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Community – University Institute for Social Research

***AN EVALUATION OF FAMILY TO FAMILY TIES:  
A REVIEW OF FAMILY MENTORSHIP IN ACTION***

**by Stacy McRae and Keith Walker**



*Building Healthy Sustainable Communities*

## **Community-University Institute for Social Research**

CUISR is a partnership between a set of community-based organizations (including Saskatoon District Health, the City of Saskatoon, Quint Development Corporation, the Saskatoon Regional Intersectoral Committee on Human Services) and a large number of faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan. CUISR's mission is "to serve as a focal point for community-based research and to integrate the various social research needs and experiential knowledge of the community-based organizations with the technical expertise available at the University. It promotes, undertakes, and critically evaluates applied social research for community-based organizations, and serves as a data clearinghouse for applied and community-based social research. The overall goal of CUISR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations and citizenry to enhance community quality of life."

This mission is reflected in the following objectives: (1) to build capacity within CBOs to conduct their own applied social research and write grant proposals; (2) to serve as a conduit for the transfer of experientially-based knowledge from the community to the University classroom, and transfer technical expertise from the University to the community and CBOs; (3) to provide CBOs with assistance in the areas of survey sample design, estimation and data analysis, or, where necessary, to undertake survey research that is timely, accurate and reliable; (4) to serve as a central clearinghouse, or data warehouse, for community-based and applied social research findings; and (5) to allow members of the University and CBOs to access a broad range of data over a long time period.

As a starting point, CUISR has established three focused research modules in the areas of Community Health Determinants and Health Policy, Community Economic Development, and Quality of Life Indicators. The three-pronged research thrust underlying the proposed Institute is, in operational terms, highly integrated. The central questions in the three modules—community quality of life, health, and economy—are so interdependent that many of the projects and partners already span and work in more than one module. All of this research is focused on creating and maintaining healthy, sustainable communities.

Research is the driving force that cements the partnership between universities, CBOs, and government in acquiring, transferring, and applying knowledge in the form of policy and programs. Researchers within each of the modules examine these dimensions from their particular perspective, and the results are integrated at the level of the Institute, thus providing a rich, multi-faceted analysis of the common social and economic issues. The integrated results are then communicated to the Community and the University in a number of ways to ensure that research makes a difference in the development of services, implementation of policy, and lives of the people of Saskatoon and Saskatchewan.

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An Evaluation of  
Family To Family Ties:  
A Review of Family Mentorship in Action

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

An evaluation of Family To Family Ties, a community-based family mentorship program put forth by Catholic Family Services, was conducted between May and September 2006. The aims of the evaluation were to: document program description; develop a program logic model; describe participant experiences; explore the outcomes of program implementation; and evaluate the program documentation process.

Qualitative data was collected from volunteer families, participant families, funding agents, program staff, and administration, and augmented by a thorough file review and document analysis. An appreciative inquiry process was used to draw on the perceived strengths of both the program and those involved in Family to Family Ties. This appreciative orientation guided the overall evaluation process.

Consultation with representatives from all stakeholder groups involved in program delivery and implementation revealed that genuine relationship building efforts were at the heart of the program delivery. Participants reported that Family to Family Ties meets its objective of connecting with isolated families and remedying debilitating isolation through excellent relationship opportunities. Numerous positive outcomes can be linked to program involvement.

Collected information indicated that capacity building and community development are intertwined throughout the program's implementation. Further to this, mentorship relationships have reportedly been developed on many levels. The program was found to be both economical and sustainable, and has given rise to a situation wherein more than half of all participant matches who participated in this evaluation reported having maintained their friendships beyond the one-year formal matching relationship period.

The documentation process and forms utilized in this program have been refined over time and appear to be meeting the objects of streamlining program delivery. The logic model provided in this report details the program inputs and defined outputs as identified by all stakeholders. Program participants and volunteers reported a high sense of satisfaction with their experience in the program, and extensive relationship building opportunities were documented.

The financial feasibility of the program and the focus on family interaction has made it attractive to funding agencies. Community members reported a change in their perception of families living in poverty and developed a greater appreciation for the real challenges faced by marginalized persons. Overall, the Family to Family Ties program is a gift that the community gives itself.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### ***PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION***

Catholic Family Services (CFS) had previously developed and revised a number of outcome evaluations for assessing the effectiveness of the Family to Family Ties program. Although these evaluation tools had given the organization some interesting information, the agency believed that the program would benefit from an external review. It was important to the organization to gain perspective on the most valuable aspects within the program and to assess its overall worth.

Further to this, the agency was seeking recommendations for streamlining the program to increase its sustainability as a program and to further meet the needs of vulnerable families. Information gleaned from this external evaluation will allow for fine-tuning, so that the organization can offer an enhanced, high quality program that continues to focus on improving family and community health.

### ***AUDIENCES FOR THE EVALUATION REPORT***

Catholic Family Services is the main audience and commissioning agency for this evaluation. It identified a need to help internal decision-making processes related to the Family to Family Ties program. CFS accessed the Community University Institute for Social Research (CUISR) student internship program to facilitate this external evaluation. CUISR is a partnership between community-based organizations and faculty and graduate students from the University of Saskatchewan, serving as a focal point for community-based research. The overall goal of CUISR is to build the capacity of researchers, community-based organizations, and citizenry to enhance community quality of life. Catholic Family Services also identified several funding agencies that were stakeholders in the evaluation process, including the following:

- Government of Saskatchewan (prevention and support grant);
- United Way of Saskatoon;
- Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross;
- School Sisters of Notre Dame;
- James P. Mahoney Institute of the Family; and
- Saskatoon District Health Region.

The agency is in the process of developing marketing strategies for the purpose of selling training opportunities to other organizations interested in delivering the Family to Family Ties program. It is anticipated that portions of this program evaluation report will inform that process.

## ***LIMITS TO THIS EVALUATION***

This program evaluation was intended to collect information from a wide range of program areas, including design, delivery, and impacts. The information provided in this evaluation report is designed to be a snapshot of program delivery related to specific components of the Family to Family Ties Program. The data collection process and analyses contained in this report are primarily focused on participants who have had long-term involvement in the program.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks is expressed to all those who participated in the evaluation. Appreciation is also extended to all Catholic Family Services staff involved in this evaluation. CUISR, too, is acknowledged here for providing opportunities to students and community organizations to partner, grow, and learn through such internship opportunities. Finally, gratitude is expressed to Maria Basualdo and Trish St. Onge for guidance, support, understanding, and respect.

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE EVALUATION OBJECT**

Catholic Family Services is an organization that works with individuals and families to provide a wide range of supports and services. CFS services are available to everyone in the community. What follows is a description of the organization and its mission.

### ***ORGANIZATION AND MISSION***

Catholic Family Services of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, in operation since 1941, is the commissioning organization for this program evaluation. The organization's mission is to promote a higher quality of life by developing and supporting the inherent strengths of individuals, families, and the community. This strength-based approach permeates the organization and is embedded in all of its program delivery. CFS services are open to everyone, and the agency, which adheres to the Social Work Code of Ethics, is concerned with the values of social justice and self-determination.

Catholic Family Services characterizes its services as follows:

- provides accessible, equitable, and professional services to help build a stronger, healthier and more positive community;
- is open to anyone in the community regardless of religious affiliation or ability to pay; and

- is a not-for-profit, non-governmental agency led by a volunteer community-based board of directors.

CFS is located in downtown Saskatoon and a part of the Saskatoon Community Service Village. The Saskatoon Community Service Village is the only one of its kind in Canada, housing seven sustainable non-profit community agencies that share resources and collaborative services.

### ***FAMILY TO FAMILY TIES PROGRAM DESCRIPTION***

Family to Family Ties has been in operation in Saskatoon for more than nine years. There is currently one program coordinator who organizes program delivery during ten months of the year on a three-days-per-week basis. The program also receives twenty percent of the general administrative support staff time. During the calendar year 1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006, ninety-two families (two hundred and sixty-six adults and children) were involved with various components of Family to Family Ties. The objective of the program coordinator is to maintain eight to ten active matches at any given time.

### ***PROGRAM HISTORY***

The Family to Family Ties program offered by CFS has been operating since 1997. It came into being when many low-income families expressed a desire to become more self-reliant, yet lacked the resources and support to move forward. Family to Family Ties is modeled on a similar program originally offered in Minneapolis through Episcopal Community Services Inc. A former executive director of CFS heard about the Minneapolis program while attending a conference in Winnipeg. After consultation with the board and staff, CFS-Saskatoon adapted the program and currently holds the copyright to the Family to Family Ties program.

### ***ELEMENTS OF THE PROGRAM***

Family to Family Ties matches low-income families (participants) with volunteer families and/or individuals (volunteers). The definition of family, in this program, encompasses all diverse family structures found in the community.

The volunteer families are trained to provide information and ongoing support to assist participant families in taking charge of their lives. This designed partnership is based on an assumption that volunteer and participant families can learn from each other. In addition to being inclusive, this model offers opportunities for entire families to participate. Families are normally asked to commit to a match for one year, although in some instances a relationship may be extended for a longer period of time. The role



of the volunteer family is to act as a support, role model, advocate, mentor, and friend to the participant family.

Professional personnel use screening tools to facilitate the family matching process. Screening is done to identify families dealing with issues that might overwhelm volunteers and/or be better served by professionals. Meetings with participants and volunteers have been found to be necessary to lay the groundwork for successful matches. Boundaries for the relationship are established during the participant and volunteer families' initial meeting. Further to this, participant families identify specific goals on which they wish to work with the support of their volunteer family. The program has a professionally trained coordinator who is available to both families to support the relationship and monitor the development of the partnership.

## **OVERVIEW OF EVALUATION PLAN AND PROCEDURES**

All study participants were selected in a purposeful sampling design, either identified by program staff, program participants and administration, or selected by the evaluator after a file review.

### ***PARTICIPANTS***

#### **Funding agents**

Program funding agents were asked to participate in individual taped interviews to explore their expectations of the program and relevant criteria for funding approval. The purpose of these interviews was to explore what elements of the program were most important to funding agents for the purpose of establishing sustainable future funding for the program.

#### **Program staff**

Program staff and administrators also participated in individual taped interviews to explore a wide range of topics, including forms, program delivery, recruitment, program logic, and the program's future goals.

#### **Volunteer and participant families**

Current and alumni families who both volunteer and participate in the Family to Family Ties program were asked to participate in semi-structured focus groups that were audio recorded. Further individual interviewing occurred to gather more in-depth themes and stories. The goal of the research was to extrapolate stories, insights, and ideas about successful elements of the program and what had been the most relevant impact for participating families.

## ***RECRUITMENT***

### **Funding agents**

Funding agents were contacted by Catholic Family Services administration to explore their availability and interest in participating in this research. Follow-up contact was made to arrange mutually convenient times for interviews.

### **Program staff**

Catholic Family Services staff volunteered to participate in the research.

### **Volunteer and family participants**

Volunteer and participant families were invited to participate in taped focus groups by the program coordinators. The program coordinators contacted current and alumni participants by phone, explaining the review and asking whether they would be willing to have their names placed on a study participant list. Alumni contact numbers were retrieved during the file review process. A script was used to explain the purpose of the study and the role of participants in the research (**Appendix A**). Names from this list were used to arrange for family group interviews. The interview roster was developed based on availability of the participants for the focus groups. In the spirit of the program, Catholic Family Services also provided a meal to those who attended the focus groups.

## ***DATA COLLECTION***

### **Focus group interviews**

Two focus group interviews were conducted with adult participants of the Family to Family Ties program. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form to participate in the research (**Appendix B**). The first group consisted of volunteer participants, the second of participant families. These focus group interviews were held at Catholic Family Services offices and tape recorded (and supplemented by field notes). A focus group script was read at the beginning of the interviews to address confidentiality issues and the rights of the participants as research subjects (**Appendix C**). A review of the focus group recordings allowed for grouping a variety of themes. Specifically quoted material from the audio recordings was reviewed and approved by participants (**Appendix D**).

### **Family group conversations**

Three individual interviews were conducted in the homes of volunteer and participant families to gather more in-depth information. A portion of these interviews included participation from children in the presence of their parents. Adult participants were asked

to sign a consent form for their own participation (**Appendix B**) in the study and that of their children (**Appendix E**). A child assent script was also read to any children participating in the study (**Appendix F**). These interviews were tape recorded and augmented with field notes, then summarized into important themes. As with the focus groups, any quoted material from the transcripts was reviewed and approved by the participants.

### **Individual interviews**

Individual interviews were held with one program funding agent and five Catholic Family Services staff, each lasting approximately one hour. Matters of consent followed the same protocols for the focus group and family interviews.

### **File review**

A file review of recent and historic alumni files was conducted. The aims of this file review were to: explore the use of specific forms in the program over time; familiarize the evaluator with the program prior to qualitative data collection; collect specific data about program volunteers and participants by using a file review rubric (**Appendix G**); and examine documentation consistency and elements of program delivery through a forms review checklist (**Appendix H**).

### **Document analysis**

Documents related to the program were reviewed for the purpose of exploring the program in the context of materials associated with program delivery and promotion. Documents reviewed were recorded in a document analysis log (**Appendix I**).

## **EVALUATION QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES USED TO FOCUS THIS REVIEW**

### ***METHODOLOGY***

The methodology used in this evaluation guided the collection of data in such a fashion that would allow for logic model formulation, clarification of program description, and an outcome analysis of the program.

