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PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
EXEMPLARY PRACTICES

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Early Childhood

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Education

2002-2003 RECIPIENTS



Canada

**PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR  
EXCELLENCE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION  
EXEMPLARY PRACTICES**

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**2002-2003 RECIPIENTS**

# Welcome

# Welcome

**I**n May 2003, 31 early childhood educators were honoured as the first recipients of the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education.

This exciting occasion reflects the growing recognition by Canadians and their governments of the importance of the early years of children's lives. It also complements the work that the Government of Canada has undertaken with its partners in recent years to improve and expand the services and supports available to young children and their families. This includes work through initiatives such as the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement, concluded in 2000, the federal strategy on early childhood development for Aboriginal children, announced in 2002, and the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care, concluded in 2003.

Despite growing understanding of the importance of the development and learning of young children, and the critical role of talented and dedicated early childhood educators, there has been no national mechanism in place to recognize the work of these educators.

The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education answer this need. The awards build on the success of the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence, which recognize the achievements of elementary and secondary teachers.

The new awards honour outstanding and innovative early childhood educators who work in preschools, daycare centres, family day homes and other early childhood education settings across Canada.

In particular, the recipients are recognized for their excellence in fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and for helping build the foundation children need to meet life's challenges. The first 31 recipients were chosen from among more than 350 applicants.

Of those 31 recipients, 10 (five individual educators, a team of two and a team of three) received Certificates of Excellence. The remaining 21 recipients received Certificates of Achievement.

The Certificate of Excellence recipients came to Ottawa to receive their certificates from the Prime Minister and participate in best practices sessions. The Certificate of Achievement recipients were honoured in their communities.

This publication, *Exemplary Practices*, is the product of the Certificate of Excellence recipients' time together in Ottawa. It contains their thoughts about many of the issues they see affecting early childhood education today. Recipients also share countless ideas — big and small — for activities and programs that other educators may adapt to their settings. You will also find contact information for all the recipients, should you wish to get in touch with them.

To learn more about the program, the recipients and how they were chosen, and to get a copy of the nomination guidelines, go to [www.pma-ppm.ca](http://www.pma-ppm.ca).

This publication is available upon request in multiple formats. Contact the Information Distribution Centre at the numbers listed below.

For additional copies of this publication, please contact the Prime Minister's Awards program at 1 800 575-9200 (e-mail: [eeawards@ic.gc.ca](mailto:eeawards@ic.gc.ca)) or the Information Distribution Centre, as follows:

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# Introducing the Educators

Meet the 2002–2003 Certificate of Excellence recipients, whose thoughts, ideas and tips are explored throughout this publication, starting on page 18. You will find brief profiles of the Certificate of Achievement recipients on pages 13–17.



*"Children are magical and to be part of their early learning experiences and developmental stages — first words, first steps, first time to cut, first time to read — is an extraordinary experience. My passion is not only for the children but also for the community as a whole. Children, educators, families and communities go hand in hand in early childhood education. I believe that by being close partners we can provide an optimum foundation for our children."*

— TRACY DOYLE

## TRACY DOYLE

Magic Moments Child Care Centre  
Tignish, Prince Edward Island

The name (Magic Moments Child Care Centre) and location (the small community of Tignish, Prince Edward Island) of Tracy Doyle's early childhood education setting are no accident. Doyle strongly believes that all moments in a child's life are magic, and that flexible, accessible and quality care should be available for parents and children regardless of where they live.

After completing her early childhood education training and gaining experience working in another early childhood education setting, Doyle returned to her home town of Tignish to begin building her dream. In just two years, Magic Moments grew from a single room to a new two-storey facility.

Doyle serves as chair of the local chapter of Prince Edward Island's Early Childhood Development Association and mentors students in the early childhood care and education program at Holland College in Charlottetown. She promotes early childhood education through letters to newspapers and appeals to the provincial government, and has inspired many others to seek training in early childhood education.

## MAGIC MOMENTS CHILD CARE CENTRE

Magic Moments is situated near both the small community's elementary school and library, and offers English and French kindergarten in the same building. This convenient location allows children to move easily from the early childhood education program to half-day kindergarten and on to full-time school.

Doyle and her staff care for 38 to 50 children of mostly seasonal workers (farmers, fish plant staff and other seasonally employed parents) in two dedicated areas of the facility: one for infants and toddlers, the other for preschool and school-aged children (up to 12 years old). The program is supported entirely by parents' fees, and Doyle employs up to eight early childhood educators at peak times of the year. To accommodate parents' long working hours, Magic Moments is open from 5:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

## GET IN TOUCH!

Magic Moments Child Care Centre  
PO Box 330  
Tignish PE CoB 2Bo  
Tel.: (902) 882-4017  
Fax: (902) 882-4017  
E-mail: [magic@pei.sympatico.ca](mailto:magic@pei.sympatico.ca)



## GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL

Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile  
Drummondville, Quebec

Geneviève Provençal began preparing for a career in early childhood education early in life.

"I grew up in a family of five in the country," she explains. "My entire childhood was spent in the company of my three brothers, my sister and cousins, having fun and surrounded by love." This childhood left her with a definite sense of what children need to grow up confident and happy.

She began working with children in her teenage years when she took summer jobs at a camp for children with disabilities. The experience was very positive and she continued in the field with her first early childhood education position — as a summer replacement — while in college.

Provençal began working at the Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in 1993. She worked as a back-up replacement worker by day and finished the courses necessary to acquire certification as an early childhood educator at night. She acquired permanent status four years ago and continues her professional development. "We are very lucky here that our director is open-minded and respects each individual's development," she explains. In addition to the training they receive during working hours, depending on their interests, all team members may attend sessions provided by the regional association of child care centres.



*"It all comes down to pleasure. I want the children to have a good time. I want them to feel good about themselves. I make an effort to be in a good mood every day. I play with the children. I make up songs with their names in them, which boosts their self-esteem and is so much fun! I invent new games for us to play. I try to de-dramatize the tough moments. Most of all, I make sure that we have fun together. I want them to smile and be happy."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL

## CENTRE DE LA PETITE ENFANCE À TIRE D'AILE

The Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile (the name means "to fly swiftly," implying that the centre helps launch children solidly into life) is located in Drummondville, which is south of the St. Lawrence River between Montréal and Quebec City. The centre serves 93 children from birth to age five, with 27 staff.

"Parents who bring their children here know what to expect and know that they are dealing with a dynamic and professional team," says Provençal. For example, parents know that an important aspect of the centre's philosophy is to expose children to a wide variety of experiences, and to ensure the children make plenty of day trips, both inside and outside Drummondville. "I have a lot I can draw on at this centre," explains Provençal. "There is a great rapport among the staff. There are toys, games and a minibus for taking trips."

## GET IN TOUCH!

Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile  
103, boulevard des Pins  
Drummondville QC J2C 1R1

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E-mail: [cpetiredaile@qc.aira.com](mailto:cpetiredaile@qc.aira.com)





*"Children are born to be loved. That is the foundation of everything we do. A child must be given love and attention in an environment that is relatively free, that gives him or her the opportunity to make choices but, at the same time, has limits — a child needs and wants structure. The other thing we want to do is give children their hour of glory, a special memory of childhood success that will be the foundation of their self-confidence. That's a tall order, but you can't just do child care on the surface; you have to go right to the roots of things."*

— DENIS ARCHAMBAULT AND  
MARIE-JOSÉE PORTELANCE

## **DENIS ARCHAMBAULT AND MARIE-JOSÉE PORTELANCE**

Au Jardin d'Alexandre  
Gatineau, Quebec

When Denis Archambault and Marie-Josée Portelance first met, he was an actor and she was working in a lawyer's office. They both had worked with children at day camps and summer camps but neither had pursued training in early childhood education.

Over the years, they married and started a number of successful companies, Archambault specializing in organizing and running events and Portelance in communication arts. Archambault also kept up his acting career.

Then came the good news that Portelance was pregnant with the couple's first child. "I wanted to be near my children, so I told Denis I wanted to open a family-based daycare," says Portelance. The couple moved to a small town, bought a house and opened Au Jardin d'Alexandre (Alexander's Garden), named for their first child.

When the couple had a second child in 1996, Archambault had recently sold his company and found himself with enough money that he could take the summer off and help Portelance. He told her he would stay the summer and ended up staying seven years.

"We wanted to have lots of children, we wanted to be with our children and we wanted to watch our children grow up. The daycare has allowed us to do this," says Archambault.

### **AU JARDIN D'ALEXANDRE**

Located in the Masson-Angers sector of Gatineau, Quebec, Au Jardin d'Alexandre is one of many early childhood education settings in the small community, which is full of young families. Archambault and Portelance provide a program in their home for nine children ages three to five.

Taking maximum advantage of the freedom the small size of their operation gives them, Archambault and Portelance have created an early childhood education setting that appeals to parents seeking much more than a place to drop their children during the workday. For example, Archambault and Portelance built a small theatre in their home, and the children prepare and present elaborate productions each year.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Au Jardin d'Alexandre  
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Gatineau QC J8M 1Z3  
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## **PAMELA BLANCHFIELD**

**Boys and Girls Club of Niagara  
Niagara Falls, Ontario**

"I just seem to gravitate towards working with kids with a lot of needs," says Pamela Blanchfield. With an attitude of "nothing ventured, nothing gained," she works closely with parents to identify and address each child's developmental and individual needs. Rather than focus on a child's strengths or weaknesses, Blanchfield offers a wide range of activities to intrigue, challenge and nourish the child's growing abilities.

Blanchfield, who manages both the Kids First Childcare Centre and the Boys and Girls Club's after-school program, has expanded operations to better serve families with young children. She instituted the Family Resource Centre, which later expanded to house an Ontario Early Years Centre, and several other programs for children up to 12 years old.

Blanchfield continues her interest in and advocacy of child development by serving on several committees, such as the Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC). (Sponsored by the Regional Municipality of Niagara, ECCDC is a non-profit, charitable organization that provides training, resources and support services to those involved in the care and education of children.) Blanchfield also serves on the Ontario Early Years Advisory Committee and the Niagara Prevention of Homelessness Committee. She promotes early childhood education by working with the Donner Canadian Foundation, which recognizes excellence in Canadian non-profit social service organizations, and by involving parents and local politicians in regular early childhood education activities.



*"I have been an early childhood educator for the past 18 years and I cannot think of a more rewarding career or anything I would rather be doing. I am truly blessed to have touched the lives of hundreds of children, and have them touch mine in such a unique and positive way. For me, every child's smiling face or warm embrace is the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow."*

— PAMELA BLANCHFIELD

## **BOYS AND GIRLS CLUB OF NIAGARA**

In the heart of Niagara Falls, in a large two-storey brick building, the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara hosts an impressive number of programs for families and up to 1800 children and youth of all ages. Blanchfield's early childhood care programs at the Club serve 250 children.

"Working for such a large organization in a large community," Blanchfield readily admits, "we're able to offer many resources and activities that other programs can't." In addition to the play-based learning centres, art activities and imagination play areas that are common in a full-day early childhood education setting, the children also enjoy swimming lessons, gymnastics practice, and access to a computer lab and an early-years water park. Blanchfield and her staff design and deliver activities and programs to promote school readiness, accessibility and cultural tolerance.

## **GET IN TOUCH!**

Boys and Girls Club of Niagara  
6681 Culp Street  
Niagara Falls ON L2G 2C5

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Fax: (905) 357-7401

E-mail: [boysgirlsclubnia@on.aibn.com](mailto:boysgirlsclubnia@on.aibn.com)





*"Children, with their innocence and their willingness to try anything without fear, are the inspiration for my career. I enjoy learning and trying new things, and it is this love of knowledge that I want to pass on to the children. I want them to wake up and wonder what they'll get to do today. As an early childhood educator, every day is different. I might be doing circle time, art, cooking or bookwork, meeting with parents, or changing diapers. I love the challenge of working with young minds."*

— TAMMY GINGRAS



*"I have the best job there is. I am a caregiver. To me, the definition of caregiver includes words such as nurture, cherish, assist and teach. I love the children and one of my greatest rewards is a hug or smile that tells me I mean something to them. I know that what I do is helping them prepare for their future and that I make a difference in their lives."*

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN

## **TAMMY GINGRAS, DONNA HUYBER, ROSEMARIE KLEIN**

**Childcare Family Access Network  
Langruth, Manitoba**

Tammy Gingras, Donna Huyber and Rosemarie Klein work independently in six small Manitoba communities between Winnipeg and Brandon (Alonsa, Amaranth, Langruth, Laurier, McCreary and Plumas) that cover a geographic area of approximately 5200 km<sup>2</sup>. Although the three educators work far apart from one another, they share a common vision. "Quality child care is as necessary and as important for rural and farm families as it is for anyone else," says Klein.

