

# connections

## Special Edition Newsletter -2010 Annual Report

### A Note From the Agency Director

Joining Connections was an easy decision. Connections matches my own beliefs about family and community. I was warmly welcomed into the Connections family and my first few months have been fun, challenging, varied and fulfilling.

Connections works to strengthen families, believing that stronger families result in healthier communities. Every day, I get to see a group of people provide this much needed support to others and make a tangible difference.

Another truth confirmed every day is that people are messy. Connections is a group of people, each with our own strengths and foibles. Connections' families are just the same. They are families filled with the messiness of daily life –people trying their best, sometimes managing very well with just a bit of help and at other times, lurching from crisis to crisis. People are messy.

An international study to uncover whether there are globally held family values found more differences than similarities in attitudes about the family unit. But the single belief most universally held is that “having children is vital to a sense of fulfillment.”

Our Spring Newsletter is doing double duty by providing an overview of our 2010 year.

January marked the departure of Pat Morris as Agency Director after 11 dedicated years.

We thank Pat for her tremendous contribution. We miss her, but know that out our client families and friends will still get to have a visit with Pat when she attends our events, as she has assured us she will visit often.

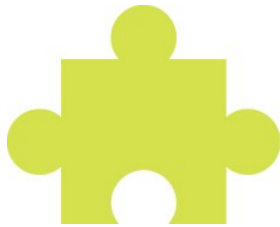
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Connections helps parents with an intellectual disability realize the fulfillment of having and raising children successfully. Not everyone believes that the people we support should be parents. And not all of the parents Connections supports are successful and able to parent their children. But through in-home support and counselling, most of our families are more stable, more successful parents, raising children who are safe and nurtured through to adulthood.

I've learned so much in the past five months from the capable Connections team and just as much from our families. Our team and our client families share resourcefulness, creativity and capability. The team adds unrelenting compassion to the mix. The results are stronger families and a more vibrant community. I am proud to be part of the team and I welcome the opportunity to meet our growing group of Connections friends and supporters who make this meaningful work possible.

- Erin Waite, Agency Director

[www.connections counselling.ab.ca](http://www.connections counselling.ab.ca)



## Our Piece of the Puzzle

Our Mission is to empower, strengthen, and support:

1. Parents with intellectual disabilities;
2. Children who have a family member with a disability;
3. Families and caregivers

by providing long term programs, counselling, and education.

**I shudder to think what would have happened to her without Connections in her life. - Child Welfare Worker**

## Our Clients Are The Reason We Are Here

There are no perfect parents.  
No perfect kids. No perfect people.  
We all need help sometimes.  
This is the 'motto' of the Nobody's Perfect program. It's wonderful to watch parents apply the songs, activities, and information from the program.

For example, a mom I work with, had to take her baby for lab tests on two occasions. Both times, she was able to use songs, eye contact, and voice tone to keep the little one occupied and to keep both baby and herself calm. On a home-visit, she and her partner requested that we do songs and rhymes together and we sat on the floor and sang for a good half hour. So far, every term, at least one parent from the community has asked for resource information regarding sons or daughters with special needs. This has led to referrals to appropriate community programs, and giving information on Sibshops. It's great to watch Connection parents share strategies that have worked for them or to ask for suggestions from other parents in the Nobody's Perfect discussion group.  
- **Pat Corbett**, *In-Home Support Worker*

It is truly a blessing to watch the interactions between the members of our client families at the Our Lady Queen of Peace summer camp. The weekend provides an opportunity for a stress free escape, in which many of our families take part. As a coordinator for the weekend camp, the many hours of hard work finally pay off when watching the families simply enjoying their time together and taking the time to play and have fun! The new friendships between families of Connections, the strengthening of current ones and the ability to have a mini vacation is a chance of a lifetime for some of these families!!

