

Family Insights over the Years



The Vanier Institute of the Family has a rich history of providing information, insights and inspiration to Canadians about families and family life across the country. On our 50th anniversary, we have been looking back at our own work during this time as well as what families have experienced in the face of social, economic, cultural and environmental forces. While some of the language has changed over the years, and indeed so have the contexts in which families live, many of the basic realities of family life – and the findings and thoughts expressed in our publications and at our events – have been relevant throughout the Institute’s history, and remain timeless today. Here are some of these reflections.

Within our own society, the range of values and acceptable behaviour has been great. And, no doubt, as family forms and tasks have changed in the past, so will they continue to change in the future. In reporting on family today, we necessarily, in some respects, give a fleeting picture.

Dr. Frederick Elkin, *The Family in Canada* (reference book for the *Canadian Conference on the Family*, 1964)

In periods of rapid social change, when each age group represented in the household has experienced critically different stimuli and pressures from the larger society, the future-creating capacity of the family may become highly developed, if the family is held together by strong social bonds.

Dr. Elise Boulding, *The Family as an Agent of Social Change* (lecture, 1981)

Becoming a father is a significant stage in adult life. As for any adjustment period, it’s a time when the individual is especially sensitive, since he’s looking back and taking stock of his past experiences. It’s a turning point that raises questions about one’s behaviours thus far.

Dr. Diane Dubeau, Université du Québec à Hull, *Portraits of Fathers* (2002 study about Quebec fathers)

Today, the ways in which Canadians are creating and recreating “family” are as diverse as the families themselves. The language of family, in this sense, is often used to describe intimate relationships of care based on ties of affection, obligation and responsibility. In the wake of rapid social, cultural and economic change, the “who, what and how” of family life has become more fluid. Convention, in many ways, has given way to matters of individual choice when it comes to forming meaningful, intimate relationships... Whether these ties find their genesis in kinship, friendship, adoption or mutual interest, they are essential components of our individual and collective well-being.

Jenni Tipper, “Creating Family” (*Transition*, 2010)

Families are optimally and potentially the crucibles of reciprocity, trust, discipline, self-restraint and responsibility. They are the architects of character and social life. It is within our families that our children learn to learn, and do not just grow up but grow into their socio-historical milieu and into the institutions and traditions that make democracy and a civil society possible.

Dr. Robert Glossop, *The Ties That Bind: Understanding Today’s Families – What They Look Like, What They Do, How They Feel* (lecture, 1999)



The “crisis” in the family has been with us for a long time. In every generation for more than a century, a vocal minority has predicted the death of the family. So far every rumour of its death has been premature. If history teaches us a single lesson about families in modern times, it is this: families and households are variable and flexible, but durable. Families and households change over time and across space. But change is not the same as crisis.

Eric W. Sager, “Canada’s Families – An Historian’s Perspective” (introduction to *Profiling Canada’s Families II*, 2000)

Families are both the adaptor to and creator of our future. All of us here are at some stage in our relationship with our own family because family extends across households and across time for all of our lives.

Alan Mirabelli, *Families in the 1990s: In Control or Out of Control* (lecture, 1990)

If we have imagination, we can reframe our family portraits in ways that will promote justice and fortify care in our culture. Honesty, sacrifice, generosity, respect and compassion are values that we uphold in families and that serve as links between our private responsibilities for care and the public common good. But it is imaginative public support of families, in all their emerging forms, that will ensure we continue to grow as a just and caring society for all the world to see.

Dr. Kerry Daly, *Reframed Family Portraits* (lecture, 2004)

In the words of David Northcott, Vanier Institute Board Chair (2012–2015), “We envision a Canada where families engage and thrive in a caring and compassionate society, with a robust and prosperous economy, in an inclusive and vibrant culture, in a safe and sustainable environment.” Over the next 50 years, we will continue to work toward this goal, sharing our knowledge and understanding with families and those who support them to assure that all Canadians and their families can reach their full potential. ♡

Even as Canadians complain that we feel increasingly stretched and stressed trying to “make time” to fit in all the responsibilities of our jobs and our homes, most of us state a preference for the same or even more hours on the job. Here we confront the fundamental paradox of the present era. While we recognize the need for more time to carry out our family work, in these insecure times we are also committed to productivity in our jobs, eager to demonstrate our loyalty to our employers and anxious to acquire as much financial security as possible for our future and that of our children.

Clarence Lochhead, *From the Kitchen Table to the Boardroom Table* (resource book, 1998)

In our view, a familial society is one in which persons and the quality of their immediate relationships, whether they be at home, at study, at work or at play, are perceived as fundamental to the quality of the society and its institutions. It is a society in which caring and sharing begins in the family, a society that is lived in community with others, even extending to the global village. Life has meaning only when I live it, not merely for myself, but for others. The search for the ultimate meaning, the ultimate truth, the ultimate justice, the ultimate wisdom and the ultimate perfection begins with my own self-awareness and my willingness to care for and share with others.

Dr. Fred R. MacKinnon, *Opening Remarks on the Familial Society* (lecture, 1979)