

Case Study – FamiliesChange.ca

Feasibility Study

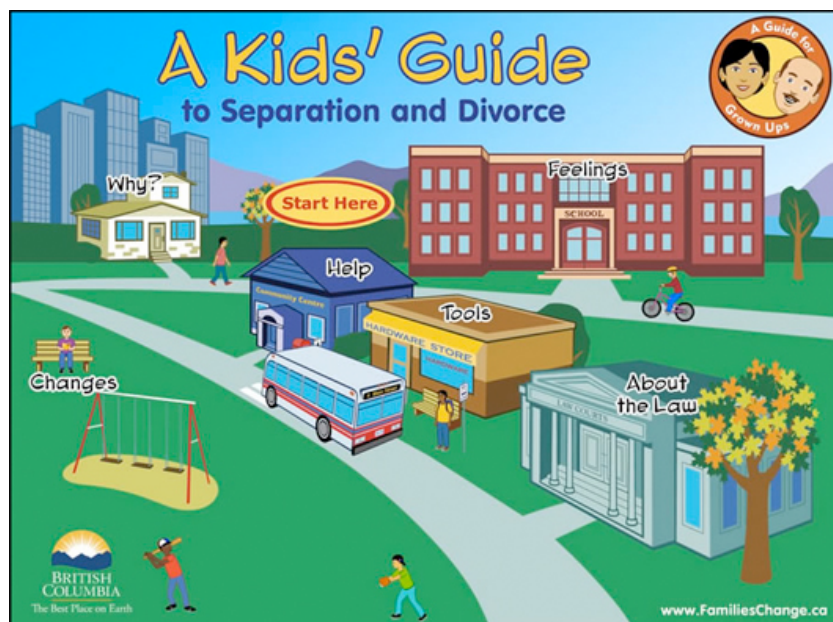
In early 2002, I conducted a feasibility study on the development of a children's website on separation and divorce for the Ministry of Attorney General, Family Justice Services Division. The study involved consultation with government and community-based stakeholder groups across the province, child and family therapists, educators and social workers. These stakeholders identified the need for age appropriate web-based resources that would normalize the confusing emotional experiences facing children and adolescents caught in the middle of parental separation and divorce.

The final report outlined a series of recommendations regarding content and method of delivery, technical specifications (including low, mid-range and high-end budget projections), and development timelines for two parallel websites that would address the needs of children and adolescents. This report formed the basis for a funding proposal to the Department of Justice Canada.

Site Development

In late 2003, development began on four websites (a Flash and an HTML version for children, and a Flash and HTML version for teens). As the Creative Director and Programming Lead, I was required to chair weekly meetings with the design team and a writer, to monitor timelines and to report to a Project Manager who maintained spending authority. I worked directly with the illustrator, directed a group of child actors in a sound studio, worked with a musician to compose original music, and oversaw a professional photo shoot to develop all of the design elements used for the websites. I was responsible for most of the programming of the children's website and supervised two additional programmers to complete the teen site and assist with the lip-synching on the children's site. Design tools included: Illustrator, Photoshop, Dreamweaver, Fireworks, Flash, and Sound Forge. The entire FamiliesChange project was completed in six months.

Screenshot



Launch

FamiliesChange.ca was launched by Attorney General Geoff Plant at a news conference in 2004. A CTV-BC News feature on the children's website helped generate significant traffic to the site.

On-going Development

In 2005, the BC logo was updated on all the pages and "A Guide for Grown-ups" was expanded to include additional information for parents regarding services available though the province, including the Parenting After Separation program. The gateway page was re-designed to track users from their point of entry, with the hope of gaining some information on the nature of the end-user populations (e.g. child, teen, parent or professional). The Justice Education Society, which has administered the website since launch, asked me to produce a collection of promotional print materials (info cards and posters) which were distributed to Family Justice Centres, libraries, local schools and community centres across British Columbia. Additional funding was made available for minor adjustments to the original sites and to correct an inaccuracy in one section that came as the result of a legislative change.

In 2007, FamiliesChange.ca was translated into French. The entire children's website was re-recorded using a cast of francophone children from Quebec, and the new sound tracks were then lip-synched to the existing animations with the assistance of three programmers. I completed the programming of the Teen and HTML versions and supervised the lip-synching of the children's site. The French version of FamiliesChange.ca was completed in only 30 calendar days.

Screenshot

The screenshot shows a web page for children titled "Guide pour Enfants" with the subtitle "vivant une séparation ou un divorce parental". The page has a blue sidebar with navigation links: "Pourquoi?", "Changements", "À Propos de la Loi", "Émotions", "Outils", and "Aide". The main content area is titled "À Propos de la Loi" and features an illustration of a judge sitting at a desk. Below the illustration, there is text in French explaining that if parents decide to no longer live together, there are things children should know about what they should do. It also includes instructions on how to use red text for definitions and blue underlined text for navigation. A green arrow icon is located at the bottom right of the content area. The footer includes the British Columbia logo with the slogan "The Best Place on Earth" and the website URL "www.FamiliesChange.ca".

Evaluation & Feedback

The site has been demonstrated at Family Justice Conferences in BC and was featured at an international conference of Family Justice programs in 2006. According to Ringo Dosanjh, Deputy Director of Family Justice Services and the Project Manager during the development of the original site in 2003, the project is highly regarded internationally and the Australian government wants to license/purchase the site.

Both the English and French versions of the project have received very favourable reviews from the Government of Canada. Family Justice Counsellors working across the Province of British Columbia have also provided extremely positive reviews. The Justice Education Society of BC has hosted 10 Family Law workshops where 30-minute guided presentations of www.familieschange.ca were shown to participants.

From April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 (3 years after the initial launch) the site had a total of 83,253 unique visits with 1,191,682 total visits and 313,509 page views.

Sean Cunniam

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