

## Clareview Head Start celebrates 10 years of service to families



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The Early Head Start children performing in their lady beetle costumes with staff and parents in the song "The Big Beautiful Planet" by Raffi.

Tiny tykes file into the gym, cuter than cute, each dressed in heritage clothes and sporting a banner to match: Afghanistan. Argentina. Bosnia. Canada. China. Congo. El Salvador. Fuji. Pakistan. Rwanda. Singapore. Sudan. Turkmenistan. Ukraine. Vietnam. They're kicking off Clareview Head Start's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations November 12, while making a cogent point: this facility embraces a remarkably diverse community, and knows how to celebrate that fact.

Opened in 1994 to help families in northeast Edmonton prepare for kindergarten and beyond, Clareview Head Start endured numerous moves and budget shifts before settling into the airy and welcoming Lila Lee Centre for Children and Families at 1142 Hermitage Road in 2002. Change

continued into 2003 as the program left the umbrella of Norwood Child & Family Resource Centre (which decided to focus its energy on the Norwood community) and joined the ECCCC family of programs. Through it all, as those gathered to celebrate the anniversary attest, the centre remains true to its original purpose.

"Our emphasis is on a holistic approach, working with both children and their families," says Program Manager Marie Deis-Borisow. More than 100 preschoolers are enrolled this year, with another 50 on a waiting list. Children ages 1 to 3 attend Early Head Start with their parents/guardians two half-days a week while those age 3 to 5 attend Head Start four half-days a week. Participating families also depend on outreach workers,

public health consultants and a CASA (Child and Adolescents Services Association) mental health therapist to support them in their journey. A family interviewing room, for example, allows the CASA therapist to videotape parents playing with their children, then help the parents assess those interactions. "Working with families at that level," Deis-Borisow observes, "we've seen that their skill development enhances the community, because now they have the capacity to become involved."

Marilyn Hildebrandt exemplifies that expanded capacity. Taking her turn at the microphone following congratulations from federal and provincial funders, she recalls how the centre enabled her to grow into an unfamiliar role as stay-at-home mom with a newborn and an inquisitive 3-year-old. "The resources that we were able to connect with were wonderful, from the speech and language early intervention that my son ended up needing, to the Edmonton Fee Reduction Program, to learning how to be an economical shopper." Nor is the giving one way. Besides volunteering in the

classroom, Hildebrandt chaired the Parent Advisory Committee, served on the Board of Directors and, after earning her child care certificate, now assists her children's elementary teachers between stints as relief assistant for the centre that walked with her family at a crucial time.

While preparing to speak, Hildebrandt asked her children, now both enrolled in programs for academically gifted students, what they remember about Head Start. Her 10-year-old son said "Food!" recalling how Barb Koetze's fine cuisine kept his taste buds happy. Her 8-year-old daughter remembered the staff's kindness and amazing ability to figure out what each child likes to do. "I guess that is another reason why the program is so successful," their mother tells the crowd: "It is child-led versus teacher-led learning."

As charter staff member Kathy Reid traces the centre's history for gathered guests, it's clear the decade has brought its share of challenge. Initially located in a housing unit and recreation room leased from Capital Housing's Bannerman complex, the centre offered full-day service to 48 children, birth to age 5. By 1997 funding cuts forced a shift to the current half-day model with no service to infants, and the centre was split between Bannerman complex and Bannerman

School. With further space issues on the horizon, the search for a permanent home intensified even as the centre was forced to move outside the Clareview community, to Steele Heights Junior High School in 1998 and to Mount Royal Elementary School in 1999. Each site brought unique challenges, putting speech pathologists next to paper cutters and forcing cooks to share space with elementary classes whose hygiene wasn't quite up to health inspection standards.

Funding from the Clifford E. Lee Foundation and an anonymous donor, coupled with numerous other supports, finally enabled the centre to design a facility specifically for its use. "It was a wonderful collaboration of a lot of people," says Judith Padua, recalling how ECCCC Director Martin Garber-Conrad pieced together capital dollars, scrounged for playground money and initiated a land swap that put the building on Edmonton Public School Board land. "It was a huge project and he made it all come together."

Construction delays caused yet another interim move in December 2002, this time

to a gym next door to the construction site, at Overlanders Elementary School. In July 2002, the centre moved into its permanent home. News of a 70-child waiting list led to additional private funding that doubled the enrolment, instantly filling the building to near capacity. "Trying to keep a sense of cosiness in a bigger facility with more people was quite a challenge," Deis-Borisow says, speaking above the din as parents and guests swap memories over Barb's carrot cake in the family room at the building's heart.

