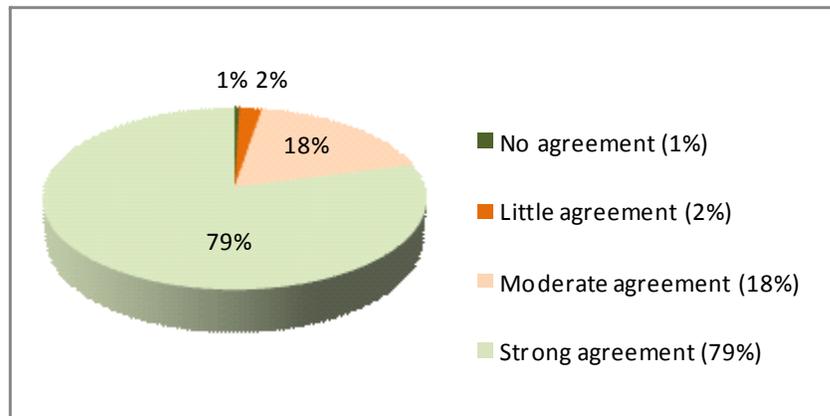


Figure 9

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

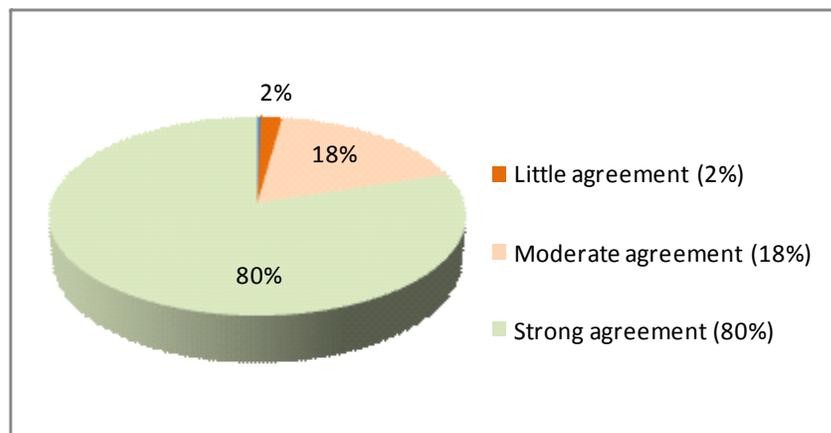
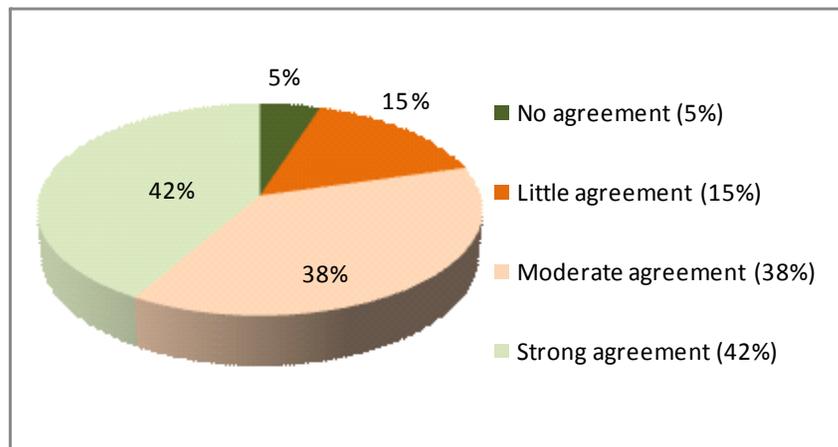


Figure 10

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



### Theme 3: Diversity

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #10*

The concept of diversity includes, among other things, ethnicity, language, socio-economic status, age, sexual orientation and physical ability. Almost all survey takers (98%) agree that family resources centres welcome participants from diverse backgrounds and circumstances. Family resource centres are continually learning about how to make their spaces and programs more welcoming to diverse groups such as gay/lesbian families, special needs families and recent immigrants. For example, findings from a recent FRP Canada project, *Welcome Here*, show that centres are increasingly working with immigrant settlement agencies to offer enhanced services and celebrate diversity in their communities.

