



Safe, strong, healthy future generations.



family, hope, health, integrity and kindness

2013 ANNUAL REPORT



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Welcome to our Families First April, 2012 – March, 2013 Annual Report!

Community matters. It is only when a child feels safe, connected to and loved by the people around them – those that make up their village - that they are free to blossom fully into everything they can become.

In the same way, parents need to feel supported by their village so they can be fully invested in the most important role of their lives. This means our village must be a strong one. It must be made up of individuals, agencies, community groups and businesses that weave themselves together into a fabric that can wrap around our families when needed.

Over the past year we have seen

the fabric of our community change and grow in very exciting ways and we feel so fortunate to be a part of it.

We hope that your journey through the pages of our Annual Report will be more of a meander. Take your time. 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 - this is our village!

*Heather Boonstra
Executive Director
Fort Saskatchewan Families First
Society*

Our Vision:
safe, strong, healthy future generations.



Our Mission:
Through improving the lives of our children, youth and families today, we help create a resilient healthy community for tomorrow.



Your Families First Board of Directors

James J. Sheasgreen, Chair:

I've been a resident of the community for 20+ years and it's important, in my view, to be involved in some capacity within the community. As I now have children of my own, I've become increasingly aware of how important early childhood development is and the need for it to be cultivated in our future generations. Many programs are geared towards the 0 – 6 age group, but the programs we offer do not discriminate between societal differences. Without organizations like ours, there would be a serious lack of family and community support services within our city and so maintaining and growing our organization is increasingly important as our city and region grows.

Karen Sliwkanich, Vice Chair:

I participate as a board member for Families First because I believe that our young children and families deserve the best services in supporting their healthy development.

Lareina Dibben, Secretary

I sit on the Families First Board because of all the things this wonderful organization has done for me and my family. It gives me a place to learn new things to do with my children, vent my frustrations and have my own personal mommy time-out, and most of all, I know, that in times of trouble, a shoulder to cry on is there in their wonderful staff no matter what. My children are growing and someday will be too old for many of the wonderful programs they run but I want to make sure that EVERY FAMILY in Fort Saskatchewan gets to experience the wonderful programs, that we've enjoyed, for many years to come.

Douglas R. Rees, Treasurer:

Once upon a time..... I was a naïve engineer who thought that as long as he went to work, worked hard, and paid his taxes, he was doing his part to make a strong and safe community. My taxes would fund the government, and they would look after all the community needs. One day, I met my future wife, and over the years, she has patiently tried to teach me that there is more I need to do, to help keep our community strong, and safe. I eventually came to understand and believe in the saying "Those that have the ability to make a difference have the responsibility to do so". I'm not sure where the saying originated, some say it came from Thomas Jefferson, but I believe the statement is true. I have the ability and therefore I have the responsibility. It is for this reason, I try to make a difference by serving on the board.

Gail Steeves, City Liaison:

Families First is a great community partner. You can always count on the Families First Board and staff to volunteer for special events or take the lead on or participate in important community initiatives. Families First programs and services address the important developmental needs of children between the ages of 0 to 6 and provide parenting information, skill development and support to new and experienced moms and dads. Fort Saskatchewan is fortunate to have this early childhood development and parent link program available as a resource to Fort Saskatchewan agencies and residents. Additionally, their Family Violence Prevention Program is a well respected resource and support system that many Alberta communities wish they were fortunate enough to have.

Lorraine Hryniw:

My first experience with Families First was the Annual General Meeting in 2012 and I was hooked. I am very passionate about all the society does and I want to help in any way I can. We are a very blessed community to have such an organization. I feel that every person we help will pay it forward in some way and we will be a richer community for that. You may feel that one person cannot do much alone, but don't sell yourself short. Every little bit of help adds up to a successful effort. Come and join us and enjoy people helping people.

Frank Garritsen:

I attended the Families First AGM last year, and it was there that I learned of the true impact that this organization has. The services that Families First provides to our population, and the stories that individuals shared at the AGM actually brought tears to my eyes. I knew immediately that this was an organization that I wanted to become a part of. If I can help an organization like Families First then I am in!

This is Our Village

by Executive Director Heather Boonstra and Board Chair James Sheasgreen

**"Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time.
We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek."**

- Barack Obama, from a campaign speech

Hello! In our 2011-12 Annual Report, we spoke about the growth in support that Families First had experienced that year. We celebrated, for example, the municipal funding that resurrected our much needed Family Violence Prevention Program. We were also thrilled to receive a Status of Women Canada Grant to reduce violence against women and girls in our community. Both of these initiatives are alive and well today and you will find their stories within this 2012-13 report.

This year's report is full of many other good news stories as well, and all of them, like the ones above, are because people are declaring that they must make change. In November of 2012, for example, Mix 107.9 hit the airwaves in Fort Saskatchewan and immediately connected with Families First, asking how they could help us out. They have been assisting us and many other community organizations ever since then, and there are many people who tell us that they have heard about Families First because they heard us mentioned on the radio.

In December, South Fort Chevrolet donated \$15,000 to Families First to give us the start to our savings for a larger Families First home. At the same time, we received a provincial Community Initiatives Program grant for our Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program. Many other groups, such as classrooms and local hockey teams,

began to raise funds, collect Christmas gifts, and donate diapers and baby formula to lend a hand to the families in our "village". We also began running radio spots on Mix 107.9, thanks to the sponsorship of Armor Self Storage. And a new community partner, Pioneer House, welcomed us in with open arms!

Our community sees themselves as playing an important role in Families First's vision of Safe, Strong, Healthy Future Generations; and more than that, they are telling us they want to be involved. They want to help. Their reasons for helping are all as diverse and unique as the individuals themselves, but the result is that we are connecting with more people who believe that it is their responsibility to make change and they are taking action!

We are grateful to Region 6 Child and Family Services for continuing to provide funding for our Parent Link Centre, Home Visitation and Early Childhood Development programs. Huge thanks also to Enterprise and Advance Education for the Family Literacy Initiative Funding which supports our Parent-Child Mother Goose and Community Kitchens programs.

To all our community granting organizations, individual donors, business supporters and community partners – thank you for believing in our work, and thank you for believing that creating healthy future generations is not just our mission, but yours as well.

Families First has an exemplary team of permanent and contract staff. These folks hold the youngsters and parents who attend our programs to the highest esteem, and as a result, hold themselves accountable to the highest standards of

...while I haven't been involved with Families First for very long, it has still changed my life and I know it will continue to do so.

Thank you for all that you do for families. I know that my son's life will be better for having Families First in it!

service delivery.

Every single person on our team considers it an honour when parents make the decision to spend time with us, trust us enough to let us peek into the windows of their lives, and if we're really lucky, actually be invited into their lives to become a part of their stories.

It is with gratitude that we ask you to accept our April 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013 Annual Report – this is our village!

***Knowing is not enough;
we must apply.***

***Willing is not enough; we
must do.***

- Goethe

**"How we treat the child,
the child will treat the world"**

Pam Leo

Human Resources

There has been abundant change throughout the past eight years that I've been at Families First. We've grown tremendously in our role of supporting families in our village. We are becoming better known in our community and are forming more and more amazing partnerships.

This past year we've worked on getting our policies and procedures into one reference manual. We've also spent time together as a team identifying our top five values at Families First: Family, Hope, Health, Integrity, and Kindness.

