



## THE POWER OF STORYPARK

*Children, families, and educators are reaping the benefits of a new communications tool in our child care centres.*

With the goal of increasing engagement with our educators and families, Family Day began implementing a new communications tool in our child care centres in 2017.

Called Storypark, the tool is an innovative, Internet-based platform that is used to document children's learning experiences. It is being gradually rolled out across the agency, as we evaluate it along the way.

"We wanted to raise the profile of our educators and make learning more visible," says Lisa Shortall, Manager of Training at Family Day. "We chose Storypark to put into our centres because we wanted better communication among children, families and educators."

It started with a pilot project at five test sites (Hickory Wood, Philip Pockock, Thornhill, Divine Infant and Markville) in 2017. We ran Storypark in those centres for a year before bringing it to another five sites in 2018. We aim to have a total of 30 sites live by 2020.

Briefly, this is how things work: Family Day educators create online "profiles" for children and use camera-enabled tablets to digitally capture moments through photos and videos. Educators can then write brief stories to expand the photos/videos and attach "learning tags" (Key Development Indicators) that relate to HighScope curriculum learning outcomes. These stories are then shared with parents via a secure, web-based



portal. Parents can view the stories on their mobile devices or computers, respond with comments, and choose to share them with other family members or friends.

"Storypark works by helping our educators and families work together to record, share and extend children's learning," says Shortall.

### **BENEFITS TO PARENTS**

The benefits have been noteworthy. Storypark has enabled parents to get more involved in their children's learning, and support their understanding of Family Day's curriculum.

"Because parents are not with us each day, it's a great way for them to see how their children are doing," says

Mary Gatti, Supervisor of Markville Child Care Centre "It's like a Facebook or Instagram feed for children, but it's extremely secure." Parents are in full control of their child's digital footprint and can decide who has access to their child's information.

Dionne Andrews, Supervisor of St. Herbert Child Care Centre, says she has found parents to be really receptive of Storypark.

"It shows the parents how children are bonding, learning to be self-sufficient, and how they are getting along with their educators," says Andrews. "For instance, parents can see that children are not just playing all day — they are learning. For instance, it might look like they are just cutting up spaghetti,

but with Storypark we can show them how the children are actually honing their fine motor skills.”

To this end, Andrews recalls a particular activity where Storypark helped parents see learning in progress. Educators at her centre set up an apparatus for toddlers that had a long plumbing tube attached to it. Then children tried to put a variety of objects through the tube to see what could go through.

“By creating a series of photos, parents were able to see learning happen,” says Andrews. “It showed parents what the children were doing, provided explanations, and gave intention behind the activity — they could see their children learning cause and effect.”

### EDUCATORS UP AND RUNNING

Storypark also has a variety of benefits for our educators. Linda Saad, Program Consultant at Family Day, says it helps to “raise the profile of the educators as pedagogical leaders, and it helps them better interact with other staff and with parents.”

Gatti agrees. She says Storypark helps educators connect better with the HighScope curriculum and with “How Does Learning Happen? Ontario’s Pedagogy for the Early Years,” a professional learning resource for educators in child and family programs. “It’s one thing to read about this, but quite another to live it and watch it progress in your centres.”

Gatti says it is also helping to build stronger educator-family relationships. She recalls a time when a new toddler started at her centre and cried a lot during pick-up and drop-off times during the first few weeks.

“We started taking photos, showed them to the child, and explained that we were going to send them to her mom. The child started to feel better and her mom was happy to see the photos. It showed the mom that even though her child was crying when she dropped her off, she was actually okay during the day. It really gave her peace of mind.”

### CHILDREN GAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Storypark benefits children as well by offering enhanced learning opportunities, providing feedback and reinforcement from families, and stimulating language and ideas.

“Storypark adds value to children’s learning and what they are doing in child care,” says Saad. “They can see that what they are doing is important, and that their educators are writing stories about it.”

Saad says it also bridges the gap between child care and home. Because families can see what their children enjoy doing each day, they can build upon those experiences and help with continuity for the child between centre and home.

It’s been a win-win-win for parents, educators, and children (see sidebar below for Storypark survey results). Says Shortall: “It really raises awareness and gives everyone a deeper understanding of our HighScope curriculum.”

And Storypark doesn’t have to end when a child leaves Family Day. Parents are able to keep their child’s online profile active as long as they like to relive important moments, milestones, and activities throughout the years.

## SURVEY RESULTS

To measure Storypark’s effectiveness, Family Day conducted an evaluation in 2018 of Family Day educators and parents.

Educators were positive, noting that they were able to easily document the learning experiences of the children in their care and share them with the parents.

