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Beyond the Boardroom Table

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For more than 30 years, my colleagues and I benefited from the wisdom and generosity of a diverse group of people from varied backgrounds, with different beliefs and perspectives, from diverse communities across the country. Successive boards of directors of the Vanier Institute of the Family were drawn together by a fascination with an increasingly fluid and evolving understanding of the family. With a spirit of inquiry and open-mindedness, these Canadians joined together to deepen our understanding of the nation's families and to help individuals and families be the best they can be, in supportive communities that value and recognize them and the contribution they make to our collective success.

All board members arrived at the Institute with their own personal experiences of family life – often joyous, occasionally painful and sometimes difficult, but mostly warm. Some arrived unsure as to whether or not they would feel welcome on the the board, as their particular family structure, socio-economic status or ethno-cultural heritage sometimes differed from the majority of families in Canada at the time. Yet each board member found the Institute not only welcoming but inclusive, supportive, caring and loving.

In some measure, these groups of individuals had been chosen because of the lives they had lived beyond the front doors of their own homes: by virtue of the jobs they held, their professional training, the goals they pursued or the contributions they chose to make to their communities. Without promise of reward, they gave their time, talent and resources to an organization that challenged their assumptions, beliefs and understanding of what families are: what they look like, what they do and how they feel.

As a not-for-profit organization, like businesses of all kinds, the Vanier Institute needs to be well-managed, effective, efficient and ethical at all times. For more than 50 years, board members have fulfilled the Institute's mission, taken on many challenges and performed their governance responsibilities well, even during periods of



Families within the Vanier Institute

Family relationships have been a part of the Vanier Institute's history since its founding 50 years ago. Ties of kinship connect individuals within the staff team, Board of Directors, Alumni Network and the volunteers who make our work possible. These family connections between parents and their children and between spouses have been a source of strength for the Institute throughout periods of social, economic, cultural and organizational change.

economic uncertainty, market fluctuations, growth and contraction.

For most directors, though, their time on the board went well beyond the typical activities of governance. Not only did they care about the important work under way, they cared about one another and about the Institute's staff team.

As though they were around a family dining table, Vanier board members brought their whole and authentic selves to the boardroom table, sharing their stories of work and family. They shared experiences and memories, with many family photos of loved ones growing up and growing old. They received guidance and support about their relationships, partners, marriages, separations, divorces, children and grandchildren. They shared achievements, celebrated successes and supported one another in times of illness and loss of loved ones.

Minds were challenged and hearts were opened in ways seldom experienced at boardroom tables. What they cared about enough to debate did not divide them but curiously *united* them to do what they could to support the foundation of Canada's prosperity and strength – its diverse and dynamic families. ♡

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