It is my privilege to work with the staff of Families First. They put their heart and soul into everything they do. They truly care, as proven by their actions and the stories shared in this annual report.

*Lorella Julien
Director of Human Resources
Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society*

Families First Made a Difference...

A graphic featuring four large, 3D-style letters spelling "HELP". The letters are colored green, blue, blue, and yellow from left to right.

Childhood happens once.
Ask for help if you need it.



Families First Made a Difference...

Families first made a tremendous difference in my family's life. Seven years ago I started attending the Mother Goose program with my daughter. As a nervous new mother this not only got me out of the house but it allowed me to bring my daughter to a safe, caring and educational environment. To this day my husband and I still use the songs we learned to calm her in certain situations.

The Families First staff has also supported my family through some difficult times over the last seven years, I'm forever grateful for all the advice and encouragement we received! I sometimes think back to those years and remember how scared and confused we both were.

Today we are confident and focused parents and we owe a lot of our success to the Families First programs - Mother Goose, Triple P Parenting, numerous evening classes discussing common parenting concerns and so much more.

I recently had another baby and yet again Families First is there offering all sorts of support for us. I look forward to making some new memories with my son at the programs offered by Families First!

Thank you again for all you have done,

A Families First Family



Angel Whispers 2013

We have had another busy year with the Angel Whispers Baby Loss Support Program.

Over the past year Lori-Ann has:

- Travelled to Grande Prairie to provide support to 13 local families and assisted in establishing a local program in Grande Prairie (Tiny Hands of Hope) which will continue to support families in Northern Alberta.
- Become a Local Leader and Alberta Coordinator for other provincial Local Leaders for the movie 'Return to Zero' (a Hollywood movie based on the true story of one family's experience with the full term loss of their baby boy), helping to raise awareness and support of the movie to help bring this independent film to local movie theatres.
- Contributed to Dr. Alan Wolfelt's Book 'Healing your Grieving Heart after Stillbirth' – Lori-Ann was asked to review the transcript for this book before it was published. Angel Whispers is listed as the first resource for families in this new international book.
- Continued her training towards her Death and Grief Studies Certificate offered through Dr. Alan Wolfelt and the Centre for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado. Lori-Ann is registered to attend the following upcoming courses in Colorado: Counselling Skills Fundamentals from November 4-7, 2013 and Support Group Facilitator Training from December 2-5, 2013.
- Created a new Angel Whispers Facebook Page and Madison Memorial Facebook Page.
- Worked together with Melissa and Blair Kondro in planning the 4th Annual Madison Memorial Golf Tournament which was held on Friday September 6, 2013.
- Continues to sit on 2 local committees – the Perinatal

Bereavement Committee and the Grief Support Providers Network Committee. Both committees meet quarterly to ensure that grieving families are receiving adequate care and support.



Since the last AGM in September 2012, Angel Whispers has provided care packages and support to 86 families (20 locally, 18 provincially, 8 nationally and 40 internationally). We have had total attendance of 74 at our Baby Loss Support Group Meetings and 36 at our Subsequent Pregnancy Support Group Meetings over the past year.

We have celebrated the birth of 6 new Rainbow Babies with our local families and currently have 5 moms expecting Rainbow babies. Lori-Ann is currently providing one-on-one support to 19 families, many of these families also attend the support group meetings. Lori-Ann provides referrals to families as necessary to other programs, agencies and services as necessary to ensure families are receiving all necessary supports.

Angel Whispers was fortunate to have received funding over the past year from the following: DOW Canada, Government of Alberta Community Initiatives Program, United Way and Strathcona County.

The program continues to expand as the services and support provided by Angel Whispers continue to be a much needed resource for grieving families.

*O*n June 12/12 our life was shattered to give birth to a Beautiful Baby Girl named Emily at 24 weeks stillborn. I didn't want people to tell me I would be okay, cause I knew I would never be the same again. While we were in the hospital we were told of Angel Whispers and how they had helped other families through such a terrible loss, so I thought we should give it a chance. I called and talked to Lori-Ann and she showed up at my door with a memory box. Instantly I felt this connection that she knew where I was coming from. Lori-Ann is and truly was my angel. I don't know where I would be without her support. She was so caring, compassionate, honest, devoted. She was always there when I needed her. We attended many groups with Lori-Ann and her husband Rene. I always felt relief from going to these meetings knowing it was okay to cry with couples who shared a similar loss. I think that Angel Whispers is an amazing organization to help grieving moms and dads deal with such a devastating loss. I just want to thank Lori-Ann and Angel Whispers for showing me that I wasn't alone in this loss, it really helped me.

Angel Whispers continued on page 9

Thank You Angel Whispers

Before I connected with Angel Whispers the best way I can describe my life is that I was surviving. I wasn't coping, wasn't thriving, I was simply surviving.

I lost my daughter over six years ago at full term but it is only since finding Angel Whispers very recently that I have actually been able to fully start the grieving process. When my daughter died I had no support from family and friends and was told many times to 'get over it' and move on with my life. I couldn't talk about her, nobody wanted to listen and without the support I so desperately needed, it became a matter of survival to just hide the pain, to lock it all away and push it as deep down inside as I could. If I didn't, the pain consumed me and I couldn't function.

Finding Angel Whispers and meeting Lori Ann has changed that. I now know that hiding from my pain isn't going to help me. I have to learn to deal with it face on and work through it in order to be able to find my new normal and move forward on life. I always thought that moving forward would be disrespectful to my daughter's memory but I realise now that she doesn't want me to be stuck in my grief and consumed by pain. Lori Ann has given me the feeling of safety to be able to do just that. To know that I am not alone on this journey and that there are people who not only know and understand that journey but who are also prepared to walk alongside me is something I cannot put a price on.

Through Angel Whispers my daughter has been acknowledged by someone other than myself for the first time since her death. I also feel acknowledged as her mother for the first time and believe now that I have the right to grieve for her. The memory box, angel wings and teddy bears are gifts that not only will I cherish always, they are something tangible that will help me in my grief.

Something to hold, somewhere to keep the few precious mementos I have and that is invaluable. The books that I have been given have also been a great help in finding practical ways to help me work through my grief and have given me some insight into workable ideas to use going forward.

For me the most beneficial part is having Lori Ann to talk to. Knowing that there is someone I can call, email or visit with, someone who understands, who cares and who sincerely wants to help has been life changing for me. Lori Ann very quickly became my 'safe place' where I could release my grief with someone who can help me make sense of it in such a way that will allow me to move forward. She has become a very important lifeline for me and I know that she will be a huge part of my grief journey and play an even bigger

part in the positive life changes I will make going forward.

I hope one day to be able to make even a fraction of the difference in the lives of others that Lori Ann and Angel Whispers has made in mine. From the very first contact with Lori Ann through the Angel Whispers website, she made it very clear that she was there to walk alongside me and offer support and that there would be no judgement, no expectations and no pressure. She is someone I know I can trust with my grief, my hurt and my heart.

In a short space of time she has become very important in my life and my little guy adores her. In his little heart he knows, as I do, that she will play a big part in our little family growing happy, whole and healthy in so many ways.

HOPE is the one word that combines everything that you have done and are doing to help me.



You give me hope that things will get better, that it won't always hurt so much, hope that I will get through it and be able to use that pain to do good, hope that there is light, happiness and peace on this journey and that I am worthy of all of them.

