O3 ON OUR OWN



ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020-2021



O3 ON OUR OWN

THE WORD FROM THE BOARD PRESIDENT



What a year 2020-2021 has been! We started our year last April in the beginnings of a global pandemic that we are still grappling with as I write this 18 months later. It goes without saying that COVID-19 had a profound impact on O3's residents, our staff, our programming and our Board of Directors. Through this challenging time, I have been so appreciative of how our community has come together and the resilience it has shown.

This year saw a new Resident Development Coordinator join us, Rosetta Sowkey. Rosetta joins us from Batshaw Youth and Family Centres and brings with her a trauma informed approach that is an asset to implementing Theory of Change. We are so grateful she has joined the O3 team.

As well, we saw old faces come in to help out, former director Linda Babins and former bookkeeper. Pilar Sanchez. A heartfelt thank you for jumping in where you left off and ensuring continuity for the organization during a time of transition.

At the Board, we welcomed a new group of associate members, Sabi Hinkson, Raeanne Francis, Lerona Lewis, Carle Jane Evans and Nora Jean Baptiste, who have brought fresh ideas to our virtual Board meetings.

Finally, Michel Theroux, Josie Scalia and Tina Pallotta will be stepping down from the Board at the end of this year. We are so appreciative of Michel and Josie's input to the fundraising and finance committees over the years and are happy we will continue to work Tina as an associate member.

And last but not least, a very special thank you to the whole team, Ushana, Rosetta, Maria, Jean, and Judy, with your commitment and hard work we weathered and are continuing to weather the challenges facing our community.

Thank you to all who contributed to O3 in 2020-21, your continued support is fundamental in helping our community of young parents better their lives and those of their children.





THE WORD FROM THE DIRECTOR



When I first began at O3 On Our Own (O3) three years ago. I was excited to lead an organization that helps young, vulnerable families overcome the barriers they face and change the trajectory of their lives. O3 strives to offer responsive programming adapted to helping our families these barriers overcome and equipping them with the tools to walk through life and move from surviving to thriving.

The last year has been a time of selfreflection and growth at O3. We completed the Theory of Change process in order to examine what we want to achieve as an organization. how we will achieve it. and how we will measure our success. We assembled a multi-stakeholder team of board members, management, staff. and residents, and many a difficult conversation was had. In the end, however, we came together as a team, centred the needs of our families at the heart of the process, and produced a wonderful guiding mandate.

This work cannot be done alone. In order to create this incredible community of healing and support, there is an army of people walking alongside me.

To my incredible staff: thank you so much for all that you do and for always going above and beyond to let our residents know that they matter. To our theory of Theory of Change coaches, Stephanie Garrow and Lara Evoy: thank you for guiding O3 through this process and leading us to an even better version of ourselves. To the O3 Board of Directors: I thank you for your guidance and support, and for being such dedicated stewards of our organization.

To our families: what an honour it is to serve you every day and to help you find the path for which you were always destined. Everyday you surprise, delight and inspire us in the face of the most difficult odds, and we thank you for allowing us to be with you for this part of your journey.

Finally, to our donors: Media Experts, The Rossy Family Foundation, Orchard House Daycare, and the countless individuals who believe in the mission of O3: without you, none of this would be possible. Thank you so much for giving your time, your human resources, and your financial resources to help our families achieve their goals and dreams.

¹⁸⁵ USHANA HOUSTON

DIRECTOR



THE STAFF



Ushana Houston, Director



Rosetta Sowkey, Resident Development Coordinator



Maria Ochoa, Community Development Coordintaor



Jean Lama, Father Engagement Coordinator



Judy Battista, Childcare Worker



Barkley Cineus, Building Manager

Departed Staff

Linda Babins, Interim Director Olivia Herron, Interim Resident Development Coordinator Keyana Graham, Administrative Assistant Abigail Lawson, Resident Development Coordinator