### ***REVIEW QUESTIONS***

The purpose of this review was to gather information, evaluate, and report on the following question areas:

- 1) How might the logic and dynamics that drive this program be described?
- 2) To what extent is the program working effectively and efficiently, and what might be suggested to improve its operations and effectiveness?
- 3) What would make this program attractive to funding agents?
- 4) What are the functions and flow of the forms used in the program? How effective and efficient are those forms to program operation? What improvements might be made to this aspect of the operations?

### ***THEORETICAL APPROACH***

This research was conducted in the context of appreciative inquiry, the goal of which was “to engage the organization in dialogue that creates multiple positive possibilities and moves the organization in the direction of the most desired future” (Magruder-Watkins and Mohr, 2001: 11). Appreciative inquiry is based on the Four D model:

**Discovery → Dream → Design → Destiny**

The program evaluator used this approach to guide the process, while focusing on uncovering the following aspects of the program itself:

- achievements;
- assets;
- unexplored potential;
- innovations;
- strengths;
- elevated thoughts;
- opportunities;
- benchmarks;
- high point moments;
- lived values;
- traditions;
- strategic competencies;
- stories;
- expressions of wisdom;

- insights into the deeper corporate spirit or soul; and
- visions of valued and possible futures.

Further to this, the evaluator sought to gather information in the context of the program's three points of connection: inter-agency activity; inter-professional activity; and direct case work.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In order to gain a better appreciation of the Family to Family Ties program, relevant literature was consulted to situate this program in current research. Selected research on mentorship, childhood poverty, resilience theory, and community capacity building is summarized below and provides background for the Family to Family Ties program.

### ***MENTORING***

There is currently a shortage of research and information available about family mentorship. However, some of the more interesting features of family mentorship are identified in this report. For example, family volunteers reported that important features include volunteering together, building family relationships (particularly in this program), and participation based on the family schedule and availability. It should be further noted that family mentorship is unique in design from other mentorship models.

A meta-analysis of current research on mentorship program delivery measures conducted by Tannis (2006) is presented in **Table 1**. These measures are useful in terms of program planning and delivery of mentorship programs in general. These may be used to provide guidance in program planning and redesign.

### ***CHILDHOOD POVERTY***

Catholic Family Services is interested in the most vulnerable of groups being served by the Family to Family Ties program. These are the families who are raising children while simultaneously struggling with the day-to-day experiences of living in poverty. In particular, children in these families are at a crucial and vulnerable time in their development.

**Table 1. Measures for Mentorship Programming.**

<b>Internal Contributors to Success</b>	<b>External Contributors to Success</b>
Adherence to high standard and best practices A focus on fostering the conditions for relationship building Priority on program flexibility and variation Providing realistic public relations and promotional material	Competent, caring, and consistent mentors Supported, responsive mentees Current high degree of interest in mentoring Empirical evidence supporting the value of mentoring
<b>Internal Deterrents to Success</b>	<b>External Deterrents to Success</b>
Ineffective mentoring practices Unbalanced mentoring approach Program misrepresentation	Lack of infrastructure Lack of volunteers Extreme poverty, family instability, and sexual/physical abuse Research limitations and inconsistencies

Source: Tannis, 2006.

Researchers agree that adequate income and a healthy start in life have a long-term impact on the health and well-being of children. Many children who become part of the Family to Families Ties program are living in families who have difficulty providing an adequate, healthy, and safe environment for their children. Children who live in poverty encounter numerous hurdles to healthy development and are at an elevated risk for a wide range of negative outcomes to their well-being. Children living in low income situations are more than twice as likely to have low levels of vision, hearing, speech, mobility, dexterity, cognition, and emotion; less likely to have an annual visit to the dentist; and are more likely to be exposed to environmental contaminants (Campaign 2000, 2005).

Furthermore, these children are more likely to be exposed to crime and substandard housing, and to continue a cycle of poverty in their adulthood. A staggering number of children, more than 1.2 million in Canada, have been identified as living in poverty. Thirty-one percent of these children live with parents who have full time employment and are working all year long, but nevertheless remain in poverty. Aboriginal and immigrant families are significantly over-represented among those living in poverty (Campaign 2000, 2005).

In a global survey on child poverty rates conducted by UNICEF, Canada was ranked nineteenth of the twenty-six wealthiest countries included in the study. Canada was found to have 14.9% of its children living below the national poverty line. (Denmark was ranked best, at 2.4 %, and the United States ranked twenty-fifth, with 21.9% of children living in poverty.) Canada was reported as reinvesting a modest five percent of its national income on social spending. The UNICEF survey reported that moderate changes to government spending could have a significant impact on reducing child poverty rates. For example, the United Kingdom, which seeks to completely eliminate child poverty, has reduced poverty rates by twenty-five percent in a short time (UNICEF, 2005).

In 2002, Saskatchewan's percentage of children living in poverty was higher than the national average—18.7% or 43,800 children. (Campaign 2000, 2005). A significant portion of Saskatoon's residents struggles with poverty. The median income of the wealthiest neighborhoods is six times greater than that of the poorest. The number of people who are living below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO) is 39,955 people or 21% of the population ([tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s29.html#aboutpov](http://tamarackcommunity.ca/g2s29.html#aboutpov)).

Family to Family Ties is a program that reaches children living in poverty and their families by creating supports and opportunities. Predictably, the preventative nature of the program will have long-term positive effects for this group and the community as a whole.

### ***RESILIENCE THEORY: MAKING A CASE FOR FAMILY TO FAMILY MENTORSHIP***

Resilience theory is beneficial because it allows for examination of successful processes on which people have relied to overcome difficult situations. The families who are involved in the Family to Family Ties program have faced adversity, and their children are subject to heightened developmental risk due to low socioeconomic status (SES) and associated negative experiences.

Resilience theory research has developed over the past thirty years as a means to explore those factors that create positive outcomes for individuals who face threats to their early development (Flynn, Ghazal, Legault, Vandermeulen, and Petrick, 2004; Masten, 2001; Roosa, 2000). In general, “resilience researchers seek to understand the propensity for health among at-risk populations” (Unger, 2004). Masten (2001) explained that “the recognition and study of resilient children has overturned many negative assumptions and deficit-focused models about the development of children growing up under the threat of disadvantage and adversity” (227). While research has clearly indicated that children who live in low SES situations are at risk, resilience theory invites us to understand those assets that are most effective and valuable to such children.

This information is critical for considering the development of programs, services, and resources for families living with limited financial means. It is important to explore

how Family to Family Ties can promote resilience and provide a high quality experience that is grounded in resilience research. Resilience researchers encourage this process in the development of programs, particularly for those that support children and youth. (Fergus and Zimmerman, 2005). Research into resilience provides a foundation for prevention intervention by identifying individual and environmental factors that contribute to healthy development and adaptation to adversity (Robinson, 2000).

Resilience is not something that one possesses or lacks. Fraser, Richman, Galinski, and Maeda (1999) have stated, “Rather than an invariant trait, resilience is a dynamic response to a multiplex of biological, psychological, social and other environmental influences” (136). Individual characteristics, family functioning, peer relationships, and community supports all work together in a complex system to promote resilience and, conversely, to create risk (Flynn et al, 2004; Masten, 2001; Newman and Blackburn, 2002). Research on resilience has moved away from placing responsibility on the individual by reframing resilience as a community process that requires participation from everyone.

The social injustices associated with high levels of risk and adversity are important considerations in resilience research (Osher et al, 1999; Unger, 2004; Werner and Smith, 2001). Flynn et al (2004) detailed four levels identified in resilience research in which protective and interactive processes can be found: individual; family; interpersonal (peer); and community. It is important to note that Family to Family Ties operates in all these aspects. Through the development of individual and community capacity building, Family to Family Ties is situated as a program that can and does promote resilience.

Models of resilience provided in research begin to explain how risk and protective factors interact to promote positive outcomes. Jackson and Martin (1998) explained that “some children who face stressful, high risk situations fare well in life, but their chances of doing so depend on the extent to which the risk factors in their lives are balanced by protective factors, both individual and environmental” (571). Dearden (2004) suggested that many risk factors faced by children and youth today are not easily changed. Therefore, increasing known protective factors in the lives of children and youth who face adversity is a useful means to promote resilient adaptation. Understanding the dynamic interaction of risk and protection is a complicated process involving many factors. Masten (2005) provided a summary of ten important factors identified in resilience research that contribute to a better understanding these processes:

1. Risk and problems tend to snowball, particularly in transitional periods.
2. Problems rise as risk accumulates.
3. High risk usually means low assets or resources.
4. Some at risk children succeed “off the gradient” in highly positive trajectories.
5. High risk children who succeed have more resources and protections.



6. Systems at multiple levels play a role in individual resilience.
7. What matters is not rare or extraordinary.
8. Resilience can be promoted.
9. Resilience research provides useful framework for action.
10. No child is invulnerable to sustained adversity.

The experience of the program has been to promote resilience at the individual, peer, family, and community level. Family to Family Ties has the potential to mobilize protective factors at every level by focusing on the basic approaches that work together to improve outcomes for children and families, while trying to change the overall social structure that creates poverty and isolation. Specifically, the program provides numerous venues for individual skill development, peer relationship building, family connection, and the formation of community networks. It is within these opportunities that resilience and capacity building are generated.

### ***COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING AND CHILD WELFARE***

Family to Family Ties has a logical connection to child welfare agencies through its goal of promoting the well-being of children through of healthy and safe family systems. In his presentation and workshop, “Enough is Enough: Building Community Capacity to Transform Child Protection,” Barter (2006) invited the child welfare community to adopt community capacity building approaches to work with families. Barter highlighted the importance of redefining how child welfare services are delivered, arguing that the current models and methods of child welfare services are inherently counter-productive to healthy community and family development. Family to Family Ties is a new and innovative approach to child welfare service delivery from a community capacity building perspective. The program utilizes pro-active and preventative approaches to working with families. Community capacity building is based on the premise that relationships, and the process of relationship building, are key elements of working within communities and must be a critical component of change making opportunities. Family to Family Ties participants involved in this review reported vast potential for community capacity building through their experience in the program.

## SUMMARY OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

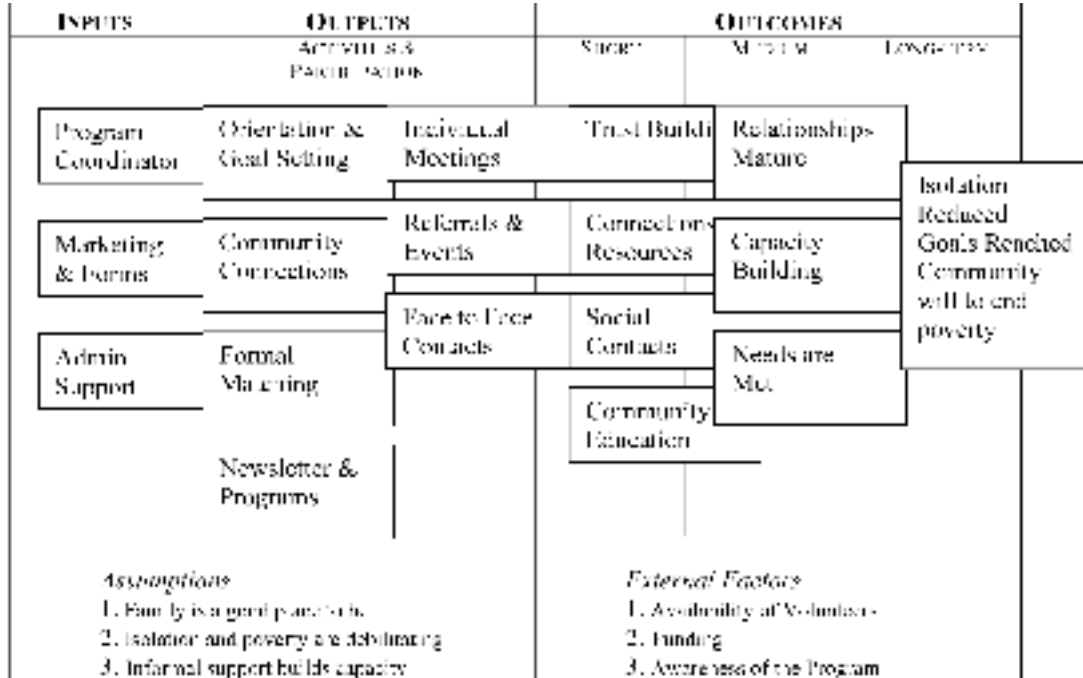
### *PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL*

A logic model was employed in this evaluation for the purpose of creating a visual picture of how the program is conceptualized from beginning to end. The following five core components are depicted in this action program logic model:

- Inputs:** resources, contributions, and investments that go into the program.
- Outputs:** activities, services, events, and products that reach people who participate or who are targeted.
- Outcomes:** results or changes for individuals, groups, communities, organizations, communities, or systems.
- Assumptions:** the beliefs that we have about the program, the people involved, and the context and the way we think the program will work.
- External Factors:** the environment in which the program exists, including a variety of external factors that interact with and influence the program action.

**Figure 1. Logic Model for Family to Family Ties.**

Situation: Family to Family Ties (Family Mentorship in Action)  
 Priorities: Ending isolation, building community capacity, influencing social change



A program logic model is useful for displaying the sequence of actions that describe what the program is and will do—how investments link to results. The logic model developed for this evaluation is intended to build on the existing Family to Family Ties process model to reflect the maturation of the program since its initiation.

