



# Mary Centre

## 20 years

CELEBRATING DEVELOPMENTAL CHALLENGES

# NEWSLETTER

### The Founding Of Mary Centre – A Brief History

The story of Mary Centre is a story of faith and frustration, patience and perseverance, and the unselfish service of dedicated employees and volunteers.

In the late 1970s, Sister Mary Hamilton trained and led a small band of volunteers who brought Catholic teachings to the developmentally challenged in the segregated secular schools that existed at that time. Her efforts, and the work of some parents, increased awareness within the Catholic community of the needs of the developmentally challenged and their parents.

The focus at first was on religious instruction. Sunday Schools were established, some of which continue to this day. Father Jean Marc Gagne was an early leader. His work was later taken up by Reverend Monsignor Samuel J. Bianco P.H., formerly of Holy Rosary Church who eventually became a member of Mary Centre's first Board.

The United Nations declared 1981 to be The Year of Disabled Persons. Pope John Paul II and the Ontario Catholic Bishops issued proclamations in support of the needs of handicapped persons. Those involved with the ongoing religious instruction programs became aligned with some parents of adults who are developmentally challenged. They wanted the Catholic Church and its allied charitable organizations to provide direct help. In particular, some parents of adult children who had a developmentally challenged living at home, worried about the future. Who would care for their children when they were gone?



**Reverend Monsignor Samuel J. Bianco P.H.  
Celebrating Mass at 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration**



*Verna and Margaret at Leyton Residence*

*“Celebrating Developmental Challenges”*

Could the church, now attuned to the needs of these parishioners, help?

In the early 1980's, committees and task forces were formed with the goal of establishing a Roman Catholic facility that would assist adults who were developmentally challenged and their caregivers. There were many delays and setbacks. But there were also triumphs and progress. Among those most actively involved in pressing for action were Ellen Ballantyne, Helen Dionne and Isobel Ricci – all parents of adult children who were developmentally challenged.

The efforts of these women and many others finally resulted in a task force specifically charged to work with the Ministry of Community and Social Services to create what would become Mary Centre. This task force was chaired by Dr Frank Turner. Its members included Doreen Cullen, Gerry Drechsler, Dan Healy, Father Massey Lombardi, Tom McNulty, Joanne Nugent and Frances Knoll.

Mary Centre was incorporated in 1987. The task force needs assessment had disclosed that older (age 50+) adults who were developmentally challenged were the group most in need of services and support. Mary Centre was formed to meet their needs. This was a mixed blessing. The agency would serve those most in need but would not directly help those who had actually pushed and prodded to get it off the ground – the parents of younger adults.

The founding board members and Bob Lomax, the first Executive Director of Mary Centre, brought the Centre from infancy to maturity in a few short years. Between 1989 and 1992, they located, purchased, recruited volunteers and professional staff for and welcomed the first residents into the five homes that still today are the key properties of Mary Centre.



**Margaret – Original resident at Leyton**



**First Group Home "Leyton Residence"**

*"Celebrating Developmental Challenges"*

To do much in so little time was an amazing accomplishment, especially considering the bureaucratic hurdles, fundraising challenges and community concerns that were simultaneously addressed.

Respite and Parish Outreach were also fundamental to the Mary Centre approach from the very beginning. Respite at first was seen as a way to address the problems of the parents who had worked to get Mary Centre started. However, it was not fully funded until a Trillium Grant was approved in the year 2000. Parish Outreach was also a key part of Mary Centre from the very beginning. As a secular agency operating on Roman Catholic values, we use Parish Outreach to maximize the inclusion of our individuals in the religious community of their heritage.

As we continue to grow, while maintaining our key strengths and core values, we salute those who built Mary Centre on such a solid foundation of professional competence and Christian compassion.

Dedicated to the members of our founding Board of Directors:

Tom McNulty  
Robert Giroux  
Helen Dionne  
Laurel Hamilton  
Reverend Monsignor Samuel J. Bianco, P.H.  
Doreen Cullen

## MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

November 6, 2008 11th Annual Fundraiser  
Famous People Players Dinner Theatre

May 12, 2009 9th Annual Fundraising Golf Tournament

For information contact Marion Patterson at (416) 630-5533 or [mpatterson@marycentre.com](mailto:mpatterson@marycentre.com)



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If you would like more information about Mary Centre and/or you would like to make a donation, clip out this and we will provide you with a Charitable Tax Deductible Donation.

- I would like more information about the agency
- I would like information on becoming a volunteer
- I enclose a cheque in the amount of: \_\_\_\_\_ or charge to my Credit Card  
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*“Celebrating Developmental Challenges”*