To see and to be seen as me | Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon | Parent Connect
Message from Caroline Bonesky, CEO

At the end of February I had the privilege of speaking to over 200 guests at our Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon.

The event featured two speakers: Naomi, a mom who spoke movingly about her experience with our Healthy Connections program, and keynote speaker Silken Laumann, who shared the intense personal challenges of her past.

Both their stories touched the very core of our work at Family Services—the thread that weaves through all of our work, whether it's with homeless youth, abused and neglected children, victims of violence, newcomer families, and isolated people.

Every person we work with has a story. These stories are often filled with pain, illness, addiction, and poverty. Those stories inform their beliefs about themselves and dictate their actions towards themselves and their loved ones. They command the decisions they make that can lead to desperate situations.

We know that every person has the ability to transform his or her life. Our focus is not on what brings people through our doors; our focus is on who they can become.

The change we see happen in people combined with the bonds that people are able to create in their lives have helped heal the social challenges we all know of and so many of us have struggled with in our own lives. It has ended the cycle of generational violence, poverty, and addiction.

This help is made possible by the generous support of our donors. As we head into the next fiscal year, we know that to continue our work, we need to raise $650,000.

These funds provide life-changing and life-affirming help and allow everyone to access service much quicker.

Every day your gift makes a difference in the life of a child and a family. Inside the pages of this newsletter are stories that show the profound impact of your generous donations.

And as Silken noted in her speech, when someone is ready to change, help needs to be there.

2015 marks a major milestone on our history; ten years ago, the programs serving homeless and at-risk youth were bought together under the banner of Directions Youth Services Centre.

Today, Directions provides a full spectrum of supports to help youth leave high risk situations. Services include youth outreach where our staff walk 22 km a day connecting with young people, crisis intervention, pre-employment programs, arts and media programs, counselling, medical support, housing, and even laundry, showers, and food.

Over the years, Directions has evolved and adapted to address the increasing complexity of issues that homeless youth face.

Our staff is committed to meeting the youth where they are in their life and developing a supportive relationship with each youth—and often that relationship is the only stable one a youth has.

Over the next few months, we’ll be marking this milestone with a series of events (see sidebar, page 3). I encourage you to join us and gain a unique perspective on the lives of homeless youth. We’ll keep you up to date on these events on our Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter pages. If you’d prefer to receive an email reminder, please send a message to amasih@fsgv.ca.

We've seen many changes over the 87 years Family Services has been creating brighter tomorrows, but one thing remains constant: when help is needed, help is there.
Directions Youth Services
Ten year anniversary celebrations

June 20, 2015
*Slice Day at the Gathering Place Summer Festival*
Come see our youth showcase their many talents during the summer solstice in Emery Barnes Park.

October 2015 (date to be confirmed)
*Words from the Street Book Launch*
Words from the Street is a collection of poetry written by youth. The launch will take place at the University of British Columbia where youth will discuss their experiences living on the street.

October 15, 2015
*A Night in the Life*
Join 19 others to experience a night in the life of a homeless youth and see Vancouver streets from their perspective. This fundraiser includes dinner made from food redirected from the landfill and the ‘Poverty Simulator’ where a lucky few will win the chance to sleep indoors and the rest will sleep outdoors. Breakfast will be served the next morning.

November 7 to 14
*Death in a Dumpster: A Musical Passion Play for the Homeless*
A fully staged musical work for children, youth and families developed and performed by street-involved children and youth that exposes the realities and root causes of youth homelessness. The play will be staged at Performance Works.

To learn more about these events, email Aneela Masih at amasih@fsgv.ca or follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter.

In this issue ...

Message from Caroline Bonesky 2
Volunteer profile | Agency news 4 | 5
To see and to be seen as me 6 | 7
Recent donors
Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon 8 | 9
WorkBC
Slice Night Delivers 10 | 11
Parent Connect 12

Save the date ...
Annual General Meeting
September 30, 2015 | 12-2 pm
Il Centro: The Italian Cultural Centre
Vancouver, BC

Find us on social media:

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Brighter Tomorrows

is published two times a year by the Communications Department at Family Services of Greater Vancouver.

Please send us your questions, comments and story ideas to Theresa Gebrail at tgebrail@fsgv.ca.

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Photo page 10, courtesy City of New Westminster Chamber of Commerce. Back cover photo, courtesy the United Way of the Lower Mainland.

