

Wonderful Spring.

It is great to have spring around us bringing warmth to our lives and promising things to come. The trick is to catch the momentum and move with it.

This spring newsletter is intended to bring parents up to date with what other parent activists have been doing and to invite you to get involved this spring. There are great opportunities to be a part of change over the summer and in the fall.

In this issue:

What parents had to say about the Colour of Poverty Campaign

Open Space – the issues significant to families

Toronto Community Development Institute – Spring Conference

Upcoming parent action group meetings

Before getting to that let's share a story.

Stories are a great way to share wisdom in a gentle way. They start conversations.

Here is a short one about planning that I think is delightful. It was snagged from the blog of Chris Cavanagh who presented a two part workshop in March and April. Check out his blog for other interesting stories.

<http://comeuppance.blogspot.com>

Don't forget to pull out a blanket and share some stories with your kids this spring.

I love the story of the dining hall at Oxford. The ceiling of the hall had been made from great oak beams that after 400 years were falling apart.

Oxford wanted to preserve the architecture and so sought for oak beams that would replace the aging ones. But they were told that there were no oak trees large enough – due to logging – from which to make the needed beams.

It was then that one of the carpenters noticed the stand of ancient oaks right beside the dining hall. They were huge and could provide the beams that were needed.

And then they realized that the builders of the dining hall 400 years earlier knew that one day the hall would need repaired. And thus had planted the oaks that they knew would one day be used to maintain their work.



Parent Conference

Colour of Poverty Campaign

The colour of poverty campaign is concerned with raising people's awareness that poverty is not impacting on communities in an equal way. In fact, it is very alarming that if you are a person of colour (visible minority) you are way more likely to live in poverty.

This is called the racialization of poverty. What that means is that statistics and people's experiences say that race is related to how well you can expect your family to be living.

This concerns a lot of people.

To help address that, parents at the FAIR Conference watched a video sharing the experience of three individuals living in Toronto. Parents were invited to discuss the video.

Here is some point form notes on what they said were things that needed to happen to address poverty for families.

Group 1

The Colour of Poverty campaign information needs to be more available to parents in communities. Post this information in community centres, childcare centre, and English classes

Group 2

- Better job opportunities for immigrants
- Training programs with great publicity
- Professional degrees accepted or quick started through funded programs

Group 3

- Education training including certification of foreign trained professionals
- Career exploration : access to computer skills to find a job and set goals
- More education on poverty, drugs, etc

Group 4

- Equal access to employment
- Recognition of credentials from abroad
- Provide volunteer opportunities within professions

- Access to funded ways to standardize or bring up to the Canadian level of profession e.g. doctors, dentists etc.
- Job placements for educated individuals
- Community programs spanning the childhood years that draw in families from different communities/groups
- Find a way to have " How things are in Canada" classes – an intro to life in Canada, rules and customs, rating systems
- Subsidized/temporary housing

Group 5

- More community groups for people from different countries
- More transparent information to newcomers about what services are available and how to get referrals
- More multi-lingual settlement and support workers who are more accessible
- Laws that make companies hire newcomers and include ESL class as part of the work day
- Have a hotline newcomers can call with any question and receive proper answers and recommendations
- Clear, accurate info in newcomer welcome packages and more full-time workers to assist

Group 6

- Believe in your rights
- Make use of them
- Keep your self esteem high
- Stop blaming, keep working
- Build your resources

If you are interested in getting involved with the Colour of Poverty Campaign or becoming better informed about it, you can:

- 1) Join other parents in planning community discussions on the issue. Parents for Action Now and East End Parent Action Group are working together to put on community events this fall. Get involved by coming to the next meeting on May 28th at St. Christopher house. For more information, call Tammy at 416-703-8482 ext. 233 or Deborah at 416-595-9230 ext. 322.

2) Check out the Colour of Poverty website.
www.colourofpoverty.ca

3) Other related websites:
Campaign 2000
<http://www.campaign2000.ca>
Make Poverty History
<http://www.makepovertyhistory.ca/en>

Open Space

Open Space is a process that sets up a time and location for communities and/or groups to set the agenda right then and there.

