

Neighbours

CALGARY HERALD



PROVIDENCE
HEALTH • EDUCATION • THERAPY

CELEBRATING 70 YEARS
SUPPORTING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

**Meeting the needs
of the Calgary community
for 70 years**



Providence is celebrating 70 years of supporting children with disabilities this year. And they've come a long way in that time: initially opening their doors to five abandoned babies in 1943, Providence now supports over 1000 young children with disabilities each year through the operation of six preschools and a community services program.

Originally known as The Crèche, Providence was started by a group of dedicated volunteers in a home in southwest Calgary. It soon became the Providence Crèche, when the Sisters of Providence took over the operation of the orphanage. The Sisters operated Providence Crèche until 1969, when it became a non-profit society, renamed Providence Child Development Centre and operated by a non-sectarian board of directors.

"We are proud of our roots," explains Rhonda Conway, President and CEO, "and we are proud of the fact we have built on that tradition of caring and compassion by adding highly-trained therapists and certified teachers to offer a warm, caring environment where most children reach 90% of their educational and therapeutic goals."

Today, with six preschools across the city and a community services team providing assessment and therapy services through more than 130 childcare facilities and independent schools, Providence continues to grow and adapt to meet the changing needs of the Calgary community.

Research proves what Providence has known for the past 70 years – that the first five years in a child's life is a critical time in their development and that specialized intervention in these years can make dramatic improvements to the trajectory of a child's life.

As Providence looks to the future, their vision is to continue to grow and change with the city, continuing to support preschool-aged children with disabilities to reach their full potential.

Archive photos: Glenbow Museum

Providence was started in 1943 by the Sisters of Providence. Originally known as the Providence Crèche, it has evolved from its roots as a foster home for abandoned children. Keeping pace with a growing population and the changing needs of the community, today Providence offers therapeutic and educational services to children with all types of disabilities.

- 1943** – A foster home for children is founded by Mrs. Herman Stevens and a host of Calgary and area women. The Sisters of Providence then take on responsibility.
- 1950** – Providence Creche continues to care for children and to aid unwed mothers.
- 1958** – Construction of new Providence Creche at current Windsor Park location.
- 1969** – Providence Creche Society takes over management, with a non-sectarian board of directors.
- 1971** – Providence Creche officially renamed Providence Child Development Centre.
- 1986** – Unwed mother’s home closes.
- 1987** – Early Intervention Program (for children aged 19 mos. – 30 mos.) opens.
- 1995** – Outreach Program (assessment and treatment in daycare facilities) begins.
- 1999** – Group homes close. New Outreach Program commences.
- 2001** – Daycare programs close – therapeutic and educational services for preschool-aged children with disabilities continues as the main focus.
- 2003** – Falconridge school opens.
- 2003 – 2005** Woodlands school.
- 2003 – 2007** Bowness school.
- 2004** – Beddington school opens.
- 2007** – Midnapore school opens.
- 2008** – Hawkwood school opens.
- 2011** – First purpose-built school opens in McKenzie Towne.
- 2013** – Providence celebrates 70 years.

Providence gives families “breathing space”



Trina and Kevin Olson with sons Reidd and Brant.

When Reidd Olson was just two years old, his mom Trina took him to the Alberta Children’s Hospital three times a week or more to various appointments to try to determine why he was barely crawling and not speaking. With each appointment came more physio exercises, stretches and flash cards – and more appointments.

“We saw slight improvements,” says Trina, “but it was exhausting. And we were unsure if we were making good decisions for Reidd.”

It was at this point that Trina and her husband Kevin heard about Providence. “We were very concerned about what possible benefits a child of his age and ability would attain by going to preschool, but within months of attending Providence’s half-day, enriched preschool program, we began to see dramatic improvements.”

From a timid little boy afraid of new people, different places and strange noises, Reidd began to interact with classmates, and the classroom environment. He even made a new friend. Trina and Kevin realized it was not their job alone to teach Reidd how to function.

The teachers and therapists at Providence had not only the knowledge and experience they were desperately seeking – but the compassion. And, as they began to share the responsibility of Reidd’s well-being, everything changed.

“All of a sudden, I felt like I could breath again,” says Trina. “Instead of being Reidd’s therapist, nurse and teacher, we could be parents – just mom and dad.” And with access to physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech language pathologists all in one place, we knew he was getting the best care possible, giving us time to just be together as a family,” says Trina.

What makes Providence stand apart from so many, Kevin adds, is the support Providence gives not only to its students but to the families as well. In addition to Reidd’s parents, his brother, Brant, and his grandparents, Ryan and Norman, are regular visitors at Providence and feel they are part of the Providence family.