What are the ingredients in this Head Start's success? "Every parent walking through those doors wants something better for their children," Deis-Borisow says. "It starts from there.

Second is the dedication and commitment of the staff who make that happen, very few of whom have left since joining us. And third, obviously the parent and community support that allows us to realize those things." Beyond government and foundation grants, that support extends to such partners as Clareview Sobeys, which gives families bread, and South Cooking Lake Ladies Friendship Club, whose handmade quilts help keep kids warm.

There's no doubt further change lies ahead. No sooner had guests left the anniversary celebration than Deis-Borisow sat down with a consultant to continue building a roadmap for a sustainable future. "We'd like our population to become even more reflective of the diversity in this community," she says. "We're also hearing that parents need places to gather, so we'd like to allow greater access to the centre." A return to full-day programming is another frequent request, to reduce disruption for the many children now bused to other daycares for part of the day, although that shift would demand a significant infusion of funds.

As provincial and federal policy makers debate such initiatives as universal daycare and junior kindergarten, it's Deis-Borisow's hope that they'll build on the foundation laid by head starts such as Clareview, rather than reinventing the wheel. "I believe that head start programs have a model that every child care centre should have in terms of working holistically with children and families in community."



The Head Start children wave goodbye as they leave the gym following their performance.



The Head Start children performing in costumes and banners representing their cultural origin to the song "Colors of the Wind" from Pocahontas.

Parent volunteer Robina Nawaz would agree. She says this centre does more to battle the depression that stalks her than doctors and medication have ever done. "It's not just for children; it's for parents, too," she says, turning to hug a friend. Being a person of colour, she appreciates finding a place where both she and her children feel at home. "It's like Smarties – lots of different colours, but they're all in one box. So close, and everybody is the same."

Wandering the bright halls and peeking inside the classrooms where everything's kid-size and friendly, I see tykes from the multicultural parade playing together and recall how Reid closed her remarks: "Here, we all smile, laugh and cry in the same language."

To learn more about Clareview Head Start, offer your support or volunteer in any way, call 475-1020.

## Who's involved?

*Clareview Head Start, 2003–2004 program year*

- 100 children at any one time; a total of 133 during the year
- 101 families (including 26 immigrant and refugee families, nearly 50 per cent more than the previous year)
- 753 family visits totalling 641 hours
- 8 program volunteers who contributed 325 hours
- 58 parents spent 2184 hours of program time with their children
- 44 parents attended 1303 hours of parent group

By Cheryl Mahaffy

**We'd like our population to become even more reflective of the diversity in this community. We're also hearing that parents need places to gather, so we'd like to allow greater access to the centre.**

*Marie Deis-Borisow  
Program Manager*



An early reader enjoying her book.

# Women's Reintegration Chaplaincy:

## Building bridges from prison to people

**W**e're sitting in a downtown coffee shop, and I soon realize it's a most appropriate place to connect with Women's Reintegration Chaplain Coleen Lynch and her assistant, Denise McLaren. Their work of building bridges between women who've spent time in the Edmonton Institution for Women (EIFW) and life outside the prison often puts them around tables such as these, sharing a coffee or breaking bread together while lending a listening ear. "One of the prime gifts we give is simply walking alongside as someone sorts out her own life," says Lynch, whose clerical collar testifies to her role as an Anglican priest.

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Women who come out of prison need to have a 'sacred' space to be able to ask their own questions, share their fears and to feel accepted for who they are, to be heard. Coleen and Denise make that happen. That type of acceptance is a catalyst for healing.

Reno Guimond  
Chaplain, Edmonton Institution for Women

Launched in 2001, the Women's Reintegration Chaplaincy has its genesis in the '90s, when Lynch mentored and assisted chaplains inside EIFW, even serving for a time as interim prison chaplain. "I came to recognize there is a huge gap out in the community for women coming out," Lynch recalls. "There are all kinds of programs through parole and programs, and advocacy through Elizabeth Fry Society, but there wasn't anything to connect women directly to what I call real society – to ordinary life and individual people in community."

McLaren knows all too well the challenges of reintegration. Four years behind the EIFW's barbed-wire fence after becoming ensnared in cocaine addiction and crime left her feeling *apart from* rather than *a part of* society, she says. "I think I walked out of that jail with my cell still around me. I felt like everybody knew and everybody judged. And you know what? I was right. That's what I experienced."

Such experiences, coupled with deep integrity, make McLaren an ideal partner in the work of reintegration, says EIFW Chaplain Reno Guimond. "Denise is powerful because she walks the talk. And she's able to reflect back the supportive but challenging statements they need to hear, because she's been there. It's beautiful."