*“Being a new permanent resident made me feel very isolated as well as the children. Lack of communication and info led me to worry about my son’s development. Through observing his peers at the groups and talking to other moms I was put at ease that his behaviour is normal and feel supported that my skills as a parent are more than adequate.”*

*“Helped my son with speech problems. They gave me ideas and support to work with him at home. They give opportunities for my child to play with other children his age and for me to interact with parents. Also ideas for crafts and age appropriate toys and recipes for my family.”*

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

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #5*

Figure 11 illustrates that 84% of survey takers strongly or moderately agree that centres help them to improve family interactions and manage the everyday challenges of family life. Around 74% of the respondents reported strong or moderate agreement to the statement: “Since we have been participating in this centre, we have more ideas and ways of getting along” (see Figure 12).

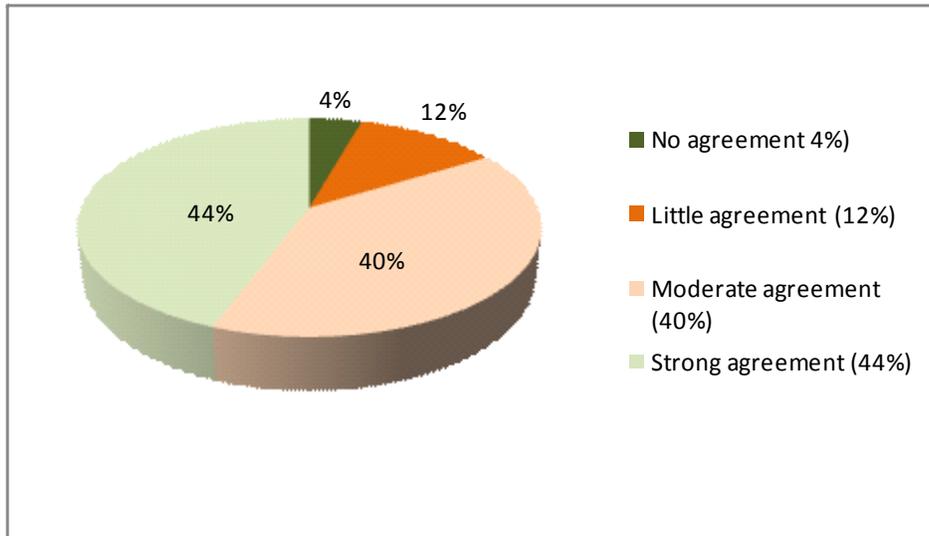
*“All the information received is shared at home, which brings us together when making decisions on how to raise our child.”*

*“My grandchildren are with me full time & I get lots of support & ideas from staff as to how to help my grandchildren cope without their parents. If I have questions about health, discipline, food, etc. they help me or find someone who can. Without it I don’t know what I’d do. It is hard to be a parent & grandma too.”*

*“This centre is a great social resource for me as a caregiver... It has been a great resource when facing new behavioural challenges.”*

