



Families First Society
FORT SASKATCHEWAN

2014-2015 ANNUAL REPORT



Safe, strong, healthy future generations

#thisisourvillage



#thisisourvillage

Safe, strong, healthy future generations

This is our village

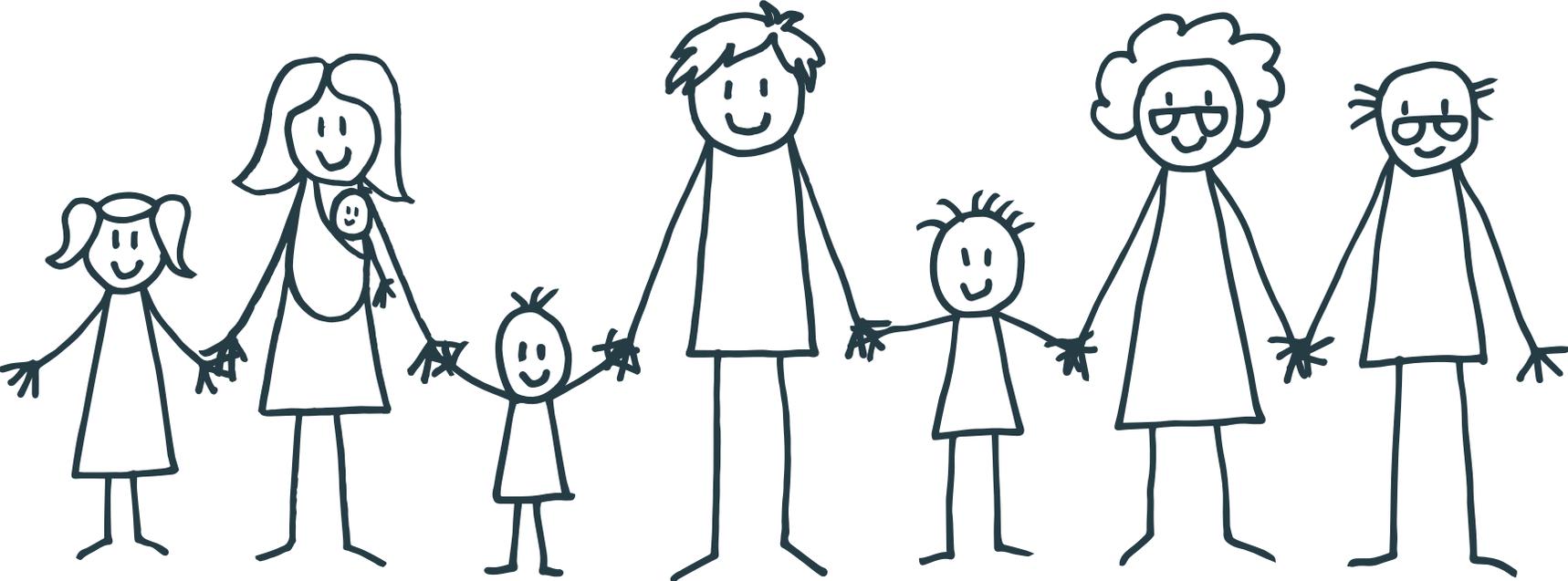
Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society is a charitable organization serving families through early childhood development, parenting programs and family support.

When our community—our village—works together, we improve the lives of families. We create a safe environment to nurture strong healthy future generations.

Over 950 families now participate in programs and services at Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society every year.

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Executive Director

Hello, Village! Ubuntu!

In Bantu, “Ubuntu” means “Today I share with you because tomorrow you share with me”. In other words, “I am, because we are.” We are connected.

This past year has been one of creating change, and to create change in a way that is positive and creative, we must first understand who our relationships are with and be grateful for the people we are connected with. This is very important to us!

One of the changes we have seen over the past year has been an expansion of our Fort Saskatchewan Parent Link Programming due to an Enhancement Grant received from Alberta Human Services. You will read in this report about how this program funding has allowed us to connect with families we would not have been able to otherwise, and we are extremely grateful for this opportunity.

Change this year has also occurred within our Status of Women Canada project to reduce family violence in Fort Saskatchewan. Again, thanks to our connected community, you will read there is much strength and resolve to proactively combat domestic violence in our city.

And thirdly, in October of 2014, our Fort Saskatchewan City Council passed a motion to lease the current RCMP station, once vacant, to

Families First at the rate of a dollar per year. This means that at long last, our dream of moving into a larger space will come true! We are tremendously grateful to our municipal council for recognizing the critical role that Families First plays for families in and around Fort Saskatchewan. Having a larger building that can accommodate the office, program and family support space that we have come to need for our rapidly growing community, will help to ensure that we can continue to provide the right programs and services, at the right time, at the highest standards.

At Families First we talk a great deal about building our community; our “village”. We talk about making change together – with each other. We salute our partners, our volunteers, and are ever grateful to our sponsors and funders. We are equally grateful for the people who bring us donations of food, infant formula and diapers, and we especially love the smiles and hugs we receive from our families every day. They bring us tremendous energy and joy!

Currently we are in the midst of a capital campaign to raise money for the renovations we must do to our new home, to turn it from an RCMP station into a warm, welcoming, family friendly environment. We hope to move this December! There will be many ways that every one of you can be involved with this exciting and important endeavor, so stay tuned!

It is with gratitude that I leave you to enjoy our 2014-2015 Annual Report. Please take your time as you read through it. Get to know the faces in the pictures. Imagine yourself in the shoes of the people who so generously and bravely shared their stories. Soak in the feelings of community and relationship, and celebrate with us.

Families First Society – this is our village. Ubuntu!



Heather Boonstra

*Heather Boonstra
Executive Director
Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society*

Chair, Board of Directors

Dear families, friends, sponsors and supporters,

It is with pleasure that we, the Board of Directors, present the Fort Saskatchewan Families First 2014/15 annual report to you. You will note within this report a number of highlights of the past year as we continue to serve the families, children and other residents of the City of Fort Saskatchewan, as well as people in Sturgeon County and the surrounding area, particularly through our Parent Link Centre and Early Childhood programs.

