

ST. ALBERT PARENTS' PLACE

Program Evaluation

Presented to:

St. Albert Parents' Place

by

The Edmonton Social Planning Council

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SECTION I

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

St. Albert Parents' Place is an independent non-profit organization which, through a diversity of programs, provides education and support to parents. The organization was established by three individuals in 1982 as the Society for the Education and Support for Parents. The initial focus of the Society was on research into the effects of parent education on childrens' self-esteem. As a result of this research, a need for ongoing support and education for parents in the community became apparent.

United Way developmental funding was provided to the Society in 1984 at which time they began to offer parenting programs and to establish St. Albert Parents' Place as a permanent facility. Since that time, the programs and services of St. Albert Parents' Place have grown substantially.

In 1986, Parents' Place took steps to obtain United Way membership in order to secure permanent funding. As part of the request for membership, a program evaluation was required and in January, 1987, Parents' Place contracted with the Edmonton Social Planning Council to conduct this evaluation. The evaluation took place between mid-January and the end of March, 1987. This report describes the evaluation, documents the findings of the study and offers recommendations for the consideration of Parents' Place Board of Directors.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this study was to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of St. Albert Parents' Place. The focus of the evaluation was on the agency as a whole rather than on a particular program. However, due to limitations on time and funding, the scope of the evaluation was necessarily restricted and not all of the concerns could be addressed in this study.

The evaluation has three major audiences: St. Albert Parents Place, the United Way and the Community Services Advisory Board of St. Albert. All three organizations have a stake in the outcomes of the evaluation and consequently, were involved in developing the evaluation questions.

Beyond providing information to assist in funding decisions, this evaluation is viewed by Parents' Place Board of Directors as essential in setting directions for the future in terms of organizational structure, program planning and the agency's role in the community.

ORGANIZATION OF THE REPORT

This report consists of four sections and appendices. The introductory section contains information on the background, purpose and scope of the study. Section 2 describes the general approach to the evaluation, the process which was followed and the methodologies used. The evaluation questions and findings are contained in Section 3 while in the final section, we identify a number of issues and offer recommendations for dealing with these.

SECTION II

HOW THE EVALUATION WAS DONE

THE EVALUATION APPROACH

The approach of the Social Planning Council to evaluation is based on the belief that, in order to provide the most useful and relevant information, the evaluation must be responsive to the needs, issues and concerns of its audiences. Fundamental to our approach then, is the notion that clients or users of the evaluation must be involved throughout the evaluation process.

In this study, the evaluation users formed an Advisory Committee which worked closely with the evaluators to identify and clarify issues and concerns, identify sources of information and develop recommendations. This partnership between the evaluation users and the researchers was crucial in guiding the evaluation and consequently, ensuring its relevance.

Another feature of our approach is its flexibility. Rather than determining the research design at the outset, we allowed it to emerge as issues and concerns were clarified. In addition, we used a multi-method approach in which a variety of data collection techniques and sources converged to provide the information required.

THE EVALUATION PROCESS

Initial discussions with representatives of Parents' Place identified the scope of the evaluation, the resources available, the constraints on the study and some of the issues and concerns of agency staff and board members. Based on these discussions, a proposal was developed for the approval of Parents' Place and the United Way. Once the proposal had been accepted, the work of the evaluation began. This section describes the process followed in conducting the evaluation.

1. Establishing the Steering Committee

In keeping with our belief that an evaluation should respond to the concerns and issues of the evaluation users, our first step in the

process was to establish an Advisory Committee. (See Appendix A for Advisory Committee Terms of Reference.) This Committee consisted of:

- one representative of Parents' Place Board of Directors
- the Acting Executive Director of Parents' Place
- one representative of the Community services Advisory Board of St. Albert
- one current user of Parents' Place
- one representative of the United Way
- the Executive Director of Parents' Place (on leave)
- the two members of the evaluation team (ex-officio)

The Committee met four times over the two month period in which the evaluation was carried out. The tasks undertaken by the Committee included:

- a) reviewing and commenting on the evaluation proposal
- b) developing, clarifying and prioritizing the specific evaluation questions
- c) identifying potential sources of information
- d) discussing evaluation results and assisting in the formulation of recommendations.

2. Reviewing Relevant Documents

To gain a better understanding of Parents' Place and its programs we reviewed a wide range of documents describing the agency both currently and historically. These documents also provided information of value in developing the questions and designing the study.

3. Developing the Evaluation Questions

A major task of the evaluators was to develop a set of specific, clearly defined questions which would accurately reflect the concerns and information needs of the evaluation users. We worked closely with the Advisory Committee to develop, clarify and assess the relative importance

of these questions.

The United Way had developed their own series of questions before the study began. A similar set of questions was provided by the Community Services Advisory Board. The other sources of evaluation questions were the board, staff and users of Parents' Place. The final set of questions brought together the issues and concerns of all of these groups but assigned highest priority to those questions provided by the United Way and C.S.A.B. The evaluation questions are included in Appendix B.

4. Designing the Evaluation

Once the evaluation questions had been finalized, the study design was developed. Each question was considered in terms of how and where information could be collected to answer the question. As a result of this process, the following methods were chosen:

- face-to-face interviews
- telephone interviews
- analysis of relevant documents
- observation
- survey

Interview protocols and questionnaires were designed and samples were chosen.

5. Collecting and Analyzing the Data

The data was collected over a period of a month and a half by two evaluators. No particular difficulties were encountered in gathering the data but the sample size of previous users was slightly smaller than anticipated due to time constraints.

Once the data was collected, it was collated and analyzed in order to answer the evaluation questions. Some of the information which emerged

from the interviews and the survey was superfluous to the evaluation questions but, where this data seems relevant, it has been included in the report.

6. Identifying Issues and Developing Recommendations

From the findings of the study, we were able to identify a number of issues which seemed important enough to require some action. These issues formed the basis of draft recommendations which were then taken to the Advisory Committee for discussion. Final recommendations were developed with input from the Committee. In addition to producing this final report, we presented the major findings of the evaluation and the issues and recommendations to Parents' Place Board of Directors.

