Creating a Community of Learning: FAMILY CHILD CARE TRAINING

What is Family Child Care?

In family child care, children are cared for in small groups in the home of the caregivers. Across Canada, this type of care has a variety of names, including home child care and family day care. Family child care is the most common form of remunerated child care used by families in Canada. According to data collected by the National Longitudinal Survey of Child and Youth (NLSCY), 56.2% of Canadian children under age 6 and 51.1% of those ages 6 to 11, who were receiving out-of-home, non-relative care on a regular basis in 1996/97, received this care in a family child care home. This means there are some 390,200 Canadian children under age 6 in this type of care, and an additional 246,400 children aged 6 to 11.[1]

In many ways, family child care is different from centre-based child care.[2] The physical environment in a home is different. Children cared for in family child care are much more likely to interact with a consistent caregiver throughout the day, and to be part of a mixed-age group of children. The relationship between caregiver and parent tends to be more intense in family child care, since these two individuals communicate frequently about all aspects of the caring arrangement. The relationship between a single caregiver, a child and his or her family often continues for many years.

According to a recent paper commissioned by the Canadian National Family Child Care Training Project, a high quality family child care:

- looks and acts like a home
- makes purposeful use of home and local neighbourhood as learning opportunities
- makes purposeful use of the mixed-age group as a learning opportunity
- is run by a provider who:
  - acts as a parenting role model and source of support and information for families
  - successfully addresses the challenges involved in working in her home, such as management of time and space, and balances the needs of her own family with those of the children in care.

Why is Training Important for Family Child Care Providers?

…because it is associated with better quality care

Many research studies have found a relationship between caregiver training and quality of care. American research studies on family child care have found that training is associated with:

- higher rates of programming involving dramatic play and language stimulation[3]
- more frequent positive provider behaviours such as positive physical contact and responsiveness[4]
- higher rates of caregiver responsiveness and sensitivity[5]
- more time spent directly relating to and playing with children[6]
- more adult/child interactions involving language[7]
- the level of the children's social play with peers and cognitive functioning[8]

Recently, Gillian Doherty, a research consultant and author of several studies on quality child care, developed a Canadian framework for understanding quality in family child care.[9] Doherty concluded that this form of child care is distinct in several important ways from centre-based care, and that quality care in a home-based setting will typically look different from high quality centre-based care. Doherty also reviewed "enabling factors" – factors that support family child care providers to provide high quality care. Included in this list were introductory training and ongoing professional development. Also included was networking with other caregivers through membership in an organized association.

… because caregivers who participate in training are more satisfied and better networked

Susan Kontos' review of the literature[10] concluded that provider satisfaction is a consistent outcome of provider training. American researcher and advocate Kathy Modigliani has suggested that participation in training, including ongoing professional development workshops, serves the additional purpose of helping providers network, thereby enhancing their opportunities for mutual support and reinforcing their interest in further training.[11]

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What are the Qualities of Good Training?

According to recent Canadian research,[12] good caregiver training:

- incorporates opportunities for caregivers to network and learn from one another, and recognizes the value of the experience that caregivers already have
- includes outreach strategies to reach isolated and independent caregivers
- is delivered by credible trainers with thorough knowledge of family child care
- is accessible in terms of cost, timing and location
- incorporates the principles of adult learning and accommodates different learning styles
- is flexible enough to adapt to local contexts and issues
- is recognized by regulators, parents, colleges and other groups and helps to build a sense of professional identity for caregivers
- includes assessment and evaluation of the learners and the trainers

The family child care sector needs affordable, appropriate, effective training programs for caregivers; resources and training to prepare experienced, knowledgeable individuals to take on the role of trainers; and action by governments, educational institutions, and organizations to move towards ensuring that family child care training is available to every caregiver in every community in Canada.

What Makes the Family Child Care Training Project Materials Unique?

The training modules developed by the National Family Child Care Training Project are available across the country from the Canadian Child Care Federation, and are unique in that:

- They are organized as a series of 36 modules. Each module can stand alone as a workshop or single session within a training program. Each includes exercises, options for evaluation, and links to other resources. Modules can be supplemented with additional material or offered in different combinations to meet local needs.
- They cover basic, intermediate and advanced topics.
- They are up-to-date, having been completed in the last 3 years.
- They are Canadian, nationally known, and accepted as fulfilling provincial training requirements in several provinces.

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