THE BOARD

Marilyn Rowell, President Sharon Rossy, President Michel Theroux, Treasurer Christine Evans, Secretary Jennifer Douglass Sissy Duong Joanna Kolb Tina Pallotta Ria Rombough Josie Scalia

ASSOCIATE BOARD MEMBERS

Clarinda Daley

Carle Jane Evans

Sabi Hinkson

Nora Jean-Baptiste

Lerona Lewis



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Thank you, Olivia

Olivia started at O3 in September 2017, as the Workshop & Community Development Coordinator. She was responsible for coordinating all of the workshops that so benefit our families, and preparing the meal we offer to families before all programming. Little did we know that she would come to contribute so much more to the organization. Over the three years she was at O3, Olivia helped transform the organization during this period of transition and growth. She was the first point of contact for all incoming residents, and helped them have a smooth transition into the O3 community. Using her human systems and program design background, Olivia helped advance the O3 program model by bringing evidence-based practice and innovative approaches to our work. She created the O3 education program, which includes study nights and one-on-one volunteer tutors for our student-parents.

Olivia also served as the right-hand to the Director, co-writing grants and serving on the theory of change and impact measurement committees. In her final role at O3, Olivia was promoted to Interim Resident Development Coordinator, ushering our families through the global pandemic during the spring and summer of 2020. Olivia is now at McGill University pursuing a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. She continues to think of our families, and brings their lived experiences – often underrepresented in academic spaces - to classroom discussion. Thank you, Olivia, for all you brought to O3 during your time with us.

-The O3 Family

WHERE WE CAME FROM

O3 was started at the initiative of Maison Elizabeth House, which recognized a need in the community for transitional housing for young, at-risk mothers.

The four-building, 29-unit apartment complex was constructed with the assistance of the Société d'habitation du Québec (Accès Logis program), and the Office municipal d'habitation de Montréal provides rent subsidies to the residents of O3.

The buildings were officially opened in December 2005. In 2012, O3 became an independent organization with its own charitable status and Board of Directors. O3 continues to work to create a circle of support around young families in difficulty.

WHAT WE DO

O3 is a small non-profit organization that offers **support services coupled with transitional housing** to young, vulnerable parents (aged 16 - 30 years old) with at least one child (0 - 5 years old).

Each family can stay for up to 5 years, during which time they work on goals relating to mental health, financial literacy, education and career, parenting, healthy relationships, and healthy living.

WHAT WE BELIEVE

We believe that strong family systems are key for reaching success, so we support the primary parent, co-parent and the child.









O3 empowers young, vulnerable families who face significant socio-economic barriers and are seeking opportunities to strengthen their autonomy, self-determination, and sense of belonging.

Our individualized, culturally safe programs and services promote opportunities for growth and well-being, leading to improved mental health, financial literacy, education and career, parenting, healthy relationships, and healthy living.

Over the next 4 years, O3 will actively seek to develop relationships with a variety of private and public partners and strengthen our ties with organizations within the NDG and greater Montreal community, to the benefit of our families. Our overall goal is for our families to move from surviving to thriving.

PROGRAM DOMAINS

Addition of domains

At O3, we work with parents to set and achieve goals across multiple domains. After going through the Theory of Change, we added mental health and healthy living to our roster that included parenting, healthy relationships, financial literacy, and education and career.

PARENTING

HEALTHY

LIVING

EDUCATION & CAREER



MENTAL HEALTH



HEALTHY

FINANCIAL LITERACY

PROGRAM DOMAINS

Parenting

We provide strategies and tools to strengthen parents' understanding of child development and attachment, with a focus on a strong family unit and school readiness. We coordinate with outside resources to ensure that the family has any additional support they may need. Our programs include individual, non-judgemental support where parents can explore their family values and needs, and identify specific challenges in parenting. Group workshops support parental development through activities and learning. O3 hosts community activities that promote fun and connection between parent and child.

