

2009 - 2010 Annual Report



Helping children reach their full potential for 30 years

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2009-2010

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## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

The 2009-2010 fiscal year marks the 30<sup>th</sup> year of operations for Children First in Essex County. Over that time period there have been many changes for the Agency and for the families that we serve. As well, much has changed within the community that we serve. More recently there has been great uncertainty and many families within Windsor and Essex County have experienced economic hardships, not to mention that Governments have struggled to maintain funding for services to families who have children with special needs.

Under these difficult circumstances, the challenge for any agency is to adapt to the changing needs in order to provide services that are relevant, helpful and valued. I am proud to say that, under the watchful eyes of Mark Donlon and our management team, our staff have been able to positively embrace the new approaches that Children First has implemented over the past year. Wait lists, as a result of the agency's new intake team, provides a near immediate response. We have been able to strengthen our partnerships with other service providers and we have been participants in the creation of new community initiatives such as the Preterm Care Pathways, the Intergenerational Trauma Treatment System, the Triple P Positive Parenting Program and the Eighteen Month Well Baby Checkup. All of this has been done with no increases in funding support to the Agency.

On behalf of the Board I wish to recognize and thank the management and staff of Children First for their hard work, dedication and professionalism in facing and dealing with the challenges we face. They do difficult work, but consistently maintain their optimism and passion for service, all for the best interests of children.

During the past year, Children First conducted a comprehensive consultation with families, service partners and funding bodies. The outcome of that process has been the recent completion of a revised Strategic Plan which the Board will use to guide the ongoing transformation of our services. The plan includes four strategic objectives that emphasize streamlined, flexible services to be delivered by our highly trained and skilled staff, in partnership with families and other community service providers. The Board of Directors are pleased with the progress that has been achieved and are excited regarding the prospects for the agency's future.

It has been my honour to serve as President, noting that I have been blessed to have a dynamic, committed and skilled Board of Directors upon whom I am able to rely. I believe that an exciting time of continuing change lies ahead for Children First. I look forward to the journey and most importantly, the further strengthening of our services to families who have children with special needs.

**Paul Layfield, President**

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### ***2009-10 HIGHLIGHTS & ACCOMPLISHMENTS***

A year ago, I outlined in the annual report an ambitious agenda for Children First. We established a number of specific goals that we wished to achieve and I am pleased to report significant progress. We completed a significant upgrade to our information technology system, including providing our staff with remote access to their computers. We created a dedicated intake team that has provided much quicker responses to requests for service. With significant staff input, an agency professional development plan was established to guide staff training with particular emphasis on best practices and evidence based approaches to service. We worked very hard to strengthen our partnerships with other service providers with notable success. We also resolved some specific policy issues affecting our staff including conflict of interest requirements and mileage allotments. Most importantly, after significant community consultation, the Board of Directors certified a new strategic plan that will guide the ongoing transformation of agency services over the next several years.

Of course, much remains to be done. Over the next year, we will upgrade our case information management system to enable a more sophisticated approach to data analysis. Guided by the new strategic plan, we will review our organizational structure to address our objective of streamlining services and maximizing our staff and program resources. We are preparing for our next accreditation review which will occur early in 2011. We will seek to increase Children's First's community profile through a concerted marketing plan that will include the sponsorship of community training and fund raising events. We will also continue our commitment to nurturing the professional development of our most precious resource- our staff, with particular emphasis on implementing evidence based service approaches.

As we work towards the achievement of our goals, Children First will continue to encounter significant challenges. The current economic climate, with another year of no base budget adjustments, is an enormous obstacle that must be managed. Few would dispute that the level of needs are disproportionate to the level of resources that can be brought to bear. However, Children First has significant strengths to see it through these difficult times. These include an active, engaged and passionate Board of Directors, a dedicated, skilful and motivated staff and the positive momentum that was generated in the past year. With these strengths, I am confident that the year ahead will bring further success and community confirmation that Children First is a critical support to families with children with special needs.

