



2008 – 2009 Annual Report

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As I consider my thoughts for this 29th Annual Report of Children First, I realize that the Agency has seen a transition as a result of the appointment of Mr. Mark Donlon as Executive Director. Mark comes to us with 16 years of experience at Glengarda Child and Family Services, demonstrating a very passionate side for helping children and families and is an advocate for early intervention to ensure a child's success.

The Board would like to give special recognition to Cathy Martel (Program Manager) and Jane Patterson (Administration Manager), who stepped up to act as our Transition Team from June to December 2008, on top of their other job responsibilities. Words can't express our appreciation of their dedication to the organization. They provided support to all staff during this time and tackled some extra tasks such as the Mapping project, working diligently to work through PSL deliverables, attending Board Executive meetings, and preparing for Board meetings throughout the summer. As well, they attended agency meetings in the community, met with funders and continued doing all of the things to keep the agency business as usual. We thank you for your diligence and commitment.

Mark has been incredibly busy since arriving January 5th, 2009. He has met with all disciplines of staff as groups and teams and Board Committees in an effort to learn as much about Children First in a short period of time. At the Board level, Mark has given some helpful insight to assist in the operations of the Agency. At a service level, changes have begun, as evidenced by Intake Area (which has been greatly stretched for some time). We now have a new Intake Team in place, ready to tackle waitlists and we expect to see significant improvements.

The Organization will continue to change just as needs may change in our community. Our priorities will be based on how to most effectively and efficiently serve the children and families of our community, as we find that Autism and Down Syndrome rates continue to increase. In these economic times, children's mental health needs are increasingly being recognized and referrals to the agency are up more than 30%. With these imminent changes, the Board will be planning break away time to refocus and with that a strategic planning session is being planned for the fall.

It was with deep regret we have accepted Dr. Sheila Cameron's resignation from the Board due to illness. Sheila was a founding Board member, who for approximately 30 years, with great passion fought for inclusion and services for children with special needs and their families. Her strategic thinking, passion, personal and professional knowledge, as well as her respect for the skills of the staff, have been an anchor to the success and philosophy of this organization. On behalf of the Board I thank Sheila for a lifetime commitment to our community and our organization. To her family, thank you for sharing Sheila with us for so many years. We wish Sheila the best of health and a relaxing retirement.

My term as President will be coming to an end as of the Annual General Meeting. It has been an honour to serve as President for the past three years. Words cannot express my gratitude to the Board Executive for their time and support given to me in the last three years. To all the directors, your dedication to the organization is above and beyond and your support to me has been overwhelming. Many thanks to all of you, for all of your contributions to Children First.

Children First is also truly blessed to have its multidisciplinary staff who have shown great adaptability, and enthusiasm to moving into the future. You continue to touch the lives of the children and families you serve, supporting each other and always remaining passionate about the work you do. Your skills and kindness to families help them grow strong. Keep up the great work.

Laura Scali, Board President

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2008-2009

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Karen Hall

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Dr. Chuks Nwaesei

Marilyn Prior

Andrea Tremblay

*Resigned



EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

2008-09 HIGHLIGHTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS

This is my first opportunity to contribute to the Children First Annual Report. I assumed the position of Executive Director on January 5, 2009. At the outset, I would like to express my appreciation for the warm welcome I have received from the staff and Board of Directors. Without exception, all have been supportive, warm and patient as I have familiarized myself with the agency's services and organizational structure.

During my initial weeks on the job, I undertook to meet with the various multidisciplinary groups and staff teams. All were asked for their feedback to three questions: What are the strengths of the agency, what are the challenges and finally what suggestions did they have to strengthen the program. Throughout, I was impressed by the passion and commitment to service demonstrated by the staff. In general, the themes that emerged were that staff enjoy working at Children First and believe that the work we do is important and valuable for families and children. Also evident was a belief that we can do more and it was evident that staff are anxious to get on with the work of strengthening the agency. Virtually everyone expressed a desire to contribute towards ensuring that Children First is a dynamic and professional agency that is acknowledged as a community leader in providing services to families with preschool age children experiencing special needs.

In response to the consultations noted above, we have set an ambitious plan to review and strengthen the agency over the next year. We will upgrade our computerized hardware and software systems to provide for better case information data and external access. The Board and staff will develop a new strategic plan to guide agency priorities and initiatives over the next five years. We will create a specialized intake and brief service team that will focus on providing evidence based services to families as quickly as possible. We shall develop and implement a plan for staff development and training to ensure that families are receiving "state of the art" services. We shall conduct a review of our current service model to determine its strengths and weaknesses and consider alternatives. We shall work to strengthen our partnerships with our funders and other service providers. Finally, we shall address the concerns identified by our most important assets - the staff - around policy questions such as pay transparency, safety, conflict of interest, staff recognition and better equipment and resources.

