



Our Journey of Hope

The 65th Anniversary of The Centre for Child Development of the Lower Mainland

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The Centre's History

Imagine that it's 1950 and you pull up to the present site of The Centre in your 1948 Chevrolet Deluxe.

This is in the time before car seats or even seat belts and behind you sits your three-year-old daughter.

It's a warm, spring day and the long, rain-filled winter is behind you — you're grateful for a little blue sky. Your daughter, as best she can, lifts her arm to point at a robin perched on a maple branch. She tries to tell you that she sees a birdie, but she has difficulty speaking. She has cerebral palsy and you've heard from your doctor how important it is that your daughter receives physical therapy. So, you've come to The Centre to work with one of its physical therapists and, a little later, a speech pathologist. You want the best for your daughter.

But you don't see The Centre. You don't see the parking lot, the main building or the pre-school. You don't see any sign of The Centre at all. There are tall Douglas firs, ferns and even a few cedar trees, but no sign that anything called "The Centre" has ever been here. You look down at the piece of paper with the address your doctor gave you: 9640 140th Street, Surrey, British Columbia. This is the place, isn't it? You're parked at the right spot, but in 1950 The Centre as we know it today didn't exist.

You and other parents of children with special needs had few options in the Lower Mainland. The only facility available was a specialized clinic within the G.F. Strong Rehabilitation Centre in Vancouver, a long, tiring commute for parents seeking the best care for their children.

It's thanks to the vital, pioneering work of a few volunteers in the 1950s that parents like you could find one another and help each other care for your children.

Grassroots - the 1950s

Without The Centre, and with the only clinic to treat your daughter far away in Vancouver, what could you do?

There were hardly any options until a few generous volunteers began to build a network among parents with children with cerebral palsy. This early work began with the Order of the Knights of Pythias in New Westminster, a local chapter of a U.S.-based international fraternity, who voted to make helping children with cerebral palsy their key priority.

One member in particular, Ron Mannering, was appointed in 1951 to locate children with cerebral palsy. Thanks to his hard work, he found them — in Ladner, in Langley, in Cloverdale and in White Rock.

And once found, the Knights of Pythias put families with children like your daughter in touch with each other. You could network with other parents whose children also suffered from this disorder. You could share your experiences, pool resources, support each other and help ease each other's lives. And each Christmas season, the Knights of Pythias would do two extraordinary things — they would bring gifts to children like your daughter, and transport you and her free of charge to the Totem Skating Club Ice Show in New Westminster.



Grassroots - the 1950s *continued*

It was as if a seed had been planted - a quickly growing one. One bright day in June 1953, parents met at the home of Norm and Mabel Sherritt to found the Lower Fraser Valley Cerebral Palsy Association (LFVCPA). Parents raising children with cerebral palsy, like you, came from Cloverdale, Langley, Ladner and White Rock to meet monthly at the Cloverdale Health Centre and help each other.

By August 1954, these kind and generous parents had raised enough money to buy a nine-passenger van to transport children like your daughter, free of charge, to G.F. Strong in Vancouver. By 1956, the LFVCPA had begun collaborating with the British Columbia Society for Crippled Children to fund more buses and, soon, there were four of them on the road taking children to G.F. Strong.

You could go to work and your daughter, thanks to these generous volunteers, could get the care she needed.

Second-hand funeral limousines were repurposed in 1956 by the newly-founded Cerebral Palsy Association to provide accessible transport for children with mobility disabilities.
Photo courtesy of City of Surrey Archives ref: SM0466B



Building - the 1960s

How could you and your daughter forget September 30, 1961? Both of you were at Surrey Memorial Hospital for the official opening of the new Children's Treatment Centre.

On this late summer day, you cheered along with all the volunteers who made this facility a reality — supporters from the LFVCPA, the Cerebral Palsy Association and the men of the Van Zor Grotto, who helped construct the first two phases of the new Treatment Centre. Among the crowd you saw, Dr. Kennedy, director of the Boundary Health Unit and the chairman of The Centre's planning committee; the Honourable Eric Martin, the Minister of Health; and, of course, the many women who formed the Ladies' Auxiliary of the LFVCPA and who tirelessly raised so many funds to help construct the new building.

