

**What Parents Feel They Need:  
Parents' Experiences with Parent Support Services in Prince George**

by

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### **Abstract**

Using hermeneutic phenomenology, this study explores parents' lived experiences with parent support services in Prince George. Parents participated in face to face interviews where they were asked to share their experiences regarding the strengths, weaknesses, barriers to participation, inclusion of culture, program delivery and recommendations for future improvements to parent support services. While parents expressed gratitude for parent support services, results suggested: the need for more flexibility within program implementation; the importance of peer support; and that parental involvement in parent support service development, implementation and evaluation is crucial to successful outcomes. Data representing the parent voice provided rich and innovative ideas that serve to advance research associated with the lived experiences of parents accessing parent support services, while also encouraging change in the development, implementation, and evaluation of parent support services.

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### **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all of the parents out there. Parenting is a never ending job, with no pay, and often little appreciation, but for the most part it is one of the most rewarding things a person can do in their life. Each of you deserves as much support as possible.

To my own parents, I want you to know how much I love you and how much I appreciate the love, guidance and support you continue to provide me as I continue to grow.

## **Chapter One: Setting the Stage**

### **Research Purpose and Goals**

The purpose of this thesis is to describe parent participants' experiences with parent support services in Prince George. Parent participants were provided the opportunity to discuss what they believe are the strengths and weaknesses of parent support services; delivery of parent support services; the roles of facilitators and support people; culture and parent support services; and future recommendations for parent support services in Prince George. The thesis findings are descriptive in nature and utilize qualitative data collected through face to face, semi-structured interviews, highlighting the personal words and lived experiences of parents in Prince George.

A goal of this thesis research is to inform children and family service delivery agents and policy makers about the needs of parents, families and children. A secondary goal is the use of findings to further educate parent support service providers to more effectively serve parents. Finally, this research will support parents in continuing their parenting journey in a strong and meaningful way with the support and services they would find beneficial.

### **My Personal Standpoint**

For the past eight years, I have worked in a variety of family settings in various capacities. I have been a childcare provider, provided family support services, counselled families in an Aboriginal agency, and worked with families whose members have had disabilities. In each of these roles I have witnessed parents struggle with accessing resources and support services, which often results in involvement with the Ministry of Children and

Family Development (MCFD) and in some cases leads to child protection concerns. Chislett and Kennett (2006) state,

Some of the main risk factors associated with child abuse and neglect are: lack of parenting knowledge and skills, living in poverty, isolation and severe family dysfunction (e.g., substance abuse in the home, parental mental illness or criminality, hostile parenting style). As well, very difficult child temperament, insecure child attachments, maternal depression, adolescent parenting, punitive parenting and low parental self-efficacy contribute to poor child outcomes (p. 473-474).

As a child care provider, advocate and family support person, I have been profoundly affected by the stories of parents who struggle with finding and maintaining support services to assist them in caring for their children. Although my primary role as a child care provider was to work from the best interests of the child, I realized that working for the best interests of the family is equally as important. I feel deep empathy for these parents and their children. The role of a child care provider immerses one in the interactions of families, allowing the child care provider to bear witness to some of the most intimate and vulnerable family moments. My experience as a child care provider has helped me to understand the complexities of trying to meet the needs of a diverse population of children and families, while working within the sometimes limiting policies and procedures of an organization and larger bureaucratic systems. I am inspired by the dedication of fellow child care providers, who do the best job they can educating and assisting families in raising children ages two to six, while also providing support to the families.

This research contributes to an improved societal and professional understanding of the realities and experiences of vulnerable parents. It is my hope that a better understanding of the struggles faced by parents will subsequently lead to improved services for parents and children. This research will provide information around provision of parenting services and resources and will assist professionals in better understanding the needs of parents.

With my newly established structural and feminist mindset I was interested in learning what parent participants had to say about their experiences with parent support services. Asking critical questions as a student researcher has shed new light on my previous opinions of parent's experiences when accessing parent support services. This research has allowed me to explore parent support services through a professional lens as well as through the perspective of parents.

### **The Role of Reflexivity**

Given my personal and professional history of working with children and families, the role of reflexivity in my thesis research was a prominent one. Patton (2002) suggests reflexivity "reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic and ideological origins of one's own perspective and voice" (p. 65). According to Neuman and Kreuger (2003), "feminist social work researchers are not objective or detached; they interact and collaborate with the people they study" (p. 90-91). My experience as a childcare provider will undoubtedly influence my perspective and perceptions; which can be useful, as Charmaz (2006) explains, "Sensitizing concepts and disciplinary perspectives provide a place to start, not to end" (p. 17). On a personal level, my Caucasian privilege, university education, experience as a woman, as a member of a family

that lived in poverty and suffered from a history of substance misuse issues, influenced my interpretation of the stories of the parents I interviewed. In an attempt to maintain some degree of transparency in the research process, I will engage in an ongoing reflexive process, remaining cognizant of my own motives for conducting this research.

### **Theoretical Perspective: Structural Social Work and Feminist Influences**

In preparation for writing this thesis I spent hours reading, reflecting and discussing various worldviews, paradigms and theoretical perspectives trying to figure out which suited me academically and professionally. Numerous debates exist in the literature on the merits of each perspective, creating an intellectual challenge. Conceptualizing and effectively articulating my own personal viewpoint and how I would approach this research would not be simple. It is with much thought and reflection that I decided to approach my research journey through a structural social work and feminist lens.

Structural social work theory emphasizes the need for critical analysis of oppressive social order and the structures that continue to prevent people from meeting their basic needs (Mullaly, 2002). In my opinion, some parent support services fall under this category to a certain extent, and subsequently exacerbate the difficulties faced by parents. The specific practice issues include: the lack of cultural competency possessed by agencies and staff; restrictive timeframes for service provision; the lack of training service providers receive to further their skill sets; and the lack of collaboration between MCFD and parent services in providing preventative services rather than crisis focused services.

Heinonen and Spearman (2006) state, “a feminist approach is not only for women, but also for all people in society” (p. 286). While traditionally the research on parenting tends to focus on mothers, I will include a male perspective as well. As a researcher it was extremely important to me to include those in a caregiving role for a child, whether that person is a mother, father, grandparent, extended family member, adoptive parent, or foster parent. Gerard Bellefeuille (2009) discusses how feminists actively engage in dismantling all oppressive relationships. As a social worker facilitating research, I would like to practice in a way that dismantles all oppressive relationships. Social structures continue to oppress parents based on gender, finances, and ethnicity, and this needs to change.

As a researcher new to feminist ideals, I found Dominelli (2002) an excellent guide to the world of feminist practice. Dominelli identifies a number of principles of feminist practice including: the recognition of women’s diversity; value of women’s strength; addressing both the social and individual causes of women’s problems; giving women space to voice their own needs and solutions; acknowledging that the ‘personal is political’ and all levels of practice interweave; redefining private problems as public issues. Dominelli then goes on to discuss a number of principles of practice for working with men. These principles include: understanding that men are privileged over women because of social organization; diversity exists among men; ensuring that men take responsibility for oppressing others; making a connection between men who oppress women by violent crime and those who do not challenge oppressive social relations; and acknowledging the connection between structural constraints and personal behaviour and lack of emotional growth.

Feminism incorporates the following: validation, consciousness-raising, transformative action and affirmation. Heinonen and Spearman (2006) discuss how people need validation of their experiences to feel that they have been believed and heard. Consciousness-raising is a great tool to use when working with oppressed people as it acknowledges that the personal is political and that individual failings or problems have social causes and connections. I think it is important to encourage the people I work with to take action against their identified oppression. Affirmation is similar to a strength-based approach as it recognizes strength and resilience.

Grounded in structural social work theory with strong feminist influences, this thesis explores and describe parent participants lived experiences with parent support services in Prince George. This research will focus on the experiences of parents who have utilized parent support services, and the changes they feel need to be made to the services in order to provide them with the support they need.

### **Significance of the Issue**

The primary need for this study is to accurately capture parent support service needs to assist parents with successful parenting. In turn, outcomes of this research may contribute to strategies aimed at addressing the need for further parenting supports as an approach to reducing the number of children taken into government care. Improved and/or additional support services meeting the needs of parents are desperately needed to maintain the health and safety of children and families.

The main objectives of this research were as follows:

1. To ask parents about their experiences with parent support services in Prince George.
2. To gain a rich and deep understanding of the contextual realities of the lives of these parents and their children who are living in Prince George.
3. To ask these parents to make recommendations from the perspective of their lived experience of being involved with these services.

### **Discussion of Terms**

For the purpose of this thesis research, the term parent will be defined as anyone who is in a caregiver role of a child (Armstrong, Birnie-Lefcovitch, & Ungar, 2005). I have chosen this definition as nuclear families are rare these days and I thought it important to include the many other people involved in raising a child. As most of my experience is with children ages two to five years old, I have chosen parent participants with children in this age group for my research. The term “parenting” is simply referred to as the raising of children to adulthood (Turner, 2005).

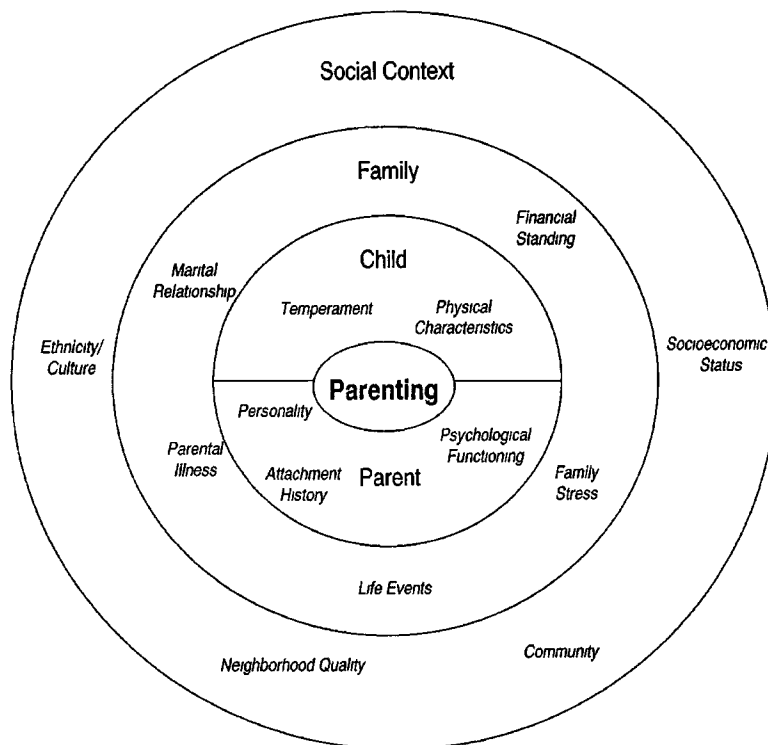
Parent support services will include any service attended by a parent, parent and child or family that assists in parenting skills, child development, relationship building, and other life events. Furthermore, parent support services will include any service that supports a parent mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

The term “culture” is challenging to define. For the purpose of this research I have chosen to adopt Turner’s definition of culture which suggests culture refers to patterns of customs, values, behaviours, commonalities of personalities, and traditions found in an identifiable group of persons.

Throughout my research I incorporate the term “family”. I have chosen Turner’s definition of family which is: “forms of family that exist today include the traditional nuclear family (i.e., mother, father, and their children) and such alternate models as extended, single-parent, childless, blended, and same-sex headed families, as well as families of choice” (p. 136).

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

There are many factors associated with parenting that go beyond the initial idea of having, and raising a child. Parenting is accompanied by issues surrounding children, family and social context as represented in the diagram by Kotchick and Forehand (2001) seen below. While the literature thoroughly addresses attachment theory, child temperament, child personality, child development, marital relationships, financial standing, family stress and parenting programs, it is limited in discussion regarding parental illness, neighbourhood quality, community, socioeconomic status, ethnicity and culture, and life events.



The Ecology of Parenting (Kotchick & Forehand, 2001)

Parenting style is presented as an ongoing issue for parents, especially as parenting styles may relate to the way parents were parented. Some of the demographic characteristics of parenting are discussed in this literature review, focusing primarily on the effects of poverty, parental mental health status, marital status, and education. The literature review discusses limitations of parenting programs as well as the need for more prevention-focused parenting programs. Highlighted at the end of the literature review are some of the parenting programs offered in the community of Prince George.

### **What is Parenting?**

Historically, raising a child could be equated with the breaking in of young horses or hunting dogs (Anderson, 1988). Today parents are viewed as playing a significant role in their children's lives, particularly in the early stages (Miller & Sambell, 2003; Tesson, 1988). Miller and Sambell(2003) state, "The significance of a parent in children's lives, particularly in the early stages, has been so emphasized" (p. 32). By many, parenting is considered largely in terms of facilitating a child's development (Woodcock, 2003). Rutter (as cited by Woodcock, 2003), states, " 'Parenting' has therefore become to be understood as a 'task', with those dimensions of sensitivity to the child's needs, social communication and emotional expressiveness, and disciplinary control, operating as aspects of that task" (p. 90).

Parenting tasks may include, but are not limited to, providing a safe environment, being responsive and sensitive, demonstrating disciplinary control, responding to distress, quality and affective tone of communication, and to produce adaptations that develop the child's competencies (Bloomfield et al., 2004; Woodcock, 2003). Further challenges of parenting include: expectations and pressures of others; play, time management, and

establishing routines; being prepared to parent; consistent parenting; and cultural expectations (Bloomfield et al., 2004). Studies show that parents play an important role in their child's development by providing positive guidance and modelling (Karreman et al., 2008).

Woodcock (2003) discusses that parenting is not a quality that someone does or does not possess, but a relationship that responds to fluctuations in other relationships. The characteristics of a parent are largely influenced by the quality of care the parent themselves received as a child. Woodcock refers to Maccoby and Martin (1983) who discuss parenting as a two-way process of interaction, which is influenced by both the child and the parent.

### **Parenting Styles**

The literature describes several different types of parenting, including permissive parenting, harsh or authoritarian parenting, and authoritative parenting. DeVito and Hopkins (2001) state, "Permissive parenting practices include under involvement, inconsistent discipline, use of indirect commands, attempts to argue or coax children, and arbitrary responses to misbehaviour" (p. 217). Studies have shown that this type of parenting is ineffective.

Authoritarian parenting can be described as parenting involving over control, unfair or harsh discipline, and inflexible enforcement of rules (Baydar, Reid & Webster-Stratton, 2003; De Vito & Hopkins, 2001; Porter et al., 2005; Xu et al., 2005). People practicing an authoritarian parenting style are more likely to use power-assertive behaviour, including yelling and grabbing, with their children (DeVito & Hopkins, 2001). The literature discusses

how authoritarian parenting can create children who are more aggressive, anti-social, and more likely to end up in prison or with serious emotional problems (Cohen, 2001).

According to DeVito and Hopkins (2001) authoritative parenting, “is characterized by a high degree of warmth, firm and fair control, and the use of explanations and reasoning...” (p. 218). Playful parenting falls under the category of authoritative parenting. Cohen (2001) suggests “play is one of the best ways to engage with children, pulling them out of emotional shutdown or misbehaviour, to a place of connection and confidence” (p. 16). Overall children who are more adaptable, sociable, and soothable have often experienced warm and responsive parenting whereas difficult children are more likely to have experienced less responsive parenting (Fish et al., 2007; Haskett & Willoughby, 2006; Hunt, 2001; Porter et al., 2005).