I don't do pics of me but it is fitting that Aiden is the one holding the piece of paper because you are giving him hope too. Hope of a happier, healthier Momma which in turn gives him hope for a happier and more fulfilling life, filled with all that he deserves and more which I will now be able to give him, thanks to your influence in my life.

Community Kitchens



Staff and participants come together to prepare delicious, nutritious meals.

What is a Community Kitchen?

A Community Kitchen consists of a small group of people who meet together with a facilitator to plan, budget and cook nutritious meals for themselves and their families.

Families come together to complete planning and budgeting on the first day and cooking on the second day.

The children go into their own program while the parents participate in the kitchen.

From Our Facilitator

It has been a pleasure to be able to deliver the Community Kitchen Program over the past year. I find the planning and cooking of food to be a gift that we can give and share with others. Making an everyday task, that can sometimes be challenging, into a fun, bonding and learning experience. This is what the Kitchen Program offers our community.

As we at Families First are fond of saying..."It takes a village to raise a child". I always add..."and a Community Kitchen to feed them."

April Jennings
Community Kitchen Facilitator



Huge thank you to Sobeys and the community for helping the Kitchen Program raise \$1,613.00.



Families First Society appreciates the grant for \$500.00 that the Community Kitchen Program received through the IGive Grant.

Kitchens continued from page 10

Children enjoy time together while parents are in the Kitchen program.



"This program offers so much to me. I really appreciate being in such a positive and productive environment. It is a great mental health break, especially knowing my kids are being cared for so well. My daughter, 4 years old, loves the community of the meal when we stop for lunch. Overall, fabulously organized and very much appreciated."

Excerpt from a Community Kitchen evaluation form.



Quick Statistics

Over the past year, 103 adults and 140 children have participated in the 22 kitchens that ran over ten months.

"First I'd like to say a big thank you to everyone at Families First Society. For helping my family out until we were back on our feet, for the time and care they put into everything they do, and for their unconditional love and support to anyone who may need it. It took a lot of stress off me to know I had a place to go if I needed to talk, either good or bad stuff, as well as if I was running low on diapers or formula. These ladies are truly a blessing to our community! Thank you all for the hope and kindness you gave to me when I've needed it most. Love you guys!"

I'd also like to mention my two favourite programs I've discovered through Families First, ChIPS Playgroup and Community Kitchens. When I was a stay at home mom, I was so thankful to have a place like ChIPS to go to 3-4 times a week to let the kids socialize and play and I got to socialize with the other parents as well. And I already miss the yummy meals we made at Community Kitchens, 4 huge family sized meals for \$20.00. You can't beat that!

Thank you guys for all you do, each and every one of you! xo"

Quick Statistics

In one year, 367 individuals were fed 3 to 4 meals each through the Community Kitchens program.

Families First Made a Difference...

I saw the post on your Facebook page earlier today. Even if you choose not to include this with what you wanted people to share stories for, I wanted to send it anyway, just to let you know of the difference you all make to people, even when you don't realise it.

You wanted to know of ways Families First has made a difference in people's lives. I haven't had much contact with Families First as of yet. I attended CHIPS for the last few weeks it was running and have connected with Lori Ann from AngelWhispers in the last month or so.

Being an Angel Mom and also adopting my little guy as a single mom comes with its challenges and were it not for Families First in recent weeks I would have lost my mind. The ladies at CHIPS are awesome - I was given a lot of useful information as well as resources that will be invaluable. Chips gave me a chance to connect with other parents and gave my little guy a chance to get

together and play with other kids, while knowing that if I have any concerns/questions/issues or just need support, there is someone there that I can talk to. Even though I haven't had to pull much from those resources yet, knowing that there is support is very reassuring.

Lori Ann from AngelWhispers has been a lifeline for me in the last few weeks, helping me to deal with the emotions and grief surrounding losing my daughter a few years ago that have arisen as a result of having my 17 month old placed with me 56 days ago. Knowing that we can pop into the office anytime, the programs Families First offer, the support... are all going to help make me the best possible parent I can be and while I haven't been involved with Families First for very long, it has still changed my life and I know it will continue to do so.

Thank you for all that you do for families, I know that my son's life will be better for having Families First in it!



Families First Made a Difference...



Families First Made a Difference...



Family Violence Prevention Program (FVPP)

April 2012 – May 2013

Outreach

Total number of individuals supported is approx. 110. This does not include individuals who were/are involved in the program prior to April 2012. Of the 110 individuals supported, 44 client files (3 men, 41 women) were created.

- 31 of the clients lived in Fort Saskatchewan
- 13 clients lived in the surrounding areas
- Total of 82 children from clients directly impacted by supports and programs provided.
- Over 154 Advocacy and support hours provided

Referrals Received From (include but not limited to)

- Child and Family Services (CFS)
- Victim Services
- FCSS
- A Safe Place
- Boys and Girls Club
- Other Families First Society/Parent Link Programs

Referrals Made To (include but not limited to)

- Counseling for Women -22 clients
- Addictions Counseling- 4 clients
- Support Groups (including DAWN and Seniors Circle of Hope) – 29 clients
- Food Bank - 8 clients
- Alberta Works - 11 clients
- Law Office/Legal Aid Support- 15 clients
- Shelters (A Safe Place/ Wings of Providence) - 6 clients
- Driving Miss Daisy - 9 clients
- Capital Region Housing- 5 clients
- Family Connections Visitation Program - 2
- Safe Visitation Program (Supervised) - 2

Other Referrals Made

Included:

- Police
- Boys and Girls Club
- Families First Programs/PLC Programs
- Family and Community Support Services
- Mental Health
- Victim Services
- Twice But Nice
- Local Churches

All Clients received One to One Support, Individual Safety Planning, Education regarding Family Violence and information tailored to their individual needs. They also received referrals as well as assistance in connecting to community supports. Some individuals needed advocacy which included writing letters or making phone calls on their behalf (mainly to Income Support, Child Welfare, Capital Region Housing Corporation, Family Law Office, Legal Aid and Police).

Current Partnerships/ Committees

Recently the Coordinator of the FVPP has taken over the role of sole facilitator for the Seniors Circle of Hope. This group was previously co-facilitated by the FCSS Seniors Coordinator and the FVPP Coordinator. The Coordinator of the FVPP also sits on the following committees:

- Seniors Group
- Building Bridges
- Evergreen Family Violence Prevention Group
- CIAFV (Community Initiatives Against Family Violence)

My daughter has been attending your group for about a month now. I have noticed a complete change in her compared to what she was after living in an abusive relationship.

Thank-you DAWN Group; keep up the great work.

In my opinion there should be a lot more DAWN Groups to help with all the situations out there.