Gingras, Huyber and Klein work directly with the children who come to the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) program, designing and leading countless activities, and maintaining close contact with parents, advising them on parenting strategies and facilitating early intervention programs. As C-FAN directors, the trio also manages all aspects of the program, from daily administration to community development.

Gingras, Huyber and Klein are committed to lifelong learning and regularly take professional development workshops and courses, and participate in the annual Manitoba Child Care Conference in Winnipeg. All three lead workshops on incorporating farm safety into early childhood education curricula, and organize and run professional development days for local early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers.

### **CHILDCARE FAMILY ACCESS NETWORK**

C-FAN began in response to growing safety concerns in the farming community, and operates as an integrated rural network of early childhood education and family services.

C-FAN's centralized administration and distribution of resources, such as toys, information and staff, enable it to create financially viable programs for rural families, despite the small number of children in each community. The programs, designed according to community need, range from full-day early childhood education for infants, preschool and school-aged children up to 12 years old to a weekly nursery school. Activities incorporate aspects of farm life, such as the harvest, baby animals and, of course, safety. In addition, staff members offer services to families of special needs children, nursery school programs, literacy programs and computer training, and youth activities, as well as a farm safety curriculum and activities for local elementary schools.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Childcare Family Access Network  
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E-mail: [cfan@mts.net](mailto:cfan@mts.net), [cfan2@mts.net](mailto:cfan2@mts.net)  
Web site: <http://cfan.cimnet.ca>



*"I enjoy working with the parents and children at the centre. I find that my job is always changing and challenging. I feel that I am helping parents with their children emotionally, socially, educationally and physically. I make every day fun by always finding new craft ideas, science activities and outdoor playtime activities. I feel totally satisfied with my work as an early childhood educator, and the reward is happy children."*

— DONNA HUYBER



## LIZ REID

Little People's Parent Participation Preschool  
Vancouver, British Columbia

"Teacher Liz" greets each child arriving at the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool by name and with joy and enthusiasm every day. The children know that there are many activities planned for them that day. What the children do not know — but the parents do, which is why they come from miles around to be part of the program — is that Liz Reid designed the activities to ensure the children's development in all areas: cognitive, social and emotional, physical, creative and ethical.

Reid actively seeks professional development for herself and others. She welcomes early childhood education students (including, lately, a former Little People's preschooler) and teaches a course in the early childhood education program at Langara College in Vancouver. She participates in both the Parent Participation Preschool Teachers Association of British Columbia and Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, and serves on the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee, also at Langara College.



*"What makes me tick? I am definitely a morning person. I wake without the alarm, bright and ready to go. Exercise clothes on, off to teach fitness to a class of 20, and then off to be with my little ones after my double-long macchiato and fruit. Energized, ready to go, plans in place, walk to school. But what's this? Something I find along the way may change the plans! I become excited about the possibilities of awakening the senses of the ever-interested children with yet another wonder."*

— LIZ REID

## LITTLE PEOPLE'S PARENT PARTICIPATION PRESCHOOL

The Little People's Parent Participation Preschool brings two or three parents and 20 three-year-olds and 20 four-year-olds together on alternate days in a bright playroom and playground for a half-day of fun and adventure.

The parents are trained as assistants in a 10-hour orientation session. They then join Teacher Liz, her assistant and the children for circle time, arts and crafts, science "think and do" projects, and lots of free time for playing with musical instruments, blocks, puzzles, and the sand and water tables. Parents have two such "duty days" a month, on Mondays and Wednesdays when their child is three years old and Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays when their child is four years old.

This time commitment means the program is not suitable for everyone, comments Reid, who explains that most of the participants in the 35 families are stay-at-home parents or professionals, though occasionally other parents with sympathetic employers can manage to participate. Some families have nannies, but the parents fulfil the duty days.

In this set-up, the children's imaginations are captured with structured and unstructured play, and parents enjoy time with their child. When Reid seizes a teachable moment and turns it into a morning of adventure, parents gain an understanding of child development. While the children do art and science activities with found objects, parents learn to see the world through their child's eyes.

## GET IN TOUCH!

Little People's Parent Participation Preschool  
5600 Balaclava Street  
Vancouver BC V6N 1L1

Tel.: (604) 261-2219



## ELIZABETH KAYE

Trinin Tsul Zzeh Day Home  
Old Crow, Yukon

With her credentials, qualities and experience, Elizabeth Kaye could choose to work wherever she wished. But she chooses her Gwitch'in community of Old Crow, located 192 km north of the Arctic Circle, because she believes that the strength and heritage of Aboriginal culture lie in its children.

Kaye ensures that the children in her care know and respect the work of the Gwitch'in people. She designs and adapts activities such as sewing, beading and preparing traditional foods to meet the developmental level and interests of individual children. She also models clear speech and language in both Gwitch'in and English for the children.

At the same time, Kaye ensures that the children have the understanding and skills they need to live with the cultures of the South. Young people must leave the community to attend high school in Whitehorse, several hundred miles away. Kaye teaches healthy eating habits to counteract the attraction of junk food, encourages good personal hygiene, and focusses on developing pre-literacy and literacy skills.

Kaye identifies children who need additional support, works closely with other organizations to provide relevant programming, and calls parents to account while still supporting their parenting. She is a role model and mentor for other early childhood educators in the North.

## TRININ TSUL ZZEH DAY HOME

Trinin Tsul Zzeh Day Home is housed in a building attached to Kaye's home, built for her program by the Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation council.

The day home has a kitchen where Kaye cooks hot lunches for up to six children ages 18 months to 5 years and demonstrates the preparation of traditional Gwitch'in foods. The building also includes a comfortable eating area and large bright playroom, where among other activities the children learn traditional sewing and beading skills.

## GET IN TOUCH!

Trinin Tsul Zzeh Day Home  
Box 37  
Old Crow YK YoB 1No

Tel.: (867) 966-3218  
Fax: (867) 966-3800



*"We, as parents, need to raise our children in a healthy environment. Growing healthy — mentally, physically, emotionally and socially — is vital for our children. A healthy community will guide our children to make wise and healthy choices. My day home contributes to supporting parents, community and children as we work together towards a better, healthier future for everyone."*

— ELIZABETH KAYE



# Certificate of Achievement Recipients

## Q U E B E C

### **SYLVIE MICHAUD**

Garderie Gavroche, Neufchâtel

#### **Child care centre for four-year-olds**

Children's interest in exploring the imaginary and the real is what drives their need to play and to learn, says Sylvie Michaud. She capitalizes on this by nicknaming her four-year-olds the "Explorers" and creating wonderful learning adventures for them, such as collecting and drying wildflowers, learning basic yoga and tai chi, and visiting a veterinary clinic, the Museum of Civilization and other interesting people and places in the community. The learning continues with a problem-solving program for young children (*Je peux résoudre des problèmes*). Michaud took the courses required to lead the program — originally developed in English in the United States — and consulted with academics who adapted the program for use in Quebec.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Garderie Gavroche  
9590, rue Saint-Maurice  
Neufchâtel QC G2B 3Z2

Tel.: (418) 842-6643  
Fax: (418) 877-9293

## O N T A R I O

### **VALERIE CHARLIE, KEITH MCCRADY**

Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre  
Thunder Bay

#### **Child care centre for children ages 18 to 30 months (toddler program)**

Valerie Charlie and Keith McCrady developed the program at Mahmowenchike Child Care Centre to allow Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in an urban setting to experience the heritage, language and culture of the Anishnawbe people while exploring all areas of child development. Their program includes a smudging ceremony on Mondays and Fridays to open and close the week, traditional crafts (the children now wear their moccasins while at the centre and sell other crafts as fundraisers) and traditional stories and legends. Charlie and McCrady, who are willing to share their knowledge and expertise with others, welcome high school co-op

students and college students to the centre, and mentor early childhood education professionals.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Mahmowenchike Family Development Centre  
229 Pacific Avenue  
Thunder Bay ON P7C 2R5

Tel.: (807) 623-9580  
Fax: (807) 622-5501  
E-mail: [mahmowen@nwconx.net](mailto:mahmowen@nwconx.net)

### **JANET MACDOUGALL**

Yes I Can! Nursery School, Toronto

#### **Nursery school for children ages 30 months to 6 years**

Believing that children's needs should always come first, Janet MacDougall set out to create a program for the children whose needs do not easily fit into early childhood education programs: special needs children and terminally ill children. She created and established the Yes I Can! communications classes and Yes I Can! social skills classes to bridge the gap between nursery school and the regular school system for special needs children. She also recruited speech pathologists and a behaviourist to help staff learn strategies and techniques for working with these children. MacDougall developed and maintains Safe Haven, a community outreach parent-and-child preschool for children who are medically fragile (often with terminal illnesses) to give them as complete a preschool experience as possible.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Yes I Can! Nursery School  
100 Ranleigh Avenue  
Toronto ON M4N 1W9

Tel.: (416) 486-4911  
Fax: (416) 486-8296  
E-mail: [yicchildren@aol.com](mailto:yicchildren@aol.com)

### **VI MATHESON**

Montessori Preschool Centre, Sheridan Institute of Technology and Advanced Learning, Oakville  
**Preschool program for children ages 30 months to 6 years**

Vi Matheson delights in seeking out and finding every opportunity to enhance children's learning at the Montessori Preschool Centre. She recognizes when a child is ready to leap into new learning, and

will find just the right toy, game, puzzle or exercise to excite and challenge the child's interest. Matheson has also developed a unique record-keeping system to ensure that each child's progress is carefully and regularly monitored. This has proved to be such a quick and useful tool that student teachers and two other community early childhood education settings have adopted it.

**GET IN TOUCH!**

Montessori Preschool Centre  
Sheridan Institute of Technology and  
Advanced Learning  
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**JAMIE MILLEN**

Today's Family: Caring for Your Child, Hamilton  
**Child care centre and family program for children  
ages one month to six years**

Believing that she has an obligation to provide a stimulating environment for children while supporting families, Jamie Millen tailors programs to reflect children's developmental progress, interests and needs. She documents children's strengths and weaknesses, gathers feedback from parents to determine children's interests, and then adapts the learning and play environments as children's interests evolve. For example, she expands the dramatic play area and adds more props when children are spending more time there. In addition, she coordinates a variety of programs with the North Hamilton Community Health Centre, providing early childhood education and care while parents are otherwise engaged, such as at a doctor's appointment or in a support group.

**GET IN TOUCH!**

Today's Family: Caring for Your Child  
44 Greendale Drive  
Hamilton ON L9C 5Z4

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Fax: (905) 574-2684

**SONIA TAVARES**

Region of Peel Cooksville Child Care Centre, Mississauga  
**Child care centre for children ages 18 months to 5 years**

Sonia Tavares' greatest satisfaction comes from fostering community partnerships and taking a family-centred approach to ensuring that families receive the highest level of service. She works with parents, intervention specialists and staff to design a program for each special needs child, developing individualized support materials and building a relationship of trust with both child and parent. She also compiled a binder of regional resources for families dealing with autism. Tavares takes the lead in providing skills development resources and workshops for peers and parents, such as a staff resource binder to support the Taming the Dragon in Your Child program at the centre and a resource room for early childhood education workers.

**GET IN TOUCH!**

Region of Peel Cooksville Child Care Centre  
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**ANDREA ZADOW**

Charlotte Birchard Centres of Early Learning, Ottawa  
**Licensed child care setting for children ages three  
and four years**

It is important to provide a balanced curriculum, giving children the opportunity to work at their own level of development, says Andrea Zadow. She creates this balance while sharing her love of music and dance with the children, enhancing their learning through activities such as playing the guitar to spark singalongs and teaching basic yoga poses and stretches. Zadow also supports children's learning by building partnerships with parents, accommodating the way individual children say goodbye to their parents, providing day-to-day feedback and photo displays recording children's progress, and giving information workshops on topics of concern, such as toilet training.

