

# Building Reconciliation at the U of S

Parent Circle, Parents on Campus, and Student Health Services

## Partnering to Support Parents

### DESCRIPTION

Over time, the demographic of students on university campuses has changed. In the United States, ¼ of students are found to have dependents and this number is growing (1). Being a student comes with many challenges, but coupling this with the responsibilities of a parent can lead to many extra stressors for some students.

Many university student parents face the challenges of balancing family and school life, time management, mental health concerns, lack of adequate child care, financial support, lack of academic supports, and feelings of isolation (2). A recent Student Health Services survey of Aboriginal students found that 33% had at least one dependent, with 8.7% having 3 or more. Despite the prevalence of students with children, few universities have adapted to support the unique needs of this population (3).

In 2014, due to the lack of family friendly and breastfeeding sites on campus, a student parent created the Parents on Campus group. This group spearheaded the creation of the first “Comfort Room” on campus and continue to act as a social and advocacy group, supporting all student parents at the university. In 2016, the Aboriginal Student Centre created the Parent Circle to address the needs and foster a sense of community for Aboriginal parents.

Understanding the value of collaboration, the Parent Circle and Parents on Campus have come together to offer special events, workshops, and activities.



### CONTACT

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### PURPOSE

The Parent Circle and Parents on Campus groups strive to foster the creation of a welcoming and empowering environment at the University of Saskatchewan for students, staff, and faculty who have dependents. Acting as a liaison between parents and university administration, Parents on Campus advocates for the creation of family-friendly spaces including the creation of the Comfort Room, breastfeeding-friendly locations, and childrens’ play areas on campus. They also provide workshops and activities to promote the building of a parents’ community within the University of Saskatchewan. Collaboration between the groups has seen the creation of activities which include:

- family item swaps
- pool parties
- nutrition workshops
- family legal advice workshops
- Childcare information workshops
- suppers to build community relationships



### SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES

#### Successes

- Collaboration has led to the building of a larger parent support community on campus
- Use of multi media to create podcasts of events so that parents can access information even if they cannot attend the event
- Further acknowledgement by the university administration for the creation of more family-friendly spaces in the future
- Incorporation of healthy lifestyle habits into activities
- Information sessions and family activities create a sense of community and can also lower stress felt by student parents

#### Challenges

- Finding appropriate times in order to have the most accessible events possible
- Being able to reach parents at the University of Saskatchewan when no means of identification is currently available
- Securing accessibility and accommodation support for pregnant mothers
- Finding areas on campus for children and families to play

### HOW IT BUILDS RECONCILIATION

#### Child Wellness

These programs work together to offer parenting programs and support for Aboriginal parents at the University of Saskatchewan, in an intercultural and inclusive space.

#### Education

The collaboration between the Parent Circle and Parents on Campus prioritizes the continued successes of all parents at the University of Saskatchewan with a focus on supporting the needs of students with children. Creating a supportive environment for student parents fosters the academic achievement of these students.

#### Health

Many of the events and activities created through this collaboration enhance the health of the participants. Nutrition workshops aim to increase healthy living, while pool parties encourage family-orientated physical activity.

### REFERENCES

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3. Hoffman, N., Vargas, J., & Santos, J. (2008). Blending high school and college: Rethinking the transition. *New Directions for Higher Education*, (144), 15–25.