This past year has been very exciting indeed for Families First. We were successful in convincing the Fort Saskatchewan City Council to support Families First as a tenant for the former RCMP building. We are so very grateful to City Council for agreeing to complete renovations to bring the building up to appropriate building code standards. It is up to the Board to raise the rest of the money to complete the renovations needed to make the building suitable for families, volunteers, visitors and staff. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to fundraising efforts so far as we work hard to raise our goal of \$500,000.

As a Board, we are most proud of how well our staff, under Heather's leadership, manages to address the needs of families and young

children. They are a professional, caring group of individuals who welcome all families and demonstrate compassion as they hear their stories and respond as necessary. We are very fortunate to have these professionals working for us on a day-to-day basis.

We also appreciate the many volunteers who give their time to help Families First accomplish our goals in serving families. We would not be able to do our work without their generosity. Please accept our gratitude for all that you do for us.

At this time, we would also like to thank our sponsors and funders, without which we would be limited in our ability to serve the needs of the families in Fort Saskatchewan and the surrounding areas. The number of contracts, grants and donations we receive annually is a testament to the community support for the aims and goals of Families First and the broad community commitment to ensuring that our local families are receiving the services, supports and programs they need.

As a not-for-profit organization, we cannot function without a strong and dedicated board of directors. The Board was very engaged this past year in planning for a new home for Families First. We are closer than ever to our goal to bring more of our programs together under one roof and to providing a more inviting

and comfortable space for the families we serve to visit staff and access programs, supports and services that they need.

Thank you again for all that you have done and will do to support Families First.

Sincerely,



Karen Sliwkanich
Chairperson, on behalf of the Board of Directors
for Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society



Board of Directors

As a board of directors, we are a group of dedicated, community-minded individuals working to make a difference.

350+ volunteer hours by board

A fable - Once there was a person walking along a riverbank. Before long, he heard a cry for help from someone in the river who was drowning. The Good Samaritan jumped into the river, saving the drowning person in the nick of time! As he was assisting the victim with his recovery, they both heard another cry for help coming from the river. And then another cry. And another! Soon the river was full of people needing help, and many more resources had to be called in for what was becoming a full scale rescue effort. At last, one of the rescuers decided it would be a good idea to walk upstream to see what was causing people to fall into the river in the first place. Upstream, he discovered there was a hole in the footbridge and that people trying to cross the river were falling through it. Once the hole was repaired, people stopped falling into the river and so precious resources were no longer required for rescuing people after the fact. Instead, time, money and energy, could be spent on preventing people from falling in, in the first place.



Karen Sliwkanich (Chair), educator, early childhood specialist



Gail Steeves (city liaison), community development coordinator, Family and Community Support Services, City of Fort Saskatchewan



Lorraine Hryniw (vice-chair), retired dental assistant



Joanne Dewart, Corporate Travel Consultant, Uniglobe One Travel



Doug Rees (treasurer), engineer



Christi Lein, DCC Events Supervisor, City of Fort Saskatchewan



Lareina Dibben (secretary), inventory manager and photographer



Annalise Yuzda General Manager, Child Care, YMCA of Northern Alberta

What is the most rewarding aspect about my volunteer work on the Families First Society's board of directors?

"The staff that put together and facilitate the programs for our families are truly fantastic people with beautiful hearts. The programs and support that are offered are very valuable to the families that participate."

- Joanne Dewart

"For me, being able to utilize the skill sets I have, which are normally applied in an industrial setting, to benefit this society and our community is very rewarding."

- Doug Rees

"I believe it takes a village to raise children. The work that Families First in Fort Saskatchewan does is vital to the success of children in our community. My career has been dedicated to Early Learning and Care and I wanted to be able to give back to the community I love and chose to live in."

- Annalise Yuzda



"The most rewarding aspect of my volunteer work is getting to hear the success stories of how the amazing staff of Families First have impacted a family or community. Any time I mention my affiliation with Families First, community members have a story to share of how the organization has touched their lives. What an amazing feeling to be a part of something which has helped so many."

- Christi Lein



Sometimes I Need to Go Where Everybody Knows My Name

From my heart:

My first contact with Families First Society was during a time where I was dealing with postpartum depression (although I didn't recognize it at the time) along with dealing with issues from my past matrimonial life. I was referred to Families First's Family Violence Prevention Program, which I'm still involved in through the DAWN Support Group. From this program I've become a diehard follower of this society. I believe Patti saw in me the need to be a part of a group of people. She enrolled me in the Sing and Sign Program which I originally thought was a ludicrous concept. But this program has decreased a lot of frustration with communication between our then 16 month old daughter Elizabeth and for me as well as our entire family. It was amazing to see how Elizabeth quickly caught on to some of the basic signs so she could communicate what she needed to all of us. Not only did the program help with the communication but it brought socialization aspect for both of us, just as did the next program we joined: "Parent-Child Mother Goose". Half way through this program Elizabeth would chant "friends" en route to the program. We both looked forward to joining our "friends". I could see the difference in Elizabeth: how she became more outgoing and would play

with other children her age. At home we would sing the songs we learned and her dad and siblings learned the songs and joined with Elizabeth. We then went to ChIPS (Children's Indoor Play Space) the drop in program where there is free play with other children and the adults can socialize together. Here again Elizabeth learns to share with other children and play "nicely". And I get coffee and some adult social time. By the way, the ladies make good java.

Now I am involved in almost all of Families First's programs. We borrow toys, books, and movies from the Toy Lending Library. One of my daughters has even had a summer job with Families First! ChIPS is ChIPS for Elizabeth but it's now my CHEERS! Sometimes I need to go where everybody knows my name. The Families First office is my CHEERS too! As a result of being so involved in Families First I have met many good friends, for which I am very grateful.

So I would like to thank the Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society for all that they do for our community and on a personal note thank you for getting me through a very rough time and thank you for bringing such enjoyment and a wonderful learning experience for Elizabeth.

We are very excited about Families First's new home and all of the space that they will have (but hope that the comfy black chairs will still be there!). I truly hope that this Society continues to thrive in our community so that many, many families can benefit.