If you do not wish to receive this newsletter or other mailings from us, please contact Aneela Masih at amasih@fsgv.ca or call 604-731-4951 x4025.

To find out more about Family Services of Greater Vancouver or to make a donation, please contact us at:

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Volunteer Profile: Pat Dunnett
“You can’t just sit back when you see something that isn’t right, you have to speak out.”

When Pat Dunnett thought about retirement, she had a slightly different bucket list than what might be expected: “If anyone asked me what I was going to do, it was nothing, absolutely nothing!”

There was a good reason for her answer. “When I look back, I was in a caregiving role for years. As a psychiatric nurse, I was a caregiver. Then I had a family; probably one of the first volunteer things I did was at a parent co-op preschool where the parents took on different roles to make it all work. When my dad became ill, I looked after him, and then my mom started to fail mentally and physically, and then my husband became ill. So it seemed I was always looking after somebody.”

Doing nothing, however, didn’t last long for this vibrant and energetic senior. She and a friend did some travelling and eventually she joined Century House in New Westminster for the fitness classes. It wasn’t long before she started volunteering for them.

She began her work with Family Services when the Neighbourhood Small Grants Program (NSG) came to New Westminster. Maylen Crespo, who is the co-ordinator for the program, had sent her an email and asked if she was interested in taking on a role on Resident Advisory Committee. She was and she did.

“Her feedback and reflection have helped me to identify areas of improvement. Pat’s charisma, love, and passion give the program a distinct touch that can be felt its success and the recognition it’s received. I am very fortunate to be able to rely on her support,” says Maylen.

As a member of the Resident Advisory Committee, she helps review the applications for grants. The committee members contact the successful applicants, provide help to applicants if necessary, and attend the events.

She also contributes her time and skills to Literacy New West, which falls under the Family Services umbrella as well. “It’s really interesting from my perspective as a senior,” she notes. “Over 80% of seniors have low literacy skills that keep them from using things like bus schedules. I really found it overwhelming,” she says.

Pat also devotes her time to volunteering for other organizations. For example, for the City of New Westminster, she helped create the Seniors Engagement Toolkit that enables city staff to engage seniors in their community. She’s developed a body of knowledge and wisdom that has proven invaluable to all the groups she’s involved with.

“She has shared stories about noteworthy projects she’s worked on with other advisory committee members, the Program Coordinator, Vancouver Foundation and the community,” says Maylen. “Her insight and knowledge are invaluable to us.”

Pat’s sense of social justice and advocacy was influenced by her aunt. She had trained as a milliner in the late 1920s, but ended up doing midwifery training at the Rotunda Hospital in Dublin. “She used to tell stories of the abject poverty and the horrible conditions in which she had to deliver babies,” recalls Pat. When World War II began, her aunt joined Queen Alexandra’s Territorial Army Nursing Service where she nursed soldiers both in England and Germany.

Pat and her family emigrated from Belfast in the early 50s and they settled in New Westminster. After high school she completed her nurse’s training at the Essondale School of Psychiatric Nursing.

“As a student you worked through every particular area and you met a lot of people. I was extremely shy so it was a big step for me because you couldn’t be shy. That stayed at the door,” she says. “It was very challenging
learning experience. This was in 1958—that was before all the anti-psychotics and the new antidepressants. We didn't have any of those so it was really hands on nursing."

“We were a pretty young bunch,” she says. “But we were enthusiastic, eager and we were willing to learn. We learned by doing—the school of hard knocks so to speak—but it was a wonderful experience.”

Her nursing career was deeply rewarding for Pat, and it’s where she developed a strong sense of advocacy, empathy, and compassion. “Many of the patients had profound mental illness, and communication was by body language, they could not speak out for themselves,” she says. “You’re doing your job yes, you’re doing your nursing duties yes, but you’re also advocating for them if you see something wrong.”

When her mother’s dementia worsened, again, she spoke for her. “You can’t just sit back when you see something that isn’t right, you have to speak out.”

When the provincial government began decommissioning psychiatric hospitals, she went back to school and got her nursing certificate in gerontology nursing. She transferred to Riverview where she worked in geriatric treatment and assessment area until she retired.

Pat’s volunteer work is just about a full time job and one that gives her a lot of satisfaction. “It gives me the opportunity to meet different people, and to keep learning, and to take on new challenges.”