**GET IN TOUCH!**

Charlotte Birchard Centres of Early Learning  
407 Hilson Avenue  
Ottawa ON K1Z 6B9

Tel.: (613) 728-1797

Fax: (613) 728-1325

## BRITISH COLUMBIA

### **ANISE ABDULLA**

Sunny Gate Montessori Preschool and Kindergarten  
Coquitlam

**Child care centre for children from 30 months to 6 years**

Anise Abdulla inspires curiosity and creativity by being curious and creative herself. She employs carefully developed themes of investigation and learning to excite children, expand their horizons and enrich their learning. For example, a unit on Asia included a morning greeting in Mandarin, interesting food, such as sticky rice, lotus roots and Asian vegetables, and a field trip to a Chinese garden. Recognizing the educational value of songs and music, Abdulla has worked with a local children's musician to develop a number of educational songs (available on CD at [www.mrichildrensmusic.com](http://www.mrichildrensmusic.com)). In addition, she shares her skills and knowledge with everyone who needs them.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Sunny Gate Montessori Preschool and Kindergarten  
1600 King Albert Avenue  
Coquitlam BC V3J 1Y5

Tel.: (604) 931-1549

Fax: (604) 944-1386

E-mail: [sunnygatemont@hotmail.com](mailto:sunnygatemont@hotmail.com)

### **PARIN ALIMOHAMED**

Little Angels Daycare, Burnaby

**Child care centre for children ages three to eight years**

Parin Alimohamed believes it is her responsibility to guide and educate children. She carries out this responsibility in a number of innovative ways. Balancing structured and unstructured play time allows children both freedom and security to experiment. Employing all the children's senses in lessons enriches their learning experience. Encouraging older children to become role models for the younger ones builds self-esteem and confidence in both age groups. Teaching about other cultures, religions and languages around the world and inside Canada broadens children's horizons and tolerance.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Little Angels Daycare  
7580 Curtis Street  
Burnaby BC V5A 4W7

Tel.: (604) 299-8015

### **GLENICE BARBER**

Sidney Preschool, Sidney

**Cooperative preschool for children ages three and four years**

"Every child is a unique individual," says Glenice Barber, "and we need to accept them for who they are — the spirited, the timid, the aggressive, the passive." Barber moves beyond acceptance to develop learning activities that suit the needs, interests and personalities of her small charges by, for example, creating action songs, outdoor play and science-based field trips for a group of very active little boys, and quieter activities and crafts for quieter, more creative children. Barber provides a cheerful, rich learning environment for children, and constructive, highly knowledgeable guidance for parent assistants, who visit the classroom on a regular schedule.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Sidney Preschool  
2410 Malaview Avenue  
Sidney BC V8L 2G3

Tel.: (250) 655-3333

E-mail: [webmaster@sidneypreschool.org](mailto:webmaster@sidneypreschool.org)

Web site: [www.sidneypreschool.org](http://www.sidneypreschool.org)

### **GENEVIEVE BODEN**

Growing Together Child and Parent Society, Duncan  
**School-based infant and toddler child care centre for children ages one month to three years**

"Everyone has the responsibility to learn one new thing each day." With this in mind, Genevieve Boden cares for and educates children ages one month to three years and their young, school-aged parents. Both benefit. She creates a stimulating, warm and friendly atmosphere that nurtures parenting skills and promotes infant language and social development, building interest and participation, skills and independence in both parent and child. Boden provides information and connects parents with other resources, and uses a questionnaire to involve staff and parents in observing and evaluating the behaviour of their children, ensuring early identification and intervention, when necessary.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Growing Together Child and Parent Society  
490 Cairnsmore Street  
Duncan BC V9L 1Z8

Tel.: (250) 748-9754

Fax: (250) 746-8341

E-mail: [growing@sd79.bc.ca](mailto:growing@sd79.bc.ca)



### **LESLEY HENDERSON**

Roseberry Preschool, Comox

**Preschool program for children ages three to five years**

Believing that the early childhood education setting is the "third teacher" (and basing her work on the Reggio Approach, developed in Italy), Lesley Henderson provides a rich and exciting learning environment that fosters exploration, creativity and cooperation, using children's interest and questions to inspire projects and promote learning. A huge papier-mâché dinosaur model that the children made is now on display at a local museum, and their art projects are shown at the annual Group of Under-Seven art show at a local restaurant. Henderson further enriches the learning environment by involving community members in the preschool program. For example, she holds an annual tea for the mayor and council, and seniors regularly visit, including 82-year-old "Pirate Ted," who tells stories and takes the children on pirate treasure hunts.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Roseberry Preschool  
1524 Grayling Drive  
Comox BC V9M 3Z7

Tel.: (250) 339-0307

### **VALERIE LAVALLIE**

Step Together Learning Centre, Coquitlam

**Special needs child care centre for children ages 30 months to 6 years**

Valerie Lavallie thinks that children are children first; their special needs are secondary. She will adapt the classroom environment and program first before limiting or changing expectations for a special needs child, and fosters inclusion in all activities. Tricycles and wagons are modified to encourage mobility and gross motor skill development, and circle time and quiet activities coincide with children's tube feedings. All children, regardless of ability, participate in therapeutic intervention exercises, and speech and language therapies, as well as story time, gardening, outdoor play and excursions to community events. Parents and families are welcomed as principal partners in their children's development and care, and every effort is made to respect parents' culture, traditions and language.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Step Together Learning Centre  
960 Lillian Street  
Coquitlam BC V3J 5C7

Tel.: (604) 939-1020

Fax: (604) 939-1013

### **AL LAWRENCE**

Le'lum'uy'l, Duncan

**Child care centre for children ages zero to five years**

Al Lawrence had a vision of quality early childhood education and care for the children on the Cowichan reserve, and he created the policies, procedures and curriculum to make that vision a reality. Thanks to his efforts, the centre now qualifies for previously unavailable grants and subsidies, and has a culturally focussed curriculum developed in conjunction with centre staff and the reserve community. The centre is one of the first in the province to implement culturally appropriate evaluation, observation and record keeping. Lawrence has also assisted in the development of cultural theme packages and audio-visual training materials for First Nations early childhood educators.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Le'lum'uy'l  
5744 Allenby Road  
Duncan BC V9L 5J1

Tel.: (250) 746-5966

Fax: (250) 746-5901

### **LEANNA LOGAN**

Waterside Child Development Centre, Vancouver

**Child care centre for children ages 18 months to 4 years**

Treating each child with respect — recognizing their needs, interests, learning styles and developmental levels — Leanna Logan carefully and skilfully adjusts her teaching style to captivate and challenge the children, many with diagnosed special needs or identified as high risk. Activities are fully inclusive, and special equipment or adaptation of the activity allows broad participation. Ongoing observation, evaluation and planning ensure the program is responsive and sensitive to the needs of the children and their families. And the needs are many in one of Vancouver's most challenging environments, the Downtown Eastside. Logan has coordinated a hot lunch program that features nutritional information, menu planning and recipe ideas for families, and collects clothing and toys for families in need.

#### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Waterside Child Development Centre  
102-321 Princess Avenue  
Vancouver BC V6A 3C6

Tel.: (604) 255-8522

Fax: (604) 255-8506

E-mail: [waterside@develop.bc.ca](mailto:waterside@develop.bc.ca)

## **MARYLOU SHARPE**

Creative Years Daycare and Preschool, Nanaimo

**Child care centre for children ages 30 months to 5 years**

MaryLou Sharpe creates a home away from home that nurtures each child's unique nature by integrating the daily routines and seasonal tasks of a two-acre organic hobby farm with the child care centre. Meals are served with placemats, cloth napkins and ceramic plates, and the children are involved in baking and serving goodies. The children also help with farm tasks, learn confidence and responsibility, and twice a year help sell produce and crafts to raise money for a variety of projects and causes. Sharpe keeps families actively involved in the centre by hosting several festive family days, publishing a weekly newsletter, and encouraging parents to share a skill or hobby with the children.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Creative Years Daycare and Preschool

2234 Maxey Road

Nanaimo BC V9S 5V5

Tel.: (250) 753-4342

## **ROSALIND TURCOTTE**

Tiny Tots Daycare, Victoria

**Child care centre for children ages 18 months to 3 years**

Always placing the child first helps Rosalind Turcotte remain aware of children's developmental stages, and then provide innovative and enjoyable learning activities. For example, baby dolls help children prepare for the birth of a new sibling, and a play cooking area — complete with pots and pans — allows several boys to develop their interest in cooking. Turcotte recognizes early math interest and provides sorting games to stimulate it, and uses songs to stimulate language development. She maintains a diary of daily activities to keep parents informed of their children's progress and a lending library of resources on a wide variety of developmental issues for staff, early childhood education students and parents.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Tiny Tots Daycare

286 Island Highway

Victoria BC V9B 1G5

Tel.: (250) 474-4342

Fax: (250) 478-7190

## **YUKON**

## **JASBIR RANDHAWA**

Jasbir's Family Dayhome, Whitehorse

**Family child care program for children ages 2 to 12 years**

"Child care without borders is my ultimate goal," says Jasbir Randhawa. She sees her work with children as contributing to the creation of a just and tolerant society. To achieve this goal, she creates a calm, quiet, positive and safe atmosphere where children can begin to realize that violence is not an acceptable way to solve problems. Randhawa employs open communication, positive reinforcement, conflict resolution and redirection techniques to prevent discipline problems, and encourages children to be independent according to their maturity and to display mutual respect. Her passion for human rights and strong commitment to early childhood education lead her to advocate for quality early childhood education with parents, the community and government.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Jasbir's Family Dayhome

1 Alsek Road

Whitehorse YK Y1A 3J5

Tel.: (867) 667-4013

Fax: (867) 667-4013

## **NORTHWEST TERRITORIES**

## **RHONDA LATIMER, NORMA SHAW**

Hay River Playschool, Hay River

**Playschool for children ages three to five years**

Encouraging individuality and self-expression through role-playing and exploration, Rhonda Latimer and Norma Shaw tailor their program to celebrate the wide cultural diversity of the centre's population and meet the needs of all the children. (More than 40 percent of places at the centre are sponsored by the territorial government for high-risk children.) Learning centres aid the development of fine and gross motor skills, role-playing and role reversals allow children to express their individuality, and traditional foods and music honour children's cultural heritage. Latimer and Shaw bring skills and knowledge to the community with a variety of projects, including an award-winning Earth Day and environmental awareness composting project that produces flowers and vegetables.

### **GET IN TOUCH!**

Hay River Playschool

10 Caribou Crescent

Hay River NT X0E 0R7

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## Curriculum Planning: Play's the Thing



**T**he early childhood education settings of this year's Prime Minister's Award recipients follow every model possible. Despite these differences, the children entrusted to these exemplary early childhood educators have at least one thing in common.

They play.

They ride tricycles, build castles, climb, play catch, paint pictures, dress up, squish clay, sand and soap between their fingers, listen to stories and sing their hearts out.

But there is more to their play than meets the eye. Through carefully and thoughtfully designed activities, children are learning positive social behaviours, developing large and small motor control and problem-solving skills, and practising good eating habits, cleanliness, safety, and much, much more.

"We give children's minds and hearts wings to fly," says a smiling Tracy Doyle, the owner-operator of Magic Moments Child Care Centre in Tignish, Prince Edward Island. "We strive to give them the confidence and vision to do what their heart tells them to do."

### *A Curriculum Built on Play*

Play-based learning is the main feature that distinguishes early childhood education from what many in the general public call "babysitting," explains Donna Huyber. A member, along with Tammy Gingras and Rosemarie Klein, of the

Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) team from Manitoba, Huyber runs a full-day early childhood education centre in the small town of Langruth for children ages 6 months to 12 years.

