

## Getting help with tuition fees

By Jane Whiting

The decision to send your child to a private school is based on a variety of factors. You need to know whether it's the right educational choice for your family. Is it a good social and emotional fit for the child? Can you afford the tuition and fees?

The last question can be the hardest for some families, especially considering that the tuition for an all-day private education typically ranges from \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year. For starters, parents can research the approximately 70 independent schools in the Ottawa-Carleton area to discover which schools offer bursaries, scholarships and family discounts. Another option is to explore education trusts and privately funded programs such as Children First: School Choice Trust, which is a program of The Fraser Institute in Canada.

Children First offers tuition assistance grants to parents in financial need, so that they can choose an independent elementary education for their children. Currently, Children First is serving 1,000 children at over 200 independent schools in Ontario. These grants pay 50% of the tuition up to a maximum of \$4,000 at any independent school.

One of the two most frequently asked questions from parents is: who qualifies for a grant at Children First and how do they apply? The first answer to this is that tuition assistance grants are available to students in junior kindergarten through grade eight (high school students are not eligible). Next, the family must fall within Children First's income eligibility guidelines, which require that the household income must not exceed amounts equal to twice the poverty line as defined by the Basic Needs Index.

Children First is now considering applications for the 2010-11 school year and the form is available online or can be obtained by contacting the program. Students are selected by lottery, and if a family's application is selected, all of the children who have applied from that family will be eligible for a tuition assistance grant. Unselected families remain on a waiting list for the duration of the school year and can reapply the following year.

*For specific information and to learn more about the Children First program, contact them toll free at 1-866-924-8881, or e-mail: [info@childrenfirstgrants.ca](mailto:info@childrenfirstgrants.ca) and visit [www.childrenfirstgrants.ca](http://www.childrenfirstgrants.ca)*

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