McLaren's work began taking shape even before her 1999 release. Having determined that something good must come from her incarceration, she became Guimond's first chapel worker. Beyond cleaning, she helped create a sacred space by assisting in services, pulling out her guitar for music nights and sharing insights gained through her struggles. Since release, she's become integral to the Women's Reintegration

Chaplaincy (WRC), first as advisory committee member and now as Lynch's assistant.

Through the chaplaincy, McLaren is acting on a dream of offering peer support via telephone. In less than two years, calls to Peer Support Plus (970-PLUS) have tripled, to 250 last year. Calls come in every hour of the day, for as McLaren wryly observes, "Crises don't punch a time clock."

McLaren also edits a women's reintegration newsletter, meets two half days a month with women preparing to leave EIFW and dedicates countless hours to connecting with those who need a listening ear. "My car is my office," says the woman who also wears multiple hats as Boyle McCauley Health Centre's administrative assistant, fundraiser and volunteer coordinator.

Lynch too wears multiple hats. Besides working with women both inside and outside prison walls, she serves as chaplain to staff in the Correctional Service of Canada Edmonton Area Parole Office and is priest in charge at Tofield Anglican Church. While this "two-life syndrome" means there's always more to do than time allows, it also opens avenues to bridge building. "We are trying to make connections, to always close that gap so that women feel more comfortable coming back out and society out here feels more comfortable

in welcoming women back among them," she says.

Toward that end, both Lynch and McLaren actively seek opportunities to speak with community groups of all stripes. Often a reintegrating woman will join them, and the mood in the room visibly shifts from some blend of disgust and fascination to empathy as that woman offers a glimpse of her journey, which often involves abuse, poverty and addiction. An audience member in one exclusive club who'd stared daggers when a rough-hewn ex-con began her powerful story later walked up, gave the chaplain two \$50 bills, shook hands and walked away wordless. "That's the way hearts are touched and lives are changed," Lynch says.

Musician Judith Lam was similarly inspired by a parolee's story to write a song, donate part of the profits from her artistry and headline an annual benefit gala. "It really moved me to realize that people in prison are still people. They are not scum or

outcasts or monsters, which is what our society is led to believe," Lam reflects. "The silent oppression in our society is dramatic. I hope that by partnering with WRC, the issues will rise in the public eye."

In the ideal world, reintegrating women would not need to tell their story, muses McLaren. "Would a person on the street have to do that for a room full of people to think they're okay? I don't really think

"We're perceived as people who have made bad choices, so we need to suffer for that. Ultimately all of us have made bad choices, and some of us got caught. It's very shallow to stop at the conclusion that we're not all responsible for each others' wellbeing, regardless of what the appearance of being unwell is."

Denise McLaren

## Women's Reintegration Chaplaincy...

that's fair, but it's the way it is. And it's effective, so we use it. I use my own story to let people know I could be your sister, I could be your mother, I could be your daughter. You could be involved in this kind of stuff. It's the luck of the draw here." Indeed, McLaren's journey was featured in *Chatelaine's* December 2003 issue as an example of inspirational women at work across Canada.

Beyond service clubs and community leagues, churches also need to hear the call to compassion, Guimond reflects. "It is true that most volunteers with prisoners come from churches. But at the same time, churches, being in society, are easily prone to slip into

a stereotype of people in prison. They need to be reminded that first and foremost they're dealing with human beings who have potential and who need a welcoming response versus a judgement. If they're really committed to a belief system, maybe it's time to go back to it again. Jesus came to set people free, but people in the pew sometimes have created their own little prisons."

Lynch and McLaren are "shining examples" of a healthier approach, Guimond adds. "They're not just professionals handing out some kind of direction. They really truly care for the women, and that has tremendous impact. They help a lot of women."

Both EIFW Warden Janet-Sue Hamilton and District Director of Parole Jan Fox echo that assessment. "Denise is a success story who is always supportive," Hamilton says, "and Coleen certainly creates an environment of trust with the women where they can rely on her judgement and honesty with them."

Chaplains employed inside Canada's prisons are considered essential services and funded as such; not so the reintegration chaplaincy. Supported by Correctional Service Canada under a pilot contract with ECCCC that was

later extended for three years, this work is now awaiting word on a proposed five-year extension. Even if extended, federal funding will not cover such essential services as the peer support line and the newsletter, let alone numerous personal needs that arise, from clothes that fit to textbooks to coffee to help build relationships.