THE METHODOLOGY

The methods selected for use in this study were deemed to be the most appropriate ones for collecting the data required to answer the evaluation questions within the time and fiscal constraints which were placed on the study. The methods used were as follows:

1. Analysis of Relevant Documents

To increase familiarity with Parents' Place services and to collect specific information, the evaluators reviewed a number of documents including:

- funding proposals directed to the United Way
- results of Parents' Place needs assessment study
- newsletters
- course evaluations
- program and administrative files
- S.E.S.P. appeal to St. Albert City Council (April 7, 1986)
- City of St. Albert Census Data

2. Interviews with Key Informants

A major part of the study consisted of face-to-face interviews with individuals identified as key informants. These included people who had direct involvement with Parents' Place (board, staff and volunteers) as well as individuals in the community whose involvement was indirect. Interviews were based on structured interview formats but all questions were open-ended. The interviews ranged in length from 45 minutes to 2 hours. The sample of key informants consisted of:

- Acting Executive Director of Parents' Place
- one other staff member of Parents' Place
- the Executive Director of Parents' Place (currently on leave)
- the President of the Board of Parents' Place
- the past President of Parents' Place
- two Board members of Parents' Place
- two outside instructors who offer courses at Parents' Place
- one Parents' Place volunteer
- eight individuals from other community agencies or organizations (including schools and the public health unit)

In addition, less formal interviews took place throughout the study with a number of individuals including parent educators and Family Studies staff at the University of Alberta.

3. Participant Survey

Questionnaires were completed by 28 participants in current courses and drop-ins. These questionnaires were distributed at the end of each session or during the coffee break and were completed immediately. Both open-ended and closed questions were included on the questionnaires and respondents were asked for personal information to contribute to a profile of Parents' Place users.

In addition, telephone interviews were conducted with eleven previous users of Parents' Place. The rationale for interviewing previous users was

to avoid the possible bias of respondents currently receiving services. These previous users were selected using a modified random sampling technique. The questionnaire administered to current users served as the interview format for these respondents.

4. Observation

The evaluators observed two classes and one drop-in at Parents' Place. In two of these situations, the researchers acted as participant observers disguising their evaluator roles in order to avoid biasing the interaction.

5. Board Audit

In order to answer questions pertaining to board functioning, board members were asked to complete a board audit form. Since only four of these audits were completed, the reliability of the results is questionable. However, some useful insights into board functioning were provided and these have been included in this report.

The information generated by each of the methods described above has been brought to bear on the evaluation questions and is presented in the following section on findings.

SECTION III

FINDINGS

DESCRIPTION OF ST. ALBERT PARENTS' PLACE

St. Albert Parents' Place is located at 100, 54 St. Michael Street in downtown St. Albert. It is a resource centre for parents with the specific goals of:

- 1) Preventing family breakdown
- 2) Improving the ability of parents and other professionals to deal effectively with children
- 3) Providing a support for parents and professionals within St. Albert in the area of child behaviour and family relations
- 4) Increasing the coping skills of parents
- 5) Enhancing family relationships.

Programs

There are four components to the Parents' Place program. These are:

1. Family Life Education which offers courses and workshops focussing on issues of concern to all parents and to special needs parents (eg. single families, blended families, parents of teens). Also offered are general courses for adults in the community on such topics as self-esteem or depression. Childcare is offered for all daytime courses and for special needs evening groups (such as single parents) at a cost of \$2.00 for the first child and \$1.00 for each additional child or by volunteering time. Course fees vary depending on the duration of the course. Fees are kept reasonably low to encourage attendance and subsidies are available upon request.

2. The Community Support Program includes morning drop-ins which are offered two times a week and which deal with various parenting concerns. The Wednesday session is led by a staff member while an outside speaker is brought in for the Thursday drop-in. While the drop-ins are free, parents pay for childcare at a cost of \$1.50 for the first child and \$1.00 for each additional child or by volunteering time. A maximum of 20 adults and 22 children can be accommodated, with most drop-ins serving the maximum possible number. There is a very strong demand for the drop-ins as evidenced by the overcrowded

drop-in area and childcare facilities. This problem will likely be exacerbated in the future as the Thursday drop-ins will be discontinued in May due to the end of funding for the program. Another aspect of the support program is counselling. Counselling is provided informally to drop-in participants as well as more formally in regularly scheduled appointments. Some counselling clients are special needs cases referred and paid for by Alberta Social Services. Fees for other clients are on a sliding fee scale. As well, library resource materials are available to all individuals at a cost of \$6.00 for a library membership. The library includes over 550 books, 22 audio tapes and 40 video tapes.

3. The Volunteer Program provides training for volunteers in the community to take on many administrative and other tasks at Parents' Place. In the 1985/86 year 121 volunteers contributed 3600 hours in several areas including the office, library, peer support, childcare and community outreach programs. As well, practicum students through the Family Studies Program at the University of Alberta are placed at Parents' Place.

4. The Public Education Outreach Program is an attempt to provide an awareness of the agency and what it offers to those who cannot come into the centre. It consists of a large travelling display which is regularly exhibited in schools, daycare centres, community health centres and other areas. As well, newspaper articles, radio and television appearances, a monthly newsletter and speaker engagements to community groups provide information about parenting to the community. This service is provided free of charge. In addition, three or four professional speakers are sponsored by Parents' Place. A nominal fee is charged.

Since the centre was opened in 1984, the demand for most services has shown a dramatic increase. This is evidenced by the frequent comments users had that larger facilities are needed.

FIGURE I

Service Users

	Sept/84 June/85	Sept/85 June/86	% Change June/85 to June/86
No. of course participants	212	220	3%
No. attending Drop-Ins			
Adults	255	620	143%
Children	355	850	139%
No. of documented individual counselling sessions ¹	32	89	178%
No. of library users	130	145	11%
No. of documented referrals from Professionals and/or outside agencies	47	143	204%
No. of telephone requests for assistance or support	56	175 (est.)	112%
Contracted services	4	41	

¹ Does not include clients seen on Staff's own time.

