



Fédération  
québécoise des  
organismes  
communautaires  
Famille



# REFERENCE FRAMEWORK FOR AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY ACTION PRACTICES FOR AND WITH FAMILIES

This reference framework was adopted under its French original title (*Cadre de référence sur les pratiques d'action communautaire autonome Famille*) at the Annual General Meeting of the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* (FQOCF) on May 29, 2008.

Translation project coordinator: Johanne Lachance (FQOCF) with support from Judith Poirier (FQOCF)  
Translator: David Llewellyn

### **Acknowledgment**

The FQOCF wishes to thank Ms. Deena White (Université de Montréal) for her support in the translation of some specific terms used in the field of autonomous community action.

© Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille, 2016  
222 Victoria Avenue, Saint-Lambert (Quebec), J4P 2H6  
Telephone: 450-466-2538 - Fax: 450-466-4196  
Email: [accueil@fqocf.org](mailto:accueil@fqocf.org)  
Website: [www.fqocf.org](http://www.fqocf.org)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1. BACKGROUND</b> .....	5
<b>1.1 Why a reference framework for family resource centres?</b> .....	5
<b>1.2 A brief history</b> .....	6
Emergence of a parent support movement .....	6
From parents' schools to family unions .....	6
From family unions to family resource centres .....	6
<i>Figure 1. Evolution of FQOCF membership</i> .....	7
<b>1.3 Our definition of “family”</b> .....	8
<b>2. FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES, A SOCIAL MOVEMENT</b> .....	9
<b>2.1 Family resource centres' profile: a rich, original movement</b> .....	9
<b>2.2 Family resource centres' contribution: key players</b> .....	9
<b>2.3 Blueprint for society and socio-political demands</b> .....	10
<b>3. FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES' APPROACH AND CHARACTERISTICS</b> .....	11
<b>3.1 Values</b> .....	11
3.1.1 Rooted in the community.....	11
3.1.2 Families at the heart of the action .....	11
3.1.3 Autonomy as backdrop.....	11
3.1.4 Flexibility and innovation .....	11
3.1.5 Comprehensive approach .....	11
3.1.6 Activities focussed on values of autonomy and individual and collective empowerment.....	12
3.1.7 Egalitarian conception of social relationships .....	12
3.1.8 Democratic participation.....	12
3.1.9 Voluntary relationship with the organization .....	12
3.1.10 Solidarity and social justice .....	12
<b>3.2 Principles and philosophy</b> .....	13
3.2.1 Family resource centres, a living and social milieu.....	13
Functions of the community milieu .....	13
3.2.2 For and with families: never without the parents .....	13
Faster alone. Further together.....	13
3.2.3 Popular education: central to our practices .....	14
3.2.4 Individual and collective action .....	14
<b>3.3 Priority Action Areas for action</b> .....	15
3.3.1 Toward improving families' living conditions: a comprehensive family policy .....	15
Economic support .....	15
Balancing family, work and studies .....	15
Health and social services.....	16
Education .....	16
Housing.....	16
Recreation.....	16
3.3.2 Support for parental role.....	17
Conception of the role of fathers and mothers .....	17
Support measures for all families .....	17
<i>Organizations which took part in the various consultations or the adoption of the Reference Framework</i> .....	20



## 1. BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Why a reference framework for family resource centres?

For the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* (FQOCF)—Quebec's Federation of Family Resource Centres—reflecting, writing and providing a reference framework for family resource centres is doing for our members what members do for families day by day, giving them tools and means to enable them to go farther. The goal is the same, in a perspective of popular education: to develop our members' knowledge and skills so they are better equipped on a daily basis in their community practice.

The family community movement has a wealth of diversified experiences and expertise. It also conveys values, principles and common practices which make family resource centres (FRCs) essential, key players with respect to Quebec families. Their community roots, their ability to create egalitarian relationships with families, their flexibility and adaptability, and their activities fostering individuals' autonomy are all elements inherent in community groups that constitute their strengths and the reasons for their existence.

Now these unique practices must be preserved, indeed safeguarded. To that end, we as community stakeholders must know and understand them so we can then convey them proudly, both in our groups and wherever we have a presence. That was the perspective in which we worked on this reference framework so that groups may find in a single document what constitutes the specific nature and the strength of FRCs. A simple tool that enables us to question ourselves and our practices, honestly and non-judgmentally, with a view to supporting and developing autonomous community action practices for and with families.

Obviously, acquiring a reference framework can raise concerns in our groups. Will we be judged if our practices and values do not match, or if certain elements of the framework are less present or developed in our groups? Clearly, the answer is "no," this approach, like any approach to educating the public, is inclusive. In the same way that there are not good or bad parents, there are not good or bad groups. A reference framework is not a tool for passing judgment on our practices, but a tool for groups to move forward on the basis of their own situations. It is a starting point, providing us with benchmarks to guide us as we reflect on our practices, principles and action.

As FRCs and as a federation of FRCs, we believe that after so many years of commitment to and community action with respect to families, we have acquired sufficient maturity to question our practices, but above all to ensure that we maintain and pursue our community action each in our living and social milieux.

This document is the outcome of regional consultations followed by two days of work at a province-wide meeting held November 15-16, 2007 in Sainte-Adèle, in the Laurentians. The final adoption took place, following a last working session with members, at the Annual General Meeting in May 2008.

