

## ***FAMILY CARE OFFICE***

### **Annual Report**

July 1, 2000 - June 30, 2001

#### **Executive Summary As Presented to University Affairs Board, November 2001**

The Family Care Office was created in December 1993. It is funded jointly by the University's operating budget (through the Office of the Vice President and Provost and the Office of the Vice President Administration and Human Resources) and by students (through the Student Services fee). On an ongoing basis, the director of the Family Care Office reviews University policy, procedures and publications for their impact on those with family responsibilities and makes recommendations to vice presidents, deans, registrars and other administrators. The Office acts as an advocate on behalf of University families with government and community agencies, University departments and employee and student organizations. The Office consults regularly with these organizations to ensure that it is meeting the needs of the University population and that a high quality of service is being maintained. The Office adopts a highly collaborative approach to programming and works with partners across the University on joint initiatives.

Since opening in 1993, the Family Care Office has experienced a steady increase in demand for its services. The case load has grown from 142 cases in 1993/94 and 419 in 1994/95 to well over 1200 cases this past year. The types of services requested by individuals and departments have extended beyond the child care and elder care functions envisioned when the Office was created. Clients request comprehensive family care, including: assistance with budgeting and time management; referrals to family lawyers, counsellors and physicians; access to a complex web of community services (including food and clothing banks, parenting classes and housing); and advocacy services. Departments benefit from consultations about policy and about unique situations involving individual employees and students. This year, the Office expanded its elder care supports and its links to financial resources for student parents.

It should be noted that case load is not the only indicator of the impact of the Family Care Office's activities. The impact of the education and training programs and of the website is as significant as that of individual casework. A monthly parenting feature was added to the Family Care website and covered such topics as parenting children with challenging behaviors, anti-racist and multicultural education and building self-esteem in children. Over 600 people attended the 31 workshops sponsored or co-sponsored by the Office this year. These programs included "Parenting Children With Disabilities," "What You Need to Know to Access Services for the Elderly," "Help! I've Got Teenagers," "Birthing Alternatives: The Role of the Midwife," and two cooking workshops which were offered in the Student Family Housing complex. The Family Care Office cosponsored the third annual symposium for women graduate students interested in pursuing an academic career and a session on changing financial and legal responsibilities of lesbian and gay partners. A new discussion group for fathers was implemented.

The Family Care Office also houses the Faculty Relocation and Support Program (FRSP). This highly successful initiative has provided deans, chairs and search committees with assistance in meeting their goals in an intensely competitive recruiting environment. The program has helped newly-appointed faculty and their families relocate and adjust smoothly to life at the University and in Toronto. This year, the FRSP experienced tremendous growth in demand for its services, both by prospective faculty and those arriving in Toronto to begin their academic appointments.

The director advised deans and chairs on recruitment efforts, particularly with senior appointments and highly sought-after candidates. The FRSP raised awareness of the importance of equity issues (ethnocultural and faith issues, disability issues, LGBTQ issues, maternity/parental/adoption leaves and other 'family-friendly' policies) to recruitment efforts. "Quality of life" factors have proven to be particularly significant in achieving a successful end to several searches.

Through all of its functions, the Family Care Office aims to raise awareness of family care issues and of quality of life issues central to the achievement of educational equity and employment equity at the University of Toronto. In 2000-2001, the Family Care Office embarked upon a number of initiatives. The Family Care Office and the Community Health Coordinator developed and implemented a pregnancy support document and protocol. The goals were to offer information and options to students who wished to balance pregnancy, parenthood and studies and to provide guidelines for staff to support students effectively in their decisions.

The Family Care Office advised the University on appropriate responses to the changes in legislation surrounding parental leave and drafted language for the University to present to various employee groups. Group and individual consultations were conducted to explain maternity and parental leave entitlements.

The Office advocated on behalf of students needing child care subsidies, part-time and off-hours child care. Changes in government child care funding policies were monitored and appealed when they ran counter to the interests of members of the University community and their children.

The Family Care Office worked collaboratively with Admissions and Awards, Students' Administrative Council (SAC), Student Affairs and parent groups in designing and implementing a mechanism for distributing the SAC "Dollars for Daycare" funds.