Children thrive on consistency and structure. According to Chislett and Kennett (2007), “consistent parenting [is] associated with a reduced likelihood of hyperactivity, conduct disorder and relationship problems” (p. 474). However, aggression in young children can be associated with punitive parental attitudes (Barlow et al., 2005). By scaffolding a young child’s activities and paying close attention to his or her needs parents are more inclined to see their children exhibit positive behaviour (Gardner et al., 2007).

In contrast, aggressive parenting techniques are associated with developmental problems in children. Chislett and Kennett (2007) state, “hostile parenting [is] associated with increased emotional problems and aggressive behaviour” (p. 474). Many studies have associated the parent-child relationship with the success of children in future years.

According to Sidebotham (2001),

A child's personality, interests and activities are neither attributes of an isolated individual nor imposed by the environment, but are firmly located in the interactions between a child and the network or system of social relationships to which each child belongs. Primarily, these relationships are focused in the immediate family environment, or microsystem, into which the parents bring their own background development (p. 470).

DeVito and Hopkins (2001) state, "Parent-child attachment is one such factor that has received increasing attention as a potential risk factor for disruptive behaviour in young children" (p. 216).

### **Demographic Characteristics and Parenting**

Demographic variables such as income, family structure, and education all effect parenting (Xu, Farver, Zhang, Zeng, Yu, & Cai, 2005). Parenting in poverty is associated with more challenges, including, higher frequency of negative events in life, a host of negative mental health factors, and social isolation (Anthony et al, 2005; Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; Fish et al., 2007; Russell et al., 2008). Ceballo and McLoyd (2002) also suggest that persistent poverty is more detrimental to a child's development than short episodes of poverty. Financial loss has been associated with fathers' increased irritability, depression, and explosive behaviour often leading to harsher discipline practices (Kotchick & Forehand, 2002). Mothers living in poverty are less likely to communicate effectively with their children, or to show verbal or physical affection toward their children (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002; Kotchick & Forehand, 2002).

According to Pears and Moses (2003), “having a higher income and two parents present in the home may give parents more time to spend with their children and thus more opportunities to talk with them about feelings and other matters relevant to perspective taking” (p. 2). The literature also suggests that married parents share equal involvement across parenting spheres in the areas of, discipline, emotional support, playing with children, and monitoring children’s activities and friends (Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) argue, “Parents of lower socioeconomic status are typically less educated and lack the structural resources to provide more stimulating environments for their children...” (p. 263).

Sidebotham (2001) suggests four broad areas of stress for parents: stresses arising from within the family or from parent-child interaction; time pressures; financial pressures; and stresses arising out of the parents’ own perceptions of what is culturally expected of them. Family stresses include: parents’ worries about their children’s health; worries about the children’s future; children’s behaviour; stresses generated by family and household activities; isolation felt by single and unsupported parents; and safety (Sidebotham, 2001; Xu et al., 2005). Time pressures include: academic pressures and pressure to achieve; social pressures and expectations; and stress generated by the conflict between work and home (Sidebotham, 2001). Financial stresses include financial pressures and consumer pressures (Sidebotham, 2001). Areas of cultural expectations and guilt include expectations of parents to provide quality time with children (Sidebotham, 2001).

Parents with mental health issues exhibit poorer parenting than parents without these risk factors (Baydar, Reid & Webster-Stratton, 2003). Parents living with depression tend to

be more critical and inconsistent, less emotionally available, and show heightened sensitivity to their children's negative or distressed behaviour (Woodcock, 2003). Situational factors, such as persistent poverty, contribute to failing mental health and increased feelings of depression, which further impede parenting (Russell et al., 2008). Russell et al. (2008) states, "Mental health services for poor parents are also in need for expansion, as parent indicated that the psychological effect of their daily struggle resulted in fatigue and depressed affect, which negatively impacted their interactions with their children" (p. 95).

Social supports play a huge role in the lives of parents. Social supports can be made up of extended family, a spouse, friends, and community (Woodcock, 2003; Xu et al., 2005). Social support can be instrumental, emotional, informational, tangible aid, positive social interaction, affection and esteem (Armstrong et al., 2005). According to Ceballo and McLoyd (2002), parents who receive social support are more nurturing, while parents who receive instrumental support are less likely to use punishment. It is suggested that parents with social supports have more resources for coping with stress associated with parenting, which allows them to practice a more sensitive parenting style (Ceballo & McLoyd, 2002). Xu et al., 2005).

### **Culture and Parenting**

Cultural beliefs and values have an impact on parenting strategies and techniques (Xu et al., 2005; Sorkhabi, 2005). According to Kotchick and Forehand (2002), "cultural beliefs and heritage, as well as social factors associated with ethnicity in this country, have important effects on parenting behaviour" (p. 259). Differing social values may result in

different methods of parenting strategies which will help children conform to cultural expectations (Porter et al., 2005). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) state, “parenting practices are determined by (1) the availability of resources in the environment that facilitate the development of culturally valued competencies and (2) folk theories of childrearing that dictate the customary parental practices believed to be successful in fostering culturally valued child behaviour” (p. 259). Parenting styles may differ between Mother and Father, and parental expectations for boys and girls may also differ (Sorkhabi, 2005).

Trustworthiness is important to some ethnic groups in regards to recruitment and retention of parents in parenting programs (Moran & Ghate, 2005). It would be useful for parenting programs to identify the diverse forms of parenting within cultures at the beginning of the program or during intake (Sorkhabi, 2005).

### **The Effects of Parenting on Child Development**

The quality of parenting a child receives plays a significant role throughout the child’s development (Armstrong et al., 2005; Barlow et al, 2005; Bloomfield et al., 2004).

According to Kotchick and Forehand (2002), “Child and family researchers have long recognized parenting as making an important contribution to child development” (p. 255).

An authoritative parenting style reflects positively on a child’s development, whereas a harsh or authoritarian parenting style may reflect negatively on a child’s development. Kotchick and Forehand (2002) state,

...parenting practices that include the provision of positive reinforcement, open displays of warmth and affection, involvement in and active monitoring of children’s activities, and consistent but not overly harsh disciplinary strategies tend to relate to

various measures of adaptive child psychosocial adjustment, including academic competence, high self-esteem, positive peer relations, and fewer child behaviour problems. ... Parenting that lacks either parental control, in the form of monitoring or consistency in discipline, or parental warmth is associated with greater child behaviour problems at various developmental stages (p. 255-256).

Research has shown that parenting strategies can effect a child's cognitive development. Pears and Moses (2001) state, "power assertive techniques (including physical punishment, yelling, and direct commands) are negatively associated with cognitive outcomes- such as academic achievement, language, and IQ" (p. 3).

The literature shows that children with secure attachment to a parent easily express emotion. Research suggests children with two supportive parents are more likely to score highly on cognitive assessments; however, having one supportive parent is better than two unsupportive parents (Ryan et al., 2006). Supportive parents can be described as possessing superior interpersonal skills and emotional well-being, which allows them the enjoyment of higher quality relationships, both parental and other (Ryan et al., 2006). According to Fish, Amerikaner, and Lucas (2007), "Parenting which is high in warmth, is sensitive, and is also child-centered is associated with more positive social and cognitive child outcomes, such as secure attachment, higher early language skills, and greater self-regulation" (p. 205-206). Berlin and Cassidy (2003) state, "...mothers of secure children socialize their children's emotions to help provide a 'secure base from which to explore'. Both negative and positive emotions are accepted and there is moderate control of children's expressiveness" (p. 479). According to Berlin and Cassidy (2003), "Parents' acceptance of their children's

expressiveness has been found to relate to children's social skills and peer relationships while parental restriction and punishment of expressiveness is related to children's emotional suppression, avoidant coping, and anxiety" (p. 480). Parents who structure their child's time carefully, initiate joint play, and are proactive have found fewer behaviour problems with their child (Gardner et al, 2007).

### **Parenting Programs**

There are both pros and cons to parenting programs. Mockford and Barlow (2004) suggest that, "support should be given to parents before small problems with their children grow into major difficulties..." (p. 220). Parenting programs have the ability to improve many aspects of family life and are often considered the "heart of intervention strategies" for parents with developmental problems (Kane et al., 2007). Positive impacts of parenting programs include: improved child behaviour; increased maternal self-esteem and relationship adjustment; improved parent-child interaction; and decreased maternal depression and stress (Bunting, 2004; Kane et al., 2007). Kotchick and Forehand (2002) argue, "parenting programs often operate as if "the family lived in a vacuum," with little consideration to the factors that may contribute to the development and expression of parenting practices themselves" (p. 256). Many parents seek out support and guidance in raising their children. Mockford and Barlow (2004) state, "increased demand for parenting programs on the part of parents themselves, suggests that parents may be feeling the need for more information about parenting" (p. 220).

Group-based parenting programs can be effective in improving the emotional and behavioural adjustment of preschool aged children (Barlow et al., 2005). Other types of

parenting programs include, but are not limited to: group-based, programs based on Adlerian theory, relationship-based, rational emotive therapy, cognitive-behavioural, and multi-modal parenting programs (Barlow et al., 2005; Bunting, 2004). Adlerian theory can be applied in attempt to enable parents as leaders; unlock mistaken goals and interactional patterns in family; and promote effective parenting (Corey, 2009). Relationship-based groups might examine the relationships within the family and support system, as well as, the relationship involving the group facilitator (Corey, 2009). Rational emotive therapy, one of the first cognitive behavioural therapies, focuses on thinking and acting rather than primarily expressing feelings (Corey, 2009). According to Corey (2009), "...cognitive behaviour therapy is based on the assumption that a reorganization of one's self-statements will result in a corresponding reorganization of one's behaviour" (p. 275).

Parenting programs are delivered using the following methods: didactic presentations; individual or small group activities; homework assignments; and role modelling (Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Parenting program topics may consist of: problem solving within the family; coping skills; partner support; relationship building; behaviour management (Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007).

The primary attendees of parenting programs are mothers. Mockford and Barlow (2004) state, "although many parenting programs are open to both parents it is usually the mother who attends" they go on to argue "if the government wants fathers to be more involved in the raising of their children, further steps will have to be taken to enable them to have more time for family life and to feel equally confident and comfortable in the parenting role" (p. 225). To engage parents in parenting programs, parents need to acknowledge that

there is a problem; parents need to understand the seriousness and consequences of the problem; knowledge and skills related to handling the child's behaviour; control and confidence in one's ability to parent effectively; parents need to receive non-judgemental support from professionals while they are gaining new knowledge and skills; parents need peer support; parents must have their own needs recognized; and must experience spousal support (Kane et al., 2007).

Effective parenting programs are usually longer in duration; have intense participant involvement; use a strengths-based approach; and include a social support component (Chislett & Kennett, 2007; Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003). However, parenting programs tend to be focused on short-term interventions which help parents cope with their child's emotional and behavioural issues (Barlow et al., 2005). Parenting programs that do exist seem to be focused on high-risk populations. However, it is suggested that the inclusion of non-high-risk parents may be more effective as they could be utilized as positive parenting models (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003). Low recruitment and poor parent participation rates may be associated with factors such as low socioeconomic status, failure of programs to provide transportation, lack of child care, distance of program from home, time demands and scheduling conflicts (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003; Owens et al., 2007). Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton (2003) further discuss the removal of the above listed barriers, and allowing the parent to bring a partner, friend, or family member as ways to increase participation in parenting groups.

Other significant aspects of parenting programs may include: increasing parenting knowledge and skills; promoting healthy child development; teaching life-skills, such as

budgeting, stress and anger management; and exploration of other community resources (Barlow et al., 2005; Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Bloomfield et al., 2004; Chislett & Kennett, 2007; Moran & Ghate, 2005; Russell et al., 2008). Improving parent resourcefulness is an important gain as it equips parents to deal with problematic child raising situations, and it implies an improvement in problem-solving skills and self-management strategies (Chislett & Kennett, 2007).

Strengths of programs include: support systems; non-judgemental and open-minded group leaders and participants; knowledgeable leaders; child care provision; convenient location; opportunity to learn new parenting techniques; the group is a “safe” place to share; informal format; appropriate length and time of session; information is provided that reflects the differing needs of parents (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Moran & Ghate, 2005; Owens et al., 2007; Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). These positive characteristics may assist in obtaining higher attendance and completion outcomes.

Weaknesses of parenting programs include: questionnaires used to evaluate treatment outcomes; programs that are too short in duration; inconsistent parent participation; group leaders who are not parents; activities such as role plays that are considered unpleasant; being taught to parent, rather than supported in the parenting role (Barlow & Stewart-Brown, 2001; Owens et al., 2007). Overall goals of a parenting program may include: improving parental warmth; decreasing parental hostility; increasing parental self-efficacy; and reducing parental stress (Thomas & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007). Collaboration between parents and professionals could lead to positive change in parenting programs.

Barriers to participation in parenting programs include: expectations that group leaders will tell participants the correct way to parent; embarrassment about disclosing personal problems; belief that the child's behaviour is too mild or severe to warrant participation; fears that parents would be judged for using corporal punishment; fears about being reported to children's services; fears about breaches of confidentiality; and time constraints (Owens et al., 2007). Parents with multiple overlapping barriers and difficulties are usually the ones to drop out of parenting programs (Moran & Ghate, 2005). One study provided the following recommendations for overcoming these barriers: direct advertising towards the community; use word-of-mouth referrals; increase children's participation; advertise using testimonials from other participants; have one group leader be a parent; increase access to counsellors for individual follow-up sessions; facilitate the creation of a support network to extend beyond the program; use a less structured format; and create groups for parents with children of a specific age range (Owens et al., 2007). It is also important that services are clear about their 'niche' in terms of what supports they can offer and the types of families they are best suited to help (Moran & Ghate, 2005).

Parents who are more engaged in parenting programs, complete homework, participate in discussions, and attended more sessions improve their parenting skills more than the parents who are less engaged (Baydar, Reid, & Webster-Stratton, 2003). Using parenting programs as a method of intervention seems to have succeeded in empowering parents in times of stress, building positive parent-child relationships, and improving the future mental health of the children (Barlow et al., 2005). Overall, parenting programs should enhance the parents' capabilities and confidence so they can provide effectively for their children's welfare (Woodcock, 2003).

### **Parent Support Services in Prince George**

The community of Prince George offers a variety of parent support services for parents with children age's two to five years. Primary agencies funding and implementing parent support services include, but are not limited to: the Northern Health Authority; Prince George Family YMCA; Carney Hill Neighbourhood Centre; Prince George Elizabeth Fry Society; Northern Family Health Society; Prince George Native Friendship Centre; Parent Support Services of British Columbia; Carrier Sekani Family Services; the Prince George Child Development Centre; AimHi; School District #57 and Kikino Métis Children and Family Services. The above listed parent support agencies provide Prince George parents with the opportunity to access a diverse list of parenting resources.

Parent support services in Prince George range in the services they provide. The Prince George Family YMCA offers "Parent and Tot Time," which invites parents to bring their children to a local gym to interact with other children and a variety of toys for a minimal cost to non-members and is free of charge for members (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009). Similar to "Parent and Tot Time" the Prince George Elizabeth Fry Society offers "Power Play," a drop-in play time for parents and children at no cost. Carrier Sekani Family Services also offers "Parent Participating Toddler Fun," a parent participating program that encourages positive parent-child interactions through play, stories, and games. This program is offered Mondays from 11am to 2pm at no cost.

