

History of the Adolescent Parent Centre

The Winnipeg School Division started a school for pregnant adolescents in 1971. The program replaced a home tutoring service which had been available. Two people who were influential in helping this process were Gordon MacDonald, the superintendent at the time, and Margaret Trott, a School Trustee who was very supportive of the program.

Classroom space was rented from the Y.M.C.A. (currently Booth College), and the school was administered by the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre. Students were able to register at the school at any time during the school year. This continuous progress model allowed students to stay connected to their course work, as well as the school they had attended. The idea at the time was for students to return to their home school after their babies were born, however, some students were allowed to continue in the program for the duration of the school year.

The school offered a regular academic program, typing, crafts, art, and swimming. Two teachers were hired to teach the grade 9-12 courses. One teacher taught English, Geography and History in the morning, and one teacher taught Mathematics and Science. A course called Family Relationships was also offered which today would be the equivalent of the Family Studies courses. There were two rooms and a small kitchen available to the staff and students. Students could bring a lunch and eat in the kitchen or buy their lunch in the Y.M.C.A. cafeteria.

Pre-natal classes were a very important part of the program and were at first provided by Public Health. These classes continue to be provided by Public Health nurses today. Some of these classes were also offered at the Community Health Centre located on Aitkens Avenue.

There were no facilities for child care in the program, but there was a child care lab in the Y.M.C.A. available for children aged two to four years. On occasions, students would bring their babies to class if they couldn't find a babysitter.

As the program grew two needs became evident. One was the need for a bigger facility and the other for programming for students at Junior High levels or less. It was also felt that there was a need for more counselling, as well as a nutritional component.

In March of 1981, a recommendation was made to move the program to the Argyle School, change the name of the program, and hire one more teacher. A further recommendation was made that negotiations be entered into with appropriate agencies to strengthen the medical and nutritional components of the program.

In September of 1981, the move to Argyle School took place and with more space more students enrolled and more teachers were added to the staff. The program had two main objectives; to help ensure healthy mothers and healthy babies, and to offer an educational opportunity for the mother by providing a transitional phase in the education of the students in preparation for their return to the regular school system or to other post-secondary endeavours.

The Program for Pregnant Teens ran from September to June (the regular school year). Registration was on a continuous basis and students set individual goals regarding their education and their future. A Junior High was added with the teacher responsible for academic programming. Students at the high school level could take three academic courses plus Family Relations in their first term. The school day included four hours of academics, prenatal exercises, and lunch which was prepared by the students. Prenatal classes were scheduled with a public health nurse one afternoon per week. Many girls in the program returned to their regular school once the baby was delivered. Others continued to come to finish particular courses or complete the term. Students were responsible to find child care while they attended school. Often students would bring their babies to class with them because they didn't have child care. This presented new challenges for the program as students were breastfeeding, they were finding it difficult to integrate back into the regular school system, and daycare for infants under four months was virtually non-existent.

Peggy Prendergast, the Vice Principal at the Winnipeg Adult Education Centre, and responsible for the Pregnant Teen Program, put forward a proposal to the Winnipeg School Division to establish a child care area in the building and hire a teacher to teach parenting skills and a child care worker to provide care for the babies. Renovations to the school took place and in September of 1984, the infant lab began. Students could now return to the school after the birth of their babies and complete unfinished courses. They could remain at the school until their babies were four months old. This also provided a practical opportunity in parenting education for all students. Students would receive practical hands-on experience in the Infant Lab and receive credit for the compulsory Family Studies courses (formerly Family Relations).

At this time the program continued to support the idea that students would return to their regular schools and continue with their education. Many did not. Oriole Veldhuis, diaconal Minister at St. Stephen's Broadway United Church, presented an idea to set up a Program for Moms and Babes to her congregation. She asked the church for two things: 1) the use of the basement of the church rent free to house the project and 2) Interested people to form a Board to work on the project. Thus the Program for Adolescent Parents and Infant Development (P.A.P.I.D.) Board was born. A number of people headed by Joyce Aitken and Jack Watts formed a board which became incorporated with a charter and a charitable donation number. The board worked long and hard to get this program underway. They set up goals and objectives and an overall design for the whole program. The main goal of the program for adolescent parents and infant development was to provide the opportunity for adolescent parents to continue their education after their babies had been born, in a caring environment, which would provide them with emotional support, with parenting skills, and with an opportunity to progress academically on an individualized basis.

The next step was to secure funding for such a project and hence, meetings were held with the Inner City Initiative, Department of Education and the Winnipeg School Division No. 1. The Board believed very strongly in the project and were not willing to see it die. They persisted

and finally in December 1985 word was received that funding had been granted and the project could proceed. This funding came from compensatory funding through Manitoba Education and the Winnipeg School Division No. 1 and a Home Economics establishment grant. This provided for staff and start up equipment and the P.A.P.I.D. Board provided money for toys, equipment for the Child Care area, as well as some kitchen supplies. The funding was on a limited basis and had to be applied for annually.

The program was designed to serve young parents up to the age of twenty one and their babies from four months to the age of two. The program started in April of 1986 with two teachers and one Teacher's Assistant who worked in the Child Care area. Students were involved with the ongoing care of their children while attending classes. As part of the establishment of the program an external review was set up and the Knowles Centre was commissioned to do this. The assessment "Program for Adolescent Parents and Infant Development, Final Evaluation Report dated March 1987 confirmed the value and excellence of the program.

In November of 1988 the School Board approved in principal the amalgamation of the Point Douglas and P.A.P.I.D. programs and the plans to accommodate them in the Cecil Rhodes School (#1 building). This would benefit the students as it would increase the staff and courses offered. Plans progressed and in February of 1989 the proposal for monies for the renovation of Cecil Rhodes #1 were approved. Peggy Prendergast worked with the architect and staff from both schools had input. Work went ahead with a target date of the beginning of September 1989 for the amalgamated program to begin.

September of 1989 saw the move to the renovated Cecil Rhodes #1 building. The first few days saw the staff and a few students who were there unpacking and setting up the facility. No official name had been chosen so the program became known as Adolescent Parents and Pregnant Teens (A.P.P.T.) It was not until March 24th, 1991 that the name the Adolescent Parent Centre (A.P.C.) was chosen and in respect for the community the name Cecil Rhodes was to remain on the school building.

Fast forward to 2021, the program has evolved somewhat, but most of the fundamental principals so carefully developed by the many school staff and supporters such as the P.A.P.I.D. Board, who are still functioning today and continue to support the school in so many ways, remain in effect and continue to act as benchmarks for all school programming. Times have changed and staff has changed, but the program continues to maintain the original philosophy and core values of the program – to provide a caring environment for students and their children to grow and flourish and to support students emotionally and academically as they strive to complete their high school diploma and set goals for the future.

A.P.C. has developed strong relationships with agencies/institutions such as Healthy Child Manitoba, the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority, Career Trek 'The M Power Program', Families First, Healthy Start for Mom and Me, Women in Science and Engineering (U of M), Red River Community College Nursing Program, the University of Manitoba Nursing Program, The

Indigenous Directorate (B.S.S.I.P.), Bookmates Inc. and, last but not least, our beloved P.A.P.I.D. Board. Students have benefited from the supports these groups have provided to us for many years. A.P.C. continues to provide a quality educational experience for students, as well as an excellent Parenting Program and Child Care Centres for babies from two months to four years. We are grateful to the Winnipeg School Division for all the support they have provided to us since 1971.

(Revised excerpt from the History of the Adolescent Parent Centre by former teacher and P.A.P.I.D. Board member, Eleanor McMillan)

Respectfully submitted,

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