Though the new building was small (just 24 by 60 feet), for the first time you and so many other parents no longer had to put your children on a bus to take them to G.F. Strong. This new Children's Treatment Centre would help kids with any condition that required physiotherapy or special education. Children could receive physiotherapy, occupational therapy and attend pre-school, all in a nearby location. It was no easy feat to keep the new facility running. Like any charity, the Children's Treatment Centre relied heavily on a strong volunteer network. If any group of volunteers at this time could be called "unsung heroes," it was the Ladies' Auxiliary of the LFVCPA who began their work in 1961 raising much-needed funds for the new building. In 1968, these same dedicated women opened "Cerepals Thrift Shop" in Whalley and, a little later, a second location in Newton to help keep the Treatment Centre running.



Growth - the 1970s

Back in 1950, you had driven your daughter to 9460 140th Street and found no sign of The Centre.

It wouldn't be until January 11, 1974 that the doors of the "Variety Treatment Centre for Children" opened at this bright, forested location. For three years, the LFCVPA and Tent 47 of the Variety Club had planned the new facility, raised over \$500,000 for its construction and collaborated with the community to erect the new, permanent Treatment Centre.

And the doors of the new building couldn't have opened at a better time — the pressure to find a new facility had been immense. By 1973 alone, The Centre had a caseload of 188 children and their families to serve. In one very important respect, the new Treatment Centre was better equipped to help these kids — the new building included a hydrotherapy pool, an effective treatment for children with cerebral palsy and other similar conditions. Like The Centre itself, the pool was always about more than just therapy — it was about inclusivity and empowering kids. For some, this meant becoming successful, competitive athletes.

Always thinking of nourishing the whole child, The Centre made big plans to help train children for swimming competitions, including sending them to the Special Olympics.



Growth - the 1970s *continued*

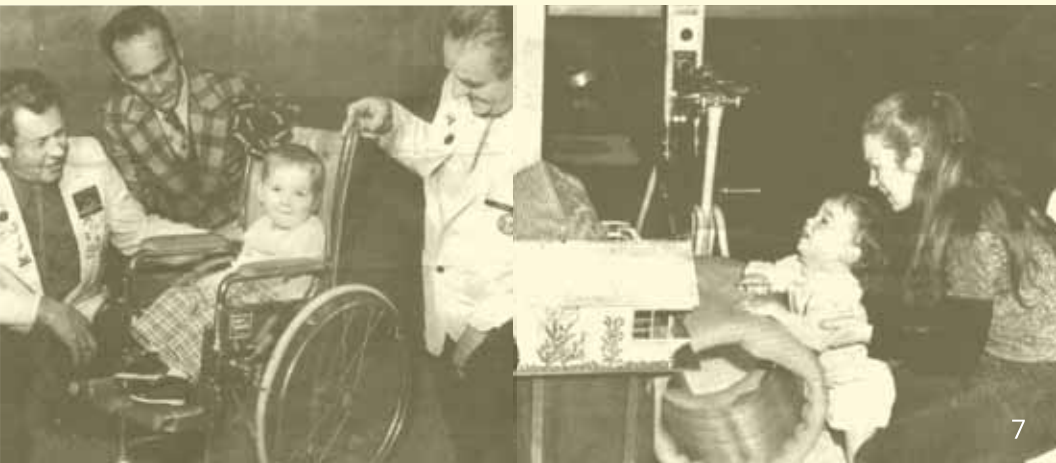
Build it and they will come — and they did!

With public awareness about The Centre's permanent new home came a flood of referrals, and by 1976 The Centre served 270 children and their families, while the newly licensed pre-school program helped 37 kids with their developmental needs.

Not only did The Centre attract more children and families seeking treatment, but it also drew physiotherapy and speech therapy students from the University of British Columbia, who now did part of their training at this new, cutting edge facility.

This new relationship with UBC represented a key turning point in The Centre's and the Cerebral Palsy Association's ground-breaking approach to early intervention in treating the disorder.

Although so little was known about cerebral palsy, The Centre continuously sought whatever information was available and then passed on this knowledge to parents, caregivers, researchers and key decision makers.



Motion - The 1980s

It was now 1985 and you and your daughter watched Rick Hansen set out on his “Man in Motion World Tour,” showcasing the potential of people with disabilities and knocking down barriers.

The profound changes that Rick Hansen introduced to the world had already taken deep root at The Centre. Athletes trained here made huge strides in the eighties, thanks not only to the parents and volunteers who emphasized sport and athletics, but also thanks to the track-and-field equipment The Centre purchased in 1981.

And how this all paid off! In 1982, twenty athletes from The Centre competed in swimming and track-and-field at the B.C. Games in Kelowna. Three of these athletes later competed in the American National Cerebral Palsy Games in Rhode Island, and all came back with medals. By the time Rick Hansen began his tour in 1985, The Centre’s track-and-field team were enjoying friendly competition and winning medals in B.C., Alberta, Oregon and New York.