> O3 has helped me to understand that dedicating time with children looks different for everyone. I try my best to be a good support to my children by allowing myself to be the person I am without having to be so hard on myself. -Shamara. O3 mom

Parenting Workshops

- Bonding through touch
- Time management and routine
- Child-led play
- Praising your child
- Developmental stages
- Co-parenting





Co-parenting can be very challenging. O3 helped my children's father and I work through our plans to keep both parents involved. -Rebecca, O3 mom

PROGRAM DOMAINS

Parenting Program Pivot during Covid

Covid meant that for the better part of the year two realities were true:

- parents were spending more time with their children, often in isolation, due to school and daycare closures, and
- O3 could not offer the usual childcare respite or stimulating activities for children, because we had to close or limit in-person activities in accordance with public health protocols.



We had to get creative, because our families needed parenting support more than ever.

Discovery with Judy

During the spring of 2020, our wonderful childcare worker Judy adapted her program online. She read with the kids, and dropped off art supplies at each home so they could do art together via Zoom. The most popular activity? Treasure hunt around





Growing Together Gardening Project

One of our residents, Barbara, is passionate about gardening. In the fall she ran a gardening program for the kids, with parental support. The kids planted: tomatoes, sage, thyme, basil, marigolds, amaranth, ground cherries, and chili peppers, just to mention a few. This 6-week program promoted parentchild bonding time, allowed the children to spend time outside (much needed after 6 months of isolation), and helped instill a sense of pride in the children, as they happily displayed the fruits of their labor!

PROGRAM DOMAINS Education and Career Pivot During Covid

We could no longer offer in-person tutoring, but learning did not stop for our parents or children at O3. With a big effort from staff, we worked with our partner, Frontier College, to offer virtual tutoring to our parents an their children, from October through May.

"Math has always been a struggle but thanks to O3 and Frontier College I have been able to improve on the subject. Tutoring has helped me improve my study skills. " -Rizza. O3 mom



A huge thank you to Frontier College for helping us transition our education program online!

PROGRAM DOMAINS Education and Career

At O3 we recognize that the path to a secure future passes through a solid education and a promising career. We offer tutoring, education and career workshops, and invite guest speakers from various industries, to help our young parents shape the bright future they have ahead.

"The extra support I have received with tutoring has given me the tools to better understand school work while enhancing my self-esteem. Now, I feel more confident and determined in writing exams. Study nights are an opportunity to focus on my studies without having any distractions from my child." -Nateisha. O3 mom



Education & Career work:

- Weekly study nights for post-secondary students
 - Each study night includes dinner for parent and child, free childcare, as well as coffee and snacks
- Weekly individual tutoring provided by Frontier College
 - Each week we begin with a meal, then a short 20 minute discussion on study tips, followed by 2 hours of tutoring.
 - Childcare includes stimulating activities so parents can feel positive about their time away from their child.
- Thriving In Education & Career workshop series
 - **101:**
 - Discussing educational experiences in childhood and adolescence
 - Exploring career paths, education requirements, salaries
 - Vocabulary-building around career, job searching, education
 - **201**
 - Introduction to higher education system and its structure
 - Introduction to financial aid and financing your education

PROGRAM DOMAINS Financial Literacy

We work with residents to help them understand their own relationship with money, while equipping them with tools to increase financial literacy and improve financial stability. We work with parents to help them create and manage a household budget, pay down debt, and save for the future.

> My main goal before I started with the financial program was to pay my debts, and I did! I had the opportunity to do the program with my partner, which helped me keep motivated in attending my goals. -Maria, O3 mom

Financial Literacy work:



• One-on-one budgeting sessions with each resident

- The RDC works with each resident, setting specific financial goals and checking in monthly on those goals. The RDC and CDC are able to adapt information to suit each resident's specific needs.
- Financial Literacy workshop
 - 101: exploring relationships to money, understanding how to use your time at O3 to reach your financial goals, setting financial values for your family and future, tracking spending and creating a realistic budget
 - 201: specific budgeting skills based on resident interest: saving on food; preparing for your transition from O3, learning about credit, bank accounts and RESPs; paying down debts, financing your education

• Guest speakers

• We had two wonderful facilitators from Caisse Desjardins and Primerica who guided our mothers and fathers through Financial Literacy 101.