Conferences/ Workshops/On-Line Training

As of April 1, 2012, the FVPP coordinator attended the following training/workshops:

- Stop Family Violence Symposium (April 2012)
- Moving Forward Conference (April 2012)
- The Faceless Doll Project (May 2012)
- Impact of Violence, Abuse and Neglect on Children (May 2012)
- Cultural Practices that Hurt Women (June 2012)
- Trauma Informed Clinical Practice Workshop (September 2012)
- Forum- Using Evaluation as an Empowerment Tool for Social Change (October 2012)
- Inspiring Resilience (October 2012)

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- Strangulation Protocol (October 2012)
- Train the Trainer- Take Action Against Elder Abuse (November 2012)
- Diverse Voice Conference (November 2012)
- Basic Facilitation (February 2013)
- Canadian Domestic Conference 3 (February 2013)
- The Leadership Challenge (May 2013)

On June 15, 2012, the FVPP Coordinator co-hosted a World Elder Abuse Awareness Day workshop in partnership with the RCMP Community Policing Coordinator and the FCSS Seniors Coordinator. The workshop covered safety information for seniors. This partnership is continuing this year for 2013 with an awareness walk followed by a light lunch and brief information session.

June 14, 2013, the FVPP partnered with the FCSS Seniors Coordinator once again to host the first ever Elder Abuse Awareness March in Fort Saskatchewan followed by a free lunch as well as brief presentation on Elder Abuse and a declaration signing by the mayor of Fort Saskatchewan.

"You will never know the impact you have had on my life."

"Jodi helped me stay strong so that I could do what was best for me and my children."

The FVPP coordinator was also a part of the steering committee for this year's Diverse Voices Conference which took place November 22-23, 2012 in Edmonton.

The FVPP coordinator has completed the following on line training since April 1, 2012:

- Risk Assessment Training for Feminist Anti Violence
- Jacquelyn Campbell's Danger Assessment Training Program
- Domestic Violence Against Immigrant and Refugee Women Through Early Intervention
- healthy boundaries
- assertiveness
- the importance of building a strong support system
- self care
- coping with the holidays
- building self esteem

DAWN Support Group

DAWN started again on May 26, 2012. Since that first group there has been a group held every week and the group will continue to run weekly with the exception of the last two weeks in December as the office is closed.

DAWN is open to women in the community of Fort Saskatchewan as well as women who have files open in the FVPP.

"Coming to the DAWN group is the highlight of my week!"

"The DAWN group is my favourite place to be!"

Since it began, DAWN has been a group where women can share their stories in a safe environment. The guidelines for the group are important and have been added to ensure confidentiality is strictly maintained. Although Fort Saskatchewan is a city, it often seems more like a small town. Sometimes participants know each other from other areas in their lives. Their children may go to school together or they may know each other through their work or from their social lives.

As well as the ongoing support that DAWN offers, there has been an educational component as well. Some of the topics covered to date are:

- education about family violence
- red flags to look for in new relationships
- how family violence affects parenting
- child abuse
- addictions

"The DAWN Group has taught me that I wasn't alone, there were other women going through the same thing."

Since DAWN began in May, there have been 131 women participants. This number reflects approximately 20 different women attending group, some regularly, some only on occasion. The smallest group consisted of 2 women, the largest had 12 women. The norm is usually 6-8 women. In addition, there have 65 children who have had childcare while their mother attended DAWN. This number reflects approximately 5 children who attended regularly and another 6 who attend only on occasion.

Families First Society has been fortunate enough to have a volunteer co-facilitator, Kim M., for DAWN group who we have now hired as a paid DAWN Assistant.

The FVPP coordinator made arrangements to have the FCSS Family and Youth Coordinator run a group for school aged children 10-17. This group is called Vibrant Youth and it will run in conjunction with the DAWN group.

Vibrant Youth has been very helpful in the past with teaching the children coping strategies, safety planning, feelings and other issues that affect children impacted by family violence. These groups will continue to run on an as needed basis.

A similar, more simplified group targeting children ages 3-10 also ran in conjunction with the DAWN group. This group is called Capable Kids. The DAWN Lead Children's Programmer,

[Family Violence report continued on page 17](#)



Mary Ann Kelly facilitated the group. Capable Kids covers topics similar to that of Vibrant Youth however in a much simpler context and mainly through interactive play.

"Without Jodi supporting and helping me, I am sure I would have given up and gone back to my ex and the horrible situation that I was in. I am stronger person because of Jodi. My children and I are in counselling, we are safe and I am able to take care of my children on my own. It has not been an easy journey but I am so grateful that I've had Jodi through it all!"

Full Day Dawn Self Esteem Workshop

A special DAWN full day workshop on self esteem took place on March 16, 2012.

The morning session of this workshop focused on inner beauty and silencing our inner critics. The afternoon session focused on outer beauty. Beauty Advisors from Edmonton attended the workshop to provide participants with demonstration and information on proper skin and hair care, lessons on makeup application and highlighting best features. The workshop finished up with mini makeovers for each participant.

November Workshop

November is Family Violence Prevention and Bullying Awareness Month. The coordinator of the FVPP organized a full day workshop on November 5, 2012 at the DOW Centennial Centre.

The workshop presenter was Dr. Diane Benoit and there were approximately 110 participants representing 30 different agencies/organizations from around the Edmonton region in attendance. The workshop focused on Trauma and the Impact of Violence, Abuse and Neglect on Children.

Diane Benoit is a Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, Project Director in the Research Institute

individual needs of the agency and the clients that they serve. A training day was held in February for the staff of Families First which addressed the new protocol and provided valuable information to the staff on safety and family violence.

The FVPP coordinator along with E.D. Heather Boonstra drafted our very own logic model to assist the FVPP in planning (funding and operationally).



Mayor Katchur proclaims November Family Violence Prevention Month

at the Hospital for Sick Children, and Staff Psychiatrist at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Ontario.

Our Mayor Gale Katchur closed the workshop by addressing the issue of Family Violence and signing the Proclamation recognizing November as Family Violence Prevention month. The Coordinator of the Family Violence Prevention Program will work closely with the Ending Violence Project Coordinator to organize another workshop this November that will bring Michael Koffman to Fort Saskatchewan and address the issue of engaging men and boys.

Family Violence Protocol

The coordinator of the FVPP worked with Shawna Bissell from CIAFV to develop a Family Violence Protocol for Families First Society. A protocol is simply a set of written guidelines, procedures, and/or policies. CIAFV assists agencies with creating and implementing protocols based on unique,

This will help ensure we are meeting our objectives and measuring our outcomes effectively.

In Summary:

The year was very productive for the Family Violence Prevention Program. It has been apparent right from the beginning that this program is needed in the Fort Saskatchewan area. It is a program that is now becoming known to various agencies not only in Fort Saskatchewan but also to many surrounding areas including the city of Edmonton. I believe as we continue to build upon our existing program, more and more families will benefit from the resources we are able to provide.

We are very grateful to the Municipality of Fort Saskatchewan for providing funding for our Family Violence Prevention Program. The Province of Alberta recognizes the importance of

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Status of Women “Bridge Mender” Project

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.

Continued from page 17

putting provincial funds towards the Prevention of Family Violence, and are working on a new Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying Strategy. While we do not know yet what this strategy will mean for families in Fort Saskatchewan, we are continuing to advocate for sustainable funding for our program. We sincerely hope that we can count on your continued financial support for the vital Family Violence Prevention supports that we offer.

Yours in the community,

Jodi Heidinger
Family Violence Prevention
Program Coordinator
Fort Saskatchewan Families First
Society

This well known fable is what our Status of Women Canada project is based upon. Unlike the efforts of the people described in the fable, the results of our prevention work likely won't be seen for many years; however, this Status of Women 3-year grant gives 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).