At the same time, parents were happy with Storypark, and felt engaged (only one per cent opted out of allowing their child to be a part of Storypark). Parents also reported being more aware of their children’s learning experiences while at child care. Here are a few of the comments they shared:

*“Thank you educators for sharing such moments about [our child], which give us such immense happiness and pride.”*

*“This is such a wonderful development. My child has become more confident and comfortable with her surroundings.”*

*“It’s a joy to see [our son’s] involvement, initiation and engagement with other children. Thank you for catching and sharing these moments.”*

Based on the evaluation, it was noted that Family Day is already meeting many of the intended outcomes for Storypark. Feedback from the survey will be applied as we complete the project rollout across the agency.



Message from  
Joan Arruda, CEO

## THE POWER OF PLAY



In January, the CBC's *The Nature of Things* with David Suzuki broadcast an excellent program called 'The Power of Play' that explored the importance of play. The show

highlighted the role of play across species in the animal kingdom, and shared the reasons play is critical for healthy development.

The program pointed out that **when children have the opportunity to participate in unstructured, self-directed play, they are able to showcase their creativity, develop their imaginations, and build confidence and capacity to assess appropriate risk.**

It took a good look at society's view of children and risky play, noting that, in general, we have become very concerned about risk. We are apprehensive about children taking risks during play that could result even in the most minor of scrapes or bruises. And we have a lot

of worry about safety in our communities, which leads many of us to deny our children the freedom to explore their neighbourhoods the way children did even 25 years ago.

As noted on the CBC website: "Risky play in early childhood can help develop a child's self-confidence, resilience, executive functioning abilities and even risk-management skills." And Vancouver-based researcher Mariana Brussoni's work in injury prevention research shows that "engaging in risky play can actually reduce the risk of injury."

I encourage everyone to watch 'The Power of Play' and consider ways to allow children to explore and experience age-appropriate risk. This risk will help to develop children's critical thinking related to challenges and teach them how best to manage appropriate risk within a play environment.

## DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY: WHAT'S NEXT?

In December 2018, all users of Family Day programs were invited to complete an online survey called 'It's All About You.' The survey was anonymous and voluntary, and we would like to thank everyone who took part.

Family Day designed the survey to help learn more about who uses our programs and services. We have an inclusion and diversity policy, so collecting this information is very important to us. As an agency, we are committed to ensuring all of our programs and services are inclusive, barrier-free, and are delivered in a safe, responsive and welcoming environment.

To uphold that commitment, we need a "big-picture" understanding of the children and families who use our programs. The 'It's All About You' survey will help us work towards improving our programs, materials and curriculum. And it will help us learn who is not able to access our programs and explore any barriers they face.

We are delighted so many people participated in the survey, and we are proud of the rich diversity of families we serve across the GTA. We are now analyzing the survey responses, putting together a full report, and making recommendations on how we can build on our strengths and goals. We will share key points of this report in future *FOCUS* newsletters.



# UNITED WAY CAMPAIGN A SUCCESS

Take a collective bow! Family Day's 2018 United Way Campaign brought in \$24,595 for the charity. Activities raising funds included the Family Day employee pledge campaign, child care centre dance-a-thons, and the annual CN Tower climb. We would like to thank everyone who so generously participated in the campaign.



**United Way**  
Toronto & York Region



**FAMILY  
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## GET INTO THE BOWLING FRAME OF MIND

Start practicing your fancy footwork. The eighth annual Bowling for Family Day will be held on Saturday, April 13. Our fundraising goal this year is \$35,000, so we hope everyone — staff, families, suppliers, and partners — will get on board to make this our best event ever. To sign up your team or donate funds, please visit [familydaycare.com/bowl](http://familydaycare.com/bowl)

## ARE YOU READY FOR THE SUMMER?

It's grey out there now, but summer is just around the corner (really). With sunshine in mind, registration opens February 25 for Family Day's summer camp programs. To register your child for a great summer at one of our school-age or extended-day camp programs, visit [www.familydaycare.com](http://www.familydaycare.com). Spots are available on a first-come, first-served basis, so register early!



## JOIN OUR FACEBOOK FAMILY

Family Day's Facebook community is now 1,000+ people strong. Our page acts as a "meeting place" for parents and staff, and is a great spot to find out what's going on in our child care programs and EarlyON Child and Family Centres. Come join the conversation at:

[facebook.com/FamilyDayCareServices](https://facebook.com/FamilyDayCareServices)



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### Our Programs

- Licensed Home Child Care
- Child Care Centres
- School Age Programs
- Resource Programs
- EarlyON Child and Family Centres
- Homework Plus

### FOCUS Newsletter

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**United Way**  
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*For countless families, Family Day is the only way!*