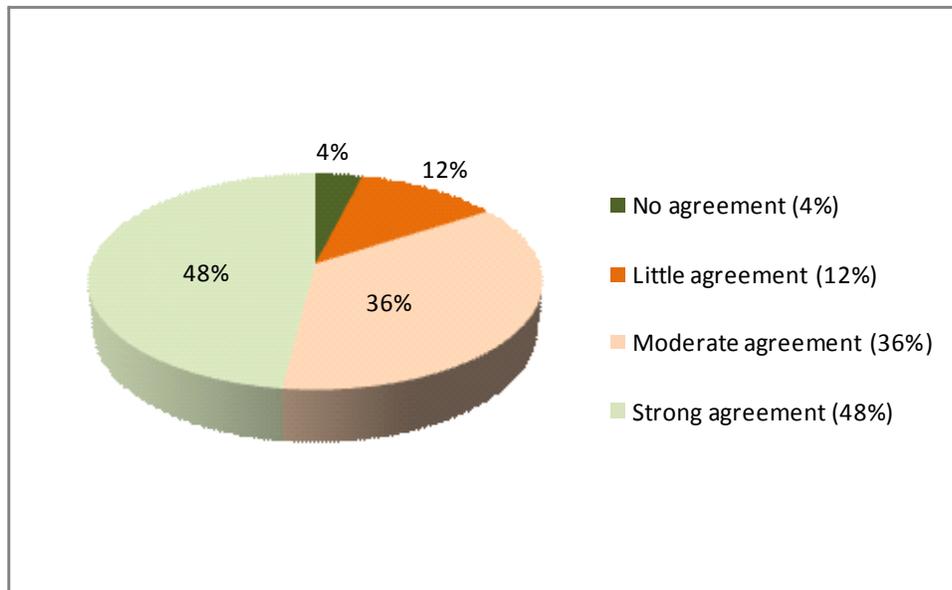
**Figure 11**

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



**Figure 12**

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



## Theme 5: Parental confidence

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

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #8*

Family resource centres understand that caring for children is both a demanding and rewarding undertaking. From time to time, most parents and caregivers need support to manage the questions and uncertainties that come with child rearing. Parental confidence is linked with positive child outcomes, as a result, centres design programs that offer information, encourage peer support and allow participants to build their care giving skills, all of which help to boost parental confidence. 87% of survey takers strongly or moderately agreed that they feel more confident as a parent or caregiver because of their involvement with a family resource centre. This result shows that family resource centres support participants to build their capacities, which, in turn, helps them to have more positive interactions with their children.

*“The program has made me a more confident parent. My children have changed—they are not pesky or fussy.”*

*“More confidence in parenting; access to health professionals—less trips to the doctor; less anxiety; better learning opportunities for child; less isolation.”*

## Theme 6: Strengthening family social networks

### ***Family support programs operate from an ecological perspective that recognizes the interdependent nature of families’ lives.***

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #6*

Family resource centres are connectors. They bring people together and, in doing so, help participants to establish wider personal and professional networks. Staff work hard to build a sense of community and belonging in their centres, both with program participants and other organizations in their locale. 76% of survey takers noticed that they have developed friendships with other program participants. Family resource centres know that when participants have a network of trustworthy, supportive people it enables them to experience success in their roles as parents and caregivers.

*“An opportunity to talk to other parents about issues we have with our kids. Have made many friends through playgroup. Access to programs that I usually would not have known about.”*

*“Meeting other dads, giving me a break from making dinner, my son made new friends” .*

*“...provides opportunity for me to connect with other women/mothers and children my kids ages. This makes a difference for my family because we are relatively new to the area and don't know many people—huge mental health benefits because parenting, although a wonderful and joyful experience is also very stressful and it's nice to know I'm not alone.”*

## Theme 7: Links to other services and resources

***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.***

*The Guiding Principles of Family Support #2*

Family resource centres have a strong history of creating ties among themselves and maintaining connections with other community services. Family resource centres link parents and caregivers to other services and inform participants about a wider range of available programs. Some of the ways they offer this benefit are: by informing participants about where to find different programs; by making referrals to community groups; and by developing service collaborations with other organizations.

More than 90% of survey 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.

*"My daughter is happier at home which makes the whole family happier. The lovely ladies who run this program are wonderful. They inform me of available services that I otherwise would not have known about."*

*"I have become more aware of what is available for me and my family in my community."*

*"Connection with community and the ability to meet and make long term friends."*

*"It has provided toys and resources and programs for myself, my daughters and my grandchildren. It has expanded my knowledge of community events and opportunities."*

## Questions about parenting and child development

Family resource centres offer a wide array of supports for adults and children. Depending on the needs of the community, centres may offer parent education courses, parent-child interaction activities (e.g. *Rhyme Time*), community kitchens, skill building workshops, etc. All of these programs are designed to help adults better provide and care for children. Child development is also a key focus at family resource centres. Typical programming can include unstructured drop-in play as well as more structure craft, music and literacy activities. 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 illustrates that respondents have learned new things about parenting and child development as a result of participating at family resource centres.

- 80% reported that they have an increased awareness of activities that are appropriate for their children
- 87% were in agreement that they are more aware of what to expect from their child(ren) at different ages
- 76% of respondents said that the centre helped them to learn things that they now use at home, including strategies for guiding child behavior and new play activities
- 86% of participants reported feeling more supported in their roles as parents or caregivers
- 80% stated that they understand their children better since they started going to centres

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

- 90% reported that their children are more comfortable in social situations since going to the local family resource centre
- 83% agreed that their children have more opportunities to interact with people from other cultures
- 95% 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

