

# OTTAWA-CARLETON HEADSTART ASSOCIATION FOR PRESCHOOLS

## FINDINGS FROM KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS WITH DIRECTORS OF HEADSTART PROGRAMS

### Background Information

Incorporated in 1990, the Ottawa-Carleton Headstart Association for Preschools (OCHAP) is an organization representing staff, parents and Board members of Headstart Preschools, licensed under the Ministry of Community and Social Services, Day Nurseries Act of Ontario. OCHAP was established in response to the urgent need for advocacy and networking among Headstart programs dealing with issues of poverty, family stress, public housing, multiculturalism and other factors affecting child development. Among OCHAP's stated purpose is: (1) to support and coordinate Headstart Preschool programs, services and community agencies, (2) advocate and inform the community of Headstart programs, and (3) to advocate on behalf of families participating in member schools.

With funding from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, OCHAP hired a Community Developer to help achieve these goals. It is the Community Developer's responsibility to:

- < help identify gaps and overlaps in services for children and parents using community Headstart childcare programs;
- < assist individual Headstart childcare programs in developing a close relationship with social, health and educational agencies within their community;
- < seek out new partnerships in the community that could assist with the support and profile of Headstart childcare programs.

In March 2001, the Community Developer spoke with the Director or Acting Director of the 11 Headstart programs in the City of Ottawa. The purpose of these meetings was:

- < to obtain information on each Headstart program – general data on the sponsoring organization and specific data on the preschool program.
- < to gather qualitative information from key individuals on their perspective related to issues facing families with children in their respective communities and throughout the new City of Ottawa.

### Profiles of Headstart Programs in the City of Ottawa.

A separate document has been produced to present general information on each Headstart Program, entitled “\_\_\_\_\_.” The intent of this document is to fulfill one of OCHAP's goals: \_\_\_\_\_.” In July 2001, each Headstart Program will have received an original printout of this document and an electronic copy in WordPerfect and Adobe Acrobat formats. The profiles include contact information, hours of operation, description of the facility, staffing, activities for children and parents, service capacity, and waiting list numbers for the following Headstart Programs:

CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY HEADSTART  
NURSERY SCHOOL  
1602 Telesat Court  
Gloucester, ON K1B 1B3  
(613) 747-7800  
(613) 747-4456 fax  
Director: Janie O'Leary

CORNERSTONE CHILDREN'S CENTRE  
2330 Don Reid Drive, Suite 102  
Ottawa, ON K1H 1E1  
(613) 731-2440  
(613) 521-8356 fax  
Director: Brenda Fick-Kahler  
E-mail: ccchtsn1@aol.com

ESTHER BY DAY CARE  
1550 Caldwell Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1Z 8M7  
(613) 729-3242  
(613) 729-6765 fax  
Director: Beth Dewan  
E-mail: beth.dewan@city.ottawa.on.ca

FOSTER FARM CHILD CARE CENTRE  
1065 Ramsey Crescent  
Ottawa, ON K2B 7Z9  
(613) 829-8939  
(613) 829-1533 fax  
Director: Wendy Miron  
E-mail: wendy.miron@city.ottawa.on.ca

HAWTHORNE MEADOWS NURSERY  
SCHOOL  
2244 Russell Road  
Ottawa, ON K1G 1B3  
(613) 731-1507 phone and fax  
Director: Nancy Rowley  
E-mail: hmns@ncf.ca

HEATHERINGTON NURSERY SCHOOL  
2330 Don Reid Driver, Suite 102  
Ottawa, ON K1H 1E1  
(613) 731-2440  
(613) 521-8356 fax  
Director: Brenda Fick-Kahler  
E-mail: ccchtsn1@aol.com

NANNY GOAT HILL NURSERY SCHOOL  
755 Somerset Street, West  
Ottawa, ON K1R 6R1  
(613) 235-7561  
(613) 7595 fax  
Director: Bev Bakka  
E-mail: bbakka@swchc.on.ca

PINECREST QUEENSWAY NURSERY  
SCHOOL  
2860 Ahearn Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K2B 6Z9  
(613) 829-1125  
Director: Michele Hynes  
E-mail: general@pinecrest-queensway.com

QUEENSWAY PRESCHOOL  
429 Parkdale Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1V 1H3  
(613) 728-8055  
(613) 728-9686 fax  
Director: Fiona Carr  
E-mail: fiona\_carr@excite.com

THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION  
WMCA-YWCA HEADSTART NURSERY  
SCHOOL  
180 Argyle Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K2P 1B7  
(613) 788-5004  
(613) 788-5095 fax  
Director: Mona Rowland

WEST END NURSERY SCHOOL  
1470 Raven Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1Z 7Y7  
(613) 728-6505 phone  
(613) 728-2921 fax  
Director: June Adamson

## Findings from Key Informant Interviews

This report, “  
summarises qualitative information obtained through the one-on-one interviews with Directors of each of the Headstart Programs. The qualitative questions included:

1. In your community, what are the biggest issues facing families with children?
2. What are the main needs which are not being met with respect to early childhood development programs in your community?
3. What are the main barriers to families accessing early childhood education programs?
4. Are there any specific groups in your community which are not being served by available early childhood development programs?
5. What is needed to provide an integrated range of early childhood development programs in Ottawa-Carleton?