The Prince George Family YMCA also funds the Prince George & Area Child Care Resource and Referral. The Prince George & Area Child Care Resource and Referral provides parents with lists of available child care facilities, provides assistance with the

government's Child Care Subsidy forms, provides training and workshops on child related issues, and has a resource/toy lending library. All of the above listed services can be accessed for an annual membership fee of thirty dollars (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009). The Prince George Child Development Centre's therapy department provides a Family Resource Lending Library for parents of children with special needs and developmental delays at no cost.

Services such as Carney Hill Neighbourhood Centre's Hadih House and Northern Family Health Society's Healthiest Babies Possible provide parenting support and programs, educational and social groups, free and low-cost groceries, cooking classes, and clothing. The Aboriginal Infant and Family Development Program, under the umbrella of the Prince George Native Friendship Centre, also provide a community kitchen with no cost, transportation and childcare availability (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009).

The Families Count Program, Family Education Outreach Program, Children and Family Information Line, Structured for Success and Project Parent North are all parent support programs under the umbrella of the Northern Health Authority. Families Count is a home-based visiting program in which a Public Health Nurse and a family visitor visit homes on a weekly basis. The Family Education Outreach Program offers parents in-home support with parenting, life, and home management skills. Outreach workers work closely with parents for three to nine months in achieving outcome oriented family goals. Project Parent North utilizes both Outreach Workers and Early Childhood Educators in their parent education program. The program is designed to help parents with meeting the physical,

emotional, cognitive, and social developmental needs of their family. Parents attend sessions twice a week and transportation, child care, and food are provided.

Structured for Success works with parents affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, providing services such as a cooking club, Twelve Step Program, and Family Celebrations. Although this program is free, parents require a referral from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, Northern Health-Mental Health, or Northern Health Alcohol and Drug services. The Children and Family Information Line is monitored by a Public Health Nurse Monday to Friday from 9am to 12pm. The Public Health Nurse is able to address concerns regarding children's health, childcare, and parenting (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009).

The Prince George Branch of Parent Support Services B.C. offers several resources for Prince George parents. *The Village* parent resource registry can be found online at [www.parentsupportbc.ca](http://www.parentsupportbc.ca), or as posted in a variety of resources throughout the community. *The Village* contains the information for a variety of parenting resources in Prince George including information on workshops, drop-in programs, early learning, financial aid, grief and loss, health, help lines, parent education, and parent services. This resource registry is published monthly and includes brief descriptions and contact information for the resources, as well as contact information for Government resources such as Canada Child Tax Benefit, Income Assistance, and the Pharmacare Program.

Parent Support Services offers the Active Parenting Now Program which assists parents in helping their children develop self-esteem, responsibility, while teaching clear communication and respectful discipline. Parent Support Circles are provided by Parent

Support Services in a variety of different community locations. A Parent Support Circle is a confidential support group run by trained facilitators. The purpose of these support circles are to give parents the opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, concerns, ideas and resources in regards to parenting. The above programs are free and childcare and transportation are available if required.

The Prince George Native Friendship Centre's Wazdidadilh Aboriginal Infant & Family Development Program focuses on early childhood learning. This program offers parent workshops, opportunities for healthy parent-child interactions, and child assessments and referrals. The program has no cost and provides childcare and transportation.

Carrier Sekani Family Services offers the program "Healthy You Healthy Family," an eight week certificate program for mothers. This program assists mothers in developing skills around self-discovery, self-esteem, values, boundaries, goal setting, conflict resolution, relationship building, and self care. Participants learn how to apply these skills to their own lives as well as to their parenting (M. Readman, personal communication, February 6, 2009). The "Strengthening Families Program" welcomes all families. The program is broken into three skills training courses: parenting skills, children's life skills, and family skills. Families attend this program once a week for fourteen weeks, spending the first hour separated in a parents group and children's group, the second hour rejoined as a family, and the third hour enjoying a meal with the group and facilitators (M. Readman, personal communication, February 6, 2009).

Kikino Métis Children and Family Services offer several free self-help mutual-aid programs for families. The "Circle of Life" program offers parenting education as well as

the opportunity for participants to develop relationships with people experiencing similar situations. While the program occurs only twice per week, one-on-one support is also available to families attending support groups. The Warrior Caregivers Fathers Support Program is based on the holistic teachings of the medicine wheel, and is developed based on the self-identified needs of the fathers accessing the program. This program runs once per week on Tuesday. Spirit of the Grandmothers is a program that supports grandparents that are raising and/or are the primary caregivers of their grandchildren. Meeting every other Tuesday, this support program provides assistance with issues involving the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Income Assistance. The above listed programs include either a meal or snacks and transportation is available (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009).

Community Living B.C. funds AimHi's family support programs. AimHi provides a 24/7 children's residence for respite for families that have children with developmental disabilities. Families must be referred by the Ministry of Children and Family Development or by Community Living B.C. in order to access the children's residence. AimHi also provides a Family Support Program which assists families with finding community resources, developing child care plans, improving parenting skills, and developing self-care skills. To be eligible for the Family Support Program families must meet the criteria provided by Community Living B.C. (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009).

Axis Family Resources provides support and training for foster parents. The purpose of Axis is to assist foster parents to successfully maintain children in their care and to increase the stability of foster placements. Services include twenty-four hour crisis support; education and training; information, educational and emotional support; and information and

support through a protocol process. Although support staff can be reached by telephone twenty-four hours a day, Axis still encourages foster parents to find a mentor or a buddy within the program (V. Gorbahn, personal communication, March 5, 2009).

The Ministry of Education, in partnership with School District #57 offers Strong Start Programs in the following Prince George schools: Beaverly Elementary, Blackburn Elementary, Buckhorn Elementary, Carney Hill Elementary, District Resource Centre, Harwin Elementary, Peden Hill Elementary, Ron Brent Elementary, Springwood Elementary, and Spruceland Elementary. Strong Start is an early learning program for children ages zero to five. Strong Start is a drop-in program and parents are required to stay, supervise and actively participate in the daily activities. The Strong Start program allows parents to connect with other families while sharing in the success and excitement of their child's early learning experiences. Strong Start operates Monday through Friday from September to June.

The philosophy of the La Leche League is to encourage, promote and provide mother-to-mother breastfeeding support and educational opportunities an important contribution to the health of children, families and society ([www.lllc.ca](http://www.lllc.ca)). The Prince George branch of the La Leche League provides support to breastfeeding mothers without discrimination. The group meets every second Thursday of each month at the Northern Interior Health Unit from 7-8pm (Edenshaw & Rhea, 2009).

The Mother Goose Society is an early language stimulation program for groups of parents and their infants, toddlers and preschool-aged children. The groups are facilitated by trained facilitators, and include songs, rhymes, and stories. It is suggested that participants

look on the Mother Goose Society website for program dates and times ([www.northernchild.ca](http://www.northernchild.ca); [www.clbc.cioc.ca](http://www.clbc.cioc.ca)).

### **Literature Summary**

Although family systems continue to change, the parental role continues to be both challenging and rewarding. Parenting styles, demographic characteristics, culture, child development and parenting programs impact parenting in unique ways. Parenting programs are intended to provide parents with the necessary support needed to further strengthen their parenting skills. Prince George has a variety of parent support services which assist parents with a range of parenting issues, including: child development, peer and professional support, development of healthy relationships, and financial support.

### **Chapter Three: Methodological Approach**

*From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings.*

- Max van Manen, 1990

In this chapter, I will attempt to balance both my interpretation of the participants experiences as well as the mode by which I have chosen to interpret their experiences. The goal of this research is to gain insight into the experiences of parents who have accessed parent support services in Prince George. First, I will describe hermeneutic phenomenology which is the methodology I have chosen for this research. Second, I will acknowledge and highlight my assumptions which existed prior to conducting this research. Third, I will discuss the methodological aspects of this research, such as, participants and procedural components. Fourth, I will examine verification strategies utilized in this research. Finally, ethical considerations that organize the study will be outlined.

#### **Hermeneutic Phenomenology**

There is limited research on parenting and parent support services in Canada. The research that does exist focuses primarily on the opinions of “experts” and tends to leave out the lived experiences of parents. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of parents accessing parent support services in Prince George, this research study is guided by van Manen’s (1990) vision of hermeneutic phenomenology. Through the process of phenomenological research, researchers borrow others experiences in order to understand the deeper meaning or significance of an individual’s context within the human world. Hermeneutic phenomenology attempts to describe and interpret the meanings behind lived experiences to a certain degree of depth and richness, through reflection and writing.

According to Lavery (2003) phenomenology is essentially the study of lived experience. Phenomenology emphasizes the world as lived by the person, not the world or reality as something separate from the person. Lavery states, “Like phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with the life world or human experience as it is lived” (p. 7). Dilthey (as cited in van Manen, 1990) suggests, “that in its most basic form lived experience involves our immediate, pre-reflective consciousness of life: a reflexive or self-given awareness which is, as awareness, unaware of itself” (p. 35). Phenomenology offers the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world, rather than providing theory in which to explain and/or control the world (van Manen, 1990). My experience with families allows me to be bonded to my research subject matter, and allowed me to explore a further understanding of parent’s experiences.

This research was pursued using the six research activities pertaining to hermeneutic phenomenology. These research activities are as follows: 1) turning to the phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; 3) reflecting on essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; 5) maintaining a strong oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990).

As an Early Childhood Educator and a Social Worker I have been committed to helping families, specifically with finding support services for parents to better care for their children. I am aware that this research is my interpretation of parents lived experiences with

accessing parent support services in Prince George, and that there is the possibility for further research with the potential of a deeper or richer description of this phenomenon. Turning to the phenomena of lived experience means re-learning to look at the world and the basic experience of the world (van Manen, 1990). Throughout the research process, it was important for me to consider my experiences with parents and parent support services, but also to understand the personal experiences of the parent participants with parent support services. According to van Manen (1990), "...a true reflection on lived experience is a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance"(p. 32). When writing this research, especially the research findings, it was imperative to be descriptive and include as much detail of the lived experience as possible. van Manen cites Heidegger who states phenomenology is "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way in which it shows itself from itself" (p. 33). Overall it is crucial that all of the research parts contribute to the research whole.

### **Assumptions**

Laverty (2003) discusses the importance of starting research from the position of a person seeking to further understand something that they already have a bond to. If a researcher already has a pre-understanding of the phenomena they are studying then it is impossible to step outside of, or put aside that understanding. van Manen (1990) suggests it is better to be clear about the researcher's pre-understandings and beliefs so that they may be challenged by the data. In order to open myself up to the reader, my pre-understandings and beliefs for this research prior to the collection and analysis of the data are listed below:

1. *Challenges related to accessing parent support services.* There are a variety of challenges faced by parents looking for support, including: lack of twenty-four hour seven days a week services; lack of transportation; lack of financial support; fear of having their children removed by MCFD if they admit they need help; lack of childcare; lack of quality support professionals.
2. *A need to change service delivery to parents.* Child welfare, specifically MCFD, in British Columbia continues to work using a crisis-focused model of service provision rather than a family-focused or person-centred approach. My belief is there would be fewer children and families requiring the services of MCFD if there were suitable parent support services offered to those caring for children.
3. *What it means to be a parent.* There will never be a universal definition of the term “parent”. I believe a parent is somebody, biological or not, who is using the skills they possess to raise a child. The skill a parent possesses varies depending on their culture, upbringing, gender, relationship status, support networks and a variety of other factors. I believe that a person never enters into the task of parenting with the intent of being unsuccessful at it.

## **Process**

### **Participants**

In order to maximize the potential for thorough and deeply descriptive experiences of parents who have accessed parent support services in Prince George, I utilized purposive sampling and established a set of criteria by which to select participants. The criteria consists

of parents (anyone who is in a caregiver role for a child age twenty-four months to five years) who self-identified as having involvement with one or more parent support service(s) located in Prince George, within the last five years. I wanted to be inclusive of mothers, fathers, step-parents, grandparents, extended family members, adoptive parents and foster parents, this is why my definition of parent is so open. I limited the age of parent participants to nineteen years of age and older. A parent support service was defined as a service providing emotional, mental, social, spiritual support to a person caring for a child age twenty-four months to five years in age.

For the purpose of this research, Prince George, British Columbia is defined as:

- All communities within Prince George city limits, including: Hart Highway, College Heights, VLA, Blackburn, Foothills, North Nechako, Parkridge Heights, Westgate, Western Acres, Haldi Subdivision, Jensen Subdivision.
- All geographic areas as far north as Meadow Road; as far east as Giscome; as far south as Sintich Road; and as far west as Western Acres.

### **Initial Contact with Participants**

I personally distributed a letter of introduction, and a participant information sheet, to agencies that provide services to parents, such as early childhood development programs, Aboriginal organizations, and parenting programs (see Appendix A & B). If agencies agreed, I displayed a poster (see Appendix C) inviting interested parents to contact me directly. The posters included my cell phone number and email address as methods of

contact. I asked that agencies refer participants if they believed they would be a good fit for this research.

Parents who expressed interest in participating in the research were provided an introductory letter. Parents were asked if they had any questions, and questions were addressed by the researcher. Each parent took part in an interview, commencing with a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). The participants and researcher identified an interview location in which both felt comfortable, while acknowledging the need for confidentiality. Many of the parent participants referred friends to participate in the research. Seidman (2006) suggests it is important to gather participants through peers if possible, as it avoids hierarchical issues. After completing eight interviews I realized that no new themes were emerging from the data. The cessation of new themes revealed the presence of saturated data (Marshall, 1996).

### **Interview Procedure for Participants**

Prior to each interview, parent participants were provided with an information sheet explaining the purpose of the research (see Appendix B). I asked each participant if they would prefer to read the information themselves, or if they would like me to read it to them. The above process ensured that participants who may have literacy problems would be provided the same information as those who read the information on their own. Throughout the interview process I asked participants if they had any questions, and let them know that they may ask for clarification or ask questions at anytime throughout the interview process.

The participants were provided with a consent form to read and sign (see Appendix D). I offered to read the consent form and clarify if necessary. I explained to participants that they could decline answering any questions, stop the interview process, or ask that their information be removed from the research project at any time without explanation, or consequence. The participants received a twenty-five dollar honorarium at the end of their interview and signed a receipt to confirm this (see Appendix F).

Participants' life worlds were examined through the demographic questionnaire to better understand the experiences of parent participants with parent support services. The term life world is best described as the world of immediate experience, or the world that is already there (van Manen, 1990). Displaying the information obtained from the demographic questionnaire allows readers to be situated within the perspective of each participant. The parent participants in this research were between the ages of nineteen and forty-five. Six of the parent participants identified as First Nations, while one parent participant identified as Hispanic, and another identified as White or Caucasian. The parent participants had anywhere from one child to seven children, with five parent participants having four or more children. The age ranges of the children were eight months to twenty-three years old. The data for this research focuses on two to five year olds regardless of the ages of the parent participants additional children. Parent participants accessed a variety of parent support services in Prince George, as further discussed in chapter four.

### **Data Collection and Interviews**

The introductory phase of the interview process included a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E), which provided insight into the living situation of each

parent participant. I conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological interview with each parent participant to achieve the following: exploration and gathering of experiential narrative material that would serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of parents experiences with parent support services; and the ability to use the interview as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with the interviewee about the meaning of the experience. This type of conversational interview is very similar to semi-structured interviews which facilitate detailed and unregulated conversations about the phenomenon of interest. According to Marlow (2005), “in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has more freedom to pursue hunches and can improvise with the questions” (p. 167). I believe the flexibility within the semi-structured or conversational interview format provided the opportunity for me to explain or elaborate the questions to the level of each interviewee if needed. A semi-structured interview also presented the opportunity for participants to fully explain their experiences.

