



mothercraft™
ottawa

Helping families
grow and thrive

Our History in Serving Ottawa
1944 - 2008

Opening the Ottawa Branch: Inaugural Meeting

Annual General Meeting – 1955

Back Row: Mrs. J.A. Haberman, Miss Elva Hewitt, Mrs. H.J. Lake;

Front Row: Mrs. A. Davis, Mrs. Vera MacIntosh Bell, Mrs. F. Kenny



The inaugural meeting took place in the Lecture Hall of the National Museum, now the Museum of Nature, on the evening of June 13, 1944.

The resolution put forward at the meeting, and presented, read as follows:

WHEREAS we the undersigned have investigated the work of the Canadian Mothercraft Society and the results it has obtained since its inception in the city of Toronto thirteen years ago; and

WHEREAS we are convinced that a similar organization in the city of Ottawa is in the interest of the health of our mothers and children;

THEREFORE we have constituted ourselves a Board of the Canadian Mothercraft Society in the City of Ottawa, this June 13, 1944.

The resolution was signed by Marguerite T. Gagnon, Muriel J. Wilson, Vera M. Bell, Sylvia Sealey, Aline F. Lamontagne and R. M. Fowler.

Ottawa Branch: Getting Started 1944-1945

Early Ambition

Vera Mackintosh Bell, a New Zealander, is credited with bringing Mothercraft to Ottawa and opening the Ottawa Branch in 1944. She held the position of Vice-President during 1944, and Mrs. Omar Wilson was President. However, at a special meeting of the Directors held in early January 1945 at the Chateau Laurier, the two switched positions, with Mrs. Bell becoming President of the Ottawa Branch, a position she subsequently held for the next 15 years, and Mrs. Wilson became First Vice-President.

Ottawa Branch's First Nurse Director

Elva Hewitt, Ottawa Branch's first Nurse Director (1945-68), arrived from Toronto in February 1945 to assume her duties. Ms. Hewitt was actively involved in speaking to many women's groups about Mothercraft and how its services benefited mothers and babies.

The President, Mrs. Bell, notes in her annual report for 1946 that Ms. Hewitt's unfailing cheerfulness, encouragement and practical help have endeared her to so many young mothers and, may I add, young fathers who also appreciate the confidence and comfort she inspires."

Prenatal Department

Prenatal education focused on having a healthy pregnancy and emphasized breastfeeding, good nutrition and *12 Essentials for Health*: fresh air and sunshine; water; food; clothing; bathing; muscular exercises and sensory stimulation; warmth; regular habits; cleanliness, mothering; management; and rest and sleep. Formation and development of the fetus and birth were covered, and demonstrations in bathing and tucking down were given.

Mothercraft nurse with group of expectant mothers at a prenatal class - 1955



Mothercraft's Well Baby Nurses

To become a Well Baby Nurse, a woman studied for 12 months at the Mothercraft Hospital in Toronto. After that, she had four months of practical field work under the supervision of a qualified Mothercraft nurse. Lectures were given by members of the medical and dental professions, child psychologists, dieticians and Mothercraft nursing staff.

Mothercraft nurses provided advice and help to families with healthy, full-term and premature babies, toddlers and preschool children. Aside from advice concerning digestive upsets, Mothercraft nurses did not provide advice concerning infants suffering from ill health, but instead referred the parents to other health care professionals.



Preschool Department

With the availability of larger quarters beginning in 1948, the Ottawa Branch could serve families with toddlers and preschoolers, ranging from 18 months to 5 years of age. Mothercraft encouraged regular visits, at least every three months, during which mothers, frequently with their spouses, received advice about their children's eating, sleeping, toilet training and any behavioural problems while their children played close by.



Above: Miss Elva Hewitt (Nurse/Director) surrounded by Mothercraft children.

