



Mission Statement

To ensure that people with disabilities develop meaningful relationships and participate fully in the community.

Extend-A-Family's Story

Extend-A-Family is all about connections and relationships; our story is no different. In the 1970's, a group of parents, all of whom had a child with a disability, got to know each other through a Public Health Nurse and a North Toronto nursery school for children with developmental disabilities. The families began meeting and quickly became mutually supportive in terms of friendship and neighbourliness. Over time, they began to express the common need for their children to experience friendships and socialization in the community while, at the same time, providing some short-term respite for the family. They identified the need for an "asker," someone who could ask other families in the community to get to know and invite a child with a disability into their home.

In 1975, twelve families decided to develop a program that would employ an "asker," and Extend-A-Family was born. Extend-A-Family is a Toronto-wide community organization that creates opportunities for a variety of relationships between individuals with a disability and people in their communities.

What is Extend-A-Family?

Extend-A-Family works in the community to support individuals who have disabilities. We bring people together by encouraging and facilitating friendships. We believe that all people belong and have the right to participate in the community. We foster public awareness of the gifts and contributions of people with disabilities.

Extend-A-Family is a non-profit, charitable organization that is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors that is comprised of parents of children with disabilities, self advocates and interested community members. Extend-A-Family is financially supported by the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, The City of Toronto Community Services Grants Program, the Nevada lottery and other donors.

Our organization has a main office but staff work in the community with families and community members. Hours are flexible so we can meet the needs of busy schedules. As a source of information, Extend-A-Family produces two newsletters a year.

The Core Work of Extend-A-Family

Host / Host Family

A host or host family is an individual or family ideally from the neighbourhood or community who has expressed an interest in getting to know a child or youth, with a disability. The Coordinator's role is to recruit, connect and support the relationship between a host / host family and an individual with a disability and their family, which we refer to as the natural family. The frequency in which people get together, depends on everyone involved.

Community / Group Connections

Extend-A-Family facilitates connections to community groups such as Brownies, Scouts, sports teams, youth groups and faith communities. The coordinator provides ongoing support to the group to help ensure the individual is included.

Friendship Circles

Students with a disability are given an opportunity to become involved in natural peer groups within elementary school settings. Friendship circles are opportunities for children to get to know each other better and to create welcoming and inclusive school communities. The coordinator facilitates circle meetings and encourages the group to explore ways to include the person with a disability both in and outside of school.

Support Circles / Support Networks

Support circles are a process for building community and creating opportunities for family and friends to come together. It is neither a service nor a program but simply a process for supporting, learning and action over the long-term.

The goal of a support circle is to sustain and nurture, in as natural a way as possible, an individual with a disability as an active, contributing participant in the life of family, friends, neighbourhood, school, work, spiritual context and leisure environments.

Enrollment Process

Natural Family

Families are encouraged to contact Extend-A-Family directly and an information / application package will be mailed. Applications will be accepted before the individual's nineteenth birthday. A police reference check form will be included for anyone in the household over the age of eighteen. Should any prior police record come to Extend-A-Family 's attention, additional written information will be required from the individual and does not necessarily preclude your son or daughter from involvement. A coordinator will visit the family to become acquainted with your son / daughter and to explore the possibilities for developing relationships.

Extend-A-Family can be most effective when it has the family as an active partner in developing relationships. Because the family is constant in the child's life, it is vitally important that they play the primary role in supporting and nurturing relationships.

Host / Host Family

Hosts are encouraged to contact Extend-A-Family directly. An information / application package will be sent to you, including a police reference check form for anyone in the household over the age of eighteen. You will also be asked to provide the names of three references and their phone numbers. As part of the application process, a meeting will be arranged to provide an opportunity for you to learn more about the role of being a host / host family.

Other Connecting Opportunities

Safe and Secure Futures Networks- funded by a City of Toronto Community Services Grant

Parents and other family members gather together to explore the question of "what will happen when I can no longer be the caregiver to my son or daughter who has a disability?" This question requires families to confront their own mortality and begin the process of planning for the future with their potentially vulnerable family member.

At monthly network meetings, the Safe and Secure Futures facilitator guides discussion, and arranges presentations based on inspiring models and studies from across North America. The mutually supportive groups consider different strategies for relationship building, financial security, network or support circle building, long term safety, and meaningful involvement in community life. The network functions as a forum for accessing the group's knowledge, and for encouraging families to plan. Limited facilitator support is available to help families develop a support circle.

Safe and Secure Futures Networks offers ongoing learning opportunities to families, community members and professionals.

Parents / Caregiver Support Group

This is a gathering of parents and / or caregivers who have or care for children with a disability. They come together to share their experiences, dreams, concerns and resources.

Socially Acceptable Behaviours / Sexuality Workshops

Throughout the year, Extend-A-Family runs workshops on socially acceptable behaviour and sexuality. The five week series is designed for children and adolescents who have a developmental disability, accompanied by a parent or caregiver. The goals for the workshop are to develop a positive understanding of sexuality, enhance self-esteem, develop patterns of socially accepted behaviour and learn to apply appropriate life skills.

Other Information

Extend-A-Family provides workshops and events that focus on the gifts that people with disabilities bring when they are welcomed and included in their communities.

Using funding from Human Resources Development Canada, Extend-A-Family hires summer students to support children in summer camps and / or in the community. This funding is determined on an annual basis.

Periodically, we have co-op students on placement who may be available to work with families.