In designing the curriculum, “we involve the children in deciding what theme we’ll explore in the coming week,” explains Huyber, who is in charge of the art activities. While a few themes may be related to the season, such as spring or Hallowe’en, most themes speak to the children’s interests, such as ice cream, thunderstorms or baby animals (a popular feature of many of these farm children’s lives). Another regular theme is farm safety, which is also a founding principle of the C-FAN network (see “Farm Safety Through Early Childhood Education,” right).

“Then I plan art activities in different media that complement the theme and challenge the children to explore both the theme and the medium.” Each day of the week has a different art activity, she says. For example, when the theme is ice cream, the children cut out ice cream cone shapes one day, glue together a sundae made out of Styrofoam and other materials the next, and draw or paint ice cream items on other days. The fifth day of the week, devoted to “messy play,” does not necessarily fit a theme, but the children love it. (See also, “Fun With Paint,” page 20.) Huyber’s fellow educators design science, manipulation,

## Farm Safety Through Early Childhood Education

Farm safety is a regular theme at the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) in Manitoba, but it is also so much more. Since 1990, C-FAN has promoted farm safety by providing early childhood education programs to families in the rural communities of Alonsa, Amaranth, Langruth, Laurier, McCreary and Plumas, Manitoba.

People who live on farms know that the farm is among the best places in the world to raise children. But it can also be one of the most dangerous. Small children living on farms are at a higher risk of accident or death than are children in the general population, reports the Canadian Agricultural Injury Surveillance Program (CAISP). A national initiative coordinated from Queen’s University in Kingston, CAISP found that an average of 10 children ages one to six die each year on Canadian farms, and that many others suffer serious injuries requiring hospitalization.

Access to rural early childhood education is an important factor in reducing injuries to farm children. “We wouldn’t bring our kids to our factory job; we place them in child care,” points out Donna Huyber, a member of the C-FAN team who works at the Lakeview Children’s Centre in Langruth. “That just seems obvious to everyone. Why should we let children follow us around while we do farm work?”

“It’s difficult for children to grasp the dangers,” explains Rosemarie Klein, who is the coordinator of both the Lakeview Children’s Centre and the Plumas Preschool Playtime, a nursery school program. “We just have to go over and over safety issues, especially in the spring and fall.” Staff members use stories (with illustrations on a flannel board), pictures, posters and demonstrations of safe practices to reinforce the safety message for the children.

“We also seize the ‘teachable moments’ when they come along,” adds Tammy Gingras, director of the Laurier Play Zone daycare and the Parkside Children’s Centre in McCreary. “For example, one day a child told us, ‘Daddy got a broken arm when a cow kicked him!’ Well, that gave us the opportunity to talk about staying out of fields and pens with large animals such as cows and pigs in them.”

“Not only do we have to teach the children,” adds Huyber, “but we also have to reach the parents. They’re accustomed to the farm environment and don’t always recognize the dangers for small children.” The C-FAN team sends an educational pamphlet home with all the children four times a year and includes safety reminders regularly in C-FAN newsletters.

For more information, including links to provincial farm safety sites and farm safety checklists, visit Safe Kids Canada ([www.safekidscanada.ca](http://www.safekidscanada.ca)).

*“We give children’s minds and hearts wings to fly.”*

— TRACY DOYLE

## Fun With Paint

Kids love to paint, but, boy, is it messy! Here are some ways to make clean-up much easier.

"If we are going to be doing something really messy with paints, such as finger painting, I mix liquid hand soap in with the paint," says Geneviève Provençal, of Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec. "The paint will wash off with just water, and hand washing in the foam is fun."

A twist on this is Donna Huyber's method, which she has shared with the other members of the Childcare Family Access Network team in Manitoba: "Make a paint base with two cups of cornstarch and one cup of water, cooked together until clear. Then whip in a bar of grated Ivory Soap until the whole mixture is fluffy. Squeeze in liquid tempera concentrate for colour. This concoction is cheaper than paint and washes out of the children's clothing a bit better."

Make paint go a bit farther (but still be easy to clean) by adding gelatin, dish detergent and water to concentrated paint base, says Liz Reid of the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool in Vancouver. Then comes the fun part: "Add confetti, glitter and anything else you think would be interesting."



imagination and other play-based learning activities around the theme as well.

"To me, the curriculum is my plan of what I want the children to learn in a specific time period," says Pamela Blanchfield of the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls.

"What do I want them to walk away with today?" This could be as simple as ensuring that they have a sensory experience every day, she continues, or as important as their first steps toward developing empathy and concern for others. Blanchfield also uses weekly themes, designing daily flexible schedules or programs around that theme. "Then I provide lots of choices for the children on what they can do and how they'll spend their time."

Geneviève Provençal, who works at the Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec, ensures her curriculum turns around pleasant experiences for the children. "I play with the children rather than watching them at play." She chooses games, jokes and songs that make children laugh and learn at the same time. (See also "Putting on a Performance," page 24.)

## Building on Learning

Children derive a tremendous amount of self-esteem and satisfaction from being able to create or build something, says Tammy Gingras, a member of the Childcare Family Access Network team from Manitoba. She has developed some innovative craft projects for the children at the Parkside Children's Centre in McCreary, Manitoba. "The children build birdhouses from pre-cut and pre-drilled wood pieces," she explains. "With adult supervision, cordless drills are safe and easy for children to use, and the children feel so grown-up and powerful using them!" Gingras also supplies the children with ceramic clay to create cups and plates, and takes the finished objects to a local potter for firing.

## What Play Can Teach

While these early childhood educators agree on the importance of designed and guided play-based learning, they do not necessarily agree on what the goals of that learning should be. Are early childhood educators preparing children for school or for life? Should an activity have an identifiable end result, or is the learning process what is important? (See also "More Than Fun: Evaluation in a Play-based Curriculum," right.)

"If a child spends an hour cutting a piece of construction paper into tiny scraps, that's fine with me," says Huyber. Liz Reid of the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool in Vancouver agrees: "Who knows what's going on in that little head? They may be quietly organizing ideas, learning about spatial and material relationships, or simply enjoying the feel of the paper and their control of the scissors."

But perhaps the learning should be more systematic than that, suggests Doyle. "We're setting the foundation for school." Activities should be planned to encourage children to reach their age-appropriate developmental goals, she believes, adding that research has shown that

## More Than Fun: Evaluation in a Play-based Curriculum

These award-winning early childhood educators firmly hold that monitoring and evaluating a child's development is an important element of a play-based curriculum.

For example, Pamela Blanchfield at the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara keeps a close eye on how each child is progressing. "When they start at the centre, we give them some little task, for example, drawing a circle, and then put the drawing away in a folder," Blanchfield explains. "Then, once every two months, we give the child the same task and see how they've improved." Staff members also use the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and the Developmental Profile Scale to assess how the child is developing. (For more information about the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale and the Developmental Profile Scale, visit [www.newassessment.org/txt/public/assessments/SelectTool.cfm](http://www.newassessment.org/txt/public/assessments/SelectTool.cfm).)

The child's social and emotional development is also monitored through daily logs that take note of the child's social interactions, whether he or she is talking, smiling or participating in activities.

Both the developmental screening and daily monitoring guide the program and daily activity plans. "We might put out more imagination props or manipulation toys, and then guide the child towards them." The object is not to make the child carry out a designated task but to provide, in a structured, interesting environment, activities and experiences that will stretch and challenge the child's learning, explains Blanchfield.

Careful monitoring and evaluation can identify learning or other disabilities early, adds Rosemarie Klein, a member of the Manitoba Childcare Family Access Network team. This is a benefit to the child, parents and ultimately the entire community. The earlier an intervention program is initiated, the cheaper it will be and the better its chances of success, she says.

*"I play with the children  
rather than watching them at play."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL



### Here's an Idea...

"Our building has an attic with a pull-down staircase. I store toys in boxes up there and rotate them in and out of the playrooms regularly. After a month or so, it's a brand new toy for the younger ones! The older children remember the toy, but seeing it again are able to find new ways to play with it."

— TRACY DOYLE

children with early childhood education experience have better success at school.

Blanchfield has a similar view. While play, flexibility and choices are important elements of her program, literacy is a cornerstone. "I probably spend more time focussing on literacy and pre-literacy than anything else." Children at her centre have many opportunities to read and be read to, to write and draw, and to count and sort, she explains. (See also, "Stay SHARPI Learn to Read," page 38.)

On the other hand, says Provençal, "It's learning but it isn't school." She encourages children to share souvenirs from their family experiences. If they have been on vacation with their parents and have a collection of rocks or seashells, she likes to use these to stir the children's imagination and creativity. "One day a

father was all apologetic because his son wanted to bring a bucket of frogs with him. I said, 'Bring them on!'"

Provençal also likes to introduce a healthy dose of the "essential" childhood experiences that she says risk getting lost in today's rushed and structured world. "For example, I take my group out and we play in the mud or in the rain," she explains. "We may look pretty silly to some ... but every child should get to play in the mud and the rain."

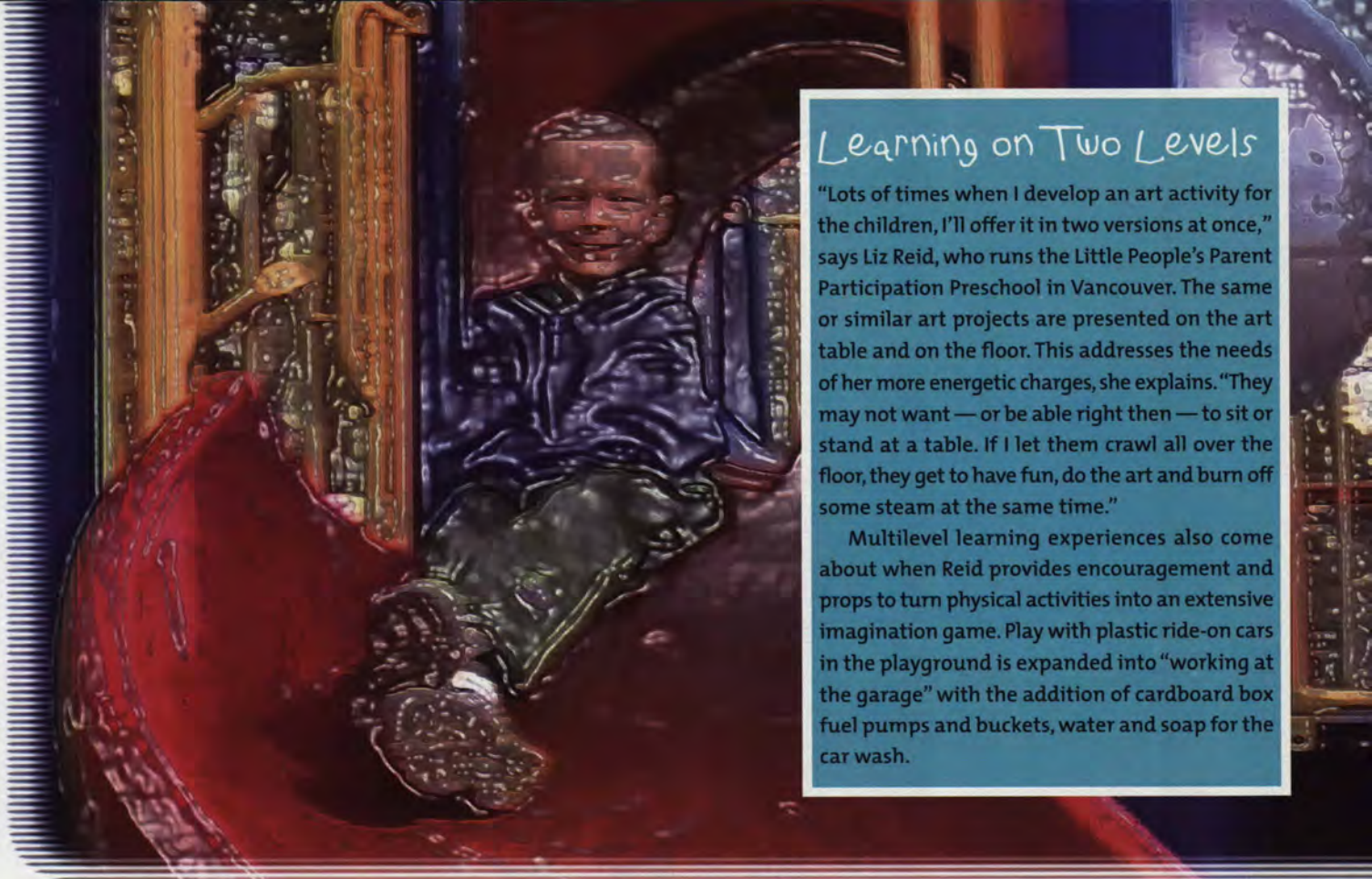
### Looking Beyond the Play-based Curriculum

At the heart of early childhood education — before and beyond curriculum, school readiness, outcomes or expectations — are the fundamental traditions, beliefs and morals transmitted to the children, says Blanchfield, speaking for the group.