I allotted one and a half hours for each interview, and all were digitally recorded. All interviews were kept confidential, and information from individual interviews was aggregated with the others to ensure that no potentially identifying information is disclosed in the final thesis document. The interviews were transcribed by the researcher.

### **Analysis**

Central to this research was the question, “what is the experience of parents accessing parent support services in Prince George?” The data analysis for this study was carried out with the guiding framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. This framework opens the research to the following: a) investigating the experience of parents accessing parent

support services in Prince George; b) reflecting on the themes and patterns that characterized the phenomenal experience of parenting through their use of parent support services in Prince George; and c) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting (van Manen, 1990).

van Manen's (1990) hermeneutic phenomenological research processes have been used to analytically examine the interview transcripts and to draw out the true lived experiences of parents accessing parent support services in Prince George. van Manen argues that a methodological interpretation of phenomenology requires the researcher to engage in phenomenological reflection as well as phenomenological writing.

Although thematic analysis is rarely acknowledged, it is a widely used qualitative analytic method (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to van Manen (1990), "Theme analysis" "refers then to the process of recovering the theme or themes that are embodied and dramatized in the evolving meaning and imagery of the work" (p. 78). I chose thematic analysis for its flexibility and usefulness as a research tool in hopes of obtaining a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the data I have collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phenomenological themes are often understood as the structures of experience (van Manen, 1990). According to van Manen when a researcher analyzes a phenomenon they are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience. When conducting my thematic analysis I followed the six phases of thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006): 1) familiarize yourself with the data; 2) generate initial codes; 3) search for themes; 4) review themes; 5) define and name themes; and 6) produce the report.

In order to familiarize myself with the data I completed all of the transcription verbatim. Transcribing the data allowed me to fully immerse myself in the language and experiences of the parent participants. Transcribing the data myself, allowed me the ability to omit identifying information, such as names of children and neighbourhoods. I read the transcripts and notes until a sense of the participants overall experience emerged.

After familiarizing myself with the data I began to generate a list of initial codes through highlighting and writing notes on the transcripts. I searched across the data set for repeated patterns of meaning highlighting common words such as support, friends, family, transportation, childcare, culture, just to list a few. With an initial set of codes in place I began to create a table that included potential themes and subthemes.

I reviewed all potential themes in order to ensure validity of individual themes in relation to the data set. During the process of searching for themes I used mind-maps to begin the organization of themes. I then defined and named themes according to the essence of what each theme was about, and finalized them in a table. Themes included support, challenges, parenting skills, service delivery, and culture. Organizing, defining and naming themes and sub-themes were challenging and consultation with fellow students and my thesis supervisor was necessary. With a fully worked out table of themes and sub-themes I wrote my research findings chapter.

The process of analysis was extremely challenging. There were many conversations and emails with my thesis supervisor to ensure I was completing the analysis correctly. Questions such as, “Ask Joanna how many participants need to say a certain thing to make it a theme?” were scattered on post-its in my reflexive journal (J. Tkachuk, personal

communication, March 2010). Another question found in my reflexive journal was, “can I write my probing questions down, or is that leading?” (J. Tkachuk, personal communication, March 2010). One of my interviews was interrupted twice; one of those interruptions was caused by another professional. I turned off my digital recorder for the interruptions as I didn’t think it was relevant to the research. Turning off my digital recorder led to some discussion with my supervisor if that was appropriate, or if I should eliminate the interview and conduct another.

While analyzing the data I was challenged by the cultural ambivalence felt by some of the parent participants. In my reflexive journal I questioned, “How is it that Aboriginal participants do not appear necessarily interested in the inclusion of culture in support services?”(J. Tkachuk, personal communication, March 2010). I remembered a parent participants comments about the need for parents to want to incorporate cultural diversity into programming and this kept me thinking about cultural influences on parenting.(awkward sentence) Another point that struck me as particularly interesting during my analysis was the common theme of mutual aid. Almost all of the parent participants shared the importance of friends helping each other, or the importance of parents as experts.

### **Verification Strategies**

It is vital that qualitative research is conducted in a rigorous manner. The existence of rigor in phenomenological research has long been debated by qualitative researchers. All of these debates have contributed to the standard of qualitative research around accuracy and validity. To ensure the research findings were as rigorous as possible I utilized several methods that support research validity: reflexive journaling, candidness, and feedback.

Personal reflexivity is a significant part of my research. Dowling (2005) states, “reflexivity refers to the engagement by the qualitative researcher in continuous self-critique and self-appraisal and the provision of an explanation of how his/her own experiences did or did not influence the stages of the research process” (p. 136). Meanings made of data are deeply connected to my own values and self-interest (Crawford & Kimmel, 1999). As somebody who works with children and families, I have developed a passion and strong convictions about injustices regarding children and their families. It is unrealistic for me to think I can separate my research from my personal beliefs and values. Thus, it is crucial that I include some trustability measures in this research. After each interview I wrote in a journal recording my thoughts, assumptions, challenges and perspectives regarding the interview. Keeping a journal allowed me to reflect which helped me ensure that I did not allow my personal beliefs and values to alter the data. Throughout this research I have been candid with the reader. I have located myself throughout this research and have been clear about my assumptions and biases in regards to parent support services in Prince George. Wolcott (1994) discusses the importance of being candid and putting yourself as a researcher squarely into the settings or situations being described to whatever extent warranted. Another strategy I implemented was getting my thesis supervisor to analyze themes separately from my thematic analysis, and then reviewing the themes together to make sure my data analysis is trustworthy. Feedback is crucial in ensuring accuracy in both reporting and interpretation (Wolcott, 1994).

### **Participant Checking**

When I had completed the stage of transcription I sent a copy of each individual's transcript to the parent participant for review. I allotted the parent participants two weeks to respond with feedback in regards to the interview transcripts. The parent participants in this research did not respond to the transcripts provided, so I proceeded with the research under the assumption that no changes were needed.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Christians (2005) suggests the following in regards to completing ethical research: obtaining informed consent; avoiding deception; maintaining privacy and confidentiality; and ensuring the research is accurate. Prior to conducting the interviews, participants were given an informed consent document that described the voluntary nature of the research study and their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. There was no deception used in this study; I clearly outlined the purpose, rationale, and process to each participant before engaging in the interview process. As the majority of the parent participants are First Nations, and the researcher is not, great sensitivity was used during analysis.

Privacy and confidentiality were thoroughly addressed in the consent form and verbally reiterated to the participant prior to the interview. It was explained to the participants that I, the researcher, have been the only person with access to the names and contact information of the participants. A fictitious name and code-number was used on all transcribed data to protect the anonymity of the participants. The participants contact information and all transcripts were in a locked cabinet in the researcher's supervisor's office

at UNBC. All information stored electronically will be password protected. After the researcher defends her thesis and all academic requirements for a Masters in Social Work have been met, the research documents will be destroyed by shredding any paperwork and deleting all electronic files.

### **Chapter Three Summary**

As a researcher, I am only one methodological channel in the process of exploring the experiences of parents with parent support services in Prince George. Other methodological aspects such as the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, assumptions, and approach to thematic analysis have been uncovered and influence this research study. Parent participants are the core element of this research; their recruitment, characteristics, and demographic information are all aspects that have been discussed in this chapter. Verification strategies were incorporated to maintain accuracy and validity throughout the research process. Core themes were revealed through the data analysis and will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

## **Chapter Four: Research Findings**

### **Introduction**

The following chapter outlines the results of eight qualitative interviews conducted for the purpose of allowing parents to share their experiences with utilizing parent support services in Prince George. Questions were asked in order to gain knowledge and understanding of the demographics of parenting; ways parent support services are assisting parents; and challenges facing parents accessing parent support services. The research findings are based on direct quotes from the qualitative interviews as to appropriately reflect the experiences of the parent participants. Although some of the quotes appear to be lengthy I found it crucial to incorporate as much detail as possible to truly represent the experiences of the parent participants.

### **Demographics**

Eight parent participants completed the demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). Of the eight parent participants interviewed six identified as First Nations. One identified as Hispanic, and another identified as Caucasian/White. The ages of the parent participants ranged from nineteen to forty-five. Of the eight parent participants, three were single; two were living common-law; two were married; and one was widowed, but currently living common-law. The parent participants had anywhere from one child to seven children, with five parent participants having four or more children. The age ranges of the children were eight months to twenty-three years old. In regards to educational background, two parent participants completed some high school. One parent participant graduated grade twelve.

One parent participant completed a Culinary Arts program. Two parent participants completed some college or university. Two parent participants graduated from college or university. Four of the parent participants had an annual income of less than \$15, 000; while the other four parent participants had an annual income of between \$40,000 and \$59,900. Five of the parent participants were currently unemployed. Two of the parent participants were employed on a full-time basis and one parent participant was self-employed. All of the parent participants resided in the Prince George area.

### **Summary of Results**

All of the parents who participated in the research were extremely grateful for the parent support services offered in Prince George. Parent participants were satisfied with the range of services being offered to parents in Prince George. Parent support services discussed during the interview process were: Prince George Mommies and Babies, Prince George Work at Home Moms, La Leche League, Strong Start, Power Play, the Prince George Child Development Centre, Aboriginal Infant and Family Development, Northern Health occupational and speech therapy, Aboriginal Head Start, Project Parent North, Kikino Métis Children and Family Services, Healthiest Babies Possible, Mother Goose, Nobody's Perfect program, Active Parenting, Structured for Success, and community parent support circles. The above listed programs provide a variety of services inclusive of, and not limited to, cognitive, emotional, developmental, and spiritual support for families. The collaboration between Prince George parents and parent support services, specifically service providers, demonstrates the dedication parents and services providers have to raising healthy, loved children.

From the data collected in the eight interviews, five main themes were identified: support, challenges, parenting skills, service delivery, and culture. Each of these main themes is divided into the following sub-themes, in no specific order:

Table 1:

<b>Support</b>	<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Parenting Skills</b>	<b>Service Delivery</b>	<b>Culture</b>
Peer	Transportation	Communication	Programs	Support of Culture
Family	Childcare	Discipline	Facilitator/Support Person	Cultural Ambivalence
Friends	Funding/Cost	Nutrition		
Service Providers	Internal  Service Implementation	Positive Parent-child Interaction		

### **Support**

Parents frequently discussed the challenges of parenting and how they felt supported during these challenging times. Parenting support came from peers (specifically fellow parents), family, friends, and service providers. Areas of support ranged from listening and discussing parenting issues, to transporting parents to and from appointments, to providing assistance with day to day activities.

## **Peer**

Peer support, support from fellow parents, was mentioned in six out of the eight interviews. George discussed his introduction to the Prince George community and fellow parents,

... like all the women and men and the families in there really helped us in this community getting established they have lots of information for us and... our friends and family now are [neighbourhood] family and that's what we call them we trade children we trade babysitters we trade food we trade lots of things at like and we really bond and I really like it that's what I like about [our neighbourhood]... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona found it important to connect with peers,

...for me it was connecting to other parents you know when I had my first child I was young and I was coming right to school so I left my home community and came right to school and just jumped right into my degree and you know so the support that I had I found amongst other students amongst other parents who were going to school umm and it seemed more readily available just doing that and being able to bring [my son] with me up to the University and just be able to talk to parents within that setting... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona felt it was important to have the support of peers who were parenting in similar ways in which she was parenting. Fiona stated,

I didn't feel like I needed a lot of support in changing how I was parenting, more a lot of support in just knowing that other parents out there are doing the same thing and then trying to find you know I think at the time too especially when [my daughter] was little is just you know I was a very avid supporter of breastfeeding of attachment parenting of co-sleeping and just talking to other parents you know who do the same things cuz with my family breastfeeding was definitely supported but co-sleeping wasn't as much and they didn't really quite understand it and there was a lot of concern that there was health risks and all that so just being able to talk to other moms and other dads and grandma's and whoever else were doing that it was like ok I am not going to kill my child because I am sleeping in the same bed with her even though my parents had had some really big concerns so just you know just connecting to other parents that way was really nice (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen shared her feelings about accessing parent support services and building peer relationships. She stated,

Umm it at first it was scary because you didn't know who you were going to meet and you didn't know what would happen but after awhile it got, it got better there's more enjoyment now you get new friends and other mothers if you're in a crisis situation they help out (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise talked about peer support as one of the primary reasons she attends parent support services. She stated, "The parents, the parent support, ya just being there with other parents and getting away out of the house is of course why I go" (Denise, personal communication,

February 2010). Carol is an only child and her family lives out of town, as a parent she really relies on the support of her peers. Carol stated,

...it just helps me to going there talking to, I guess this is at Strong Start, talking to other parents helps me cope with umm its big at just telling stories and experiences helps you realize that I'm not alone and ... in the situation and they just give me ideas I'm not sure exactly what you know I have a lot of children and ... it's just having somebody to talk to mainly, another parent I don't have any brothers or sisters I'm an only child and even if I lived around my mom I don't have brothers or sisters so I really like is just to talk to other people it's nothing really I don't know I just really need to talk to other parents and get ... advice from them and encouragement I guess (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Anne found peer support from two of the services she belongs to in Prince George. She stated,

I belong to [a couple parent support groups]for me I ...I find those as groups tend to be really good and supportive and to like ask other parents about their experiences if I need help with an issue with my children and I ... its really nice social aspect of course (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Anne also stated,

...it's nice to be able to discuss to share with other parents the milestones your children are hitting, and we have a two parent household and so we have each other to share but at the same time it's nice to be able to share that with parents who are going

through the same thing and talk about like mile like stages that your children might be hitting at the same time and seeing how each of them are doing ... Its really nice to be able to share the joy of our children with other people who have that same that same feeling going on I guess (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

## **Family**

Parent participants shared the importance of family support and a variety of ways they felt supported by members of their family. Some of the parents interviewed shared how they wished their family lived closer so they could receive family support. Anne discussed the ways she feels supported by her husband. She stated,

He's very supportive like we are very good as working as a team he's you know he's very good with the kids he doesn't need you know me pushing at him to play with them or change a diaper or take them if I need to go out while she still comes with me everywhere but he's very good about if I need to go out in the evening for whatever reason ... So he's very supportive he's very good at backing me up as opposed to undermining me I know that some people have that issue and I am very glad that I don't (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Betty's mother was her primary support as a parent. Betty stated, "...when I am not available or not accessible she takes that role providing him the same care that I would because that's where I learned my parenting skills (Betty, personal communication, February 2010). Fiona's mother supported her as a parent. Fiona stated,

...my mother has been a primary support for me right from the beginning having [my son] at a young age she was a really big advocate of me getting my education, breastfeeding sort of doing all those things so they've been huge just in regards to childcare and you know anything that I've needed to do for school... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Service Providers**

With family living out of town and the challenges of creating healthy friendships parent participants found themselves relying on service providers for support. Ellen shares the support she receives from two parent support services and their staff. She stated,

...I could talk to them, like it doesn't have to be about program you don't have to go there just talk about programs, you can go to them and tell them about some of your problems and they sit there and listen or else they try to help you out with it and try to help you find other resources to go to, to get it, to get what you need basically (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather gained the support of one of the service providers in a parent support service she attended. She described the support she received,

I've had to...get my daughter [medical coverage]because status won't cover her because I don't have full custody ... And so [my support person] got all the forms for me ... offline or online and printed it off and filled it all out with me, and some of them for me, and put it all in an envelope and all I had to do is go buy a stamp and go send it off. And she went out of her way to do that and like paperwork for me already

is just something I don't like like I don't know why I just don't like paperwork [laughter] and so that was a big thing. ... (Heather personal communication, February 2010).

