



FAMILY SERVICE ASSOCIATION
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A United Way Member Agency

MEDIA RELEASE

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**Online Stress Relief for Caregivers:
Social Service Providers Harness the Power of the Internet**

Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA Toronto) is one of three pilot sites in Ontario that are participating in a Virtual Caregivers Support Group project. Initiated by the Canadian Association for Community Care, the project teaches families that are caring for seniors to access information and support on the Internet. The first group of caregivers graduate from the training program in August.

Open to people with all levels of computer experience, the program teaches participants to find information for caregivers on the Internet, to use e-mail, and to participate in online discussion groups. With the help of a donation from the CIBC Employee as Ambassador Program, computers were upgraded for participants who did not have their own equipment.

“The great thing about the virtual support program is that it will allow caregivers to access information and interact with others who understand their situation, even when they can’t leave home,” says FSA Toronto’s Seniors and Caregivers Services Manager, Lisa Manuel.

The Virtual Support Group has earned praise from participants who now use email at any time of the day or night to ask questions of their counselor and share experiences with other group members. This success signifies the potential of the Internet for extending support services to individuals who have difficulty accessing more traditional programs. Because of the high time and energy demands faced by caregivers, they are frequently unable to attend regular support groups or counseling meetings. Reaching these individuals through alternative means, such as online support groups, is becoming critical as the number of Canadian families caring for seniors at home increases.

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The Virtual Caregivers Support Group pilot project is a collaborative effort and has benefited from the help of volunteers and funders. “Family Service Association of Toronto is thrilled to have the support of the community in this exciting new venture,” says Peter Crosby, Director of Client Services. “We thank the volunteers who have worked so hard to deliver training, develop the website, and give technical advice. And we thank the Canadian Association for Community Care for initiating the project, and CIBC for supporting their employee’s volunteer work with a corporate donation.”

Family Service Association of Toronto is a leading nonprofit social service provider and a United Way member agency. For more than 80 years, the association has been helping families and individuals in the greater Toronto area through counseling and community development programs. More information about Family Service Association of Toronto is available at www.fsatoronto.com.

For more information and photographs, please contact Karen Luttrell, Communications Manager, at (416) 595-9230 ext. 225.

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