**"You reap what you sow. Women in prison take a lot of programming to say they need to distance themselves from their old friends and ways of doing things, yet they tend to leave here without a lot of positive support in the community. To bring some balance, we need to show there are some other ways."**

*Janet-Sue Hamilton  
Warden, Edmonton Institution  
for Women*

In that environment, donations are essential. But dollars alone aren't the answer, Lynch says. "We need more money in the donation fund, but you know what? That's not the big issue. The big issue is that people don't even care that there are women in prison who are coming back into society. And we can make a difference in a positive way in how we accept them back."

For that reason, WRC fundraising always aims to raise not only dollars, but bridges and awareness. The gala benefit concert, for example, showcases the talent and stories of reintegrating women while the reception that follows sees them mingling with community members who may never have spoken to a former inmate. For some, awareness translates into action, whether that means stuffing envelopes or extending friendship or offering a home or employing former prisoners. With 90 women in EIFW, 40 on parole and dozens more who've been there, those extra hands and hearts are essential to meeting the need.

Yet the fact remains that this work, focused as it is on women with a criminal record, doesn't reel in sympathy in the way that hungry kids or food banks might. "I think it's important for people to challenge themselves

to be that open armed community where we don't shoot our wounded. We take them back and we nurture them and we help them become healthy again," McLaren says. "By doing that with individual people, we gain a healthier community."

"If people want to have safer communities, then we need to be involved in one another's healing," Lynch adds. "And it isn't the stuff of rocket science and it isn't the stuff of big budgets and it isn't the stuff of lots of money and lots of programs. It's about relationships – what we're about is relationships."

### What can you do?

- **Pray.** Add your name to the volunteers who periodically receive lists of needs for which to pray.
- **Learn.** Invite chaplaincy representatives to speak to your group.
- **Visit.** Request a tour of the Edmonton Institution for Women.
- **Volunteer.** Be interviewed, screened and trained to work directly with reintegrating women.
- **Employ.** Include your business in the database of those willing to hire reintegrating women.
- **Accommodate.** Address the urgent need for safe housing by offering your home as a private placement through Elizabeth Fry Society.
- **Build bridges.** Help with such events as the annual gala concert and silent auction.
- **Contribute.** Send a cheque to ECCCC earmarked for the WRC donation fund.
- **Pray.** Only God can bring the healing and reconciliation we all need.

#### Connecting points:

The Reverend Coleen Lynch, 495-5793, 940-4733, LynchCA@CSC-SCC.gc.ca

Denise McLaren, 970-7587, denisemc23@hotmail.com

By Cheryl Mahaffy

**"Our work is to walk alongside someone no matter what's going on in their life. All kinds of nasty stuff happens within that. Lots of the women we work with go back to jail, and there are tragedies too, where women have died of overdoses. But always we are to continue to be faithful and hold that bridge and help women and society meet with one another in a safe way."**

*Rev. Coleen Lynch  
Women's Reintegration Chaplain*



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**Demo, Dinner &**  
**Silent Auction**  
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## Volunteers needed:

Various roles, duties, but always lots of fun!  
**Contact Jacqueline** at: 424-7543 ext 225 or email: [jbiollo@eccccc.org](mailto:jbiollo@eccccc.org)

## Home for Healing Wish List

### Cosmetology

new bottles of hair products (shampoos, conditioners, professional combs, brushes, etc.)

hair dryers

curling irons

CTS modules/teaching supports for Cosmetology (videos, CTS module packages)

### Foods

CTS modules/teaching supports for Foods (videos, CTS module packages)

### Fashion Studies

fabric

thread

fabric scissors

sewing accessories (seam rippers, measuring tapes, etc.)

sewing machines; serger

CTS modules/teaching supports for Fashion Studies (videos, CTS module packages)

### Language Arts (upgrading)

workbooks/textbooks for adult literacy students

workbooks/textbooks for students working at grades 7-12 levels

## Items Needed

### ECCCC is looking for donated items to assist their clients

- Infant/Toddler car seats and cribs (CSA approved)
- Vacuum Cleaners
- Microwaves
- Disposable Diapers (all sizes)
- Baby Wipes
- Kitchen "starter" items (pots, dishes, can openers, etc)
- Freezer, Washing Machine and Fridge

### ArtStart needs volunteers and related supplies such as:

- Dance slippers (ages 5-10)
- Art supplies
- Musical instruments (wind, brass, piano, etc.)
- White glue
- Scissors
- Plastercene

### Tools:

- Hammers
- Screw drivers
- Wrenches
- Pliers

**Please contact the ECCCC office at 424-7543 for more information or to make arrangements for a donation**