George shared the connection and support he obtained from a service provider. George stated,

...he's a man about my age, and he's got young kids at home, and he's got a degree he's really smart, but I made a connection with him as a father and as a giver to the young kids, as a part of the community... I don't really know the proper procedure for [a death in the family] and there's no family here but me and he came to our door and he said look he knows we're great people and he said we need to work together so we're working together ... so now he's helping me get over this that's a great facilitator right that's a common ground we have feeling to you know and that's to me that's a good facilitator you know he understands exactly what I'm going through he was willing to help he's got the proper goggles on. We're sinking right cuz I lost some phone numbers and kinda got frantic for a minute and he calmed me down he understands ... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

George also appreciated the openness and flexibility of some service providers. He stated,

...they make you feel so welcome in this community. This man oh I'll give you a ride home but I gotta go do this, oh that's ok I have some time you know, and it's like wow that takes a big weight off your shoulder for that day and you know and that just feeds you just feed off of it you know. You do some good deed to someone and

you get a good deed back and that their attitude and their karma and their energy is just awesome it's pretty hard to find a negative person working in these places in this town really I found that just rare. I find all the women and men that work in this industry are helping children and they're pretty good I am really pleased where I came from [in a northern community] there's some people in those places that are like if you're drinking and drugging we don't even want nothing to do with you... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona found multiple service providers in a local neighbourhood centre were able to support her as a parent. She stated,

I've found that I could get a lot of support was I had a connection with a [parent support service] here in town both as a parent, and then [as a professional]. So having my youngest, well my oldest, go through ... my youngest go through ... you attach to them professionally just being able to talk to the different staff members there about what's available in Prince George was really good... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

## **Friends**

During the interview process parent participants discussed the importance of having supportive friends in their lives. Anne explained how her friends provided her support when her husband was working out of town. She stated,

...they are really good about being there when he isn't. His job does take him out of town fairly often, well more often coming up here because he's on a new project but

his job is one that can mean he's out of town for you know days or even a week at a time and my friends are very good about being there if I need some help for babysitting or Sunday night bath if he's not around to do it. ... they are all around so it's fun to have friends when you have a new baby, you know they bring you food, they bring you food, and presents for the baby, and come play with them and stuff or come play with my son so he doesn't feel left out or things like that (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise explained how her friend supports her and vice versa. She stated, "...when I need... childcare and she's gotta go to an appointment I will watch her kids, and if I have an appointment she's... there for me to watch my kids while I go to my appointment... (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). Fiona discussed how a friend was able to support her in a crisis situation. She stated,

I've managed to find a friend now who has a variety of children ranging from 17 to 9 so that's been a huge support to recognize you know just you know even little things. Like [my daughter] this weekend ended up with lice and you know I was in a big panic and I've never really had to deal with that before and she was so calm and she's like it's not a big deal all kids get it and you know it was just here this is what we can do about it and I was like [sigh of relief] ok [laughter] so that was a big panic for me [laughter] (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

## **Challenges**

Throughout the interview process parent participants discussed the challenges of accessing parent support services. Challenges included: transportation, childcare, funding, internal challenges, and service implementation.

### **Transportation**

Prince George is a fairly large city with diverse weather conditions creating a challenge in accessing parent support services for parents who may not own their own vehicle. When asked about barriers to accessing parent support services Denise replied, “Probably transportation, especially when you have four kids and there’s other parents that walk to school but they don’t mind walking cuz its exercise. ... that would be one, transportation...” (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). Anne discussed the challenges of transportation as,

...well I have my own car so we generally transport ourselves. We haven’t had to access the public transportation or anything for that ... which is good because we are way out here and there is no public transportation up here. You kinda have to have a car or you’re screwed (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

George discussed how one of the parent support services in town provided bus passes, but there were limits to the amount of tickets distributed. George stated, “We got some bus tickets and we did get a few free rides but they were also like you know they put up their boundaries on that too and we didn’t sign up with these people to get free rides” (George, personal communication, February 2010). George went on to further state,

...I said transportation was a barrier and we needed help to get our babies from this point to this point, but they didn't have the funding for it. I'm like I don't have a vehicle, though I have a license, but I sold my vehicle, and the baby is sick we don't want to take her out. We don't have money for a cab, we are on a fixed income and that \$10 is coming off the table to eat, so could you help us out? It would be a big big help with that ride. No we're limited in funding we don't have that kind of insurance our job description isn't that way... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen also found transportation to be an issue. She stated, "I think that the transportation is the big issue with that for support services cuz not everybody seems to want to walk to the programs too much or its too far they don't wanna..." (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010). Heather discussed the challenges of accessing services on a time frame when sharing a vehicle. She stated,

...the time, like I drop off my kids for school and then I have to get to the places and sometimes I have my vehicle and sometimes I don't, which is more often I don't then I do. We only have one vehicle and me hauling my 4 kids around is just nuts (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Overall, parent participants found it difficult to access services without their own vehicle or transportation that was provided by the parent support services in the community.

## Childcare

Onsite childcare services were very important to parent participants who have children between the ages of twenty-four months and five years. As children of this age category are not in school, and the cost of daycare is high it is important that childcare be provided so that parents can focus their entire attention on the programs they are attending. Many of the parent participants discussed the challenges of accessing parent support services without appropriate childcare. Denise discusses the challenges of completing tasks while watching children,

you have to keep an eye on your kids ... which program was it ya your trying to do crafts I think the one program I watched my kid and ... they had no childcare so we had to uhh keep a close eye focus on what you're doing keep an eye on your child while you do your crafts (Denise, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise stated, "I come here and I like coming here because they have childcare while you're doing the cooking, so it relieves a little stress..." (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). Denise further stated, "I wanted to do upgrading but I have no childcare for awhile so it kinda I don't know where to start with childcare..." (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). Fiona also shared the challenges of finding childcare while she attempted to attend parent support services in the evening. She stated,

...I think the only barrier was that it was in the evenings and it was only once a month so it was not like it was a barrier that I couldn't overcome but just having you know my oldest at home and needing to find something for him to do in the evenings if I

did want to go out was a bit more of a challenge... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather was concerned about parent support services having appropriate childcare. Heather discussed the need for proper childcare spots,

...like if there's childcare and there's nowhere really for them to go then they just have to go and hangout ... like [at one community parent support service] its just one open area and there's a water cooler there and it's not very child proof it's just this little area with toys and a TV... (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

## **Funding**

Funding issues impact many social services in Prince George; this is inclusive of parent support services. Funding issues can impact parent support services in the following ways: parent support services may be limited in duration to conserve money; parents support services are often broken up into categories based on a child's age due to the allocation of funding; parent support services may have to operate with minimal resources due to financial issues. Parent participants expressed concern over parent support services and issues surrounding funding. Heather stated,

...the one program that I go to ... the facilitator has so many good ideas and she applies for grants here and there she gets denied so all these ideas she came up with just gets thrown out the window pretty much (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen was concerned with funding services based on the ages of children. She stated,

... [My daughter] she's under 5, so she's only 5, so she's not arranged in that category to go in some programs or else you need the money in order to go to those programs and where are you going to get the money to go to those programs? (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

George shared his experience with accessing a parent support service and then having to leave because the funding was no longer available. He stated,

You know, I'm like you get attached to the person, you know what I mean, you have the baby they see you home and then all of a sudden it's like see you later. Oh ya we don't have the money for you after 6 months you gotta go to these other supports. I'm like oh, that's how we went down to the [another parent support service] we really didn't want to leave [the parent support service we were attending] right we liked the staff, we liked the people, they were so nice and and the attention and all that the kids got, all the good attention, but we had to leave because of limited funding and space... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona also saw funding as a challenge in regards to parent support services. She stated,

...the general sense that funding these programs aren't necessarily a high priority on all peoples agendas right, so you're seeing, ... but you know I think just the abundance of programs seem to be lessening as you know agencies are finding that they have to stretch their dollars in different ways to cover, to cover their services (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

## Internal

During the interview process parent participants discussed the internal challenges they created themselves in regards to accessing parent support services. Internal challenges were challenges created by the parent participant themselves. George openly discussed how he himself was the barrier to accessing parent support services at times. He stated,

...I'll tell you from my experience the barrier was me. I put my barriers up not wanting to expose myself, not wanting to be honest of my other barriers, you know maybe boozing too much right turning to the bottle to reduce stress, transportation maybe was a barrier I put that up. How am I going to get there with all these kids my wife's busy I can't make it. I use that as a barrier. ...maybe all our kids were sick and we couldn't leave the residence, you know like the health of the family was a barrier right. ... maybe a disagreement my wife and I had that day I would be like you know maybe we shouldn't go out and be miserable with everybody else right, you know just personal stuff...(George, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol also experienced internal challenges to accessing parent support services. She discussed her challenge as,

...myself not getting on the phone and making an appointment. I think when I first phoned [a parent support service] ...they told me that ... I had to be, or I had the understanding that I had to be, referred by MCFD and I wasn't on MCFD care then so I just left it (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Betty found just recognizing that she needed support was a challenge. She stated,

I think for me primarily it was accepting that I was going to need some support and how to apply it to my everyday life and be able to live with that and not just mimic behavior on a support worker but actually incorporate it into my behavior so I could extend that to my son on an everyday scale (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Service Implementation**

Parent participants shared their experiences with some of the challenges regarding the implementation of parent support services. Betty found the wait lists she encountered for support services to be challenging. She stated,

...there was a waiting list for a speech therapist for 2 years I had to go and request private funding through [my son's] band to privately hire a speech therapist. It seems that most of the services that I needed even inclusive to the CDC the waitlists are 1 to 2 years (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol addressed challenges in regards to program staff, program length, and being on a wait list. She stated,

...we didn't really finish our goals there, and our worker there had some health problems that she when we told her we wanted to carry on with [the parent support service] and not end our 5 month thing there ...she said ok the [Program Manager] is not in she'll be in next week. Next week came and [our worker] was sick and [our worker] has since asked for 2-3 month leave and didn't get to ask this and that so they

didn't know that we wanted to ...to carry through with it, but we're on a waiting list again... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona discussed the importance of consistency in programming, including facilitators and location. She stated,

...most of the things I attended have been volunteer driven so it's a lot harder to you know I think attract and retain volunteers in Prince George. I think anywhere in Canada for the last 10 years or so anyways. To see consistency in leaders and in facilitators...in programming that organizations are doing you know you see a lot of these different programs, ... sort of hop around different sort of support agencies so seeing that level of consistency... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona further discussed her experiences with one parent support service in Prince George in which she was never able to connect with the facilitator. She stated,

...I didn't get to the point of having facilitation just that level of sort of non-communication, and non, like that ability to not follow through I think has left me at a point whereas even if they did offer a course now I don't want to, you know? I've had to call that number like 3 times and leave a message anonymously and someone calls me back then it doesn't happen right. So you know, I think poor facilitation ... just sort of discourages people from wanting to attend.

### **Parenting Skills**

Parent participants shared their experiences in regards to the variety of parenting skills they improved upon by accessing parent support services in Prince George. The most

prevalent parenting skills discussed were communication, discipline, nutrition, and positive parent-child interactions.

### **Communication**

In many cases parent participants discussed the importance of good communication with their child(ren). During the interview process parent participants shared their experiences with good communication between themselves and their children and the impacts good communication can have on the parent-child interaction. Fiona stated,

...I think a lot of what I've picked up is just around communication with my children, and setting good boundaries, and you know keeping firm. So a lot of you know that "I" messaging and reflection and paraphrasing and you know finding ways to communicate with my kids that doesn't leave them feeling like they've been judged or they've done something wrong. ... As well trying to find different ways to redirect I think has been a huge skill cuz there are times when you just want them to stop what they are doing, but how to do that without having them walk away feeling like they've been bad right, you know? So I think that's been a real good skill is you know just being able to redirect in a positive way to use the word "no" a whole lot less, to use the word, but a whole lot less umm has been a really great skill even. You know I use it now and they're a lot older and [my son] it's still a skill I can use with him and it gets him out the door (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

George also discussed learning communication skills through parent support services. He stated,

...I learned more in there then I could have imagined. The levels of communications that children do, I already kinda knew the levels but I didn't know they were scientific based you know, I mean step 1 to 6. And now I can see where my children are at certain ages are communicating to me, which brought more patience to me and understanding them, more time to listen you know to talk back down at their level to talk to a child, they're important right... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

George further stated,

...I don't know if you ever hear people communicate with their children and they're like shut the fuck up, shut up stupid, you dummy like all these negative things that we're taught right. You're ugly, you're gonna amount to nothing. I'm like no, you never hear those words in my home cuz I learned personally how much they hurt and then through the program I learned to communicate to my child and listen the facilitators teach us you know that is a little person that's saying something to you and you're not listening. And because you're not listening you're not solving the issue. So you learn to communicate with your child and I just loved that part of the program (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen also shared her experience with learning communication skills. She stated,

...basically trying to sit and talk to the kids because it's hard for me. When I was a kid I was always yelled at and swore at. So, and the programs I went to they help[ed] me slowly learn to, to like just ask the kids, like get down to their level and

ask them instead of just demanding them...(Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Betty shared her experience of the challenges of communicating with her son who has developmental and behavioral challenges. She stated,

...when you're dealing with specific service providers and they give you a better understanding of the behavior of your child and why they are ... going through this process, or reacting in that manner and you have full understanding and then umm it makes a little bit easier for you to react. An example would be if your child is hurting [themselves] because he can't communicate when you are working with the speech therapist and hear how she explains, that it is because he cannot communicate and they feel frustrated, and they feel isolated from society because of their challenges. Then you see things, you see the child's point of view. Then that way your anxiety of why you're not communicating with your child gets ... an explanation and then from there you afford to be able to deal with that after you understand it (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

## **Discipline**

Parent participants seemed very grateful for the positive discipline skills they learned through accessing parent support services. Parent participants reflected on the way they were disciplined as children, and also the benefits and challenges to disciplining their child(ren) in a positive way.

Carol discussed how she utilized positive discipline with her daughter, and how it impacted her as a parent. She stated,

...like kinda counsel her through and ask her to stop when I am you know .... We have to tell her we are only one person and that she has to wait cuz there is others you know, she has others, she has brothers and ... it's not just her, and there is rarely time when there is just her. ... It's hard because you can see it hurts her feelings, but she needs to understand that's why. ... We just really haven't been consistent with it although we could because at the same time you are trying to discipline her its breaking your heart, although it's the better for both of you (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

George reflected on how he was disciplined as a child and how he wanted that to be different for his children. He stated,

...I realized that I didn't have no skills and that I could have been an angry dad. I could have been mean to my kids like I grew up.... These programs I did helped me recognize that. I tell you though and I really wanted it, that's probably why, and I really listened, and I really try to participate. ... Cuz of my upbringing my kids are the opposite of that now, and I don't spank my kids, I do not hit my children. I sometimes ... maybe I'm learning from the program that my voice is also hurtful too right, what I say, think and how I approach, that is very important... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona shared examples of discipline techniques she tried along the way, and which techniques were successful and which weren't. She stated,

...I think I tried a lot of different things, times outs and you know the whole counting down, and it never really worked for us as much, just sort of that positive communication piece I picked up along what I've been doing (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise discussed one of the positive discipline techniques she learned from accessing parent support services. She stated,

... if your child is throwing a fit or something, ... I just give them their quiet time in their room about I don't know 10 or 20 minutes later they come out of their room and ... apologize and like say their sorry, so ... that helps a lot (Denise, personal communication, February).