I am confident that we can achieve the goals we have set for Children First. With the support of the Board and an engaged and energized staff, we will meet the challenges we encounter over the next twelve months successfully. I look forward to reporting our progress in the next annual report.

Mark Donlon, Executive Director



MISSION STATEMENT

Children First was founded on the knowledge that the early years of life are crucial to the healthy development of children and families. We are dedicated to promoting and providing family-centred services to children up to six who are demonstrating special needs.



"I have learned a great deal that I have not learned before, either by reading books, or articles, or talking to other counsellors. I have adopted a lot of the strategies that have been suggested and they work very well with myself and my children. I strongly believe this group (Separation & Divorce) is a very valuable tool ..."

CHILDREN FIRST GROUP SERVICES

In order to offer a more comprehensive range of service options to children and families referred to our program, Children First has continued to expand the number and type of parent and/or child groups that we offer either independently or in collaboration with community service partners. In addition, we continue to support the promotion of staff competence in early learning and child care settings.

In total, approximately 14 groups were offered for families and child care centres, involving about 127 participants. In addition, we participated in 16 groups with community partners.

The following are some of the groups that our multidisciplinary staff provided during this year:

Community Parent Education Program (COPE) is a large group parenting course for parents of children aged 3 to 6 years, designed to:

- Improve child management skills
- Improve family functioning
- Build and strengthen personal networks

Parents can learn skills to increase positive behaviour, avoid conflicts, encourage cooperation and respond to aggression from their child while connecting with other parents to talk about common problems. Parents have often been invited to attend COPE while waiting for an ongoing service partner from Children First. Feedback from participants has been extremely positive, with parents often commenting that they found the group very helpful, learned how to be a better parent and would recommend the group to others.

Children's Social Skills Activity Group assists children aged 3 to 5 years in developing more appropriate social skills and prosocial behaviour as well as enhancing their social competence, and is designed to compliment the curriculum learned by caregivers in the COPE parenting course. The children as well as the parents evaluate their experience and involvement with the group, with the majority reporting positive feedback.

COPE was offered in the Spring of 2008 in collaboration with St. Mary's Family Learning Centre who provided space, child care and support. It was offered again in the Fall of 2008 at Children First in conjunction with the Children's Social Skills group. There were a total of 27 participants involved.

Sibling Support Group is a unique partnership with Children First and Family Respite Services providing staffing support and space for the group generously provided at no cost by Maryvale Child and Adolescent Services. It is an opportunity for siblings of children who have special needs to connect with other siblings via monthly fun and lively activity based sessions including games, crafts and snack. An annual celebration dinner includes parents and participants. Feedback from children and youth attending has been very positive with statements such as "I appreciate coming to the group knowing I'm not the only one with a brother who is different."

Sibling Support was offered monthly from October 2008 to May 2009 involving 15 participants from 13 families.

Making Sense of Separation and Divorce as it Relates to Parenting Your Young Child/ren is a group for parents referred to Children First who have separated from their partner in the previous two years and who want to better understand their feelings and reactions as well as their child's in relation to this change. The program is designed to help parents support their children in adjusting to the changes in the family's life. Information and strategies are provided to parents to assist them to manage their own stresses as well as to help their child to cope.

Making Sense of Separation and Divorce was offered in the Spring of 2008 and again in the Fall of 2008. Eleven parents participated.

Triple P (Positive Parenting Program) offers 5 levels of intervention from basic to more intensive, all aimed at helping parents feel more confident and competent in parenting their children. Staff trained in Triple P engage families individually in this approach and also provide seminar and group training .

Triple P is expanding and growing in popularity, resulting in schools and other community groups asking to have this group offered at their site, in both city and county locations. As six more staff were trained this year in this evidenced based approach, we were able to provide five 3 session seminar series and 1 group as part of a community initiative, (approximately 135 parents attended) as well as 1 seminar series internally for families involved with Children First.

More Than Words is a Hanen Parent Training Program for parents of children 18 months to 5 years with Autism Spectrum Disorder or related social communication difficulties. There are 8 parent only sessions and 3 video feedback sessions. This is a popular group always in high demand.

More Than Words was offered in the Spring of 2008 to 12 families.

It Takes Two to Talk is a Hanen Program for parents of children with language delays, aged 2 to 5 years, who are receiving other services for developmental concerns. There are 8 parent sessions and 3 video feedback sessions.

It Takes Two to Talk was offered in the Spring of 2009 to 7 families.

Learning Language and Loving It is offered to staff in child care centres and is a very effective Hanen training program that provides a step by step approach to promoting children's social, language and literacy development during everyday activities in early childhood settings .