### **Inputs and outputs**

This program logic model defines three main program inputs: program coordinator, marketing and documentation, and administrative support. These actions work together to create four main program activities:

- (1) the screening, orientation, and goal setting processes between both participant and volunteer families that happen at the outset of program delivery;
- (2) participants are linked with existing community resources;
- (3) the Family to Family Ties community receives regular newsletters that detail the activities of the program and the larger community; and
- (4) the families participate in a formal matching process.

### **Participation**

These activities are carried out through a series of participatory actions. This participation can come in the form of individual meetings, such as orientation sessions and home visits; the active involvement in referrals to community services, such as specialized child care services, parenting programming, or summer camps for kids; or the bi-annual special events coordinated by the Family to Family Ties program coordinator. Further to this, the specialized educational opportunities, such as the collective kitchen offered to all those involved in Family to Family Ties in partnership with other community organizations, is another venue for participation. The basis of this participation is also exemplified by the regular contact that families make with each other during the formal matching process, many of which are supportive phone calls and face-to-face meetings in the community or in family homes.

### **Goals and outcomes**

The overall goal of the Family to Family Ties program is to end isolation, build community capacity, and influence social change to eliminate poverty in the community. The short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes of the program reflect how these goals are achieved. Trust building, connection to resources within the community, social contacts, and community education are short-term processes that directly influence the medium- and long-term outcomes. Through these initial outcomes, relationships mature, participant capacity is increased, and needs are met. The final outcome is that there are

fewer families living in isolation, goals are reached, and the community itself has a will and desire to end poverty, and will act to reach this end.

### **Assumptions and external factors**

The program itself is based on three overarching beliefs. The first is that family must be a good and desirable place. Family, after all, is our first experience in life and is crucial to the creation of healthy communities. The second belief is that poverty and isolation are debilitating influences on family and community. The third belief is that having informal and lasting support in the community builds capacity and abilities that will positively influence a family's healthy development.

Family to Family Ties is directly influenced by three critical external factors: the availability of volunteers; program funding; and overall awareness of the program.

## **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S COMMENTS**

In the delivery of human services, especially in times of limited resources and high rates of poverty, it is important to have clear vision and leadership to sustain organizations and move forward an agenda that cultivates change. Executive directors often adopt this role in the non-profit community, which is made up of individuals who are creative, energetic, and able to quickly align their agencies with the needs of the communities in which they work. Trish St. Onge exemplifies these qualities in her work with Catholic Family Services. She is a true visionary and her enthusiasm for working within the community to sustain real and lasting capacity building is evident when she talks about the Family to Family Ties program.

St. Onge provided the following reflections on the program, drawing on her extensive experience with Family to Family Ties as a program coordinator and current administrator.

*What we are trying to create is what might be natural in your own life. Someone to problem solve with, someone to talk to when you are not sure, someone to listen.*

*We are trying to create opportunities and to open possibilities for change. We are intentional about doing things like exposing kids to camps, summer theatre, and playful times in the park, watching other families who we perceive to be healthy, watching them make supper. Without having these experiences, how will they know what they can aspire to? How will they get exposed to other ways of living? These experiences create some idea of where they are headed. What does life look like for other people in the community?*

If children and families in our community live in isolation, surrounded by poverty in many cases, it can prevent them from experiencing other ways of being and living that are within their ability to create in their own lives with support and community resources. Family to Family Ties is designed to meet this objective by introducing children to opportunities that they may not otherwise have, with a hope of seeing the possibilities for living differently.

*It is not uncommon to have met families who can't identify anyone as a support who isn't a professional, which is exactly the opposite of what you will find in a well connected family—informal support.*

When one's support system consists of only those who can be contacted during business hours, there is a quality of life deficiency. Families require natural, sustainable supports to grow, to cope with adversity, and to celebrate life's achievements. Family to Family Ties is delivered in such a way as to provide opportunities for this kind of natural experience.

*Sustainability is demonstrated [by this program] in moving families out of dependence into inter-dependence. Most of us exist in interdependence. The goal is to create and stimulate resilience and hope that results in taking chances and finding the courage to make changes—confidence.*

Family to Family Ties helps develop connections on many levels through all the actions of the program. Relationships are formed through connections with other families in the community. Through the course of these experiences, individuals and families alike begin to see themselves in a new way. These newfound views of self and others are intended to lead to new growth and to create a snowball effect that leads to real changes and sustainable relationships.

*These families are involved at the truest level of community—in each other's homes, sharing meals, and parenting.*

Families involved in Family to Family Ties are intended to experience the program in natural environments where families normally interact with one another.

*This is not a service—this is an experience. Service denotes power—this program is a powerful program, but no one is in power. Funnily enough, that is in itself empowering.*

There are often real or perceived power imbalances between families and formal service providing agencies. These imbalances can act as barriers to meaningful service provision. Family to Family Ties is designed to move beyond service provision and into purposeful engagement where all families involved participate by living out experiences in a shared and dialogical process. The giving and receiving of support coupled with the maturation of friendships contrasts formal working relationships and the perceived unilateral delivery of a formal service. Families in the program do not receive anything, but rather are living out experiences.

*The people who are in the program are now maintaining the program; many participants are now becoming mentors. The goal is to empower people so that they believe they can empower others—that's brilliant and we are not paying anybody, nobody's getting paid. It's the people out there who are doing the work—real live people who have interest in their community and in each other's lives.*

Family to Family Ties is a vehicle for community capacity building. Families involved in the program have become a community in and of themselves, with the power to cultivate new relationships with other families who desire the experience of being connected and supported in this way.

*Organizations who fund this program are starting to realize that this is different. This program is not coordinator dependent, a staff person can leave, be on hold, and the program continues. Who else can say that without massive disruption? This is an inexpensive, humanistic, productive, demonstratable program.*

Current federal and provincial economic structures limit expenditures for social programs designed to meet the needs of marginalized groups in our society. Accordingly, non-profit and government organizations alike often compete for resources and funding. Family to Family Ties is created on a model that is extremely cost efficient.

*Sustainability is key. We value ending isolation. When you are so deflated it is hard to seek even emotional support or friendship. You have to set up an artificial friendship to get it started ... a bridge. A friend is someone who reaches for you hand and takes your heart. A bridge is the hand, and this is offered through other programs. However, the sustainability is the heart. There is no agenda for anyone involved in it other than friendship.*

Ultimately, Family to Family Ties is intended to create opportunities for individuals and families so as to make lasting connections that become part of the ongoing land-

scape of their lives. These relationships are not dependent on referral criteria or specific needs, nor are they designed with a formal end point of delivery. Rather, relationship building is open to everyone involved in the program and is encouraged at every level of involvement.

### ***PARTICIPANT AND VOLUNTEER FAMILY PROFILES***

Participant and volunteer families bring skills and strengths to the program that allow for reciprocal experiences where both families find that they are able to delight in the experience of sharing time and building a relationship. Many participant families have developed a high degree of skills and abilities associated with surviving, and in some cases thriving, while living with limited means and resources.

Time and again, these incredible skills and strengths are demonstrated, which allows program staff and volunteer families to connect more easily with participant families and continue with capacity building opportunities that benefit all. What follow are just a few glimpses into the lives of Family to Family Ties participants and volunteers alike. These examples reflect some of the life situations of those who are directly involved in Family to Family Ties. Pseudonyms have been used to maintain confidentiality.

#### **Mary, Cindy, Alex, and Dawn**

Mary is the sole caregiver for her three grandchildren. She is very busy, ensuring that the children receive the support, supervision, and care needed to grow and succeed in life. She joined the Family to Family Ties program after a friend of hers who had been involved suggested that she and the children could benefit from additional support. Mary explained that raising a new generation of children as a grandparent was a big challenge. She wanted help “learning how to parent all over again.”

Mary was matched with Ann. Mary and Ann completed their one-year match, but more than a year and a half later they continue to nurture a close relationship. They talk twice a week by phone and get together in person whenever possible. Mary recently relied on Ann’s support when the family experienced stress due to the illness of one of the children.

Mary has found it difficult in the past to open up to others and ask for support. She described herself as a shy person by nature, and initially taking a risk to get to know Ann was scary. Mary reported that becoming involved in the Family to Family Ties program has been a great boost to her confidence. At the time of this research, she was preparing to present a speech to over a hundred people, which she believed would have been impossible before her involvement in the Family to Family Ties program. Mary has continued to be involved and active in her community and in the lives of the children whom she is raising.

Mary also feels a great comfort in knowing that she can phone Ann for support from a non-judgmental person. Mary shared that she sometimes lacks this emotional support from her own family, but that Ann is able to provide this for her and that it keeps her going.

Cindy, Alex, and Dawn also have been able to participate in some special times associated with the Family to Family Ties program. The children attend program functions where they enjoy games, share a meal, and socialize with other children and families. Cindy especially liked being involved in the Christmas get together where she had fun, saw some friends, and took home gifts and other things that the family needed. The family still has the clock that they won as a prize in their living room to remind them of their special connection to the program.

Mary and the children strongly recommend the program to other families and have found it to be unlike anything else in which they have ever been involved.

### **Deanne, Laura, Christopher, and Lisa**

Deanne is a single parent of three children. When she was first connected with the Family to Family Ties program, she could not identify a single support in her life. Deanne and her children often stayed home in their small apartment with little outside interaction. Deanne's youngest child had a developmental delay and the family had not been able to connect with services for proper assistance. Deanne reported feeling unhappy with her current situation and wanted changes for her and her children.

The Family to Family Ties program coordinator was able to link Deanne and her children to supports and services readily available to them in the community. An assessment was sought for her youngest child. The Family to Family Ties coordinator also identified a play school where special services were in place to address concerns around child development. Deanne made connections with a local recreational program and became a regular team member on a local team. Laura became involved in the Family to Family Ties special events, where she took a leadership role in volunteering. Suddenly, this family, disconnected from its community, was now an active member within the community, all before being matched with another family.

### **Mark, Dakota, and Rain**

Mark was trying to complete his education so that he could obtain better employment. He is a single dad who was also struggling to be an effective parent, but feeling alone and in need of support. He wanted a better education and sustainable employment for himself and his children so that the family might have greater security in the future.

Mark was matched with Bill and Eva, a retired couple who had professional experience as teachers. Mark found it initially awkward to make a connection with the



couple, but soon found that he and his children felt very comfortable spending time with Bill and Eva.

Bill and Eva shared time and resources with Mark and his children. For example, they had an extra computer available and provided it as a resource to Mark and his children. Mark also found that he had someone to talk to about parenting problems. In general, Mark felt support and encouragement for pursuing and completing his education.

Mark, Dakota, and Rain still have a connection with Bill and Eva, even though the match was completed some time ago. Mark and his family have since gone on to become mentors to other families in need of additional support and encouragement. Mark is employed and the children are busy with sporting events, school, and the Family to Family Ties program.

### **Kamal, Irena, Jameen, and Kala**

This family found themselves living in a new country with new customs that were very different from their own. In addition to these life changes, they also found themselves without the support of their extended family, who were still living in their country of origin. Irena explained that this was very hard for their family, for in her country family plays a key role in people's lives. For example, there were no nursing homes or shelters because families look after each other. Irena found herself missing that family interaction and felt that her family in Saskatoon lacked the support and connection to others necessary for proper adjustment in their new community.

Irena, Kamal, Jameen, and Kala were matched with Donna, Sarah, and Patrick. Irena found that having a family to visit was very nice, and Jameen and Kala felt that they had gained friends in this new place. Irena was so please to hear Jameen and Kala say, "These are my friends," when the two families would meet.

### **Alison, Dana, Sarah, Brandon, and Derrick**

Alison and her four children experienced a tremendous loss when Alison's husband died suddenly. Alison, normally shy and focused on the care of her daughter, who has special needs, found herself having to be the family's main communicator and decision maker. Alison did not feel prepared for this sudden role and felt that she and the children needed additional support. She and her family were matched with Karen and Don, and their children Steven, Joshua, and Darren. The families soon found that a shared love of hockey helped spark a special connection. This shared passion helped solidify the relationship that they maintain today.

Alison quickly began to realize how much she had needed someone to talk to about her decisions and the need for these supports to be aware of her children's personalities

and special needs. Don and Karen were there to support her when she doubted herself while working through the process of becoming an advocate and the leader of her family—the role that her husband had played so well before his death.

Alison is now working on employability for herself and her children as they move into adulthood. Alison felt that the confidence she needed to move on in her life derived, in part, from her connection to this program. She believed that she is a stronger and more capable parent now, and that Karen and Don's encouragement to have all the children stay involved in extra curricular events has helped build her children's strengths.

### **Kathy, Steve, and Brittany**

Kathy is a part time student and a single parent of two young children. Her son Steve has special needs that require additional supports in school. Kathy reported that she experienced a very traumatic childhood, and, as a result, has limited contact with her natural family and has struggled to build trusting relationships. After hearing about the Family to Family Ties program through her counselor, Kathy explained that she found the courage to register for the program because she is committed to creating a safe and happy childhood for her own children so that they do not experience the same pain that she has had to endure. Kathy wants her children to experience love and support, and believes that Family to Family Ties can help her achieve this goal.