## **Nutrition**

Some of the parent participants had accessed cooking programs, within parent support services in Prince George. Parent participants accessing cooking programs were very grateful for the new things they were learning about nutrition.

Denise described one of the cooking programs that she had accessed through a parent support service. She stated, "We do free meals, like they cook you lunch or supper and you get to take home the dinner for supper. They give you free bags of groceries to go with it which is really helpful..." (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). Denise further

discussed her experiences with a different cooking program offered through a parent support service. She stated,

I'm taking a program at [a parent support service] it's a cooking program with a dietician and it's a 6 week program. I think I'm on the last week and we get our certificate after we're done. And they took us on a Save-On tour with the dietician, it's really good. So teaching you healthier ways to cook food, not all the chips and pop. My kids don't drink pop, but they drink some juice. ... Give them healthier dairy and more vegetables since I attend that program, so I make vegetable platters and they eat it all ... (Denise, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather reflected on nutrition in her household as a child, and how she is learning the importance of good nutrition from parent support services. She stated,

...I was raised in a very poor family, like my mom was single mom, she had 6 kids and so she wasn't worried about nutrition, she was worried about getting the meals on the table. ... She was on welfare she never ever worked until I became an adult and so learning nutrition was a whole new world for me ... I learned all the values and how it helps your muscles, I didn't know how ... important nutrition was. ... I knew fruits and vegetables were healthy and I knew milk had calcium, but I didn't know all the little things well not little ... like I didn't know ... how important they were for us I guess (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Parent-child Interaction**

Some of the parent participants shared their experiences of learning or improving the ways they positively interact with their child(ren). Parent participants appreciated that parent support services were able to provide a safe space and encouraging support staff to guide them through this process. Carol discussed how parents are human, and although they make mistakes they need encouragement to continue to improve their parenting skills and interactions. She stated,

...just an understanding of how we all are as parents, and yes we all can get mad and holler around but, also realizing ... just the understanding the knowledge that they tell you. How your children feel when you...when you're trying to get them to listen, that there is better parenting styles, that it doesn't seem like it'll work now, like right now over night with one try but ... repeated attempts. From like a whole variety of things to get your children to ...listen ...that they'll work in the end. And we're slowly trying with our daughter. When we first started our daughter had dad wrapped up right around her finger and he was getting tired of it because she was like bossing him around all day go get this and go get that and he would do it and he didn't want to stop because he ...she'd freak out and he would also have, he would feel guilt I guess. ... Anyway ... its helped him to ... get her to stop and actually she's trying to do that with me now... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen described the importance of professional and peer education for parents of children with differing personality traits or disabilities. She stated,

...it gives me information on something, like even though I have a lot of kids all ready all of them are different. So it does help ... you could not know one thing about one child and there's totally ... like one child has a disability and you do not know what to do with that disability and other parents are there and then they're like ok my child has the same thing or we went through that already and they just explain what they went through and then tell us what they could try... (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

George discussed the importance of sobriety in both parent-child interactions, as well as, parent-parent interactions. He stated,

...One thing we're learning from these programs is how to be with other parents sober and how to interact with the children sober and discipline properly without fighting other parents. It doesn't have to be with violence to solve an issue and we're at that point you know... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

George further stated,

...these programs are just assisting me, they're there to help me and I'm accepting. I want it and I want them to know these programs, I think they're great; they've made me a better person. They've really helped me look at the children's perspective take myself out of my feelings and bring me back into operating and counseling as a parent... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise described a positive interaction she had with her children at a parent support service. She stated that she liked, “watching them playing, watching them do their crafts [and] helping them do it” (Denise, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Culture**

While some of the parent participants found it important to incorporate culture into parent support services in Prince George, others were more ambivalent towards the idea. Some of the Aboriginal parent participants discussed the loss of culture through historical oppression and the need to bring culture back into their everyday lives.

#### **Support of Culture**

When asked why incorporating culture into parent support services was important to her, Denise replied,

It’s just very interesting and ... when we were growing up, when you know how the residential school thing all happened, they lost all their culture and language so I don’t know my language now. So the culture part ... should be really good because I need to learn that... (Denise, personal communication, February 2010).

The importance of culture was prevalent throughout George’s interview. When choosing parent support services George included culture into his decision-making process. George stated,

...we chose [a cultural] society for the parenting group ... [another cultural agency had] a different program and that didn’t fit into our lifestyle ... so much where as the

[this agency honours] all Indians, all plants and everything. So we'll throw our can in there and fit in that way in the community. Nothing wrong with [other agencies] but, I'm like you know we feel comfortable that we made that decision... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

George also discussed the importance of cultural inclusivity within parenting programs. He stated,

...no matter what color skin you are and where you live, you know your babies aren't no different than mine. We learn a different language and a different race but, you're not better than me and no one's better than anybody in this community and we gotta start seeing each other as equal members, and I really want to see that... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen shared her experience as a Gitksan woman living and parenting in Carrier territory.

She stated,

...well my culture is pretty different, so where I come from ... we speak different language but, up here we are doing the Carrier culture which is interesting. ... It's nice to see that they have drumming up here too and the Indian dancing, pretty much the same as what we do back ... at our home town too (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Betty thought it was important to incorporate culture into programs with a large Aboriginal population in attendance. She stated,

I believe that there is certain cultures that have a more underlying...coincidence or similarities culturally. ... I believe that that might be a great factor especially for First Nations children, they have a higher number with speech and ADHD and other, FAS, so I think it would be really good for some of those services to be culturally sensitive (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona discussed the importance of culture across all community programming, specific to parents, but also to other groups as well. She stated,

... unless you're really coming from a foundation that celebrates an Aboriginal, you know philosophy, or an Aboriginal identity then it's harder to make that work and so you know as much as we have ...you know school based population of 25% Aboriginal children and a community based population that's fairly high of Aboriginal people in the community there isn't a lot of ...organizations out there dedicated to that, beyond sort of specific measures right. So you have organizations that look at Aboriginal people and HIV or Aboriginal people and health or Aboriginal people and community development but nothing really looking at parenting. ... So you know I don't know that if that's just because no one's ever thought of it or I don't know why but, I think as a community that has a large population of Aboriginal people living in it I think you know the oness is really on all of the organizations to look at how they are supporting parents and families in general, not just parents (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona also talked about the importance of parents becoming involved in the creation of culturally appropriate parent support services. She stated,

I think the demand for that has to come from the parents. You know I think a lot of organizations, like I said before, sort of chase the dollars around and there is a lot of dollars that sort of focus on Aboriginal anything right ...but unless you come from a place that's strong in that and has an identity in that it's really hard to meet those needs because it seems tokenistic or kinda shallow or casual. So I think that the demand really needs to come from a) parents wanting those services and then b) helping organizations develop those services and so, I don't know how it will happen but, you know maybe as parents, whether or not they're Aboriginal parents or parents you know newly coming to Canada from other countries from other cultures, ... you know I think as they become more confident and willing to ask for help. I would hope that those agencies will change to be reflective of that (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Cultural Ambivalence**

Some of the parent participants interviewed said that they would participate in cultural activities if they were presented in parent support services but, they would be fine if there weren't any cultural activities. Heather stated,

...I'm not much into my culture, but [the parent support service has] drums and rattles and she's printing off words in my language which I don't mind. I don't mind learning the language so that's a really big thing in my life cuz I don't know my language. Both my parents, well my dad, remembers his language but he doesn't speak it because he went to residential school and stuff (Heather, personal communication).

When asked if she thought should be an important part of parent support services Heather replied,

Somewhat some of the culture I don't mind, like respecting our elders. Not a whole lot of people do that nowadays and that was always a huge thing in my life, like if you're sitting and an elder comes in and there are no more seats, give them yours just little stuff like that. But I'm not big on much of the spirituality of it (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol also discussed her participation in cultural activities if they were happening, but suggested it wasn't a big deal if there weren't any cultural activities present. She stated,

...I feel that its fine, I mean I participate in stuff but ... I'm not gonna sit and say gee it's not enough that's not me, maybe another parent feels that way. But we've done some art work or made drums and ...I participate totally but if it's not there it's not a big deal with me... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol felt that a person's culture didn't define them as a good parent support service facilitator or support person. According to Carol, "just because they're Native doesn't really mean anything who you are and how you teach and I think that's good" (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Service Delivery**

The theme of service delivery encompassed the types of parent support services offered in Prince George, as well as, the way the programs were facilitated. When it came to

the facilitation of parent support services parent participants had very specific ideas of what made a quality facilitator or support person.

### **Programs**

Prince George offers a variety of programs related to parenting. Parent participants were very open in their dialogue about the structure of these programs and how they were beneficial. Anne stated,

...I do really enjoy going out to groups usually like Strong Start cuz I find that's a really good social gathering for me to talk with other parents, and it gives a really good place for my son to get some social time, my daughter too now that's she's a little bit older but, more for him, so far he really enjoys going... (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Anne also shared how the parent support services she has attended are welcoming. She stated,

...I have found them to be really open and inviting places to be .... The environments ...have been fairly well organized and everybody usually I know, I have always found myself I have felt welcomed when I have attended the parent support groups... (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Denise described the structure of one of the parent support services she attended in Prince George. She stated, "They have parent support groups there that you attend just for the parents and the kids are in child care while we are in parent support just discussing parent

topics” (Denise, personal communication, February 2010). George found one of the parent support services offered in Prince George provided support in a variety of ways. He stated,

...we went to [a parent support service] first and we got their program ...tried to find employment, it helped with that. It helped with ...baby’s health, like fresh milk for mom, eggs and stuff for the nourishment of the child, clothes and they also had little programs we did there. She did a parenting course or whatever. Sat one on one with the lady to vent... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen described some of the services offered by the parent support services she has attended in Prince George. She stated,

...they’ve got some good programs there; they do some workshops once in awhile so it’s really good. ... A couple of them were anger management workshops ... they did some other workshops ... a cop just came in and recently talked to us about us being the victim explaining about all that kind of stuff...(Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen also found some great resources through another parent support service in Prince George. She described, “they do cooking classes and [other support] groups which is good and then in between that [my family support worker] helps bring me to some appointments if I need it” (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

According to Ellen one of the parent support services she attended further educated her on day to day parenting activities. She stated,

...its good information though, they sit there and do little ... I don't know like kinda quiz games or stuff like that or give you information on stuff, certain other stuff you need to know about your kids or everything pretty much. Basically just doing what you would do at home with your kids, like putting them down for their naps in between our sessions, having lunch with them...(Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol described two types of parent support services she had attended, one in which parents were separated from their children and another in which parents interacted with their children throughout the program. She stated, "we went into a parent room separate from the kids and had our own little parent club-like thing" (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol further described,

...we do you know parent... I guess, group downstairs there while your children played with the childminders. You would have lunch together then you would be back with your children interacting with them. Parent-child interaction for a couple of ... hours... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol also described the structure of one of the parenting programs she attended. She stated,

...you either go Tuesdays and Thursdays or Wednesdays and Fridays you are there all day from like 10 o'clock to 3 o'clock they provide you with lunch and your children with snacks and they also pick you up and drop you off (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona discussed the structure of the parent support services she attended as an environment for peer-based education. She stated, “they both sort of have that peer level parent access stuff like there is some training curriculum they go into but a lot of it is really about getting parents to come together and connect and talk” (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010). Fiona also shared her experiences with two parent support services that offered more structure to their programs. Fiona stated one parent support service was,

...sorta based on 4 different themes and so each week they would just rotate through the different themes. So a question might be around weaning and self-led weaning with children, or around different parenting styles, attachment parenting and that, and it would just give our crew the opportunity to ...talk and to share ...about what works for them really focusing on the peer level style and foundation for education (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona discussed another more curriculum-based parent support service she attended. She stated,

[The parent support service] was more of a curriculum based program, and that was the one I think I enjoyed a little bit more in that I felt like I didn’t necessarily have to share sometimes. So ...there was like actual curriculum to get through each week I can’t remember how many weeks I went, it was I don’t know maybe 4 or 5 weeks. ... So there would be different stages, you know taking us through different ways to talk to our kids, and you know different ways to discipline, and different parenting styles, and identifying your own parenting styles. There were definitely opportunities to

share throughout all of that but it was ...a little more classroom based (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona also described a parent support services she attended which included parent-child interaction. She stated,

...what we would do was we would come together as a group, the facilitator would take us through you know some training around singing and reading to our kids doing some hands on activities and then they would open it up as a question of the week so something around parenting...(Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather described the structure and resources offered at the parent support services she has attended. She stated,

...we're doing a program right now, the Diabetes Association is hiring somebody, a nutritionist, to tell us or teach us to cook nutritious meals because I guess the diabetes rate is so high especially in First Nations. ... So that's a good program for me because this past year I've been getting very self-conscious about diabetes so I go there and then I go to the parent support services there. Some Mondays they have parent support circle, they have childminding and at [at another parent support service] they have a circle time, play time and a snack time so we sit there with our children and play with them and they learn a lot. It's like preschool, getting them ready, and then they also have a parent support room in there and we go in there and they have another parent support circle... (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Facilitator/Support Person**

Parent participants discussed the important qualities they like to see in a parent support service facilitator or support person. Many of the parent participants found it very important that facilitators or support people were parents themselves and had the personal experiences of parenting. During the interview process parent participants often referred to facilitators or support people as “she” which demonstrated the large amount of females working in the parent support service profession. Heather described the support she received from a support person. She stated,

...I’ve known her for 2 years now and ... she listens and if there’s something going on in your life she’ll just pop up all these ideas. If you don’t want to hear it she won’t say it anymore. ... She’s help me overcome so much and with my parenting skills she’ll sit and listen and then she’ll look it up on the internet or anything just to help me overcome whatever it is that I’m struggling with(Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather really elaborated on the support she received from a parent support service facilitator. She stated,

...this one [facilitator] she’s got her Social Work and I don’t know whatever else degree. She just, she’s awesome, she’s like our life is not her priority but it’s like we’re high on her list, her priority list. ... So many people that are caring, like genuinely caring like some people will come and just like I don’t know look down on

us for some reason I want somebody just nice (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Heather further discussed the importance of utilizing parents as parent support service facilitators. She stated,

...they know what we go through and stuff like the ages and stages of kids like what to expect like not every child is the same but like they know how it is to stay up half the night with their crying baby and stuff and so they've been there and they just let us know its normal or something (Heather, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona discussed the importance of facilitators or support people parenting in a similar way to the way she was parenting. She stated,

...the facilitators at the time were ... great you know, and I think they parented the same way I did. So they were very supportive of what I was doing, you know, as I went back and found other moms who were doing sort of the same thing it got easier...(Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Fiona believed that it was important to maintain facilitator consistency within parent support services. She stated,

...with one set of facilitators the whole way through I think how they did it was a real strength. That you know was very ...positive focus, very straight face. They came into everything with not a lot of focus on sort of the deficit view of parenting, or you know if things weren't going well that it was a problem. I think that it was just who they were as people... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol also thought it was important for parent support service facilitators or support people to be parents themselves. She stated,

... I don't really want to take advice from some woman who doesn't have children or has never been there done that. ...I mean I do but, I always give more consideration to a woman who is a parent ... the [program manager at a parent support service] like always, every now, and then she talks and gives me an example of something and then she doesn't have any small children anymore but you know her youngest child is 17. You know she's a parent and you know she knows what it's like to have small children because her kids were small once and she also knows what it's like to have teenagers... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Carol further described a facilitator that impacted her experience with parent support services. She stated,

...there is a [facilitator] down [there] she's excellent with the kids; she's excellent with the adults. ...What I like about them too is that they're real and what I mean by real ... that when they speak with us they aren't like by the book; and that and they're actually working with interest; and they're throwing their experiences out there to you. ... To me it feels like once the job is over this is who they are when they go home and that's what I like cuz I have ran into people who are totally by the book and it just doesn't feel real (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Betty found it crucial that facilitators or support people have a diverse background in meeting the needs of both children and parents. She stated,

...if they have a full realm of disabilities and developmental growth it is a huge asset. ...That way they can see if there is any key factors changing his progress ...and not be so isolated or specialized to one area but, to have a little bit of realm of everything when dealing with these supports because additionally providing support to the child many times you will be needing to provide support to the parent. ... Parents have to transition in accepting support to begin with and then begin being able to apply that support to their everyday lives (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen shared her experiences with a Program Coordinator that she built a relationship with.

