

CAPACITY BUILDING - A GIFT THAT KEEPS ON GIVING

Every centre should be so lucky to receive the gift that ours did this past year as part of the INCLUSIVE CHILD CARE CAPACITY BUILDING PROJECT-Phase 2!

*Do you know how wonderful it is to have a resource person
“handed to you on a silver platter”?*

Each of our centres was assigned a mentor for the duration of the project at no cost, with no strings attached. Although we were a little afraid at first that our programs might be “picked apart”, we soon came to see our mentor as a peer who was able to offer honest, constructive feedback. They provided all staff members with an orientation of the *ECERS-Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale* and the *Specialink Inclusion rating scale* to help us observe our own programs in an objective way and the results of these assessments were useful in setting goals based on the needs of our individual centres.

We were guided in the direction that WE wanted to go...

Staff members were viewed as the experts of our own programs and participated in the strategic planning process to develop six to twelve month goals. These goals were realistic and achievable because they were based on the changes that WE wanted to make in our own centres. During regular consultations with our mentor we were able to keep on track with our plans and “on the same page” with co-workers, which strengthened our working relationships. As changes were gradually implemented in the learning environment and program, our mentor focused on our achievements along the way. This strength-based approach helped us to see the many positive things we already had to offer as well as our potential to do even better. The overall process was much easier than we had perceived it would be.

Free professional development workshops

Staff members attended the Preparing for Inclusion workshop series at no cost to them or the centre. This training assisted with how to include children with special support needs and provided opportunities to network with colleagues from other centres who were facing similar challenges. Often discussions carried over afterwards during the carpool home or into the staff room the next day and there seemed to be a renewed sense of energy & motivation after each session.

All children are benefiting from the changes in our programs...

Increasing the quality of our programs has benefited **ALL** of the children who attend, not just children with special support needs. There is a team approach to meeting the needs of individuals, which no longer limits children with special needs to only one staff person. Instead, we draw from the skills and experience of all staff members who interact with & assist all children in a more balanced and natural way. This has allowed for more than just physical integration of children with special needs into our centres but also provides them with more opportunities to be socially included with their peers.

There have been other benefits from participation in the project that we didn't foresee

Having clear goals and identifiable accomplishments have made our grant proposals attractive to funding agencies in planning for the purchase of furniture & equipment. In addition, each of our centres hired two inclusion staff members on the *Summer Career Placement Grant* in order to supplement our programs and assist with the follow through of our project goals.

Our centres are gaining a reputation in the community for being inclusive and parents of children with special needs as well as those of typically developing children are seeking out our programs.

The project is over ...

Phase 2 of this project is now officially over but staff members at our centres are still using the knowledge and skills gained over the past year. We continue to seek new and creative ways to accommodate the needs of individual children and continue to work collaboratively with one another. Team competency continues to grow as individual staff members seek further opportunities for professional development on inclusive practices. Our capacity to become even better at inclusion is a gift that will keep on giving.

We know how lucky we have been to participate in the *Inclusive Child Care Capacity Building Project*. We only wish that all Manitoba centres were able to enjoy this same opportunity.

Thank you to the staff members at both of our centres for their commitment to this project and for their efforts in transforming our programs to be more inclusive!

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