Love,
Families First Mother of Four



Being Part of the Solution

During my 37 year career as a Registered Nurse, I was astounded at the need for literacy in the general population. As an avid reader, I couldn't imagine not having the ability to read and vowed that, one day, I would find a way to help others increase their literacy skills.

The time did come in 2008, when I retired from nursing, and I began volunteering with Wendy Rhodes in the Community Adult Learning and Literacy Society. Wendy then got me connected as a volunteer with the Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society. I volunteered at the Children's Indoor Playground Society, Books for Babies, and Sing and Sign.

I was also able to put my sewing talents to use, another hobby I enjoy immensely. I made fabric gift bags for the Santa's workshop and helped with wrapping during the event. It was fun interacting with the other volunteers, especially the little shoppers and their elves!

As there was a need for book and toy bags for the lending library, and clothing for some dolls, I was able to use up a lot of my extra fabric, which helped me!

I have met some really wonderful people during my time with Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society. It has been a very rewarding experience to help where I can fill a need, and spend time with the little ones!

I have been made to feel so valued and appreciated by everyone I have come across. I look forward to continuing the relationships I have at Families First.

– Families First Volunteer Extraordinaire



I'm convinced of this: Good done anywhere is good done everywhere. For a change, start by speaking to people rather than walking by them like they're stones that don't matter. As long as you're breathing, it's never too late to do some good." (Maya Angelou)

"This quote captures what may be impossible to put into words – the love and compassion Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society has for our communities.

Simply put: For each family or individual to pass through their doors, Families First creates opportunity. The opportunity to try; the opportunity to strive; the opportunity to grow. Each day they do one thing – change lives.

The Alberta Heartland Primary Care Network takes great pride in our partnership with Families First – a true partner in mobilizing the collective impact so critical in building our village. They makes us better at what we do."

– Graham Kitson, BSc.
Executive Director,

Alberta Heartland Primary Care Network

ABC Grow with Me Summer Day Camp

Kylee, Camp Coordinator

ABC Grow With Me is a free-of-charge, drop-in day camp during the summer months. Parents and/or caregivers come and share crafts, songs, lunch and snack with their children 0 to 6 years old.

ABC Camp provided a summer full of new experiences. Both caregivers and children developed new skills and friendships within their community. ABC Camp was led by two new full-time leaders and a new junior leader each week. This provided a fun and welcoming atmosphere for all attendees.

This summer, ABC Camp strove to make new connections within the community by inviting both new and previous businesses and organizations to be a part of camp. We are so thankful for the generosity of our community! We would also like to thank all our helpful volunteers and the businesses for their support of ABC Camp!

Thank you to everyone who helped make ABC Camp a success this summer!



"I have met a few new friends (adults) here and then saw them again at other events (playmob, Redwater swim, Harbour Pool, etc). It has been amazing!"

- Mother of four

ChIPS (Children's Indoor Play Space)

Cathleen, ChIPS Coordinator

ChIPS is an informal drop-in parent and child play program for children 0 to 6 years old. Children learn socialization skills through play and parents can access peer support. There are many toys that enhance motor skills, role-play, cooperation, and literacy. Coffee is provided and there is a healthy snack for everyone.

Our Creative with Kids program runs two days a week in conjunction with ChIPS. This arts and crafts program continues to be very popular with our participants as not every parent/caregiver has the ability or desire to be creative in their own home. Through the Creative With Kids program our little ones are able to work on their fine motor skills ie: using scissors correctly, holding a crayon properly, etc. This program also is a good place for parents to let their children express their creative nature. I always tell all of my participants "It's the process, NOT the finished product that matters!!" Hence, if Mom or Dad wants to do their own craft, I always have plenty of supplies available so that EVERYONE can participate.

"ChIPS is a safe place where anybody can feel comfortable coming in for the first time or the hundredth time. This is proven time and time again when a participant comes in and looks like they need to talk or looks upset. I am honoured to be the place they can come to, the person that they can talk to and/or refer to another one of my co-workers if they are in need or whatever reason."

- Cathleen

339 unique parents
and/or caregivers
425 unique children



Participant story: One of our newest participant families had just moved from the east coast to Fort Saskatchewan and through social media found out about us. She and her daughter were embraced whole heartedly into the group. Through our conversations I found out that she played the fiddle. I asked if she would mind coming to our Halloween party and playing a few tunes. She was more than happy to do that for ChIPS. Not only did she bring her fiddle and entertain the children BUT her daughter had a miniature fiddle which she bought in as well to play for everyone. The children who were at the party had a wonderful time listening to the lively music. They were also able to have a hands-on musical experience as they were allowed to touch the fiddles after the musical interlude was over.

Parent-Child Mother Goose Program (PCMGP)

Kim, Parent-Child Mother Goose Program Coordinator

PCMGP is a 10 week program where parents and caregivers with children aged 0 to 36 months gather to learn songs, rhymes and stories all delivered orally, no books, no paper...just participants, childminders, facilitators and of course the children. Sounds simple and kind of fun, but let me tell you a story about what you may see the first time you visit a program...

You will see quilts on the ground, people (parents, caregivers, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends) sitting in a circle on the quilts. Children may be lying on the quilts, walking or crawling around, childminders circling, and facilitators creating space and time for connection and moments to happen. The pace is relaxed, with lots of repetition and time to talk, laugh, sing, rhyme and tell stories. It seems simple, easy almost, but within the ease are moments. Moments between parent and child, between child and child, between senior and child, between parent and parent - many, many moments. It's the moments that make PCMGP so special. These moments lead to the connections which make our village stronger.

This year PCMGP ran a total of 15 programs. The popularity prompted two extra programs to run plus a special pilot program of preschool PCMGP, which was a huge hit for all involved.

"I would like to take this chance to thank the Mother goose staff, for what you guys have done for our daughter. As you know when we started the program our daughter was a very shy and wary child when it came to strangers and to other children.

It took a year, but she has developed into a child that is more outgoing and confident. The songs we sang at mother goose have become part of her life with her and her sister singing them to each other and their youngest sister.

I would like to think that all of you ladies had a big part in the development of our daughter, and I would like to thank you from the bottom of my heart, I do really appreciate it. The girls got really excited when we would go to the program, and we will continue to go till all of our children are too old to go."