Walking upstream:

Status of Women Canada asked that the first phase of our project be to complete a Gender Based Analysis Study. We needed to reflect on and learn about how gender impacts policies, programs and organizational priorities in our city, and to identify explicit actions to improve gender equity in order to end domestic violence.

Repairing the hole:

The Gender Based Analysis identified a wide range of actions for the community (not only for Families First) to reflect on, and the following priorities have been identified:

Gender Equity

- Spearhead public awareness events and campaigns on gender and domestic violence.

Prevention

- Ensure ongoing funding for current frontline services; enhance funding for prevention efforts.
- Implement workplace prevention program with local business partner.
- Enhance existing parenting programs to include gender awareness.
- Engage men and boys as partners in preventing family violence.

Policy Coordination

- Create opportunities for improv-

ing services and sharing learning focused on violence prevention.

Legal/Justice Capacity Building

- Provide gender/domestic violence/trauma sensitive training for partners in the justice and legal community.

For more information on our Status of Women Bridge Mender project and how you can help, please contact Jennifer at 780-998-5595, ex. 227.

Upcoming Events

- **September 19, 2013** Take Back the Night
- **November 2013** White Ribbon Campaign – Family Violence Prevention Month
- **November 4 and 5, 2013** Michael Kaufman Conference
- **December 6, 2013** National Day of Action and Remembrance on Violence Against Women (Montreal Massacre)
- **March 8, 2014** International Women's Day
- **March 22, 2014** The Vagina Monologues



Sturgeon County Programs



Wow - time flies when you are surrounded by great people. It has been a year since I joined the Families First team.

I have been working in Sturgeon County, running several different Parent Link programs. It has been a great year; here are my top 5 picks:

Ariane's Top 5 Experiences of 2013

- Meeting new families and watching them grow
- Seeing a huge increase in family participation
- Watching children and their parents make new friends and connections
- Meeting new community partners and strengthening these relationships
- Being part of the Families First family

It takes a village to raise a child and I am so very proud to be a part of this village.

*By Ariane
Parent Link Centre Worker*



ABC Camp 2013



ABC Camp has just celebrated its 10th year, and we are happy to report that this has been another fun and successful summer!

Camp got off to a bit of a rocky start, due to some fallen trees from a bad summer storm. We ended up having to stay inside for safety for the first two weeks of camp. Luckily, the City of Fort Saskatchewan came to our rescue and cleaned them up to make our park safe to play in again!

We also began our new partnership with the City of Fort Saskatchewan's Leaders in Training (LIT) program this summer. Every week, we were introduced to two new teens who volunteered their time to help us with camp. We made some new friends, gained new experiences, and taught the LITs what ABC Camp is all about!

Some highlights of our summer included: our special guests, the C.O.W. Bus coming to camp, the R.C.M.P coming to camp for the first time, potato sack races, dressing up for special days, and our fantastic last day Birthday party.

We had so much fun this summer, and I am sad that it is my last summer of ABC Camp. However, I know that Kaitlyn will do an excellent job coordinating camp next year. We would like to thank all the families who came to camp this year, all the community partners who donated to us, and all the special people who volunteered their time.

Thank you for making ABC Camp's 10th year so much fun!

*Carrie Radke
Kaitlyn Lautner*



Families First Made a Difference...

I am writing this letter to let you know that if it wasn't for the Fort Saskatchewan Families First Society I am not sure where I would be. I was in a mentally abusive relationship for a short time. I got myself out in a hurry as I recognized that the situation was bad and would only get worse. However when I left the relationship I was four months pregnant. I found myself scared. It was then suggested that I go in and talk to one of the ladies at Families First. I found myself in really great care and all the help I needed in the direction to continue getting the legal help also. If it was not for a place such as Families First being in Fort Saskatchewan people like myself would be at a loss. I am still growing now as a single mom of a very busy toddler and the society is always there in assisting me and helping me to continue to grow. I appreciate the fact that the society is here and I can go to them for the help I need.

Sincerely one very thankful single mom.



ChIPS 2012-2013 (Children's Indoor Play Space)

The past year at ChIPS has been very eventful. We have had many special days: Family Literacy Day, our Halloween Party, the Pancake Breakfast and the Year-end Celebration, just to name a few.

We have had literally hundreds of children and their grown-ups walk through the doors at ChIPS. Not only do we have traditional families (mom and kids) coming to this program, we also have dads bringing their little ones. We have several day homes bringing their special little people down as well. We have grandmas and grandpas and aunts and uncles bringing the kids down to ChIPS. Any combination that you can think of we have probably seen at the ChIPS Program.

ChIPS is a very welcoming place to come. There is always coffee on and some sort of snack for everybody to enjoy. The friendships that have been formed at ChIPS are many and as varied as the families who attend this program.

Over the course of the past several years I have been very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work here and become friends with so many of our families who have attended ChIPS. Seeing the babies sprout up into toddlers and then become preschoolers and finally having to say a final good-bye to them as they get ready to attend kindergarten or grade one really makes me appreciate what I do and the effort that goes into making a program like this happen.

ChIPS is definitely a vital part of life in Fort Saskatchewan which I am very proud to be a part of.

*Cathleen Sinclair
ChIPS Co-ordinator*



ChIPS is a drop in parent and child program that provides an informal play environment 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, co-operation, literacy and more.

Coffee is provided and there is a healthy snack for the children.



Parent-Child Mother Goose Program®

The Parent-Child Mother Goose Program is a group experience for parents and their babies and young children, focusing on the pleasure and power of using songs, rhymes and oral stories. PCMG is based on the knowledge that the shared words, actions, images and feelings of oral rhymes and oral stories enhance the relationship between parents and their children.

In Fort Saskatchewan we run a total of 12 programs each year, 6 infant programs – 0 to 18 months and 6 toddler programs sessions – 18 to 36 months. Each program sees parents and caregivers gathering together for one hour each week for 10 weeks. The session is a relaxed environment where parents and their children, along with two facilitators and childminders sit in a circle on the floor.

Parents and caregivers learn rhymes and songs that involve holding, touching and bouncing their children. Children are free to participate, walk about, play or nap. Parents are able to focus on learning the rhymes and songs because of the childminders who help to keep the exploring children safe.



Babies and toddlers love the time spent....



Families First Made a Difference...