"O3 has helped me understand how a credit score works. With this information, I have been able to understand how it may affect my goals and future investments like purchasing a car, a house or something smaller such as a cellphone. Over my time living at O3, I have upped my score, opening doors for my future." -O3 mom

PROGRAM DOMAINS: Mental Health

Mental Health is one of two new domains coming out of the Theory of Change. We recognized that given the challenges and traumas our families have faced, that poor mental health is often a barrier to success in other areas of life. Through our two-generation and trauma-informed approaches, we will educate parents as to what trauma is, how it can impact aspects of life – such as learning and parenting – and how it can impact mental health. Where needed, we will refer them to outside mental health professionals, though cost is often a barrier. We do all we can to help our families receive the healing they need.

> Mental health is such an important domain to focus on at o3 because it is the foundation in order to succeed in all of the other domains. -Chelsea. O3 mom

Recognizing that stable mental health is key to success in other domains, we support them with coping strategies and help residents access outside resources as needed.

We are continuing to explore what this domain looks like in the O3 context. We are looking at increasing mental health literacy, and exploring barriers to reaching goals that can be worked on through increasing confidence and hope.



Having a positive and stable mental health is the foundation to health overall. Mental health is one of the most important aspects to focus on in the lives of young parents who have so much to deal with. Offering support to the parents at 03 not only benefits the adults but the family as a whole. –Jamie. O3 mom



PROGRAM DOMAINS:

Mental Health Pivot During Covid

Mental health was a challenge for everyone last year, particularly our families who already face so many challenges. The number one risk factor was isolation. Our moms, dads and kids who would normally take part in the the O3 community activities were now isolated.

Because of quarantine restrictions and curfews, they could not attend our programming. They could not visit each other. They could no longer visit or rely on extended family, such as grandparents.

Our dedicated staff checked in on residents at least weekly, and more often for those families we knew were particularly isolated. As soon as public health protocols permitted, our Resident Development Coordinator, Rosetta, hosted weekly coffee clubs, of 3 moms at a time. This was a space for them to connect, vent about covid stressors (like pivoting to online learning, homeschooling their children), and most importantly to do as much as we could to reduce isolation.





PROGRAM DOMAINS

Healthy Relationships

Helping residents understand the importance of healthy communication and boundaries weather with a partner, co-parent, family member, or friend and acquire tools and strategies to help cope with the stress of challenging relationships.

> O3 has helped me understand that dedicating time with children looks different for everyone. I try my best to be a good support to my children by allowing myself to be the person I am without having to be so hard on myself.

-Shamara, O3 mom

Healthy Relationships work:

- Modeling good behaviour for children
- Tools for healthy communication and conflict

management

• Communicating and maintaining boundaries with coparents, friends and loved-ones



"O3 has been helped me make better daily routines with the kids and develop my parenting skills. "Discovery with Judy" gave the kids a social and learning experience while giving me some extra time. Overall O3 has already allowed me to make many improvements in my life." - Seth, O3 Dad

PROGRAM DOMAINS

Healthy Relationships Pivot During Covid

During the pandemic, the media reported a rise in femicides and incidents of domestic violence across the Greater Montreal Area. We adapted our programming to address this new reality.

We invited Alison from Auberge Shalom to host a workshop on healthy relationships and allow moms a space to discuss relationship values and expectations.

Rosetta, our RDC, designed a special in-house program that was delivered to both moms and dads focusing on ASP - Awareness, Safety and Prevention.

> Through good support, healthy relationships can be develop where both people have a better understanding and communication towards each other, and acknowledge each other flaws. –Jovena, O3 mom



PROGRAM DOMAINS: Healthy Living

Focusing on physical health and ensuring there is a healthy home environment. This includes regular health check ups for parent and child, setting up a healthy home, exercising regularly and healthy eating.

