



Apropos...

Batshaw Youth and Family Centres

News from Michael Udy, Executive Director

Special Edition / Judith Rycus Visits Batshaw Youth and Family Centres

On February 8 & 9, 2000, Dr. Judith Rycus presented the key elements of a family-centered approach to child protection and development to 400 Batshaw staff and 29 Batshaw partners. This special edition of *Apropos* gives a résumé of why Dr. Rycus was invited to Batshaw, and what she said.

Background – A Search for Coherence

On October 1, 1992, a single board of directors took over responsibility for directing the affairs of the four agencies now known as Batshaw Youth and Family Centres. Since that time, directors and staff have struggled through a period that all agree was extremely difficult.

Progressive budget cuts eventually removed more than ten percent of the agency's financial and human resources. This contributed to repeated reorganization, cuts in services, cuts in supports to service providers, including cuts to management. The entire Batshaw community is aware of the subsequent impact on services and on morale.

These events have somewhat obscured the challenge that lay before Batshaw directors and staff at the beginning. The challenge was, and still is, to create a new, coherent agency from what the four founding agencies brought to the merger. Understandably, it has been difficult to focus on this over the last several years.

In the spring of 1998, managers repeated to the members of the Batshaw Management Committee (BMC) what staff were saying to them: senior managers need to develop, share with staff and involve them in implementing a coherent vision of Batshaw services and how they are to be provided.

Since that time, the members of the BMC have worked on responding to this message. In November, 1999, the document, *Beyond the Year 2000*, was circulated to all staff and many Batshaw partners. This document presents a proposed service philosophy and a management philosophy for the organization, and was endorsed by the management team on November 12, 1999.

The service philosophy presents what BMC members believe to be the best synthesis of our current clinical views, compatible with the Quebec Youth Protection Act, compatible with directions already adopted in Batshaw, and reflective of the latest developments in the child welfare field.

A Family-centered Approach to Child Protection and Development

This approach, a family-centered approach to child protection and development, is based in good part on the work Doctors Judith Rycus and Ronald Hughes of the Institute of Human Services (IHS) in Columbus, Ohio. Their work is contained in their encyclopaedic, *Field Guide to Child Welfare*, published in conjunction with the Child Welfare League of America, and available in our library.

IHS has been providing guidance in program and staff development for over 25 years to child welfare agencies in 25 states and four Canadian provinces.

As part of the process of developing a consensus around this service philosophy, the BMC, in collaboration with the Batshaw Multidisciplinary Council, invited Dr. Rycus, to come

to Montreal and address a large number of Batshaw staff and partners. On Tuesday and Wednesday, February 8th and 9th, Dr. Rycus met four groups of Batshaw staff and partners - in total, 400 staff and 29 partners. In summary, she said:

- ◆ Adopting a family-centered approach engenders a large scale organizational change;
- ◆ Large scale organizational change inherently has obstacles, and key factors for success are staff engagement, detailed and timely planning and the use of clear standards;
- ◆ Dr. Rycus is interested to see how adaptable the IHS model is to Batshaw's reality, given its range of services and in particular to our Young Offenders Services;
- ◆ Over the last century, child welfare has developed from the use of orphanages, to the use of foster care, to the use of residential treatment, and most recently to the use of a family preservation model. All required adaptation to properly address children's protection and developmental needs;
- ◆ The family-centered approach to child protection and development proposes that the best way to meet protection and development needs is in a safe, permanent family;
- ◆ This family preferably will be, but is not necessarily, the child's biological family. Children's rights to safety and security are absolute, parents rights are conditional on not harming their children;
- ◆ Alternatives to biological families include: kinship and extended family care, adoption, and independent living for older adolescents. Foster care is a support to stabilizing permanent family arrangements and sometimes a prelude to adoption;
- ◆ Carrying out this work requires an assessment with the family that enables us to answer the question: "How can we best promote protection and permanency for this child in these circumstances?"
- ◆ The answers to the question are contained in the Case Plan. The Case Plan aims to assure protection of children by strengthening the biological family, or determining the alternative.
- ◆ Through the Case Plan, workers use their own power to facilitate changes and empower the family, or substitute family;
- ◆ The Case Plan focuses on learning and development for child and family, building on strengths, addressing limitations that might require specific rehabilitation approaches;