- **Stacy Tidlund**, *In-Home Support Worker*

As gratifying as this work is during the typical day to day, there are always those special families that stand out. This is the case with one of my families whose two young children have both been in-care since birth. Since our involvement, this family has grown from seeing their children for 1 hour per week at a Child and Family Services office to being able to have their children in their home for 5 hours per week (2 hours of which they are alone with them) and they also attend a Parent/Child Mother Goose program with the children. This family now has the real hope of having their children returned to the home. It has been wonderful to see this family so committed to learning all they can to be better parents, to see the family bonding with each other and to see the children thrive in the relationship. - **Jan McInnis**, *In-home Support Worker*

I was recently asked by a mom to help her look through a document - a dreaded school form. The form was very complex and was even difficult for me to navigate . The mom had asked me to help her fill out the form so her daughter could attend the program, but I realized the form was only to be filled out if you wanted your child to be EXEMPT from the program. Mom didn't know what this word meant, and simply would have filled out the form, wanting to ensure her daughter got the same opportunities as other kids. As the legal guardian she was responsible for providing informed consent, but needed support to fulfill this role. It is rewarding to provide that help.

-**Lauren Raymore**, *Program Director*



I have seen families that come to this agency confused and devastated. Helping them break things down and sort out their own emotions allows them to grow. One family, whose son had trouble with aggressiveness, were exhausted and scared. Even though their son has a cognitive disability and often experiences frustration and failure when attempting to communicate, he is now able to use creative original coping strategies to manage his emotions enough to think about his behaviour and the possible consequences they may have. This ownership of behaviour is great to see and shows me that no matter what individual challenges a person faces, there is always room for growth and change. - **Melanie Macpherson**, *Counsellor*



# Small But Mighty—Connections' Balancing Act in 2010

Connections strengths are many, with an excellent team of experienced, capable and creative in-home support workers and a counsellor with specialized expertise that perfectly supports our clients and their families. This small team, supported by three part-time and one contract staff member with management and administrative expertise, provided consistent support to 37 families and a number of group programs that are attended by our client families and many others in the community. The effectiveness and reach achieved by the Connections team is astounding.

## 2010 Highlights

- Jan McInnis and Lauren Raymore presented "Best Practices for Supporting Lifelong Parent/Child Relationships" at the 2010 International Conference by The Association for Successful Parenting
- Melanie MacPherson's counselling was key to support people with developmental disabilities whose emotional well being is affected by other challenges
- Pat Corbett played a key role leading a specially developed parenting program that blended Parent/Child, Mother Goose and Nobody's Perfect features
- Amy LeBlanc did the groundwork for the "Creating Excellence Together" accreditation, an in-depth review that takes place every three years and is required by Persons with Developmental Disabilities
- Stacie Tidlund took charge of an extremely popular opportunity for our families to experience a sleep-over camp — a weekend for families and a week-long camp for children in Bragg Creek
- Lindsey Cartwright continued her leadership of Sibshops
- Tracy Collyer, Donna Cashin and Doug Harder contributed by serving client families during the year
- Jessilyn Yuhas created a successful event in honour of Connections' 20th Anniversary and inspired a 15 percent increase in donations
- Lisa Tuplin provided steady support to the team throughout the entire year and offers a warm and caring greeting to clients who call and come into the office

We have many goals for Connections and for the way we want to add to the services we now provide. From a management perspective, it continues to be an unmet objective to cover costs more comfortably, including more appropriately compensating our highly specialized team. Not only do we require a high level of education and experience, but the demands include working in isolation, emotionally stressful situations, maintaining a car and higher than standard level of auto insurance, maintaining first aid certification and supporting an ever-increasing burden of reporting.

We have many initiatives in development, each with a champion who is working to make them a reality. These projects include:

- Developing a **Financial Literacy** group program into an on-going open to the public program
- Piloting **KidShops** as a spin-off of Sibshops so that children who have parents with an intellectual (or other) disability have a peer support program of their own
- Updating our **Outcomes Evaluation** process to stay ahead of the trend and ensure we customize the process for our families
- Creating a **new, inter-agency advocacy service** for families who must make a transition as their children age out of agencies that support children with disabilities to ones that support adults with disabilities.