### Make It Magical!

The learning centres at Magic Moments Child Care Centre in Tignish, Prince Edward Island, do more than encourage children to learn through play. From January's "cave" in the cozy corner where children can "hibernate" with a book to July's tropical-themed playground with music, games and customs from around the world, Tracy Doyle's theme-based learning centres are designed and stocked to stimulate the children's imagination and make every moment magical. "I take a big idea — like our theme, Summer Fiesta — and break it down, remembering the child's point of view. What would seem amazing or magical to them?" Wonderful experiences and learning follow.

*"We may look pretty silly to some ...  
but every child should get to play in the mud"*



## Learning on Two Levels

"Lots of times when I develop an art activity for the children, I'll offer it in two versions at once," says Liz Reid, who runs the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool in Vancouver. The same or similar art projects are presented on the art table and on the floor. This addresses the needs of her more energetic charges, she explains. "They may not want — or be able right then — to sit or stand at a table. If I let them crawl all over the floor, they get to have fun, do the art and burn off some steam at the same time."

Multilevel learning experiences also come about when Reid provides encouragement and props to turn physical activities into an extensive imagination game. Play with plastic ride-on cars in the playground is expanded into "working at the garage" with the addition of cardboard box fuel pumps and buckets, water and soap for the car wash.


"We begin with the foundation and building blocks of roots, vision, values, heritage, love and respect."

Educators also model positive behaviours, and choose books, songs and stories that encourage children to explore themes of empathy and kindness, at the same time demonstrating to each child that he or she is unique, special and valued. "We teach and encourage children to use their hearts and their common sense to guide them in life, to make choices instead of simply following rules," Blanchfield says.

"We give them peace and victory," concludes Marie-Josée Portelance, who, with her husband, Denis Archambault, runs Au Jardin d'Alexandre in Gatineau, Quebec, holding up two fingers to demonstrate the victory we achieve over life's obstacles when we find inner peace. "We could give them all the answers they need to survive in the world, but it is better to teach them that the answers are all around them; they need only to listen to the little voice inside of them to find the answers they need."

*and the rain."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL



## Putting on a performance

**C**hildren and performance are such a natural combination that we rarely stop to think about it. Singing, dancing, acting and learning how to make believe are universal to early childhood.

Why?

Mostly, because it works. "The arts are like play at its best," says Liz Reid of the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool in Vancouver.

Denis Archambault of Au Jardin d'Alexandre in Gatineau, Quebec, agrees. "We started doing small theatre productions because we like theatre, and the children liked it, too," he explains. Sitting down afterwards to evaluate the results of those first few productions, he and his partner, Marie-Josée Portelance, quickly realized that they had touched on every area of Quebec's early childhood education curriculum.

### When to perform

One very important lesson for children is learning when it is appropriate for them to perform, says Geneviève Provençal of Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec. "The key is to focus on when it is a good idea to perform rather than when it isn't. Children respond well to being told what to do rather than what not to do."

Provençal clearly establishes that there are certain places and occasions when performance or other activities of this kind are appropriate. "I say 'We sing our silly songs inside in this area.'" She then reinforces that with her own behaviour. "I never sing this type of song in the playground outside. I only sing inside."

The children also learn to ask before singing silly songs, she adds. "Children love to sing some pretty silly songs and you want them asking before launching into them."

One effect of this is that the children look forward to the time when they are allowed to sing. "They often make up whole songs just so they can sing them," says Provençal.



That was the start of a long run of two big shows a year at their family-based centre. "When I look back, I can't believe how well we did," says Archambault. "It became a very special moment for the children and their parents."

Acting things out is a very natural thing for children, explains Archambault. "They put on shows of their own," he points out. "My daughter puts on performances for her dolls."

Children perform so naturally that it can be shocking, adds Geneviève Provençal of the Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec. "My influence as a role model really came home to me when the little girls in my group started picking up my mannerisms, even my way of standing."

She takes advantage of this to get the children to sing. "I love to sing and I sing badly," she says.

*"They put on shows of their own.  
My daughter puts on performances for her dolls."*

— DENIS ARCHAMBAULT



## Teaching Empathy Through Music and Drama

Empathy skills — the ability to identify personal emotions, recognize those emotions in others and understand the consequences of actions on emotions — are central to developing children's social skills and an important element of the play-based curricula taught by this year's Prime Minister's Award recipients.

Tracy Doyle, owner-operator of Magic Moments Child Care Centre in Tignish, Prince Edward Island, recommends *Play Fair Kids: Teaching Skills of Empathy to Young Children Through Music and Drama* as a helpful resource. The program was put together by the Early Childhood Development Association of Prince Edward Island and promotes the development of the language of emotions and empathetic behaviour in children from ages three to six through drama, music and play. "In my centre, we use the kit both as a learning resource and material in our learning environments and as a resource for circle time," explains Doyle. "The children love the program."

The program takes advantage of the fact that children learn through observation and imitation, she explains. They observe the behaviours of the people around them, watch the antics of characters on television and in videos, and listen to adventures in storybooks. *Play Fair Kids* features a live actor play, videos, songs and stories about the actions and emotions of two characters, Shoe Shoe and Sais Sais, for the children to observe and imitate. Puppets and dress-up props are also provided to encourage role-playing and further discussion of emotions.

Each licensed early childhood education program and family resource centre in Prince Edward Island received a kit, an invitation to attend in-service training to support the use of the kit in their program, and tickets to attend the show *Shoe Shoe with the Big Feet* in their community.

Doyle plays the music from the play throughout the day, reads the stories to the children, encourages role-playing with the accompanying puppets and relates the messages to the children's everyday situations. "I can ask, 'Remember when Shoe Shoe and Sais Sais both wanted the same toy? How did they feel? What did they do?'" *Play Fair Kids* offers a friendly and safe haven for children to feel and express themselves through the world of play and role-modelling, she explains.

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The quality of the performance matters little, she explains. "The other day I taught a song to my group. My colleague Chantal, who is a good singer, came up to me afterwards and pointed out that I had sung the words to the wrong melody. I thought, 'Oh well. They will all sing it my way now.'"

The associations adults have with performance tend to blind them to what children experience, Archambault adds. "Risk is an adult concept; children simply don't think about it," he says. "That explains why adults have to be present for children's attempts at performance: to create a social environment, a civic environment, where the dangers have been anticipated and minimized."

But children do experience stage fright, as an adult might, he stresses. "The first time they appear in front of an audience, there is a brief moment when it sinks in that they are in front of these people, but that's all," he explains.

To make this possible, Archambault spends 15 to 20 minutes a day with the children preparing for the public performances that he and the children put on. "Children develop confidence slowly; you can't push it," he explains. "After every practice, everybody applauds and jumps into one another's arms — it's quite an experience."

In addition to confidence, children acquire all sorts of other skills, often unconsciously, while performing. Singing teaches children how to speak not only well but also beautifully, says Provençal, noting that children often speak poorly because they don't know how to breathe properly. "However, when they sing, they have to breathe, and it becomes a fun way to learn."

Singing also introduces new subjects for children to talk about, adds Provençal, who has collected a binder full of songs to use with her



### Here's an Idea...

"When I move from one place to another with the children, to keep everything calm I 'transform' them. I tell them, 'Watch out, friends. Abracadabra! Now you're tiny mice.' Then they move noiselessly on tiptoe and there is no shoving. I change the animal or object from one time to the next."

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL

charges. "We just learned a song about a calumet, which was a ceremonial pipe used by Aboriginal peoples. It was a great opportunity to explain what a calumet is and a bit of its history."

Theatre is a great way to help children learn social skills, says Archambault. Most importantly, theatre helps children learn how to express their feelings to others. "Acting is not about simulating emotions; it is about understanding our own emotions so that we can express them. This is an essential part of a child's social development," he explains. (See also "Teaching Empathy Through Music and Drama," left, "Acting on Their Feelings," page 28, and "Kids at Centre Stage," page 39.)

Theatre projects also teach teamwork and responsibility. "The children all know that everyone else is depending on them," he explains.

The performances at Au Jardin d'Alexandre were quite grand, Archambault admits. "We

## Sacks and Baskets

Imagine hearing a story, then being given puppets to act it out and even come up with a different ending. This is exactly the idea behind story sacks and story baskets.

"Story sacks and story baskets expand a story into a creative learning experience for parents and children," says Rosemarie Klein, a member of the Childcare Family Access Network team from Manitoba.

Each drawstring sack or simple basket (depending on the size and number of items collected) holds a storybook (to be read aloud to the children), and puppets and a backdrop, or costumes and props, to fit the story, Klein explains. The sacks or baskets might also contain a flannel or felt board, the book on tape, a game such as Matching Cards and other items that suggest other ways to explore the story.

started with simple productions and built on that base. My professional experience in the theatre helped us to do some of the more spectacular effects, but others could do something just as impressive, particularly people who are self-starters."

The effort is well worth it to see the effect it has on the children, he concludes. "Performing in





### Here's an Idea...

"When you are in a place meant for children, spend a day playing on your hands and knees to gain a greater understanding of a child's world. That is really getting down to their level!"

— DENIS ARCHAMBAULT  
AND MARIE-JOSÉE  
PORTELANCE



## Acting on Their Feelings

Brindami is the name of a mouse puppet. "And that crazy mouse is magical," says Geneviève Provençal of Centre de la petite enfance À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec.

Provençal learned about Brindami (the name suggests the French phrase "brin d'ami," which literally means "a little bit of a friend" but also suggests "a fine friend"; see photo on page 29) from an educational consultant at the Centre de la petite enfance who had received training on the pedagogical program developed around the puppet. Provençal was so impressed that she took the training required to deliver the program.

The program uses dramatic presentations with the puppet to model various social behaviours. It allows children to understand their emotions and how they react in social situations by letting them distance themselves from the behaviour so they can think about what is happening, explains Provençal. "They learn by watching Brindami and discussing Brindami's reactions."

When, for example, someone speaks harshly to Brindami, she may decide to go away, and Provençal puts the puppet behind her back. "The children notice right away that the puppet is gone, and we discuss what it would take for us to get her to come back."

The children's reaction to Brindami went far beyond what Provençal had expected. "There is an incredible chemistry there that I can't explain," she says. "The children will even come up and whisper secrets in the puppet's ear."

The Brindami program was developed by the Centre de psycho-éducation du Québec for children ages two to four. It is a spin-off of an earlier puppet-based program for five-year-olds featuring Fluppy, a dog puppet. Fluppy was created in 1984 and has been used with considerable success to help children, particularly boys, develop positive social skills rather than resorting to aggression.

More information about Brindami and Fluppy is available from the Centre de psycho-éducation du Québec at [www.centrepse.du.qc.ca/base.asp](http://www.centrepse.du.qc.ca/base.asp).

front of their parents in a show they are proud of is their hour of glory," he says, "a special moment they remember for years."

Big or small, performances can bring all sorts of benefits, many of them not anticipated. Provençal's co-workers often accuse her of being an old person in a young body because she regularly teaches the children songs from days gone by. "One little boy came back to the centre all excited because his grandmother knew the song we sing before story time. Just think about it," she says. "That song became something that the boy, his mother and his grandmother got to share. That's wonderful."