Caring hearts, caring neighbours

Christmas 2014 is fast becoming a distant memory for the seniors and families who benefitted from our Caring Neighbours program; however, the warm feelings still linger.

“This year, we had 79 families, individuals and businesses who ‘adopted’ a family or senior,” says Tulia Castellanos, Director, Strategic Community Engagement. “Thanks to them we were able to help everybody on our Christmas list.”

Donors also alleviated some of the loneliness and isolation many people feel over Christmas. One sponsor of a senior said, “The morning of the delivery we went to Safeway to buy her lunch, a hot barbeque chicken and Mojo fries. She was very happy!”

Directions Stocks Up!

Back in May 2014, Directions Youth Services moved to its permanent home on Burrard Street. Since that time, there’s been a dramatic increase in youth accessing services. In just the first few months of operation in the new location, staff report they had already reached 70% of the number of youth accessing the centre compared to the entire year prior.

This increase in youth visits caused a serious shortage in some basic necessities: shampoo, soap, razors, toothbrushes, tooth paste and other toiletries. “Basics like toiletries are something we tend to take for granted,” says Heather Scott, Director of Development at Family Services. “But for homeless youth, having a hot shower with soap and shampoo, having a new toothbrush and getting cleaned up means dignity and self respect.”

Using our collective personal and social media contacts, Family Services got the call out for donations. Big thanks to Gordon Presbyterian Church, the Board and Staff of Family Services, and the many individuals who donated boxes of items leaving the supply cupboards at Directions less empty (see sidebar).
To see and to be seen as me
Healthy Connections helps moms bond with their babies

There’s a quote that says, “the moment a child is born, a mother is also born.”

Pregnancy and motherhood is a time of profound change for women. But what happens when a woman wants to be the mother that she didn’t have, or if there’s concern that she won’t be able to bond with her child?

That’s where the Healthy Connections Program comes in. This unique program serves pregnant women and moms who have a history of trauma that may affect a mom’s ability to bond with her child. Trauma is broadly defined—it could be childhood sexual abuse, loss, divorce, neglect, any kind of unresolved issue that is activated due to the pregnancy.

Sarah Kennedy, the coordinator and primary therapist for the program says, “The purpose of the program is to help those moms repair attachment wounds. This allows them to become the moms they want to be and not repeat history.”

Sometimes women are in crisis or trauma when they come into the program. It may be the father has abandoned the relationship and they’re facing becoming moms on their own or they may have left an abusive relationship. These moms are triggered by the realization she’s pregnant and facing a whole new chapter in her life and needs support.

“It’s so important for babies coming into the world to experience secure attachment. The program helps women heal from their own attachment wounds so they can foster secure attachment with their babies.”

The mother/child bond is vital to ensuring a baby feels safe, secure and protected. According to Babies Best Chance, a publication of the BC Ministry of Health, a strong emotional attachment is one of the key factors in raising a happy, resilient, and confident child.

As one mom who completed the program puts it, “Healthy Connections was a safe place to start making better decisions for myself and as a result, for my girls. Just that small amount of peace has had a ripple effect. Even though it’s been years, I see it in action all the time. That support has had a lifetime impact on me.”

“The program just gave my daughter so much more of me. When I think about them not having gone through that program I feel an ache in my heart to imagine not being able to be that kind of the mother for them. It allowed me to be present; it allowed me to overcome any fears and challenges that I had around attachment to really be there with them. I feel that now. I feel how close we are now and how seamless that attachment is. And I would take it a million times again,” she adds.

The artwork on the front cover and in this article were created by moms participating in the Art Therapy component of the Healthy Connections Program. The images are used with their kind permission.
There are two components to the program, individual counselling and group therapy, including art therapy. Art therapy allows moms to work through their struggles in a non-verbal way using art.

“The women do their deep work with their one-to-one therapist and then they come to group therapy and interact with other moms and so it works in a lovely circle,” says Rose Clarke, art therapist. “What comes up in group they work on with their one-to-one therapist and what they work on with their one-to-one therapist they can work on in group using another modality.”

Another mom who completed the program says, “There’s a connection with that voice that sometimes can only come through when you’re given the opportunity to do something visual or do something that’s exploration of a different kind. The stuff that would come up in those sessions was just like little windows opening. It comes not from the ‘chattery brain’ place but that place of calm when you’re doing art or visual media.”

