

NACY  
CHILD AND YOUTH THINK TANK  
FEB. 16, 2012  
UNITED WAY OF THE LOWER MAINLAND

**SOME THOUGHTS ABOUT SECTOR TRENDS:**

When Michelle asked me to fill in for Dr. Grant Charles, I told her that I would do my best and that I would trust that the participants at this event would gladly fill in any gaps that I have missed. So ... please regard this presentation as my effort to put a few ideas out there, knowing that there is an incredible amount of experience and expertise in this room and that through the dialogue we will have today we will get a clearer picture of the issues and challenges we all face in our work in the Child and Youth sector as well as have an opportunity to share our ideas and best practices around effective ways of collaborating, thereby strengthening our work and maximizing the benefit to children and youth in our province.

I'd like to start by looking at the 10,000 foot level i.e., the larger picture, that is, the context in which we do our work.

- All of us in this room have some relationship to work that focuses on children and youth. This puts most of us in the non-profit sector, mainly in the community social services sector. I regard this sector as making a significant contribution to the health and well-being of British Columbians of every age. Yet somehow, this sector has not received the recognition it deserves for this contribution. We have yet to make a compelling case to decision-makers that the work we do in this sector is about the health of people (children and youth) and if we don't pay attention now we will pay for these issues when they need to be addressed by the health care system, the education system and/or the criminal justice system. (Pay Now or Pay Later). (I like the challenge that Judith Maxwell gave us in her paper: *The Road to Resilience: Working Together*. She said: "It's time to think of ourselves as the leaders who can mobilize Canadians to make the country a better place.")
- The work of Imagine Canada can also shed some light on our sector (and indeed on the whole non-profit and charitable sector). Imagine Canada has identified several "Drivers of Change in Canada." They have identified the overarching driver as "The Changing demographics of Canadian Society." But there are 7 other drivers of change identified:
  - Driver 1: The increasing importance and influence of social innovation in Canada (We have not done a good job of addressing the root causes of social issues)
  - Driver 2: Structural shifts in the revenue base which supports the work of charitable and non-profit organizations
  - Driver 3: Shortage of talent to strengthen and lead charitable and non-profit organizations (The Labour Market Partnership research (Roslyn Kunin) that

was done in BC in the past couple of years shows that we are heading towards major challenges in recruiting and retaining workers for our sector; the research also shows that even though we provide services to an increasingly diverse population and to Aboriginal people, our workforce does not reflect that diversity). Susan Carters paper has some pertinent observations about new ways of working in our sector, such as developing shared space, shared services (such as Shared HR Services; Shared Purchasing and Services such as those provided by the United Community Services Co-Op in BC)

- Driver 4: Changing expectations of volunteers who govern, support and promote civic and community organizations
  - Driver 5: Heightened demand for transparency, accountability and communication of impact
  - Driver 6: Growing need for transformative partnerships among charities and non-profits and with other sectors
  - Driver 7: Increased use of social media and new technologies for community engagement, outreach to youth and networking.
- This month, Imagine Canada released the results of their latest *Sector Monitor* – the result of a survey taken in late 2011 (a survey was also completed in mid-2011). Here are some highlights of the survey:
    - Demand for services remains high and many organizations continue to experience difficulty carrying out their mission.
    - A significant minority of organizations regard themselves as being at risk.
    - Signs of stress are relatively widespread; organizations in Quebec and BC appear to be under more stress.
    - Broadly speaking, the financial picture is somewhat soft (i.e., revenues are not increasing or, are, at best, stable)
    - There has been little to no change in human resources.
    - Leaders are more pessimistic than in mid-2011.
  - Staying at the 10,000 foot level, let's look at the political context in which we are doing our work with children and youth:
    - In BC, the next 14+ months will essentially be a run-up to an election.
    - My hope is, politicians will be listening harder.
    - Yet, we also know that managing budget deficits will be high on the list for both the Federal and Provincial government at a time when demand for attention to social issues is on the rise. It will not be business as usual for us. While we have all grown accustomed to doing more with less, now we must do more by working smarter. And, to quote Judith Maxwell again: *"This means doing things differently. And more often than not that means working in collaboration with others so that we can set bolder goals and bring to bear more people and resources."*

