

## Early childhood inclusion advocates earn top award in disability community

On October 14, 2006, Community Living Manitoba awarded the Community Living-Manitoba President's Award in the category of Early Childhood to the Inclusive Policies Working Group during their annual Celebration of Accomplishments Luncheon and Annual General Meeting.

The Inclusive Policies Working Group is an ad-hoc committee made up of members of the early childhood community to support the development of policy statements and job descriptions that promote inclusive high quality childcare.

Membership is somewhat fluid but the following members have been consistently involved over the years

- **Hubert Fenton Smedts**, Kid Gloves;
- **Linda Heron**, Little Peoples Place/SISTARS
- **Fernanda Hodgson**, Day Nursery Centre
- **Monica Lytwyn** consultant;
- **Cara Foley**, Kinderworld;
- **Cindy Drysdale**; Play Penn Co-op
- **Donna Freeman**, Discovery Children's Centre
- **Sue Sydorchuk**, Province of Manitoba Child Care Program
- **Marc Battle**, on behalf of Manitoba Child Care Association
- **Robyn Rybychuk**, Campus Day Care
- **Kerri Pruden**, Campus Day Care

Resigned but still appreciated:

- **Joanne van Dyck**, Province of Manitoba Children's Special Services

Thanks also to the progressive workplaces of these volunteers who have supported their staff involvement on this working group.

These volunteers

- have exhibited innovation in the support of children with intellectual disabilities in their care, by sharing policy statements and providing peer to peer support, acting as leaders to their colleagues at their own centres and within their own groups in the childcare community
- have gone beyond the bounds of the traditional job description to ensure that inclusion and participation are at the core of the child's child care/nursery school experience, by developing specific job descriptions that focus on leadership, quality and inclusion and by mentoring others to this way of thinking
- have demonstrated strong leadership by making a commitment to this volunteer work and by helping to create bridges between the childcare and disability communities
- have demonstrated positive role modeling in the community through their writing and public speaking on this issue

In 2004, the group first developed a survey of how the field interprets the value of a mission statement for inclusive childcare and how job descriptions and titles flow from the vision of inclusion held by the specific childcare centre. The survey was published in the Manitoba Child Care Association's fall 2004 journal, and circulated by email to hundreds of Manitoba childcare centres. Response to the work was strong, with many centre directors asking for specific examples of appropriate language and policies.

The group soon realized that prior to developing language suited for use by a centre, an overarching vision of early childhood inclusion needed to be developed and agreed upon. Through a creative facilitation half day workshop, we were helped to develop a graphic vision for inclusion. This was followed by extensive dialogue and wordsmithing and eventual consensus on the wording our group approved in April 2005. In June 2005, the board of directors of the Manitoba Child Care Association endorsed the wording. In fall of 2005, it was approved by the

board of Community Living Manitoba. During 2005 and 2006, committee members shared the vision via informal community workshops and discussions at Director Support Group meetings, staff meetings, and with students. The Group wrote to the Minister of Family Services and Housing to endorse it as well, and the Province committed that an inclusion statement for children with disabilities will be added to the Manitoba Child Care Regulation by March 31, 2007<sup>1</sup>. In fall 2006 and throughout 2007, the group plans to operationalize this vision in specific policies, job descriptions, develop and share a new workshop with a working title of *Taking the Fear out of Inclusion*, and continue to dialogue with the child care field at large about these important issues.

In addition, this dedicated group of volunteers from the early childhood community have been regularly meeting each month, and have agreed to take on other bigger issues such as

- Linking with Manitoba Child Care Program, Manitoba Children's Special Services, Manitoba Child Care Association and SpecialLink, as well as closer relations to and understanding of the community living movement
- Development of a workshop and PowerPoint to use in presentations to outside groups
- Presentations to various meetings of childcare centre directors who meet within their area groupings, in Winnipeg and in rural Manitoba on our Inclusion Vision for ECE in Manitoba; fall 2006 will broaden out meeting targets to family child care providers, nursery school teachers, and others
- Submission of a workshop to be presented at the MCCA provincial conference 2006 which was cancelled due to lower enrollment
- Meeting with the Government's Regulation Review Committee to share our vision
- Participating in think tanks and consultations, etc called by disability groups such as SpecialLink

The vision statement that is at the heart of the work being carried out by this group of volunteers:

**ALL children bring gifts  
and have the right to be valued, accepted and included.  
We embrace inclusion and celebrate diversity as the means to foster the  
well being of every child and thereby enrich our communities.  
All are entitled to full participation and support  
to meet their individual needs  
using a strength based, family centered approach  
whereby we all learn from each other.**

Debra Mayer is the early childhood consultant for Community Living Manitoba and offers staff support to the working group honoured by this award.

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<sup>1</sup> Moving Forward on Early Learning and Child Care Manitoba's Action Plan –Key Objectives, November 2005 [http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/moving\\_forward\\_detailed\\_action\\_plan.pdf](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/childcare/moving_forward_detailed_action_plan.pdf)

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If you are interested in joining in the work of this volunteer group, please contact Debra at 489-6897 or [debramayer@shaw.ca](mailto:debramayer@shaw.ca) . There is also a group of volunteers meeting in the Westman region of the province.