

Connections focuses on supporting families who are vulnerable to intervention by Child Welfare (now Children's Services). Sometimes an intervention file is opened because the family is struggling to manage but often the reason is simply that the parent has a disability.

Connections' role is to get to know the family, focus on the family's strengths, assess the child's safety, and identify the supports needed to maintain a safe and nurturing home. With these in place, we passionately advocate for the family to stay together.

What's different about Connections?

Connections' support is different by responding to the individual needs and learning style of the parent, teaching with hands-on demonstration and visual aids, including repetition and reinforcement, and by extending long-term – for as long as the parent wants Connections to be in their lives. In-Home visits are supplemented by a family group program of workshops and social events and by offering counselling to parents or family members. This approach to supporting parenting capacity is proven effective in our 24 years experience and in research from Australia, England and Canada.

As Connections' effectiveness – helping families maintain safe and nurturing homes for their children – became known, two government agencies began funding Connections for services. Persons with Developmental Disabilities and Child and Family Services signed contracts with Connections so that we could support more families to parent successfully.

In 1999, additional funding and a three-year commitment from United Way allowed Connections to hire a part-time Agency Co-ordinator with the position of Executive Director continuing as a volunteer position.

Over the past decade and a half, Connections has expanded its capacity to support more families. Growth has been steady with referrals, each year, surpassing our capacity.

From 17 to 110 families supported

From 2000 to 2005, we grew to support from 17 to 25 families. Then from 2010 through 2013, growth was faster paced, from 37 families to 91. Each year, support was enhanced. In 2000, a family received 57 hours of support, on average. The support increased to average 110 hours per year per family over the past three years. By 2015 and 2016, Connections is serving over 100 families during the year, with a caseload of approximately 90 families at any given time.

Connections has gained funding support from foundations and individuals, including FCSS and the Calgary Foundation, along with increased funding and referrals from both PDD and Children's Services. We are one of the few Children's Services agencies to receive referrals from all of the Calgary sites, including the specialized AVIRT (Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team) program.

Connections' unfailing commitment to our families

While funding is a vote of confidence in Connections' contribution to the community, we are most proud of the combined impact of attracting an impressive team and making every decision based on the needs of the individuals we support. The high level of expertise, experience and passion reflected by Connections' team is second to none. With a volunteer Board of nine, an Agency Director and the founder still involved as Program Director, Connections is positioned to ensure children are raised by the people who love them most for as long as the families need us in their lives.

In 2017, Lauren Raymore, Program Director and Founder, was recognized by the Premier's Council for the Status of Persons with Disabilities with the Gary McPherson Leadership Award. She was recognized for changing the opportunities for adults with developmental disabilities, as Connections is the first and only agency funded for a program dedicated to supporting parents with cognitive challenges to be successful parents.

"I shudder to think what would have happened without Connections in that family's life."

Children's Services caseworker.