

CHILD DEVELOPMENT UNIT

All services within the Child Development Unit are offered with a vision of healthy communities built through supporting families.

Through community development initiatives, that aim to connect people to one another and to their larger society, we will collectively build communities that are places of safety, hope and pride for all children and families.

FOUNDATIONS AND PRINCIPLES

- We recognize and work to reduce the systemic marginalization that families face.
- We offer strength-based groups that promote healthy parent child interactions.
- We bring expertise in the area of Early Childhood Development, Early Learning and Parenting, Family Support and Community Development.
- We offer universal and targeted programs for families with children 0-12.
- We act as lead agency in neighbourhood centres to help bring meaningful and relevant services where people live.

The Child Development Unit is staffed by six full-time Child development Workers, a Family Support Worker and a Community Developer. These staff members provide a variety of services in a structured yet nurturing environment for the children who attend with activities to promote gross and fine motor skills development, cognitive development, and to meet social, emotional, and developmental needs. Programs may include free play, a creative/craft period, circle time, snack, and story telling. While in this environment children's creativity is encouraged, self-esteem is enhanced through positive interaction with parents, peers and staff and behaviour is reinforced or redirected in a positive manner. The Child Development Workers are available to promote a healthy environment, offer guidance with regards to child development, play and interaction, or behaviour management and offer support to parents. They also provide appropriate referrals to information sources for parents who have questions regarding resources in the community. Much of this programming is provided in consultation with social workers.

Child Development Workers can provide individual developmental assessments and will implement individual or small group programs within the context of the FRC or community site to deal with the developmental needs of children. This may be very pragmatic support, focusing on specifics of every day tasks (i.e. sterilizing, bathing, feeding) with parents whose children are at risk or in a broad universal context at various community sites throughout the city. Parents are encouraged to chart their own progress and both Child Development Workers and social work staff offer support and education in a safe, non-threatening environment.

Service and programs within the Child Development Unit include:

Best Start Early Learning and Parenting Centres – Bellview, Notre Dame/Branlyn, Centennial, Major Ballachey, all in Brantford and St. James Church (Paris)

Community Development

Neighbourhood Family Resource Centre – Stepping Stones (Riverside Neighbourhood) , Northland Gardens (Northland Gardens Neighbourhood) and New Beginnings (Eastdale Neighbourhood)

Patta Cake – Program outreach – Brantford Library

In Home Family Support Program – Offering individualized support, to families with children 0-6, in their home with a vision to rooting them in to their local Early Years Programming

Parent Child Interaction Program – Group program for families with children 0-6 designed to promote healthy parent child attachment and interactions for families experiencing significant challenges with parenting.

Teen Parenting - Group program for young parents and their children that offers an opportunity for learning and support. A meal is offered and shared together and parents may attend a workshop and/or spend time in parent child interactive time.

Community Development and Neighbourhood Resource Programs

The Framework

Community development involves working with people “at a local level to promote active participation in identifying local needs and organizing to meet those needs” (Wright, 2004, p 386). We have adopted an ecological model/framework to help direct the work in the area of community development. The ecological approach to child welfare addresses the complex relationships between the individual, family, community and social factors/environment which influence a child’s well-being and development (Wright, 2004). This model suggests that in order to help children and families in the long-term and holistically, community factors that promote or allow child abuse or neglect have to be addressed.

We have to take into consideration what is going on in their homes and communities and help work with them to address these issues through a number of strategies and when those pieces are done, people can start to work towards a self-help model. It is difficult for people to find their power when they do not believe that they have power or their power is exerted in negative ways.

Through all of this, we also have to focus on the assets of the communities and the people who live in them. Rather than basing our work entirely on “needs” or issues, we have to embrace and celebrate the assets, skills and resources that the communities have.

By intersecting both these approaches, the staff in the Child Development Unit can work with local children, families and communities (including service communities) at identifying the factors that affect them in order to holistically increase the parenting capacity as well as help the communities become vibrant, safe and healthy places to live and raise families where people are proud of their communities.

The Model

The Children's Aid Society of Brant is working collectively with the City of Brantford Housing Authority and three local Resource Centres to provide children and parents with a nurturing and stimulating experience in a supportive community setting. Stepping Stones, New Beginnings and Northland Gardens Resource Centres are strategically located due to high risk factors and the lack of local supports. The partnerships are the result of a financial support from City of Brantford through Child Care Services.

Children’s Aid Society of Brant through the Child Development Unit offers the services of lead agency in three neighbourhood projects: New Beginnings, Stepping Stones, and Northland Family Centre and all are offered in partnership with the City of Brantford and Brant Housing Authority. As the lead agency we work in collaboration with other service providers in the community to bring meaningful and relevant services to each neighbourhood. Advisory committees have been recently formed to ensure coordinated and responsive services. Services are advertised by monthly calendars and are delivered to each resident monthly as well as available on the intranet for Society staff to access to encourage and emailed to a group list of community service providers.

STEPPING STONES is located in the Riverside Gardens Housing Project, this center has been in operation since 1991. This site services clients in the Eagle place community beyond the local housing project and is enhanced by the expertise of caregivers.

NORTHLAND GARDENS FAMILY CENTER is located in Memorial Gardens Housing Project, this center has been in operation since 1994.

NEW BEGINNINGS is located at Eastdale Gardens Housing Project, this center has been evolving since 1996.

Consumer Participation

True to the tenants of Community Development, we endeavour to hear the “voice” of the communities in which we are located. This will be accomplished through two means: monthly open houses at each site, monthly community “community chats” and Quarterly Community Advisory Board (service providers currently offering service at centers or interested in exploring offering programs at the centers).

Open Houses

The purpose of these open houses are outlined below:

- Provide a monthly neighbourhood activity where people can connect outside of their homes. Promote neighbourly relationships in a safe and neutral environment.
- Provide a welcoming open opportunity for new community residents or residents unfamiliar with the centre to come in and learn about the program.
- Provide an opportunity for people to meet with the lead Child Development Worker as well as the Community Developer and other possible staff who offer programs and support at the centre.
- Opportunity for the children to see the adults in their community interact in a positive, neutral environment.
- Connect neighbours with one another if they share common concerns, skills, needs, ideas etc.
- Offer partners with another opportunity to orient themselves to the community residents
- Offer parents an opportunity to sign up for programs or learn about upcoming programs.

If community issues come to light at the “community chat”, the Community Developer will bring this information forward to the larger advisory committee and will encourage residents to be part of this process if they would like to. For example, if a number of parents state that they are concerned about bike safety at the “community chat”, it will be the responsibility of the Community Developer to engage with the community around this issue but to also bring it to the attention of the partners in order for us to provide a coordinated approach to addressing it.

Advisory Committee Structure

Advisory committee for all 3 centres – meets quarterly to increase engagement within community centers. This provides a forum for discussion, planning and increased partnerships for those who have been offering services or those who would like to offer service out of the resource centres. The Community Developer chairs each meeting and annually reviews the Terms of Reference for the group.

CAS CDU staff (leads and Com. Dev)

CAS protection staff (reps from the community based teams)

Public Health

St. Leonard's

Parks and Recreation
Churches
Other community partners