- Father of three daughters

"Great place to connect with the community."



"Definitely helps build relationships with babies and other moms."

Parent Link Centre

Ariane, Family Support Worker, Parent Link Centre Programs

As a Parent Link Centre we recognize that all parents, regardless of their circumstances, should have access to high quality early childhood, parent education and family support programming when they need it.

Families First is the Parent Link Centre for Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon County. Throughout the winter and this past fall and spring we offered programs in Legal, Bon Accord, Gibbons, Morinville and Redwater, as well as Fort Saskatchewan. Over the summer months in Sturgeon County we offered a fun drop-in summer camp called Summer Surprise, which ran in Bon Accord, Gibbons and Redwater with great success. These programs were offered free of charge and promoted positive adult-child relationships, expanded parenting knowledge and skills, fostered optimal child development, and allowed children and parents opportunities to play and socialize in a friendly environment.

Attendance in our weekly groups has grown tremendously over the past years. We are now seeing families travelling between communities to attend our programs, a goal we hoped for from the beginning. Families are now recognizing that they have access to Parent Link programming at least five days a week.

For many of our families, Parent Link programs are weekly staples in their lives. They are places to go to make new friends and connect with their community. They are places where they can learn new ideas and places where they can ask for help if needed. Our facilitators develop nurturing and trusting relationships with families which allows the facilitators to connect the families with other resources and supports in the community, as well as to complete Ages and Stages questionnaires on each child as needed. These screening tools are used to identify any developmental concerns there may be as well as celebrate each child's growth and achievements. It is the relationships and the support that parents bring to other parents and children to other children that result in safe, strong, healthy communities.



Triple P (Positive Parenting Program)

April, Ariane, and Abby, Family Support Workers

Triple P gives parents simple tips to help manage the big and small problems of family life.

At Families First we deliver the Triple P Program in four different formats. We hold Seminars to give large groups basic information about parenting and put on Discussion Groups that deal with one specific area that parents would like more ideas on, such as Disobedience or Bed Time Routines. We also meet with parents One on One to discuss a specific difficulty they would like to address and work through over a four week period. The fourth way is holding Groups where more specific information is given and several goals are set for each family to work on and accomplish over an eight week period.

"This has been such a help to my parenting style and given me a boost of confidence as well as more knowledge and patience in disciplining my toddlers."

- Mother of three, under three years old

"I learned a lot about myself and how I was dealing with what I thought was only my child's problem. When I started to change how I reacted to her, she started to change how she reacted to me. We are much happier now."

- Grandmother



Five key steps to this program are:

- Create a safe and interesting environment
- Have a positive learning environment
- Use assertive discipline
- Have realistic expectations
- Take care of yourself

WE'RE MAKING AN IMPACT!

79 families participated in Triple P this year!

"Triple P has helped me in so many ways. With our two girls we started needing help with temper tantrums and then sought help with thumb sucking and used the program when lying became an issue in our home."

The program has helped me keep my sanity as a parent. It has been great to have the support from Families First when I needed it.

I feel safe making the phone call and asking for help as soon as the problem comes up with either of my girls."

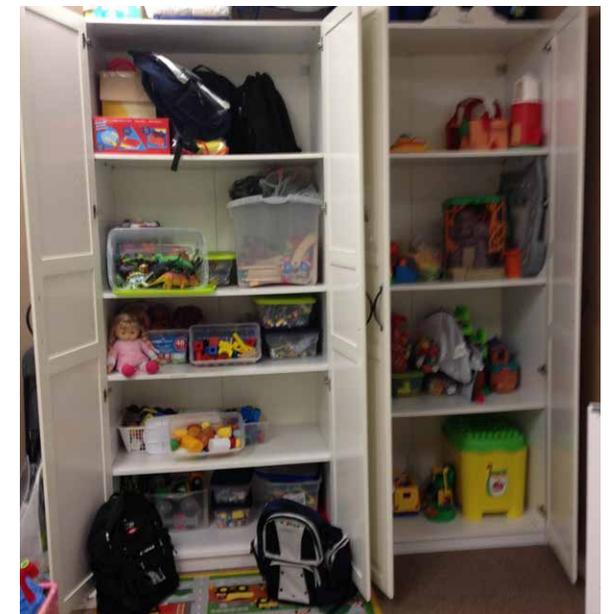
- Local mother of two daughters

Toy Lending and Parent Resource Lending Library

Our Lending Library is a valuable part of what Families First has to offer. This library is a selection of toys and books on various topics that our families can borrow for a two week period. It gives parents access to a selection of quality, stimulating and developmentally appropriate toys, as well as books on various parenting and childhood development focuses such as feeding your baby, toilet training, sleeping through the night, temper tantrums, and mental health.

Our toy lending libraries can be found in Bon Accord, Fort Saskatchewan, Gibbons, Morinville, and Redwater. Families are encouraged to sign out toys that are available in their community as well as check out our Lending Library Catalogue. In this catalogue, families can view all the toys and resources available throughout Sturgeon County and Fort Saskatchewan.

The lending library is a valuable resource in our communities and we are very fortunate to be able to offer it to our families!



Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program

Lori-Ann, Angel Whispers Program Coordinator

The Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program is a caring, confidential support program for families who have experienced the loss of a baby to miscarriage, stillbirth or neonatal death.

The Angel Whispers Program continues to grow and the demand on the services offered has increased dramatically this past year. Families are being referred to our program from hospitals, health units, funeral homes, past and present Angel Whispers Program families, and others in the community who have heard about Angel Whispers. Our biggest challenge remains the fact that our program currently receives no long term sustainable funding. We rely heavily on our annual fundraiser, the Madison Memorial Golf Tournament, as well as other fundraisers we coordinate, in addition to grants and individual donations.

The Angel Whispers Program continues to see an increase in the number of families accessing help through our one to one support, group support, and keepsake and memory box outreach program. The demand for our memory boxes and care packages has increased so much, in fact, that we have had to implement a donation request in order to keep up with the expenses.