## STAFF AND VOLUNTEER SURVEY RESULTS

### The Big Picture

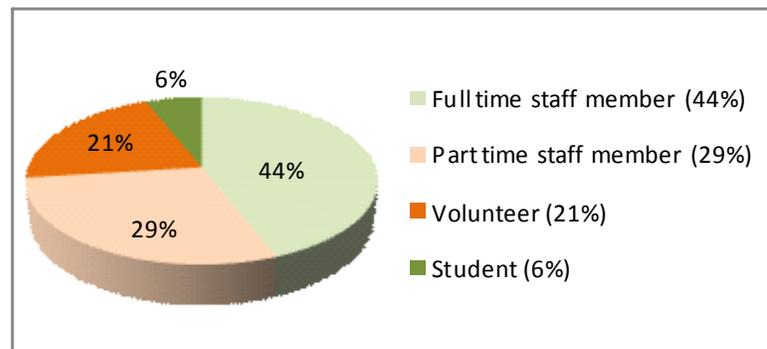
Similar to the Participant survey, the results of the Staff/Volunteer Survey are emphatically positive. Family resource centre staff and volunteers are highly involved and invested in their organizations. The vast majority of respondents report that they take part in many aspects of centre operations, including decision-making and program planning. They also feel that their centres support staff career development and create policies that provide clear guidelines for their work. As a result, staff and volunteers have a high degree of satisfaction with their role at family resource centres.

### Who are family resource centre staff, students and volunteers?

About 400 staff, volunteers and students responded to the survey. The data tells us that:

- almost all centre staff, students and volunteers were women
- 73% of respondents were full or part-time staff members, 21% were volunteers and 6% were students
- survey takers were evenly represented across the age spectrum
- most staff have worked in the field for more than five years
- the majority of staff and volunteers have post-secondary training
- few staff stay with one centre for their entire career

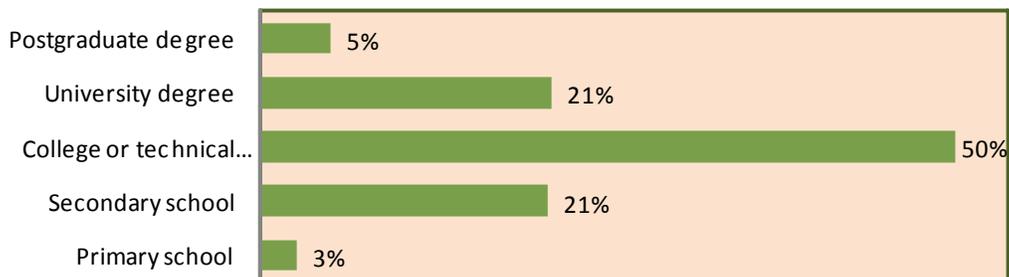
**Figure 13** At present I am...



### Highest level of education

In total, 76% of survey takers have some post-secondary training. Half of respondents said that they have completed college or technical school and a further 21% have a university degree.

**Figure 14** Highest level of education completed for staff, volunteers and students



## Age and years of experience in the field

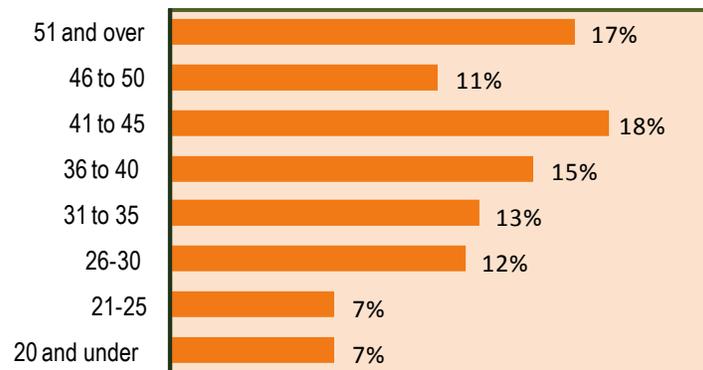
The results show that 54% of staff, volunteers and students were under the age of 40, while 17% were over the age of 51. As with ages, staff and volunteers have various levels of experience in the family support field:

- 45% have between one and nine years' experience (the figure for staff only is 49%)
- 31% have ten to twenty years' experience (36% of paid staff)
- 15% have over 20 years' experience (the same for paid staff)

This wide range of ages and years of experience may help protect family resource centres from staff, skill, and knowledge loss as older workers retire.