## 1.2 A brief history

### Emergence of a parent support movement

The family community movement came into being in the first half of the 20th Century, so the various influences affecting its evolution over more than 60 years have to be taken into account. Families' need to group together to improve their living conditions is not a new phenomenon.

In the early 1940s, several specialists began to develop standards of behaviour for both children and parents. In response to this current, organizations known as "parents' schools" came into being. Their purpose was to bring couples together to share their experiences with respect to family dynamics, couple relations, and relationships between parents and their children. These organizations, brought together by the *Fédération des Écoles de parents*—a federation of parents' schools—were offshoots of Action catholique<sup>1</sup>, as were most organizations of the period, and focussed primarily on families' home lives.

### From parents' schools to family unions

In 1955, the Quiet Revolution was beginning. For some time, Simonne Monet-Chartrand had been active in the Longueuil parents' school, and she rapidly came to the view that family issues went beyond the educational relationship between parents and children. This growing awareness led her, with the help of some pioneers from the parents' school, to set up a task force whose work would lead in 1956 to the creation of the *Union des familles de Longueuil*.

Longueuil's example prompted the *Fédération des Écoles de parents*, at its 1958 AGM, to dissolve in favour of a new federation with a broader mandate. This led to the creation, in 1961, of the *Fédération des unions de familles*, bringing together local family unions, run by fathers and mothers on strictly democratic lines.

The new federation took the initiative in creating a family education committee in each local union. Emphasis was placed on training and information for parents in their role as their children's primary educators.

The second front on which the Federation focussed its action was school. Family-school committees would be the tactical instrument of its intervention. Since the main thrust was to take closer account of the family unit as a whole, it was no surprise to see the emergence in the local unions of a host of services aimed at meeting families' specific needs. In that sense, family unions may be said to be the forerunners of family resource centres.

### From family unions to family resource centres

Family unions enjoyed their heyday during the 1960s. Historically, they played the role of school committees, which did not exist in the Ministry of Public Education (*ministère de l'Instruction publique*) structure of the time. Shortly after grassroots school committees were incorporated in the school structure, the committees managed by family unions disappeared. This led to a marked decline in participation in local unions.

At that point, as in most industrialized countries, the family was not a popular topic in Quebec society. Rather, sociologists and thinkers together predicted the end of the family under pressure from the women's and youth movements. The family itself was undergoing major transformations. This context contributed to removing from public discussion the concerns for all aspects of families' lives, and thus to a deceleration in the development of the family movement.

But the economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s and the gradual dismantling of the Welfare State prompted politicians and social stakeholders to view the family as a lifeline. Nevertheless, since the family had changed a great deal over those few decades (women at work, divorce, single parenthood, declining birth rate), it was no longer able

---

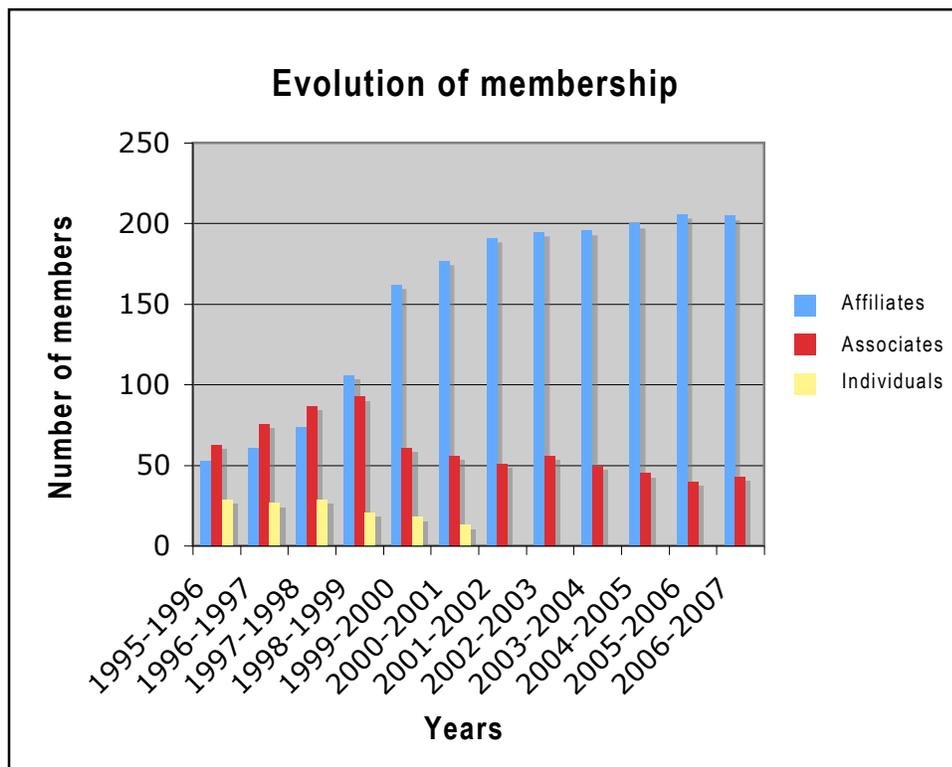
<sup>1</sup> Translation remark: this Catholic social movement has founded organizations such as Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, etc.

to cater in the same way to all its members' needs. Various family support organizations were set up during that period.

