



# A program showcase

## Centre de la Petite Enfance de McGill, Montreal, Canada

by Michael Kalinowski

On a warm summer afternoon I climbed the Peel Street hill in the heart of Montreal, away from the shops and boutique hotels below, and towards McGill University, Mont-Royal, and the series of the gray stone buildings that house the McGill Childcare Centre, also known officially as the Centre de la Petite Enfance de McGill or CPE McGill. Wally Wang-Garrety founded the program in 1973 with help from a federal local initiative grant. Her primary goal was, “that the daycare would place an emphasis on the social and emotional development of each child . . . a home away from home.”

Today, CPE McGill is a non-profit corporation holding permits from the City of Montreal and the Quebec Government, and is governed by an elected Board of Directors composed primarily of parents, with one staff and one community representative. Parents are welcomed into the CPE community with a coffee social, and encouraged to participate by reading stories, playing instruments, serving on committees, and attending an annual community barbecue. As befits a metropolitan program, children have access to a swimming program, education department library, campus gardens, and excellent campus and city museums.



The program staff includes 18 full-time and four part-time educators, and two administrators. The educators are responsible for the preparation and implementation of an engaging, well-balanced program of activities that is developmentally appropriate and arises from the interests of the children. A teacher, Alma Crane-Hennessy, who has worked with infants and toddlers at CPE McGill for 20 years, was recently selected for the Prime Min-

ister's Award for Excellence in Early Childhood Education. Executive Director Lisa Gallagher is the proud new recipient of the first Prime Minister's award of Excellence for Leadership in ECE.

The philosophy of CPE McGill is based on the belief that children learn through hands-on, age-appropriate activities that enhance a child's creativity and sense of discovery. According to Lisa, "Children learn about the world around them through play. Through an individualized approach within a group setting, the staff strives to provide the children with a consistent, warm environment." As part of its philosophy, the centre encourages exposure to the rich cultural life of urban Montreal, and works hard to celebrate individual family heritage.

There have been a few struggles over the years. One unique aspect of housing a child care facility in a series of aging, gray stone campus buildings has been the need to move regularly in recent years for renovations. As Lisa puts it, "It gives us all this great sense of adventure. . . . When the best interests of the children are kept in focus, everything else falls into place." With the support of the University, they view the temporary changes in location as opportunities to expand their horizons and build relationships within the University and surrounding community.

CPE McGill serves 106 children ranging in age from four months to five years, the children of McGill University students, staff, and faculty. Eligibility is limited to full-time faculty and staff members working the equivalent of 30 hours per week, and to full-time students. Each child must have one parent who is working or studying at McGill. The second parent must also be working or studying full-time. Children cannot be accepted on a part-



time basis because the educational mission requires full-time attendance. There are about 800 families currently on the waiting list.

There is a community quilt hanging in the main entrance depicting what their families value. At the centre of the quilt is the quote, "Children, at the heart of it all." This was a project that was brainstormed and carried out by the educators, in collaboration with parents. It truly represents who they are: a centre as an extension of the family. The program will celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2013.

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The Program Showcases are developed by Michael Kalinowski as a component of the World Forum on Early Care and Education. They are intended to highlight the work of particularly interesting, unique, and/or exceptional early childhood programs around the world.

Selected programs will appear in future issues of *Exchange*, and are also available on [www.ChildCareExchange.com](http://www.ChildCareExchange.com).