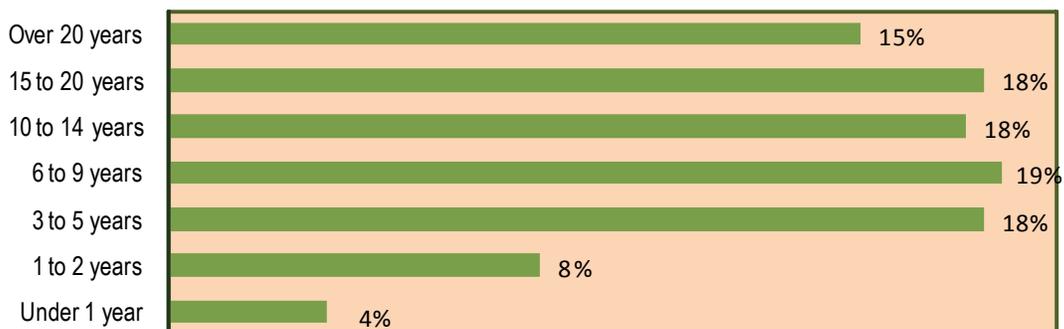
**Figure 15**

**Age of staff, volunteers and students**



**Figure 16**

**Years of experience in the field  
(Paid staff only)**



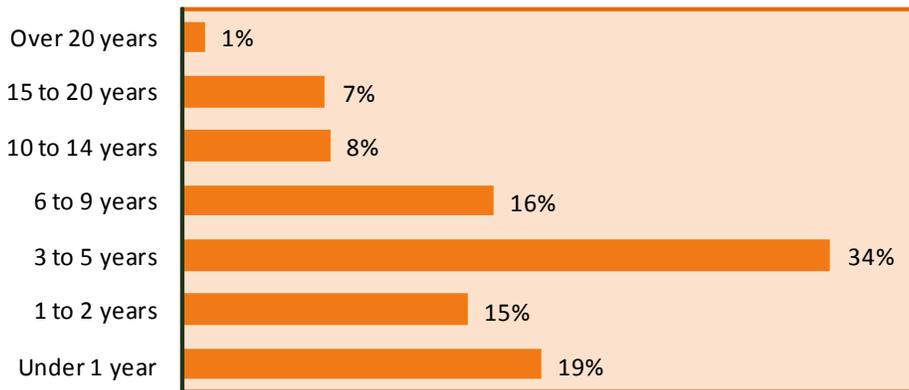
## Years working or volunteering at the centre

68% of respondents have been with their current centre for five 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. 27% of respondents have been working at their centres for two years or less. This includes volunteers and students.

When the numbers for paid staff only are examined, 40% appear to have been at the centre for over five years and 10% over 15 years. Of those who responded, 37% have been at their current centre for 5 years or less and 23% two years or less.

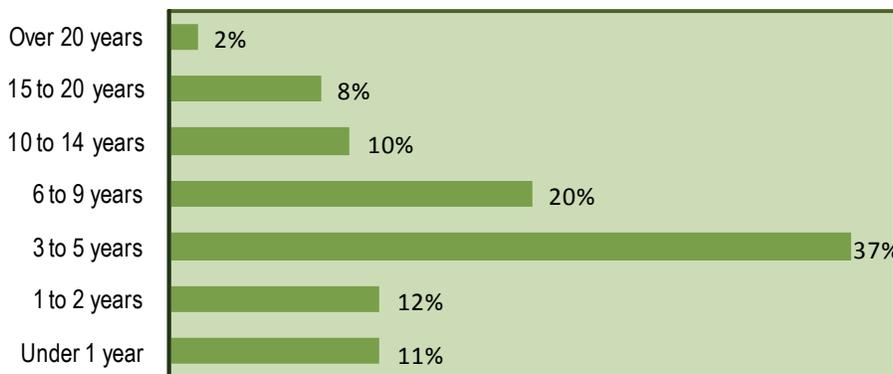
**Figure 17**

**Years working/volunteering with the centre  
(All staff and volunteers)**



**Figure 18**

**Years working with the centre  
(Paid 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<sup>8</sup>. Family resource centres are known to be relationship-based organizations that take a keen interest in staff development and workplace culture.

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 they have opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills (92% agreement). And 86% of staff and volunteers reported that their centres provide opportunities for them to become involved in the operations of the organization. This result indicates that family resource centres value the input of staff and volunteers—so much so that centre employees report having the freedom to make program decisions, participate in strategic planning and have a say in policy development. Furthermore, Figure 19 illustrates that 99% of respondents are in strong or moderate agreement that their work is meaningful and feel that their personal efforts contribute to the organization as a whole.

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 (see comments below). These comments serve to highlight the fact that core funding for family resource centres is often limited.