Kathy was matched with Cora, who is also a single parent. Kathy reported that Cora has acted as a significant support in her life, particularly because she is also a parent to a child with special needs. Kathy reported that her social skills and those of her children have improved dramatically since building a relationship with Cora. Cora is also going to school and the two talk about the struggles of single parenting while completing education programs. Kathy also observed that her children have demonstrated increased competency at school.

### **Tim, Doreen, Shelly, and Jill**

Tim and Doreen were blessed with a healthy family and the resources to live comfortably in a safe home with good jobs and support from friends and family. They felt that getting involved in a program like Family to Family Ties would be worthwhile and would allow them and their daughters to reach out and get to know another family. They were quite pleased when they found out that they would be matched with Natalie and her infant son Jarvis.

Tim, Doreen, Shelly, and Jill were moved at how Natalie worked so hard to overcome the daily struggles of living in a low income situation with a disability, and as a single parent to a young child. The relationship between the two families strengthened over time through regular phone contact, visits, and shared meals. A special treat for Tim,

Doreen, and their children was Natalie's cooking skills. Both families were able to get together and enjoy the special meals that Natalie would prepare. There were sometimes challenges, but the families worked to overcome these differences with the support of the program coordinators. Jarvis grew to love playing in Tim and Doreen's backyard, in part, perhaps, because he and his mother lived in an apartment. These two families have stayed connected for more than five years.

### **Gill and Janice**

Gill and Janice have been retired for a number of years. They moved to Saskatoon after living in a rural community for most of their lives. Janice found that she had extra time on her hands and wanted to get involved in the community. Gill supported this and agreed to help out. The two were matched with Joanne and her daughter Sadie. Janice and Gill were honored guests at Sadie's birthday parties and special school functions, including band recitals. Joanne and Sadie joined Gill and Janice on a family camping trip during the summer for an opportunity to relax and get away from the city.

Janice explained that after the one-year match concluded she really felt that Joanne was a friend, and the two families have remained connected for over five years. Janice has found that she is more aware of the daily struggles faced by people in the community who have a low fixed income. She remains amazed at how Joanne and Sadie find ways to celebrate small things and remain positive despite the financial constraints that they face. Janice and Gill have a deep respect for Joanne's strong commitment to her child, who, despite having a learning disability, remains involved in school and extra-curricular activities.

Janice felt that being involved in this program has been fun and led to a lasting friendship. She has found that she has done things that she would have otherwise not had the opportunity to do, and feels more a part of her community. She continues to encourage others in her community to take a risk and become a volunteer for Family to Family Ties.

### **A summary**

The Family to Family Ties experiences described above illustrate the many examples of inputs, outputs, participation, and action. These examples also demonstrate the wide range of experiences and divergent outcomes that exist within the Family to Family Ties community. It is difficult to capture in quantitative terms the benefits of the program and to link all the potential impacts to the various actions that take place within this dynamic program. These examples were intended to provide only a selection of program experiences, for in no way do they capture the hundreds of unique experiences of needs being met by program participants and volunteers alike.

## ***THE MENTORSHIP EQUATION***

It was evident during the course of the research for this study that mentorship was happening at all levels of program delivery. Volunteer families, participant families, program staff, administrators, and funders provided dozens of examples during interviews. Further to this, mentorship relationships were reciprocal and capacity building among those involved in the program was bidirectional. All those involved in the program were experiencing new learning and change brought about by connecting with others. In a sense, what starts out as a mentorship experience often evolves into peer support and friendship.

## ***SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDERS***

The following is an annotated list of the various stakeholders and their involvement in, and roles and relationships with, the program:

**Program Coordinators:** As facilitators for the program, they are responsible for: recruitment of volunteers and participants; matching families; delivery of two annual special events; connecting families in the community; facilitating learning opportunities, such as the collective kitchen; documentation of program and files; collecting data on program; writing reports; marketing; and public education through poverty presentations.

**Volunteer Families:** They complete an orientation program facilitated by the program coordinator and pledge to a one-year match with a low income family. The volunteer family maintains regular contact with the participant family through phone contact and face-to-face meetings. This interaction varies from match to match.

**Participant Family:** They participate in a screening process and identify specific goals to be accomplished with the program coordinator. The participant family may or may not be matched immediately. The participant family can participate in community connection, including referrals from the program coordinator and attending Family to Family Ties programming and special events. Alumni families who have completed the formal one-year match are also welcome to continue to participate in the annual special events and the intermittent educational opportunities. The alumni families continue to receive a copy of the program newsletter.

**Administrative Support Person:** This person is responsible for completing all administrative duties, including: development and delivery of the Family to Family Ties Newsletter; organizing files and forms for the program coordinator; completing

data entry in the collection of statistics; assisting with program reports; and helping organize special events hosted by Family to Family Ties.

**Funding Agents:** They provide funding support to the program. Funding agents involved in this program are often also involved in the delivery of special events. For example, a locally owned business provides financial support to the Christmas gala, while its employees volunteer at the event to serve the meal and interact with those involved in the program.

Each set of stakeholders are integral to the program's success. The continued opportunity for all those involved in the program to interact, build relationships, and allow those relationships to mature are an important part of the Family to Family Ties Program. What is missing from this group, as recommended in the current *Program Manual*, is an advisory committee. Having a Family to Family Ties advisory committee made up of a representative from each of these stakeholder groups would be an important next step for program development. Such a group could act as a sounding board for program development and oversee other committees that could be formed and associated with specific program delivery.

### ***PROGRAM DELIVERABLES***

**Table 2** presents the deliverables offered by the program. The current program is comprehensive and the deliverables are well organized. Each component of the program appears to work collaboratively to further the aims of the Family to Family Ties program. During the course of this evaluation, program staff and participants discussed the possibility of diversifying the program further to provide a continuum of support services. Some suggestions made in the course of this evaluation were: to create a parent education component; to match university students with families for literacy support; and to increase program coordinator support to facilitate marketing, recruitment, and educational workshops, and to support a higher number of matches. It was noted that the program should continue to be available to meet the needs of immigrant and Aboriginal families, both of whom are over-represented in the lower socio-economic sector of the community.

**Table 2. Family to Family Ties Program Deliverables.**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Newsletter</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• this is sent out to all who are involved in the program and provides updated and relevant information about the program and community resources</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Program Coordinator Support</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• until a formal match is made, the program coordinator provides support and links families to community supports</li> <li>• the coordinator also supports the formal matches directly and indirectly</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Community Connections Referrals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• after initial assessment, families are referred to supports in the community depending on the needs of the family (e.g. child care, health or community services)</li> <li>• all children in the program are supported to attend summer camps</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Bi-annual Special Events</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• all current and alumni families involved in the program are invited to attend the Christmas gala and the spring barbecue, where there are special activities and opportunity to interact</li> <li>• these events are also for families not formally matched</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Educational Workshops</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• includes collective kitchens and other workshops that target specific skills or issues (e.g. assertiveness, budgeting)</li> <li>• presentations to educate the wider community on poverty issues and solutions</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Formal Mentorship Match</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• families commit to a one year relationship with a minimum of one face-to-face contact and two phone calls per month</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Evaluation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family to Family Ties collects statistics about program participants and delivery for reporting purposes</li> <li>• evaluations of the program itself are completed at the end of the one year match and again one year after the formal match</li> </ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Documentation and Reporting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the program coordinator completes a monthly activity report, as well as an annual report about that year and the program delivery, summarizing program participants and the deliverables provided during that calendar year</li> <li>• Family to Family Ties has a specialized filing system, with all client files and paperwork housed in its own cabinet within the office of the program coordinator</li> <li>• the program coordinator maintains client documents for each individual family in the program</li> <li>• families are provided with a certificate to recognize the completion of the formal one year match.</li> </ul>

## INTERPRETATION OF EVALUATION FINDINGS

### *PARTICIPANT FAMILY PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES*

This section presents the perceptions of the Family to Family Ties program as reported by families who have entered the program as participants. The comments have been organized into themes, and include additional commentary.

#### **Why do participant families access the program?**

Participant families have identified four main reasons for accessing this program.

##### *1. Participant families want to feel connected to people and their community.*

Having access to support and resources, particularly in times of crisis or adversity, is something that many take for granted. Families involved in this program are seeking support and resources, and share a desire for a sense of belonging.

This desire to be connected is illustrated by this participant's comment:

*I grew up in a different culture, where family and community were very connected. For example, there are no nursing homes where I grew up—we look after each other. When I am asked for help, I give it always and show respect. Our families are all together for the holidays. We play together and are always talking. I have been living in Canada for ten years and I don't have cousins here or brother[s] or sister[s]. It is hard for me. This program is like that and I need that.*

Family to Family Ties, in this example, provides support for a new Canadian who has had to leave behind old supports and connections.

##### *2. Participant families desire positive supports outside of formal service provision.*

When a person does not have someone to talk to after business hours, or someone to invite to a special event, life can feel empty. For some, finding healthy peers and supports is a challenge. Research participants reported that this program helped fill that important need.

*I had no one else to talk to other than my counselor.*

*I wanted to be able to find some positive social people. I tended to hang out with people who had many needs and were not able to be a support to me.*

Families that feel isolated can turn to Family to Family Ties for a means of making informal connections in a healthy, safe, and supportive fashion.

*3. Participant families are motivated to access support for their children.*

Time and again, parents talked about the value that they placed on their children and how much they wanted good models in their children's lives.

*I don't have family and so my kids have me and just me, so there wasn't a lot of other people in their lives.*

*My son was having social problems, he was withdrawn.*

These comments demonstrate the importance of children in this program. Parents are seeking support, in no small part because it will, in turn, support their children.

*4. Participant families want to be the best caregivers possible for their children.*

Program participants spoke about the challenges of parenting. They recognized a need for additional support in their goals to be strong parents.

*I'm my children's best role model, and if I don't take chances and get involved in things then they aren't going to.*

**What are the important elements of this program identified by participants?**

Participant comments identified six themes with regards to the program's most important elements.

*1. Family to Family Ties ends isolation for participant families.*

Many of the families who accessed this program were truly isolated and had very few supports. It was clear when interviewing participant families and reviewing feedback in the files of participant families that this program was meeting the objective of ending isolation. All participants reported a sense of being connected through the mentorship match, relationships with staff, or program events and activities.

*It gave us a chance to go somewhere all together.*

*It gave us a place to be together as a family besides the home.*



*We had something to look forward to other than sitting on the couch.*

*It provided many opportune times to have fun.*

*Our kids were the same age and we would go to their house or they came to mine. It was good for the kids and they become friends. When they run into each other in the community, they are excited and will say, "That is my friend."*

Families reported a high degree of connectedness, and it was obvious in their facial expressions, body language, and use of language that they have found an important connection through their involvement in the Family to Family Ties program.

*2. The program creates awareness that families facing adversity are not alone.*

Further to meeting the objective of ending isolation, participants reported feeling a great sense of solidarity by providing families an opportunity to see that they were not alone in their struggles. Not only do participant families gain access to the company of others in the community, through this contact they get a chance to see first-hand that they are not isolated in their challenging, painful, and often overwhelming experiences. Participants reported that they felt empowered by this awareness and that they no longer felt isolated by their problems.

*Now my children see that, yes, there are families out there. Some people have dads, some don't, and no matter what kind of family, if you have challenges you can overcome them, and that support is out there.*

*Initially we attended the planned events that they had for everybody. This was helpful because the kids got to see all these different dynamics of different families getting together and they are all going through things, and it just opened their eyes that we are not alone—we all have our issues, our needs.*

*It is a shared experience and you see that you are not alone.*

Further to this, participants reported that through this newfound awareness they also recognized that they could overcome the many obstacles that they and many others

in their community face. One participant had this to say about the negative experiences she had endured prior to entering the program:

*It [a bad experience] can destroy you or make you a better person.*

The experiences gained through involvement in the program have helped participants move toward change, embrace hopefulness, and enjoy the positive connections brought about by the relationships formed through participation and engagement.

### *3. It creates opportunities for capacity building.*

Some participant families who make the decision to participate in Family to Family Ties have experienced trauma and extended periods of isolation. All are struggling to cope with the challenges associated with living as a family with low socio-economic status. Participants shared many pathways toward capacity building, all of which stemmed directly from their experiences in the program.

*It helped me to realize that sometimes when you do reach out you get some positive benefits.*

*Meeting this family—it brought normalcy into a chaotic world.*

*It has given me the courage to get involved in new opportunities for my children.*

*I was able to deal with some of my issues.*

Finding employment, going back to school, becoming a stronger and more skilled parent, building communication skills, trusting others for the first time, having fun, having the courage to access resources, and learning about healthy meals reflect only a small sampling of the outcomes that participants attributed to the program.

### *4. Family to Family Ties “pays it forward”.*

It is evident that the helping associated with the Family to Family Ties program does not stop at the end of the match. Many participants go on to volunteer for the organization in some capacity. In many cases, families who have entered the program as participants go on to volunteer as mentors to other families.

*Donna helped me and then I could help somebody else. ... [T]hat is what life is about. If you are really truly growing as a person, growing spiritually, or growing mentally, and emotionally, that once you do learn your gifts then you have a right to help others who aren't quite there yet.*

What this program creates, then, in a seemingly effortless fashion, is a ripple effect that is both exciting and overwhelming to consider. Program participants both grow and have their needs met simultaneously.