“Group and art therapy give the women a chance to connect with other moms and out of that create supportive friendships,” says Sarah. “Often, these mothers are marginalized and don’t have necessarily healthy relationships with, or support from, their families.”

Ideally, women enter the program when they are first pregnant. “A lot of work can get done before baby comes but sometimes we’ll take somebody post partum up to six months,” says Sarah.

Women find out about the free program through the Family Services website, and many are referred by social workers, doctors, psychiatrists, midwives, doulas and public health nurses. Moms can stay in the program up until their child’s third birthday. Last year, over 60 women turned to Healthy Connections for support.

“The babies are the inspiration and catalyst for change. They motivate mom to do the often challenging, yet meaningful work of re-parenting herself, while also learning how to care for and parent her child,” says Sarah.

“I am always moved to see how many women decide to embrace a healthy life style as soon as they know they are pregnant. Many feel they’ve been given a chance to start life over and bring their best selves forward, with the hope of giving not only their child but also themselves a different experience, and hopefully a corrective one.”

“I think one of the positive effects on my life over the three and a half years I was in the program was the creation of this inner toolbox of self compassion. When I am in stressful situations, I don’t go back to those ways I would have responded with in the past—self loathing, anger—things that were not productive,” notes another mom.

Continues Sarah, “One of the things I love when telling people about this program is that everybody says, ‘Of course. This makes total sense. Isn’t it wonderful that this program exists?’”

To see the video “Healthy Connections—You and your baby,” visit our website at www.fsgv.ca/beinspired.
Thank you to our most recent donors

At Family Services, we know that when people get the help they need, they are able to move forward with their lives. Our donors help make this possible. With their support, we are able to reach out to more people in need and by strengthening people and their families we build a stronger community. Please join us in thanking everyone who donated $1,000 or more from July 1 to December 31, 2014.

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THANK YOU to Intact Insurance, who made a donation of $15,000 to support Keeners Mobile Car wash and youth in our community. Pictured is Calum Scott, Director Youth Services, Directions Youth Services, Mithles Lal of Intact Insurance and Beth Rees, President & CEO, Family Services EAR.

See it on Facebook
A big thank you to our friends at the Vancouver ATOM C2 Timberwolves hockey team and Scotiabank Game Changer Program for organizing a bottle drive that raised $1,000 for Family Services. You rock (and recycle too)!

Visit the video section of our Facebook page to see this heartwarming story.

Our clients say it best

After years and years and years of counselling - I am 50 - I have NEVER had more useful therapy - safe, compassionate, accepted, and collaborative.

- Counselling client
Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon

Over 200 people gathered at the Four Seasons Hotel for our fifth annual Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon.

The programme featured two speakers: Naomi, a mom who completed the Healthy Connections program (see feature story, page 6-7) and keynote speaker Silken Laumann.

Both women shared their deeply personal and inspiring stories and showed that with compassionate support, everyone can change his or her life and fulfill their highest potential in all of life’s roles—as parents, spouses, co-workers and friends. As Silken said, “help must be there when it’s needed”.

And with the help of so many people in the room over $73,000 was donated so that Family Services can continue to provide programs like Healthy Connections.

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Thank you to Vivio Flowers and Mink Chocolates for bringing beauty and sweetness to the luncheon.

More pictures from the Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon are posted on our Facebook page. Remember to “Like” us too!

Congratulations to Ken Sewell, the winner of our WestJet Raffle! Thank you to Myrna Pawlick of WestJet who attended our Brighter Tomorrows Luncheon and picked the winning ticket. Ken, we hope you and your wife have an amazing time on your trip to the Caribbean!
“Forget whatever negative things people have told you.”

WorkBC Employment Services Centre Vancouver (City Centre) helps people find jobs

And that was when what he calls his first miracle in Vancouver happened.

He was walking on Davie Street and saw a sign board that said, ‘are you looking for work?’ He walked upstairs to the Vancouver City Centre, WorkBC Employment Services Centre run by Family Services of Greater Vancouver, and “could instantly feel the warmth and a feeling of care in the air.”

He registered for a job information session and was assigned a case manager. “She did not talk about the things that people usually talk about—your degree, your qualifications, and your skills. She immediately understood what I needed: “What I needed was motivation, to clear my mind, and to gain confidence. That was quite the turning point for me.”

Shehbaz definitely appreciated his case manager’s strengths-based approach. “She listened without any rush and then said to me what I still remember: “Forget whatever negative things people have told you.”