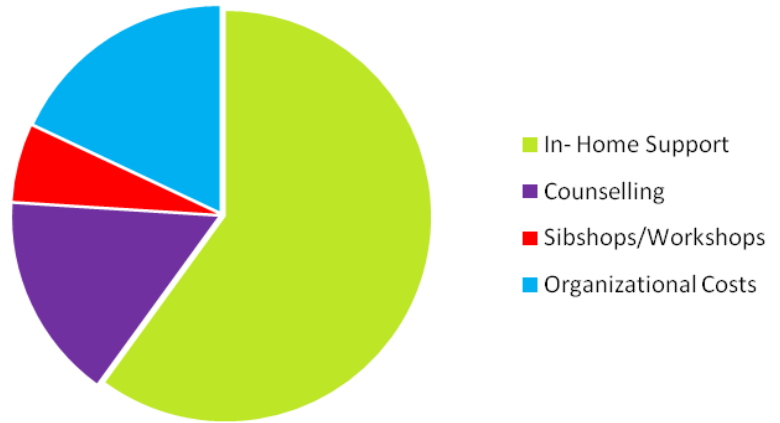
**Together, the Connections team with our families and supporters are working to ensure families are more stable and their children safe and nurtured.**



## In- Home Services Form The Core

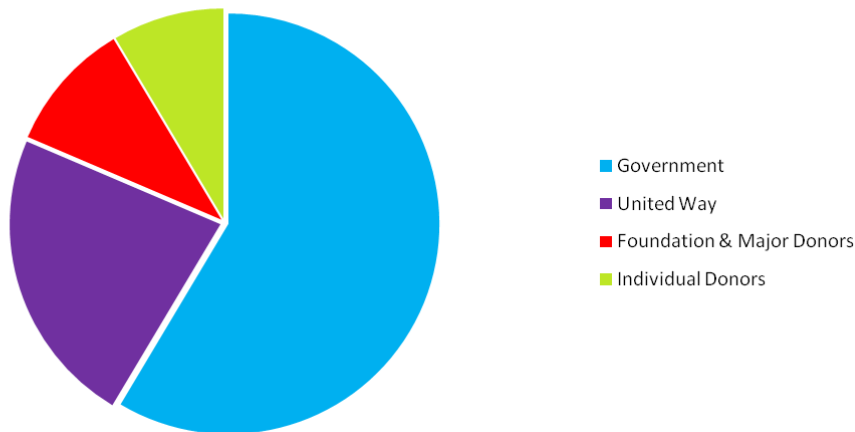
In 2010, Connections provided 37 families (124 family members) with In-Home support, 50 individuals with Counselling, and another 275 parents and/or kids with programs and workshops. All of this was completed by investing \$479.4 thousand.

Revenue totaled \$477.2 thousand, representing a four percent drop from 2009, and left Connections with a small deficit of \$2,133. As always, Connections has a strong balance sheet with no debt.



2010 was affected by a difficult environment for non profits and funding. Despite this, Connections increased support from foundations, corporations and individuals by 15 percent. Three categories of government funding were down in 2010 compared to 2009.

## 2010 Programs are Funded by a Range of Sources



We are well into 2011 and are seeing dramatic improvements in all areas.

We are seeing more referrals for In-Home and Counselling services from a broader range of other agencies and professionals. We are continuing to build support from community partners and a variety of funders. Our partnerships are generating new services and extending our reach.

We not only expect 2011 will be completed without a deficit, we look forward to reporting on more services provided, continued successes by our client families, all backed by a solid financial position.

