



# Strong Families, Healthy Communities

**NORA SPINKS**

At the Vanier Institute, while we are non-policy-prescriptive, our work does inform policy discussion, program design and further research. We analyze data, synthesize information, organize resources and mobilize knowledge about families, family life, family experiences, expectations and aspirations. Through the lens of the *200-year present*,<sup>1</sup> we use a balanced perspective and take a strength-based approach to learn *from* and *about* families.

We are collaborative, inclusive, respectful of diversity and non-partisan. Our resources and events are broadly available and accessible. Our *strength-based* approach shapes how we translate and transfer knowledge through various forms and formats, including in print, online, in the media and in person.

Regardless of the form or format knowledge mobilization takes, our observations, conversations and presentations are non-judgmental in nature. Rather than framing family experiences, circumstances and perspectives as “problems to be solved” or “challenges to be overcome,” we frame them as “realities to understand.”

By leveraging strengths and assets and sharing creative and innovative stories, we are able to identify key elements required for a family to engage and thrive in caring and compassionate communities.

We explore leading and promising practices that are evidence-based or evidence-informed. As we seek to understand families in all their complexity and diversity using this frame and approach, we learn how families create and seize opportunities, grow and develop, and interact with and have an impact on social and economic forces.

Some people see the glass as half full while others see the glass as half empty, but we don't focus on

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evaluating the vessel – we focus on understanding the *content*. In other words, if you take the water out of the glass, notions of “empty” and “full” become irrelevant. The same amount of water in a different glass can be interpreted differently; it's no longer about “good” or “bad” – it just *is*.

This is not to say that we *ignore* the reality that some families in Canada may face adversity. We examine the relationships between families and social, economic, environmental and cultural forces, focusing our work on what in any given experience can be leveraged, built on or learned from. We believe that change is inevitable and that families aspire to succeed and contribute to their community.

Understanding and appreciating the present is only part of the process. We also apply a balanced perspective and strength-based approach to anticipate and plan for the future. Not only do we report on family experiences, but also on family expectations and aspirations (e.g. *expecting an education will lead to a good job; wanting the next generation to have opportunities for success*).

A strength-based lens makes it possible for us, as family researchers and educators, to mobilize knowledge, communicate our findings, build our networks and engage in inclusive meaningful conversations.

We believe that teaching and learning is an exciting, collaborative and participatory process. We look forward to engaging Canadians in the further exploration of families and family life while respecting and honouring the past, understanding and appreciating the present, and preparing for the future. ◀

<sup>1</sup> See “The 200-Year Present” in the 43-3 edition of *Transition* under the “Resources” tab at [www.vanierinstitute.ca](http://www.vanierinstitute.ca).