# If I Only Had One Thing

**T**his year's recipients give us their desert island selections.

## It's All in the Attitude

*"I hope I will always have the ability to see the magic in learning. Not everyone is suited to be an early childhood educator, and more important than any training you could get is this love of the magic of learning."*

— TRACY DOYLE

*"We saw examples of what creative management can do when we were in Ottawa. If you talk to Geneviève Provençal and ask her how she can do the wonderful things she does, one of the first things she tells you is how her supervisor supports her. We need more supervisors like that. Educators need a certain degree of freedom to be able to try new methods."*

— DENIS ARCHAMBAULT AND MARIE-JOSÉE PORTELANCE

*"I feel privileged to be part of the À tire d'aile team. My colleagues are dynamic and full of truly wonderful ideas. I would be remiss if I did not mention the support and encouragement our director provides day after day and year after year. Many thanks, À tire d'aile."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL

*"I want to give kids a sense of security, a lack of worry. If I had an empty room and a bunch of kids, all I'd need is a tote bag of odds and ends and my imagination!"*

— PAMELA BLANCHFIELD

*"That parents understand how important it is to care for our children — what they can do to take care of their children."*

— ELIZABETH KAYE

## Back to Basics

*"A piano. With a piano you can lead songs, tell stories, get the children experimenting and exploring movement. Music is a wonderful thing."*

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN

*"A loft! A raised play platform with a ladder for the children to climb up and down and a railing so the children could play underneath and on top."*

— DONNA HUYBER

*"An art shelf stocked with glue, scissors, paper, paint, magazines. Everything we'd need to create wonderful art!"*

— TAMMY GINGRAS

*"I'd go for those big hollow wooden blocks. The children can build castles with them, sit and climb on them, start all kinds of fun with them."*

— LIZ REID



## The "Musts" and "Shoulds" of Communicating with Parents



**C**ommunication is a subject that simply will not stay in a little box. It inevitably breaks out and embraces bigger issues.

This year's Prime Minister's Award recipients tend to see communication both in the narrow terms of simply transferring messages, and in the much broader terms of building and maintaining good relationships with the parents of the children in their care.

In practice, the recipients say, passing on messages tends to be immediate — the "must" part of communication. Communicating to ensure ongoing positive relationships with parents, in contrast, is the "should" part — and can sometimes fall by the wayside, the recipients note.

### The "Musts" of Communication

An obvious example of required, essential communication is a parent's request. When a parent wants his or her child to have only a half-hour nap, that message needs to be written down and read by all staff members. That same parent who is up late that night dealing with a child who had a two-hour nap earlier in the day and can't sleep is an unhappy parent, says Tammy Gingras of the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) in Manitoba.

Because the consequences of not dealing with a "must" are often immediate and sometimes unpleasant, everybody does deal with them.

Perhaps the most basic tool of essential communication is a sign-in book or sheet. A sign-in book helps keep track of who is in the facility and when (see "Taking Attendance," page 33). Sign-ins are almost foolproof, although one recipient reported that parents have been known to enter



false drop-off and pick-up times in an attempt to lower their monthly bill.

Staff members at Manitoba's C-FAN group of early childhood education settings use communication journals to record information parents give them, such as when a friend or relative is going to pick up a child instead of a parent. The journals are

also useful for staff members to convey messages to one another, such as a weather report when it is going to be exceptionally hot or cold, so they can plan activities accordingly.

Communicating the other way — that is, getting messages back to parents — can be trickier. "Writing things down on a notice board or

*"Being a parent is tough, and it helps people to know that someone else recognizes their efforts."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL



in a newsletter is great, but only when all the necessary people actually read the thing," says Geneviève Provençal of the Centre de la petite enfance (CPE) À tire d'aile in Drummondville, Quebec. Provençal reports that she and her colleagues sometimes resort to measures such as attaching notes to children's clothing to get messages to parents.

Provençal says that oral communication is the most dependable way to make sure messages get to parents. CPE À tire d'aile is one of many Canadian early childhood education settings to use shifts for its staff. Depending on which shift she is working, Provençal either tries to catch parents as they are dropping off their children or picking them up.

Provençal likes to play to her strengths in relating to parents. Because she is gregarious and used to taking the lead in social situations, she is always willing to meet parents more than halfway.

In one case, she says, "one father never told me when his child was arriving or leaving, so I asked one of my colleagues to let me know when the father arrived. I approached him and told him how important it was to talk about his child's progress with staff at least once a day."

The tactic worked. "He comes in and talks to our staff every morning now," says Provençal. "He is no longer in my group but he still says hello to me."

## Taking Attendance

Attendance books and sign-in sheets keep track of children for safety and billing purposes. But in the hustle and bustle of opening and closing time, how can early childhood educators ensure that these useful tools are filled in each and every time?

It can be a problem, comments Pamela Blanchfield. "Parents would never dream of dropping off or picking up their preschool children without informing a staff person," says the manager of both the Kids First Childcare Centre and the after-school program at the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara. "But as the children get older, sometimes the parents get a little more rushed." To make sure that each child's leaving is recorded, there is a staff person at the front door of the building from 3:30 to 5:30 p.m. to sign people in and out of the building.

The Club's after-school program picks up children from 19 local elementary schools. If the program hasn't been informed that a child is absent that day or has been picked up early directly from school, then the pick-up van must wait at the school until the parent is located, which disrupts the schedule and inconveniences everyone. In these cases, parents are first sent a pointed note signed by the board of directors. If the problem persists, the parents are fined five dollars each time it happens.

"Though they may seem unnecessarily strict, the policies really are in place to ensure the safety of the children," comments Blanchfield. "We all have to work together."

## The Larger Picture

This year's recipients see communication as a key part of meeting a larger goal: a good relationship with parents.

"I hear stories about genuine communication problems with parents, but my experience is that they are very rare," Provençal says. "But we

need to do more than just pass messages successfully," she argues. "There should be an active dialogue between the parent, child and early childhood educator about what the child is doing every day."

Denis Archambault, who runs Au Jardin d'Alexandre with his wife, Marie-Josée Portelance, in Gatineau, Quebec, agrees. "Education is something that happens at home first, and daycare and school are an extension or complement to that," he explains. "If the parents don't talk to you about what they are doing at home and they don't take an interest in what their children are doing in daycare, it is very difficult." (See "Getting It Down on Paper," page 34, to learn about a tool Archambault has developed to tackle this problem.)

It has become progressively harder to keep those roles clear as society has begun to rely more and more on institutions such as early childhood education settings, camps and schools to help raise children, says Archambault.

It's not that the parents don't care, adds Provençal. "We all lead such busy lives today that it is too easy for parents to drop their child off and pick them up and never really think about what this means to their child's upbringing."

The impetus to make the extra effort to bridge the gap lies with the early childhood educator, Provençal says. "We have to remember that we are there for the parents and not just the children."

Tammy Gingras agrees. "I like to maintain a good communication relationship with the parents so that their first reaction is to just



### Here's an Idea...

"It's a busy time when all the children are arriving in the morning. This one needs help with their boots; that one is trying to open the dress-up box. A clipboard for the sign-in attendance sheet for a staff person to carry around is really helpful. Ours has a cover, so we can even take it outside without the sheets blowing around."

— TAMMY GINGRAS

## Getting It Down on Paper

In most licensed early childhood education centres in Quebec, staff members use a report to keep parents informed about their child's progress. While he likes the idea in theory, Denis Archambault of Au Jardin d'Alexandre in Gatineau, Quebec, is dissatisfied with the examples of these reports that are available on the market because, in his opinion, they do not encourage children's participation.

Archambault has spent the last few years developing a "carnet de communications" that will do the job better. The most obvious distinguishing characteristic is that the report has the educator, the parent and the child contributing. The educator and parent use the report to exchange information about what and how well the child is doing in the early childhood education program and at home.

The child's contribution — often a picture — works on two levels, Archambault explains. "Obviously, the fact that the carnet contains the child's work is going to attract the parent's attention," he explains. "On a deeper level, it will also start a three-way dialogue."

The carnet will be published in 2004. For more information, contact Denis Archambault at [mariden@videotron.ca](mailto:mariden@videotron.ca).

come to me any time they feel uncertain about something, and I can go to them any time I need clarification," she explains.

At CPE À tire d'aile, the staff members begin by meeting all the parents at the start of the year. "I tell them who I am, who my colleague Chantal is and who the other women in the centre are. We talk about what they can expect from us and what we need from them."

Parents often choose a particular early childhood education program because they respond to the values it projects, adds Provençal. "If my director has told parents that we have a certain philosophy here, then the parents had better see that philosophy in action when they see me with the children. Otherwise, there is no point."

Archambault and Portelance like to begin by making sure that, in fact, they and the parents share a similar philosophy about what children

need. "We make sure that everybody agrees that the child is the priority," says Portelance. "You can tell right away if they understand — people who don't feel this way will see very little value in what we do."

Portelance says that they have had an easier time as the years have gone on. "Our philosophy got to be known and parents who share that philosophy started to seek us out."

## Keeping the Conversation Going

The backbone of good communication for Provençal is conversation. "If we don't talk, things will end up badly, so we have to talk.

"I know this as a parent myself when I drop my children off somewhere. I want someone to listen to me," she says, "regardless of whether we've had a bad day or a good day."

She begins with the parents' perspective. "I often say, 'You know your child best. What do you think is best for him or her?'" Other times she may offer some tips and techniques that work for her. "With two boys of my own, I know exactly what it feels like to have them bouncing off the walls."

Other times, she is able to direct parents to other resources. "When a mother is struggling because the father left her before the child was born, that is beyond me, but I can tell her where she can find help."

Finally, she believes it is important sometimes just to be a sympathetic ear. "Being a parent is tough, and it helps people to know that someone else recognizes their efforts."



## Food, Glorious Food

Some communication between early childhood educators, parents and children does not get written in notes or posted on bulletin boards — it is transmitted through daily routines.

Elizabeth Kaye sees an important part of her Trinin Tsul Zzeh Day Home program as communicating several important messages to her community. She provides quality early childhood education, teaching and nurturing for the children. She also educates the parents of Old Crow, Yukon, on the best ways to care for their children. And of all the things she teaches, none is more important to her than good nutrition.

Some parents and grandparents express their affection with treats, buying the child a candy bar or soft drink instead of spending time simply talking or playing with them, Kaye says. This is of special concern for First Nations people, who have a high risk of developing diabetes. "The parents need to give their children teaching," Kaye emphasizes, "not things. They need to be taught love and respect as well as the survival skills of our culture."

To provide a different example to children and parents, Kaye serves a hot lunch and two snacks each day, based on the *Canada Food Guide*, which is prominently posted in her day home. She cooks in the day home's kitchen, often with the children's help. They develop good nutritional habits while learning to make soup and stews, bake bannock (see recipe, right) and watch the techniques of preparing dry meat, a staple for the Gwitch'in people. The children eat well and learn well. "Don't drink pop. It's got sugar bugs!" one little girl at the day home reminds her friends and parents.

Niagara Falls' Pamela Blanchfield and Tignish, Prince Edward Island's Tracy Doyle see a hot, nutritious lunch as an important element of their programs, too, recognizing that it is often the biggest meal of the children's day. "It gives parents peace of mind to know that their child is receiving a nutritious hot meal at lunch or breakfast to keep them going throughout their busy day," says Blanchfield.

Half-day programs have a bit more leeway in the matter of food, usually serving snacks rather than meals. At the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool in Vancouver, each of the two parents on duty that day brings food for snack time. "Sometimes we end up with some weird and wonderful combinations," says Liz Reid, who runs the program, "but it's the best time to get the children's taste buds going," she enthuses. "You can get them to eat things when they're among their peers that they mightn't want to eat at home. It's a good opportunity to educate their palates."

### BANNOCK

4 c. all-purpose flour  
4 tbsp. sugar  
4 tsp. baking powder  
Pinch of salt  
4 tbsp. lard or shortening  
2 c. milk

Pre-heat oven to 400° F. Combine ingredients, but do not overmix. Shape into biscuits and place on lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake until brown on top.



### Here's an Idea...

"Children's hands are not fully developed until the age of seven. Until that time, you have to modify activities so that the children get a good result and can feel proud of what they've done. When teaching about Gwitch'in beading on moose hide, I provide felt for the older children to use, while younger children sew mitten-shaped cards."