Highlights of the last year:

- Lori-Ann contributed to a book on miscarriage written by Dr. Alan Wolfelt; Dr. Wolfelt acknowledged Lori-Ann's contribution in the introduction of the book. She previously contributed to Dr. Wolfelt's book on stillbirth.
- In attempts to secure sustainable funding for the program, we continue to meet with potential funders to share details of how Angel Whispers helps families devastated by the loss of a baby.
- The second Annual Pub Night Fundraiser and Silent Auction raised \$5000 for the program.
- Huge thanks to Blair and Melissa Kondro, who through the Madison Memorial Golf Tournament raised \$17,000 for Angel Whispers.
- This year Angel Whispers received support and grants through the following organizations: Alberta Blue Cross Hearts of Blue Team, DOW, Fort Saskatchewan Hospital Auxiliary, Capital Powers EmPowering Communities Grant, Ed Stelmach Community Foundation, and several individual donations made from Angel Whispers families and community members.
- Angel Whispers continued to receive beautiful quilt donations for our Rainbow Babies from Jennifer King with Kings Quilting Queen. Thank you Jennifer!
- Angel Whispers planned ongoing opportunities for families to honour their precious babies – Annual picnic and balloon release, Annual Rainbow Baby Reunion, Prayer Flag workshop.

- We continued to partner with various organizations to help coordinate other healing opportunities for families – Annual Baby Loss Memorial and Baby Steps Walk to Remember.
- Lori-Ann sits on the following committees to ensure consistent supports for grieving families – Grief Support Providers Network Committee and AHS Perinatal Bereavement Committee.
- Lori-Ann recently appeared as a guest speaker on BOLD radio's "It's My Thing" talk show discussing Baby Loss and the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program.

"Angel Whispers has provided us with the chance to talk our way through our grief, to teach us that it is ok to feel sad and cry over our loss whenever those feelings arise, to allow us to help others like us that are dealing with the loss of a baby."

- Thank you for helping us accept the feelings and chaos that come with grief.
- Thank you for connecting us with other parents.
- Thank you for providing us with a safe environment to share our feelings.
- Thank you for honouring all of the babies who didn't get to live the lives we wanted them to.
- Thank you for the support that parents like us need.
- Thank you Angel Whispers.

- Father of Angel Baby and Rainbow Baby

Our services include:

- Baby Loss Support Group
- Subsequent Pregnancy Support Group
- Healing Hands Workshop
- Rainbow Connection Group
- Resource Lending Library
- Quarterly Newsletter
- Care Packages
- Birth Certificate Keepsakes
- Memory Box Program
- One on One and email support
- Referrals for families requiring additional support
- Website – www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers



"I wouldn't be the person or the mom that I am today were it not for Angel Whispers, I am forever indebted to this invaluable program and all of the people who are in my life because of it."

- Mother of Angel Baby and two children

ANGEL WHISPERS BABY LOSS SUPPORT PROGRAM

57 families supported (35% increase from last year)

68 families received care packages

206 attended our support group meetings and workshops

Over the past year we celebrated the birth of **15 new Rainbow babies**, and we sent out **120 birth certificate keepsakes**.

"We learned of Angel Whispers through one of the social workers at the hospital, and attended our first meeting 3 weeks after our loss. Needless to say, this was an extremely emotional time for us and it was here that we learned that we are not alone in our grief. It's truly unfortunate that there is a demand for such a program, but we are sure glad that we came across it at such a needed time. The group consisted of several families that were at different places in their journeys, some like us, were very recent and others were years deep. Being new to the program, we looked for those that have been a part of the group for longer for inspiration and ideas of how to get through upcoming hurdles, such as holidays and birthdays.

A few months after our loss, we discovered that we were expecting again. Thanks to Angel Whispers, we were not alone as they also offer meetings for subsequent pregnancies after a loss. Some families that experienced a loss around the same time as us were also expecting their "Rainbow Babies". Together we discussed our struggles, our joys and our hopes."

- Mother to Angel Baby and Rainbow Baby

Community Kitchens

April, Program Coordinator

Community Kitchens is a program where a group of people get together on a regular basis to cook healthy, nutritious meals. From recipe selection, to budgeting, cooking and clean up, every one participates. Within the group, participants find fun, friendships and the tools to stretch their food dollars. The quantity of food that is prepared is divided among group members to take home. Community Kitchens is participant driven, with each group deciding what meals they will prepare.

This past year was enjoyable, educational and successful. We were able to offer 22 kitchens over a 10 month period with great attendance. We offered several specialty kitchens for our families that have food sensitivities or preferences. Gluten free, meat free and dairy free were offered, as well as two dry soup kitchens that gave the participants everything they needed, other than broth, to make a large pot of noodle and barley soup at home.

"So great. I learned lots of kitchen tips so I can do things quicker and easier at home."

"I enjoy this program as it benefits my entire family: getting to work with other moms, a time away from baby, and meals to make hubby happy."



"I learned how to make a grocery list."

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

22 kitchens

481 people fed (up 27%)

130 adult participants (up 37%)

180 children in childcare program (up 55%)



New Programs

Kids Can Cook

April, Program Coordinator

A wonderful program where children and their parents/caregivers are given the opportunity twice a month to come and make their own snack. Through the experimentation, manipulation and playing with their food, little ones learn to appreciate, enjoy and eat what they have created.

With a generous donation from Dow Canada, we have been able to run the Kids Can Cook Program for the first time at our Children's Indoor Play Space.



73 unique children joined in the food fun

Parent Link Enhancement Programs

Also new in 2014-2015 has been an expansion of our Fort Saskatchewan Parent Link Programming due to an Enhancement Grant received from Alberta Human Services. Fort Saskatchewan was identified as one of six communities within our region that could benefit from more opportunities to support developmental readiness in five domains: physical health and well-being; social competence; emotional maturity; language and thinking skills; communication skills;

and general knowledge. Our community was identified by Human Services when they examined data gathered as part of the Early Childhood Mapping Project (ECMap), which can be found at <http://www.ecmap.ca/>.

Enhancement funding allowed Families First to offer programs and meet families that we would not have been able to otherwise, and we are tremendously grateful for these opportunities.