It was only in the early 1990s, though, in the wake of the International Year of the Family (1994), that a large number of organizations came into being. These could be consider to be actually the third generation of family support organizations. Among them, many chose to call themselves “Family Houses”—*Maison de la famille* or *Maison des familles*. At that time, more than 130 organizations belonged to the *Fédération des unions de familles*. In 1998, following a naming process, these groups would identify themselves as “family resource centres,” part of the broader autonomous community action movement. From then on, much effort was put into more clearly defining the organizations grouped together in the Federation and developing a platform of common demands. In the wake of these deliberations, at a policy conference held in November 2000, members took the opportunity to adjust their group’s name to their new reality. Thus, the *Fédération des unions de familles* became the *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* in 2002.

On the political front, the creation of Quebec’s Family and Childhood Ministry (*ministère de la Famille et de l'Enfance*) in 1997 with a view to developing childcare services contributed to a significant mobilization of the family support organization movement. In short order, a task force on the recognition and funding of FRCs was set up to study the possibility of linking this cluster of organizations to the Ministry of Health and Social Services (*ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux*). The transfer would be completed in April 2003, following the adoption of the government policy on recognizing community action (*Politique gouvernementale de reconnaissance de l'action communautaire*) in September 2001.

**Figure 1. Evolution of FQOCF membership**



### 1.3 Our definition of “family”

The word “family” covers increasingly diversified realities. Most often, it is very difficult to define the family. While the FRCs professed themselves open to all families and all stages of life, it was time they set themselves some common benchmarks to define their scope.

The *Fédération québécoise des organismes communautaires Famille* considers the family, the individual's first living milieu, to be the basic unit of society. Taking on many and varied forms, the family contributes to the physical, emotional, intellectual and social development of all its members. It is a special setting for discussion, learning, socialization and support among the generations, in a perspective of mutual respect, transmittal of values and developing of the citizens of tomorrow.

## 2. FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES, A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

### 2.1 Family resource centres' profile: a rich, original movement

The family resource centres that are part of the Federation's membership represent, for more than 90,000 families in every region of Quebec, living milieux for mutual assistance, support, encouragement, involvement and development for all family members, from the youngest to the oldest. Recognition of parents' role is a core concern for them.

FRCs are abundantly able to innovate and create, identify the new realities experienced by families and explore new solutions often at the cutting edge of social policy. It is their autonomy that enables them to adapt their action to families' needs, taking into account the social and political issues facing them.

### 2.2 Family resource centres' contribution: key players

Family resource centres contribute to community development and to enhancing the social fabric. Calling on families' ability for self-empowerment, FRCs contribute to creating welcoming community environments, supporting involvement and building solidarity and mutual assistance networks using an approach that encourages families to seek solutions collectively.

FRCs offer families activities and resources, implement innovative solutions geared to their evolving needs, and develop alternative interventions to those in place in the public system. Open to all families, they also reach parents who are loath to call on the public social services system. Thus, FRCs often act as forerunners.

As everything begins with and comes back to the family, FRCs are in touch with all ages, all generations. With the disengagement of the State, the impoverishment of families and the deterioration in their living conditions, ambiguity as to their parental responsibilities, and the pressures exerted by the consumer society, the FRCs are having growing demands placed on them. They stand in the front line in relation to different issues that affect families, such as poverty in all its forms, violence, isolation and exclusion. This explains the diversity of forms of the actions taken by family resource centres, depending on their environment.

Aside from their part in supporting and boosting parents' role, FRCs have developed activities to accompany families faced with different situations, introduced relief and respite for parents, contribute to supporting children's development and creating support networks, and work to improve families' material conditions.

Through mobilization of the families that attend the centres and the individuals working there, FRCs constitute a key social movement for demanding policies and measures to support families properly. Thus, the expertise they have developed is contributing to improving Quebec society.

On the political front, the struggles waged by the community movement are a positive factor for change toward greater social justice. The mobilization of individuals helps create a collective movement engaged in the evolution of society.

## 2.3 Blueprint for society and socio-political demands

For more than 30 years, despite social and economic currents and the transformation of the family support movement, one constant remains: the desire finally to give Quebec families the conditions conducive to the development of each of its members through the creation of a genuine comprehensive family policy.

In an increasingly materialistic society in transformation where values of consumerism and individualism reign, support from FRCs and the adoption of a family policy worthy of the name are essential elements in the survival of Quebec society and its values.

---

### Family Resource Centres' Manifesto

**In 1999, the FRCs released their first manifesto in favour of families and the adoption of a comprehensive family policy.**

**We, representatives of organizations working with families across Quebec, wish to make this manifesto public in order to underscore the deterioration of the conditions necessary for parents to exercise their parental and family responsibilities.**

- Because the family is the individual's first living milieu;
- Because the family is the first agent in the child's development;
- Because parents bear primary responsibility for their child(ren);
- Because parents have the necessary potential to love, bring up and nurture their child(ren);
- Because parents need social support in their commitment toward their child(ren);
- Because it is wishful thinking to support children's development without actively involving their parents.

**We have questions concerning our society's current choices when we observe:**

- the ever more dominant role of the State in children's development, in a context conducive to parents' disengagement;
- the tendency of institutions and stakeholders to take credit for young people's successes and to cast responsibility on parents for their children's problems, without any tangible support measures being provided;
- a growing gap between parents who work and the others, who are increasingly likely to be excluded, along with their children, from the social sphere;
- the growing development of chronic incompetence syndrome in Quebec parents.