*There are lots of people out there struggling, but we are still helping each other. ... [W]e are still making a difference in lives, and if you can make a difference in just one person's life, then that is important.*

#### *5. Empowering people and building confidence.*

Many participants reported that they felt an increase in self-confidence that allowed them to work toward specifically identified goals. The confidence found in their connection to the program seemed to grow out of the sense of security that comes from belonging. Isolation can breed insecurity and can prevent many individuals from taking the emotional risk involved in moving forward.

*Being with Family to Family Ties helped me to realize that in doing these things and coming out, I'm helping myself and I have a goal of going back to work. I now want my kids to see me as a working mom.*

*Looking back, it helped me to trust myself and to go back to school and get my education.*

The pathways are often very different, but participants reported an increase in confidence that led them to make changes in their lives or to sustain themselves during adversity. For those participants who had been in the program years earlier, they were able to identify that some of the benefits of the program did not come into effect until long after their direct involvement in the match.

#### *6. Meeting needs from the grassroots level.*

It is essential to have access to professional services, including counselors, parent educators, social workers, doctors, and teachers. Many of the participant families, however, reported having few if any informal supports. Not having a friend, a shoulder to cry on, someone with whom to celebrate a child's birthday, or someone who has no expectation

or agenda can have a serious negative impact on families. Resilience theory tells us that people who experience adversity especially require supports for positive adaptation. Indeed, without this kind of support, individuals are much less likely to overcome challenges and problems.

*We could just go out to her acreage just to play on the swings just having fun. ... [O]ne of the most beneficial things was just hanging out. It didn't have to be saving this person from the crisis, it can be just easy and mellow and hanging out. It wasn't that anybody needed fixing. Genuine, I guess.*

Researchers have documented that treatment, crisis intervention, or medical attention is regularly provided for families in difficult circumstances. However, many families lack companionship, friendship, and unconditional support. What kind of impact does this kind of informal support have in comparison to formal services? Conversely, in the absence of this kind of support, can the formal services provided establish sustainable benefits? These are questions that are beginning to be explored in resilience research.

## ***VOLUNTEER FAMILY PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES***

### **Why do families choose to volunteer?**

Volunteers are representative of a wide range of social and cultural groups. Some families who volunteer have access to a large number of resources, while others are struggling to make ends meet. Some volunteers have been matched with several families over the years, while others are new to the program. Volunteer families may also have been former participant families in the program. It is clear that all volunteers share a desire and a commitment to the program and the community. From the volunteers' responses, four reasons have been identified for choosing to be involved in the program.

#### *1. They want to have a positive impact on their community.*

*We wanted to share what we had with someone else who needed help in the community.*

#### *2. They want to educate their children and instill values.*

*A desire to want to help others and to want to develop our own family ties and hopefully our children will continue the trend when they are adults.*

*Help our children understand that not everybody had the same opportunities.*

*We were looking for something to do as a family that helps teach our kids important life values.*

*The inner feeling I get from giving, and I want my children to experience that feeling.*

*I think it was important for the kids to see that we were not just helping, we were befriending someone in the community. She was reaching out as well.*

3. *They want to give back what they have been given.*

*I had a lot of support and I would like to pass it on.*

4. *They have a desire to help born of a shared experience.*

*Helping others who have been in similar situations I have been through.*

*To be able to help someone that has or is going through what we have gone through.*

### **What do volunteers report as the most important elements of this program?**

*Volunteers report Family to Family Ties is special and different from other programs*

Volunteers reported that they had been involved in other types of programs and volunteer activities, but nothing compared to the experience of Family to Family Ties. There was recognition that valuable relationships were formed because of their involvement. From these relationships and interactions, support was provided and received. Volunteers talked about the special time that was spent with participant families, and believed that they had been able to have a positive effect in the lives of the participants.

*Very personal, unique, I don't know, others like it.*

*It is valuable and in demand. For the amount of money you could only imagine that the capacity building it has in terms of matching all those families and taking hours that would probably be needed from social services that maybe volunteers from this program can provide.*

#### *Volunteer descriptions of the program*

Volunteers identified that the program helped them work toward developing their community into a positive place for everyone.

*I think this is a formalization of what neighbors should do for each other, and some people are isolated in the community and they don't have easy access to support. If my car broke down, I might call a friend or neighbour.*

*This program gives somebody who does not have anybody somebody to call.*

*Formalizing a friendship or a neighborhood relationship for people who don't have access to that.*

#### *Volunteers report being matched with truly isolated families*

Time and again, the volunteers spoke of the isolation of those families participating in the program.

*Sometimes we were the only people there to celebrate her son's birthdays.*

*We were the only people they considered friends, which was unique and special.*

*We were the only people who were not professionals who didn't have to be there to fill in a form or be the social worker.*

#### *Involvement at the truest level of community and family interaction*

Volunteer families spoke about the fun and intimate connections that they had the privilege of sharing with participant families.

*Birthday parties, Christmas, barbecues in summertime, and any special occasion at our house or theirs. ... [We] saw them at least once a week.*

*The personal relationships are fabulous.*

#### *Volunteer families are impacted by the experience of Family to Family Ties*

Volunteers described how their view of the world and the people in their community changed after having been involved in the program.

*We learned to care more. Our kids would look at this situation and really be empathetic, sometimes sympathetic. Their life was tough. ... [T]o be a single mom, living on social assistance with health problems. We got to know another family in the community, got to know their struggles. Life as a single mom was something I had never experienced. Seeing life through Jennifer's eyes, it really opens your eyes to what people have to go through, just to live their day to day lives. [The experience] created more self-awareness. It's a very personal relationship.*

#### **Volunteer comments on struggles associated with being in the program**

Volunteer reports on the program, both during interviews and in the sampling of written evaluations reviewed, indicated a positive experience. In some cases volunteers expressed experiencing guilt. These feelings were associated with having more resources than the participant family, having to pull back from the relationship due to extenuating circumstances, or when the participant family was so busy that the volunteer family was impinging on their time.

One volunteer expressed a “twinge of guilt now that we are no longer involved.” Barriers to maintaining a high level of involvement were identified, including differences in parenting practices and relationships becoming strained and confrontational at times. One volunteer described the process of pulling back to preserve an informal contact relationship for occasional support after a long-term, intimate connection. Despite the difficulties, one program volunteer reported, “I would not have changed the experience.”

#### **Family to Family Ties is sustainable**

Volunteers and participants were in many cases developing natural and informal friendships as a result of the formal matching process. Over half of all volunteers and participant families reported that their relationship had continued past the formal one-year match.

*[W]e were a big part of their lives for five years.*

### **Volunteer advice to other families**

Volunteers strongly recommended that others take a chance and become part of the Family to Family Ties program.

*I would advise anyone to take it on and do it because it is a very rewarding experience. You get to know some great people, to see their strengths. I could not even imagine coping with what she had to cope with, and she is so determined.*

### **Comments about Family to Family Ties' coordinator**

Volunteers reported having been well-supported by the coordinators of the program.

*They knew what they were doing and you felt confident calling and saying this is going on, and they were really accessible. And this is important because I am not a social worker, and I wouldn't know how to deal with some of the issues that came up.*

*Nothing but praise for the program and the staff.*

## ***CATHOLIC FAMILY SERVICES STAFF PROGRAM PERSPECTIVES***

It is striking to consider the many pathways to support and preventative intervention that this program provides. The important elements of the Family to Family Ties program that the staff identified are detailed below.

### **1. Involvement in the program is voluntary.**

Program staff talked about the importance of how families, some of whom are involved in formal or even mandated service provision such as child welfare, are invited to join the program on a voluntary basis. Further to this, families involved in the program get out what they put into the program.

*The learning experiences they will get is truly up to them.*

The program, staff believed, is designed for people who have an interest in getting better and in change.

### **2. Relationships are the foundation of the program.**

The word “relationship” was used regularly when discussing the program with stakeholders. One staff member made the following comment about connecting with families:



*People feel validated and heard right from the beginning ... so we go out and listen to their stories and start to build a relationship. So relationship building is huge because a lot of our families are very isolated.*

### **3. Family is the heart of the program.**

With busy schedules and time commitments, as well as specialized individual services available, families are often competing just to be together and share in life's experiences. This program deliberately creates environments that are family friendly. Family is our first experience in life, and therefore the most crucial experience in development. Family to Family Ties recognizes just how critical healthy families are to our communities.

*We want people to pick up on the idea that families can be a good place to be. And that we can care and connect about each other as families.*

*We include people of all ages together. Volunteers can be attracted as they don't have to leave their families behind and the whole family can take on the mentorship role. And for the participant families, they have an opportunity as a family to see something different in life as a family.*

An example of family to family interaction is provided here by a CFS staff member:

*One clear example I can think of is that the mom [in this example] had grown up on the streets and she didn't have a sense of family. She had two little boys and they didn't have a vehicle. So her volunteer family just picked them up one day and took them to Beaver Creek, and they went to the little interpretive center there . ... [B]ut the greatest part for the kids was that they all lay in the snow and made snow angels. ... [I]t is a very simple thing ... but is an example of how even in the simple things we can create that sense of being together, having fun together, and that family is a good place to be and that we can connect with each other. ... [A]nd they hadn't had that kind of experience before. So sometimes it is the little things that can have a big impact on people. It happened to be a couple who had grown children. ... [F]or that mom, really, they became her parents. She didn't have an example of what that looked like and of what other families did together.*

#### **4. Proactive versus reactive.**

Family to Family Ties is designed to create changes before crises overwhelm families. The preventive support that is generated by this program, all through volunteer hours, is exceptional.

*Poor people are sicker, let's give them adequate nutrition, money to buy healthy food, provide programming in the community (i.e. sports).*

Having access to healthy food is a highly preventative intervention that can create multiple positive outcomes in the lives of children and families. The collective kitchen, which is an educational opportunity for preparing healthy food in the community, is one example of how Family to Family Ties is preventative in nature. Families involved in this partnership program with Child Hunger & Education Program (CHEP) are invited to participate in this shared meal preparation experience. These types of supports can prevent health problems that can spiral into more serious difficulties. The collective kitchen workshops are designed to allow for these issues to be addressed.

#### **5. Family to Family Ties is concerned with social justice versus charity.**

The families who are eligible to be participant families in this program are identified to be at increased risk for a wide range of negative outcomes, which has been well documented in research on families living in low socio-economic status. Staff involved in this program reported having witnessed the lack of resources faced by this segment of the community. This awareness came about through visiting the homes of family participants and by being more engaged in the community.

Families volunteering in the program are able to see first-hand the daily struggle faced by families who are living with such limited means. The goal of the program is to educate the community about ways to combat poverty and to debunk the myths that poverty is unavoidable in our society. In reality, the costs associated with neglecting poverty issues are very substantial.

#### **6. Family to Family Ties is about reciprocity.**

This program is not about providing a hand-out, but rather a way to connect people in the community in a meaningful way. A misconception about the program is that some believe that the participant family is the beneficiary while the volunteer family brings the support and mentorship.

*It's one of the things we have been very conscious about and we have talked to people about in the program, is that we don't want this to be a hands down relationship ... "[Y]ou're the volunteer way up here and you are the participant way down there." It's that this is a program*

*about equality and we all have something to offer and to teach each other, and so as a volunteer you might have certain things that you offer, but the participant family also has things that they have to offer, so it's learning and growing from each other.*

What often happens, as program staff reported, is that everyone benefits in multiple ways. One staff person had this to say about program participants:

*We think we offer stuff. They come to us with strengths and abilities and confidence that we can't imagine sometimes—not always, but sometimes. These people who are stressed, survive and also thrive. They also have pride in themselves.*

*Many times I have had volunteers come at the end of the year and say, "Oh, I am sure I learned a lot more from my participant family than I was able to give them or teach them." And that is probably true in some cases and that's really our hope.*

### **7. The program creates awakenings that foster change.**

Program participants and volunteers alike are challenged in their thinking by their mutual experiences. Such awakenings are often very powerful and can impact how families see themselves, each other, and the community around them.

*Some participants come in and they are stunned to see that our volunteers have similar experiences as they do. For example: "My kid stole something from school." "So did mine."*

*Awakenings are so valuable for them to realize everybody struggles, parenting is sometimes a struggle for everybody and everybody struggles with relationships.*

### **8. Kids feel part of a care system.**

Children in the program gain a sense that "others monitoring and supporting them, having expectations of them—those are the networks that keep kids safe and these are the networks that support parents."

*Many times we have had children who have connected very well to adults in the volunteer families and that is very important for both sides. We have so much peer things happening these days and not*

*enough child and adult interaction. That is very valuable mentoring in itself ... particularly as the children grow up and get older that they have somebody outside of the family to talk to, they can trust and build relationships.*

### **9. Parents are supported in their role as parents.**

Parenting is often claimed to be the most difficult job that any adult can have. This important role, however, is not given the same support and training of other jobs (i.e. employment). Family to Family Ties allows parents to come together to share the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows of parenting in an intimate and meaningful way.

*As parents, we all need someone to say we are doing a good job—and we need someone to say that in front of our children. The facilitators do this in front of the children – “Your mom is respectable, worthy of respect.” This changes the dynamic.*

### **10. Family to Family is a capacity building program.**

Families set goals for their futures in this program and supports are available to help them achieve those goals. Family to Family Ties is dynamic in that it is open to everyone, no matter what their struggle or aspiration.