*“As a long term employee I have had opportunities to provide input into discussion of new directions and have usually felt my contributions to program, special events and networking within the community have been valued. I believe strongly in our agencies’ overall mandate and am gratified to be seen as part of our front line delivery of services.”*

*“I hope this centre provides us with comprehensive benefits such as insurance plans to improve working conditions for staff. I am greatly satisfied with the various programs that this centre offers and services to support every families needs. The complimentary remarks of families and professionals and the attitude of the staff bring me to work everyday.”*

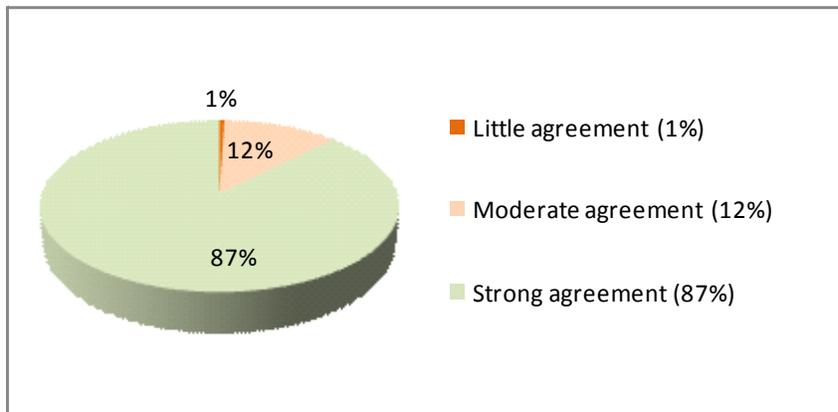
*“Everyday is very rewarding. The staff work as a great team together. Also, the volunteers and other agencies are very supportive. We also always have a chance to learn and grow through professional development.”*

*“I love my job and continue to stay because I believe in the work the centre is doing. However, the pay needs to be higher and the funders will not give money towards higher wages. I currently make \$12 per hour...and even need to live in subsidized housing.”*

<sup>8</sup>CPRN (Canadian Policy Research Networks). What workers want in a Job. Retrieved July 7, 2008 from <http://www.jobquality.ca/indicators/rewards/>