Now in his third year at Providence, Reidd is a long way from the scared, introverted and immobile child who started a few years ago. He has made close connections with his teachers and therapists, understands he is in a safe environment, and is increasingly willing to explore. Shortly past his 4th birthday, Reidd graduated from crawling to high-kneeling, then from standing to side-stepping along tables, he took his first independent steps, to the cheers - and tears - of his teachers, therapists and family.

Reidd turns five years old this November, and, like many of the children at Providence, he still does not have a specific diagnosis other than “severely globally delayed”. Although some of his symptoms look like a particular disease, the diagnosis doesn’t quite fit. His specific symptoms and challenges are unique to him alone. “And that’s OK,” says Trina. “with the expert care and support we’ve experienced here at Providence, we feel prepared, as a family, for whatever lies ahead for Reidd.”

“We can’t say enough about Providence and what they have done for us,” says Trina. “They’ve been a godsend. Although we are a special needs family, Providence has given us the freedom to simply be a family.”

Where are they now?

With 70 years of history behind them, Providence has supported thousands of children and their families over the years. But, as is often the case, it’s difficult to stay in touch.

“We would love to hear from Providence alumni – whether your association was through the orphanage, the group homes, the day care or the preschool classes; as a client, a staff, or a volunteer,” says Rhonda Conway, President.

If you would like to read some of the stories already submitted, go to www.providencechildren.com. If you would like to share a story, please send it to info@providencechildren.com.

New resources available for parents and caregivers

To help support more parents and caregivers of young children, Providence’s Community Services Team have developed a series of information sheets, entitled Pathways to Success. Some of the topics include:

- Encouraging Language Development in Young Children
- Language Fun – Singing and Playing Games
- Easy and Fun Fine Motor Activities to Try at Home
- Calming Strategies

The Pathways to Success information sheets are available on the Providence web site, www.providencechildren.com

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Dedicated staff provide skilled, caring, therapeutic and educational services



Each student at Providence has a direct, daily, intensive therapeutic and educational program delivered by a team of certified teachers, speech - language pathologists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, music therapists, psychologists and educational and therapeutic assistants. And they work right in the classroom alongside the children.

Providence is proud of this dedicated team of more than 100 skilled and caring professionals who have a passion for working with children with

disabilities. Many have worked at Providence for 10 years or more and love what they do.

“I feel like I have the best job in the world,” says Steve Reinhardt, a kindergarten teacher at the Windsor Park location, who has worked at Providence for five years. “As teachers, we are lucky to be a part of these students’ lives and help support their growth and development.

Speech-language pathologist Melanie Thomson shares Steve’s enthusiasm. “I get so much fulfillment from watching a child discover something new, then watching as that discovery opens up a whole new worlds for them,” she says. “Part of what makes the Providence model so effective is that I am able to work with the children right in the classroom, playing along side them in their own environment, as I help them work on their individual goals.”

And the model works. Most children at Providence achieve 90% of their treatment and education goals.



Unique program provides early intervention expertise to childcare facilities



Dawson at his daycare with Providence physiotherapist, Christina.

Research has shown that birth to five years is the most critical time in a child’s development. That’s why Providence’s Community Services team of therapists have developed partnerships with a wide range of community agencies to provide timely assessment and therapeutic treatment to young children who might not otherwise be identified as needing intervention until they reach school.

One such program is a unique partnership with nearly 70 childcare facilities in the city to provide assessment and therapeutic support to children who have been identified by childcare professionals as having a possible developmental delay.

“By working with caregivers to identify children who may have developmental delays or challenges, we can assess and begin treatment at a critical point in their development,” says Brenda McInnis, VP of Community Services at Providence. “Once we do an initial assessment, our occupational and physiotherapists, and our speech-language pathologists, can work not only with the child, but with the caregivers and the parents to support the child.”

Another Community Services program operates through the newly-formed Regional Collaborative Calgary & Area (RCCA). Through this program, Providence provides direct therapy service to children attending independent and charter kindergartens in the Calgary Rocky View Region. A speech-language pathologist and an occupational therapist are available to provide assessment and direct therapy to those children identified as requiring assistance by the teaching staff at each kindergarten.

Providence supports children with all types of disabilities

Providence supports children from as young as 19 months up to six years of age, and their families. The children may face a wide variety of challenges, from speech and language delays, Autism Spectrum disorders, Down Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum disorders, development and cognitive delays, sensory disabilities, deafness and hearing loss, or any one of about 4,000 genetic disorders.