**Connections Audited Financials can be viewed on our website at [www.connectionscounselling.ab.ca](http://www.connectionscounselling.ab.ca)**

## 2010 Board of Directors

**Daryl Pamplin**  
Past President

**Peter Cheung**  
President

**Gavin Preston**  
Treasurer

**Gurbeer Singh Gill**  
Secretary

**Michelle Wolfe**

**Susan Plesuk**

**Joining in 2011**

**Tennille Boessenkool**

**Ian Gray-Donald**

Connections thanks the Board for their valuable input and dedication

# 2010 Year At A Glance

## 4039 Hours of In Home Support

*"In November 2008 we lost our two boys to Child Welfare, because they believed that we were not good enough parents when many of our friends, family, and other professionals thought we were. I don't learn very well from books or being told what to do. I am a better learner from being hands on and had never had experience raising children. Connections came to our aid by providing a Support Worker to help my wife and I gain better parenting skills. The Support Worker was non-threatening and demonstrated through modeling different tasks. We have developed a strong, trusting relationship with our Support Worker, and would like her to continue to support us. We believe that without this support we would not have gotten our kids back in February, 2009. We now have a new born son and we feel that with continued support we can continue to learn from our worker and grow as a healthy family. "*

## 608 Hours of Counselling

*"When it comes to a crisis and I call Connections, my worker calls back as quickly as she can to meet my needs. My mother has been ill at times and that puts a strain on me. My worker reassures me that I'm doing a great job. I feel more confident in myself and she gives me a lot of strength."*

## 222 Participants at our Family Events

*"My daughter and I go to the Connections family outings and Christmas party. They have gotten tickets so we can go other events, and we got help with Connections Christmas hamper. I like the outings and meeting with other families, being able to talk about our problems. I like trying to figure out how I can help some of the other parents."*

## 54 New and Returning Participants in Sibshops

*"Sibshops has been a helpful and excellent experience. It's a very rare chance for me to talk in depth about issues I have with my sib. Not only that, but I get the chance to help other kids with their problems as well. The overnight was a great chance to trade stories about our sibs, and to really get to know one another. It's great just to get out and have a good time with people who deal with the same issues as you, in a fun and comfortable environment. Not to mention, they always have juice boxes..."*

## 852 Volunteer Hours

*"Whether it is talking to our support worker or any other staff or volunteer at your office, you are all listening to me and my concerns or ideas. This means a lot to me and my family."*



Calgary Children's Foundation  
AM 770 CHQR/WESTIN HOTEL

We would also like to extend our heartfelt appreciation to all of our Individual Donors, Donors Choice supporters & Volunteers without whom Connections could not continue the work we do.

## Partnering Agencies



## Be a Piece of the Connections Puzzle

I would like to Adopt a Family ( check your monthly donation)  
 \$20  \$50  \$100  \$250  Other amount \$\_\_\_\_\_

OR

I would like to make a one time donation of \$\_\_\_\_\_

### Your Information

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Province: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
City: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

### Method of Payment

Direct Deposit (for monthly donors).  
- Include blank cheque with VOID written across it

Cheque enclosed for above amount (for **one-time** gifts only)  
Payable to **Connections Counselling & Consulting Foundation**

Please bill my Credit Card.

Name on card: \_\_\_\_\_  
Card number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Expiry date (MM/YR): \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Registered Charity # 890700347RR0001

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As a non– profit society we welcome members.  
Join us, receive updates on our progress and vote at our  
Annual General Meeting. To become a member contact  
info@connections counselling.ab.ca

## How We Help

Connections supports families where one or both parents have an intellectual disability through in-home support, counselling, advocacy and workshops. We also provide Sibshops, a program assisting children who have a sibling with a disability. Our difference is our long-term approach, supporting families through life's stages.

*The value of this approach was evident last spring when a son of a client who had received support since birth became the first in his family to graduate high school. A new cycle of well being is underway.*

Without the support of our programs, children being raised by a parent with a disability and *not* receiving adequate support suffer risk factors associated with poverty, violence, inadequate safety and nutrition, assuming parental responsibility and a tendency toward high risk behaviours later in life.

Every family needs help from time to time. Connections offers consistent support to families who are otherwise isolated and vulnerable.