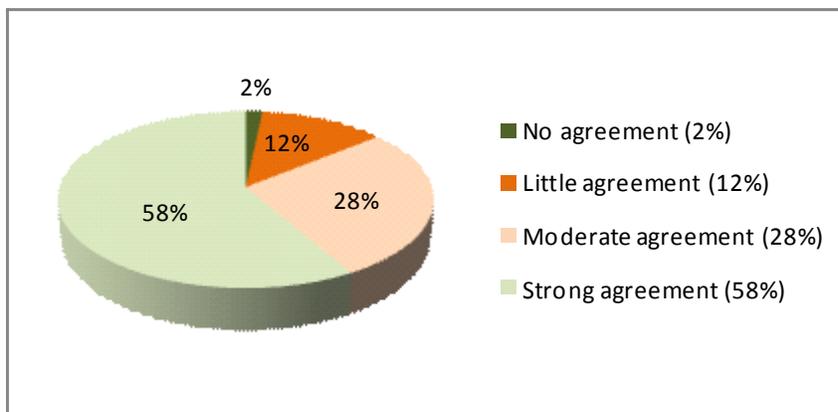
**Figure 19**

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



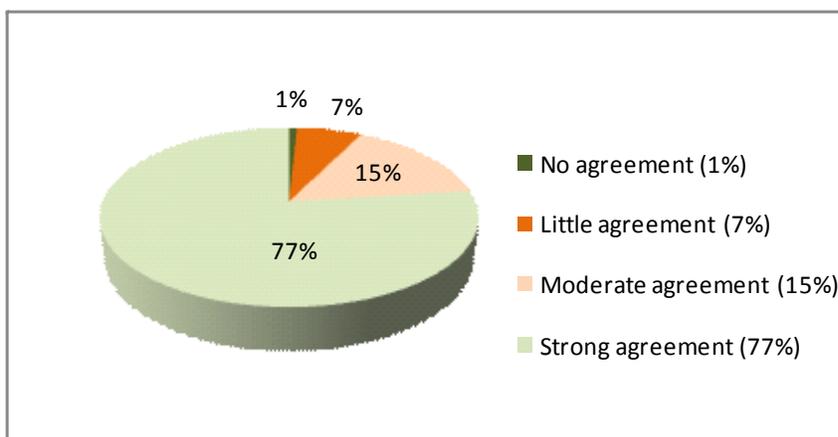
**Figure 20**

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



**Figure 21**

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



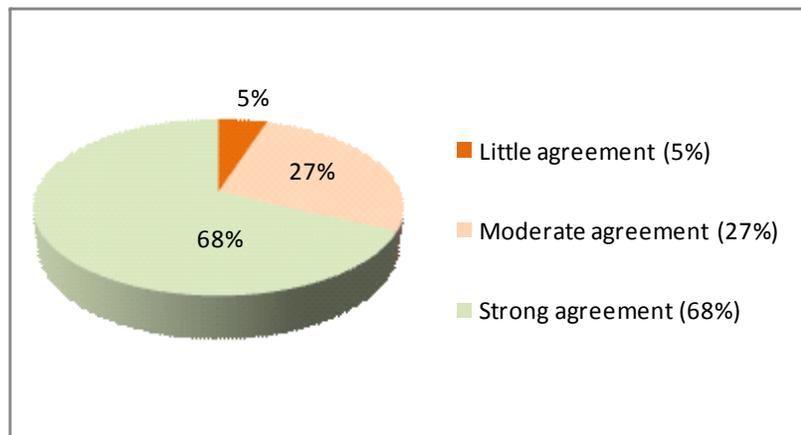
## Theme 9: Appropriate policies

For decades, Canadian family resource centres have subscribed to similar approaches to working with participants and operating their organizations. In 2002, FRP Canada published the *Guiding Principles of Family Support*, a document based on cross-country consultations with family resource programs. These principles, highlighted throughout this document, are the cornerstone of family support practice; they reflect the philosophical underpinnings of the field and describe the values that centres use to guide the development of their organizational policies (see Appendix A).

Figures 22-24 indicate that survey respondents believe that family resource centres 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 (85%) that their centre's policies reflect family support principles. Moreover, a large majority of respondents (95%) said that family resource centre policies are adequately designed with the needs of staff and volunteers in mind. Finally, 97% of survey takers agreed that centres have policies that provide clear direction to staff about their work.

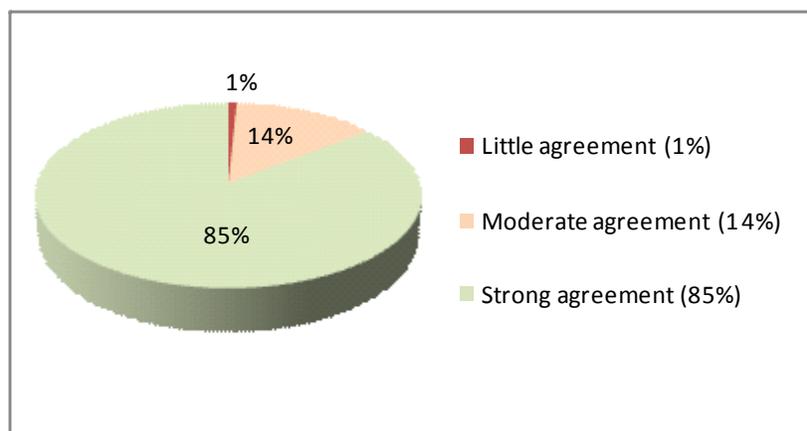
**Figure 22**

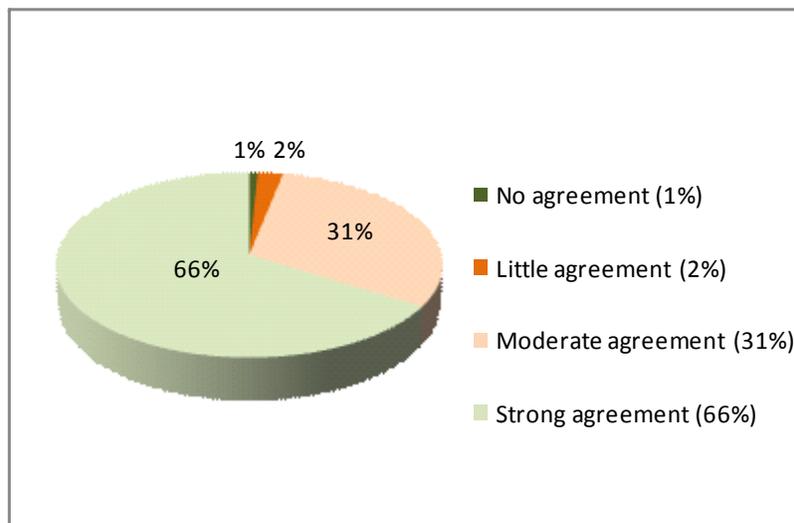
**Workplace policies and procedures take the needs of staff and volunteers into account**