Our Enhancement Programs include:

- Park Attack
- Sunday Fun Hour
- EPIC
- Play Mob
- Preschool Parent-Child Mother Goose Program
- Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) Fair



Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP)

Jodi, Family Violence Prevention Program Coordinator

Our Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP) provides the necessary tools and support to individuals impacted by family violence, to break the cycle of violence for themselves and their children. This support includes risk assessment and safety planning, education and awareness, individual and group support, court support, advocacy and referrals.

It sure has been a productive year for the FVPP with referrals of clients coming in from agencies across the region.

Participants in our support groups have completed some really great programs this year. The DAWN (Discovery, Affirmation, Wellness and New Beginnings) group recently completed the second series of Brené Brown's online Art Journaling which the ladies really enjoyed. We completed the first series last year and we are hopeful that a third series will follow soon. Both the DAWN and Seniors Circle of Hope groups are currently focusing on Gretchen Rubin's - "The Happiness Project". This is a year-long project which focuses on a different topic each month and highlights little things in that area that anyone can do to cultivate more happiness in their life.

Last October, in addition to our weekly meetings, we organized a wellness workshop for the ladies in both support groups which gave them exposure to a variety of activities that promote physical, mental and spiritual health and wellbeing. The goal of the workshop was to help the ladies find healthy positive outlets by considering a balance of different options. This fall, in partnership with Your Holistic Earth, we are arranging for the women in the groups to attend the first Whole Health Conference and Expo in Edmonton. This event will host an array of alternative/holistic health care providers showcasing their amazing services and products. In addition, there will be a full day of speakers whose goal will be to have a profound positive impact on their life.

Family Violence Prevention in Alberta has really taken the direction of engaging men and boys in the efforts of ending gender based violence. As a member of various local and regional committees, we have been involved in many of those initiatives including Take Back the Night, White Ribbon Campaign, and the Men as Allies Breakfast. Every year our nursing students from the University of Alberta are required to explore issues that are affecting different populations in Edmonton and area and propose ways to help positively influence these issues. This year's group of students, in consultation with

the FVPP Coordinator, focused their efforts on an initiative that would promote positive fatherhood involvement in Fort Saskatchewan. Their final project proposal would include a partnership with the local pool and was titled "Dive Into Fatherhood" - involving fathers as a starting point for promoting father-child relationships and preventing domestic violence.

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

169 individuals supported

33 client files

37 children of clients directly impacted by supports and programs provided

295 advocacy/support/court support hours provided

The FVPP has made some great partnership over the last year. We teamed up with the Chimo Youth Retreat Center in the spring to provide Family Violence training to the Outcome Based Service Delivery (OBSD) Wellness Program Workers. The Chimo OBSD Family Wellness Program works cooperatively with many other child, youth, and family services to provide integrated, safe, effective, and creative services for families. It is expected that three to four trainings per year will be completed by the FVPP Coordinator to the staff of Chimo.

In partnership with the YWCA and the Primary Care Network (PCN), we held the "Toward Balance Support Program" for women in the FVPP program. Toward Balance is a program that provides women with the tools to explore their anger responses and how to choose healthier ways of interacting. We are excited at the possibility of holding another session this fall.

Staff and friends of Families First Society came together again on June 21, 2015 in support of the Third Annual Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation Run in Morinville. The Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation met their fundraising goal of \$25,000. All funds raised are used by the Foundation to provide support to victims of domestic violence in Morinville, Sturgeon County, and surrounding areas.

In addition to celebrating the Inspiration Award presented to Families First Society for our efforts in Family Violence Prevention, the FVPP Coordinator was presented with an International Women's Day award for her contribution to Women's Health and Wellbeing. In the year ahead we are looking forward to building on the wonderful foundation of work that the society has created over the last three years. We hope these efforts will include creating systemic changes in the community to how we respond collectively in addressing family violence. We also look forward to continuing our efforts in supporting and celebrating more successes with our families.



"Your support has given me the assurance and confidence that I need. It uplifts me to the vision of a better future."

Status of Women Ending Violence (Bridge Mender) Project

Jennifer, Ending Violence (Bridge Mender) Project Coordinator

The Bridge Mender fable on page 4, is what our Status of Women Canada project was based upon. Unlike the efforts of the people described in the fable, however, the results of our prevention work likely won't be seen for many years. This three year project gave Families First and community partners the rare opportunity to walk upstream, attempt to find out why people are falling into the river (why violence against women and girls is occurring) and repair the hole in the bridge so people stop falling in (reduce the violence). In the final year of our project, we were able to take our work and really root it in the community, thereby ensuring it's sustainability beyond the project funding.

The following is taken from the Executive Summary of our Status of Women Final Evaluation Report, authored by project evaluator Deborah Morrison of Perfecting Tomorrow Inc.

EVALUATION FINDINGS

Project Design and Implementation

The implementation of this project over a three year period achieved a broad scope of participation and dedication in the City of Fort Saskatchewan among community leaders, human service practitioners and community members alike. It utilized two well-developed theory based approaches

to achieve success in raising the profile of the important issues of gender equity and violence against women and girls; health promotion and community development.

A shared leadership model was used from the beginning of the project, beginning with the proposal. The collaborative approach used by the Families First Society of Fort Saskatchewan, as the lead agency, and Building Bridges, the Advisory Committee, both modelled community building values and strategies and set up expectations of participation by others. They carried the banner for the project and were viewed by their peers as positive role models.

The four strategic focus areas delivered together provided consistent messaging and created a very supportive environment for behavioral change among individuals and professionals. The combination of experts, community based leadership and community members exemplified the behavior change approach to health promotion.

The project involved a strong media presence with consistent messaging and media advocacy. It involved numerous human service leaders from the network of agencies engaged in the prevention and response to family violence and beyond. Practitioners in complimentary

fields received training and education in the identification and support of families/ individuals experiencing domestic violence. Participants reported increased knowledge.

Policy makers at the municipal level created proclamations and civil servants were involved in the delivery and leadership of the project. Human service leaders in their planning exercises, identified as a next step, creating common policies and protocols which would be jointly adopted and utilized in the prevention and response to domestic violence.

The project was able to bring together the community of Fort Saskatchewan around the issues of gender equity and violence against women and girls. The broad representation of community political leaders, media, service providers, individuals impacted by domestic violence, community volunteers and residents involved over the three years of the project is impressive. If the commitment shown by participants is any indication, the ground work has been set for continued action on the important issue of violence against women and girls.