*[I]t was really neat to see her grow in the process, and as she was growing she's gaining skills. And every time she stretched herself a little bit to be, to try something different, she started to feel more confident and capable in herself, and she would keep on going.*

*People then get the message that I am capable, I can do things, and, you know, I am gaining some skills. ... [T]here has been lots of that.*

### **11. Capacity building and mentorship go way beyond “the match”.**

Although not formally recognized in program delivery, Family to Family Ties is a program that provides a continuum of services that, individually and collectively, have far reaching implications. The formal match is understood to be the pinnacle of program involvement. However, this is not the only relationship or vessel for capacity building and mentorship.

*There is clearly a lot of other things happening in families outside of the match. That is not something that really gets seen. What gets seen is that we have this number of matches, this number of families over this time period. .... [I]t's the numbers usually that get reflected.*

*I think we have a lot of families who have benefited from the program whether or not they have gotten matched. And even if they have gotten matched ... there are often other side benefits that they have received from mentoring in different ways. For example, the informal networking and mentoring that happens even around participant families getting together with staff, or going out to see the different people as we hook them up with resources or training opportunities. We invite those families to the picnics or the Christmas supper so that they can engage with other families in other ways or we look for ways to hook them up to other resources.*

The divergent ways that families connect, showcasing their strengths and finding ways to meet their needs, is reflected in this statement. Family to Family Ties is so much more than merely a formal matching of two families. It is a continuum of services in and of itself. This is further reflected in the logic model demonstrated earlier in this report.

## **12. The program accepts people's status.**

The program is designed to meet people in their current life situation. This is an exceptional benefit because of the flexibility. No matter what is happening for the families, they are provided with unconditional support and they cannot be excluded from the experience of being connected in a new way within the community.

*[T]here is no criteria. ... [Y]ou don't have to be in this certain place ... and if you are not at this certain place you don't get cut off. It's about allowing for that growth at the pace that it's going to happen—really exciting ... [and] open-ended.*

## **13. Family to Family Ties celebrates strengths.**

Family to Family Ties works to move beyond surface and/or false perceptions to experiences where people get to realize that families and children, facing the adversity of poverty, also carry strengths and abilities.

*When you really get to know people I think that we can see what incredible strength quite a lot of them have to even have survived as far as they have ... is really an honour and a privilege.*

## **14. Family to Family Ties is sustainable.**

This program is unique in that most of the work is carried out by the people who are involved in the program. The program itself runs independent of coordinators during the summer months to conserve funding for the remainder of the year.

*We have some that make very good friendships that they continue on, and some that are actually quite old friendships by now that have gone on for well over five years. ... I know of a couple for sure that have continued on. ... [T]hat is really good to see. That the friendship has had time to develop into a deeper level, and that we continue to be supportive and hopefully it will be a mutually supportive thing at this point.*

### **15. The program coordinator is in place to help.**

The program coordinator role is important and provides the necessary support and consultation to families during the various phases of their involvement in the program.

*[W]e have a staff person who is always available for those families and many times we have participant and volunteer families phoning in about different issues and so they have somebody they can actually connect with and sometimes it's about advocacy sometimes it is about resources or just advise.*

### **16. Staff orientation and documentation are important tools for program coordination.**

Historically there has been stable staffing associated with the delivery of Family to Family Ties program through its program coordinators. During the past year, the Family to Family Ties program coordinator position has turned over twice. With these changes, an opportunity has arisen to reflect on staff orientation and documentation. This opportunity lends itself well in the development of training materials for the promotion and marketing of the program to potential program purchasing agents.

One week of training was provided to the most recent program coordinator trainee, including meetings with the previous coordinator. The new program coordinator reviewed ghost files developed for the program to examine how a participant and volunteer family file is organized (see **Appendix H**).

Staff reported that there is an extensive documentation system, including files that contain copies of all previous program newsletters, strategic planning information, media /communication, correspondence, recruitment tips for participants, orientation, and presentations. There is also a *Family to Family Ties Program Manual* that was originally provided by Episcopal Community Services, Inc. when the program was first adapted from that organization. These documents are available to the program coordinator and provide a documentation orientation.

Observations of the previous program coordinator proved to be a valuable resource for orientation. Further to this, all staff reported having tremendous support from the

entire staff at Catholic Family Services, who acted as peer support and provided informal consultation according to their areas of expertise throughout all program delivery. Having this extended support network as program coordinators supported the overall program delivery.

*Having relationships with the staff here was important to me and I felt comfortable asking for help—everyone was very helpful and would assist if I was unsure of something.*

One area identified for improvement in the orientation of new staff was more documented procedures and guides about program delivery. It was also suggested that further development of program delivery could include the following:

*An enhanced program manual organized by month—what you have to do list for each month, like summer camps in May. A monthly to-do check list formulated with what to do—who are the contacts, resources, and materials.*

Although many resources and information about Family to Family Ties exist within the organization, not all the information has been documented. Such work is often difficult to coordinate due to time restrictions. Having an enhanced program manual with best practices in it, including a description of the specialized filing system, would further benefit the organization.

### **17. Time, flexibility, and efficiency are required to meet program participant needs.**

Program coordinators reported working flexible hours was an important part of facilitating the Family to Family Ties program. Staff reported that they felt fully supported by supervisors in the mixed work hours that were submitted for the program. It was acknowledged that work from home, as well as evening and sometimes weekend work, was required for the successful facilitation of the program. Three days a week for program delivery was viewed as challenging, particularly when considering that team meetings and supervision time is included during some work weeks.

## ***FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN THE MATCHING PROCESS***

Although there are other elements of program delivery, the formal matching process is a significant component of the Family to Family Ties program. What was exciting to uncover during the evaluation was that families were making a connection and the nature of what helped form the relationships was sometimes unpredictable. Through

assessment and screening, the program coordinator is able to make a recommendation as to which families might be best suited for a matching relationship. What follows is an exploration of what factors contribute to the matching process, as identified by various stakeholders involved in Family to Family Ties.

### **Commitment by all involved**

When families are meeting regularly, communicating, and building a relationship, these are strong indicators of a successful match. In situations where there is no reciprocation, when one family is trying for weeks and there is no response, then a match would be closed down at that point. Some families reported meeting in person in the community, in each other's homes, talking on the phone, and attending the planned bi-annual events hosted by CFS for the Family to Family Ties program. Some families reported that they felt that their volunteer family was not committed to the relationship, or in several cases the participant family realized that they had alternate support and/or were too over-committed to participate. The evaluator was not able to determine the ratio of successful matches that reached maturation to those that ended prematurely.

### **Ability to get in touch**

In some cases not having a phone contributed to the breakdown of the matching relationship. One program volunteer reported that she felt guilty trying to maintain contact with a participant who had to bundle up her small child and make her way outside to a pay phone to return a call. Ultimately, the match broke down due to an inability to maintain contact.

### **Proximity**

Although not a necessary factor, in some cases it was reported that living in the same area of the city facilitated relationship building. It should be noted, however, that there were well-developed matches where families lived in opposite areas of the city. Where possible, the program coordinator considers location and transportation as part of the initial matching processes. If one family does not have a vehicle, this is an important consideration for planning a successful match.

### **Common ground**

The program coordinator spends time with families during the orientation processes and carefully plans a match between two candidate families. Sometimes it is obvious that a shared interest or a shared challenge might work toward helping the two families develop a matching relationship. When the pool of participant and volunteer families can be matched based on common ground, the coordinator considers the special interests, common needs, and other potential sparks.



### **Kids of the same age**

Many participant and volunteer families request that they be matched with families who have children in the same age range as their own children. When possible, the program coordinator attempts to make this accommodation. This is not always possible, and has impeded the matching process. Program coordinators and families have learned that matching can be successful among families who have children in different age brackets.

### **Compatibility**

In some cases, families have made relationships and have maintained those relationships for years after. It is obvious that those families were compatible and willing to commit to the matching relationship. There are some cases where families are not compatible, and this is often discerned in early sessions and meetings facilitated by the program coordinator. At this time, families can opt to withdraw from the match, preserving the integrity of the program and respecting the differences and comfort of each individual program candidate.

### **Support from the program coordinator**

Families reported that it was valuable at times to access the program coordinator for professional consultation. The coordinator also helped with the intentional process of introducing the families, setting up goals and objectives, and inviting the families to the events hosted by CFS for this program.

Having all these ideas in mind when formulating matches is valuable, but a shared interest in getting to know another family and working on a relationship are still the most valuable building blocks to any successful family match.

## ***PROGRAM FUNDER PERSPECTIVE***

Catholic Family Services is properly concerned about sustainable funding for the Family to Family Ties program. In order to better understand what motivated program funders to provide financial support to the Family to Family Ties program, an interview was conducted with an individual who had been responsible for considerable program funding for Family to Family Ties in the past.

The interview was intended to explore those elements of the program that attracted potential funding organizations and any recommendations a current and dedicated funding group might make for the administration of the program and for future funding proposals. One member of a small charitable organization was interviewed to present information about their involvement with Family to Family Ties.

This funding organization has an extensive helping portfolio and has been involved with many organizations and various programs in several provinces. Further to this, the funding agents are concerned with social justice and recognize that there is a need to support at-risk people in the community.

### **How did the funder hear about the program?**

The funding agent first heard about the program through Rhonda Gogh, previous executive director of Catholic Family Services, during a scheduled information luncheon about Family to Family Ties. At the time of this meeting, Family to Family Ties was in early stages of program development and delivery.

### **What attracted this funding group to the program?**

This charitable organization placed a high value on healthy family development, which in turn motivated them to invest in the Family to Family Ties program.

The following comment exemplifies the organization's commitment to family supports:

*Because it was helping families we were interested in, that we feel that when families suffer, our society suffers, our country suffers.*

Further to this, the unique aspect of family-to-family mentorship was a strong selling point in the organization's decision to invest funds in program delivery.

The following statement relates the funding agency's interest in the informal nature of the Family to Family Ties program:

*The type of program that it is interested us because it is a family helping a family—it isn't just one person going into it, saying, "Change this."*

In addition to this, the program funder recognized that Family to Family Ties is intended to provide something that other programs might not be able to deliver, namely a special relationship with another family in the community.

The support that is generated through the experiences in the program is described in the following comments:

*It's a little bit of time and a little bit of love and friendship and this is what really interested us.*

*Sometimes people get depressed because they don't have someone who cares about them. ... [W]hen you are depressed you don't function properly—so you are different person. Recreational needs get met, someone who visits you who is interested in you. ... [I]t's important but it is a different type of help, it is a relationship.*

This particular funding organization has been providing funding to the Family to Family Ties program for a significant period of time. One of the key reasons for continued funding was hearing first-hand from participant and volunteer families.

*We hear reports from families who really enjoyed doing this.*

Funders had a chance to hear about the progress reported by those involved in the program by participating in the semi-annual events hosted by Catholic Family Services. These events include the Christmas dinner and the spring barbecue.

*When it's the Christmas dinner we see lots of people enjoying this, including the people that are coming to help. Everybody seems to be happy. ... [I]t's a nice gathering, it's helpful. ... [N]ot only do they have games for the kids, there are gifts and the children that participate are making gifts, too. And in spring we see the families that are participating and some of the helping families are there, but that is not always possible. So to us we find this a great program. ... [T]here is a lot of growth from both sides because they become friends.*

The funder reported two examples of positive developments generated from the program. The first was an example of a volunteer family helping a participant family gain important networking opportunities that resulted in gaining full-time employment.

*I heard about one helping family [who because of their circumstances] were able to get in touch and help him get a job, and to me that is very powerful.*

The second was an example where recreation time spent among two families was special and enjoyed by both families.

*Because they recreated together every once in a while, it's been good for both sides.*

### **What were the important program elements observed by the program funder?**

Relationships that matured into friendships were seen as significant outcomes of program involvement.

*There is a friendship that develops and there is a sort of security, I think, for the non-functional family that develops.*

*I have met a lady who is a single person who has helped single ladies. Because it's a friend that they can depend on, I think it is a very important program.*

**What processes are important to the funder with regards to their relationship with the program?**

The funding organization reported that face-to-face contact with the organization administration and staff has been important. Further to this, direct involvement in the program has provided the funding organization with a unique and special connection to the program and the investment that they are making in the program.

*Because you feel part of it; other places, we send a cheque and that is all.*

The funding agent reported that the documentation was valuable and that a report was useful document.

*It would be nice to know how many families, to see how it differs year to year... [T]hat is a good idea and that would be encouraging so you can track it over time.*

The program funder also addressed the issue of the many requests for funding that are received by their organization:

*We do realize that there are a lot of needs out there and I just get overwhelmed just thinking about it because of all the requests that come in the mail, and it's unbelievable.*

It was further recommended by the funder that Catholic Family Services continue to advertise that the program is non-denominational and open to everyone.

***FORMS, FUNCTION, AND FLOW***

There were five main areas of focus that emerged from this component of this evaluation. Each is described below.

### **Marketing materials**

These were designed to communicate information to the community about the program. It was found that the materials were well-organized and useful for educating the community about Family to Family Ties. Unfortunately, many people involved in this evaluation reported that the community at large is generally unaware of the program. Community awareness about the program was often compared to the profile that Big Brothers, Big Sisters has been able to develop. Relatively speaking, Family to Family Ties is a young program and there are still many future opportunities to promote and market the program.

### **File documents**

These are documents used to collect specific information about the participants and used in the interactive process of screening, assessing family needs, and exploring “matchability.”

It was noted in the evaluation that a streamlining of this process was undertaken over the past several years. Staff made few recommendations with regards to current streamlining of the forms. Several different ways to record data, either handwritten or typed, were discussed. It was noted that these processes were dependent on the particular organizational skills of the program coordinator.