**To remedy this situation, we demand a comprehensive family policy which:**

- respects families' diverse realities;
  - gives families genuine choices;
  - reaches all family members;
  - addresses all stages in families' lives;
  - is supported by society as a whole;
  - encompasses all the areas that concern that family, i.e., health, education, work, recreation, economy and living milieux.
-

### 3. FAMILY RESOURCE CENTRES' APPROACH AND CHARACTERISTICS

**At the November 2004 AGM, the Federation membership drew up the following statement of values:**

Family resource centres must establish a necessary balance among the three levels of action that should be found in any organization:

- On an **individual level**, the shared values are: openness, listening, respect, welcoming and recognition of strengths;
- On a **group level**, the shared values are: autonomy, freedom, integrity and cohesion;
- On a **community level**, the shared values are: justice and social solidarity.

#### 3.1 Values

**As members of the autonomous community action movement, FRCs espouse the following values:**

##### ***3.1.1 Rooted in the community***

FRCs are the outcome of needs being identified by a community. Created on the initiative of members of that community, they reflect the ability to mobilize and the quality of the social fabric. As with all grassroots organizations, their primary legitimacy is to be found in civil society, with its networks of support and solidarity. FRCs' proximity to the community's various social networks enables them to reach a larger number of families in their different situations.

##### ***3.1.2 Families at the heart of the action***

Rooted in the heart of their communities, FRCs are welcoming and living milieux that foster involvement, participation and action.

##### ***3.1.3 Autonomy as backdrop***

The concept of autonomy is key—autonomy of both individuals and organizations. Members of organizations have to be their true engine, and ensure control of them democratically so FRCs do not become dependent on the State, an institution, a labour union or even another grassroots organization.

FRCs freely determine their policy, approaches, practices, standards of internal governance and operating rules.

##### ***3.1.4 Flexibility and innovation***

Since they are rooted in and identify with the community, FRCs show flexibility and versatility to adjust to the changing needs of families and their communities. They have successfully developed initiatives geared to new needs, along with innovative practices.

##### ***3.1.5 Comprehensive approach***

FRCs advocate an approach whereby families' well-being is determined by the economic, political, social, cultural and environmental context in which they live. They have developed a diversified range of activities which aim first of all to act on the causes.

### ***3.1.6 Activities focussed on values of autonomy and individual and collective empowerment***

The activities offered by FRCs promote a vision which encourages individuals' and communities' autonomy. They foster families' progress toward harnessing their ability to resolve their difficulties and alter their living conditions. Actions are taken in a perspective of welcome, support, information, awareness, education, accountability and mobilization.

### ***3.1.7 Egalitarian conception of social relationships***

FRCs convey through their practices an egalitarian conception of social relationships whereby relations between stakeholders and families, and among parents themselves, are built on a principle of collaboration and co-responsibility. Together, families, stakeholders and everyone who participates in the life of the organization share their knowledge and power in an approach involving individual and collective empowerment.

### ***3.1.8 Democratic participation***

This egalitarian conception of social relationships is also reflected in the FRCs' internal organisation, in which direct democracy plays an important role. FRCs value the participation of the families attending the organization, staff and community members in defining the mission, policy and operating methods of the organizations. This participatory approach thus contributes to increasing individuals' sense of belonging to the FRCs and the community, while being conducive to citizen engagement.

### ***3.1.9 Voluntary relationship with the organization***

The families attending FRCs do so freely. They take part in the centres' life and activities on a voluntary basis.

### ***3.1.10 Solidarity and social justice***

Family resource centres espouse the values of solidarity and social justice. The creation of bonds of solidarity is central to social change. The practices related to it guide actions on the basis of collective rather than individual interests.

Social justice can be defined as the equitable distribution of collective wealth among the members of society. It calls for the pursuit of greater equality among individuals without consideration for their social class, sex, sexual orientation, religious belief or ethnocultural background. In compliance with this principle, FRCs are open to all families without any discrimination on the basis of economic, social, cultural or other status.

## **3.2 Principles and philosophy**

### **3.2.1 Family resource centres, a living and social milieu**

FRCs are multi-faceted community milieu which meet families' needs by allowing them to get involved, giving each other mutual encouragement and support, and creating links. In concrete terms, the community milieu is distinguished by the way in which the sites are set up and the time devoted to people. Emphasis is placed on a personalized welcome, characterized by warm, direct contact in a friendly, respectful atmosphere where above all a relationship of trust with the families is sought. Everyone takes part, both the families and the facilitators. Appointments are not required. Parents can talk with a resource-person, find written material, referrals or the date of an activity to put in their diary, or simply spend time in good company. Families can go there without seeking a response to an immediate need, but just to share and validate experiences, and build ties with their peers.

Through accessible, adapted, open spaces that families can transform as they wish, FRCs foster the development of a feeling of belonging. Since emphasis is placed on the process and the relationship rather than the result, the time dimension requires special flexibility. The community milieu facilitators are careful to respect individuals' spontaneity and pace.

#### **Functions of the community milieu**

Over the past few decades, the settings for social bonding conducive to participation in development of the community, such as the extended family, church, village, neighbourhood or school have undergone profound transformations. In an increasingly individualistic, compartmentalized society, people face growing isolation.

