

**Family Services à la famille Ottawa – 312 Parkdale Avenue
Celebrating Our 90th Anniversary
(A series of 9 articles leading up to our Birthday Celebrations in May 2005)**

*Did you know..... We became a professional counselling agency?
(1954-1964)*

In the previous four decades, our agency was known as the Ottawa Welfare Bureau, providing relief services, assisting soldiers and their families during and after the war, and developing and delivering services wherever the need arose. As the government started to develop social service programs, the Ottawa Welfare Bureau changed its name to the Family Service Centre of Ottawa-Carleton and began focusing on providing counselling services and assuming more of an advocacy role.

Although as an organization the Family Service Centre (FSC) was celebrating its 40th anniversary, for many staff members, the beginning of this decade felt like the beginning of a new agency. In addition to changing its name, the agency had lost two long-time employees to retirement. Florence Christie was now the Executive Director, and in the 10 years she was to be with FSC, her work laid the foundation and direction for the agency for the next 50 years. As part of her effort to establish FSC as a leading community agency, she changed the venue of the annual meetings from the Chateau Laurier to various United Churches in the City, such as Dominion.

Advocacy started to become a more important function during this period, although paling in comparison to its work in the 1970s and '80s. FSC chose housing as its first significant issue to tackle. Housing had been a concern since 1916, as so many of the interactions with clients were in their homes. The lack of affordable housing and the unsanitary conditions of many homes was frequently raised at Board meetings and Annual meetings. FSC struggled to obtain a permanent home for itself, which may have personalized the issue, but perhaps the new director and new agency name provided the motivation needed to finally broach the issue formally with the City.

Unique about this period was FSC's effort to establish its role in the community as a leading professional counselling agency. Although it continued to provide some financial assistance, FSC's real aim was to provide counselling to help families and individuals lead healthier, happier lives. Social Workers still had the capacity to continue to offer tangible support to clients as well, given the number of partnerships created over the years with other community agencies. For example, if a mother, recently widowed and struggling to deal with young children needed

support around the house, FSC had access to funds and a working relationship with Visiting Homemakers Association. FSC also continued to offer individual advocacy, helping clients access benefits and medical necessities.

It is hard to imagine the number of lives touched by one agency over the last 50 years, but each intervention, each compassionate, caring contact had a profound impact. The Annual Reports during this time period captured personal client stories that highlighted FSC's day-to-day work. An example of such a story was also included in Miss Christie's address at one of the Annual meetings.

"Mr. T. came to the agency in November 1955, unable to pay his fuel bill while feeding his 2 young daughters. His wife was in the Sanitorium and would be there for another year. His salary was \$40.00 a week and he could not cope. His wife's health deteriorated while worrying about him. The FSC worker sat down with Mr. T. to help him financially with budgeting and to plan meals. Renewed confidence and time gave Mr. T. the opportunity to get a better job, and FSC staff remained involved until Mrs. T. was healthy enough to return home."

We don't know what would have happened to this family if FSC staff were not there. Perhaps conditions would have worsened and Mrs. T. would have remained in hospital longer, or the girls might have become wards of C.A.S. There were many other families like this one whose lives FSC staff touched, sometimes with practical support, and sometimes offering the unmeasurable aid of the dignity of knowing someone cares.

By the time FSC reached its 50th anniversary in 1964 its staff had helped over *** people.

(Next issue, Decade #6, 1964-1974).