It welcomes people to put up topics, gather together interested people to discuss issues and decide what if any actions they want to happen from their discussions.

1. Parent empowerment: Creating spaces/opportunities for parents to build relationship and support each other. Included ideas like flexible work environments, access to free community spaces, knowledge of resources.
2. Housing: Including respectful processes and inclusion in development/ redevelopment plans
3. Cultural Sensitivity in Public School System: Understanding the public system and having a forum for parents to support and advocate for students needs
4. Affordable daycare: Waiting lists are a big concern. Parents want more than simply licensed childcare.

One interesting point was the idea of multicultural background caregivers to help children maintain cultural root.

Another was the need for a full range of family supports from family resource programs to licensed childcare. Families need things like parent relief and home visiting.

5. Speech and Language Development in First Language: There is a lot of interest about the family literacy including the notion that families need to read to their children in whatever language they feel most

comfortable in. Kids learn by experiencing reading – the language the book is written in is not important.

6. Reduce Pollution: Parents are concerned with the world for their children. Creative actions and concerns were discussed.

7. Pay Equity and Women's Financial Security: Parents need women focused education around wills and returning work. They felt a good way to do this would be to have guest speakers from different careers and from women specific job centres.

8. Teaching kids about diversity: There is a need to be involved in making sure children learn about diversity in all aspects of their life. Perhaps creating a program like Roots of Empathy run through schools would be an option. There could be a way to expand it to make sure diversity is covered.

Parents and programs need to make sure families are celebrating diversity in every day life.

9. Child and Senior Abuse: Parents are concerned that there is not enough attention paid to the abuse of seniors and children and the connection between them.

10. TTC being stroller and wheelchair friendly: families need to be supported and welcome on the TTC including making sure that transit understands the impact of not welcoming parents and children by the lack of good policy and practices.

11. Short term and Partial Disability: Families are impacted by changes to things like ODSP. Families need help to understand and keep current with these programs and supported to navigate these systems.

Were you involved in any of these discussions at the Parent Conference? Do these topics interest you? Call or email Deborah if you would like FAIR to help you meet with other parents to continue to discuss these topics.

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Parents take the Lead

Parent Activists participation at Toronto Community Development Institute Conference

There was a conference in April bringing together community activists from across the city to learn from each other about how to engage community in action.

Two workshops that were accepted for inclusion in the conference program included facilitation skills of parent activists involved with FAIR.

Facilitating Capacity Building

By Debbie Bottley

I wanted to be involved with the Toronto CDI conference for two reasons. I have been involved with FAIR for more than a year now and was happy to have the opportunity to talk about the FAIR project. It has been a positive experience for me that I am eager to share with other people.



Debbie and her boys enjoying the park.

I have just finished the Community Worker Program at George Brown College and I saw participating in the conference as a way of building on what I have learned. As a community worker, my career will likely to include facilitation, so I was grateful for an opportunity to practice these skills

I enjoyed facilitating my part of the workshop. Participants were attentive and they participated well in the activities. This helped things go smoothly. My favourite part was an activity that demonstrated four different types of communities: geographic communities, communities of interest, age group communities and issue based communities.

The only unpleasant was the confusion resulting from the TTC strike. I left home without my presentation materials. Staffs was able to help get everything there so there was no disaster.

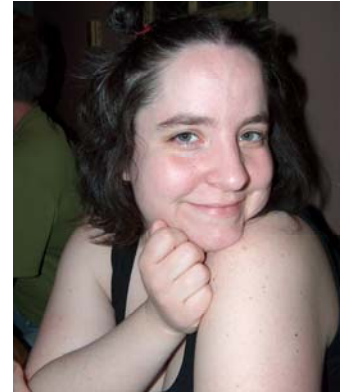
I also attend other workshops during the three-day conference. I enjoyed meeting people who do interesting work in community development. The workshops I attended were very different and highlighted the different forms community development work can take, from planting gardens, to outreach, to image theatre.

It is difficult to choose a favourite workshop since I enjoyed all of them; however the image theatre workshop stands out. Prior to attending the workshop, I had no idea what image theatre was, so I the things I learned were completely new to me. I also liked this workshop because it was so interactive and participation based. We were not just learning about or watching a "performance", we were all performing.