**Mark Donlon, Executive Director**

## SERVICE HIGHLIGHTS 2009-10

*During the past year a number of exciting new initiatives took place at Children First:*

As a result of a review of changing needs, **an Intake and Brief Service Team** was established in July 2009 and currently consists of four Resource Consultants, two Social Workers and a Speech and Language Pathologist. Other disciplines such as Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy and Psychology provide input and assessment as required. Feedback from families served and community partners has been positive especially in regard to new opportunities for timely and short term service provision.

**Preterm Care Pathways** community and staff training occurred at Children First with Dr. Virginia Frisk, Hospital for Sick Children and other infant development experts in the Fall of 2009. The implementation of this evidence based approach to screening and assessment of children born prematurely began at Children First in May 2010. Collaboration with community providers already offering services and supports to this population is essential to the success of this new endeavour.

**Intergenerational Trauma Treatment Model** implementation occurred as a collaborative effort between local Children's Mental Health programs and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services who has supported the staff training required by all the agencies involved. This evidence based approach to trauma treatment, being offered by social workers at Children First, involves both the caregiver and the child.

**The Infant Sibling Screening** initiative, utilizing the Meade Movement Checklist, began in the Fall of 2009. Physiotherapists screen the infant siblings of children currently receiving services from Children First. The goal is to identify as early as possible indicators for later movement delays and provide strategies to parents to support their baby's optimal motor development. This early screening also ensures that appropriate early intervention will be provided for those infants identified with motor delays.

**How Does Your Engine Run: The Alert Program for Self Regulation** was offered in the Spring of 2010 for young children 4 to 6 years old and their parents. The program was overseen by occupational therapists. Parents and children are provided appropriate self regulation strategies to help the child find ways to ensure that their "engine speed" is just right, possibly preventing future academic or social- emotional difficulties.

**A Parent Handbook** has been developed that will soon be translated into various languages for distribution. This will be an excellent resource offered to all families seeking service from Children First and will greatly assist in the orientation process to agency services.

**The first Children First Newsletter** was developed by staff in the Fall of 2009 and a Spring edition in March 2010 contained information about agency updates as well as many helpful tips for families of young children including available community resources/ events. Future editions will be available on the Children First website at [www.children-first.ca](http://www.children-first.ca).

**COPEing with Toddler Behaviour Facilitator Training** occurred in March 2010 with staff attending from 8 different organizations across Windsor, Chatham, London, St. Thomas and Brampton. This training will assist staff to provide an evidence based group service for parents of 12 to 36 month olds and is designed to prevent disruptive behaviour disorders. Children First hopes to launch a group in conjunction with other community partners this Fall.

***In addition many excellent services continued to be offered this year:***

**Community Training and Information and Public Relations** continued to be a focus with staff participating in at least 30 community events or activities. These range from:

- a) providing specific information on various topics to university/college students,
- b) setting up and staffing a Children First information display, (examples of information displays occurred at : The Community Services Expo, 13th Annual Family Fun Festival, Health Access Day for Newcomers and School Health Fairs or Open Houses. )
- c) training by our professional staff for students, parents and organizations on various topics, (e.g. training at St. Clair College for Early Childhood Educators (ECE's), and sessions at the Windsor Essex Children's Aid Society for foster parents and for staff)

Many diverse groups for parents and children as well as for child care staff were offered again this year with a total of 12 groups and at least 126 participants. Regularly offered in the community along with other community service providers are **Triple P** parent education seminar sessions as well Triple P group sessions. The Community Parent Education Program (**COPE**) has been offered jointly at St Mary's Family Learning Centre as well as at Children First. **Hanen** speech and language parent training groups are regularly offered to parents as part of the Preschool Speech and Language initiative, along with staff from our speech system partners, Talk 2 Me and the John McGivney Centre.

***Continued emphasis on community collaboration:***

The value of partnership permeates not only our work with families, but also our collaboration with many service providers and community organizations. Our staff work actively with various community providers such as physicians, teachers, early childhood educators, special education personnel and others such as Children's Aid Society workers to provide the best possible individualized service to children and families. This year, for example, we transitioned approximately 130 children to school. Attendance and collaboration on a large number of community committees by front line and management staff involves planning and coordination of services to children birth to six and their families as well as collaboration with many others such as our funders, advisory committees at St Clair College, and Autism Service providers.

