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Safe haven

Nursing prof's vision fosters caring in Calgary

by Karen Cook

The Children's Cottage in Calgary stands as the embodiment of the small, familiar, thatched farmhouse often pictured in traditional rural society.

A quiet place, the Cottage provides a sanctuary from the challenges facing many families in urban society and, through its many programs, offers relief in times of loneliness, stress or danger.

Established in 1986, the Cottage has some of the most comprehensive and expanding set of resources for families with infants and children requesting social support.

It operates on the premise that social support serves a critical role in health promotion. For Sandra Reilly, associate professor in the Faculty of Nursing and the author of the original proposal for the Cottage, this principle remains essential to its philosophy of social health.

"Our experience demonstrates that health increases when a community guarantees family rights, reduces social inequities and provides coping

mechanisms to families under stress," Reilly says.

The Cottage's philosophy is summed up in its two goals: Promoting family life and preventing harm to children.

For the families that use the Cottage, it is more than merely a refuge; it is also a place that provides opportunities to resolve crises and avoid their re-occurrence.

The nurse clinicians on staff contribute significantly to the Cottage's success, says Leianne Vye-Rogers, an instructor in the Faculty of Nursing and a longtime member of the Board of the Children's Cottage Society.

"The nurses are skilled in family assessment," she says. "They focus in on a family's strengths and the enablement process. In so doing, they concentrate on two core beliefs: That parents can become more competent and that they learn best when exposed to positive experiences that promote self-learning."

Patty Kilgallon, executive director of the Cottage since 1987, says "the social support offered to parents succeeds only because of our exceptional staff."



Clockwise from top: Patty Kilgallon, executive director, Children's Cottage; Leianne Vye-Rogers and Sandra Reilly, Faculty of Nursing.

“ Their hard work on behalf of Calgary families makes the Children's Cottage one of the best in North America. Their accomplishments, of course, rest on the exceptional work provided by the parents, our volunteers and contributors. It succeeds only because of the commitment of so many.”

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