Staffing

St. Albert Parents' Place operates its programs with a paid staff of four. This includes a part-time director, a part-time consultant, a full-time temporary office manager/volunteer coordinator and a full-time temporary library assistant. The wages for the latter two positions are subsidized under the federal government's Priority Employment Program. Parents' Place is requesting funding for a full-time director and full-time office manager/volunteer coordinator. They also plan on increasing the consultant's hours from 6 to 13 hours a week in 1988. The library assistant position will be renewed if wage subsidies continue to be available. Policies and the budget for Parents' Place are determined by a nine member Board of Directors (in addition to two advisors to the Board) who meet once a month. As well, administrative volunteers aid in the day-to-day functioning of the organization.

Funding

Parents' Place is funded from a variety of sources. Application has been made to the United Way for long term funding. The major sources of income for Parents' Place have been:

- United Way Development Funding
- Family and Community Support Services, City of St. Albert
- fees for service (mainly from courses)
- grants through the Secretary of State and subsidies through the PEP and STEP programs
- fees for service from Alberta Social Services for clients referred by them
- fundraising activities such as casinos, garage sales and bake sales
- regular proposals submitted to the Clifford E. Lee Foundation, Wild Rose Foundation and the Town of Morinville (F.C.S.S.)
- soliciting donations from users who become "Friends of Parents' Place" by purchasing a general membership for \$25 instead of the regular \$6 fee.

The following section presents the answers to the evaluation questions.

FEES

1. Are current program fees to users appropriate?

Evidence from this study suggests that the fees currently levied by Parents' Place are appropriate for the type of services provided. Users of Parents' Place generally view the fees as being "reasonable". Most respondents were satisfied with the fee levels judging them neither as too high nor as too low. (See figure I). Some users commented that higher fees would prevent them from attending.

FIGURE 2

Opinions Regarding Fee Levels

	Low Too Low	Reasonable	High Too High
Courses	4%	93%	3%
Childcare for courses	23%	71%	6%
Library Membership	21%	76%	3%
Public Speakers	22%	75%	3%
Drop-ins	15%	85%	0
Childcare for Drop-ins	29%	71%	0

In the Family Life Education program, counselling and childcare, fees cover the direct costs of program delivery but offset only a portion of administrative costs. The drop-ins, the public-education drop-ins and the outreach programs are free of charge and hence do not cover any of the costs of delivery or administration. The extent to which subsidies are used by participants also has an impact on whether or not costs of a program are covered. There is some confusion among Parents' Place users as to the distinction between the \$6 library membership fee and the \$25 "Friends of Parents' Place" fee.

Because fees are reasonable and subsidies are available, Parents' Place programs are accessible to virtually anyone who is interested in participating. In other words, the fees are effective in encouraging a broad range of users from many different backgrounds and circumstances.

Some users indicated that they would be willing to pay a slightly higher fee but these were in a small minority. In general, we had a strong sense that an increase in fees would have the effect of discouraging participation. It seems clear that, if fees were raised, the programs of Parents' Place would become less accessible to those with lower incomes. On first appraisal, Parents' Place fees appear to be relatively low, particularly as some services are free of charge. However, as respondents pointed out, a "free" drop-in does involve other costs such as childcare, transportation and photocopying costs for materials. Comparison of Parents' Place course fees with those of similar agencies reveals that fee levels are very similar.

2. Are differential fees charged based on ability to pay?

In Parents' Place counselling program, fees are based on a sliding scale according to the client's ability to pay. Fees thus range from 0 to \$25; however, total subsidies in the counselling program are set at a maximum level of \$60 per ^{week} ~~month~~.

In the current fiscal year, \$700 has been set aside for subsidies in the Family Life Education program, although this amount will not all be used. Subsidies are given upon request and are advertised in the Parents' Place brochure. Recipients are encouraged to donate some volunteer time to reciprocate for the subsidies received. Likewise, participants may receive free childcare if they volunteer to assist in childcare on every fourth visit.

3. Which programs are covered by fees and which are provided free of charge?

Parents' Place programs and services offered free of charge include:

- the drop-ins

- the volunteer program
- the public outreach program (except for evening speakers)

Fees are levied for:

- Family Life Education courses (varying fees)
- Library membership (\$6 annually)
- Evening speakers (\$2.50 per session)
- Counselling (0 - \$25)
- Childcare
 - for drop-ins: \$1.50 first child
\$1.00 each additional child
 - for courses: \$2.00 first child
\$1.00 each additional child

In addition, charges are made for photocopying and coffee.

4. How are course fees decided?

Fees for Family Life Education courses are determined by calculating all direct costs of the program and adding an administrative fee. An understanding of what participants would be willing and able to pay and of fees charged for comparable programs contributes to decisions about fee levels.

CLIENTS

1. Who uses the services provided by St. Albert Parents' Place?

There are actually two questions inferred here:

- Who are the services directed toward?
- and
- Who actually uses the services?

In answer to the first, it is evident from this study that Parents' Place services are directed toward all parents and families in need of support, assistance or education. Moreover, the agency makes every attempt to encourage parents from all walks of life to participate.

The role of Parents' Place is to ensure that services are: available (based on demonstrated needs) and accessible (based on cost, location and publicity). The success of Parents' Place in ensuring both availability and accessibility of programs is clearly established by this study. Precisely who chooses to participate in these programs is a matter beyond the control of the agency.

The question of who uses Parents' Place services appears to relate to concerns about whether services are provided to disadvantaged groups in the community and whether people who are really in need of help are indeed using the services. Both of these concerns are allayed by the evaluation findings. It is clear, for example, that many referrals to Parents' Place come from social workers, physicians, public health workers, school personnel, mental health workers and other community professionals whose clients are in need of help. Furthermore, both the survey results and observation of the programs confirm that many users are single parents, members of blended families, low-income individuals or people experiencing serious family or personal problems. Special needs clients, whose fees are paid by Alberta Social Service, are referred because their children are identified as being at risk.

Users of Parents' Place are primarily St. Albert residents although the agency also serves surrounding communities and some residents of Edmonton.

Figure 3 illustrates particular characteristics of Parents' Place users. It combines information on library members (August, 1986 to February 1987) and survey participants from this study. The total of these two groups is 160. It should be noted that library members are considered to be generally reflective of Parents' Place users and in fact, in most cases use other services such as drop-ins and courses.

