Family Is...

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STUDENTS

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

What does "family" mean to you? Over the past 50 years, the Vanier Institute has explored this question as part of its mandate to enhance the national understanding of families, family life and family experience, expectations and aspirations. What has been clear from the outset is that families are every bit as unique as the people who comprise them. Families are a foundational institution in society, acting as a cornerstone for social, economic and cultural life. And yet, families are not static, perpetually adapting and evolving as roles, responsibilities and relationships are renegotiated and redefined in response to ever-changing needs.

Despite this ongoing diversity and dynamism, the basis for family relationships is a constant in family life. Throughout the national *Families in Canada Listening Tour*, we asked participants to complete the phrase "Family is..." with one word. After each event, we gathered all responses and used them to generate a word cloud, in which the size of the submitted words are proportionate to the frequency of each particular response (as seen in

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What does "family" mean to you? The three most common responses we receive to this question are *love*, *care* and *support*, regardless of the cultural, economic or demographic background of the respondents.

PROFESSIONALS

MILITARY FAMILIES

the culminations above that we gathered from students, community organizations, professionals and military families). It is not a rigorous scientific exercise, but rather a simple way to assess people's initial reflections about what family means to them. One thing we have found is that, regardless of the cultural, economic or demographic background of these diverse groups of Canadians, the three most common responses are *love, care* and *support* – all of which are fundamental components of the Vanier Institute's functional definition of family.

No two families are the same, but families perform the same basic functions regardless of what they look like or where they are from. *Families* themselves are built upon cornerstones of love, care and support – relationships between individuals. It is this focus on relationships that provides the basis for the Institute's work.

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