FRCs are far more than places where activities take place and services are provided. They foster the creation of networks of mutual assistance. They encourage speaking out by providing more room for discussions in workshops, gearing the content to the needs expressed, drawing on each person's knowledge and strengths. In eliciting active participation from families, the FRCs prompt them to handle responsibilities and develop their talents. In a society where democratic spaces are increasingly hard to find, FRCs are essential public spaces for breaking down isolation. They thus become places for citizen participation and sharing that contribute to the development of social solidarity and collective prosperity.

Ultimately, these practices have an impact on families' integration into society as a whole. Their increased ability to take charge of their lives is reflected in all the places where they have to spend time: childcare services, school, health care services, municipal environment, etc. FRCs also contribute to the integration of members of cultural communities by creating links among participants.

### **3.2.2 For and with families: never without the parents**

#### **Faster alone. Further together.**

For family resource centres, parents are the primary and principal educators of their children. Parents have the ability to develop their own solutions to the different challenges they are faced with. The activities put in place stem from the needs expressed by the parents, and are not in any way intended to replace them.

Because they readily recognize parents' ability and potential, FRCs offer them opportunities for empowerment, to actuate their power as educators, a power all too often reserved for specialists in our society (childcare services, school, social workers, etc.). The FRCs' approach is based on respect for individuals, their pace, confidence in their potential and openness to differences. Accompaniment from the FRCs gives back to parents the capacity to claim or claim back their parenting role.

That is why FRCs have adopted the concept of enriching the parental experience, which contributes to eliminating any notion of judgment as to the parents' abilities or competencies. The learning model developed is based on participation and individual and collective empowerment.

Activities for enriching the parental experience are preventive rather than therapeutic. The facilitator's role is to support families in their discussions. It is not a case of someone on one side who knows, and someone on the other side who does not know what to do or how to do it. The goal is to establish an egalitarian relationship. In groups, participants learn as much from other participants as from the facilitator. The reflection they do together about their experiences and others' helps them realize they are not alone, builds them up and helps them place situations in perspective so they can overcome them more effectively.

As a result, parents are an integral part of all the processes. For instance, rather than workshops being run with children alone, parents are involved in all the activities. They are consulted and supported in their initiatives. Parents' committees are set up to define priorities in activities, schedules, changes to be made, etc. Parents can manage Websites, and initiate activities that meet their needs. While this takes more time and energy, it is how the organizations become true agents of change.

### **3.2.3 Popular education: central to our practices**

There are historical factors that validate the choice of popular education. For instance, the development of childcare services, implementation of the Quebec Parental Insurance Plan or recognition of midwives represent a series of measures from which all families benefit today, and which are based in autonomous community education.

More locally, community education is a special tool for families who group together to have road signage improved for their children's safety, or who exert pressure to have strollers allowed on public transit or for setting up a safe neighbourhood playground.

Popular education (in an autonomous community action approach) may be defined as a series of learning and critical reflection steps leading to individual and collective awareness as to families' living or work conditions. It aims in the short, medium or long term at a social, economic, cultural and political change in their environment. Awareness is key to popular education practices, on the same basis as social and political action. Thus, rather than proposing action for changing the individual with a view to his social integration, popular education practices enable families to be re-empowered so they can act on their living conditions and their environment.

Popular education aims for social transformation by focussing on working on the causes of social problems rather than their effects. That is why promotion of equity and social justice is a key practice. For instance, poverty is not seen as an individual problem. Its origins lie in how society is organized. In that sense, in the case of a collective problem, we have to act together.

The notion of social transformation goes beyond the limited framework of the centre's activities. A change at one level often has an impact elsewhere. For instance, if families' living conditions improve, this can translate into their greater ability to become involved culturally, politically or socially.

Carrying out autonomous community education means caring about the means one uses to move forward together. It means, for instance, ensuring that the concrete tools and means for action faithfully reflect our image as individuals and groups. Every opportunity is good for developing knowledge and skills.

### **3.2.4 Individual and collective action**

Social transformation inevitably supposes action. Autonomous community action fosters collective action, which helps create a better power relationship than individual action. As well as being effective, it is a means conducive to a participatory, democratic approach. Parents are thus allowed to exercise their citizenship and go beyond the role of taxpayers and consumers of services to which they are often confined.

This type of action is also a response to isolation and growing individualism. The ability to participate, decide, achieve, criticize and evaluate contributes to educating people, increasing their awareness and knowledge, and bolstering them in the face of a shared challenge. Successful collective action also enables parents to emerge from powerlessness as

citizens, and to regain confidence in their ability to act to improve their own environment and that in which their children live.

For instance, beyond merely providing emergency food supplies, FRCs will set up soup kitchens. Beyond help at the start of the school year, they will set up a parents' committee to consider the issue of free education in order to exert pressure. Rather than giving early stimulation workshops for children alone, FRCs will bring parents into the activity. Of course, it is more demanding to promote community action rather than to give an individual response, but such action is genuinely empowering.

### **3.3 Priority Action Areas**

#### **3.3.1 Toward improving families' living conditions: a comprehensive family policy**

Over the years, FRCs have closely followed the changing situations experienced by all families. They could not fail to observe that families often have to deal with more precarious economic conditions and increased labour market requirements on the one hand, and significant social upheavals along with changes in the family unit itself on the other hand. At the same time, the social and economic support they are given fluctuates along with shifts in the political mood.