### **Program delivery documents**

These documents were related to the specific tasks associated with organizing the program overall, including best practices, event organizing, and the existing program manual.

### **Evaluation tools**

These documents were used to measure statistics as well as outcomes. Creating a balance between the quantitative data collection process and the qualitative data collection process can be difficult to achieve. Quantitative measures of outcomes are not easy to identify considering issues of internal and external validity. For the purpose of this program, descriptive statistics such as percentage and income levels can be used to document important aspects of the participants. It is suggested that ongoing work to collect qualitative data around participant experiences might be the most beneficial means of exploring the program’s short- and long-term impacts. This evaluation would be an example of that process.

### **Reporting documents**

Staff involved in the delivery of the Family to Family Ties program have worked collaboratively over the years to streamline the forms associated with the program. A sen-

timent expressed by staff was that the forms were in part geared toward the collection of statistics for the purpose of reflecting program information for funding proposals. It would be important to create a balance in this process. It was advised that having an informal conversation with families would allow for the data to be collected, and program coordinators could go back later and add information to the forms themselves.

Intimate information, including income and health, are part of data collection. Staff reported that where a relationship was formed with families, participants were open to share this information. Further interactive ways of collecting information, such as eco-maps and genograms, might also be meaningful ways to work with families to visualize who they are and of what their supports consist. A before and after eco-map might be a beneficial tool in the evaluative process, and is less prescribed than a question and answer format.

### **Evaluator comments on forms, function, and flow**

In a review of the forms with program staff, there were very few recommended changes. It was reported that the forms were valuable and for the most part useful guides in the process of meeting with families initially and documenting the ongoing matching relationships.

In the file review process, it was found that the documentation on the closed and active files was consistent and the records clearly documented with uniformity. The initial assessment regarded the current information being collected as necessary for the program's identification of eligibility criteria.

Very few changes in the current forms process are recommended here. However, with an appreciation of the short time frame that the program coordinator has to deliver his/her responsibilities, it is suggested here that additional information gathering could, in turn, streamline the program and reflect more of the actual work being completed by the program itself.

## ***A SHARED VISION FOR THE FUTURE***

A shared vision for the future of Family to Family Ties was explored by volunteers, participants, and program staff. All stakeholders reported that they wished to see this program continue for as long as there are families challenged by poverty.

### **CFS staff and administrative wishes**

Having secure and predictable funding for this program was a wish expressed by many.

*That the program would have core funding and would be fiscally secure.*

*It would be nice to continue without worrying about funding so we are not continuously struggling. It detracts a lot.*

Having a community that is involved and active in the program was also deemed important.

*That the community will respond by getting involved in Family to Family Ties.*

It was noted that the host organization for the program wished to be in tune with the community.

*That CFS have the capacity to recognize what people need—to be open to hear what the community needs.*

General awareness of the program was also identified.

*I wish people knew about the program.*

Several visions for the future were further provided:

*My dream for the program would be that it would grow and expand because there is a number of different ways that I think the program could expand and there are lots of different things that we could do if we had some money to put in there and to be able to run with it. ... [W]e could create an even more comprehensive program.*

*I would like to give credibility to the other parts of the program. Where we still engage with those families [who have not been matched]. For example, those kids in those families get to go to camp now because we will make sure that those kids will get to camp even if those families sat waiting for a long time.*

### **Volunteer family wishes**

Having cost effective things to do while engaging in the community is important for those involved in the program. Practical resources to reach this end were identified, such

as passes to recreational activities in the community. Likewise, funding was identified by volunteers as a key issue.

A desired outcome of the program was that real relationships are forged during the experience.

*That the families would connect and that long-term relationships would come from these.*

Volunteers also talked about the importance of meeting needs. Further to this, the examples below indicate that volunteers recognized the need for a shift in the community that would eliminate poverty and isolation.

*Children and families get the support that they need.*

*I wish people didn't have to be isolated and that no one needed this program. It's too bad that people don't just connect. That we have created this world where we actually have to have a program to connect families.*

*That there will come a day that this program won't be necessary and we will all be so involved in our communities that you'll know the woman down the street is isolated and you will have the time to go and help without CFS having to design a program so that you would do it.*

*I wish the program would go away! That we structured our community in such a way that it was not necessary.*

### **Participant family wishes**

Participants wished for engagement in the program.

*That more people would get involved in the program and see that it is a good program.*

Participants identified sustainability and a future goal of increasing the number of families involved in the program

*For it to continue ... [and] provide more for more families.*

*See them continue the mentoring with more groups, meet more people.*



An overall awareness of the program and its benefits was wished for.

*Public awareness.... [A] lot of families that could use this. ... I think people would see a lot of less problems in the city.*

One participant provided an example of a match that was not especially strong. This participant wished for more program coordinator involvement to assist in the matching connection or to intervene or discuss new ways of being connected. Despite having a weaker matching relationship, the participant still reported the program as a positive experience.

*Very good program. ... I wish every two months [that the] program coordinator to be in touch meeting each other.*

Specific suggestions about how the program could be expanded include the following examples:

*Do something like get male Huskies athletes to volunteer for physical activity collaboration between [the] University and CFS. [P]rivileged by going to university and may have good role models. [T]his contributes back and help people who are in less fortunate situations than they are.*

*More provincial / fed policy. ... [W]hether people who live in poverty and who struggle with mental illness have a higher need. ... This must be addressed—this program could be a place to do that. If there is a higher need then we have to be acknowledged by government.*

*I would like it to be Canada-wide, a standardized thing—to make Canada as a blue print. ... Canada is a developed nation—what we are doing for our poor in our own nation [could] set an example for other countries.*

Participants provided reflections on how this program benefits the community as a whole. The following comment depicts the insight into the structural issues related to poverty and isolation in the community.

*If we do have a collaboration on all different kids of levels we can have a reduction of crime and children will grow up believing they have more value, and more worth so that they will want to contribute to society and that they won't have to go around looking for confidence from people around them. They will already have it inside themselves.*

Finally, participants spoke about the value of family and desired that the program preserve its focus on family.

*I hope they keep it family oriented because there isn't a lot of family oriented stuff out there. People don't make family important. If you don't have family, what do you have?*

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND RATIONALES

Following are recommendations for the Family to Family Ties program. These recommendations are made with the recognition that the Family to Family Ties program, as it is currently being delivered, is a valuable and powerful experience for all those involved. The recommendations are based on the four questions that were outlined in the evaluation methodology and have been outlined by function. These recommendations are intended to be considerations in future development of the program with the view that program funding would be secure, which would in turn support the following suggestions.

### 1. Forms, function, and flow.

*E-mail addresses should be added to all application forms associated with participant and volunteer family recruitment.*

- Additional contact information could reduce the difficulty in locating participants and volunteers (a problem identified through this evaluation) once they exit the formal match component of the program.
- E-mail contact could be an additional means of sharing information with participants and volunteers.
- Upload the program newsletter onto the CFS web site and forward the newsletter through e-mail to those participants and volunteers with e-mail access.
- This could reduce costs for the program associated with printing and postage.
- This could promote capacity building for those families who are working on increasing computer skills.
- This could be a more efficient means of communication and allow other organizations in the community to circulate important information about the program.

*Consider dating all program materials, including brochures, forms, and other publications and documents added to the web site.*

- This will allow the organization to efficiently track documentation and publication materials.

- This will also allow outside organizations to determine whether they have up-to-date materials available to potential participants.

*Ensure that all program delivery is documented and dated manually to ensure for proper program delivery and efficiency.*

- The purpose of documenting program delivery is to ensure that corporate knowledge is retained and can be used for guidance to new staff, to assess program development, and to provide a history of program delivery to the organization and all stakeholders involved.
- A second function of such an endeavour would be to develop a training package from these materials that would be attractive to other organizations for establishing program delivery in another city.
- Finally, the program itself was found to be spread out in a variety of ways—manuals, anecdotal reports, files, and program staff itself. Such a process could assist in solidifying all program information into one main collection of materials that would be easily accessed, particularly for the training of new staff.

One means of accomplishing this task is for the program coordinator to document, step-by-step, relevant tasks associated with program delivery, along with suggested roll out dates or time frames. One example of this would be a list of tasks and relevant contacts associated with the Christmas or spring program functions. Such a document would then be added to the current program manual. This could then be considered the Christmas gala event guide. To assist with this process, a student interested in policy development could be recruited to develop this material.

*Include in the staff orientation and program guide a written copy of the criminal check/child welfare check policy for easy reference.*

*A form should be created to begin data collection on the quality and relationship of the match that is being formulated.*

- One way of doing this could be to document how often the families meet, the types of activities reported by the client, and an overall assessment of the match. These could be done as a checklist to avoid adding to the burdensome documentation process.
- This process could also help track the matching relationship and identify when added supports might be mobilized to help build the quality of the match.
- This information could be collected over time, which might help to further identify trends in the matching relationships and help with further program development.

*Consider having consistent exit interviews with families who have completed their one-year match.*

- Before the interview, send out forms to be completed before the interview. Further to this, ask that the children provide artwork or poetry, or have a skit or play about their experience in the program.
- This may be a more efficient means of reflecting back on the one-year matching process. Because the program is about relationships, the organization can continue analyzing relationships to evaluate the participant's experiences of the program.

*Consider including an application form as part of the brochures for volunteers and participants.*

- If the application form were readily available while people reviewed the material, it might stimulate an increase in participation.

*Consider creating a referral form for use by partnering agencies.*

- This could generate awareness of the program and increase volunteer and participant involvement.
- A referral form could encourage partner agencies to talk about the program to those with whom they interact.

*Continue to provide direct recognition to all those who participate in the program in the form of a certificate of completion for one-year matches.*

- The certificates, which are currently presented bi-annually at special events, should also be kept on the file. These file copies could be used to track volunteer and participant family involvement.
- This would further develop the strength-based culture of the program.
- It would create a tradition and opportunity for program participants to celebrate the completion of a match.
- It provides program participants with documentation and memorabilia associated with their involvement.

*Merge existing data entry into a spreadsheet application so that charts and graphs can be used to present statistical data in annual reports, funding proposals, or other presentation purposes.*

- Presenting program data visually allows for quick interpretation, summarizes information, and is more pleasing to the reader. This could assist in securing program funding and allow for continued program development.

*Continue to use a graphic representation of the program to promote Family to Family Ties.*

- As one participant mentioned, in today's visual world a graphic representation of a product must exist in the community consciousness.
- This logo should continue to be used on all promotional material.

## **2. Logic model.**

The key elements of the community connections aspect of program delivery are identified in the logic model. These key elements are offered through the program coordinator's direct work with families upon initial entry to the program. Having these families, who were otherwise isolated, connect to existing supports in the community is a key program component. This community connections component also includes all Family to Family Ties special events, newsletters, and initiatives, which all families entering the program are automatically eligible to access.

*Specific language/terminology should be developed for the community connection aspect of program delivery.*

- The program is recognized for this service and the coordinator's work in assisting at-risk families.
- Families are then considered to be active in the community connections component of the program, as opposed to only being on a wait list for a mentorship match.
- The Family to Family Ties program can begin with an already existing program component to display a continuum of services that are available within the program.
- Statistics associated with this work could document to the action and work of the program coordinator, and the potential positive outcomes could be assessed from the outset of involvement in the program.

## **3. Program operations and effectiveness.**

*Continue capacity building of the program by encouraging development of volunteer committees.*

- An example of this might be a committee whose main responsibility is public education about poverty. They could be involved in the delivery of the poverty presentation that is currently facilitated by the program coordinator. These committees could be branches of the advisory committee.
- The participants are the main resource of this program, and so it is important to continue to engage them in the aims of the program and draw on their first-hand knowledge.

- Including participants in committee work could lead to them participating in lobbying for funding and resources for the program.
- The program coordinator's ability to act as a facilitator for the program as a whole is increased if more program delivery is managed by the participants.
- The tasks that the participants complete in the program should be celebrated and recognized at the special events.

*Ground program delivery in resilience theory and community capacity building research.*

- An example of this might be to explore developmental assets available to the children in the program. Information on the developmental assets that foster positive development can be found at [www.search-institute.org/assets/assetlists.html](http://www.search-institute.org/assets/assetlists.html).
- Research and information is currently available to give credence and credibility to this program. Identifying how the program relates to the work being conducted by researchers provides an excellent foundation.

#### **4. Funding considerations.**

*Continue to ensure that program funders receive quarterly, biannually, or, at minimum, annual reports that detail progress and other updates about the program.*

- This will keep all program funders informed of program implementation and progress.
- Program funders have identified the importance of having such information for their own records.

*Consider hosting an annual Family to Family Ties fundraiser.*

- An annual event situates the program in the community and serves as promotion.
- Media attention for such an event can also aid in marketing the program.
- The participants could assist in planning such an event and could be a part of its delivery, thus promoting capacity building.
- The funding can be used for sustaining program operations.
- National Family Week might be a good time to have such an event. Organization might begin by building fundraising partners, such as Christian ethics students in schools who are committed to a volunteering plan.

*Consider funding partners, both provincial and national, who might be interested in the community capacity building component of this program and the alternative delivery of services.*

- Due to the unique and comprehensive delivery of this program, a wide range of funding organizations might find this program to be an investment in proactive community development.