She stated,

... She's been a big support. She's been helping with the kids a lot and getting us to appointments too. So they help with appointments too sometimes they've been once and awhile too they just bring extra stuff in ... like extra stuff that you would need like diapers and milk and things like that, cuz ya it's not easy living just off of welfare. ... (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

George also shared his experiences with supportive parent support service facilitators. He stated,

...they helped us safety our home up. She came in and she's like ok we need this, we've tried but, here is some proper ...feedback. You need to safety your home here and there to prevent injury for your child. I thought that was great too, that she was able to do that and then she gave counseling to [my partner] and stuff like that with

the baby and helped out made us feel like we were special parents to this child...(George, personal communication, February 2010).

Similar to other parent participant experiences, George felt it was important for facilitators or support people to be parents themselves. George stated,

I always love a facilitator who listens. That just listens; and also I love a facilitator that's been there done that. Like no offense to you, you don't have any children, someday you may have children but, as of yet you don't really understand the feelings of parenting until then. So when I go out to a parenting group or I have a facilitator they talk about their kids and ...that makes me understand that we have the same feelings, and we can connect them whether your woman or not, or man or woman and that's a common denominator and that can bond us right...(George, personal communication, February 2010).

Anne felt it was important for facilitators to be friendly, and have the ability to connect with parents, as well as, being a parent themselves. She stated,

...Its nice obviously you know a friendly person, who's a facilitator, who is able to go up to like different people who may be are a bit more shy and not able to approach other parents at the programs. A facilitator who can go up to those kind of people and get them drawn into conversations with other parents is always really helpful because you know some people are just too shy to make that contact themselves they really want to they just don't know how to start it. ...A good facilitator would be able to reach that kind of little distance. And then I find it helpful, I have been to programs

where the facilitators have had children and haven't. ...I do find it helpful when they have had their own personal experience with children its it kind of adds that little bit because they are another parent who you can talk to about things, and not that facilitators that don't have children don't necessarily know about those kinds of things but, its different when they have experienced it themselves (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

### **Chapter Four Summary**

Five major themes emerged from the analysis of eight face to face interviews with parents, of children ages two to five years, who have accessed parent support services in Prince George. These themes were: support, challenges, parenting skills, culture, and service delivery. Each major theme was divided into two or more sub-themes. Overall, the parent participants were extremely appreciative of the parent support services being offered throughout Prince George, as well as, the facilitators and support people operating these services. The parent participants interviewed were all extremely dedicated to parenting and open to support to continue to build upon their skill-base as parents.

### **Chapter Five: Summary and Recommendations**

At the end of December 2009 there were 254 children in care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development in Prince George, not including those that may be in care of a delegated Aboriginal agency (O. Gill, personal communication, Jan. 2010). Woodcock (2003) discusses how child protection is enhanced by the improvements in the welfare of families and the promotion of positive parenting. Providing parents with appropriate resources to raise their children is crucial in order to reduce the number of children in the care of MCFD, and also as a method of parental support. Parent participants were extremely grateful for the parent support services offered in Prince George. Through the interview process parent participants were able to share some of the strengths, weaknesses, and barriers of the parent support services they have attended, while providing future recommendations to better meet their needs as parents. Parents and children accessing parent support services require programming that supports keeping families together, providing support mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. Furthermore, parent support services need to be delivered consistently and adequately funded.

The future of parent support services needs to be built based on community collaboration. Owens, Richerson, Murphy, Jagelewski and Rossi (2007) discuss the importance of incorporating parent's preferences and values into future modifications of parent support services, which would lead to better matching of community needs and services, ultimately reaching a greater number of families in need of support. Fiona stated, "...talk to parents, you know, find out what types of supports they're looking for..." (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010). Fiona further suggested,

...keeping things at a peer level when it comes to parenting recognizing that parents as educators are the experts that facilitators as much as they're there to help deliver curriculum really only need to be there to manage the conversation at times... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen thought it was important for parents to be included in decision-making. She stated,

I think if they give the parents a chance to speak out because we're the ones taking our time to sit there and gather up what we should do and everything, and there's lots of things that we want to do, but because of policy reasons we cannot do (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Including parents in what occurs in parent support services may increase participation and rates of completion. Parents are a valuable resource in program development and implementation, it is critical that their experiences be considered and their voices heard (Bloomfield et al., 2005; Russell et al., 2008).

### **Adequate Funding**

Increased funding would provide parents further access to affordable childcare services, one on one support from service providers, transportation, programming that addresses the needs of each unique family, cultural diversity in programs, and flexibility in program times and length. This is not to say that issues of child protection will be completely eliminated if the above recommendations are met, but rather provision of adequate parent support services is a notable method of prevention.

It was important to this research to capture the concerns parent participants had in regards to funding of parenting and children's services. Parent participants recommended funding increases to further support program growth and development. George stated, "...to start first of all we need more money and the facilitators need to be paid a little more..." (George, personal communication, February 2010). George further recommended that funding be put in place to hire community elders to participate in program development and implementation. He stated, "...I would really like to have a wage set for an elderly person to be paid well to just sit there and listen and counsel young mothers and fathers..." (George, personal communication, February 2010).

Increased funding could potentially eliminate time restrictions on parent support services. Parenting is a 24/7 job, parents do not get evenings, weekends, and holidays off and support services should be flexible in their availability to meet this need. Carol captured this when she recommended more flexibility in the availability of parent support services. She stated,

...for me it's just to be there when I need them and not ... like our duration for this thing is only this long, and haven't you learned anything yet? Hurry me out the door, I would like for it to be open whenever I can access it when I need it... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Eliminating time restrictions would allow parents to learn and develop skills at their own pace.

Adequate funding would improve the salaries of facilitators and support people. Providing staff and program consistency could support relationships between parents and service providers. Increased funding could allow for further creation of open, welcoming environments for children and parents. Parent support services must be flexible in duration, and times that they are offered. Increased funding could create services to be offered and delivered based on the needs of the parents.

### **Program Delivery**

As previously discussed program development and delivery should reflect the needs of the parents participating in parent support services. Parent support services for families with children of all ages would be beneficial. While it may not always be possible to meet the needs of all parents involved, it is crucial to collaborate with parents in areas of program development and delivery. Parent participants discussed the challenges of meeting their children's needs when parent support services had age limitations. Often service providers are allotted money to provide specific services, and while these services are beneficial to some parents they may not be as valuable to the majority of parents in need of parent support services.

### **Parents as Experts**

Throughout this research process there has been a reoccurring theme that parents are the experts behind parenting. Parents recommend that facilitators and support people working in parent support services should actually be parents themselves. Owens et al. (2007) discussed how parents in their research expressed negative sentiments toward group

leaders who did not have children and toward university-based professionals. While it may not always be possible to have a facilitator or support person who is a parent themselves, the following recommendations have been made: ask the parents attending the parent support services to take turns co-facilitating with the regular facilitator or support person; have guest speakers that are parents come and share their experiences around parenting; open communication and collaboration with parents, allowing their voices to be heard in regards to program development, implementation, and evaluation.

### **One on One Service Provision**

While group parenting programs have proven to be effective, parent participants would appreciate one on one support as well. Parent participants need a facilitator or support person to come to their homes and assist them in their daily parenting routines while in their environment. Carol requested,

...more one on one with [my] children and a worker ... I just would like them to ... know exactly you know the struggles that I might be going through with my child and work on it, not just randomly in a whole group... (Carol, personal communication, February 2010).

Teaching parents strategies in their home environment would reinforce the information facilitated in a group environment.

### **Variation in Services**

Parents expressed that the variety of parent support services in Prince George were meeting their needs, however they had suggestions for improvements. Recommendations

included: inclusion of physical activity; creating support groups that meet the specific needs of parents and children; and incorporation of nutrition into programming. As stated repeatedly throughout this research parents should be consulted throughout the process of parent support service development, implementation, and evaluation.

Rates of childhood and adult obesity are on the rise. Parents are looking for strategies to improve the health of themselves and their children. When asked about recommendations Heather stated, "...more walking [and] physical activity..." (Heather, personal communication, February 2010). Heather suggested that parent support services have community kitchens. According to Heather, "...teaching us good healthy meals at a low cost budget or whatever so we divide that all up, so some place with a full kitchen and childminding..." (Heather, personal communication, February 2010). Parents require strategies around incorporating physical activity and healthy eating into their daily lives.

Parent support groups provide a safe place for parents to discuss the multiple issues of parenting. While keeping parent support groups and topics of discussion open it would be useful to have parent support groups that are adapted to parents with specific needs. Betty stated,

I believe that there are many support groups that are lacking here and that ...I've been in the position that I am, employment wise, I get a lot of complaints in regards that support groups that are out there for families generalize ...are being grouped together. That ...to me would say that children with ADHD, with children that have FAS, with children that have another disability, are being grouped so many parents do not want to be grouped they want to speak specifically about the one disability or challenge or behavior. ... It's very challenging to sit in a group and be able to share your story or

your challenges or your difficulties with people that don't understand... (Betty, personal communication, February 2010).

Creating parent support services based on the needs of parents might raise attendance and completion outcomes. Parenting is unique for each individual and collaboration is necessary to ensure success.

### **Cultural Diversity**

According to Owens et al. (2007), "...cultural values and interpersonal dynamics associated with the local culture may interfere with parents' decision to attend parenting programs" (p. 181). Cultural sensitivity is necessary in the development and implementation of parent support services. Discussing the cultural component of programming with parents is crucial as cultural beliefs are diverse. Providing an environment which embraces cultural diversity and sensitivity could increase rates of attendance and program completion (Moran & Ghate, 2005).

Parent participants expressed the need to improve and encourage cultural diversity in parent support services. Fiona stated,

...I think for anyone to succeed in whatever they do whether or not that's parenting or any of their other goals in life you need to feel like you have a place to belong. And so you know when you walk into a lot of agencies that work with Aboriginal people it really comes from that deficit-based approach that you know there is something wrong with what they're doing; whereas you [should] have a sense of belonging or to

feel like who you are is being celebrated in some way... (Fiona, personal communication, February 2010).

George was particularly interested in incorporating each and every culture throughout the community of Prince George into parent support services. His recommendation was as follows,

I would like to bring in all the cultural foods and banquets more often where we have cultural events in a big gym and we have all sorts of food everywhere ... once a month not just once a year, all the time. I would [like to] honour the Chinese New Years and Indian New Years and I would do all of these things in the community to enlighten all the cultural people in here French, Portuguese, the Irish like that. ... I would have all kinds of information on how you would raise a child in different nationalities and I would like to have the facilitators all knowledgeable or even living these things... (George, personal communication, February 2010).

This research demonstrates the need for culturally inclusive programming and parent support services.

### **Overcoming Practical Barriers**

Barriers can be strong predictors of program drop-out (Owens et al., 2007). Barriers include: difference in cultural values, difference in interpersonal dynamics, lack of child care, transportation difficulties, financial challenges, and time constraints (Owens et al., 2007). While parent participants experienced a variety of barriers to accessing parent support services, for the most part they were able to overcome them. Reflecting on their experiences

parent participants provided recommendations to service providers and other parents on how to overcome barriers.

### **Advertising**

Parent participants expressed their challenges to accessing parent support services because they weren't aware of services being offered. Parent support services in Prince George need to improve on advertising their programs by posting the dates, times, and locations throughout the community and, also online. According to the research conducted by Owens et al. (2007) parent participants recommended tailoring advertising to methods commonly used throughout the community, such as postings on community bulletin boards, announcements on local radio stations, and postings in the local newspaper. In the past Anne tried to organize some advertising for the parent support services she was attending, but she recommended agencies need to improve their methods of advertising parent support services. She suggested,

Some better advertising actually would be nice because in terms of like the times and stuff for groups, like power play stuff, I generally have to hunt down ...when they are. They don't change that often and so usually you can be pretty good at guessing but, at the same time it would be nice to have them advertised in more places so that you knew when the events were. ... I haven't done it this year but last year I actually hunted down all the Strong Starts in town and all the power play times and all the library times and I wrote up a list and I posted them online but, I haven't gotten around to that this year and it would be nice if they were advertising it themselves so that it was easier to find (Anne, personal communication, February 2010).

Based on the participant interviews it appears with increased advertising parent support services would see higher program attendance.

### **Transportation**

Throughout this research the issue of transportation has been prevalent. Parents living on a low income often do not own vehicles and find it challenging to get to parent support services. Family size and weather conditions contribute to transportation challenges. While parent participants attempted to resolve their transportation on their own they also recommended that parent support services in Prince George provide transportation for parents and children. Strongly recommended by parents is the provision of taxi vouchers, bus passes, or having agencies directly transport parents to address solutions to transportation issues.

### **Childcare**

Parents are more likely to attend parent support services that provide adequate childcare for children of all ages. Russell et al. (2008) suggest that providing subsidized guaranteed childcare that begins at an early age may be one of the greatest aids to families. Parent participants discussed the need for childcare so that they could focus directly on program education and skill development, while knowing that their children were being well cared for. When asked how parent support services could meet her needs as a parent Carol replied, "...to have [a] daycare atmosphere for the children..." (Carol, personal communication, February 2010). Denise recommended more childcare, specifically low-cost childcare with flexibility in the hours of operation. She suggested,

More availability, like I wanted to do upgrading but I have no childcare for awhile so it kinda I don't know where to start with childcare ... Probably like the very low income I guess. I know childcare is expensive so ...people that can't afford it [I] would like to go back to school and cant that's one barrier I think of... (Denise, personal communication, February 2010).

Ellen suggested that parents could take turns operating their own childcare so that the needs of parents and children were both being met. She stated,

...it would be a couple of the parents staying home sort of like running like a daycare service thing but it wasn't happening every day it was happening every weekend or so the parents could get to know each other and the kids could interact and just stay at home and play... (Ellen, personal communication, February 2010).

Parent participation in the provision of childcare would reduce the financial pressures on the agencies, while continuing to provide a necessary service.

### **Capturing the Phenomenon**

This research was conducted using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which attempted to present the basic essence of the experiences of the parent participants. van Manen (1990) states, "phenomonolgy aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences" (p. 9). Using the six research activities presented by van Manen assisted me throughout the research process, they are: 1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; 2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; 3) reflecting on the essential

themes which characterize the phenomenon; 4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; 5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; and 6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.

