



Joy Johnson-Green, Executive Director
Sonshine Children's Centre

Theme: Children Exposed

The Sonshine Children's Centre is a licensed, accredited daycare located in SW Calgary. It provides 28 spaces for children aged 19 months to six years. The Centre opened in June of 2015, offering specialized child care for children from Sonshine's shelter, other shelters and the greater community who have experienced domestic violence. The Centre's programming incorporates leading edge child development and brain development research and is the first program of its kind that offers integrated services for both the typically developing children as well as children who have been exposed to family violence and other forms of trauma. Program staff recognize that children who are exposed to family violence are more vulnerable than their peers to social, emotional, physiological and cognitive development problems that can have long-term effects on their family, friends and community. For those children, the program focus is to prevent the cycle of violence from continuing by intervening early on in a child's development, so that they can grow into healthy, positive youth and adults.

Critical Elements

- This is not a regular daycare – about two-thirds are children who have experienced some type of trauma, including domestic violence and up 90% are experiencing at least one Adverse Childhood Experiences factor.
- The program is grounded in well-tested therapeutic frameworks and principles, including Trauma-informed service delivery, ARC Framework, Neurosequential Model of Theraplay, and Learning Through Play.
- Because of complexity of the children that centre works with, it has an enhanced staff to child ratio, to ensure that children can have one on one attention when needed.
- Interventions are woven right into the children's play, particularly focusing on self-regulation and how it is part of child's everyday life.
- Centre staff receive on-going and enhanced training on theraplay, trauma-informed service delivery and use of self-regulation, attachment and related techniques.
- A parent child educator is available to support parents and the children together, working in particular on attachment and reflective functioning. A parent child educator is critical to ensuring that improvements that occur for the children in the Centre are sustained at home.
- It is usually the most complex families that can most benefit from the program, that are not able to afford regular daycare fees or even subsidized daycare fees. The program is always looking for donations to make this specialized daycare available to those families.