FIGURE 3

Characteristics of Parents' Place Users

<u>Sex</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Female	150	94
Male	10	6
	160	100

<u>Age</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Under 20	1	1
20-29	25	16
30-39	116	73
40-49	15	9
over 50	1	1
	158	100

<u>Marital Status</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Single	2	1
Married or Common Law	140	88
Widowed, separated or divorced	17	11
	159	100

<u>Number of Children</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
1	27	18
2	90	59
3	28	18
4+	8	5
	153	98

<u>Ages of Children</u>	<u>No.</u>
0-5	136
6-12	109
13-18	33
19+	9
	287

<u>Number of Adult Wage Earners</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
1	84	63
2	49	37
	<u>133</u>	<u>100</u>

<u>Highest Level of Education</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
High school	44	35
*Post secondary	81	65
	<u>125</u>	<u>100</u>

*any training beyond high school

<u>Annual Family Income (in \$)</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%</u>
Less than \$10,000	2	2
11,000 to 20,000	8	8
20,000 to 30,000	8	8
30,000 to 40,000	35	32
Over 40,000	53	50
	<u>*106</u>	<u>100</u>

*refers to library members only

2. Who does not use the services and why not?

To know with any certainty about people who don't use the services of Parents' Place and why they don't use them would require an extensive survey. We can assume that people who don't know about the agency and/or who have no need for or interest in the services are non-users. Also, as is common with family life programs, fathers tend not to use the services often. It appears however, that this is largely a matter of choice although restrictions on program hours may discourage some fathers from participating. In general, it appears that no groups are left out. However, there is certainly a demand for more programs for:

- blended families
- fathers
- parents of teenagers
- grandparents
- entire families

3. What attempts have been made to expand use of the services of St. Albert Parents' Place to other groups?

Programs at Parents' Place are directed toward many different groups of parents and professionals. Through the Family Life Education program in particular, they have attempted to expand services to a broad range of groups including single parents, blended families and parents of adolescents. Also, through encouraging referrals from a variety of sources such as doctors, school counsellors, social service workers and public health nurses, Parents' Place has attempted to meet the needs of diverse groups of people.

Some concern was expressed by respondents in this study about the somewhat limited hours of Parents' Place. It was pointed out that the agency would more effectively meet the needs of working parents and fathers by having more evening and weekend programming (particularly drop-ins) and by remaining open during the summer.

Parents' Place has also increased accessibility to parenting education through the Public Education Outreach program which disseminates information through schools, daycare centres, libraries, health units, churches, shopping centres, radio, television, and newspapers.

PUBLIC AWARENESS

1. What methods are being used to publicize St. Albert Parents' Place programs?

Public awareness efforts of Parents' Place are extensive and include:

- a) Radio announcements
- b) Posters displayed in:
 - shopping centres
 - the arena
 - the library
- c) Press releases
- d) The Outreach Program
- e) A newsletter distributed to:
 - medical clinics and doctor's offices
 - health units
 - schools
 - other agencies
 - individuals
- f) Announcements of courses and drop-ins in:
 - school newsletters
 - local newspapers
 - the Edmonton Journal "Neighbours" section
 - Parents' Place newsletter
 - MacDonald's tray liners
 - St. Albert's Further Education brochure etc.
- g) Distribution of Parents' Place brochure (6,000 to 8,000 a year).

2. How effective are current public awareness efforts?

Indications from this evaluation are that the publicity efforts of Parents' Place are thorough and effective. Essentially all sources of publicity appear to have been effectively utilized and there is general agreement that it is not difficult to find out about Parents' Place. The evaluation survey and the information provided by library members show that most people become aware

of Parents' Place through newspaper announcements and articles, word-of-mouth referrals, schools, the Further Education brochure, public displays and newsletters. Other sources include: pre-natal classes, the Child Abuse Hotline, the Volunteer Resource Centre and churches.

3. What improvements could be made in public awareness efforts?

Given the already extensive efforts of Parents' Place with regard to publicity, there are few improvements that we could suggest. The increasing demand for the agency's services would seem to indicate that no further publicity efforts are necessary at this time. We might suggest however, that further measures be taken to ensure that professionals in the community are made more aware of Parents' Place services as there seems to be a gap in this area. Specific suggestions include in-service presentations to professionals (such as doctors) and presentations to school staff prior to a display being set up.

4. How is St. Albert Parents' Place perceived in the community in terms of its visibility, credibility and specific image?

This is a difficult question to answer without doing a community-wide survey. However, results of this research strongly suggest that professionals and people from other agencies and organizations in the community view Parents' Place as being very credible and providing an extremely valuable service. Many key informants commented that Parents' Place is of direct benefit to them in doing their job effectively. They also perceived Parents' Place staff as being professional, competent and well-qualified. Staff of the Family Studies department at the University of Alberta commented that Parents' Place provides one of the better practicum placements for students, that supervision is good and that the staff "do a very professional job."

Most respondents felt that Parents' Place has a high level of visibility in the community, due primarily to a good reputation and extensive public awareness efforts.

In terms of the specific image of the agency, some respondents view it as dealing basically with "healthy" families. The difficulty with this point of view is that, inherent in the term "healthy family" is the assumption that families fit into one of two categories: healthy or unhealthy. Such a dichotomy cannot hold true as health is clearly on a continuum. Furthermore, since Parents' Place offers a primary prevention program, all families must be viewed as potentially having needs for parent education and support.

Figure 4 shows how our survey respondents rated particular aspects of Parents' Place.

FIGURE 4

Satisfaction With Specific Aspects of Parents' Place

	Satisfied/ Very Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied/ Very Dissatisfied
Instructors	97%	3%	0
Newsletter	68%	32%	0
Location	79%	18%	3%
Drop-in Times	72%	19%	9%
Drop-in Topics	96%	4%	0
Course Times	86%	10%	4%
Types of Courses	85%	5%	0
Childcare Facilities	56%	30%	14%
Parents' Place Staff	100%	0	0
Library	71%	26%	3%
Public Education Hour Topics	100%	0	0
Public Education Hour Times	92%	8%	0

LONG-TERM GOALS AND PLANNING

1. What is the current mandate of St. Albert Parents' Place and what is the source of this mandate?

The mandate of Parents' Place as stated in their mission statement is to:

Through the community facility of St. Albert Parent's Place, provide support and encouragement to individuals, well families and families in crisis by means of education and information.