As somebody who has worked with families for many years this topic not only interested me, but I felt committed to exploring and sharing the experiences of parents. Through this research I was able to actively explore the lived experiences of the parent participants, which presented both similarities and differences in my own experiences with parent support services. While the transcripts presented similar themes, it was important for this research to be reflective and thoughtful in choosing the experiences that would be presented. While writing and rewriting this thesis a lot of thoughtfulness went into the language used to make sure that the experiences presented were presented precisely as they were presented to the researcher. Although challenging at times, I was able to maintain a strong and oriented relation to this research, there are no superficialities or falsities. Each part of this research has been balanced to contribute to the research in whole.

### **Limitations**

Although this research offers rich information related to parents' experiences with parent support services, it has limitations. Parent participants primarily consisted of mothers, with limited representation of fathers, and no representation for foster parents, adoptive parents, grandparents or extended family raising children. In addition, this research focused on parents with children ages two to five years, excluding parents who have accessed parent support services for infants and/or youth. Although parent participants came from various cultural backgrounds, there was not enough cultural saturation to render any culturally

specific observations. Therefore, we do not know how a person's cultural background influences their experiences with parenting or accessing parent support services. Participants accessing parent support services in other areas of the province or country may have different participation barriers, and recommendations for future improvements.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

In order to strengthen the literature on parent's experiences with parent support services, research should be conducted in several prospective research areas. First, research similar to this study needs to be conducted provincially throughout Canada inclusive of urban and rural and remote areas. Second, there is little information on the recruitment and retention of parents accessing parent support services so future examination of this is necessary. Third, parents have consistently discussed the importance of facilitators and support people being parents themselves, research examining relationship dynamics between parents and facilitators (trained parents vs. university trained professionals) should be examined. Fourth, an extensive study on ethnic backgrounds and how ethnicity may influence and impact parenting, including parents experiences with parent support services. Fifth, a further investigation of how peer support impacts parenting and parent's experiences with parent support services is needed.

### **Conclusion**

This research journey has been filled with moments of enlightenment as well as challenges. It was central to this research that I have quality supervision and guidance. There were many times throughout this research process where I needed to consult or debrief

with my thesis supervisor. Issues regarding follow-up interview questions, cultural sensitivity, coding, and thematic analysis were frequent topics of discussion. After asking my supervisor about incorporating follow-up interview questions I was able to take the advice given and apply it to the interview process in order to gain richer and deeper responses from the parent participants. The more questions I asked my supervisor, the more I learned about the research process, which built my confidence as a researcher.

Having six Aboriginal parent participants brought diversity to the research and learning opportunities for me as a novice researcher. As a non-Aboriginal person conducting research with Aboriginal parent participants it was important to be aware of the possibility of misinterpreting what was being said due to cultural differences. As a non-Aboriginal person it was crucial for me to conduct myself in a culturally sensitive manner during the research process. To ensure cultural sensitivity I maintained transparency in my role as a student researcher, and embraced the role of learner, rather than professional or expert. I realized by being transparent and embracing the role of a learner that the parent participants involved were comfortable enough to truly share their lived experiences, which resulted in richer data.

When I began the research process I was nervous and felt unprepared to take on such a challenging task. I thought to myself that I would never do research again, so all I had to do was get through this one research process. During the research process I was able to apply the things I had learned from reading the literature, and have in-depth discussions with my supervisor in ways that built my confidence as a researcher. The knowledge and skills learned allowed for the development of rich information regarding parents' experiences with parent support services. To conclude, as a researcher I was able to apply my new found

knowledge and skills throughout the research process, and further develop them with the assistance of fellow researchers in a way that allowed me to become a confident researcher. Knowing and experiencing what I have during this research process has encouraged me to want to participate in future research endeavours.

Parent support services are at the heart of prevention and intervention strategies for parents. Parenting is constantly changing for a variety of reasons, including: societal change, cultural change, changes in child development, and economic change, to list a few. Meeting the needs of parents is crucial and as parenting is constantly adapting to change so should parent support services. The aim of this research was to examine the experiences of parents accessing parent support services in Prince George using the hermeneutic phenomenological approach created by van Manen (1990), in order to give the parent participants a voice and also to sensitize policymakers and practitioners to the key factors that parents perceive to be of value. Although every parent participants experience with parent support services was unique, the participants in this research were able to create a vivid understanding of their personal experiences with parent support services and provide future recommendations of ways to improve services to meet the needs of parents. Further research based on the findings of this research could only strengthen parent support options, policies and program development.

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## Appendix A

Jennifer Tkachuk, MSW Student

3333 University Way, Prince George, B.C., V2N 4Z9

Cell phone: 250-640-7642 email: [tkachuk@unbc.ca](mailto:tkachuk@unbc.ca)

*Date*

*Name of Agency*

*Address, City, Postal Code*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

As a graduate social work student at the University of Northern British Columbia I am required to conduct research and develop a thesis based on the findings. I would like you to consider encouraging participants from your program to participate in this research.

The purpose of this research is to give voice to the experience of parents, of children ages twenty-four months to five years, in Prince George who have used one or more parent support services in the last five years. It is hoped that their stories and insights will provide information about accessing parent support services, as well as, the usefulness of these services. Additionally parents will be asked to share their process of engaging in parent support services. Parents who agree to participate in this study are asked to share their own understanding of what would be helpful to them, and possibly other parents, while raising their children. All participation is completely voluntary and individuals are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

Once I have received your permission I will display posters where they will be visible to program participants. The posters will explain the research project, and request that parents who are interested in participating contact me at the cell phone number or by email to arrange for a face-to-face interview.

All participants will be assigned fictitious names to protect their identities, and confidentiality will be maintained. All data and participant information will be stored in a locked cabinet in the thesis supervisor's office within the School of Social Work. The participant information sheet has been included with this letter for you and your staff to look over before presenting this information to clients. If you have any additional questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me via phone or email.

Your support is sincerely appreciated,

Jennifer Tkachuk, MSW Student, UNBC

## **Appendix B**

### **Project Information Sheet**

**Graduate Student Thesis Researcher:** Jennifer Tkachuk, Masters of Social Work Student

c/o University of Northern BC School of Social Work,

3333 University Way, Prince George, B.C., V2N 4Z9

Email: tkachuk@unbc.ca Cell phone: 250-640-7642

**Thesis Title:** Parents experiences with parent support services in Prince George.

**Supervisor:** Joanna Pierce, MSW, RSW, Associate Professor School of Social Work, UNBC

#### **Purpose of research:**

The purpose of this research is to give voice to the experience of parents, of children ages twenty-four months to five years, in Prince George who have used one or more parent support services in the last five years. It is hoped that you sharing your experiences, stories and insights will provide information about accessing parent support services, as well as, the usefulness of these services. Additionally parents will be asked to share their process of engaging in parent support services. Parents who agree to participate in this study are asked to share their own understanding of what would be helpful to them, and possibly other parents, while raising their children. All participation is completely voluntary and individuals are welcome to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **Respondents will be asked to:**

- Contact the researcher at the cell number or email above to arrange a time and place for an interview;
- Commit about one to one and a half hours of time for the interview process;
- Answer the researchers demographic questions, and questions about your experience of being a parent and using parent support services in Prince George;
- Give consent (in writing) to be interviewed, and have the interview recorded by hand and on a digital recorder;
- Allow the researcher to use quotes and demographic information from your interview that do not identify you personally.

### **Potential benefits and risks to participants:**

#### **Risks**

This study is designed to seek information about existing parent support services in Prince George therefore I do not foresee any risks to the participants. Some possible risks may include: concerns about confidentiality regarding personal information; possibility of emotional upset due to the subject matter; possible disclosure of a child who has been harmed or neglected, which would result in an immediate report to MCFD. The above potential risks will be addressed in the following ways:

- Researcher and participants will choose an interview location in which both parties feel comfortable and in which confidentiality can be maintained;
- Interviews will be manually and digitally recorded with permission of the participants;
- Only the researcher and the researchers supervisory committee of three UNBC professors (who are obligated to maintain your confidentiality) will have access to the information provided in the interviews;
- The written and digital recordings of the interviews will be locked in a filing cabinet in the thesis supervisors (Joanna Pierce) office (TAL 10- 2568), and the voice recordings will be transcribed into computer files. All interviews will be transcribed by the researcher. In an effort to preserve anonymity the tape file will be kept separately from the identity file. The computer files will be protected by passwords and firewalls. The computer files and transcripts will be destroyed after this student researcher has defended the proposed thesis;
- Any potentially identifying information will be removed or altered when input into the computer, participants will be assigned a pseudonym to protect their identity;
- There will be no identifying information included in the final study findings, however personal experiences shared may be familiar to people you know;
- The final study will be published as a thesis and possibly published in relevant journals, or presented at conferences. No information that could identify participants will be included in the final study;
- Participants can decline to answer any questions that they do not feel comfortable with, can decline to complete the interview, and can ask that any information they have provided be removed from the study at any time during the interview process;
- At any time a participant is emotionally distressed they will be provided with a referral to appropriate services that can provide counselling or support;

- At the beginning of each interview the researcher will identify that she is able to maintain confidentiality of the information shared, with the exception of information that may indicate a child has been harmed or neglected. The researcher will explain to participants that the researcher has a legal duty to report this information to MCFD;
- If a research participant discloses information about a child who has been harmed or neglected, the researcher will explain that she has to share the information with MCFD, and encourage the participant to call and report the information themselves. If the participant does not report the information, the researcher will call and report the information.

### **Support Agencies**

- **Native Healing Centre**, 3rd Floor, 1600 Third Avenue, 250.564.4324
- **Walmsley & Associates**, 1512 Queensway, 250.564.1000
- **UNBC Counselling Centre**, 3333 University Way, 250.960.6364
- **Brazzoni & Associates**, 301-1705 Third Avenue, 250.614.2261

### **Benefits**

There are many benefits to participating in this study. Participants will have the opportunity to explore their experiences, and consider what worked for them and what did not work. This may provide participants with a better understanding of their own needs as parents, and help them express those needs. Participants will have the opportunity to ‘give voice’ to parents who are working hard to parent their children. Participants will help this research, and future research, to better understand the process of involvement with these service systems in Prince George. Researchers can use this knowledge to recommend changes to the service providers whose responsibility is to help support parents.

Participants can request and receive a copy of the study from this researcher when it is completed. If participants would like to review the transcripts prior to the final report being written they can voluntarily provide the researcher with their personal contact information. Participants receive a \$25.00 honorarium for agreeing to participate in this study. Should participants require further information before, during, or after the study they can contact the student researcher Jennifer Tkachuk by email at [tkachuk@unbc.ca](mailto:tkachuk@unbc.ca) or cell phone 250-640-7642, or my thesis supervisor, Joanna Pierce, MSW, RSW by email at [piercej@unbc.ca](mailto:piercej@unbc.ca) or phone 250-960-6521. Any complaints about the research project should be made to the Office of Research, University of Northern British Columbia 250-960-5650, or by email [reb@unbc.ca](mailto:reb@unbc.ca)

### **Appendix C**

## **UNBC graduate student is looking for parents in Prince George, B.C. who are willing to be interviewed.**

This graduate student research is about the experience of parents who have attended or are currently attending one or more parent support services in Prince George. The researcher is interested in talking to parents about their experiences attending parent support services in Prince George.

- Participants must be parents or a person (19 years and older) in a caregiver role for a child age twenty-four months to five years.
- Participants must have accessed a parent support service for their child within the last five years.

### **What do you have to do?**

Contact the student researcher either by email or phone using the contact information provided below to arrange an interview.

### **How much time will it take?**

Each interview will take about an hour to an hour and a half.

### **Where will the interview take place?**

The interview will take place at a safe location in the community. This location will be decided on by the participant and the researcher.

**A \$25.00 honorarium** will be provided for parents who agree to participate in this research.

Information shared for the purpose of this study will be kept confidential.

**Contact Jennifer at cell number: 250-640-7642**

**email: [tkachuk@unbc.ca](mailto:tkachuk@unbc.ca)**

## Appendix D

### Informed Consent Form

I understand that I am agreeing to participate in a research study.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I have myself read, or the researcher has read the attached information sheet to me and I have received a copy.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand that the researcher will record some information by hand on a form, and that the interviews will be voice recorded.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study with the researcher.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand the benefits and risks involved in participating in this study.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand that the researcher is obligated to maintain my confidentiality, and that no personally identifying information will be used in the final thesis report.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand that only the student and her supervisory committee (consisting of 3 UNBC professors) will have access to identifying information about me.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand that if I disclose information about a concern for the safety of a child, that the researcher has a legal duty to report that information to MCFD.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and I can withdraw from the study at any time.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

This study was explained to me by: Jennifer Tkachuk, Master of Social Work Student

I agree to take part in this study:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Research Participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Printed Name of Research Participant*

Contact Information for Transcription Distribution: \_\_\_\_\_

I believe that the person signing this form understands what is involved in the study and voluntarily agrees to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of Researcher*

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix E**

### **Participant Demographic Interview Questions**

Please answer these questions to the best of your ability. If you choose not to answer a question please indicate that you want to pass on the question and move on to the next.

1) What is your age?

- ☐ 19-25 yrs
- ☐ 26-35 yrs
- ☐ 36-45 yrs
- ☐ 46-55 yrs
- ☐ 55+ yrs

2) What level of education have you completed?

- ☐ Elementary School
- ☐ Middle school/Junior High School
- ☐ Some High School
- ☐ Graduated Grade 12
- ☐ Some College or University
- ☐ Graduated College or University
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

3) What is your relationship status?

- ☐ Single
- ☐ Living Common-Law
- ☐ Married
- ☐ Divorced
- ☐ Widowed
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

4) How many children do you have?

- |                            |                                    |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 | <input type="checkbox"/> 5         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2 | <input type="checkbox"/> 6         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 | <input type="checkbox"/> 7         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8 or more |

5) What are the ages of each child?

- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> _____ |

6) What is your ethnicity?

- ☐ First Nations
- ☐ Métis
- ☐ Inuit
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Caucasian/White
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

7) What is your annual household income?

- ☐ less than \$15,000
- ☐ \$15,000 - \$24,999
- ☐ \$25,000 - \$39,999
- ☐ \$40,000 - \$59,999
- ☐ \$60,000 or more

8) Are you currently employed?

- ☐ yes
- ☐ no

9) If you are currently employed, what is your employment status?

- ☐ Full-time
- ☐ Part-time
- ☐ Casual
- ☐ On call
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_ (please specify)

10) What area of Prince George do you live in?

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**Appendix F**  
Honorarium Receipt

University of Northern British Columbia  
School of Social Work

I \_\_\_\_\_ have received an honorarium of  
\$25.00 from UNBC graduate student Jennifer Tkachuk on this day  
\_\_\_\_\_(month/day/year) for my participation in graduate student  
research.

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of research participant*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Signature of graduate student*

\_\_\_\_\_  
*Date*

## **Appendix G**

### **Participants Interview Questions**

1. What parent support services have you accessed in Prince George?
2. Why did you access a parent support service?
3. How were you referred to the parent support service?
4. Were there barriers to accessing parent support services? What were they?
5. What are the strengths of the parent support services you attended?
6. What are the weaknesses of the parent support services you attended?
7. What would you like to see changed in the parent support services offered in Prince George?
8. How did utilizing a parent support service affect your parenting?
9. What qualities would you find beneficial in a program facilitator or support person?
10. What recommendations would you make to improve parent support services in Prince George?
11. Tell me about your primary support system as a parent.
12. How did the parent support service(s) you have participated in meet your cultural needs?
13. Is there anything else you would like to tell me?