And by 1988, The Centre’s athletes expanded their activities, also competing in skiing, horseback riding, cycling and bocce.



Motion - The 1980s *continued*

With 1989 came a new look for The Centre - both physically in the form of a \$1.6 million, 20,000 square-foot expansion, and graphically with a new logo.

The Centre became the “Variety Child Development Centre” to reflect the new focus on developing the full potential of children and not just treating illness. The Centre had evolved from bussing children like your daughter to G.F. Strong to helping kids live productively in the modern world — whether these amazing children wanted to grow up to be athletes, parents, doctors or research scientists.

The new, colourful logo told the full story — a child held aloft by the LFVCPA umbrella. A child in motion. And that motion was up.



Survival - the 1990s

Your daughter, now a grown woman herself, joined you to celebrate Norm Sherritt's retirement, after forty years serving on the LFVCPA's board.

You remembered back in 1953, when Norm and his wife Mabel worked tirelessly to help transport kids to G.F. Strong, and you recall when Norm became president of the LFVCPA in the late fifties.

Without the dedicated service of volunteers like Norm and Mabel , you wouldn't have been able to provide the care your daughter needed to grow into the woman (and now mother) she is today. Despite the Sherritt's legacy these were tough times for The Centre, but when you came to visit, the two of you didn't realize what was happening behind the scenes.

In the mid- to late nineties, The Centre, so long a source of compassionate service to children and families in the South Fraser, found itself fighting for its very survival.



Survival - the 1990s

By this time, about 70% of The Centre's funding came from the B.C. government and, as government philosophies and priorities shifted, The Centre found itself lobbying for essential public support.

But, slowly, The Centre, now renamed the "South Fraser Child Development Centre," emerged as the "special needs agency" for Surrey, Delta, Langley and White Rock. The Centre had survived intact.

The Centre couldn't have survived without volunteers like the Ladies Auxiliary of the LFVCPA. Since forming in 1961, the Ladies Auxiliary had raised an astonishing \$600,000 for The Centre's operations.

During these years there were difficult times - without the fundraising of these dynamic women, The Centre would've been in deep financial trouble. And there was hardly a fundraiser the Ladies Auxiliary didn't try: they sold Christmas candy wreaths, made and sold handicrafts, held strawberry teas, staffed booths at charity bazaars and, of course they opened and operated the thrift shops in Whalley, Newton, and later in Cloverdale.



We're 50! - The 2000s

2004 marked the fiftieth anniversary of The Centre. Fifty years!

You and your daughter had been there at the beginning, when what was to become The Centre started as a volunteer service transporting kids by bus to G.F. Strong.

And how could your daughter forget "Nice Mr. Pearson," the retired RCMP officer who drove the bus to and from the Cerebral Palsy Clinic? Of course, you, your daughter and now your granddaughter came for the 50th Anniversary celebration at The Centre on November 26, 2004.

What amazing growth The Centre had experienced in those fifty years. Now it had three locations in Surrey, Delta and Langley, all to provide therapeutic services to children in the South Fraser region. The Delta location also had the "Lookout Preschool" to serve children ages thirty months to six years.

The Centre, from its small beginnings as a transport service for eight kids at a time, now provided care for 1,800 children each year, with a special focus on serving the children of South Asian families with cultural sensitivity and, where possible, in their own languages.

That anniversary year, the community recognized The Centre's outstanding work.



We're 50! - the 2000s *continued*

The Surrey Chamber of Commerce honoured The Centre as the "2004 Not-for-Profit of the Year" at their Surrey Business Excellence Awards.

In 2006, this recognition continued in the form of The Centre's largest private donation to date. The Djavad Mowafaghian Foundation donated \$500,000 to provide speech language pathology services to children with special needs and an additional \$250,000 to renovate and upgrade Lookout Preschool. This generous gift dramatically reduced the one-to-two year wait list for speech therapy services for children and gave Lookout Preschool a fresh start to serve another generation of children.

As if the good news couldn't get any better, you had one more moment to celebrate The Centre's success. The Centre unveiled a fresh logo in 2005 — a yellow umbrella held above The Centre's new name: The Centre for Child Development of the Lower Mainland.

The new logo emphasized the multidisciplinary and collaborative care The Centre provided to children and their parents. Parents didn't have to travel far and wide for a range of piecemeal services for their children -

The Centre had it all under one umbrella of care.



