

# CFUW ONTARIO COUNCIL STANDING COMMITTEES

Saturday, January 13th, 2007

## Morning Session

### Creating Healthy Communities Through Education

Panellists: Sue Sigurdson of **Pathways to Education**  
Lucy Di Carlo of **Roots of Empathy**

**Lucy Di Carlo** is the Ontario Program Coordinator for *Roots of Empathy* (ROE). This organization develops empathy by teaching students about their feelings and the feelings of others. It is an evidence and research based classroom program.

A certified ROE instructor visits a classroom every week during the year. Once a month, from October to June, a parent and baby from the community come with the Instructor for a Family Visit. Over the course of nine months the students observe the development of the baby and the interaction between parent and baby.

Part of Ms. Di Carlo's presentation was a video about the program which showed the classroom experience and interaction of the young children and the baby. The students had the opportunity to observe and interact with a baby when it was upset, grumpy, or sleepy, as well as happy and playful. When the baby's visit was over, the instructor would then discuss with the class how they felt about what they had experienced.

Ms. Di Carlo related the story, about a young student – a real troublemaker – who asked to hold the baby in the Snuggli. The baby who had been fussing, calmed down and was comfortable with the boy. He later turned to the instructor to ask if he would be able to be a good father since he had not been loved. This was an anecdotal indication of the impact of the program, which research has also shown.

The goals of *Roots of Empathy* are:

- To foster the development of empathy
- To develop emotional literacy
- To reduce levels of bullying, aggression and violence and promote children's pro-social behaviours
- To increase knowledge of human development, learning, and infant safety

For more information see [www.rootsofempathy.org](http://www.rootsofempathy.org)

The second speaker was **Sue Sigurdson**, Programme Director, *Pathways to Education*. The Pathways programme was started in Regent Park, the oldest and largest public housing project in Canada. The issues to be addressed being the high drop out rate (56%) from high school and the resulting low paying jobs, crime and/or homelessness. The mission of the *Pathways to Education* programme is to reduce poverty and its effects by supporting the development of youth from economically disadvantaged communities.

Pathways identifies vulnerable children and offers the following four pillars of support

- Academic – There are 225 volunteer tutors that offer assistance 4 nights/week.
- Social Support – Mentoring is available every 2 weeks.
- Financial Support – Unbelievably, there are no high schools within walking distance of Regent Park! This was identified as a risk factor in preventing students from getting to school. Pathways give two weeks worth of TTC tickets to students to help get them to school. Attendance is taken to ensure that they are being used properly. Upon graduation, these students have earned \$4000 toward any post secondary education.
- Student Advocates – Pathways volunteers provide a connection between home and school. It should be noted that most of these students come from homes where English is not the first language and the parents often do not understand the education system.

How do they know that the programme works? The students are closely monitored and the statistics tell the tale.

- Absenteeism has been cut in half.
- The Pathways students are doing as well or better than their peers.
- There is a reduction in the use of health and welfare services.

It is interesting to note that there is almost no government funding in the Pathways programme. RBC and Bell Canada are major corporate sponsors.

The Regent Park model has been so successful that an effort is being made to expand the programme across the country. The first extensions are in Montreal – in Verdun and in Little Burgundy. In Toronto, Rexdale and Lawrence Heights are communities targeted for development.

For more information see: [www.pathwaystoeducation.ca](http://www.pathwaystoeducation.ca)