> Moving into my own apartment for the first time was exciting, but took a lot of work to find everything I needed to make it feel like home. O3 helped me set up my apartment and find the furniture I needed. Now I feel more organized and relaxed as I have a place to study and rest while my daughter spends time playing in her own playing area. -Princess, O3 mom

Healthy Living work:

This is one of two new domains added in 2020 through our theory of change process.

Much of this work is done on an individual basis with the RDC, and involves matters such as:

- seetting up the home environment when moving into O3

getting a family doctor and pediatrician

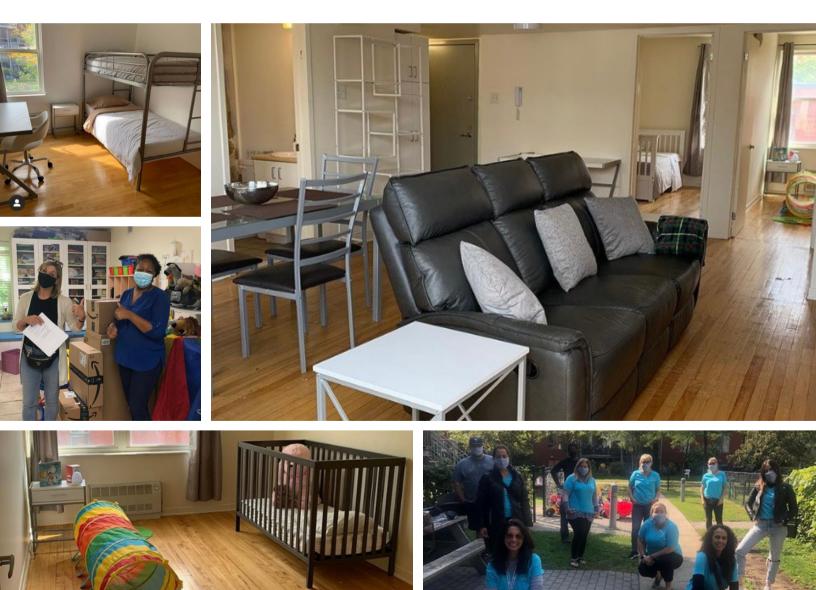
- keeping up with health appointments such as vaccines, dental appointments
- safety in the home according to the developmental stages of the child
- connecting physical and mental health

PROGRAM DOMAINS: Healthy Living Angels During Covid



When families move into their apartments at O3, oftentimes they are coming from shelters or other precarious circumstances, which means having no furnishings for their apartment. Well, last summer, angels came to our new families at O3, in the form of Giving Project MTL. Through grassroot efforts, they mobilized their community of volunteers to fully furnish 7 apartments for incoming families! This included: beds, mattresses, sheets, dressers, pots and pans, dishes, kitchen ware, bathroom furnishings, living room sets, coffee and end tables, and so much more!

Quote from a mom



03'S FOOD PROGRAM Food Security during Covid

When the pandemic hit, food security was one of our primary concerns at O3. All of our families are on a very limited income, and they were now facing higher food prices, children being at home full-time (which led to higher grocery bills), and the logistical challenges of shopping due to social distancing.

As with the rest of our programming, O3 adapted its food program to meet the urgent needs of our families. In partnership with the African-Canadian Development and Prevention Network (ACDPN) and the NDG Food Depot, O3 was able to provide fully prepped meals and a box full of pantry staples on a weekly basis for the whole family, from spring to Christmas.



"Over the past year as a resident at O3, I have benefited from several activities. With the food program, I learned how to cook better from the recipes they gave us. - Seth, O3 Dad



INDIVIDUAL



Here at O3, we strive to create a supportive environment in which residents can shift from surviving to thriving in terms of personal growth, thus fostering a deeper understanding of healthy co-parenting relationships, self-care and boundaries. Ultimately we support our families with the development of tools and strategies to navigate parenting and the ever challenging work-life balance so they can achieve independence.