— ELIZABETH KAYE



Come for  
a Visit:  
Encouraging  
Community  
Involvement

**A** regular part of many early childhood education programs is a visit from someone in the community, be it a firefighter, a farmer, a parent or a dental hygienist, to talk to the children about what they do.

This year's Prime Minister's Award recipients also see bringing members of the community into the centre as helping them meet another goal: publicizing what goes on in an early childhood education setting and how that work benefits the community.

One example of this is the Breakfast for Learning program run by Pamela Blanchfield at the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls (see "Stories With My Cereal," right).

In Tignish, Prince Edward Island, Tracy Doyle regularly invites local professionals to visit her Magic Moments Child Care Centre. The children learn from the visit and the visiting professional sees firsthand the broad scope of learning activities that take place in an early childhood education setting. A tireless advocate for her programs and early childhood education in general, Doyle also involves the children in local festivals and parades whenever possible, and encourages local businesses to display signs promoting Early Childhood Education Week in November.

Even when it's just for fun, a visitor still gains insight into the professionalism of an early childhood education setting. "A local ranch owner brought her horse right into town for us," says Donna Huyber of Lakeview Children's Centre in Langruth, Manitoba, a member of the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) team. "The children were able to spend a lot of time petting it and watching it. The owner was impressed by the children's good behaviour and by their questions."

## Community Contributions

Making community contributions in areas related to education or child welfare also brings the activities of the early childhood education setting to the attention of community members. For example, Tammy Gingras, another member of the C-FAN team, is part of McCreary, Manitoba's Healthy Child Committee. She meets monthly with a community representative, the kindergarten teacher, a resource teacher and the principal of the local elementary school to design and implement activities in the community promoting early literacy. "It's helped me develop a good working relationship with the school and some awareness in the community of how our early childhood education program contributes to children's literacy," she says.

Vancouver's Liz Reid devotes many hours to improving the teaching and practice of early childhood education in her province, efforts that also contribute to better community understanding of the field. In her spare time away from the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool, she teaches early childhood education courses at Langara College in Vancouver, chairs the Early Childhood Education Advisory Committee at the college and works closely with the students and teachers there.

## Stories with My Cereal

The Breakfast for Learning program is just one of many services for parents, children and the community at the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls. As well as giving school-aged children a nutritious start to their day, the Boys and Girls Club uses the breakfast program to teach social skills and responsibility. Each school-aged child helps set tables and lay out food on a rotating schedule.

"Then we realized that the preschool children were arriving at exactly the same time," says Pamela Blanchfield, program coordinator. "So we decided to incorporate the younger children into the program." Now, an older child guides a younger child through the morning's tasks (with a staff member nearby to assist).

Twice a year, in September when the program funding arrives and in March to celebrate Nutrition Month, the Boys and Girls Club invites the whole community to join the children for breakfast. Many accept the invitation, Blanchfield reports. There were 45 children and 26 adults, including the mayor, city council members, the local member of the provincial legislature, the Boys and Girls Club board of directors, and local police officers and firefighters at the most recent breakfast.

The city council and mayor are also invited to read stories to the children during the breakfast. "It's wonderful. I love it!" Blanchfield exclaims. "You see a mixture of 2-year-olds to 12-year-olds sitting beside policemen in uniform, firefighters and Kiwanis Club members, all eating breakfast together, and more children sitting around a rocking chair while the mayor reads them a story. The kids here, they all know who the mayor is!"

Though enthusiastic about the concept, the adults were initially reluctant to sit down and eat breakfast among the children. The first year, all the adults sat together and the children sat together. "We're learning how to encourage them to mix," Blanchfield says with a laugh. The latest initiative is to serve breakfast to the children on blue plates, while adults get green plates. The blue plates go with blue placemats and the green plates go with green placemats, which are evenly distributed around the tables.

*"Quality child care helps parents go out to work knowing their children are safe."*

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN



### Here's an Idea...

"Take the children for nature walks. Go slowly and help them to really look at everything that's around them. Pick up stones, sticks, leaves and all the other things they find and bring them back to use in crafts, art and science exploration."

— Liz Reid

## Stay SHARP! Learn to Read

Each week, Donna Huyber of the Childcare Family Access Network team from Manitoba visits the local kindergarten class with her small preschool charges as part of the SHARP program. The School-Home Access Reading Program introduces children to the school experience and exposes them to early reading, explains Huyber.

The preschool children play in the room for a few minutes, and then gather around the kindergarten teacher to listen to a story.

They then choose three books from the kindergarten library to take home in their book bag, which also includes a reading journal. Parents fill in the journal when they read the book with their child, reporting what the child enjoyed about the book. The children are also encouraged to colour in their journals and draw pictures for the kindergarten teacher. The next week, after reading the parents' journal entries, the kindergarten teacher helps the children choose other books they will enjoy.

"The children love it. They quickly learn to look forward to their trips to 'the big school'," recounts Huyber.

## Business and Service Group Sponsorships

In addition to writing grant applications to large philanthropic foundations and organizations (see "Funding and Resources: You Can't Always Get What You Want...", page 40), Huyber requests funding for specific projects from local service organizations. "The Legion or the Elks are usually more than happy to donate money to fix the playground or buy a piece of equipment," she says. "Every time I write a letter requesting funds for a project, it's a chance to tell them what we do at the centre, too."

In the same way, the Co-op store in Tignish, Prince Edward Island, is happy to donate food for the annual Magic Moments family barbecue, says Doyle.

## Public Relations

Many early childhood education settings send out newsletters informing parents of their activities. Doyle broadens this public relations effort by also writing letters to local newspapers, keeping them informed and advocating for the support of quality early childhood education.

"Winning this award has done a lot to increase public awareness of early childhood education in our community," adds a pleased and excited Gingras. "People stop us on the street to congratulate us, but then they also ask what the award was about and what we're doing in the centre!"

"Quality child care helps parents go out to work knowing their children are safe," says Rosemarie Klein, the third member of the C-FAN team. "It gives them the opportunity to increase family income, which is a benefit to them and to the whole community."

Parents benefit in other ways, too. For example, special needs children can be placed in intervention programs close to home, and stay-at-home parents can get an occasional break, Klein says. As a result of public relations, sponsorships, community contributions and involvement, Klein sees a slow but steadily growing acknowledgment of the importance of quality early childhood education to children, parents and the community.



## Kids at Centre Stage

Pamela Blanchfield's determination to make the most of every community resource has led to some innovative and exciting learning opportunities for the children at the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls. Among them is a popular after-school arts program sponsored by the Shaw Festival and the Royal Bank.

A team of actors and stagehands from the Shaw Festival visits the Boys and Girls Club every year to lead three workshops for three age groups (4-6, 7-9 and 10-12), for a total of nine sessions. Wigs and Makeup shows children the basics of costuming and makeup, and transforms the children into any number of wonderful characters. Stage Movement teaches the participants the basics of moving around a stage and how stage falls, fights and mayhem are carefully choreographed to avoid injury. The Theatre course provides a basic acting lesson. The children then travel to the Shaw Festival to see a play.


Blanchfield says that exposure to the arts builds confidence and self-esteem. "We have a karaoke machine at the Boys and Girls Club," she delightedly explains. "The little kids just love it! They are not self-conscious at all. Singing along with the machine gives them a tremendous feeling of success." And she's quite sure that this early confidence and stage experience benefit the children throughout their lives.

## You Never Grow Out of Safety

Donna Huyber of the Childcare Family Access Network team in Manitoba continues to promote farm safety — an effort begun in her early childhood education programs (see "Farm Safety Through Early Childhood Education," page 19) — with elementary school students.

Each spring, she gives a 45-minute presentation to local Grade 2 and 5 classes. The presentation, created by Farm Safety 4 Just Kids ([www.fs4jk.org](http://www.fs4jk.org)), includes overheads, a short video and a demonstration using a miniature gravity-fed grain wagon and an action figure to show just how quickly a person can become buried. "Before I come to the school, I send a safety pre-test for the class to complete," says Huyber. "And after my presentation I send a post-test to see how their awareness has improved." She also sends children home with a colouring book and safety game, information for parents and warning stickers to place on tractors and other hazardous machinery.





Funding and Resources:  
"You Can't Always Get  
What You Want . . ."

**B**ut with some careful budgeting, creative project planning and innovative fundraising, "you just might find that you get what you need."

### Grants and Corporate Sponsorships

The Rolling Stones anthem is probably the farthest thing from Pamela Blanchfield's mind when she sits down to write a grant application, but she often does manage to get just what she needs.

Blanchfield, of the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls, applies for and receives an average of five grants a year from various foundations and organizations. For example, she has received money from Ontario's Trillium Foundation for playground improvement, transforming the Club's standard wading pool into an accessible water park.

"The non-profit world tends to keep each other informed about what's out there, what's available," she says with a laugh. "It's just a matter of doing the research and planning, writing it up and sending it in. If it doesn't work, it hasn't hurt." Typing "grants" or "foundations" into an Internet search engine will produce many useful Web links, Blanchfield suggests.

Once she's received funds for a specific project, she carefully tracks how that money is spent and reports back to the granting organization at the end of the fiscal year. "Some organizations want a detailed 25-page report," she says. "Others only require a four- or five-page report." The grant application, budget tracking and reporting processes all take time, she admits, but are well worth it in terms of benefits to the children.



Blanchfield has also collected several corporate sponsors. Each year, they provide money for regular programs, such as her popular after-school arts program, sponsored by the Shaw Festival and the Royal Bank (see "Kids at Centre Stage," page 39).

### Fundraising

Instead of approaching a large organization for a large donation, funds can also be raised by appealing to the general public, point out this year's Prime Minister's Award recipients. Fundraising projects abound, though, and you have to be inventive to catch a possible donor's attention. An innovative fundraising project by the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN) in Manitoba combines C-FAN's need for an interesting, easy-to-administer fundraising project with convenience for parents.

As Tammy Gingras, a member of the C-FAN team, explains, "One of our parents owns a pizza place, so twice a year — at planting and harvest time, when parents are busiest — we sell frozen pizza." The frozen pizza project earns about \$700 in two weeks, she reports. C-FAN also hosts the Home Party Extravaganza, bringing representatives of several direct sales organizations, such as Tupperware and Regal, together in one building.

Another interesting fundraising project takes place in Vancouver. There, the parents of the Little People's Parent Participation Preschool, other community members and local businesses donate items for an annual auction, says Liz Reid, who runs the preschool program. "My husband acts as the auctioneer and we raise anywhere from \$3000 to \$8000 in an evening." The donated items can be anything, she adds, from two evenings of babysitting, to a weekend at a cottage or six home-baked apple pies. It's a fun evening that draws the parents together as friends and community.

### Fees and Subsidies

Of course, the backbone of the budget of most early childhood education settings is the fees paid for each child. These may be paid entirely by the parent or may be fully or partially covered by provincial or territorial government fee subsidies.

*"The Prime Minister's Award has given a lot of credibility and recognition both to the need for quality child care and to me."*

— TRACY DOYLE



Here's  
an Idea...

"A designated fundraising manager — whether it's a staff person, a parent or a volunteer who can work with you — really helps make the most of your fundraising efforts."

— PAMELA BLANCHFIELD





### Here's an Idea...

"We have a different art activity every day, and a different theme each week. To avoid having to come into the centre on weekends or stay late at night, we often use nap time to switch the supplies at the art centre and the theme-based artwork on the walls. On other occasions, when there are only a few school-aged children in the after-school program they enjoy helping us, too."

— DONNA HUYBER

The latter is the case for children attending the Trinin Tsul Zzeh Day Home in Old Crow, Yukon. Before 1990, parents in Old Crow relied on family or sitters to care for their children while they worked. Since most of the jobs in the community only pay minimum wage, parents ended up spending most of their income on child care. Elizabeth Kaye began her day home program when she realized that territorial subsidies were available for low-income parents to place their children in a licensed facility. Kaye's day home provides quality early childhood education to the children of her community at a more affordable cost for parents, a benefit to all concerned.

This benefit is well recognized by the band council, which contributes resources to cover any additional costs Kaye might have, such as improving the outdoor play area. Recently, Kaye submitted a proposal to the council to expand her program, converting her home — which is currently attached to the existing preschool building — into an infant and toddler centre, and renovating another building nearby to house her family.

