“I grew up an only child,” says Sarah*, reflecting on the bond she now sees between her two young daughters; a bond she never experienced. “The love that they have is so sweet.”

Nearly four years ago, Sarah was referred to Closer to Home’s (CTH) Healthy Families program by a health nurse when she was pregnant with her first child. She was scared and unsure of her ability to parent. She had never pictured herself becoming a mother, but it was about to happen.

“I remember thinking, ‘How am I supposed to be a good mom?’” she says. “I guess I’ve always had that little bit of personal doubt, like ‘Am I doing this right?’”

Sarah had a difficult relationship with her mother growing up, and felt disconnected from her Cree heritage. “I still have a lot of anger towards my mom for the way she raised me,” she says. “But I knew that I didn’t want my daughter to feel the way that I felt towards my mom. So I try to be a good mom for her and give her the love that I didn’t have.”

Marion Redwood, a Home Visitor with CTH, worked closely with Sarah, teaching her about child development and slowly helping her improve her self-confidence. “She was already doing a lot of the things we teach, like positive parenting,” says Marion. “She just needed some reassurance.”

After the birth of her daughter, Sarah struggled with postpartum depression and anxiety. She felt alone and it was often difficult for her to leave the house. She had gone from working and going to school, where she was always surrounded by people, to being at home with her daughter every day with nobody else to spend time with.

It took some time and personal growth to form a bond with her new baby, learn to love herself, and fall into the role of being a mother.

Marion would make weekly visits to check on baby and make sure mom was doing okay. “Sometimes I would be having a bad day,” Sarah remembers, “but then after Marion came, I felt better. She was always encouraging me and giving me information. After she would leave, I’d think ‘okay, I know I can do this’.”

Marion and the Healthy Families team worked with Sarah for three years, eventually discharging her from the program and connecting her with Marsha Hanson, Facilitator of CTH’s Kiwehtata program. Now, she regularly attends cultural events and workshops, and has built a solid network of support in her community.

“I don’t really have a lot of other Indigenous aspects of my life,” Sarah says. “It’s nice to have other people who are part of my culture and who understand what I’m going through.”

Sarah says that growing up, she wasn’t as connected to her culture as she wanted to be, and felt like she didn’t have an identity. “But now that I’m a mother,” she says, “I feel like I have a place where I belong.”

“Being connected to my culture and having that spiritual background, I know that I’m not alone,” she says.

Continued on Page 2
“After spending time with my friends and their child, I've noticed that my daughter tends to mimic some of their behaviours, like an unwillingness to share toys. How can I curb this behaviour?

This is a common issue that we see with a lot of kids! Children do not fully start to understand how to share until around the age of 4, but even before then it’s great to start modelling and practicing. At home, practice sharing toys with your daughter, praising her positive behaviour when you see it. For example, if she hits either you or another child when they want a toy, say something to her such as, “No, honey, we don’t hit. It hurts when you do that. Be gentle, this is how we ask for the toy gently,” and then demonstrate asking for the toy and handing it over.

At your friend’s house, you can try sitting down and playing with the children, modelling for them how to share toys. Children learn by watching and observing other children and adults, so by modelling positive behaviour, you are teaching them how to respond in an appropriate manner. Your friend may even learn from this approach and try it on his or her own later.

-Amanda, CTH Program Coordinator

Do you have parenting questions for our staff? Send them to us at jmelynchuk@closetohome.com and you may be featured in our next newsletter!
Strengthening Families and Communities with Summer in the City

Closer to Home’s Summer in the City day camp means more than fun outdoor activities for kids. Free, quality summer programming means kids from low-income families do not undergo a “summer slide” and adopt risky behaviours.

The story of Diana* and her daughter helps us understand why Summer in the City is crucial for families in Calgary.

As a single mom residing in a low-income housing complex, it has not always been easy for Diana to find an affordable camp program for her daughter Fiona*. Before Closer to Home’s summer camp, her daughter stayed home or just “hung out” in the community.

Fiona was struggling in school, below grade level in her reading and comprehension. Considering this, proper use of her time during the summer break was essential in advancing her academic skills. However, with a lack of affordable, quality and educational summer camp opportunities nearby, Fiona stayed home.

After learning about Summer in the City Diana thought she finally found the right program to send her daughter to for a rewarding experience that she could otherwise not give her.

Fiona, now in grade four, participated in Summer in the City in 2016. “I met many new friends and went to so many places,” recalls Fiona. Always accompanied by camp leaders during field trips, she felt safe and comfortable asking questions and telling them how she felt. Diana also noticed that her daughter learned some important life skills like cleaning up after herself, making healthy snacks and other key social skills.

The opportunity to participate in positive summer activities not only helps kids like Fiona make new friends and learn important life skills, it also helps strengthen communities, making them safer for all.

Diana has already registered her daughter for this year’s camp. Knowing that her child will have access to fun and educational summer activities, free of charge, she is grateful to Closer to Home and the donors who make it possible.

*Name changed to protect privacy

Investing in Kids’ Futures

When Amanda Frazer found out about Closer to Home’s partnership with Birdies for Kids presented by AltaLink in 2016, she was excited to share the opportunity to support local children with her team at Alaris Royalty Corp. A national equity provider, Alaris is committed to supporting local organizations with a focus on sports and family-based charities.

“Not everyone can afford summer camps,” says LiAnn Truong, Corporate Communications Associate at Alaris. “Camps like Summer in the City give kids the opportunity to test the waters and see what kinds of sports and activities they like. That opportunity is so important.”
Closer to Home would like to recognize our donors and supporters for the last quarter (January 1 - March 31, 2017)


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TEACHING PARENTS

This is a full-time live-in position for a couple able to provide intensive treatment for six youths in a family home environment. The Teaching Parents’ primary objective is to encourage youth to develop to their maximum potential and enable them to successfully integrate back into their families and communities.

As ‘parents,’ you would be responsible for these youths as you would your own children with days off and vacation time provided. While modeling the skills needed to be a part of a healthy family, within the Teaching Home and in the community, you would assist the youth in their daily activities and routines, implement treatment planning and manage crisis and escalations when needed.

For detailed information on the above position or to check out more career and volunteer opportunities, please visit our website at www.closertohome.com.

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Please note: The Birdies for Kids program requires a minimum donation of $10. Any donation over $5,000 must be paid by cheque.

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