It is good for me to participate in that type of activity, which requires me to move a little beyond my comfort zone and deal with people watching what I am doing. The workshop was a lot of fun, as well as educational. I love all kinds of theatre, so I loved learning about how it can be used as a community development tool.

Participating in the conference was an overwhelmingly positive experience for me. The most important understanding that I take away from the conference is there are many different ways to do community development work. There is not one method that works better than another. What works in some situations may not work in others and I need to keep my mind open to all the possibilities.

What I think is a good idea may in fact not be, and what may sound like a strange idea to me may in fact be the right one. I had been told these things while I was at school, but it enlightened me further to hear from the people working in community development about all the



different methods that have been working for them.

Discovering the skills and interests you have to share with your community and other families is an important part of FAIR.

To find out about how you can get involved, contact Deborah at 416-595-9230 ext. 322.

Cristina invites workshop participants to talk about “the elephant in the room” – how can they improve the workshop.

Maybe Collecting Stories is the Action

Three parents from Parents for Action Now presented a workshop at TCDI. The workshop highlighted the work being done by members of the parent action group.



Cristina and Rita discuss next steps of the workshop

Cristina, Claudia and Rita worked together to create and facilitate a 3 hour workshop. They had a great interactive exercise to help participants understand how overwhelming being a newcomer with young children can be. It was very powerful.

They collected stories from workshop participants and lead a discussion on next steps for the story collecting.

PfAN will continue to collect stories about the impact of immigration on families. They are interested in going to other communities to hear stories from parents.

What do you have to say?

The FAIR project will be wrapping up in November 2008. There are many parents still interested in working together after that time as well there are many issues to be explored and stories to be shared. What's stopping you from getting involved now?

In order to be looking at how to continue with pieces of work parents feel passionate about we need to hear from you now.

Ways to be involved:

Come to parent action group meetings

Parents for Action Now and East End Parent Action Group will meet on May 28 and June 25 from 6:00 to 8:00. Call Tammy Décarie at 703-8482 ext. 233.

Central Family Action Group will meet at 519 Church St. Community Centre on June 13 at the 519 Church St. Community Centre. Summer meetings will be held at FSA-T at the 355 Church St. location on July 10 and August 14. Call Ronnie at 416-863-0499 or Joanne at 416-392-6874.

Mamma Bears meets at Harbourfront Community Centre. Phone Gaby or Alka at 416-392-1509.

Come to FAIR training

The next FAIR training will be on June 6th from 2:00 to 5:00. We will be talking about The Missing Link



- Communication. If we do not pay attention to the words we use and how we communicate we may be excluding people from the work and actions we are taking.

Please let Deborah know if you are planning to attend and if you need childcare.

Contribute to FAIR parent newsletter

The next newsletter will be going out before the end of June. If you have a story you would like to share about your experience as a parent activist please don't hesitate to connect with Deborah about it. The parent newsletter is for that specifically – parents talking to parents.

Come to public conversations

A public conversation is held simply for the pleasure of talking about an issue of interest for a couple of hours in a public space. Any one is welcome to participate.

Two public conversations will be hosted by the FAIR project during the summer. Although dates and locations have not been decided yet, you should now what we are planning to talk about.

Redefining Community Readiness

Often when the term Community Readiness is used, people assume this refers to community members such as parents, volunteers or other local activists. Over the past two years, there has been anecdotal evidence that sometimes it is agencies, services and networks that may also be experiencing barriers to be ready for deeper inclusion of families. If we want more inclusive communities, can redefining community readiness help us to be gentle with ourselves and in the end get to inclusion faster?

The benefits of risk taking

There are lots of good reasons why we need to consider our involvement in actions before plunging in head first. However, is it possible that we have become too cautious? Has our need to consider the all of the impacts and risks immobilized us?

In AFIR we ask parents and frontline staff to be risk takers. They have stepped outside their comfort zone to learn new ways of thinking about issues and taking action.

How do we create this kind of risk taking in more aspects of our lives and work?

Would you like to learn how to moderate a public conversation? Do you want to be the guest that introduces either of these topics?

Let Deborah know. She would be happy to include you!

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you."

Maya Angelou