

Spotlight on Success Cridge Centre for the Family

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People have a hard time believing Shelley Morris when they ask for her charity's tax number.

"Nine," the chief executive officer of the Cridge Centre for the Family informs them. They always tell Shelley she must be mistaken, because there needs to be many more numbers than that.

Not if you're the oldest continuously operated charity in Western Canada.

The Cridge registered as a charity in Victoria in 1873, and has the single-digit charity number to prove it. The Cridge Centre ran an orphanage in the city in those early days, on a green and park-like stretch of property along Hillside Avenue where it still operates.

But the world has changed many times over since then, and the Christian-based Cridge has adapted as needed. Today, the orphanage is a distant memory but the caring continues, through a diverse array of services to all ages of people with a wide variety of needs.

"Our expertise was always with children," says Shelley when asked about the organization's path into more extensive social services. "When we had to reinvent ourselves in the 1960s - when the pendulum swung away from the orphanage model - we converted the orphanage into a child-care centre and built low-cost housing on our property as well. And it grew from there."

The Cridge of today has full- and part-time day care for 180 children, and 77 units of assisted living for seniors. It operates the only designated residence in the region for people with brain injuries. It has a transition house for women and children fleeing abuse.



It runs the Respitality program, an extremely effective partnership with the Victoria hospitality industry that gives families of children with special needs an annual free night on the town (in some cases, the only real day off that year the parents will have). It has 29 units of supported low-income housing; a young parent outreach program and a respite referral service.

Cridge Centre services may appear a little random on the surface, says Shelley. But what they have in common is the way they're delivered.

"I talk about a Cridge culture of care - it's not so much about following the definition of any of these services as it is about having our staff looking at all of our services as if it were their parent, their sister, their family getting them," says Shelley, who has been at the Cridge for 29 years and CEO since 2004.

"We want to break what some people would consider the rules and really reach out and care for people."

That takes planning. But sometimes, it's just a happy accident. Housing support for immigrant and refugee families, for instance, bumped quite accidentally into another housing program for women and children leaving domestic abuse. The happy result: real community developing in the Cridge townhouse development where they all live.

"Whether a child has seen Daddy beat Mommy or has seen soldiers beat Daddy, that child has experienced trauma," says Shelley. "We are seeing people pull together and really support each other."

Shelley worries at times that the Cridge's diverse services confuse the public, as the organization means something different to everyone depending on which of its many services they're most familiar with. Fundraising tends to get done program by program rather than in one big drive, because people don't always recognize that specific programs are in fact Cridge services.

But there's no confusion inside the organization about what unites the Cridge Centre's vision, Shelley adds.

"If you've got a cold, go see a doctor. If you've got a problem with a landlord, maybe you need to see a lawyer," says Shelley.

"But if you're somebody who just needs help with all the rest, we'll help you. If you need housing, if someone's being cruel to you, if you need to get off the street - we're here."

**For more information on the Cridge Centre for the Family:
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