

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT  
COALITION OF CHILD CARE ADVOCATES OF BC  
AGM JUNE 21, 2007

As many of you know I'm not the kind of Chairperson to give a traditional Chairperson report. Later tonight we'll be showing you a video of many of the activities that Coalition people across the province have been engaged in. Many of you keep track of all the events through our website calendar and many of you have participated in the rallies, town hall meetings, protests and petitions. We have learned many things over the past 25 years – mostly patience. Changing history apparently takes longer than we had hoped – but change history we will.

Tonight is a night for stories, and so I want to take my time to tell you my story. It is a story of hope of courage and of persistence. A story that I think represents our organization – at the grass roots level – where it counts the most.

Two years ago a very frightened little girl (she was 2 \_ ) entered her new day care centre. This amazing child, adored by her family, tiny and fragile, funny and creative loving and animal lover extraordinaire, had not had the easiest start in life. Early on her mother knew there was something different about her baby. She seemed anxious, unable to cope with crowds, cried all the time, and while she could dance and sing with all her little girl splendor, her mood could drastically change in a second. She could be happy one moment, and in despair the next. Her clothes caused her pain, she could not sit still, - most often the world was a very, very scary place.

For those of us who work with families we know that a mother's instinct is not always enough. There are wait lists for diagnosis, services that should be but aren't available, and childhood development is not always easy to figure out. So, it was that this mother

took her child to this centre with mixed feelings. She knew that she wanted her child in a community based, unionized centre, because she knew that odds were these places could provide the best care for any child. But would they understand, could they cope, could they love, this angel who she treasured.

That was the first day of a two year journey that lead our family through paths of hope, support and gratitude, hand in hand with the remarkable team of women at St James Day Care (in Vancouver). For the first few weeks, our angel, Clara, cried (no screamed) for hours on end. She seemed defiant, unable to learn or follow rules. She pushed boundaries, pushed kids and I'm sure pushed sales of Tylenol (or vodka) through the roof for the staff. She disturbed others during every nap time, needed extra staff on a daily basis, and did not get through many days without a full out tantrum. Most people would understand if the staff said, "she's too much". Most people would understand if the staff said, "we can't cope". Most people would say, "how can they put up with that".

But these women, these gifted and caring women, could see past all of that. They saw a child who cared about others, who kept trying and trying and trying, who could be funny and who loved to dance and have stories read to her. They could have turned her away but they opened their arms. They could have said no but they said yes. They saw her goodness, and they made a commitment to her to keep trying until they got it right.

There are many remarkable teams of early childhood educators across our province.

Teams, like our family's team, who find the potential in each child who are able to look past the challenges and create worlds of safety, harmony, acceptance and creativity for each child in their program.

Our Clara is going to Kindergarten in September. She has a team of supports in place and although we are worried about transitions and new programs for her – our experience

at St James gives us hope. Clara will have other teachers, other community people in her life, and she has the strength in herself to find her way. But I know that her future successes will be, in large part, because the team at St. James treated her with kindness and respect. She has learned so much more than her ABC's and numbers there. And while we may not be able to "measure the outcomes" there are so many more important learning times that have happened both for Clara and the other children in her program. Clara has found a friend – she has developed confidence – and she has taught others in her group to accept others with differences. No chart, no list will ever capture the importance of that.

There are still days when Clara will say "I don't want to be Clara, it's just too hard", but because of her experience in this wonderful child care environment, she has skills to get her through, she has learned that she can work through the bad moments, that she has people to support her through her troubles. The world is still sometimes scary for her – but this remarkable team has helped her to feel that it is a little less scary.

They have given our family a gift that we can never repay. To say thank you, is so not enough. So tonight I dedicate this report to their work, to their caring, to the difference they have made for my granddaughter, and by making a difference for her, they have made a difference for the world.

So as I keep up my personal commitment to fight for higher wages I will think of the women at St James. While I demonstrate, rally and sign yet another petition, I will think of the women at St. James. While I continue to fight for a national child care system, those women will be my inspiration. And for all of us – that's really what it's all about.