School locations

**Windsor Park
Beddington
Falconridge
Hawkwood
Midnapore
McKenzie Towne**

Programs

- **Early Intervention Program**(Ages 1.7-2.6yrs)
- **Pre-school Special Education Program** (Ages 2.6-4yrs)
- **Pre-school Integrated Program** (Ages 2.6-4)
- **Junior Kindergarten Special Education Program** (Ages 4-5)
- **Junior Kindergarten Integrated Program** (Ages 4-5)
- **Kindergarten Special Education Program** (Ages 5-6)
- **Kindergarten Integrated Program** (Ages 5-6)
- **Outreach Program for Child Care Agencies**
- **Therapy support for Independent Early Childhood Services Providers** (Kindergarten)

Crescent Point is a proud sponsor of Providence



Congratulations on your 70th anniversary

Expanding to accommodate Calgary growth

As Calgary's population grew over the last decade, and families with young children were living in new communities further and further from the city's core, it became evident that one school location was no longer meeting the needs of the Calgary community.

In 2004 Providence opened a school in Beddington in the NE, then in Falconridge, Midnapore and Hawkwood in the following years. With each new school opening, enrolment was immediately full. In 2011 Providence opened its first purpose-built school in McKenzie Towne, with large windows, wide hallways and heated floors in each classroom. A specialized, accessible playground was also installed, thanks to support from Calgary Rotary South, featuring a wheelchair accessible aero-glider rocker along with ramps, stairs and slides built to accommodate varying levels of ability/mobility.

"What a unique opportunity it was to be able to design a space to meet the specific needs of our children," says Rhonda Conway, President. "We focused on creating an environment that removed any barriers to movement and learning, and maximized opportunities for our students to learn and grow."

Calgary's population of more than 1.2 million is now spread over 825 square kilometers. The challenge for Providence is to continue to provide convenient locations in all parts of the city to avoid long bus rides for their young students.

"There are an estimated 80,000 preschool-aged children in Calgary today," explains Rhonda Conway, Providence president. "If one in ten of those children have some form of disability, we are still only reaching a fraction of the children who could use our help."

So much more than a playground

At Providence, playing is serious business.



the next 15 minutes. It may be called recess, but there is much more going on than appears at first glance.

"There are many natural teaching moments that occur in the playground," explains Becky Sorensen, a speech-language pathologist with Providence. "The playground provides opportunities to work on the child's therapy goals in different situations and in new ways, which helps transfer their skills into different environments away from school."

For example, the swing is a huge motivator for communication, says Becky. First, a child has to let her know he/she would like to swing: making a request is often a big goal for many children. They usually need to request help to get in the swing. "I wait for non-verbal children to request a push on the swing. Any sound, facial, expression, or gesture can be used to indicate that they want you to push them."

In all, a non-verbal child may have to initiate interactions of some sort 10-15 times during 10 minutes of swinging. Finding activities that are this motivating for children in the classroom can be difficult. Other children may use the swing to learn about taking turns with friends, sharing, and waiting.

"We can also work on transitions - moving from one activity to another, Becky adds. "Other children may be working on descriptive words such as big push, little push, fast, slow, high, low. One activity can be used in many different ways based on the child's needs and abilities.

The next time you're in a playground, take a moment to observe all the learning that is going on.

The pre-kindergarten class at Providence McKenzie Towne School is taking their turn in the specialized playground for



Community support ensures Providence students have the opportunity to reach their potential.

Providence is thankful to Alberta Education for its financial assistance in delivering educational services to its students. But it's the generous support of individuals, corporations and foundations that makes Providence's programs stand apart and enables them to provide these exceptional programs free of charge.

"We couldn't offer the high level of programs and services without support from the community," says Mark Josefchuk, Providence, board chair.

Community support helps Providence:

- Operate the Early Intervention Program, a half-day school program for children aged 19 months to 2 years who have been diagnosed with a (severe) developmental delay. This program receives no government funding.
- Offset the increasing costs of bussing their young students to and from school. Providence does not charge families for bussing, and government funding covers approximately 65% of their \$2 million transportation costs.
- Operate the Nutrition Program, providing nutritious snacks made in their own industrial kitchen, to 500 students every day.
- Provide therapeutic supplies and equipment in each of their 25 classrooms, as well as to the mobile Community Services team.
- Provide school locations in all parts of the city to increase accessibility and reduce lengthy travel times for young students.

How you can help

Make a donation On-line at
www.providencechildren.com ,
By Mail at 5232 - 4th Street SW Calgary, Alberta T2V 0Z4
Call (403) 255-5577.

Support an event
Ticket and sponsorship information is available for Providence's Dine & Deals Gala and the Wildcatters' Golf Tournament.
Contact Diane at (403) 255-5577 or
ddehekker@providencechildren.com

Preschool registration information

Providence will be accepting applications for the 2014-2015 school year beginning January 2014, including integrated programs.
Contact Debra Busic at 403.255-5577 for more information.

Financial information:

Providence financial statements are available on the web site at
www.providencechildren.com.

Contact info: www.providencechildren.com
(403)255-5577
info@providencechildren.com



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