These questions correspond to OCHAP’s goals: (1) to support and coordinate Headstart Preschool programs, services and community agencies, and (2) to advocate on behalf of families participating in member schools. The questions relate to the work of the Community Developer: to help identify gaps and overlaps in services for children and parents using community Headstart childcare programs; to assist individual Headstart childcare programs in developing a close relationship with social, health and educational agencies within their community; to seek out new partnerships in the community that could assist with the support and profile of Headstart childcare programs; and to articulate issues facing families with children in communities and throughout the new City of Ottawa.

### **Question #1: In your community, what are the biggest issues facing families with children?**

The Directors of the Headstart programs discussed a range of issues facing families with children – with the issue of poverty as a consistent theme. Poverty was related to poor self-esteem, housing problems, and lack of access to resources such as full-daycare programs and recreational programs. Families in high density housing areas are prone to experiencing many stressors, including violence, isolation and lack of support. Some families are struggling to meet basic needs (e.g. food) and are dealing with addiction problems, mental health issues, and other disabilities. New Canadians, immigrants and visible minorities face issues of prejudice and racism, cultural and language barriers.

The Directors talked about the need to focus on life and behavioural management skills for parents, but recognized the existence of a communication problem and lack of awareness of different types of programs among parents, as well as a low level of comfort in accessing services. Providing financial incentives to help parents move away from Social Assistance was mentioned as an issue by one Director.

**Question #2: What are the main needs which are not being met with respect to early childhood development programs in your community?**

The Director emphasized the need to expand subsidized spaces for Headstart programs. Long waiting lists and limited capacity (space, staff and hours) affect access to services for many economically-disadvantaged families – forcing families to put children in unsupervised and unsafe environments. More resources (money, food for children, etc.), services (for parents, ESL families, extended hours) and support (enhanced child to staff ratios) are particularly needed for special needs children or children with behavioural issues in Headstart programs.

The Directors also spoke about the lack of child care programs, which cater to the diverse needs of families. The Directors articulated the need in the City of Ottawa for:

- < affordable, full-day childcare programs (especially in under-serviced areas like Vanier);
- < non-traditional child care (in evenings, weekends or extended hours);
- < child care for infants and toddlers; and
- < other programs to prepare children for school (for parents who don't work or don't go to school).

The Director expressed the need for more resources or expanded services to complement early childhood development programs in communities, such as:

- < Locally-based speech language programs (other than CHEO);
- < Safe, outdoor play spaces and recreational areas;
- < Sufficient medical care and services (intake at some community health centres is closed);
- < Community education on existing programs for families.

**Question #3: What are the main barriers to families accessing early childhood education programs?**

The intake system for applying for daycare subsidy and Headstart programs is perceived as bureaucratic, intimidating, and disrespectful to parents. Oftentimes, information is wrongly given to clients. This process results in clients being turned away unnecessarily and /or discouraged from continuing with the process. Many families do not qualify for the subsidies, however, their children could greatly benefit from such enriched early childhood education programs. The subsidy restrictions disadvantage many economically, border-line families.

Each family may face their own unique barriers, e.g. low functioning, low motivation. Some families may require affordable and flexible daycare to accommodate work schedules. For many ESL families, language becomes a barrier. Transportation is another barrier to families trying to access early childhood education programs. Seven of the eleven Headstart programs provide limited transportation. Lack of transportation causes parents a inconvenience.

Parents, especially newcomers, have a lack of knowledge of available programs and services (where to go, shop, get doctors, catch bus, register children, etc.) in their community. The value of early childhood education program is sometimes underappreciated by parents.

**Question #4: Are there any specific groups in your community which are not being served by available early childhood development programs?**

The Directors identified early childhood education programs for “special needs children.” as the most under-served group in the City. The definition of “special needs” being broad – autistic children, children with behaviour disorders, developmentally delayed, physically disabled, etc. The Headstart programs value the support of Practical Assistants provided by Children’s Integrated Support Services, but CISS is underfunded and their support is inadequate to meet the growing demand for services for special needs children.

Other specific groups in the City which are not being served include: socially-isolated families, families in shelters and special living arrangements, new Canadians (e.g. Somalian community) and other ESL families, and families with infants and toddlers.

**Question #5: What is needed to provide an integrated range of early childhood development programs in Ottawa-Carleton?**

Based on their collective and extensive experience in the field of early childhood development, these ten Headstart Directors recommend an integrated range of programs, which includes

- < universal access to childcare opportunities;
- < planned approaches and identification of specific needs for “early intervention programs”
- < more qualified, prepared and equitably paid early childhood educators and staff;
- < accessible, enriched preschool programs in under-served areas (e.g. Vanier);
- < more funding to expand Headstart and other enriched ECE programs;
- < better visibility, outreach and communication about and between programs;
- < increased collaboration among programs to meet the multiple needs of children and families;
- < adaptable services and parenting programs to meet families’ unique and changing needs.