Below: Mothercraft picnic at Strathcona Park - 1955

History at a Glance

		1950	Moved to 243 Daly Avenue.
1907	Dr. Truby King and others establish the Society for the Promotion of Health of Women and Children, better known as the Plunket Society, at a public meeting. This society became the basis for Mothercraft Societies subsequently established in other countries.	1954	Moved to 129 McLeod Street.
		1962	Mme Georges Vanier, who became honorary president of Canadian Mothercraft Society in 1962, presided at the opening of the Ottawa Branch at 142 Carling Avenue (now Glebe Avenue).
1915	King George V honours the Plunket Society with the title of Royal New Zealand Society for the Health of Women and Children.	1974	Moved to 450 MacLaren Street.
		1977	Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton becomes an independent agency, and henceforth evolves separately from the Canadian Mothercraft Society of Toronto.
1931	Mothercraft comes to Canada with the founding of the Canadian Mothercraft Society in Toronto by New Zealander Barbara Mackenzie (Mrs. Irving Robertson).		Infant nursery opens January 1977, with one full-time baby. At maximum capacity, it will look after 3 babies full-time and 1 part-time.
1944	Mothercraft opens an Ottawa Branch, with the inaugural meeting held June 13 at Victoria Museum (later the Museum of Nature). The Branch was located at 185 Metcalfe Street.	1978	Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton introduces home child care training program in Ottawa, based on the one pioneered by Canadian Mothercraft Society in Toronto.
1945	The Ottawa Branch relocated to 231 Cobourg Street.	1980	Daycare service expands with move to 983 Carling Avenue.
1946	Pre- and post-natal Advice Rooms open on Rideau Street, with space provided by A. J. Freiman.		
1948	Moved to Murphy Gamble premises.		

1983	Moved to 475 Evered Avenue.	2002	Canadian Mothercraft was chosen for the Ontario Early Years Centre in the Ottawa-Centre riding.
1990	The building is ours! Mortgage paid off.	2004	An After-school Program was started at the Elmdale Public School.
1990	Birth Companion Program started.		
1992	We celebrate the 60 th anniversary of Mothercraft in Canada with a special reception June 9. Her Worship Jacqueline Holtzman, Mayor of Ottawa, proclaims the week of June 7 to 13 as <i>Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton Week</i> .	2005	The Elmdale After-school Program was converted into a School Age Program with designated space in the Elmdale Public School.
	Funventure Camp introduced.	2006	Canadian Mothercraft opened its Waterbridge School Age Program in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's Farley Mowat Elementary School in Barrhaven.
1994	Parent Companion Program added.		
	Respite Care Program introduced.		
1995	Kinder Program introduced.		
	Major renovation work to upgrade the building and add much needed additional space.		
1997	Baby equipment rental service available. Infant care room closed.		

***TWENTY – THREE YEARS WITH
OTTAWA MOTHERCRAFT***

*(Written by Marjorie W. Hewitt)
A Tribute from Elva M. Hewitt
upon her retirement – February 23, 1968*

*How quickly the last twenty – three years have passed
Since our Ottawa Branch had its birth
With the help of our members and many good friends
I believe we have proven our worth.*

*In the forty-five years I've been nursing
And that's quite a while you'll agree,
Thirty-three I have spent with Mothercraft
And it's been most rewarding to me.*

*Now tonight, I'm a wee bit nostalgic
As I look back over the years,
Recalling the time I have spent with you here
Now that retirement nears.*

*Our inaugural meeting in forty-four
Was held on the thirteenth of June
When Princess Alice expressed the need
Of a branch being opened here soon.*

*For the next two years I spent half of my time
Making Mothercraft here better known.
To this fair city I travelled each month
But my work here was not done alone.*

*Two very fine women worked by my side,
They assisted me often and well.
I refer to our friend Madame Chasse
And our dear Mrs. Mackintosh Bell.*

*The ground floor seemed quite suitable
For offices, it was agreed
And the second floor, my apartment,
Was most comfortable indeed.*

*The two large rooms in the attic
Into a flat were soon made
And the money from the tenants
Into our coffers is paid.*

*We've really been very happy here
And I love my apartment too.
I am truly most grateful
And my thanks I give to you.*

*Our pre-natal classes are booming
We hardly have room for them all
And we know there will always be babies
Be it summer, or winter or fall!*

*Thus our Mothercraft babies are many
Some twenty-three hundred or more
And getting them off to a real good start
Has been a most pleasant chore.*

*And when some of them get together
At our "Mother and Baby Tea",
Just to look at those healthy babies
Is a wonderful sight to see.*

*There are many more things I remember
And I hope you will bear with me
As I reminisce a little
In the land of memory.*

*Then in January of forty-six
Freiman's kindly gave us some space
And a telephone too; 'Twas a generous gift
And I was in charge of the place.*

*But we soon found out there were many who wished
To know more about Mothercraft care
And our office became a little too cramped
To work effectively there.*

*Then Murphy Gamble came to our aid,
We were helped along once more.
In October of nineteen forty-seven
We made the move to their store.*