Our Final Evaluation Report and Executive Summary can be found at www.familiesfirstsociety.ca.

Supporters

As a charitable organization, Families First depends on support from funding and community partners, as well as time and effort from volunteers to sustain our programs and services. In the past year, we are grateful to have experienced a growth in support.

1800+ volunteer hours every year



"For us to be able to give back to the community and help organizations like Families First Society is an honor. It is a very small way to say thanks to you, the community, for your support, by helping our partner, Families First. Without programs and partnerships like this, we as a Co-op would not be able to help grow our own community."

- JP Stassen,
Co-Op Store Manager

"Families First is an organization that Access Pipeline is proud to support. Families First's vision aligns with Access Pipeline Inc.'s in that our people are key to our success and that teamwork enables us to reach their full potential then we are happy to contribute and support such a cause in our communities where we work and live - we are part of the village that it takes to raise a family."

- Carleen McCreight,
Stakeholder Relations Assistant
Access Pipeline Inc.



Special Thanks

Families First received many gifts of funding, space, materials and time this past year. Warm thanks to the many generous individuals and organizations for their donations within our April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015 Fiscal Year.

“Heather Boonstra is the director of a group of people that each personify the “Givers Gain” philosophy long before I told them about it. They also promote the message that “this is our village” which to me has always meant that not only can anyone in the community be a part of something bigger than themselves it also means that no one need be left behind. Many people often need some guidance, support or just a bit of confidence to move forward in their lives. Heather and her team offer that hope. For that I am impressed and if my day needs a boost I just drop in for a hug....and for that I am grateful-:”

*- Ken Jackson,
Realty Executives Focus*

FISCAL YEAR: APRIL 1, 2014-MARCH 31, 2015:

Grants

- Alberta Food Banks
- Canada Summer Jobs Program
- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- CIBC Children’s foundation
- Community Initiative Program (Government of Alberta)
- DOWGives Community Grants Program
- Family Literacy Initiative Fund, Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education (Government of Alberta)
- Family Violence Prevention Grant
- Operation Red Nose (Rotary Club)
- Morinville Community Grant
- Redwater Family and Community Support Services
- Region 6, Human Services-Parent Link Center, Early Childhood Development, Home Visitation funding (Government of Alberta)
- Shell Community Grant
- Status of Women Canada
- Twice But Nice Clothing Society
- United Way

Businesses and Organizations

- Aux Sable
- BNI Group
- Capital Power Corporation
- Downtown business association
- EECOL Electric Corp.
- First United Church
- Fort Floors and Decors
- Fort Saskatchewan Alliance Church Benefit Fund
- Fort Saskatchewan Food Gatherers
- Fort Saskatchewan Marathon Bridge Club
- Fort Saskatchewan Community Hospital Auxillary
- Friendly Nails
- GBS Portable Welding Ltd.
- Heron Printing Ltd.
- Home Hardware Building Center
- Kanata Inn
- Kjenner Financial Services Inc.
- Little Rascals

Businesses and Organizations *continued...*

- Sharper Image Salon
- The Sawmill Restaurant
- Tirecraft
- Shell Canada Ltd.
- Win Ferguson Community School
- Winners Way Sports and Cycle
- Yoga Studio

Fundraisers

- Heartland Ford fundraiser
- Johnny B Fitt Mothers Day Walk
- Storm the Fort Night Race
- Johnny B Fitt Obstacle race

Thank you to the many individuals who have generously donated their time, gifts, and energy.



Financials

Doug Rees, Treasurer's Report

A complete audit of the Society's accounts was performed by the Milena Wildeman Professional Corporation, for the 2014 fiscal period, which ended on March 31, 2015.

The audit found no significant accounting issues or irregularities in the Family First Society's finances. There are no required changes to our accounting procedures.

A summary of our 2014 financial position:

ASSETS	\$364,973	REVENUE	\$920,892
LIABILITIES	\$188,171	EXPENSES	\$878,127
		SURPLUS	\$42,765

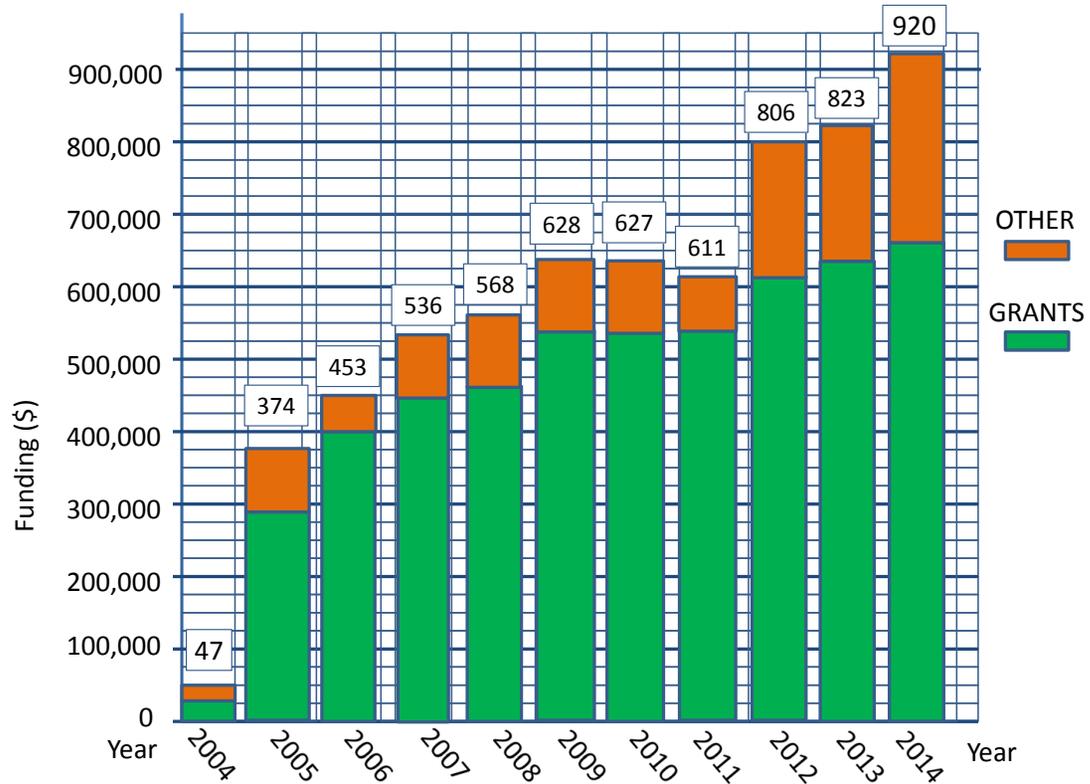
There are two suggestions for the Board to consider on debit card use, and vehicle \$/km reimbursement values.