- What are some of the social issues we are facing in BC?
  - BC has the highest child poverty rates in Canada; this is the eighth consecutive year that BC has had the worst record of any province. The before-tax rate of child poverty in BC is 16.4 percent; the after-tax rate in BC is 12 percent – 100,000 poor children – the national rate was 9.5 percent. BC children under 6 years of age have a higher poverty rate of 20.2 percent (in 2009), compared to the overall BC child poverty rate of 16.4 percent. BC’s under-6 poverty rate has been higher than the national rate since 2002.
  - We know that this higher rate for young children is very alarming, given the importance of the early years of life for children’s development. (It is not surprising that the most recent EDI data from the Human Early Learning Partnership shows increasing developmental vulnerability for the province’s children upon school entry, now reaching 31 percent at risk). This is alarming and I am increasingly disturbed by the numerous international assessments of public investment in early human development that consistently rank Canada last. To quote Clyde Hertzman – *“This hurts more than our national pride; the absence of public supports for children during their critical years of early brain development has life-long consequences for health, behaviour and cognitive function.”* There continues to be a huge gap between what we know about early child development and what we do!
  - Until this year, the minimum wage in BC has been the lowest in Canada; now, as of this year, our minimum wage is the 4<sup>th</sup> highest.
  - There appears to be no overarching social policy agenda or coordination in BC.
  - Sustainability issues and budget cuts leading to program and agency closures means fewer services will be available.
  - Community mental health continues to be underfunded.
  - Homelessness continues to be a significant issue.
  - Aboriginal Treaty issues remain unresolved.
  - Poverty in Aboriginal communities and the consequent social fallout remain.
  - The new Federal Crime Bill will see more prisons built and more people imprisoned and with fewer rights.

As we discuss today both the challenges and the successes of our work in the child and youth sector, I hope we will leave with a sense of renewed commitment and optimism. There are some successful initiatives happening in BC and all of you here are more than likely responsible for a great many of them. Let me list some of the ones that I am aware of and/or have been involved in:

- **First Call: BC's Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition**
- **Society for Children and Youth – (e.g., its work on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)**
  
- **Success by 6 (The Future of Our Communities Children; First Years First)**
- **Middle Childhood Matters**
- **The Early Childhood Development Evaluation Project: Its Vision: Children are healthy and develop to their full potential.**  
**Outcomes:**
  - **Mothers are healthy and give birth to healthy infants who remain healthy.**
  - **Children experience healthy early childhood development, including optimal early learning and care.**
  - **Parents are empowered and supported to nurture and care for their children.**
  - **Communities support the development of all children and families. (Success by 6)**
  
- **The BC Association of Family Resource Programs is continuing its work in the implementation of Provincial Standards of Practice for the Family Resource Program sector and for the third consecutive year has delivered the 8 course as also submitted a proposal to the Ministry of Children and Family Development to develop 80 BC Parenting Centres (60 Non-Aboriginal and 20 Aboriginal) throughout the province.**
  
- **Early Childhood Educators of BC and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC have developed a "Plan for an Integrated System of Early Care and Learning in BC. The key elements include:**
  - **The Ministry of Education would be responsible for planning, developing, delivering and governing an integrated system of early care and learning from birth up;**
  - **A new BC Early Care and Learning Act would be developed.**
  - **Boards of Education would be responsible for the local governance of the Early Care and Learning Act and related community and school based services**
  - **An amendment to the School Act would accommodate the new Kindergarten/Grade 1 program and make Boards of Education responsible for the provision of school age care for children from Grade 2 up and where there is demonstrated need.**

- Numerous parenting education programs and facilitator training opportunities are taking place throughout the province; these programs focus on the early years; the middle years (tweens) and teens and the key role that fathers play – BC Council for Families
- A provincial network for supporting Young Parents (Teen Parents) has been established – BC Council for Families
- Parent Support Services Society (support of grandparents parenting their grandchildren)
- BC Healthy Child Development Alliance – its recent work on Infant & Child Mental Health and the development of resources for child welfare workers; health care providers and early child development and parent support providers.
- We have regular reports from the Representative for Children and Youth

At the end of the day, I believe we are all involved in this work because we understand that the true measure of our province's standing and its health is how well it attends to the well-being of its citizens. As was so eloquently said in a UNICEF Report Card:

*“The true measure of a nation's standing is how well it attends to its children – their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies into which they are born.” (UNICEF, Innocenti Report Card 7, 2007).*

Thanks for listening and let's have a productive day!