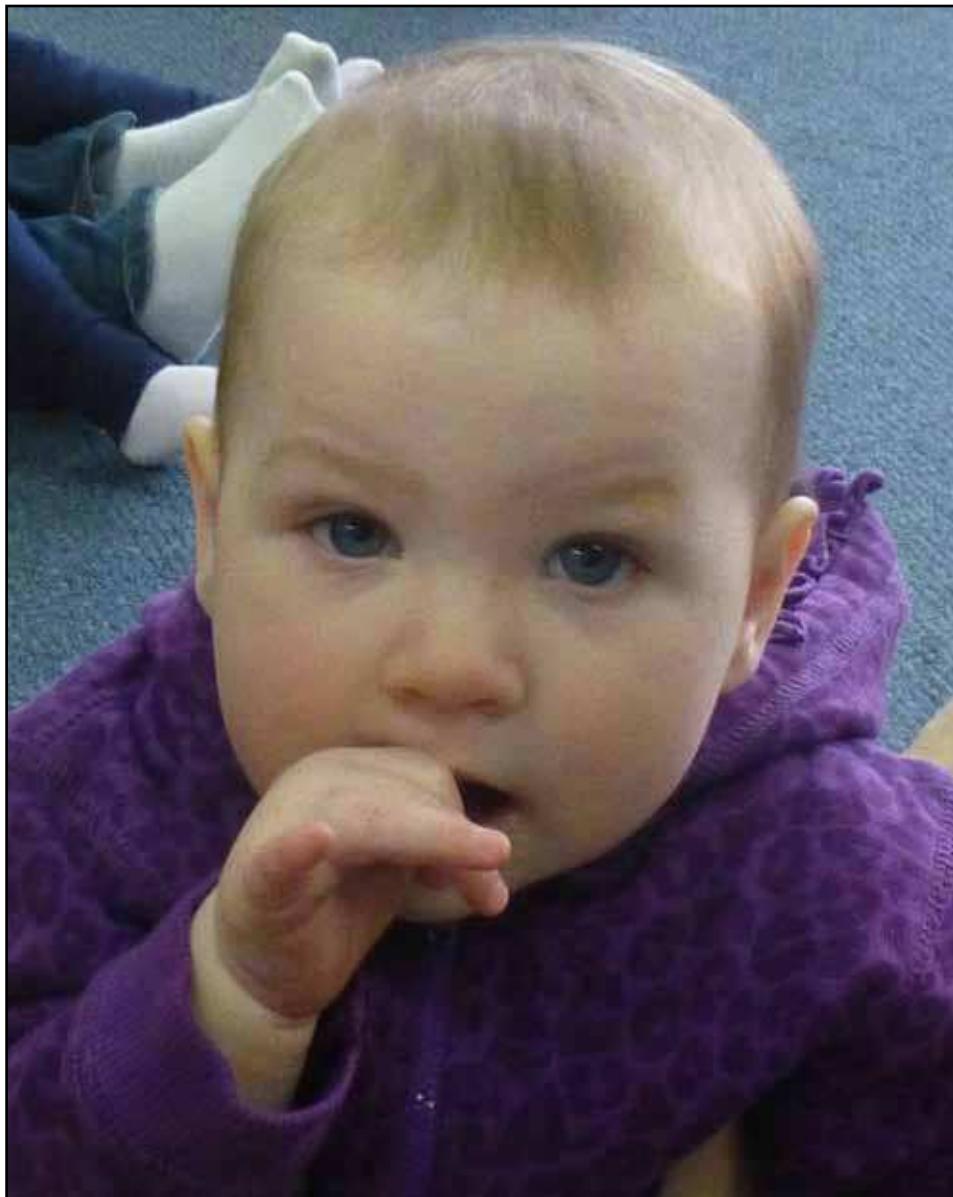


Families First Made a Difference...



Young Parents Group

A program geared toward moms and dads up to 24 years old. Come join us for dinner and learn new skills, do fun activities, and meet other young parents!



Home Visitation

A voluntary confidential and free of charge program that provides long term, in home support for families who have infants or toddlers.



Health for Two

Health for Two is a program available to expectant moms offering prenatal information, nutritional supplements (such as milk coupons and prenatal vitamins), and support during their pregnancy and following the birth of their baby.

ASQ's

The ASQ (Ages and Stages Questionnaires) is an easy parent-completed assessment tool developed to monitor 6 important areas of your child's development.



Building Community Connections

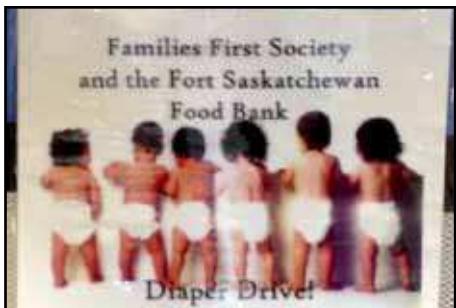


Community Connections:

Our April, 2012- March, 2013 funding and donations came from:

Fort Saskatchewan and Sturgeon County:

- ATCO Energy Solutions
- Blondes Brunettes and Redheads
- Catholic Women's League
- Catholic Women's League Fort Saskatchewan
- CIBC Wood Gundy
- City of Fort Saskatchewan
- DOW Chemical Canada
- EECOL Electric
- Families First Penny Drive
- Families First Santa's Workshop
- Fort Saskatchewan Balloons
- Fort Saskatchewan United Way Advisory Committee
- Fort Saskatchewan Dart Club
- Fort Saskatchewan Elementary School
- Fort Saskatchewan Food Bank
- Gunther Construction
- Hair Junky's
- Howard Johnson/Armor Self Storage
- Legal Small Town Saturday Night Committee
- Legacy Park Festival
- Mayor's Tea
- McHappy Days
- Mix 107.9
- Novice A Rangers



- Order of the Eastern Star
- Pioneer House
- Rotary Club – Operation Red Nose
- South Fort Chevrolet
- Starbucks
- Station Square Sobeys
- Strathcona County
- TD Bank
- Twice But Nice Clothing Society
- United Way Donor's Choice donations
- V-Day 2012
- Winners Way
- Many generous individuals who have donated time, food, clothing, other household items, and money

Province of Alberta

- Alberta Enterprises and Advanced Education
- Community Adult Literacy and Learning Society (CALLS)
- Community Initiatives Program
- Region 6 Child and Family Services
- Summer Temporary Employment Program

Government of Canada

- Canada Summer Jobs
- Status of Women Canada



During this year, donations of space have come from:

- Bon Accord Public Town Office
- Careers Under Construction
- Christ Lutheran Church (Fort Saskatchewan)
- Fort Mall
- Fort Saskatchewan Public Library
- Gibbons School
- Legal School
- Morinville Public School
- Ochre Park School, Redwater
- Our Lady of the Angels Catholic Church (Fort Saskatchewan)
- Pioneer House (Fort Saskatchewan)
- Rivercrest Care Nursing Lodge (Fort Saskatchewan)
- Town of Gibbons
- Town of Legal
- Town of Morinville
- Town of Redwater



Thank You to all our supporters and funders!