“She reminded me of what skills I already have and how many years of international, professional experience I came to Canada with. She put things into perspective and made me believe that there’s no need to feel panicked if I couldn’t find a job in just two months after landing.”

Careful not to duplicate the job search courses he had already taken, Shehbaz enrolled in the ESC’s Workplace Culture and Social Media workshops. He also updated his LinkedIn profile, a move that would prove fruitful.

A few days later he received a message from a large recruitment firm interested in talking to him about a contract position with one of the “Big 4” accounting firms. He happened to be with his case manager when he received the phone call. She encouraged him to take that call and coached him through it.

She also helped prepare him for the interview process and contract negotiation with success; with the help of the recruitment firm he set up his own business and had his first consulting contract. “I still haven’t applied for a job yet,” he says smiling. (cont’d next page)
Agency News

New Westminister Office wins platinum

Family Services’ New West office was awarded the 2014 New Westminster Platinum Award for Best Not for Profit over $1 million.

“What was very honouring for us was the fact that we were nominated by an employee of another social service organization who has worked alongside the staff for many years and felt it was time Family Services was recognized,” says Family Services’ CEO Caroline Bonesky.

“It was very powerful when they spoke about the impact that our clients say we have in their lives,” says Caroline.

The Platinum Awards celebrate business and community excellence in New Westminster. The award recognizes businesses and individuals whose achievements and contributions to the community distinguish them from their peers.

Congratulations to the entire New West team! 🌟

Work BC (cont’d)

The contract is coming to a close but Shehbaz isn’t worried. The contract allowed him to work with a wide variety of clients and gave him a taste of different corporate cultures and future possibilities. He’s networking with other professionals, and is exploring further education opportunities.

For now, Shehbaz and his wife are settling into their new life in Canada. They are enjoying the diversity of their West End neighbourhood and they’re even taking Italian language lessons.

“I am so happy I read that sign that day and walked upstairs to the WorkBC ESC Vancouver City Centre office—that was the best thing I did in Vancouver. They proved to be angels in the new country for me. In fact, the staff does not seem that they are doing a job—it’s their life. They are doing a great service, with a human touch.” 🌟

Slice Night Delivers!

Congratulations to the youth and staff of Directions Youth Services who once again delivered another successful “Slice Night” showcasing the amazing talents of our youth.

Held on December 7 at Cafe Deux Soleils on Commercial Drive, the night featured spoken word performances, opera, and even a raucous banjo version of the Guns n’ Roses song, “Sweet child o’ mine.”

This was the third annual Slice Night, and every year the talent gets better and better. Congratulations to all who participated!
Four months ago, Rahima, mom of three children, suffered from an anxiety attack. Having moved from Afghanistan twelve years ago with her husband, she didn’t have any support from extended family. The care for the children, the household and day-to-day responsibilities became too much.

“When my friend found out what happened,” Rahima says, “she mentioned the New Westminster Parent Connect program to me.”

Once a week throughout fall and spring, Family Services offers the Parent Connect program to parents like Rahima.

Program Director Patricia Steiner describes Parent Connect as a facilitated, discussion-based program bringing together ‘connector parents,’ who have lived in the community for several years, and ‘newcomer parents.’

“It’s really about learning more parenting skills and finding out about community resources while strengthening social connections,” Patricia says.

Another mother who participates in the program, Amara, also faced difficult issues. This mother of five moved from Nigeria to Canada several months ago and was struggling with learning a new language and adapting to a new culture.

“I have learned so much from other parents in the program and it’s wonderful to have time to connect with moms and guest speakers while my children are in child-minding services downstairs. Not only am I meeting new people and learning new things, but my children also have a great time socializing with other children,” says Amara.

The program gives parents with young children a break from the extensive family responsibilities, provides them with a great opportunity to learn more about the community and to make friends while sharing the experiences and challenges of parenting.

“We couldn’t do it without the support of the United Way,” says Patricia, “the Parents Connect program is fully funded by Success By 6.”

Success By 6 BC is dedicated to helping young children and their families. It’s a partnership of the United Way, Credit Unions of BC, the BC Government through the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), and Aboriginal and community leaders. United Way of the Lower Mainland acts as the managing partner for Success By 6 BC.

Helping kids be all that they can be
Parent Connect program strengthens social connections for newcomer parents

Thank you to the United Way of the Lower Mainland for kind permission to reprint this article and photo of Amara and her young son.