### ***FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FROM EVALUATION PROCESS***

When seeking funding, many non-profit organizations are under pressure to demonstrate outcomes empirically. Funding agencies have strict formulas that often determine how programs are implemented so as to ensure that the necessary data is collected. Unfortunately, funding for extensive research and evaluation is not an option for most organizations such as health and community services, let alone non-profit or community-based groups. Further to this, qualitative research is still often seen as soft or subjective and does not prove outcomes and establish empirical, causal relationships between program inputs and outputs.

Nevertheless, the stories and voices of the program participants, volunteers, staff and administration, and funding agents present a compelling argument that Family to Family Ties is different from other programs. It requires sustainable funding, and must be further developed to increase its capacity to change the lives of those involved and improve the community. The economic feasibility, sustainability, and capacity building opportunities make this program exceptional in its ability to serve the community.

If this is not enough to capture the interest and confidence of the community, resilience research gives credence to the Family to Family Ties program. Until such time when family mentorship is further explored in research, resilience researchers allow for better understanding the intrinsic value of the Family to Family Ties program. In a forty-year longitudinal study on resilience, it was found that seventy percent of all study participants struggling with significant adversity during early development were able to grow into healthy and capable adults (Werner and Smith, 2001). The breadth and scope of that study has provided concrete information about children at risk. Werner and Smith explored the common threads and have been able to identify that access to strong support, despite difficult circumstances, is key to maintaining a stable developmental trajectory.

Barter (2006) explored community capacity building as a means of developing the community through the power of relationships. Family to Family Ties is also grounded in this work.

One area for further evaluation is the matching process. The goal would be to document the ratio of complete and incomplete family matches, and then explore what factors contributed to the completion of the match. This might help the program coordinator

ensure that new matches have the maximum likelihood of success. Some information already exists as to what contributes to a successful match, and this could be used as a starting place for a future inquiry. Likewise, the participants who were involved in this study have provided considerable information about what has led to positive experiences within the matching process of the program.

## CONCLUSION

*The most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved. We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.*

- Mother Teresa (Johnson Lewis, n.d.)

Family to Family Ties is a unique and exciting program. The positive energy and momentum exhibited by all those involved in the program was evident in each interview and discussion for this research. Based on the information provided in this report, the aims of the Family to Family Ties program are being met. Participants and volunteers alike are making connections and building relationships. Families are moving from isolation to connection. Through these experiences, participants are accessing support and navigating personal growth that contributes to various pathways toward healthy development and increased community engagement.



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## **Appendix A. Telephone Script.**

### Evaluation of the “Family to Family Ties” Program

**Researchers:** Stacy McRae, BSW. (M. Ed. Candidate), Department of Educational Psychology and Special Education; Dr. Keith Walker, Professor, Department of Educational Administration, University Saskatchewan; Maria Basualdo, Research Supervisor, CUISR.

#### **Program Description**

We are inviting you to participate in the evaluation of the Family to Family Ties program delivered through Catholic Family Services of Saskatoon, SK. The goal of the research is to collect a wide range of information about the program, its delivery and the impact that the program has on program participants. A desired outcome of this research is to create a document that will reflect the information gathered through this research.

#### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

The individual information you give us is confidential, and this confidentiality will be protected to the extent permitted by law. Individual responses will not be linked to particular participants.

All conversations will be confidential and any results will be reported anonymously. The information collected during this research may be used for educational purposes, and will become part of a published report. Verbatim (word-for-word) quotes will be assigned to pseudonyms and NO information will be reported that would allow anyone to be identified individually.

#### **Research Participation**

Participation in the study is voluntary. You will not be required to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions, or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

#### **Potential Benefits Associated with Participation**

We believe your input about this program is important. The Family to Family Ties program is a unique program and continued development of the program is necessary to ensure that the program is flexible in meeting the needs of those who are served by the program.

After having your questions answered, if you are comfortable with participating in the research, please provide your name and contact information so it can be placed on the participant roster.

Once contacted for research interviewing, you will be provided a consent form detailing further information about the study and your rights as a research participant. If you have questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research subject you may contact the Office of Research Services, xxx-xxxx at the University of Saskatchewan. If necessary, the Office of Research Services can be contacted by calling collect. Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix B. Adult Consent Form.**

You are participating in a study entitled, “The Evaluation of the “Family to Family Ties Program.” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

### **What is this Study About?**

We are inviting funding agents, program staff and program participants who are currently, or have in the past, been involved in the Family to Family Ties program to participate in either individual taped interviews or taped focus group interviews that will take approximately forty five minutes to complete. The purpose of this research is to collect a wide range of information about the Family to Family Ties program that will assist program staff in further program development.

A desired outcome of this research is to create a document that will reflect the information gathered through this research.

### **Potential Benefits**

We believe your input about this program is important. The Family to Family Ties program is a unique program and continued development of the program is necessary to ensure that the program is flexible in meeting the needs of those who are served by the program.

### **Risk or Deception**

Participants will not be deceived in the course of this study. Risks due to the limits in the ability to guarantee confidentiality of participants drawn from a small population is addressed in the next section.

### **Your Confidentiality**

Individual and focus group taped conversations will be subject to examination only by the researchers, however, because data is collected using taped conversations with participants drawn from a small population, the researcher’s ability to ensure confidentiality and anonymity is limited. All materials will be completed anonymously and assumed names will be assigned by the researcher for use in the transcription and reporting of the data. Participants will be informed that there are limits to which the researcher can ensure the confidentiality of the information derived from the individual interviews.

The level of security involves locked file cabinets, contained in a locked office (for paper files such as consent forms and interview transcripts). Files are accessible only

to research staff. Computer access is by password only; computers are kept in locked offices. Backup copies of data are maintained by the researchers and contained in a locked file drawer in a locked office. The data (transcripts and audio recordings) will be stored at CUISR in the office of Maria Basualdo for five years following completion of the study.

### **Right to Withdraw**

As a participant, you may refuse to answer individual questions and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Withdrawal from the study will in no way influence your involvement in the program. This withdrawal will not affect your access to, or continuation of, services provided by public agencies such as the University, hospitals, social services, schools, and in no way changes your relationship with Catholic Family Services. If you choose to withdraw, your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.

Although the data from this study will be published and presented publicly, the data will be reported in summary form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the materials used, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Please do not put your name or other identifying information on the materials used.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.

### **Consent to Participate**

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, with the understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time, without any consequence to me. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

### **Feedback on Results**

We are happy to share the results with you. A summary of research findings will be generated and made available to participants upon completion of the study.

### **Ethics Approval**

This study has been approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan on \_\_\_\_\_. Any questions can be directed to the researchers or to the Office of Research Services, xxx-xxxx. If necessary the Office of Research Services can be reached by calling collect.

#### **Researcher(s):**

Stacy McRae

CUI SR Researcher, University of Saskatchewan

Phone: xxx-xxxx

Maria Basualdo

Community-University Institute for Social Research,

University of Saskatchewan

Phone: xxx-xxxx

Dr. Keith Walker

Professor, University of Saskatchewan

CUI SR Researcher Supervisor

Phone: xxx-xxxx

**Appendix C. Focus Group Script.**

Welcome to the focus group interview for the Family to Family Ties program evaluation. Your participation is very much appreciated. If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided to you if you have questions at a later time. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality. The researcher will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so.

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time. Withdrawal from the study will in no way influence your involvement in the program. This withdrawal will not affect your access to, or continuation of, services provided by public agencies such as the University, hospitals, social services, schools, and in no way changes your relationship with Catholic Family Services. If your child chooses to withdraw, your data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.

I agree to participate in the study as outlined above. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons and without any consequences.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)



**Appendix D. Transcript Release Form.**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have reviewed the complete transcript of my individual and/or focus group taped conversation, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my individual and/or focus group taped conversation with Stacy Johnstone, researcher. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Stacy Johnstone to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **Appendix E. Child Release Form.**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is participating in a study entitled, “The Evaluation of the “Family to Family Ties Program.” Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you might have.

### **What is this Study About?**

We are inviting funding agents, program staff and program participants who are currently, or have in the past, been involved in the Family to Family Ties program to participate in either individual taped interviews or taped focus group interviews that will take approximately forty five minutes to complete. The purpose of this research is to collect a wide range of information about the Family to Family Ties program that will assist program staff in further program development.

A desired outcome of this research is to create a document that will reflect the information gathered through this research.

### **Potential Benefits**

We believe your input about this program is important. The Family to Family Ties program is a unique program and continued development of the program is necessary to ensure that the program is flexible in meeting the needs of those who are served by the program.

### **Risk or Deception**

You are asked to be present during the course of the interview with your child. Participants will not be deceived in the course of this study. Risks due to the limits in the ability to guarantee confidentiality of participants drawn from a small population is addressed in the next section.

### **Your Confidentiality**

Individual and focus group taped conversations will be subject to examination only by the researchers, however, because data is collected using taped conversations with participants drawn from a small population, the researcher’s ability to ensure confidentiality and anonymity is limited. All materials will be completed anonymously and assumed names will be assigned by the researcher for use in the transcription and reporting of the data. Participants will be informed that there are limits to which the researcher can ensure the confidentiality of the information derived from the individual interviews.

The level of security involves locked file cabinets, contained in a locked office (for paper files such as consent forms and interview transcripts). Files are accessible only to research staff. Computer access is by password only; computers are kept in locked offices. Backup copies of data are maintained by the researchers and contained in a locked file drawer in a locked office. The data (transcripts and audio recordings) will be stored at CUISR in the office of Maria Basualdo for five years following completion of the study.

### **Right to Withdraw**

As a participant, your child may refuse to answer individual questions. Your child is free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Withdrawal from the study will in no way influence your involvement in the program. This withdrawal will not affect your access to, or continuation of, services provided by public agencies such as the University, hospitals, social services, schools, and in no way changes your relationship with Catholic Family Services. If your child chooses to withdraw, your child's data will be deleted from the study and destroyed.

Although the data from this study will be published and presented publicly, the data will be reported in summary form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the materials used, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Please do not put your name or other identifying information on the materials used.

### **Questions**

If you have any questions concerning the study, please feel free to ask at any point; you are also free to contact the researchers at the numbers provided above if you have questions at a later time.

### **Consent to Participate**

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to my child's participation in the study described above, with the understanding that he/she may withdraw this consent at any time, without any consequence to me or my child. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

### **Feedback on Results**

We are happy to share the results with you. A summary of research findings will be generated and made available to participants upon completion of the study.

**Ethics Approval**

This study has been approved by the Behavioral Research Ethics Board at the University of Saskatchewan on \_\_\_\_\_. Any questions can be directed to the researchers or to the Office of Research Services, xxx-xxxx. If necessary the Office of Research Services can be reached by calling collect.

**Researcher(s):**

Stacy McRae

CUISR Researcher, University of Saskatchewan

Phone: xxx-xxxx

Maria Basualdo

Community-University Institute for Social Research,

University of Saskatchewan

Phone: xxx-xxxx

Dr. Keith Walker

Professor, University of Saskatchewan

CUISR Researcher Supervisor

Phone: xxx-xxxx

I agree to allow my child to participate in the study as outlined above. I understand that he/she can withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons and without any consequences.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Signature of Researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

**Appendix F. Child Involvement Assent Protocol.**

I am inviting you to participate in this conversation about Family to Family Ties program. Your parents are going to be present during this conversation and if you do not feel comfortable talking about it, you can choose not to share your experiences with me. This conversation will teach me more about the experiences that you and your family have had with this program. You do not have to do this, and no-one will be angry. If you start and then get tired of it, you can get quite and no-one will mind.

**Appendix G. File Review Rubric.**

**Participant Family Files**

First contact and matched date  
Number of children in family  
Identified goals  
Where they heard about the program

**Volunteer Family Files**

First contact and matched date  
Where they heard about the program  
Program interest  
Motivation for involvement

## **Appendix H. Forms Review Checklist.**

### **Participant Family File**

Participant family job description  
Letter to potential participant families  
Family information forms  
Contact tracking information  
Assessment summaries  
Case notes  
Participant background information  
Participant program perspectives  
Personal goal planning sheet  
Goals to share with volunteer family  
Criminal record check volunteer letter  
Consent form  
Permission release form  
One-year letter  
Participant outcomes questionnaire  
Participant one-year follow-up evaluation

### **Volunteer Family File**

Letter to potential mentor/volunteer families  
Helping other in health ways handout  
Volunteer family job description  
Family contact information form  
Contact tracking information  
Assessment summaries  
Case notes  
Volunteer background information  
Volunteer program perspectives

Questions for screening volunteers  
Criminal record check letter  
Child abuse record check letter  
Child abuse record release  
Reference release form  
Reference form letter  
Reference form  
Informed consent  
Permission release form  
One-year letter  
Volunteer outcomes questionnaire  
Volunteer end of program survey  
Follow up referral sheet  
Child abuse record check



**Appendix I. Document Analysis Log.**

Program newsletter, fall 2005

Partner family handbook

Historic volunteer brochure

Historic participant brochure

Poverty presentation

Reviewed complete CFS web site

CUISR internship application

Family to Family Ties annual report (1 April 2005 to 31 March 2006)

Current volunteer brochure

Current participant brochure

Current general program brochure

Field notes collected from presentation made by Terry Lowe (29 March 2006)

Field notes collected from two videos “Plugged in” and “Family to Family Ties”

Participant family forms folder

Volunteer family forms folder

Current CFS mission brochure

Family to Family Ties monthly statistics (August, September, and October 2005)