The mandate to provide such services comes from a number of sources including:

- apparent demand for the services as demonstrated by increasing use of programs and increasing requests for expanded services (both to St. Albert and to other communities).
- the original research project which demonstrated a need for the services.
- the needs assessment study completed by the agency in 1986.
- the agency's community-based board of directors, advisory committee and membership base.
- referrals from other agencies and organizations in the community. Use of Parents' Place by these other agencies further demonstrates the need for such services.
- a body of literature demonstrating the benefits of parent education and support.
- letters of support from a wide range of people in the community.

Professionals and others in the community offer the following comments in support of the mandate of Parents' Place to offer its services:

"Parents' Place... has helped us do our work more effectively and efficiently. The need for programs such as the ones provided at Parents' Place is certainly evident as it is the only agency in the area providing such services."

(Acting Casework Supervisor, Alberta Social Services)

"I believe the facility (Parents' Place) provides much needed parenting skills that our community desperately needs."

(St. Albert family physician)

"The target population that you serve needs even more support during economic times such as we presently are experiencing."

(Community Nurse)

2. What are the goals and objectives of St. Albert Parents' Place?

The overall goals of St. Albert Parents' Place are:

1. To prevent family breakdown within the community of St. Albert and surrounding district.
2. To improve the ability of parents and other professionals to deal effectively with children.
3. To provide a support for parents and professionals within St. Albert, in the area of child behavior and family relations.
4. To increase the coping skills of parents within St. Albert and surrounding district.
5. To enhance family relationships.

In addition, each program has its own specific goals and objectives. It is the opinion of the researchers that the agency's mission statement and general goals need to be reviewed and revised to more accurately reflect what Parents' Place does and how they do it. Program goals and objectives appear to be clear and appropriate.

3. Does St. Albert Parents' Place have a long-range plan in place?

Parents' Place has developed an impressive one year action plan for 1987 but has no long-range plan in place. The action plan is a good first step but, given the increasing demands on Parents' Place services and their limited resources, a long-range plan would be an essential decision-making tool. Such a plan should include a process to facilitate regular monitoring and review of goals objectives and strategies.

4. What is the process of short-term and long-range planning used by St. Albert Parents' Place?

No formal process of planning is followed at Parents' Place. However, the board and staff together developed the one year action plan. They have also been active in developing a needs assessment study, having their bookkeeping system evaluated, designing an evaluation format for their volunteer program and generating this evaluation study. It should further be pointed out that preparing funding applications and reports is a planning activity which requires considerable staff and board time.

Developing a process for short-term and long-range planning would seem to be an important activity for Parents' Place to undertake. Such a process should involve board, staff and volunteers.

ROLE IN COMMUNITY

1. Do the services offered by St. Albert Parents' Place overlap with others in the community?

It is evident from this evaluation that St. Albert Parents' Place offers a unique service which in no way overlaps with other community services. The only similar service offered in the community is counselling; however, the counselling offered by Parents' Place is viewed by respondents as differing substantially from other counselling services in that it has a different focus, it is less formal and therefore less intimidating, it is less expensive and it involves no waiting lists.

2. What formal/informal processes allow coordination with other agencies/organizations and how effective are these?

It appears that there are no formal processes in place which facilitate coordination with other agencies and organizations. However, this should be viewed as a weakness on the part of the community rather than being attributed to any shortcoming of Parents' Place. For their part, Parents' Place has developed an informal network to ensure continued contact with agencies and government bodies. Wherever possible, Parents' Place and these other agencies coordinate resources, programs and ideas. For example:

- a) Volunteer Resource Centre - provides an ongoing source of volunteers to Parents' Place.
- b) Pregnancy Help - Parents' Place offers courses specifically designed for their clients. The two agencies have joined forces for some fundraising efforts.
- c) St. Albert School Districts #3 and #6 - Parents' Place provides speakers for the schools in these districts. They also co-sponsored a Family Intervention workshop for professionals (1987).
- d) Alberta Social Services - refers clients to Parents' Place and provides funding for some special needs clients.

- e) University of Alberta Family Studies Department and Faculty of Nursing and Grant MacEwan Community College - use Parents' Place for practicum placements for their students.

Links are also maintained with the Further Education Council, other F.C.S.S. funded agencies, Family Inter-Agency Support Services (a new group), the St. Albert Association for the Handicapped and the One Parent Family Association. Despite all of these relationships, several of the key informants felt that a more formal coordination process would be beneficial both to Parents' Place and to the larger community. More frequent joint sponsorship of courses was also suggested.

3. From what sources are referrals made to St. Albert Parents' Place?

Referrals are made by a wide range of individuals and organizations. The specific organizations which refer to Parents' Place include:

- Alberta Social Services
- Sturgeon Health Unit
- Pregnancy Help
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- The Pastoral Institute

The types of people who refer clients to Parents' Place include:

- teachers
- public health nurses
- school counsellors
- psychologists
- physicians
- social workers

The difficulties encountered in compiling information on sources of referrals indicates the need for better record-keeping with regard to referral sources.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

1. How effectively are board, staff and volunteer components functioning?

Information from several sources in this study creates a strong impression that the board of directors of Parents' Place has some serious shortcomings. To begin with, the board is short of members and some of the current members appear not to be sufficiently active. Some board members on the other hand, work very hard and carry out the majority of board tasks. A major problem here seems to be ineffective recruiting and orientation of board members. As some board members commented, there may be too much emphasis on recruiting "professionals" who have no time to devote to agency concerns. The skills which are need for effective board function seem to be in short supply and this creates a lot of pressure on active and committed board members. Exacerbating the problem is the fact that board sub-committees are not used effectively and as a result, much of the time of the board is devoted to fundraising issues. In general, Parents' Place board appears to be lacking strength and, as a result, has difficulty in projecting a positive image to the community.