Learning Language and Loving It was offered in the Spring and Fall of 2008 at several child care centres and provided training to 32 child care staff.



Cathy Martel,
Program Manager

“The program (It Takes Two to Talk) reinforced that with the proper guidance and support both from us and trained professionals like those who taught the class, there is plenty of hope for our son's continued improvement and quality of life.”

~ COPE ~

“I think going to parenting groups will help my children as they get older.”



HEARTFELT FAREWELL

Dr. Sheila Cameron

Dr. Sheila Cameron became a pioneer for infant development services in the 1970's when she was raising her son Steven and seeking support for her own child and family. She was instrumental in establishing an Infant Stimulation program that was housed at what was then known as the Windsor Association for the Mentally Retarded. Dr. Cameron believed, as did others, that parents of young children would be more likely to accept early intervention and support if the services were offered by a community agency that was not associated with the label "retarded". In 1981, The Programme for Encouraging Development began at the Windsor Essex County Health Unit. Sheila recruited Dr. Lois Dobson who became the director. Lois remembers that at that time she wasn't entirely sure that she wanted to work with children but Sheila persisted because she felt strongly that Lois was the best person to lead the program. Sheila sat on the PED program's Advisory Committee throughout the years and a need was identified for the program to become a discrete agency. When the program incorporated and became the Infant and Family Program in 1988 Sheila was a member of the founding Board of Directors. She served as Vice President in 2001 and 2002, President from 2003 to 2006 and Past President for the remainder of her term on the Board. She chaired many Board committees, and recruited many Board members over the years.

Throughout the 20 years that Sheila sat on the Board of Directors, through the challenges and changes the program weathered, she remained a strong advocate for children and families, a champion for a family centred approach to service delivery and a steadfast supporter of the value of the services Children First provides. While her presence on the Board will be truly missed, Sheila's vision and her commitment and dedication to Children First will not be forgotten.

Marilyn Prior

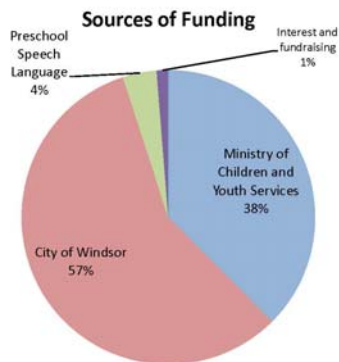
Since 2005, Marilyn has brought her energy and experience as the mother of two boys to the Board table and kept the needs and perspective of parents in the forefront of many discussions. She believed in the value of allowing parents to connect and share their stories. With this in mind she revitalized the Parent Committee of the Board and was instrumental in the recent creation of the Promotion of Parent Participation committee. Through these initiatives, the agency was able to offer several Create-A-File workshops in partnership with Ensemble, providing parents with the opportunity to work together while building a record keeping binder to organize information about their children. Marilyn has made a lasting contribution to parent involvement with Children First and we wish her well.

Dr. Chucks Nwaesei

As a renowned Neonatologist in this community, Dr. Nwaesei values the importance of early intervention and the work that Children First and the Neuro-developmental Follow-up Clinic do collaboratively with premature and high risk infants and children. He has been a valued member of the Board since 2006 and has always been instrumental in influencing services that support families and children. Dr. Nwaesei continues to monitor many of the children in our program and always welcomes our staff to his clinic at the hospital. We thank Dr. Nwaesei for his dedication and passion in his work, both in the community and as a member of the Board.

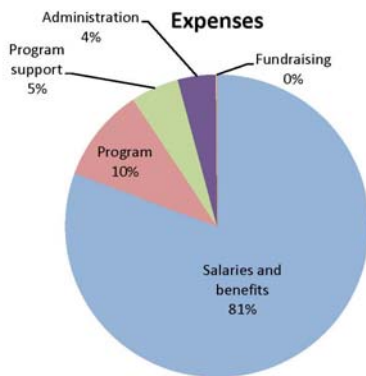


REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES 2008-09



Revenue:

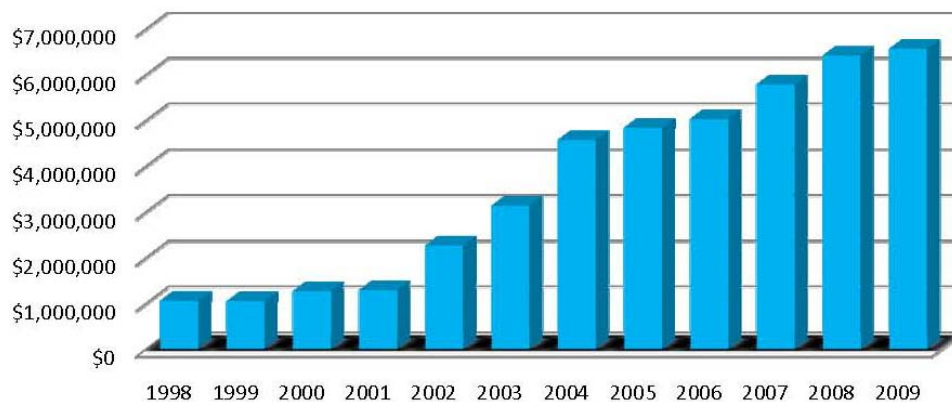
<i>Ministry of Children and Youth Services</i>	\$ 2,495,075.00
<i>City of Windsor</i>	\$ 3,815,638.00
<i>Preschool Speech Language</i>	\$ 247,378.00
<i>Interest and fundraising</i>	\$ 84,622.00
	\$ 6,642,713.00



Expenses:

<i>Salaries and benefits</i>	\$ 5,340,427.00
<i>Program</i>	\$ 667,877.00
<i>Program support</i>	\$ 339,594.00
<i>Administration</i>	\$ 269,043.00
<i>Fundraising</i>	\$ 6,866.00
	\$ 6,623,807.00

Children First - Growth in Operating Revenue



WHAT OUR FAMILIES HAVE TO SAY. . . .



“Children First changed our lives and we are eternally grateful for all the help we received from the various people.”

~

“Very impressed with [both workers]. They always have fun games with them and teach me lots of ways to communicate with my son.”

“The home visits are a blessing! My son does better in his familiar setting of his home and I believe he will do better in the long term by having this available.”

“Our worker has done a terrific job in helping us with [our son]. If it was not for her early intervention we would probably have had to wait longer for services available to us.”

“[Our worker] has been a wonderful gift to our team. Not [only] has she been here to work with my son, [to] help with strategies, but she has been a great “ear” for myself “provide the push” in the right direction. She will be missed.”

“Our worker was always very kind and sensitive to our individual family needs and seemed very interested in helping all family members in regards to the situation. Very informative, provided a lot of resources and suggestions. It was wonderful.”

“While waiting for services, I was kept up to date with the progression of our request. This was good –reassuring. I also like the involvement of Children First in our assessment at John McGivney.”

“[Our worker] was always positive and very patient during lessons. He was very optimistic about the progress made but also always pushing to make higher goals.”

“The work Children First has done for my family was amazing. Through you, my child is getting the best help possible. He is changing for the better.”

“I liked having someone come to our house which made our daughter more comfortable and open to the services/exercises. I enjoyed having the same people each time. Resources were always offered, toys/books were lent out.”

	Always
Services offered were clear	89%
Resources provided helpful	71%
Phone calls responded to	81%
Satisfied with service	75%
Would recommend	86%

SERVICE PERFORMANCE

	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Number of Referrals	554	534	564	682	687
Number served annually	1124	1041	1137	1225	1251
Waiting list at the end of Report Period	106	101	97	70	109
Discharges	502	536	456	556	594
Front Line Staff F.T.E. (at year end)	61	62.1	70	80.8	87
Administrative Staff F.T.E. (at year end)	9.6	9.4	8.9	9.8	9.6

Our current staff complement is 93, serving 1251 children between April 1, 2008 & March 31, 2009.

FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES



Coral Medical Health Spa held an Open House fundraiser entitled "Because it's Good for Me", on Wednesday, November 26, 2008. A portion of the proceeds from a silent auction held at the event were donated to Children First. Left: Mark Donlon, Andrea Tremblay, Jane Patterson and Sharri Hamelin presented Ken Sherman of the Coral Medical Health Spa with a certificate of appreciation for their donation of over \$800.00.

Once again Children first was honoured to receive the proceeds from the RBC Dominion Securities Charity Golf Classic. The Golf Classic was held on June 23, 2008 at Pointe West Golf Club and was a huge success, raising more than \$20,000. Staff and Board presented a plaque to RBC Dominion Securities in appreciation of their support.

A heartfelt thanks goes out to the members of the Windsor Rotary Club 1918 for their generosity in providing 65 Easter baskets for the children we serve. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the work of Janet Kelly and Maureen Lucas for their efforts in making this wonderful initiative a reality again this year. In this economy, the recipients of the Baskets would not have been able to provide their children with the generous gifts donated by the Rotarians. The baskets were greatly appreciated.



PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

We believe that:

- Family relationships are the foundation for growth and learning.
- Families are the primary resource and decision-makers for their children.
- Services are best provided through flexible partnerships with families and the community.
- Every child has the right to be supported to reach his/her potential.

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