**Cathy Martel, Program Manager**

## **Mission**

Children First in Essex County partners with families and the community to provide individualized support for children (birth to 6 years) with developmental and/or mental health challenges, helping them reach their full potential through early identification, education, and clinical intervention.

## **Vision**

Children First is a leader in providing services where:

- All children and families are supported to help them reach their full potential;
- Children are supported to feel a sense of inclusion and belonging in the community;
- Relationships are nurtured with families, partner organizations and the community to assist children who have developmental and/or mental health challenges;
- Timely and tailored supports are provided by professional staff who use innovative evidence based practices.

## **Values**

We believe in:

- Supporting the child's best interest, recognizing that family relationships are the foundation for growth and learning.
- Providing timely, flexible services that support children to reach their potential.
- Promoting continuous learning, innovation and evidence based services among our valued staff.
- Honouring our partners and committing to work together to address the unique and evolving needs of children, families and the community.

On behalf of the Children First's Board of Directors, we would like to thank everyone- the families we serve, staff, community partners and funders- for your thoughtful comments and input regarding the review of our strategic plan. The two major outcomes of this process are the revised Vision and Mission Statements and the confirmation of our new Strategic Objectives.

Over the next several years, we intend to deliver the best and most helpful services possible to address the changing needs of families with children who have special needs. We look forward to working with you and we thank you for your support.

*Mark Donlon, Executive Director*



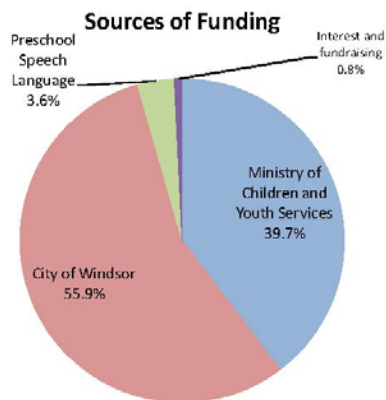
## SERVICE PERFORMANCE

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Number of Referrals	534	564	682	687	710
Number served annually	1041	1137	1225	1251	1290
Waiting list at the end of Report Period	101	97	70	109	*
Discharges	536	456	556	594	564
Front Line Staff F.T.E. (at year end)	62.1	70	80.8	87	86.1
Administrative Staff F.T.E. (at year end)	9.4	8.9	9.8	9.6	8.6

\*Children First has implemented a new Intake & Brief Service Team which has eliminated the wait time for initial services.

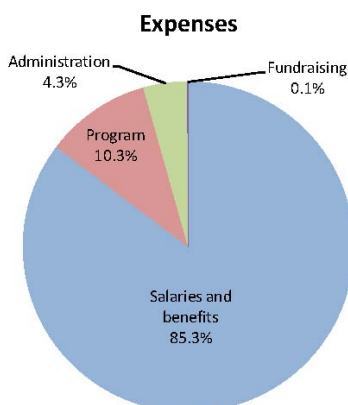
*Our current staff complement is 91, serving 1290 children between April 1, 2009 & March 31, 2010.*

## REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES 2009-10



**Revenue:**

Ministry of Children and Youth Services	\$ 2,495,075.00
City of Windsor	\$ 3,515,590.00
Preschool Speech Language	\$ 228,919.00
Interest and fundraising	\$ 49,124.00
	<b>\$ 6,288,708.00</b>



**Expenses:**

Salaries and benefits	\$ 5,399,924.00
Program	\$ 652,358.0000
Administration	\$ 270,524.00
Fundraising	\$ 5,804.00
	<b>\$ 6,328,610.00</b>

**Net Revenue Over (Under) Expenditures**

**\$ (39,902.00)**

## WHAT OUR FAMILIES HAVE TO SAY. . . .

*“Our resource consultant and speech pathologist were both terrific. Both were honest and upfront, plus bonded well and created a positive impact with our son. Their suggestions and advice assisted us in a positive manner.”*

*“The services I have received from Children First have allowed me different ways to communicate with my child. [Through] home visits, the goals that I work on with my child has [helped] him from only saying two words to putting five to six words together!”*