In my role as the Resident Development Coordinator, I work with each resident to develop an individual action plan within the O3 program domains. My objective is to meet the residents where they are, fostering trust and openness and through a collaborative approach I support them with identifying goals they will be working towards. As a social worker and trained trauma informed practitioner I utilize a strengths base approach providing residents with the psychoeducation needed to process traumatic life events, ultimately creating self-awareness and self-compassion as they begin to realize their strength and resilience. Since arriving at O3 I have been privileged to share in this healing process with many residents and witnessed how their resilience has led them to a place of confidence and safety from which they can now feel comfortable accessing support externally as well as acting as a mentor to other residents.

This past year it was especially challenging to support our residents during COVID. While many social service organizations had suspended in person services at O3 we managed to continue individual inperson meetings, respecting safety protocols. The new reality – isolation, having their children 24/7 without respite, transition to online learning for themselves and homeschooling their children – was particularly triggering for many residents. Despite the challenges, I continued to respond to their needs, whether through check-in phone calls, Zoom calls, or in-person meetings when possible. I also set up a "coffee club" so they could safely connect with peers and me; giving them a space to share what they were experiencing during this difficult time.

I am most certainly privileged to be a part of such an innovative organization that recognizes the lived realties of our families. Acknowledging their trauma and creating the space for them to heal ultimately puts them on a path to achieving their educational goals, building healthy attachments with their children and improving their overall health and wellbeing.



ues Sincerely,

ROSETTA SOWKEY,

RESIDENT DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR

DADS' PROGRAM

A REAL REPORT

Coming to O3, I was not fully certain of what to expect in this new role as Father Engagement Coordinator. What I did know was that as a young father of a 4-year-old boy I, too, have had questions about fatherhood; and I wanted to share as much of my knowledge and experience with O3 dads as possible. When the dads come to meet with me, I tell them that there is no manual on "how to be a father". Each meeting, each workshop, and each exchange are opportunities to learn and grow. At O3, we feel that, where possible, it is important to support men through the journey of fatherhood, as it benefits the mother, the child and the family unit. As a father strengthens his parenting skills and develops more self-confidence as a dad, he is better able to support mom. The more time and care the father gives to his child, the more quickly the attachment bond between them will develop. Studies show that the father's parenting role helps children take risks, show initiative in unfamiliar situation and overcome obstacles. These characteristics contribute to the child's identity and their eventual role in society.

Over the last year, the fathers built a bond of trust with one another, through our weekly group meeting. It became easier for the dads to confide in one another. O3 has become place where they feel a sense of belonging and know they can access support.

As we do with the moms, we offer one-on-one support to the dads. During these meetings, we set up specific objectives that the fathers will have to reach according to the O3 domains: parenting, education and career, financial literacy, mental health, healthy relationships, and healthy living. For them, it was important to have these meetings, because it allows them to be heard and supported. Some fathers were able to go back to school by looking at the pros and cons of having a high school diploma. Others have returned at work. Together we were able to identify their challenges and find ways to overcome them. We also highlight their strengths, which are important to name, as our dads are not told often enough about how well they are doing as fathers. By putting into action the skills they acquire and their new-found confidence, some fathers have been able to prioritize the family by changing their routine. They spend more time with their family during the week, participate in bath and bedtime routines, and take their children to the park.

I find it very touching that the resident fathers of O3 and the co-parents are so committed to the program and their own development. It shows that O3 is responding to an existing need by supporting fathers, their children, and the family unit overall.



FATHER ENGAGEMENT COORDINATOR



I, and many other young mothers, come through these doors with such complex situations. We face a lot of obstacles and challenges while trying to further our education, manage our finances and balance our family life. O3 alleviates some of the stressors that may hinder our personal growth by providing us with access to viable resources and the unwavering support of their staff.