FRCs define comprehensive family policy as a series of coherent measures conducive to improving families' living conditions in a perspective of growth and well-being. This support has to be financial, political and social. It has to be available at all stages in families' lives and reflect parents' personal, family, professional and social realities.

#### **Economic support**

The Federation maintains that recognition of family involvement by society as a whole must continue to be expressed through universal programs and taxation. Families had to double their paid work time between 1970 and 1990 in order to sustain an equivalent standard of living, and have had to adapt their lives to the increased demands of productivity and job flexibility, often involving precarious, atypical employment. The FRCs can testify to the ongoing deterioration of families' living conditions.

Over time, governments have adopted various measures to offset the investment involved in bringing up children. For the past decade or so, we have been seeing a growing targeting of measures aimed at underprivileged families, to the detriment of families as a whole. The targeting of measures has a significant impact on social solidarity in that it creates a rift between those who pay but never benefit from the measures and those who benefit from these measures.

#### **Balancing family, work and studies**

The mass advent of women on the labour market has led to upheavals both in society and in families. Indeed, most families now have to rely on two incomes to make ends meet. Balance of family, work and studies, long seen as a personal matter, is now a topical issue as well as the focus of numerous studies.

Balancing family, work and studies has to be part of a comprehensive approach. Application of a few isolated measures may be encouraging, but they are not sufficient. In fact, to achieve genuine social change concerning the balance of family, work and studies, appreciation of the family in the broader sense is essential. The central role of the family as the basis of society as well as its socio-economic contribution should receive greater recognition. The necessary changes should be built on society as a whole, thus removing from parents, particularly mothers, the need to bear on their own the burden of balancing family, work and studies. Moreover, today's families are diversified, and reconciling the realities of all types of families with existing systems is a major challenge. For example, fathers' growing involvement with their children leads to a repositioning of measures, which have to tie in with a comprehensive approach. These measures have to be articulated in line with a perspective that takes into account both economic development and equity among populations, between the sexes, and among generations.

## **Health and social services**

Before the introduction of the universal health system, medical fees were the main source of family debt. The successive reforms of the past few years have a greater impact on access to general or specialized public resources and to the psychosocial services that are now identified for vulnerable clientele. Increasingly frequent referral to private services is emphasizing the resemblance to a two-tier system. This situation has a direct impact on families' living conditions.

## **Education**

Families and schools have a shared interest in children's success. Nevertheless, significant tensions remain despite schools' avowed interest in founding a real partnership with families. The increasingly close links that are established between combatting poverty and education militate in favour of a greater openness toward families and children. The start of the new school year is also a period of major stress for families. For a good number of them, it means going into debt to pay for all the associated expenses. Concerns with respect to boys' success at school also bring the institution into question, and not just society or families.

## **Housing**

Housing is an item that has a major impact on families' living conditions. The current housing crisis in certain regions, the excessive debt load necessary for access to homeownership, and discrimination against families with one or more children prompt us to take a position on the subject.

## **Recreation**

Recreation time is conducive to the development and maintenance of family relationships. While it provides special opportunities for contact among family members, family time is increasingly limited, partly as a result of the large amount of time devoted to work and of non-typical schedules. The organized recreational services available are also primarily focussed on individual recreation.

Also, families' capacity to pay is directly proportional to access to social, cultural and sports activities and the facilities necessary to practice them.

### **3.3.2 Support for parental role**

For close to 40 years, the number of children per family has continued to fall, profoundly altering the parental experience. Furthermore, society is increasingly emphasizing children's rights and interests. It is no longer enough to be a parent: now one has to perform and ensure the success of one's children's education much as one has a successful career, without necessarily having clearly established benchmarks for achieving this. Also, FRCs see the lack of recognition and appreciation of parental involvement. The growing number of professionals and specialists who intervene in family life means that today's parents are often isolated compared with previous generations, and are overwhelmed by a feeling of incompetence and disempowerment that undermines their self-confidence.

Having children is an additional responsibility that people agree to take on. Fathers and mothers thereby contribute to ensuring the continuation of society. As a result, FRCs are of the view that all members of society must contribute to supporting parents in their role.

#### **Conception of the role of fathers and mothers**

For FRCs, both parents have an essential role to play in relation to their children, from conception onward. Each contributes, in his or her own way, to the child's development. These differences must be respected. As a result, support activities have to be adapted to the parental role so they meet the specific needs of each of the parents.

This adaptation of measures can only lead to greater equity in the sharing of parental responsibilities and, as a result, greater equality between men and women. Today, close to 75% of women who have a child aged under 6 and more than 80% of women with a child aged 6–15 are on the labour market. The FQOCF considers that if the implementation of measures to facilitate the balance of family life and work can help reduce inequalities between men and women at work, a fairer sharing of parental responsibilities would in turn increase the impact of demands concerning such reconciliation. These responsibilities would then be borne by both men and women, a trend already being seen with a growing number of members of the younger generations, within which this sharing is more often put into practice.

#### **Support measures for all families**

For FRCs, all families may need support at certain points in their lives. Regardless of their family income, level of education or age, or of the composition of their family, all parents can be isolated, experience times of distress or feel powerless since children's education is one of the greatest challenges they will have to meet in their lives. While having children means contributing to generational and societal renewal, it also means accepting upheaval, questioning and risks that the childless will never have to take on.