2012 – 2013 Families First Society Treasurer’s Report

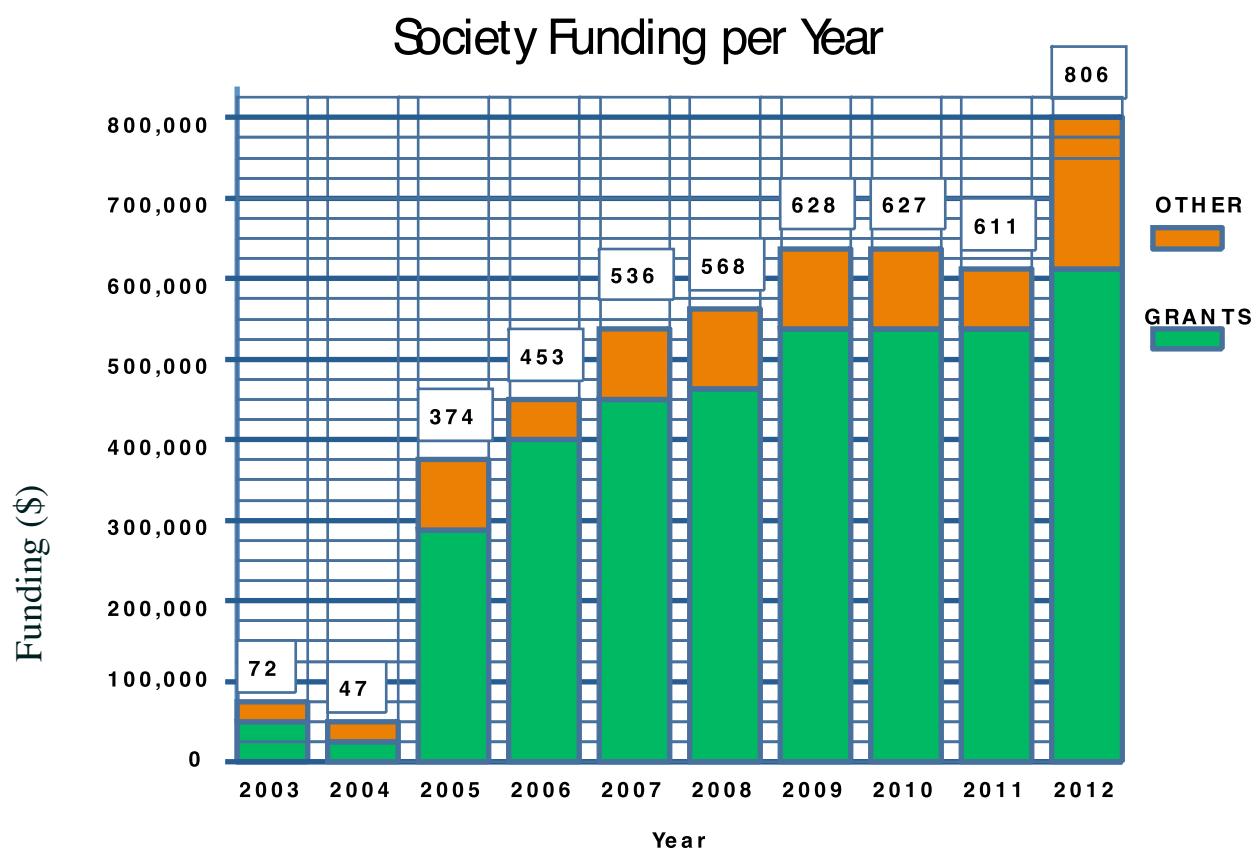
September 10, 2013

A complete audit of the Society’s accounts was performed by the Milena Wildeman Professional Corporation, for the 2012 fiscal period, which ended on March 31st, 2013.

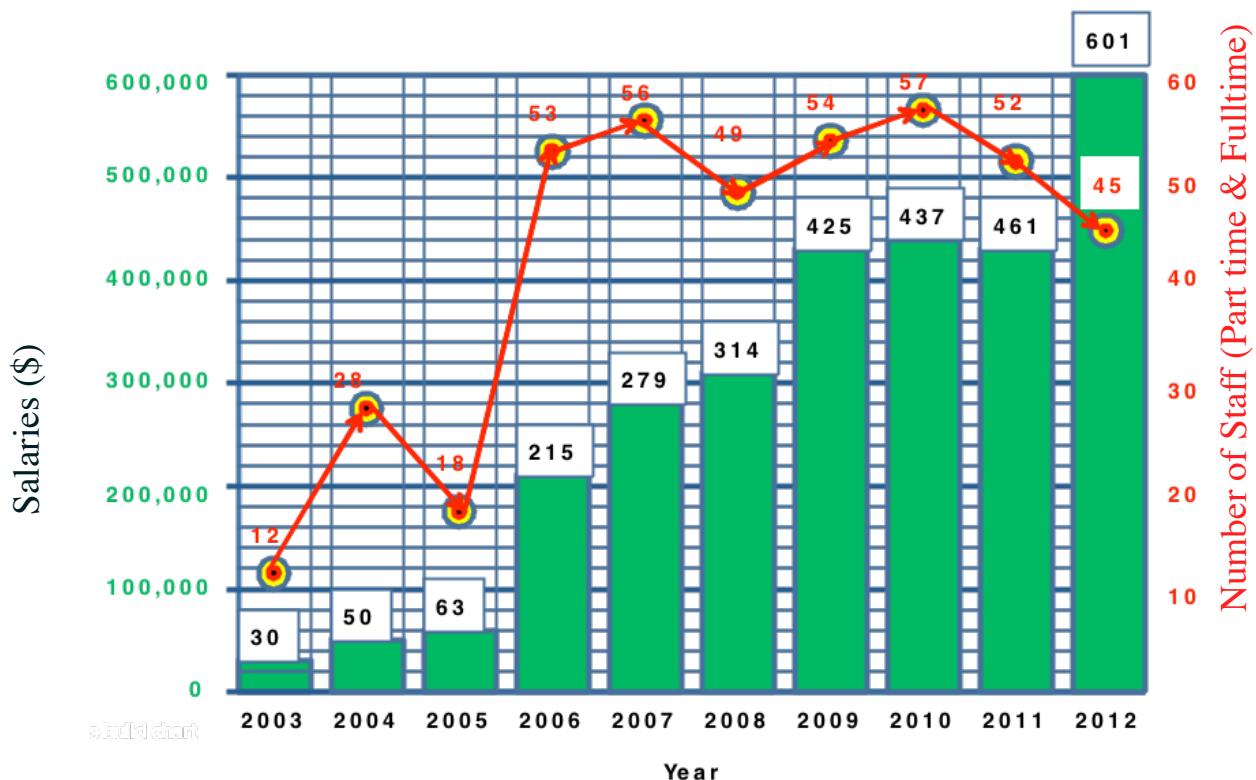
The audit found no significant accounting issues or irregularities in the Family First finances.

A summary of our 2012 financial position:

ASSETS	\$351,009	REVENUE	\$806,248
LIABILITIES	\$291,447	EXPENSES	\$798,559
		SURPLUS	\$7,689



Society Growth per Year



There was only one suggestion to improve our current accounting system. It is suggested we review our current practice of using a debit card for small dollar purchases to support our programs. We need a process which will ensure we can track all cash flows and have accountability for all spending.

All of the recommendations from the 2011 audit have been corrected or closed.

Finally, the Society continues to grow with the 2012 revenue exceeding \$800,000, which is an increase of almost \$200,000 over the 2011 value.

