

**Family Services à la famille Ottawa – 312 Parkdale Avenue
Celebrating Our 90th Anniversary
(The 6th of 9 articles leading up to our Birthday Celebrations in May
2005)**

A Decade of Community Building (1974-1984)

Having settled into our new building on Ross Avenue in the Tunney's Pasture neighbourhood, the Family Service Centre continued its role as one of the city's premier counselling agencies, providing support for thousands of individuals, couples and families. Gus Fraser continued to grow the Family Life Education program, delivering Parenting programs across the region.

What made this period unique in our history was the influence of our Social Workers in building the Social Service structure that remains viable today. Joan Gullen was instrumental in supporting community development and establishing counselling and advocacy support in the communities that we served. This was outreach as it was meant to be: staff and citizen volunteers working side by side to build neighbourhoods.

Evelyn McCorkille, Executive Director of Family Services at this time, had essentially given Joan the opportunity to do what work was necessary to strengthen and build communities by working alongside residents in impoverished areas and advocating on their behalf. The first area chosen for this work was in South East Ottawa, in the Heatherington community. Joan worked on site as a counsellor in an office in Confederation Court, an arrangement made possible by the provision of office space by the City. Residents of the community took part in designing the programs needed, and through their involvement in this community work, they gained a voice for their concerns with local politicians. The importance of having such full community participation was in order to lead community members to become full partners in the delivery of community services.

Having Joan on site led to the development of other community programs, such as one to assist mothers make the transition to going back to finish high school or college, as well as the development of the first Homework Club. With Joan leading the way, Family Services played a role in establishing many Community Resource Centres which still exist today, such as Carlington Community and Health Services, Lowertown Community Resource Centre and Pinecrest-Queensway Health and Community Services.

As well as playing key roles in community work, in the early 1970s, FSC and Joan played a key role in obtaining federal funding to open a Shelter for women. Campaigns to end violence against women were gaining momentum in North America, and as a result of Joan's and others' work at Family Services, in 1976, Interval House opened its doors as the first shelter in Ottawa, and only the second in Ontario.

One of the most memorable efforts that Joan and Family Services were involved in during this decade, however, was the beginning of the Snowsuit Fund. In the early 1980s, a School Board Social Worker brought to the attention of FSC that a number of children were going to school without snow suits. FSC initiated a survey to confirm this concern, and as a result of acting rapidly to approach City Council with this concern in December 1981, we were given \$15,000 to purchase clothes. It was agreed that the first depot for distribution of the clothing would be at the Ross Avenue FSC Boardroom. FSC looked for a local manufacturer to purchase snowsuits in volume, but could only locate one in Montreal. So Joan Gullen rented a van and drove to Montreal in a snowstorm to pick up the snowsuits, returning at midnight. This project eventually caught the attention of the media. It was so successful that it eventually spun off into a separate organization now known as the Snowsuit Fund.

The Snowsuit Fund initiative reinforced the legacy and significance of this small but mighty agency. Whether it was in the creation of the Christmas Exchange, the After 4 Program or Interval House, the work and influence of Family Services à la famille Ottawa has left a lasting and profound impact.

(Next issue, Decade #8, 1984-1994).