*“Very good service – friendly staff. Best feature was home visits. Not having to take my son (with some issues to work on) to a strange place which made him uncomfortable.”*

*“The program helped provide methods and information to help our daughter and us better understand where she needs help.”*

*“Everyone was helpful and courteous. I always felt that the interests of my child were top priority.”*

*“I have recommended your services to others and have made anyone involved in my son’s care (aware) that we use your service.”*

*“Our son received excellent support from all staff we came in contact with. Children First staff were very caring and were always seeking the best solution for our family. We are very happy with the progress he made while under your care.”*

*“Children First is very accommodating to me and I can’t think of anything to suit my needs better at this time.”*

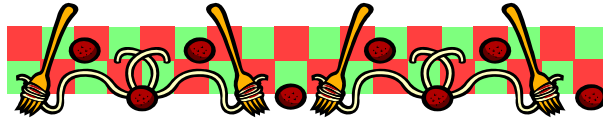
*“Your services were a great help to our family! Although I was aware of how many children your service takes on, our workers (we had three) all made us feel like number one and we greatly appreciate it!”*

*“If it wasn’t for our workers, I don’t know where we would have turned.”*

	Always
Services offered were clear	94%
Resources provided helpful	72%
Phone calls responded to	85%
Satisfied with service	80%
Would recommend	88%



## FUNDRAISING INITIATIVES



### Caboto Charity Pasta Nites

Children First would like to thank everyone who participated in the Caboto Club Charity Pasta Nite to benefit our agency, on October 7, 2009. The event was a huge success with an unprecedented number of attendees. The evening was a family centred event that provided many children's activities such as face painting, crafts and Author Arnot McCallum reading stories to the many children who attended. Two bicycles and passes to Monkey Town were given away as door prizes. Staff and family volunteers worked diligently to ensure a successful event.

Children First would like to express our gratitude to The Caboto Club for allowing us to take part in the Club's popular 'Caboto Charity Pasta Nites'. The Club invites local charities to take part in these evenings that take place the first Wednesday of each month. Thank you for providing this fundraising opportunity for our community's charities.

A very sincere thank you goes to Tom Weber of RBC Dominion Securities and the RBC Foundation who presented the agency with a donation of \$1000.00 during the event. Their donation will help make a positive difference in the lives of the children and families we serve. We thank RBC for their continued generosity and support.

## PAYLESS GIVES

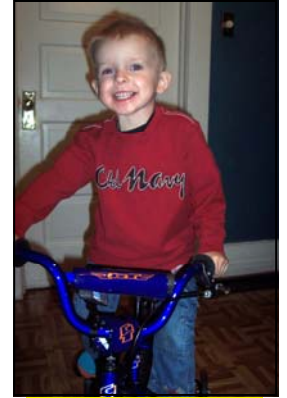
Children First was selected to participate in the 2009 Payless Gives Shoes 4 Kids Campaign. Payless Gives is a grass roots campaign that delivers 1.2 million dollars in free shoes to children of families in need. Fifty children who receive services from Children First received shoe gift coupons, just in time for the holidays! In these difficult economic times, many of these families may have not been able to provide their children with new shoes or boots this winter. All of the gift cards were greatly appreciated.



During the months of January and February, Monkeytown hosted a series of evenings dedicated to the children and families served by Children First. This was an 'invitation only' event and admission was 'by donation' with all proceeds going to purchase 'Melissa and Doug' educational toys for our Resource Library. The Resource Library is available to all of our staff to access materials to use with the children they work with.

Most importantly, these 'Children First Family Nights' provided the opportunity for families to engage with one another and have a fun experience with their children. Staff volunteers were on hand working very hard...playing with the children!

Children First would like to express our sincere gratitude to Cynthia Nantais and Lawrence Jeun, owners of Monkeytown, for sharing their indoor playspace with us, for donating their time during the Family Nights and for helping us to secure more than \$600.00 in toys for our Resource Library.



**Pictured Above:**  
A proud winner of one of the bicycles given away at the Pasta Nite!



**Above:** Owner, Cynthia Nantais accepts a Certificate of Appreciation from Children First!



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[www.children-first.ca](http://www.children-first.ca)