*In just two years we expanded again
'Twas the only thing we could do.
We took an apartment on Stewart Street
Where I could live there too.*

*Then in nineteen-fifty we moved again --
Daly Avenue seemed just right.
The Branch was learning to walk alone
And our future appeared quite bright.*

*But once more we found we must make a change --
The place we had would not do.
So we moved again to McLeod Street
And I could reside there too.*

*By now we were starting to spread our wings
And aid from Toronto was sought.
Headquarters came through and they helped us
And a house on Carling they bought.*

*We have had our little worries
And duties we must not shirk
For gardening and shovelling snow
Are all in a good day's work.*

*When it comes to fixing water mains
I'm afraid that's where I balk,
But the broken main sure made a mess
Of the Mothercraft's front sidewalk.*

*Now over the years we've tried many ways
To raise money to help our cause.
We've had penny auctions and fall bazaars
What a lot of work it was.*

*But we all pulled together,
Each member shared the load
And the money we raised was well worth it
As our final totals showed.*

*Another thing that we've started
Is a children's used clothing store
And the mothers who go to our basement
Usually find what they're looking for.*

*Now I'd just like to say before retiring
That I'm leaving in capable hands
Our Ottawa Mothercraft Centre --
Joan (Moniere – William) can handle its many demands.*

*I have found here a wonderful helpmate.
She is competent, hardworking too.
She can counsel and help our new mothers
And tell them just what they should do.*

*May I thank you all too, most sincerely
For the friendly and loyal way
You have helped make this Mothercraft Centre
The success that it is today.*

*I'm moving down to Toronto,
Lakeshore Boulevard two-six-six-three
And if you're ever down in that city
I hope that you'll visit me.*

*I've really enjoyed working with you,
May your future be rosy and bright.
I shall never forget all the dear, fine friends
Who are gathered here tonight.*

*And for any who are not present
Do give them my wishes sincere,
And though you all know it, I'll say it again
It's been wonderful working here*

1970s: The Transition Years

Push for Daycare Centre

By the 1970s, daycare had become a major issue in Ontario, with the provincial government allocating \$10 million in 1971 to build new Daycare centres. The Ottawa Branch worked hard to introduce a daycare program, which it successfully realized in 1977. The program operated in the existing premises at 450 MacLaren, with three infants in full-time care and one part-time.

The daycare program proved so successful that parents were urging expansion, not just to increase numbers but to add another age group - toddlers. Within three years, the program had increased sevenfold in terms of children, staff and resources required.

Mothercraft Introduces Home Child Care Training

The Canadian Mothercraft Society, through its Toronto office, introduced a Family Daycare Training Program (i.e. home child care) in 1971, with support from the Department of Manpower and Immigration. It was very evident at the time that group care could not meet demand. Although the concept of family daycare was not new, Canadian Mothercraft entered new territory by training women to provide home care. Following the 20-week course, the Society continued to work with graduates, providing monthly supervision to those operating home care services. The program was introduced by Mothercraft in Ottawa in October 1978.

Ottawa Branch Becomes Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton

Relationships with the Mothercraft Society in Toronto had entered a difficult phase by the start of the 1970s. The situation was subsequently smoothed out. While some thought was given to introducing by-laws to govern Ottawa Branch operations, this appears to have been dropped in favour of less formal guidelines. In 1977, the Ottawa Branch became an independent agency with the creation of Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton. The break appears to have been amicable, as Toronto granted the Ottawa agency \$40,000 in 1979 towards new and larger premises to house a daycare program.

1980s: Rapid Growth

The 1980s brought considerable growth in demand for daycare services. To better serve its clients and accommodate expansion, Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton relocated to 983 Carling Avenue in January 1980. It took the ground floor where Children's Village had been operating a daycare for preschoolers, while Children's Village continued to operate a home daycare program office on the second floor. Mothercraft enrolled 22 children in daycare in 1980 at its new location.

By 1983, Mothercraft had outgrown 983 Carling. That year it purchased the Ste Jeanne d'Arc School located on Evered, Mothercraft's permanent home since then. Throughout the balance of the 1980s, daycare services remained a primary focus, with other services continuing to be offered.

1990s: Innovation

Mothercraft ended the 20th Century with a stellar decade of achievements. It not only weathered a difficult decade in terms of funding, it broadened existing services, introduced several new ones and undertook major renovations, which interrupted life at 475 Evered but resulted in a more welcoming building.