Other concerns which emerged from this study relate to the lack of clarity regarding board-staff roles and responsibilities and to the problems with communication between board and staff. Difficulties are due in part to a staff shortage which places additional pressure on board members to take on staff responsibilities. Job descriptions for staff are also lacking clarity and no process is in place to ensure that they are followed. Roles of volunteers are generally clear and communication between staff and volunteers does not seem to be problematic. Parents' Place uses a large amount of volunteer time (about 3600 hours a year) and for the most part, has an effective volunteer program. However, more extensive volunteer orientation and training could be provided. In addition, there is evidence that volunteer roles need to be expanded to make more effective use of volunteer skills. This would be of benefit both to the volunteers and to the agency. A difficulty in implementing this suggestion lies in the lack of staff to coordinate the volunteer program.

Some of the communication difficulties experienced at Parents' Place may be due to the fact that meetings of staff, instructors and volunteers are not held regularly. A lack of common group meetings as well as a lack of meetings between the various groups was noted as a concern. A potential result for course instructors is an overlap of course content as outside instructors in particular tend to be somewhat isolated.

2. What improvements can be made in the functioning of board, staff and volunteers?

The problems regarding Parents' Place board of directors, while serious, are by no means insurmountable. In general, it needs to be a larger board and a working board with sub-committees. The key to improving board functioning appears to lie in more effective recruitment and orientation of board members.

Board-staff communications could be improved by holding more regular staff meetings and by having a staff person on each board committee. More inter-group meetings would also be valuable. Difficulties with regard to staff and volunteer functioning can be attributed largely to under-staffing. However, more clarity with regard to job responsibilities and a process to ensure that these are followed would be helpful. It should be emphasized that many of these aforementioned concerns could be alleviated with the availability of additional resources. (See the section on issues and recommendations for an expansion on this response).

3. What qualifications are required for staff, board members and volunteers?

At the root of some of the board difficulties is the lack of clarity regarding board members qualifications. It is important that Parents' Place determine the kinds of skills and backgrounds that they need to have represented on the board and that they recruit accordingly. Board member job descriptions and orientation materials would be useful.

Staff qualifications seem appropriately high and Parents' Place staff are certainly perceived in the community as well-qualified. However, some of the qualifications required in the job descriptions (for example, a counselling degree or equivalent for the executive director) appear to be unnecessarily restrictive. There are no problems with the qualifications for volunteers; however, there is some concern that volunteer's skills are not used as effectively as they could be.

PROGRAM BENEFITS

1. In what ways do clients benefit from St. Albert Parents' Place programs?

Both clients and key informants interviewed as part of this study spoke with enthusiasm of the many benefits to clients of Parents' Place programs. In general, clients felt that they had benefitted enormously from the information and support they had received at Parents' Place. For some, the help provided by Parents' Place had allowed them to deal more effectively with a family crisis. For others, the information and support had helped them to become more effective parents and had strengthened the family unit. Most respondents described positive things which were happening in their families as a result of their involvement with Parents' Place. A sample of their comments follows:

"I am handling parenting problems more effectively and I'm raising a responsible child."

"Power struggles are decreasing."

"There are better feelings at home - less disagreements."

"We're more aware of interactions that happen between parent and child - aware of potential problem areas and how to prepare for them."

"I learned a completely different way of parenting - more positive."

"I feel more confident about parenting."

"I can't begin to tell you about how my life has changed."

Key informants also emphasized the benefits to clients of Parents' Place services, commenting that:

- clients become more positive and gain confidence
- clients learn new approaches and ideas
- clients improve attitudes and relationships with children

- clients learn practical strategies to deal with problems they have
- people develop skills in parenting

2. How can these programs be improved?

It is difficult to suggest improvements to programs which are rated so highly by so many sources. Nevertheless, a few concerns about the program did emerge from the study. One of these is the overcrowding of the present facilities, particularly in the drop-in and childcare programs. It is evident that more space is required for the current programs.

Another concern relates to the childcare program which is hampered by crowded facilities and a lack of childcare staff and volunteers. This is the only program in which the quality of service was questioned. Several respondents had other specific suggestions for improvements, including:

- more drop-ins (evenings/Saturday/weekdays)
- more courses available
- more counselling time
- more materials in the library
- more staff

3. How does the community benefit from St. Albert Parents' Place?

Parents' Place provides a unique service which is clearly of great benefit to the community. The key to the benefits of Parents' Place is the preventive nature of the service. That is, if serious family problems can be prevented, families will be more stable and consequently, the community as a whole will benefit. Key informants emphasized that Parents' Place services help to reduce parental stress, help families to stay together and function more effectively, prevent future problems and have the potential to eliminate violence and abuse in families. They were also unanimous in their belief that such an agency is needed because:

"Good parenting and family communication can alleviate problems in the future."

"There is more stress in society (unemployment, blended families, poverty)."

"Because people are relatively affluent, doesn't mean they don't need parenting support (physical and sexual abuse runs across all economic groups)."

In addition, most key informants felt that, if Parents' Place were no longer in existence, the quality of life in the community would be threatened. As one respondent commented,

"The overall quality of life would be reduced. People would not have a place to come for support or help. The burden of handling severe family problems would increase for Social Services, Mental Health, school guidance counsellors. Problems not handled by these agencies would likely increase family stress."

Finally, when asked why Parents' Place should receive funding, key informants commented that:

"The whole society benefits if the family is well."

"Funding preventive services is important. A small amount of money could go a long way. Parenting is a very difficult job for which people receive little training support or assistance."

"People helping people is what Parents' Place is all about."

SUMMARY

In summary, St. Albert Parents' Place appears to be offering an exceptionally valuable service to the community and should be commended for the excellent job that they are doing. Without such a service, the community would be poorer. Most of the problems encountered by the agency can be attributed to lack of resources, rapid growth in a short period of time, increasing demands for service and weakness in board functioning. It is the view of the evaluators that these problems can be overcome without too great an effort. The following section offers specific recommendations for improvement.

ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Board composition and functioning

- Board roles (relative to staff roles) are unclear
- Board lacks strength and consequently fails to project a positive image
- Board membership is too low
- Board recruiting is ineffective
- Board orientation and training are ineffective

Recommendations

- that the Board design and implement a recruiting strategy to include a nominating grid
- that an orientation process and materials be designed for board members.
- that a strategy for evaluating Board membership be developed
- that the Board take measures to establish and make effective use of sub-committees (eg. fundraising)
- that the Board arrange for a workshop or series of workshops to address board-staff roles and responsibilities and other board issues.
- that the Board review and revise Parents' Place purpose, objectives and bylaws

2. Board/Staff/Volunteer Roles and Relationships

- There is insufficient staff for the work required
- Opportunities for communications at and between various levels are lacking (eg. board to staff, instructor to instructor, volunteer to volunteer)
- Recruiting, use and training of volunteers are not as effective as they might be
- Job descriptions are unclear and no process is in place to ensure that they are followed

Recommendations

- that funding be obtained to expand and stabilize staff resources (for example, to hire a full-time volunteer co-ordinator)
- that opportunities be provided for more regular meetings both of common groups and among groups
- that channels of communication between board and staff be improved through holding more regular staff meetings and appointing appropriate staff members to sit on board committees.
- that volunteers be used in more roles within Parents' Place
- that volunteer recruitment and training be reviewed and that, given sufficient resources, improvements be made in these aspects of the volunteer program.
- that job descriptions be reviewed and where necessary, revised and that new job descriptions clearly define the roles of staff and volunteers

3. Agency Concerns

- There is no effective system of record-keeping in place
- Facilities are over-crowded, particularly in the child-care and drop-in areas
- No long-range plan is in place
- The purpose, goals and approach of Parents' Place are lacking clarity
- Knowledge of Parents' Place on the part of professionals in the community needs improvement

Recommendations

- that a system be devised to collect a minimum of basic client information including:
 - number of clients served
 - age, sex and family status of clients
 - source of referral, if any
 - reason for clients' involvement
 - nature of clients' involvement (ie. service provided)
 - how clients found out about the agency

- that course, volunteer and other evaluation forms be regularly compiled and documented to ensure that improvements to the program can be readily identified and made
- that funding be sought to obtain a larger facility
- or
- that programming be re-organized so as to take pressure off the facility at what are now peak times
- that the Board and staff devise a process of long-term planning which would allow for regular review and updating
- that the purpose, goals and approach of Parents' Place be reviewed and clarified and that these be incorporated into promotional materials such as the agency brochure
- that a campaign be undertaken to familiarize all relevant professionals in the community with the services of Parents' Place (eg. doctors, school counsellors)

4. Program Concerns

- Some services such as drop-ins are not accessible enough to working parents
- The child care quality needs to be improved in terms of space and child-staff ratios
- The agency is over-extended as there has been too much growth in too short a time

Recommendations

- that more programming be oriented toward working parents (eg. evening drop-ins, Saturday drop-ins and evening workshops rather than 10 week courses
- that Parents' Place explore various options for improving the staffing in the childcare area (for example, offering incentives to volunteers or hiring another staff person)

- that Parents' Place make better use of trained volunteers to provide services to meet increasing demands (eg. could use experienced volunteers to act as leaders for the drop-ins or speakers in the outreach program)

or

- limit programs until funding is such that they can afford to meet the current demand

APPENDIX A

ST. ALBERT PARENT'S PLACE EVALUATION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Terms of Reference

Purpose

- To serve in an advisory capacity to the Edmonton Social Planning Council in planning and carrying out an evaluation of the St. Albert Parent's Place.

Tasks

- To review and comment on the study design.
- To assist in developing the evaluation questions.
- To serve as a resource to the evaluation team with regard to information sources and methods.
- To receive and review the evaluation report.

Membership

The Committee will consist of:

- one representative of Parent's Place Board of Directors
- the Acting Executive Director of Parent's Place
- one representative of Family and Community Support Services
- one representative of the United Way
- one current user of Parent's Place services
- the Executive Director of Parent's Place

The two members of the evaluation team will sit on the Committee on an ex-officio basis.

Meetings

The committee will meet a maximum of four times between January and March, 1987. Meetings will not exceed 1 1/2 hours in duration.

APPENDIX B

ST. ALBERT PARENTS' PLACE

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

Fees

Priority

- 1 1. Are current program fees to users appropriate?
 - a) Do they cover the cost of program delivery?
 - b) What is the impact of fees on program use?
 - c) Would program participation decline if fees were raised?
- 1 2. Are differential fees charged, based on ability to pay?
- 1 3. Which programs are covered by fees, and which are provided free of charge?
- 1 4. How are course fees decided?

Clients

- 1 1. Who uses the services provided by St. Albert Parents' Place?
Why?
- 1 2. Who does not use the services?
Why not?
- 1 3. What attempts have been made to expand use of the services of St. Albert Parents' Place to other groups (such as certain disadvantaged groups).

Public Awareness

- 1 1. How is St. Albert Parents' Place perceived in the community in terms of its visibility, credibility and specific images?
- 3 2. What methods are being used to publicize St. Albert Parents' Place programs?
- 3 3. How effective are current public awareness efforts?
- 3 4. What improvements could be made in public awareness efforts?

Long Term Goals and Planning

Priority

- 1 1. What is the current mandate of St. Albert Parents' Place and what are the sources of this mandate?
- 1 2. What are the goals and objectives of St. Albert Parents' Place?
- 1 3. What is the process of short-term and long-range planning used by St. Albert Parents' Place?
- 3 4. Does St. Albert Parents' Place have a long-range plan in place?

Role in Community

- 1 1. Do the services offered by St. Albert Parents' Place overlap with others in the community?
- 3 2. What formal/informal processes allow coordination with other agencies/organizations?
How effective are they?
- 3 3. From what sources are referrals made to St. Albert Parents' Place?

Organizational Structure

- 2 1. How effectively are board, staff and volunteer components functioning?
- 2 2. What improvements can be made in the functioning of board, staff and volunteers?
- 2 3. What qualifications are required for staff, board members and volunteers?

Program Benefits

- 1 1. How does the community benefit from St. Albert Parents' Place?
- 2 2. How can these programs be improved?
- 3 3. In what ways do clients benefit from St. Albert Parents' Place programs?
- 3 4. How valid and effective is the outreach program?

