

**Maximizing a child's potential for success:
The importance of the first five years**

Montreal, October 7, 2009 – The Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation today launched a broad-reaching outreach campaign to make people aware that providing the right environment for children under the age of 5 is of the utmost importance in ensuring their success in school. The campaign, entitled *Help them grow*, puts parents back in the spotlight, valuing their essential role in helping children develop the maturity they need to successfully begin their school years.

The Foundation is concerned by the results of a recent study indicating that only half of all parents in Quebec know that the brain's peak learning capacity is during the first three years of life. "This period of childhood is critical, because that's when the brain is most receptive to stimuli," says Michel Boivin, Vice-President, Societal Mobilization, of the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation. "Furthermore, 68% of parents do not feel that society values their role as parents. We want to create a climate that promotes every kind of activity that can help little ones grow and thrive."

Experts associated with the campaign believe that, during the early years, parents are the most important people in their children's lives and are also the best equipped for the job; in fact, parents are a baby's idols. The simplest parent-child interactions during the course of an ordinary day can prevent all kinds of delays and difficulties that may hinder a child's development and ability to learn.

"With Quebec's alarming school dropout rates causing such concern, it is worth noting that early intervention can play a critical role in determining a child's interest in their education and capacity to stay committed to it," notes Germain Duclos, psycho-educator and special education teacher.

It's all decided in the first five years... and even before

While all vital organs – heart, lungs and kidneys – are fully functional at birth, the brain is still developing and continues to be malleable until the age of five. Research shows that the neural connections established in the first five years of life have a determining impact on how a child will think, learn and develop.

"At birth, a baby's brain is just one-quarter the size of an adult brain, but it triples in size until it accounts for 80% of body mass by the age of three," explains Julie Brousseau, early childhood expert with the Foundation. "This is the time when the potential for learning is greatest. A young child's brain is twice as active as an adult's. At this stage, the child is literally learning how to learn. That little brain has to be fed, i.e. stimulated, and some of the best ways are through touch, play and language."

“Most parents stimulate their children automatically, without even thinking about it. But it can help parents to be aware of a child’s phenomenal capacity for learning between birth and age three, while also understanding the child’s need for love and reassurance,” adds Claire Gascon Giard, General Coordinator of the Centres of Excellence for Children’s Well-Being. “Being prepared to start school doesn’t mean knowing how to read and write at age three. It means children must be able to listen, wait and communicate their feelings. Parents have to help them develop these social and cognitive skills.”

Parents are the stars in their children’s eyes

The advertising campaign focuses on the critical years of early childhood and the unique role parents can play in their children’s development. Simple gestures, words and conversations are valued for their positive impact. The *Help them grow* campaign will run until October 2010 and include television and radio ads, as well as ads in dailies and magazines.

Parents can learn simple ways to stimulate their children at www.helpthemgrow.com. Many other organizations and individuals involved with early childhood development are also involved in this province-wide awareness campaign.

Committed to success

“The Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation wants children to succeed in school so that they can become independent, accomplished parents,” notes André Chagnon, Chairman and CEO of the Foundation. “Our activities are usually focused on people and organizations involved with early childhood development. By targeting the general public with *Help them grow*, the Foundation hopes to foster community-family synergy to achieve its social objective.”

About the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation

The mission of the Foundation is to contribute to the development and improvement of health through poverty and disease prevention by focusing primarily on children and their parents.

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