

History of CPF

Canadian Parents for French was founded in 1977 with the encouragement and endorsement of Canada's first Commissioner of Official Languages Keith Spicer. A meeting between Mr. Spicer and parent volunteers who wanted their children to learn French as a second language but ran into roadblocks at the local school board, laid the foundation for CPF.

Canadian Parents for French was a small volunteer organization consisting of a board of 5 people from across the country. Today Canadian Parents for French is the largest Anglophone organization promoting French second-language education and opportunities in Canada; with a national office, 10 provincial branches, some 170 local chapters and over 20,000 volunteer members across the country.

In the 38 years since its inception Canadian Parents for French has worked hard to create French speaking opportunities for children across the country, both in and out of schools.

CPF today

Canadian Parents for French's work can be summed up in two primary functions:

1. Creating better and more French second-language programs in schools; and
2. Creating exciting opportunities for children to use their French and be exposed to French culture outside of the classroom

In order to achieve this Canadian Parents for French works with Ministers at Federal and Provincial levels, municipal officials, school boards, and schools to find ways to increase the number of French second-language programs and make current programs stronger.

Canadian Parents for French also works hard to organize various events for children to speak French outside of the class room and learn about French culture. These include French language summer camps, movies nights, book fairs, and our most recognized contest, the largest French second-language speaking competition in Canada, the Concours d'art oratoire.

CPF behind expansion of French second-language in Canada

The number of students enrolled in French Immersion has been increasing in popularity since the first program was created in 1965. In 1977 there were roughly 45,000 students in French Immersion, 15 years later there were over 300,000 students enrolled and that number is still going up! Canadian Parents for French cannot take full credit for this increase; however our role as facilitators, supporters, and educators of the benefits of French second-language programs has definitely helped this trend.

Most of our branches can – and sometimes do – boast about consistent annual growth in popularity of French Immersion in their respective provinces.

The program is becoming so successful that there are often national news stories which report about the long line ups of parents waiting to subscribe children to French Immersion, or the frustration of parents who are forced to participate in lotteries to see if their children will be able to attend French Immersion.

There is no other school program which faces the same problems on an equivalent scale in Canada.

While one could argue that this is a testament to the success of French Immersion, Canadian Parents for French is working hard with schools and school boards to give more children the opportunity to speak French and learn about French culture.

How the organization is structured

Canadian Parents for French organizes its work on three levels, Nationally, Provincially, and Locally.

Our local chapters are the most important part of the organization. They are in the trenches and are working with parents and schools to create new programs, assisting in finding ways to either improve or supplement existing programs, and running many of the events which help expose children to French and French culture outside of the classroom.

The provincial branches of Canadian Parents for French play a pivotal role in the organization. They are the direct line of support for their respective chapters and assist the national office in disseminating the appropriate information and research as needed. The branches also work with their respective provincial governments and Departments of Education to influence change on province wide legislation which affect French second-language programming.

The national office often wears many hats at the same time. The national office provides research and necessary findings to support the work of CPF branches and chapters. It serves as the unifying voice of the organization, given that the constraints and issues facing the branches are different from province to province, the national office works to mediate branch concerns and sets the agenda on priorities affecting the organization. It also serves as the organizational speaker to the Federal government when there is a focus on Official Languages in Canada.

Organize Volunteer Force

In order for us to accomplish all these tasks Canadian Parents for French depends heavily on the work of volunteers. Our volunteers are the lifeblood of the organization. They are found at every level of the organization as board members of the national and provincial offices, running our local chapters, and helping with various events we host across the country.

Two excellent examples of the work our volunteers do are the Concours d'art oratoire and the way volunteers gathered together to prevent the closing of French Immersion in New Brunswick.

The Concours d'art oratoire is an event held across the country. There are over 70,000 participants across the country competing at various levels from classrooms across the country to the National Concours d'art oratoire which takes place here in Ottawa. And at every level volunteers are needed to help organize and run the competition.

In 2008, the New Brunswick government considered the closing of their Early French Immersion across the province due to a report which stated that it was not an efficient means of learning French. The branch was able to mobilize volunteers in their province to participate in rallies protesting the decision and members of the voluntary board to speak with provincial members of parliament. Through these volunteer efforts the program was only modified rather than completely removed.

Philip's story

As my oldest child neared school age we decided that we wanted the opportunity for our children to learn French as that was one thing we could not do at home. We were involved parents from the start. Our school division wanted a chapter of Canadian Parents for French started, I took out a membership and started trying to get other parents interested. Being in a school division where French Immersion is strongly supported it was hard finding people who wanted to join. Meeting with other people in Canadian Parents in French lead me to be recruited to the branch board. After a successful term as president at the Manitoba branch I felt I could be helpful at the national level. This has led to my chance to speak here today.