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONNAIRES

ST. ALBERT PARENTS' PLACE

EVALUATION

The Edmonton Social Planning Council has been asked to conduct an evaluation of St. Albert Parents' Place. As part of the evaluation, we are interested in knowing how people benefit from the services of St. Albert Parents' Place and how the program could be improved. We would also like to get a better idea of who uses Parents' Place services.

As someone who is involved in Parents' Place programs your views would be very helpful. We would appreciate it if you could answer the following questions. Please do not include your name unless you wish to do so.

Thank you for your help.

-
1. What services have you made use of at St. Albert Parents' Place?

2. What was your reason for making use of these services?

3. How did you find out about the services offered at Parents' Place? Please check.

Newspaper _____

Radio _____

Referral _____ By Whom? _____

Further Education Council Brochure _____

Friend/Family Member _____

School Newsletter _____

Other _____

(Please specify)

4. Can you make any suggestions as to other ways St. Albert Parents' Place could advertise their services?

5. Are there any other services that you would like to see offered at St. Albert Parents' Place that currently are not available? Please list them.

6. What do you feel are the most positive things about St. Albert Parents' Place?

7. What could be improved?

8. Are there any positive things now happening in your family as a result of what you learned at St. Albert Parents' Place? Please describe.

9. Have you taken any other parenting (or related) courses offered by other agencies in St. Albert or Edmonton?

Yes () No ()

If yes:

Name of course(s) _____

Date offered _____

Name of agency _____

10. We would like to know how you feel about various program fees at Parents's Place. On a scale of 1 to 5 how would you rate the following fees? Circle the appropriate number.

	<u>Too Low</u>	<u>Reasonable</u>			<u>Too High</u>
Courses	1	2	3	4	5
Child care for courses	1	2	3	4	5
\$2-first child					
\$1-second child					
\$4-maximum for 3 or more children.					
Library Membership - \$6	1	2	3	4	5
Public Speakers - \$2.50	1	2	3	4	5
Drop-Ins (Free)	1	2	3	4	5
Child care for drop-ins	1	2	3	4	5
\$1.50-first child					
\$1.00-second child					
\$3.50 maximum for 3 or more children.					

Any comments about the fees? _____

11. Generally, how would you rate the following aspects of St. Albert Parents' Place? Circle the appropriate number for those areas you are familiar with.

	<u>Very Satisfied</u>				<u>Very Dissatisfied</u>
Instructors	1	2	3	4	5
Newsletter	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' Place location	1	2	3	4	5
Hours for Drop-In	1	2	3	4	5
Drop-In topics	1	2	3	4	5
Times for courses	1	2	3	4	5
Types of courses offered	1	2	3	4	5
Child Care Facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Parents' Place staff	1	2	3	4	5
Library facilities	1	2	3	4	5

Any Comments? _____

In order to provide us with a better idea of who uses St. Albert Parents' Place programs and services, we would appreciate the following information about yourself.

1. Sex (M)___ (F)___
2. Age (under 20) ___
(20 - 29) ___
(30 - 39) ___
(40 - 49) ___
(50 +) ___
3. Marital Status
Single, never married ___
Married ___
Separated or Divorced ___
Widowed ___
Other ___
4. Number of children ___
Ages of children _____
5. Family Income
under \$10,000 ___
\$10,000 - \$14,999 ___
\$15,000 - \$19,999 ___
\$20,000 - \$24,999 ___
\$25,000 - \$34,999 ___
\$35,000 - \$39,999 ___
\$40,000 plus ___

Thank you for you assistance.

ST: ALBERT PARENTS' PLACE EVALUATION

Questionnaire for Key Informants

1. What involvement do you have (or have you had) with St. Albert Parents' Place?

2. How long have you been involved?

3. What would you say is the purpose of St. Albert Parents' Place?

4. What services/program are offered by the agency?

5. Which service do you feel is the most important?

6a) Who uses the services of St. Albert Parents' Place?

6b) Are the services directed to one specific group?

6c) Do you think there are any groups/individuals who are overlooked by St. Albert Parents' Place. (That the Agency ought to be providing services to?)

7a) Is there a need for an agency such as St. Albert Parents' Place?

7b) Why is there a need?

8. Should St. Albert Parents' Place be expanded? If yes, in what way?

9. How do people (users) benefit from the services of St. Albert Parents' Place.

10. How do the community itself benefit from the work of St. Albert Parents' Place.

11. Does St. Albert Parents' Place duplicate any other services available in the community?

12a) Is St. Albert Parents' Place widely known in St. Albert?

12b) How could it become better known?

13. What are links/communication channels which exist between St. Albert Parents' Place and other agencies in the community?

14. In what ways could the services of St. Albert Parents' Place be improved?

15. What would be the effects of discontinuing the services of St. Albert Parents' Place.

16. If the United Way came to ask you, "Why should we fund this agency?" what would you respond?

SUPPLEMENT A
EXTERNAL INTERVIEWEES

We have just a few more questions which are meant for people outside the board and staff of St. Albert Parents' Place.

17. How did you first find out about St. Albert Parents' Place?

18a) Do you refer people to St. Albert Parents' Place?
YES () NO ()

18b) If yes, who are you likely to refer?

18c) If no, why not?

19. Do you feel that staffing at St. Albert Parents' Place is adequate and appropriate?

20. Do you feel that having the services of St. Albert Parents' Place available is helpful to you in your work? If yes, how?

SUPPLEMENT B
INTERNAL INTERVIEWEES

We have just a few more questions which are meant for board, staff, volunteers and instructors at St. Alberta Parents' Place.

17. What do you gain personally from your involvement with St. Albert Parents' Place.

18. Are the roles of board, staff, volunteers and instructors clear? If no, in what way are they unclear?

19. Do you feel that the roles are appropriate? If no, why not?

20a) Are appropriate communication channels in place between board, staff, volunteers and instructors?

YES () NO ()

20b) If no, how could they be improved?

21. What improvements in general could be made to the functioning of board, staff, volunteers and instructors?
