



FOCUS

Being a mom and a student

Dual role made easier by Dalhousie Student Mothers Society

BY JANET FRENCH

Imagine having to work two full time jobs at once — one requires focus, dedication, hard work, a flexible schedule and perpetual interest. The other needs you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, giving your complete attention and continued support. To an average student this seems incomprehensible but this is what student mothers do everyday.

The Dalhousie Student Mothers Society was created by Sabrina Morrison to provide support, information and most importantly bring a little bit of sanity to the hectic lives of student moms.

Currently a graduate student at Dal and mother of a three-year-old daughter, Morrison was inspired to start the group when she returned to school after a three year absence to raise her child.

"Coming back to school was hard," said Morrison, "even with my husband around."

Morrison felt it would be of great comfort to meet women in a similar situation and to have a support network. However upon contacting the Dalhousie Women's Centre (DWC) and analogous organizations at Mount Saint Vincent University and Saint Mary's University, she realized that such an organization did not exist. The DWC suggested that Morrison start a society to meet the needs of this specialized group of individuals,



and offered their full support. Thus, the Dalhousie Student Mothers Society (DSMS) was born.

The meetings of the DSMS, which are held monthly in the women's centre, act as an open forum for mothers in the unique situation of balancing the stress of student life with motherhood.

The group currently consists of 16 mothers and four non-mothers. The non-mothers are instrumental for the society because they have the freedom and time that does not come so easily to most of the mothers. The non-mothers often take care of the children during meetings, allowing the mothers to give their full attention to the discussion.

The women of the DSMS are studying in a variety of fields, ranging from arts to medical school. There is also

variety in length of time the women have spent in school, which is especially useful for the women who are just starting out.

"It's very inspirational to see people who have made it," said Morrison, who explained that the meetings are a chance for the mothers to trade notes and textbooks for similar classes or arrange a baby-sitter if they have classes at different times.

Most women in the DSMS are not so lucky as to have the father of their child around.

"A lot of the time, [the DSMS] makes up for the deficiencies in their family," said Morrison.

The DSMS also helps mothers access the resources available to them. The group offers assistance in placing children in daycare and helping the women who could not normally afford daycare to find subsidies. Student mothers have priority on the waiting lists of a few campus-affiliated daycares, and there is a \$2 per hour babysitting available at Dalplex.

The DSMS also brings in a variety of guest speakers and councillors to address issues such as stress management, child-parent relations and career choices. Morrison explains that some mothers feel guilty about not devoting their full attention to their children.

Josie Faubert, a single mother who just graduated from St. Mary's, agrees.

"Taking time away from my son, to do all the things I had to do was really hard," said Faubert. "I

felt really guilty."

The DSMS also provides mothers who are struggling financially with options that will decrease their debt. Morrison says that the main source of income for single mothers are student loans and welfare. The family benefits package for single mothers offered by the government excludes those who are students. In addition, there is no maternity leave for students, unlike working mothers, who reap the benefits of staying home and receiving money.

Solutions to such dilemmas include the Dalhousie and Saint Mary's married housing complexes, where student mothers can live under more affordable conditions.

But time is much more scarce than money for most student mothers. Children take priority over everything else.

"[My son] is my first priority, everything else comes second," said Faubert. When you're a student mother and your child has a cold or ear-ache you have to worry about them before you can finish that assignment or do that

research. This can sometimes interfere with getting assignments in on time and the quality of the work.

Luckily, professors are usually understanding of the demands on student mothers, because most are parents themselves.

"The professors at SMU were wonderful to me and very understanding. I loved them all," said Faubert.

Despite time restraints, mothers tend to do well in classes because they are motivated to graduate to make a better future for not only themselves but their children as well.

"I wanted to feel good about myself so I could do better for my son," said Faubert. "I wanted to be a good role model for him."