**Figure 23**

**The policies of this centre reflect family support principles**



**Figure 24****The policies provide clear guidelines and direction to staff**

*“...numerous opportunities for staff and volunteers to improve their skills and effectiveness while providing an environment where people are given opportunity to express concerns and contribute ideas. There are continuous efforts to develop and maintain “teamwork” where all people are heard and respected and work together toward excellence. The human aspects of life are considered and grace is extended in a healthy manner...”*

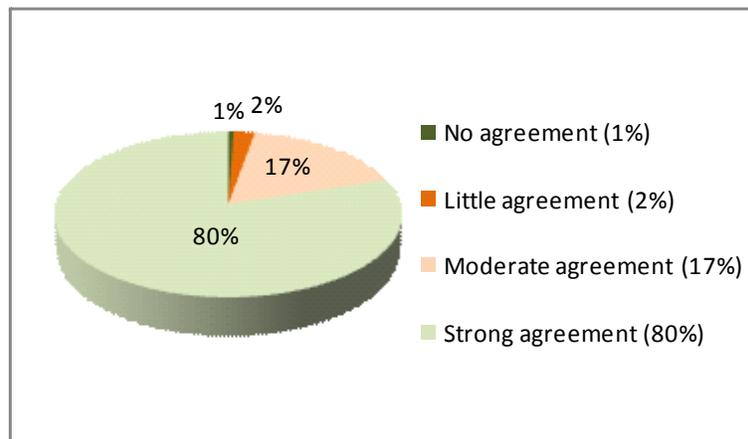
## Theme 10: Collaboration and partnerships

**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.** *The Guiding Principles of Family Support #2*

Family resource centres recognize that individual centres cannot supply all the services that healthy families need<sup>9</sup>. Thus, centres maintain a web of relationships and agreements with other community-based organizations who can offer families other types of support. The survey results show that Canadian family resource centres continue their long-standing practice of working with other organizations to offer support to families and caregivers. The nature of these collaborations is not explored through the survey; however, 80% of staff and volunteers reported that their partnerships and collaborations allow their centres to offer enhanced services. Also, 96% of staff and volunteers noted that stakeholders and partners support the local family resource centre.

**Figure 25**

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



*“Ever since I have been with this Centre, partnerships with community service providers, private operators and volunteers have been the norm. These collaborative partnerships have contributed towards enhanced programming and services - in spite of flatlined budgets - which continue to benefit the families we serve. As staff, we also learn a great deal through these partnerships. Our Centre - like many others across the Province - have acquired many years of experience in the area of service integration because, out of necessity, it has been our way of doing business.”*

<sup>9</sup> FRP Canada. Evidence Supporting the e-Evaluation System (Theme 10: Collaboration and Partnerships). Retrieved on July 7, 2008 from [www.frp.ca/evidence](http://www.frp.ca/evidence)

## CONCLUSION

The results from the first *e-Evaluation* surveys show that family resource centres are successfully supporting parents, caregivers and children in many Canadian communities. The responses from over 3000 participants confirm that centres put the *Guiding Principles of Family Support* into practice and are contributing to the well being of families and communities.

The responses from staff and volunteers suggest that centres maintain solid partnerships with other community-based groups and are diligent about the governance of their organizations. Staff and volunteers also expressed strong satisfaction with their workplaces independent of remuneration in light of the many opportunities they have to develop their skills and make meaningful contributions to their centres.

Family resource centres and their staff are affected by many variables such as new technologies, changing funding requirements, and economic factors (i.e. regional booms or slowdowns). These variables will play a role in the levels of staff satisfaction and the resources available for staff development and in providing adequate compensation. As with other types of organizations, family resource centres will be challenged to adapt to ever-changing environments while maintaining quality working conditions for centre staff. Future cohorts of this survey will continue to provide family support leaders with meaningful details about how staff experience their workplace as well as ideas for potential improvements.

This round of survey results highlights the deep impact that family resource centres have on the social fabric of Canada. Funders and policy makers can be rest assured that their investments in the family support field are paying off in positive outcomes for parents and children and with multiple benefits for caregivers, extended family and communities.

FRP Canada will continue to support family resource centres in using the *e-Evaluation* system to track the views of centre participants, staff and volunteers, as well as the progress of the family resource/ support movement across the nation.

## 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](http://www.frp.ca/_data/global/images/resources/guiding-e.pdf)

## APPENDIX B

### Survey themes

<b>Participant survey themes</b>		<b>Survey question (s)</b>
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

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