

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.....

A new millennium and new challenges.
(1994-2004)

The last five years of the second millennium provided a unique set of challenges for Family Services à la famille Ottawa (FSFO). Across Canada and the Western world political thinking and public sentiment reflected a new toughness that often became mean-spirited. Public services, health, education and the social safety net became favourite targets for deep reductions in public funding as governments at all levels sought to solve their financial woes. Sadly, this was often at the expense of those least able to stand without some support.

The computer and internet had revolutionized the world and the way we work and play. So much so that we worried that a worldwide shutdown would result from a simple yet pervasive computer code. Who can forget the immense effort and expense that went into preparing for the millennium bug.

Ottawa enjoyed a boom in the high tech industry that more than compensated for the reduction of the civil service. Unfortunately many in Ottawa did not enjoy or participate in the prosperity. And for those that did benefit the costs were high in terms of personal stress, and work and family pressure. Requests for service from people on both sides of the poverty line grew rapidly as the staff struggled to do 'more with less'. New ways of helping people were developed to stem the tidal wave of demand; helping families interact, building community strength, helping people through their place of work, and providing more educational opportunities were just some of the responses that were developed.

Family Services emerged from the funding freeze of the late 90's as a stronger, more resilient organization. The millennium came and went, the dot com economy came and went, and political thinking became less severe. We were beginning to remember our sense of community, to feel good about ourselves, and thinking more about our future directions. It seemed as if we were on our way to a kinder, gentler time for much of our society. Service numbers and client satisfaction were high, and budgets were balanced. There was a sense that FSFO, as an organization and a community, had successfully survived a tough challenge but that we would be wise to be better prepared for the future. In the year 2000, Family Services found themselves in a unique partnership with Rideauwood Addiction Services and Citizen Advocacy as owners of the building at 312

Parkdale. Anyone who has moved after 25 years in the same house will know the emotional upheaval this can cause. However the new location quickly became a 'home' and would prove to be successful on all accounts.

There are a few rare events that are so broadly experienced that they can define a generation. Everyone remembers that morning of September 11, 2002. Just as we remember the Kennedy assassination, this generation was forever changed, as a whole, in that instant. We debated the causes and responsibilities, we experienced fear and anger, we considered how to respond and what to change. As events unfolded on the world stage, FSFO spoke out in the name of peace and harmony; trying to think globally and act locally. For the most part, in communities across Canada, the sense of anger moderated and it became apparent that we would continue to respect and value our cultural makeup.

Although overshadowed by world events there was an important debate quietly underway in Canada on the role of the voluntary sector; how it should operate, how it could be supported, how it was defined. FSFO took a long hard look at its own role and began exploring new ways of supporting itself and ensuring its top quality services are available to all those in need. Family Services developed a new name, look and logo, and committed itself publicly to its values and beliefs. As well, it began to look at other ways to find the financial support needed to operate, to reduce its reliance on traditional funding sources. But finding the necessary funds and telling people what you stand for is secondary to the quality of help and actual support offered at FSFO. Clients of Family Services; individuals, families, and entire communities, have high regard for the help and support they receive, word of mouth is still the most common way that people come to know about this remarkable agency

It's also a remarkable tribute to the founders and those involved since its inception that, 90 years later, Family Services is still committed to the same values and purpose. The means may have changed with the times but Family Services still provides for the emotional health and well being of families, individuals and the larger community, just as it was intended to do those many years ago.

This is the last of the series of articles ..., but continue to follow activities at FSO by logging in to www.familyservicesottawa.org The Gala 90th Birthday Celebration is to be held on May 6 at the Chateau Laurier....."