Today - 2010 and Beyond

You, your daughter and granddaughters visited in early 2012 for a landmark moment in The Centre's history.

Sophie's Place opened its doors as the first child advocacy centre in B.C., a safe place where children who had suffered abuse in Surrey can come for compassionate, vital services provided by a multi-disciplinary team.

Staff from The Centre, a team of RCMP officers, the Ministry of Justice Victim Services and Crime Prevention Division, and the Ministry of Children and Family Development — all dedicated themselves to helping children up to the age of eighteen recover in a safe, child-centred environment.

The number of children needing services at Sophie's Place soon outgrew the initial space.

And so, from 2013 to 2014, The Centre expanded the child advocacy centre from 1200 square feet to almost 4500 square feet, but even this expanded space quickly filled.



Today - 2010 and beyond *continued*

In the 2015-2016 fiscal year alone, 201 children were interviewed at Sophie's Place and staff put 12,500 hours into investigating cases involving child abuse or where a child was potentially in need of protection.

The result of the collaboration of The Centre, the City of Surrey, two B.C. ministries and patron Sophie Tweed-Simmons, this unique and caring place for vulnerable children soon garnered awards — at the Surrey Police Officer of the Year Awards in 2016, Sophie's Place received the Police and Business Partnership Award.

And Sophie's Place Sergeant Lyndsay O'Ruairc received the Police Officer of The Year Award (Nominated by Community), and in 2017, Sergeant O'Ruairc earned the Surrey Cares Foundation's inaugural Serving with Distinction Award.

Sophie's
place
Child & Youth Advocacy Centre



Today - 2010 and beyond

It's 2018. You can't believe how quickly time has passed. It seems as if it was just yesterday, and you were driving your daughter to G.F. Strong.

Now, three generations of your family are here at The Centre's Gala Celebration for its 65th anniversary. You and your daughter were some of The Centre's founding clients.

Now your granddaughter volunteers as an ambassador for The Centre, telling her story of the care she received here, how it changed her life. Over the decades, The Centre has provided so much for your family, from therapeutic services to caring support and guidance. You know that there are so many more families and children that could benefit from these services, if The Centre had the resources to grow.

Over 26,000 of B.C.'s 64,700 children and youth with special needs live in the South Fraser Region - almost half! Today, The Centre is straining to help 3,100 children with special needs.

You know that you're in a unique position to help. You take your daughter and granddaughter over to a couple you just met at the Gala's reception table. You clear your throat.

"Excuse me," you say, "I'd like to introduce you to my daughter and my granddaughter. I was just thinking that without The Centre, they wouldn't be the strong, independent women they are today.

The Centre has done so much to help our family over the years and I'd like to return the favour, in some small way. Can you join us in helping The Centre now?"

***Heather Basham,
Director of Supported Child Development***

“Over the decades, I’ve seen so many wonderful, supportive parents come through the Centre with their kids.

One mom in particular touched my heart. I was working in the pre-school, and her children attended three days a week for just two and half hours. It was challenging work, and at the end of the session, I felt exhausted.

One day, this mom arrived to pick up her twins — both were in wheelchairs. I asked her how she managed, because I could barely get through my pre-school shift, but she had to care for her children all day every day. She said to me, “God would never give me more than I could handle. I can do this because these children are mine.”

I never forgot her words, her resiliency. It changed me.”



***Karen Edwards,
Director of Occupational Therapy***

“What makes me most proud of my work at The Centre is the impact we have on the families.

Sometimes success isn't a short-term thing, but something that emerges over the long-term. The families and the kids impact you, too. I remember when I started I had a very difficult first year — I was working with severely disabled kids and there were so many cases that touched me.

One mother I remember - her daughter, who wasn't able to move her body at all, had somehow turned over and was throwing dirt from a nearby plant onto the floor. We celebrated because her daughter achieved something new, being able to roll over and get into mischief. I learned something so important that day — don't mourn the loss, celebrate the success.”



Judy Krawchuk, Vice President, Sophie's Place

"I came to the Centre in 1999 as the director of fundraising.

Asking people for support is very difficult and there are days when you receive so many no's you just want to give up. But the kids we raise money for remind you why this work is so special.

There was a little boy, Evan. His parents said because he was born with Arthrogryposis his limbs were like a pretzel and over time, with the help of The Centre, he blossomed like a flower. Evan couldn't walk. The day I saw Evan take his first steps, I cheered. The whole team cheered. Evan could walk.

I knew right then that I could keep helping these kids no matter how great the challenge."





the-centre.org