Each phase of families' lives brings with it new needs, and requires adjustment, not only from the parents, but also from their community and from society as a whole.

Starting with the planning of birth or adoption, changes begin in terms of pace of life and lifestyle, and these call for adjustments, both material and financial as well as psychological and emotional. This is a key first step in establishing the relationship between the child and each of its parents. While the first birth often brings a significant awareness of increasing responsibilities, each subsequent birth frequently imposes just as many adjustments. In a context of family recomposition, the same phenomena exist and can be magnified.

The FQOCF membership welcomed the extension of maternity leave provided by the federal government, and especially the implementation of the new Quebec Parental Insurance Plan in 2006. But, along with many other Quebec groups, they bemoan the fact that this plan is not truly universal, and remains inaccessible to women who have not earned more than \$2,000 in the year before they gave birth.

Moreover, in many FRCs, young mothers and even young fathers have recently been seen arriving with longer parental leave. Faced with the disappearance of traditional mutual assistance networks, deprived of their usual networks consisting of people who work, more and more of them are, from this stage onward, seeking ways of breaking the

isolation that weighs on them and is added to the isolation they experience once they return to work. They then quite simply no longer have the time to meet other families with whom they could share their new experiences.

During this period, the child develops very rapidly. For the parents, the first few months in the newborn's life are very demanding, physically and psychologically. Also, as soon as the child begins asserting itself, they have to find a balance between being authoritarian and being permissive. This period requires them to adjust constantly and develop new means for meeting all the child's needs. It is at this important time in life that the foundations of socialization are laid.

Parents who choose to slow down their pace of life or remain home are often regarded askance socially, and can also experience isolation. Moreover, those wishing to re-enter the labour market face many barriers. Despite this, many parents would appreciate being able to spend more time with their young children, but financial or job-related constraints, particularly at that stage in their lives, prevent them from doing so. Conflict is then likely to arise among the various aspects of the parents' lives (professional, personal and conjugal).

Parents see the upbringing they gave their child put to the test, both in the context of doing well at school and in terms of their child's adjustment to this new environment. The experience can prove even more uncomfortable for immigrant parents, whose values often differ from those of their new social milieu. The difficulty experienced by so many families in dealing with the world of school, with its expectations and limitations, thus becomes even more of an issue when command of the language is an additional barrier to communication. Their experience should be acknowledged, more attention should be paid to it, and they should be supported in it.

Childhood is an intense period of discovery. The culture transmitted by their peers and recreation outside the family sphere become more important. They experience a brand new world of influences which has the effect of increasing demands and pressures on parents. Expectations regarding performance at school and social conformity increase, and a growing number of children experience high stress levels. In the context of the consumer society, the gap increases between children with many opportunities and those experiencing more restrictions owing to their families' economic situation. This is the first stage in family life where parents and children are really confronted with differences in socio-economic level. Sometimes it is hard for children not to establish a direct correlation between material possessions and self-esteem, while parents, faced with difficult choices, often see their sense of competence and their parental esteem falling.

Between the growing importance of the first groups of friends and organized recreation, along with childcare services (sometimes inadequate), there are few opportunities that provide the whole family with a genuine living milieu where parents and children can be together. Indeed, there are few places and resources offering support, contact and discussion geared to this period in a family's life, which all too often seems hidden, squeezed in as it is between early childhood and adolescence.

Despite the fact that only 15% of teens experience great difficulty during this period, the vast majority of parents clearly have the impression that they are entering an area fraught with turbulence. They are often afraid of the consequences that can be entailed by the choices their children make for their futures.

For their part, young people are fully engaged in seeking their own identities. They are exposed to social models conveyed by their peers, but also by the star system, Internet and the media, which can promote or trivialize behaviours which parents often consider objectionable. This becomes a source of confrontation that contributes to fuelling family conflicts.

While they are not all affected in the same way, such issues as drugs, anorexia, hypersexualization, AIDS or suicide also spring up in families' daily lives.

This period demands extra energy from adults, who constantly have to re-examine their values, attitude and judgments in their efforts to support their evolving youngsters. Showing sometimes flexibility, sometimes firmness—and often required to be flexible and firm at the same time!—they have to guide their youngsters along the path to responsible autonomy, with all the trial-and-error and hesitations that involves, on both sides.

Today, a new reality is being seen. With young people studying longer and labour market entry conditions becoming increasingly precarious, the transition to a fully independent life is not always facilitated. More than half (55.1%) of young people aged 20–24 still live at home with their parent(s) or those acting as parents. Between ages 25 and 29, this percentage falls to 18%. Nor is it unusual to see young people returning to the family home after living on their own for a while. But a number of parents, many of whom had already left home at that age, would like their young adult to be more engaged in the process toward autonomy.

Lifestyle and value differences and the difficulty in establishing clear limits can also lead to tension and conflict that can even turn violent.

Still at that age, questioning as to how to guide young adults toward autonomy, concerns as to their ability to achieve it, and fears of being excessively or insufficiently demanding are core parental concerns. Even if the number of families facing these situations is constantly rising and the topic is often discussed, privately and in the media, it is not managed socially: support networks are virtually non-existent.

FRCs are concerned with meeting the needs expressed by families, regardless of their stage in life.