Tracy Doyle, on the other side of the country and at the other side of the business organizational spectrum, faces a very different situation. "I'm at a crossroads right now," she says with a sigh. "My centre is entirely supported by parent fees and I'm just not making ends meet." Doyle is committed to providing a quality early childhood education program with no compromises on the nutritious meals served, activities provided and qualified and trained staff employed. "Yet I can't raise my fees. It will harm too many



families. And I can't raise the wages, so some staff are leaving because they can earn more at McDonald's or a call centre."

Doyle has approached the provincial government to advocate for quality early childhood education, pointing out that without support she and others will have to close their facilities.

She hopes that the recognition of quality early childhood care and education programs brought by the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education will lead to "partnerships between government organizations and early childhood education providers that will financially support parents, early childhood educators and, most of all, our children." All of society would benefit from such a comprehensive early childhood care system, Doyle insists, pointing out that parents, educators, government and children are all necessary elements to create partnerships and promote the known benefits of quality early childhood care.

"The Prime Minister's Award has given a lot of credibility and recognition both to the need for quality child care and to me," she comments. "I'm hopeful that something will develop."

# If I Had a Wish

**T**his year's recipients remark on their wishes for themselves, their early childhood education settings and the children in their care.

## Support and Recognition

*"I'd love to see support systems for child care centre staff that would allow them to have their professional development days financially supported. I'd also like to see resources for families provided through child care centres — workshops, resource material and equipment."*

— TRACY DOYLE

*"For daycare generally, we'd like to see more flexibility and individuality in the way it is governed and managed. You look at this year's recipients, and you see a lot of different approaches. These people prove you don't need the same approach for everyone."*

— DENIS ARCHAMBAULT AND MARIE-JOSÉE PORTELANCE

*"I'd wish for some extra help running my day home. It's difficult to care for the children all day, then have to take care of the paperwork at night. The government makes new rules about playground equipment, for example, and then doesn't give any money or help to meet them."*

— ELIZABETH KAYE

*"What I wish most in the world is for our society to reflect its family values and provide a constant presence and necessary support to its children so that tomorrow's society will be made up of people who are fulfilled."*

— GENEVIÈVE PROVENÇAL

## Material Needs

*"I would love to be able to provide better wages for my staff. I wish I could provide children with what they need, too, not just material things at the centre, but that pair of winter boots, the swimsuit that would allow them to take swimming lessons, the extra pair of running shoes."*

— PAMELA BLANCHFIELD

*"I'd wish for a new building for our program, with everything all on one level and a good roof that didn't leak. And more farm toys for the children — good quality tractors and combines."*

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN

*"I'd wish for more outside toys — enough bikes, trikes, tractors and scooters that everyone could take a ride."*

— DONNA HUYBER

*"I'd wish for an outdoor play space that the children could explore and exercise in, with a log to climb over, a play fort, a dry creek bed and a little hill to climb."*

— TAMMY GINGRAS

*"I'd wish for our own building, on a little hill where we could climb and slide. We'd have a view and could learn about compass directions, clouds and the weather, and lots of other things."*

— LIZ REID



## Learning is Not Only for the Children



**E**arly childhood education settings across the country fairly hum with the exploration, curiosity and sheer joy of learning that fill a young child's days.

"But why should all this fun be confined to the children?" asks Liz Reid. Known as "Teacher Liz" to more than 30 years of children, Reid runs a preschool program in Vancouver that emphasizes parent participation. Ongoing professional development not only keeps early childhood educators aware of the latest discoveries in child development and psychology, and the newest learning activities and play equipment for their young charges, she says, but it also keeps the profession fresh and interesting.

"Professional development offers many things besides the actual information taught," agrees Rosemarie Klein. An early childhood educator for nearly 10 years in Alberta, British Columbia and now Manitoba, Klein works with the Childcare Family Access Network (C-FAN), a centrally administered network of child care and family services in rural Manitoba. Dedicating time to improving professional skills rather than just using them, maintaining contact with peers and developing different perspectives, and gaining insights and ideas through networking and sharing of experience ensure that "we continue to promote and deliver the quality child care we promise to parents and the community," says Klein (see "Extra Training," page 46).

### *Commitment to Quality Care*

This year's Prime Minister's Award recipients have various backgrounds and training in early childhood education, but they share a commitment to the field that requires some sacrifice and effort.

## Plain-language Policies

Hundreds of children, from infants to teens, visit the Boys and Girls Club of Niagara in Niagara Falls every day. Each program at the Club has policies and procedures appropriate for the activities and ages of the children attending. "This means we have a huge book of board-mandated policies and procedures and provincial requirements for the whole Boys and Girls Club of Niagara," explains Pamela Blanchfield, who manages a number of programs there.

To provide something useful to staff, who come to the Boys and Girls Club with varying qualifications and often work in more than one program, Blanchfield decided to write specific guidelines for her early childhood education staff. These guidelines allow them to learn about early childhood education and her philosophy and expectations.

"I took the relevant policies and wrote each one in simple language in a single paragraph instead of the standard hierarchical format," she says. Instead of a manual of several hundred pages, she created a 30-page staff handbook. Staff members are required to read it and sign a form signifying that they understand it and agree to follow it. Provincial regulations also require signatures for confidentiality, behaviour management and playground policies.

"All good centres have policies and procedures, often simply using provincial requirements, but they can be difficult to read and understand," comments Blanchfield. "I think it's a good idea to have a staff handbook as well, written in plain language."

This is certainly true of Elizabeth Kaye, who began her day home in her fly-in community of Old Crow, Yukon, in 1991. After seeing a need in her community for quality early childhood education, and consulting with the Vuntut Gwitch'in First Nation social services department, she applied for a licence and information package from the territorial government in Whitehorse. "The package gave me the information I needed to operate a family day home — the policies, regulations and procedures to follow," Kaye recalls. Her program was well received by the community and, in 1995, she moved it out of her home to a new building built for her program.



*"Professional development offers many things besides the actual information taught."*

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN



## Extra Training

The wealth of professional development opportunities available today plays tug-of-war with an early childhood educator's limited time, resources and energy. What courses would this year's Prime Minister's Award recipients take if they could?

"I'd like to learn to play a musical instrument," laughs Liz Reid of Vancouver. Her early training in England included building wooden toys, making and clothing dolls, and designing and building play furniture, as well as lessons in child development and activities. This gave her an independent, investigative manner, she explains. "If there's anything I've wanted to do or learn, I've always just gone out and done it."

"I'd take an advanced sign language course," says Rosemarie Klein of the Childcare Family Access Network team in Manitoba. "I taught basic sign language to a speech-delayed child and found it so satisfying that I'd love to learn more about it." Klein would also like to learn more about the business side of early childhood education.

"I'd like to be able to organize professional development days and conferences for all the early childhood educators on Prince Edward Island," remarks Tracy Doyle, owner-operator of Magic Moments Child Care Centre in Tignish. She'd also make "substitute early childhood education workers available so that a centre didn't have to close for the day" when staff wanted to take this training. Psychology would also be a beneficial area for all educators to learn about, she adds.

"I'd like to provide training for parents on how important it is to care for children, to give them not only toys and treats, but also to teach them respect and self-confidence," says Elizabeth Kaye. She points out the need in her community of Old Crow, Yukon, for the children to learn both the traditional ways of their Gwitch'in culture and of the South.

children's development much better and am able to recognize problems and recommend early intervention." In September 2003, she left her community again, to complete the third and final level of her early childhood education training.

Correspondence courses are available to Kaye, but she decided classroom courses suit her needs better, even with the attendant sacrifices. Besides having contact with her peers and help with English when she needs it, taking courses away from home gives her time to concentrate on her studies.

Klein wholeheartedly agrees with this need for concentration. "It takes dedication and persistence to complete correspondence courses." She has also had to make special efforts to maintain her commitment to quality early childhood education, spending two years completing certification requirements at night and in her spare time while working with C-FAN during the day. Though she was an experienced early childhood educator with initial training in Alberta and further training in British Columbia, she was not able to obtain certification from Manitoba's government when her family moved to the province.

"I had to complete the Competency Based Assessment Program by preparing a 240-page portfolio covering 13 functional areas of child development," she explains. As part of this project, Klein designed activities to promote learning in these 13 areas, gathered research sources to support her activities, then carried out and documented the activities with the children. It is an incredible amount of work and an extensive



### Here's an Idea...

"Recently, we transformed our sandbox area into a vegetable garden. The children still get to dig and water, but now they're growing carrots, beans, peas and huge sunflowers.

They think it's the most amazing thing."

— ROSEMARIE KLEIN

In 1999, new regulations required that day home operators in Yukon acquire provincially approved training and certification. This meant Kaye had to leave her community of 350 people for two years to attend Whitehorse College. As a further challenge, the courses were taught in English, her second language. "I made sure I was always four assignments ahead," she recalls with a laugh, "just in case I ran into trouble."

Her hard work was rewarded when she was named valedictorian of her class. The training also made a drastic difference to her daily practices, she reports. "I am more patient, understand the

time commitment, comments her colleague Donna Huyber, who also completed this project.

Although both Klein and Huyber agree that doing the program was worth the effort, "It would be helpful to have some sort of system between provinces to prove competence and equivalence," Klein comments. "I'm sure I'm not the only one who needs to move every few years."

Klein has also taken correspondence courses to gain specialized training in caring for infants and toddlers, and found the courses very thorough and well organized, especially with the recent additions of teleconferencing and e-mail discussion groups.

Contacting a local professional association or post-secondary institution will also reveal many possibilities, advises Klein.

"Here in Vancouver, we have community colleges nearby, two active professional associations that host conferences, workshops and seminars, guest speakers available to come to the centre, and professional magazines for further reference," adds Reid.



Even in a larger community with such a wealth of resources, it can still be difficult to access professional development, Reid acknowledges, especially in the evenings after a busy day at work. She recommends setting goals: for example, one course and one workshop per year. "It's so necessary in order to stay fresh and excited about your job, and as happy and excited every morning to see the children as they are to see you."

*"I am more patient, understand the children's development much better and am able to recognize problems and recommend early intervention."*

— ELIZABETH KAYE

# PNM EOE

## About the Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education

The Prime Minister's Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Education honour outstanding and innovative early childhood educators who excel at fostering the early development and socialization of the children in their care, and at helping build the foundation children need to meet life's challenges. The awards are administered by Industry Canada on behalf of the Prime Minister and in partnership with Social Development Canada and Health Canada.

The committee of early childhood education and care practitioners and stakeholders that selects the award recipients looks for evidence of nominees' innovative approaches and outstanding ability to engage and support the development of the children in their care, and their overall commitment to the development of children and the early childhood education and care profession. Specifically, the committee looks for clear evidence that nominees have excelled in the following four areas:

- ▶▶ support of child development
- ▶▶ innovation
- ▶▶ involvement with parents, families and the community
- ▶▶ commitment and leadership in the field.

To be eligible for an award, educators must work a minimum of 2.5 days a week providing direct education and care to young children in a licensed early childhood education setting (as defined by provincial or territorial government regulations<sup>1</sup>).

Nominees may receive one of two awards: the Certificate of Excellence or the Certificate of Achievement. All recipients receive a financial award, and a certificate, pin and letter of congratulations from the Prime Minister. The financial awards are provided directly to recipients and may be used for professional development, equipment, resource materials or other tools to improve developmental programming and children's experiences related to the educator's work.

The Certificate of Excellence recipients also receive a three-day, all-expenses-paid trip to Ottawa involving tours and best practice sessions, and culminating in the presentation of award certificates at a special event. Certificate of Achievement recipients are honoured at local events involving children, supervisors, colleagues and local members of Parliament or local leaders, as appropriate.

For more information about the program, or to get a copy of the complete nomination guidelines, call 1 800 575 9200, send an e-mail to [ecceawards@ic.gc.ca](mailto:ecceawards@ic.gc.ca) or visit the program Web site ([www.pma-ppm.ca](http://www.pma-ppm.ca)).

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<sup>1</sup> This requirement is waived for nominees who work in Aboriginal Head Start sites on and off reserve or in early childhood education settings on reserve in circumstances in which there is no applicable provincial or territorial government licensing.

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