O3, to me, is a place where you can put your cards on the table without fear of judgement in a supportive environment. It is a place where you can develop your plan and ultimately grow from your past, acknowledge your present, and work towards your future. It is a place where we gain realistic knowledge about the world that we live in, and prepare so that when we leave we are wellequipped to be on our own.

-Anonymous 03 Resident



They say, "It takes a village to raise a child." However, strong community support is just as important when trying to become better versions of ourselves. O3 is a vital part of our community, thank you to all contributors who help keep the vision alive.

O3 Childcare Program

We are so lucky to ahve a childcare worker like Judy, who genuineliy loves the O3 children as if they are her own. The first time Judy saw the children after months of shutdown due to the pandemic, she bricke down in tears. She had missed them so terribly. And of course, the moment they saw her, cries of "Judy! Judy! Judy! rang throug the air, and the kids ran to her and showered her in hugs.- o3 Staff

"What | like from Judy is that she is fun, she supports me when | am sad and we can play together." - Jayda. O3 child

A word from Judy...

During this past year during the pandemic, we offered mostly respite childcare for families who were in need based on priorities such as mental health, lack of family support and for time allotted for studying.

We worked with one family at a time as needed. I believe it made a great impact and the added support made a world of difference during this tough time of the pandemic.

During the summer months I created "Summer Fun with Judy" which was a program that was geared to get the kids outside enjoying the summer months while enjoying summer activities at the local parks and allowing them to have some time in a small group setting where the attention was on them and the time that they were sharing.

The outings consisted of park time, field games, sand castle creations and most importantly the children got some one on one time where we shared our stories of the day and how they were feeling about different things. The time was greatly appreciated by me and by them.

The program was designed in pandemic friendly manner where

I divided the children of 03 into small groups of four and they remained in the same groups all summer. I rotated the groups in a biweekly manner four evenings a week for two hour sessions each.

The time also gave the parents an opportunity for respite to focus on things that they needed to as well.

All in all it was another successful year and I look forward to what this coming year has to bring!

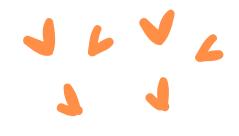


Sincerely,

Judy Battista, Early Childhood Educator







Time at 03: 3yrs Child's Age: 3yrs Program Completed: Intensive class 2 driving program

Tell us more about the program you completed?

The course I took was an intensive class 2 driving program. In completing this program, you leave with a professional class 2 driver's license, an airbrake and suspension license, and. a certified attestation from the SAAQ.

When you were a kid, what was your dream career?

As an 11 year-old kid I was sure that I wanted to be an automobile mechanic. This was a dream job for me at a very young age. Unfortunately due to circumstances in 2020, I had to proceed with another career.

How has O3 supported you?

O3 has supported me in numerous ways: encouragement and patience, to name a few, and giving me the push that I needed to get back into school to learn something new.

What advice would you give students that are parents?

Explain to your children what you are going through, and involve them in your journey.

How do you feel about where you are now in life?

I am very pleased with where I am in life now.

"Love yourself to heal your heart. You are strong and beautiful."

THANK YOU TO OUR **PARTNERS!**

CLSC Benny Farm

















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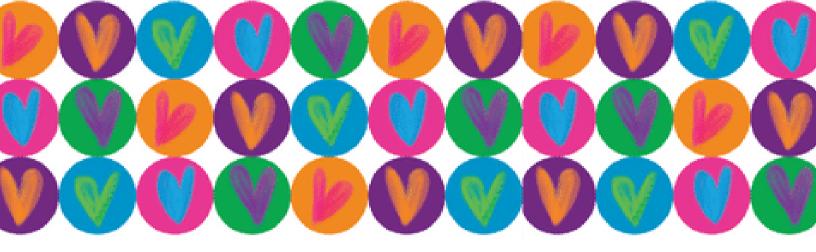
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