

Strong communities build strong families

Family Resource Programs lend a hand

By Kathleen Sandusky

If it takes a village to raise a child, then Canada's children deserve the healthiest communities possible. This guiding principle is at the heart of more than 2,000 Family Resource Programs (FRPs) across Canada. FRPs are not-for-profit, community-level organizations that support families and their communities. They provide a range of services and resources from drop-in programs for children and their caregivers, to community-building events for everyone. Taking a holistic approach to their services, FRPs strive to enhance the well-being, not just of children and their families, but also of their wider communities. Families who use their services are viewed as "participants" in family support, rather than traditional "clients" in a hierarchical sense.

In 2002, Canadian FRPs faced a crisis. Increasingly, funders were demanding statistics and hard data to support their financial decisions. Traditional tracking methods, how-

East Toronto Family Resources, "If we did not have good evaluation tools, then we could be measured by other outcomes, ones forced upon us that may not be relevant to this field."

To meet this challenge, the Metro Association of Family Resource Programs (MAFRP) asked Susan Silver, an Associate Professor at the Ryerson School of Social Work, to undertake a research project that would explore new ways to measure FRP impact. Dr. Silver, in turn, invited her colleague Sue Wilson, a Professor in the School of Nutrition and the Associate Dean of the Faculty of Community Services, to join the proposed study. Dr. Wilson's extensive background in quantitative research would be essential in developing the instruments used in the project. Next, they invited Rachel Berman of the School of Early Childhood Education to join the project, given her expertise in family studies and early childhood development.

The project received more than \$626,000 funding from Human

Resources and Skills Development Canada for a period of two years. Says Dr. Wilson, "It was a very large project. We felt that in order to do it right, we needed that generous funding, because we knew that the methodology was very labour-intensive, and because we wanted to make it national, which is expensive. It just wouldn't have been as effective had we stayed in Toronto."

Beginning in 2002, the team talked to more than 200 FRP participants. They worked closely with a local steering committee and a national advisory



Researcher Susan Silver (left) with colleagues Rachel Berman (centre) and Sue Wilson (right) are investigating the impact of Family Resource Programs on the community.

Dario Ruberto



These books resulted from a national study on Family Resource Programs.

ever, were not adequate in describing the impact FRPs have on participants and their communities.

Says community partner Marg Cox, Executive Director, East York

panel that included representatives from MAFRP, their provincial and national counterparts, FRP participants and practitioners from across Canada. The resulting study, called "Participants' Voices", was completed in 2005. It achieved a new and more effective way of measuring and giving voice to the successes and challenges of Canada's FRPs. The words and experiences of program participants themselves anchored the report's data.

Through their analysis of participant stories and the emerging best-practices literature, the team was able to identify several pivotal themes in FRP services. From there, they isolated

potential questions that could be used to measure how participants view their FRP experiences. These questions are now used by Canadian FRPs.

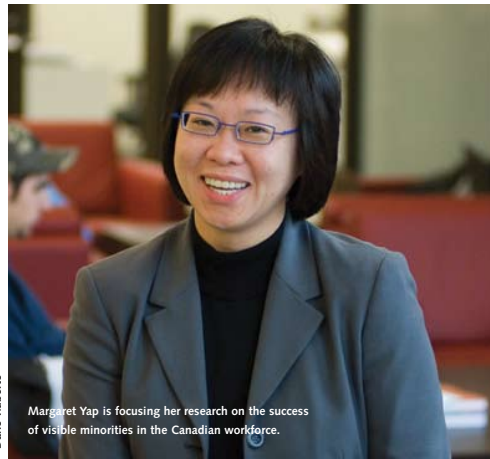
Two books were created from the study: one containing the literature review, practices and outcomes; the other, a collection of narrative vignettes. These are available at: www.ryerson.ca/voices. Says Dr. Berman, "We present the themes we identified in the literature review, such as the importance of building communities or the importance of engaging families; and we also present the participants' stories, to really give life to these themes." Both books are now required

reading for Ryerson's Certificate in Family Supports, and for courses at Ryerson's Schools of Early Childhood Education and Social Work.

As usual with the data and measurement tools may prove to FRPs, the study's implications for the wider field of community service are also important. Says Dr. Silver, "The 'it takes a village to raise a child' concept was borne out by this study. The concepts of preventing social isolation, of raising social capital, of developing authentic networks of support which we all need as parents... these were borne out. These programs are effective at producing these outcomes."

Visible minorities in the workplace

Looking for the competitive edge of diversity



Dario Ruberto

Margaret Yap is focusing her research on the success of visible minorities in the Canadian workforce.

By Marian Stinson

Margaret Yap is on a research journey that is taking her behind the scenes of corporate Canada. Her mission? To discover the barriers to career advancement faced by visible minorities.

Born in Hong Kong, Dr. Yap is an Assistant Professor in Ryerson's School of Business Management. Two years ago she published a widely cited study that strongly linked corporate financial performance to gender diversity. Now she is shifting her research skills to visible minorities, to help companies cope with the looming labour

shortage that is expected as baby boomers retire.

If current trends continue, in 10 years non-whites will represent almost one-half of Canada's available workforce in major cities across the country. Yet little research is available on the challenges they face in their professional lives. The Diversity Institute at Ryerson University's Faculty of Business, headed by Prof. Yap, in collaboration with Catalyst Canada, is embarking on a study that explores the career development and advancement experiences of visible minority professionals, managers and

executives in Canadian organizations. This study, entitled "Career Advancement in Corporate Canada: A Focus on Visible Minorities", involves an employer and employee survey, research tools which are currently underway.

There is a significant cost to the country if visible minorities cannot participate fully in the workplace.

Gordon Nixon, President and Chief Executive Officer of RBC Financial Group, believes there is a significant cost to the country if visible minorities cannot participate fully in the workplace. "Businesses have been dropping the ball when it comes to tapping the potential of visible minorities in our workforce. Diversity can be Canada's competitive advantage. So the challenge for corporate Canada—for each of us—is finding out exactly what barriers are preventing visible minorities from advancing in their chosen careers and then addressing them."

Visible minorities are those who identify as non-Caucasian in race and non-white in color. The research team will gather data based on the following Census of Canada classifications: Chinese, South Asian, Black, Arab/ West Asian, Filipino, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Japanese, Korean and Other. Although the research team recognizes there will be variations within each of these groups, these categories seem a reasonable starting point to better understand the differences between the groups, the team believes.

The research team will focus their work on the *National Post's* FP500

organizations. Employees in participating organizations, both visible minorities and non-visible minorities, will be invited to complete a web-based survey that will explore their perceptions and experiences of their workplace. The employer survey will

investigate organizational practices that may affect their employees' career development and advancement.

"Data permitting, the research team will report on the success factors employed by various visible minority groups and the barriers they face by industry sector, versus their non-visible minority counterparts," says Prof. Yap.

"We can learn from visible minorities who are successful in their career and those who are not as successful. At the same time, we can also learn from non-visible minorities who are successful and those who are not so successful. The goal is for everyone to learn from each other, and for organizations to make their employee development and advancement processes in organizations more transparent. This ultimately will benefit all employees in these organizations."

Although research is in its early stage, response has been good so far, says Prof. Yap. She hopes that many employers and employees across Canada complete the survey. Prof. Yap expects an initial release of the study's findings in spring 2007, and a full report by May or June.

Marian Stinson is a graduate of Ryerson's School of Journalism.

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