**Organizations which took part in the various consultations (2007)  
or the adoption of the Reference Framework (May 2008)**

	<b>Region</b>	<b>Participating Organizations</b>
(01)	Bas-Saint-Laurent	Regroupement des organismes communautaire famille du Bas-Saint-Laurent Maison de la famille de Matane (Élisabeth Turgeon) Maison de la famille du Grand-Portage Maison de la famille du Kamouraska Maison des familles de la Mitis Ressources Famille des Basques
(02)	Saguenay–Lac-Saint-Jean	Conseil régional des familles Association Éveil-naissances Association La Relance Maison des Familles de la Baie Parents – Enfants Parensensemble La Nichée CSSS du Norois d'Alma Diocèse de Chicoutimi, Pastorale Familiale
(03)	Capitale-Nationale	Le regroupement des organismes communautaires Famille de la région 03 Entraide-parents
(04)	Mauricie	Le regroupement des organismes communautaires Famille 04-17 Allaitement Soleil Maison de la famille de Trois-Rivières Maison de la Famille du Bassin de Maskinongé Maison de la famille des Chenaux Maison des familles Chemin du Roi Maison des familles de Mékinac Maison des Familles du Rivage Ressource Parents-Ailes
(05)	Estrie	Le regroupement des organismes communautaires Famille de l'Estrie Centre d'action bénévole de Coaticook Famille Espoir Maison de la famille du Granit Maison de la famille Memphrémagog Maison des Grands-parents de Sherbrooke Réseau d'appui aux familles monoparentales et recomposées de l'Estrie Ligue de l'Enfance de l'Estrie
(06)	Montréal	ROCFM Carrefour familial Hochelaga Entre Parents de Montréal-Nord Inc. Interaction famille Hochelaga-Maisonneuve La Maison des familles de Mercier-Est Les enfants de l'espoir de Maisonneuve Regroupement pour la valorisation de la paternité Répit-Providence Maison Hochelaga-Maisonneuve

Organizations which took part in the various consultations or the adoption of the Reference Framework (continued)

	Region	Participating Organizations
(07)	Outaouais	Table secteur enfance-famille de l'Outaouais La Chaumière entre Monts et Vallées Le Centre d'animation familiale Le Centre de la petite enfance Le Centre de ressources pour la famille de l'Outaouais Comité solidarité Gatineau-Ouest L'Association des familles monoparentales et recomposées de l'Outaouais Les enfants de l'Espoir Maison de la famille Petite-Nation Maison de la famille Vallée-de-la-Lièvre Solidarité Gatineau Ouest
(08)	Abitibi-Témiscamingue	Le regroupement des organismes famille de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue Maison de la famille de Lasarre Maison de la famille de Malartic Maison de la famille de Rouyn-Noranda La Maison de la famille de Val-d'Or inc. Pour tous les bouts de chou
(10)	Nord-du-Québec	Les animations PACE-ÂGE
(11)	Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Table des organismes communautaires Famille Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine La maison de la famille MRC Bonaventure Organisme communautaire famille L'Embellie Maison de la famille Parenfant Halte-Parents de la Vallée
(12)	Chaudière-Appalaches	Regroupement des organismes communautaires famille de Chaudière-Appalaches Maison de la famille de Bellechasse Maison de la famille Nouvelle-Beauce Maison Famille Chutes Chaudière
(13)	Laval	Table des organismes famille de Laval Bureau d'aide et d'assistance familiale Centre communautaire Val-Martin La Parentèle de Laval Le Relais familial d'Auteuil Maison de la famille de Laval-Ouest Maison de la famille de St-François Maison des enfants Le Dauphin de Laval La Maison de quartier de Fabreville Maison de quartier Vimont

Organizations which took part in the various consultations or the adoption of the reference framework (continued)

	Region	Participating Organizations
(14)	Lanaudière	TROCFL Action Famille Lanoraie Action Famille Lavaltrie Association Carrefour Famille Montcalm Carrefour familial des Moulins Cible famille Brandon Défi-famille Matawinie La Joujouthèque Farfouille La Maison de la famille aux quatre-vents La Maison de la famille La Parenthèse La Maison de Parents Matawinie Ouest La Maison Parent-Aise Les Ateliers éducatifs les petits mousses Mouvement organisé des mères solidaires
(15)	Laurentides	C.E.S.A.M.E. Deux-Montagnes La Maison de la Famille de Bois-des-Filion La Maison de la famille du Nord La Petite Maison de Pointe-Calumet Le Centre de la Famille des Hautes-Laurentides Le Groupe MARRAINE Tendresse Inc. Maison de la famille des Pays-d'en-Haut Maison Parentant des Basses Laurentides Inc. Maison Pause-Parent
(16)	Montérégie	Regroupement des organismes communautaires Famille de la Montérégie Centre des ressources familiales du Haut-St-Laurent Carrefour Familial du Richelieu Carrefour Naissance-Famille du Bas-Richelieu Le Fablier, une histoire de familles Maison de la famille de Brossard Maison de la famille de Chambly Maison de la famille de la Vallée-du-Richelieu Maison de la Famille Vaudreuil-Soulanges Maison des familles des Maskoutains
(17)	Centre-du-Québec	Le regroupement des organismes communautaires Famille 04-17 Association Parents-Ressources des Bois-Francis Carrefour familial de Manseau Centre Plateau Laval Ludolettre Centre d'éducation populaire Maison des familles de l'Érable Rendez-vous familial Inc.