For 2014, the Society continued to fundraise for the renovations required for the new home for the Society. The account grew to \$28,231 at year's end.

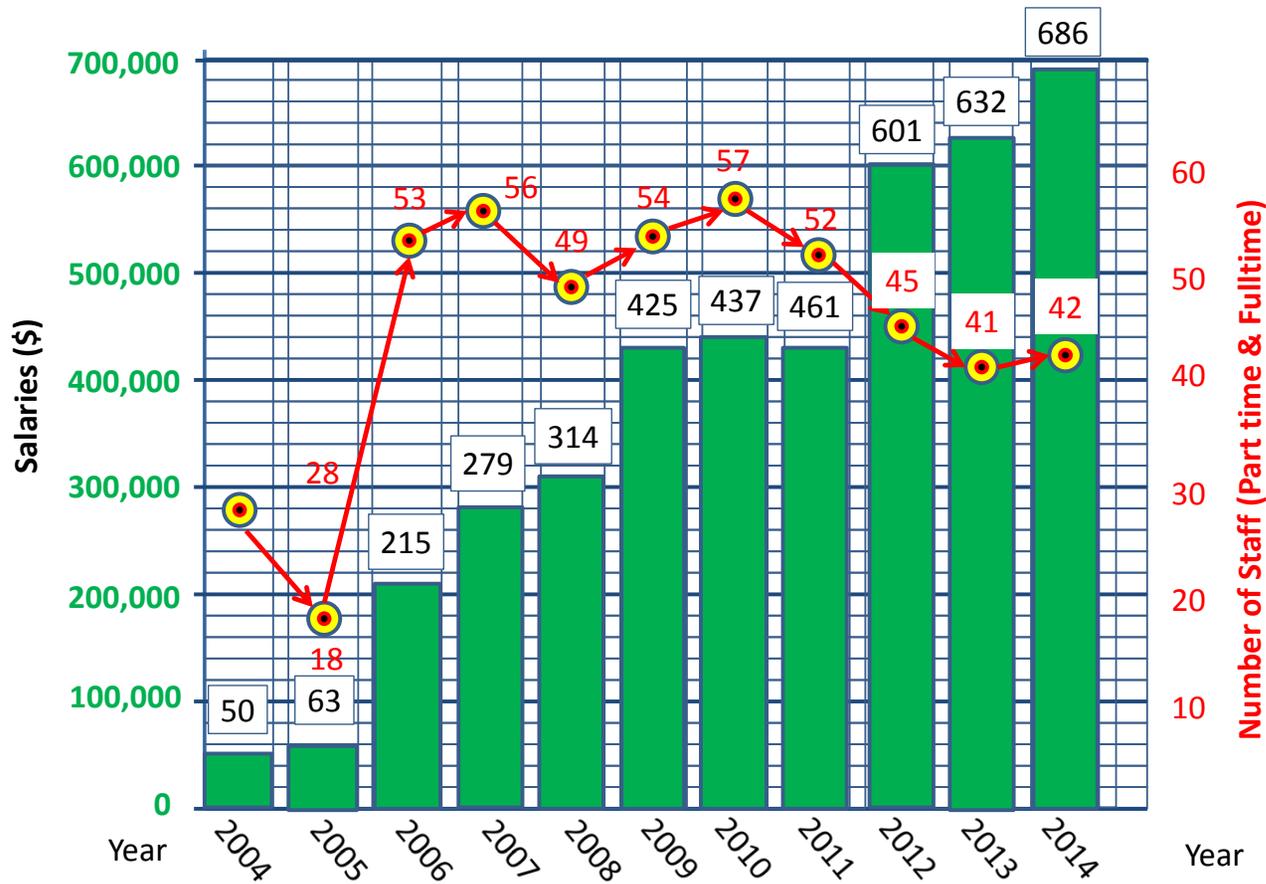
Finally, the Society continues to grow with the 2014 revenue exceeding \$920,000, which is an increase of almost \$100,000 over the 2013 value.

I found no issue with this audit, and will recommend to the board they approve this audit.

SOCIETY FUNDING PER YEAR:



SOCIETY GROWTH PER YEAR:



“The staff at the Fort Saskatchewan Health Unit has the most fabulous partnership with Families First. We connect with them on a daily basis, and the majority of families we see end up connecting with the staff and programs at Families First. When we have families that are struggling with parenting, or isolation, or the feeling of being overwhelmed, it is so effective to refer them to Families First for unconditional support and acceptance. It is like the health unit is one hand, and Families first is the other. When the two hands come together, the connection is warm and powerful. One of the great things that happen, is the follow up from the New Mom’s Network to CHIPS (Children’s Indoor Play Space). The moms and babies can continue to flourish in a supportive environment after our six week program has concluded. They then have a new place to connect. Families First is flexible in their willingness to accommodate and support our referrals. It’s so great to have such a strong Families First team in our community. The families of Fort Saskatchewan are well supported under their gentle care. For me, it’s so nice to know that I can refer a family that is struggling, and know that they will be welcomed. On that note, they may not be struggling, but, could just use the awesome resource that it is. Families do better with love and support, and that’s what Families First does, love and support our families.”

- Kathy Siracky,
Alberta Health Services





Thank you for taking the time to read our report.
We hope you feel inspired to come and see us
in the office, give us a call, or look for us on
Facebook or Twitter.



Like us on Facebook: Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society



twitter.com/FSFFSPLC

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Putting families first.



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