Child Care Services: A Cornerstone

The 1990s started with a drop in demand for daycare services, but this changed by 1993, with enrolment being so steady that a waiting list had

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to be created. Still, there were some key shifts in demand for services during the 1990s which Mothercraft staff met with characteristic innovation. A summer Funventure Camp, introduced early in the decade, became so popular it had to split into two groups a few years later. The need for centre-based care and early childhood education shifted notably from infants through preschoolers to toddlers through preschoolers and kinder program children. This shift required the closing of Mothercraft's infant care room in 1996, but during the decade, other programs expanded and new ones were introduced. For example, a very successful Kinder Program was introduced in 1995.

Significant changes in employment patterns led Mothercraft to introduce its innovative Respite Care program in 1994. This program proved hugely successful with self-employed parents and others wanting short-term care for only a few hours or a few days per week. Initially operating one day a week, the program was licensed for five days a week the following year. Demand increased so rapidly in 1995 that Respite Care not only expanded to two rooms in April of that year, but it split again at the end of the year to serve three age groups: infants, toddlers and preschoolers.

Other Essential Services

The Resource Centre continually adapted its services to meet changing needs over the decade. For example, it introduced parent discussion groups, workshops and a teen babysitting course. The Drop-In Centre enjoyed steady use throughout the >90s, although some related services, such as toy lending, fluctuated. A parent and caregiver registry in place at the beginning of the 1990s was eventually phased out.

In response to renewed demand, prenatal classes, which had been suspended for a few years, resumed in January 1990. While the number of courses varied somewhat from year to year, as demand was not consistent, expectant parents gave very positive evaluations year in and year out. Mothercraft also offered an Infant & Child CPR Course.

More Innovation

In 1990, Mothercraft launched its Birth Companion Program. The program trains Birth Companion volunteers to offer support to young women throughout pregnancy, childbirth and the early weeks of parenting. Services provided include childbirth education for single parents, labour support, parenting support in the early weeks, information about community resources, workshops and opportunities to socialize.

This venture proved so successful, that many of the new mothers were soon asking for follow-up support, to help see them through the challenges of adjusting to parenting. The answer was Mothercraft's Parent Companion Program, started in 1994. In this program, volunteers are trained to assist young parents gain experience and confidence with parenting and life skills.

In 1997, Mothercraft introduced its Baby Equipment Rental Program. This initiative serves many, with car seats and port-a-cribs being popular rental items.

Renovation: From Institutional to Home Away from Home

A strong working capital position at the start of the decade meant that Mothercraft could pay off its mortgage on 475 Evered in 1990. The following year, the agency committed itself to major renovations and a fundraising campaign to make it happen. In January 1993, the Board committed to proceeding with renovations in the spring of 1995. By September of 1995, all programs and staff returned to the completely renovated centre.

2000s

Expansion of Child Care and Family Services

Our Child Care Resource Centre underwent a dramatic and exciting change in 2002! Selected as the Ontario Early Years Centre for the Ottawa-Centre riding, our Resource Centre took on a new name, a new look and a much broader scope. Hours of operation were extended to allow for increased services and support for families. New partnerships were also initiated in the community, which resulted in the augmentation of already existing quality services for families in our community.

In September 2004, we opened our first After-School Program in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's Elmdale Public School. The need for full- and part-time after-school care in this area was evident and the Principal and School Council were extremely supportive and helpful.

In only its second year of operation, the agency expanded and converted its off-site After-School Program at Elmdale Public School into a complete School Age Program offering before and after school care as well as full day care on PD days and during the summer. As of September 2005, the Elmdale School Age Program offered care for 20 kindergarten and 30 school age children.

Canadian Mothercraft performed a child care needs assessment in Barrhaven in 2004 and we were extremely pleased to have been able to implement part of our growth plan. In September 2006, Canadian Mothercraft opened the Waterbridge School Age Program which is a child care facility attached to the Farley Mowat Public School. The program offers care for 20 kindergarten and 30 school age children.

In 2008, Canadian Mothercraft of Ottawa-Carleton adopted the simpler working name of Mothercraft Ottawa, while retaining the original name for legal purposes. Mothercraft Ottawa also introduced a new look to its publications and website. This fresh new look is clean and fresh and despite its simplicity, reflects well the diversity of families and services at Mothercraft Ottawa.

For more information about Mothercraft Ottawa's programs and services please view our website at www.mothercraft.com.