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

Best Regards,

Doug Rees.
Treasurer, Families First Society

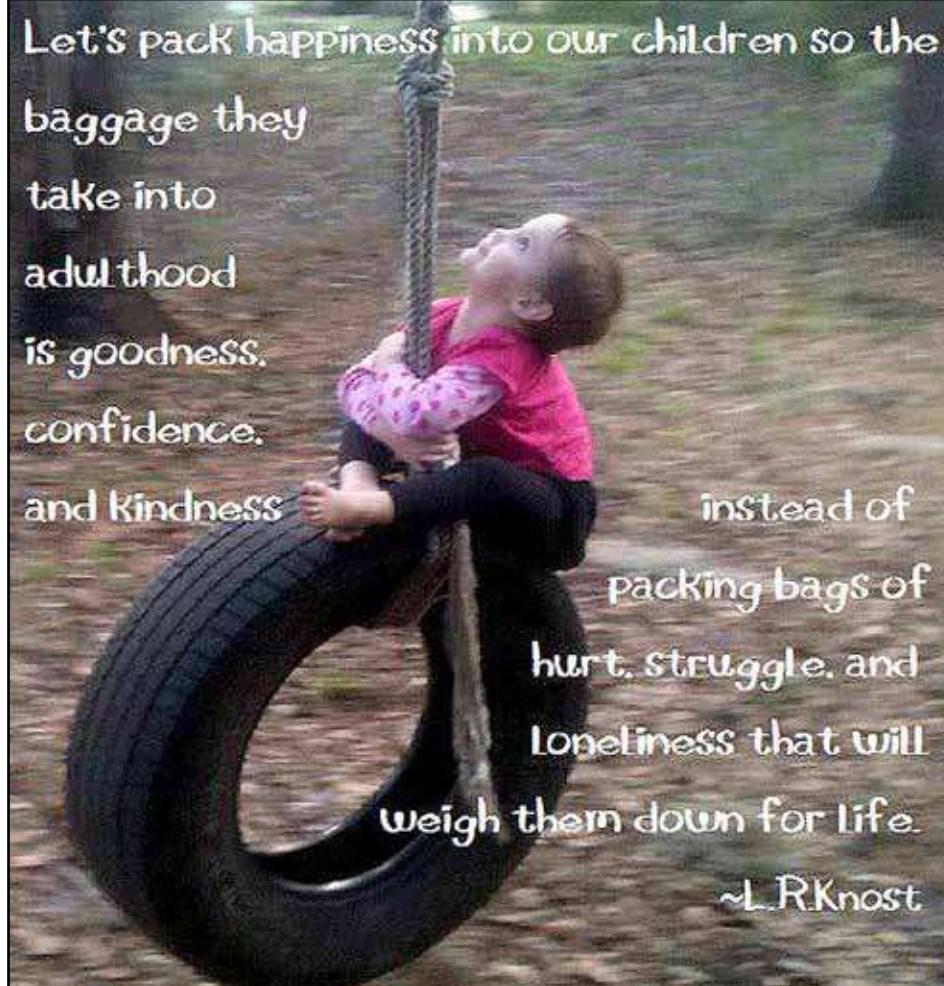
Families First Society/Parent Link Center

ph. 780-998-5595
(toll free 780-413-9153...998-5595)
fax 780-998-5503
Monday - Friday
9am - 3pm

Come visit us at
10302A - 99 ave
Fort Saskatchewan, AB

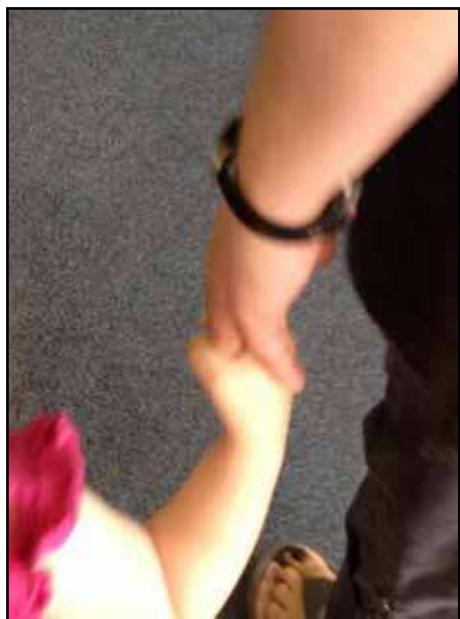
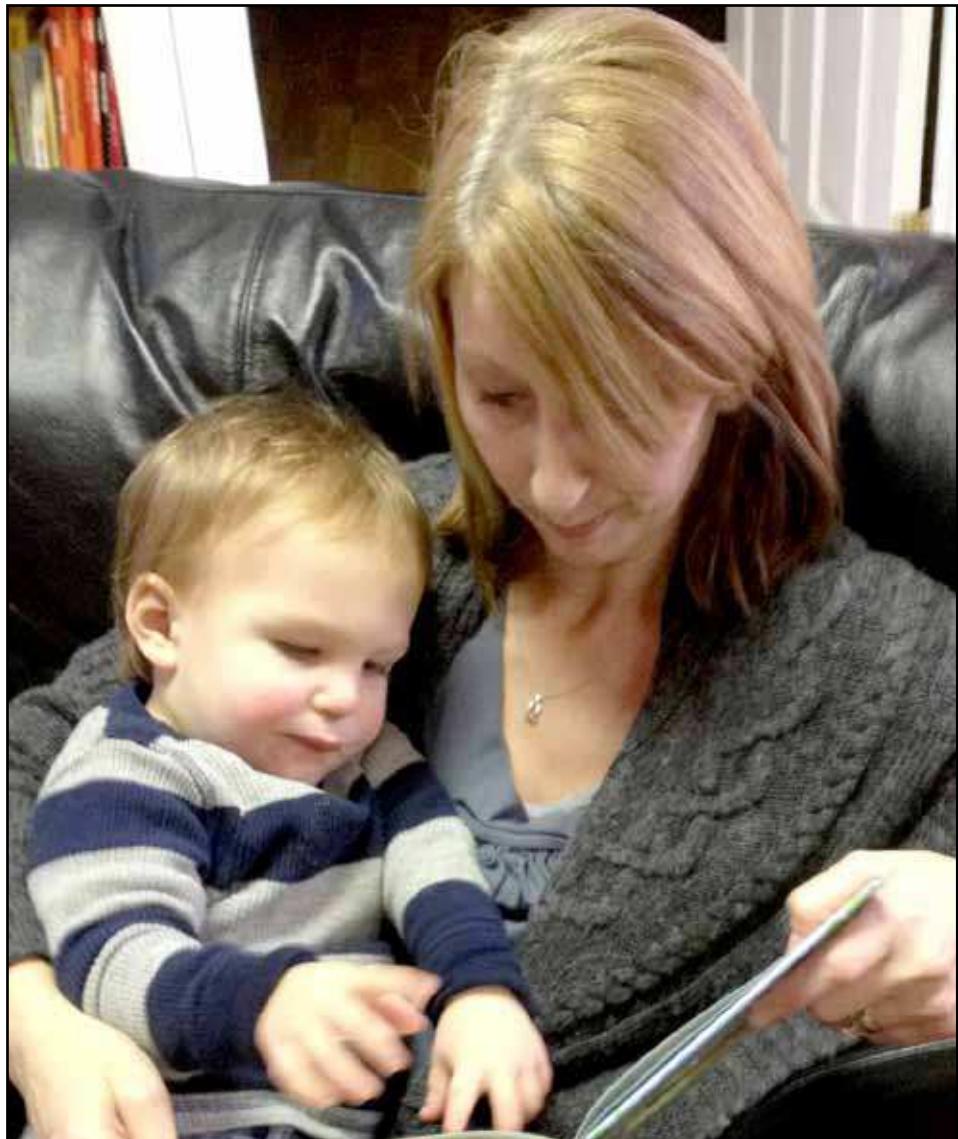
Mailing Address
Box 3285
Fort Saskatchewan, AB
T8L 2T3

www.familiesfirstsociety.ca



Every single person on our team considers it an honour when parents make the decision to spend time with us, trust us enough to let us peek into the windows of their lives, and if we're really lucky, actually be invited into their lives to become a part of their stories.

It is with gratitude that we ask you to accept our April 1, 2012 – March 31, 2013 Annual Report – *this is our village!*



**Children are valuable
for who they are
right now, not for
what they might
become if we train
them correctly.**



www.ParentingforSocialChange.com