

National Alliance for Children and Youth “Taking Stock” Project: Inform, Inspire, Innovate

Think Tank Meeting Highlights

Halifax, Nova Scotia March 23 to 24, 2011

A. Meeting Agenda – See Appendix 1

B. Highlights From Discussions

Overview

Context:

Where do children and youth show up on Canada’s National Agenda?

Local resources have been constrained and cut back, while there is an increase in demand for domestic child and youth services.

Challenges:

- Demands change; services are struggling with capacity to deliver and sustain services that are needed; child & youth sector(C&Y sector) has complex service needs and is operating on a service delivery framework developed in the 1960’s.
- Reality changes: can children and youth be better served to meet the reality that they are living with?
How can they be better served? What are the outcomes that are needed?

Purpose of the “Taking Stock” Project:

- To develop capacities around leadership, knowledge, and tools that serve the C&Y sector;
- To identify where and how economic crisis impacts the C&Y sector
- To facilitate knowledge transfer among sector and NACY members
- To learn new and innovative ways to transfer knowledge
- To learn more about how to change ourselves and our organizations

Methodology for “Taking Stock” Project

- Benchmark survey
- Consultation
- Research gathering
- Outreach and work with pilot groups at the community level

- Sharing lessons and best practices

1. How has your organization(s) been impacted by the changes in the sector over the last two years?

- Current organizations grew up around one set of funding concepts and principles, the themes of which are now changing as almost all funding is given by the government to both commercial and non-profit organizations. While the quantity of resources remain the same, definitions of funding sources have become more narrow, and thus, the money does not go as far as it did before
- There is very little collaborative community development for non-profit organizations as a whole – organizations lack a network or a system to link and share their experiences with one another. We do not celebrate what we do as a cohesive unit in the sector – NACY can play a role here
- The reality of changes in government mentality of privatizing social services has the sector questioning our own assumptions and other ways of knowing what the real issues are. In Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, there has been more emphasis on commercial child care than on services provided by the sector
- The dominating view from government is that the community can do everything for nothing
- As the government from both Federal and Provincial levels pressure organizations to “pull them up by your bootstraps” with regards to funding children and youth services, community centres for one, suffers from low social collective esteem

2. Sharing Main Issues

Local Level Issues:

- Youth violence is increasing – guns are present at high schools and correctional systems are overflowing. There appears to be a lack of deterrents and correctional systems are used as a training ground for future criminals
- There does not appear to be a common thoughtful approach to serving children and youth, as youth services are generally organized around “bad kids”, yet there is less focus on the early child
- On a local level, the District Manager in the field is often invited to sit in on meetings, but regionally, there is still a financial crunch – despite this, the government and community can have a conversation
- There is an emphasis on creativity in finding funding options (corporate) in the non-profit sector, as evidenced in Jasper’s experience (creativity vs. hard to be creative). The crisis the sector is experiencing is going to mean that some organizations are going to have difficulty surviving, as more entities are going after the same pots of money. In this sense, “survival of the fittest” means best business model and the best lobbyists, but not necessarily the best services

- In Nova Scotia, we have seen a real shift in democratic values, as financiers are now running the show instead of programmers. Additionally, as we live in a service contract world, core programs that have been in place for years are now being downsized, as funds for the core infrastructure is no longer there

Promises not fulfilled:

- Also, while communities are good at understanding what is needed, we need enablers to create change; we know that people delivering services in the non-profit sector are getting older and more cynical, however we get excited when there is movement
- What service providers need is a field in which their importance is acknowledged – there is a dichotomy between consultation versus collaboration
- There has been initiatives to start community child welfare boards which looks at the life of children and families, however this has not occurred in the child welfare sector

Economics:

- In terms of funding from government sources, there is an existing culture for the government to refer back to the budget for every project and program
- There is also a lack of good ideas on how to change policy and operations, which stems from a lack of clear government policy in the first place. One suggestion would be to move money of the governments into organizations in order to do what is needed; however, organizations are often created for each new issue, and proliferation of non-profit organizations to deal with these issues may lead to the assumption that organizations are entitled to this government money
- Community groups can surpass the lack of finances, by finding a way to work together and getting things done
- A good foundation is required in order to enable them to continue despite financial ups and downs, scarcity versus abundance
- In reference to demographics, rural areas are “bleeding” young people out – the average age of women in these areas is 55 years. Additionally, unemployment rates have increased, as people leave the poorer provinces to wealthier ones in search of work
- There have also been cuts to schools, and usually the first thing to go would be inclusion programs
- There is also an economic and demographic decline in volunteers – especially in Nova Scotia as we now see an increase in low level jobs by corporations
- In terms of funding from the government, requirements for funding have been met with increasingly stricter fiscal regulations, yet the same

outcomes are to be expected from the decrease in money. The public demands to know “what they got for their money” without paying for the proper infrastructure

Major Initiatives Around Collaborators:

- In terms of collaboration with other organizations, it is easy to talk about joint initiatives, but in Prince Edward Island for example, collaboration is going backwards. Especially in light of the changes to the sector, roles and boundaries within organizations have changed, and “iron silos” are evermore present between organizations
- Additionally, while collaboration is easy to talk about, we have not invested in learning how to do this – we need leadership and commitment from skilled facilitators. One example of collaboration working well is in addressing homelessness and housing in Newfoundland– however, where did they receive the funding for facilitation?
- We need to formalize collaborative strategies – it is about behaviour of the individual in that seat – this does not refer to the structural tension issues between the government and the non-profit community.
- There is a natural human behaviour of turf protection; however, it is having a conversation about a common goal
- Deputy Ministers and senior civil servants have a lot of authority to influence and have the ability to move information about programs up – for example, in Nova Scotia, the funders are brought together
- Overall, collaboration may be difficult to achieve as funders themselves do not often collaborate, and volunteerism, which organizations rely on often for staffing, is on the decline. Moreover, there is an increasing immigrant population in Canada, which may not have overall positive attitudes about community service

What We Are Not Talking About:

- We hear rhetoric about crime prevention, minimizing over-crowding in jails, promoting community and family values, however we need to focus on the unintended consequences of our decisions.
- There is a belief amongst mainstream Canadian society that troubled kids are disposable, and that we would write them off because they do not fit mainstream society

3. What is your Organization Doing to Address Current and Emerging Issues Impacting the Non-Profit Sector? What is the Sector doing to Address Current and Emerging Issues Impacting Non-Profit Organizations?

- In PEI, the government saw the need for evidence based research in Early Childhood Development – they were allowed to develop a team of 12 organizations (ECDA); however people did not have enough time to get together, so the question remains on what support is required to help this happen?
- A data poster was created to help the sector see what is happening and to identify gaps
- Action projects were created to run small research projects – 5 projects were funded at \$10 000 each
- A report was created in New Brunswick by Claudette Bradshaw for not-for-profit sector, which was a great recommendation, but yielded will progress in sharing resources. One good thing that resulted from this report was the shift from 1 year contracts from the government to 5 year contracts to allow for long planning cycle
- An example of interesting collaborations in Moncton (to find out more, contact Veronica McNeil from Federation of Community Organizations (FOCO))
- One thing to keep in mind, collaboration requires time and energy, and when in survival mode, organizations tend to lose creativity as they must deal with the survival
- There appears to be an assumption on the government's part that rationalization of fragmented sector is simple
- Collaborations with fundraising is a challenge, as we need to determine who does the work? and Who gets the money? For instance, Big Brothers Big Sisters Halifax is working towards the establishment of a foundation to share among 7 organizations
- Moreover, in some communities, there are overlapping and duplicated services, which can make it difficult to choose which ones require more funding/less funding as more place search for limited funding
- In Nova Scotia, voluntary not-for-profit is now attached to "Labour and Advanced Education", which may be an opportunity for coordination and collaboration
- The Youth Engagement Unit in Nova Scotia, which is funded by municipal grants, has led to increased private sponsorship of the program
- Family Resource Centres is also a successful model which focuses on the grassroots, and is legitimized by all economic sectors. Here, parents feel that they have a sense of belonging in terms of use, such as: Toy

- lending/library services, the establishment of a Healthy Baby club, and parenting programs
- There is also a strong sense of family values because of individual family needs

4. Sharing Solutions – What Do We Need to Do that We Are Not Doing?

- Questions we need to answer are what makes us work more efficiently and in a healthy way? We need to recognize that we are working as a process, not as an end product, which means we need to be flexible, while keeping in mind the broader organizational picture
- We all have something to learn and something to teach one another, and a systematic approach to gaining information is key. There is a need to establish an organization that is a network of “helpers”, very much like the Nova Scotia Non-Profit Director’s Network, which may provide the opportunity for those in the sector to network with one another
- Services are now too compartmentalized – we need to offer more comprehensive and multi-faceted abilities to wrap around comprehensive services such as universal programs. We need to be honest about whether what we are doing works, with emphasis on child- and community-specific programs. We also need to increase skills and engagement with the government via data relations
- Additionally, we need to get better at identifying who we work with well – 70% will do fine, 5% will be well off, but 25% will struggle regardless
- Examples of successful community initiatives are Junior High health promotion/prevention – but when moved to high school, it is less successful
- We also need to get past altruistic motivations (what’s it in for them), and get to know MLA’s (personal stories) and get better at telling their story and showing how we are doing more with less
- We also need to stop trying to fit budget lines to funder requirements (salaries are not all administration) and need to get better at engaging with foundations as not-for-profits can play a bigger role in influencing them. There is also a need to change how we label things, not just to fit funder expectations (i.e. prevention, promotion, etc), and reframe the words on our own terms
- Another solution is that governments need to get out of direct service with child protection, addictions and mental health. While we get trapped by historical circumstances, we need to rethink our structures, which can only get stronger with size
- In terms of resources, we need to have the willingness to think big, involve youth and need to shift to programs rather than expanding

- NACY has the potential to provide open dialogue with current government and can bring people to the table who are not dependent on government funding, such as academics and foundations
- There is a need for leadership in the sector, and being enabled to do the things that are noted and supported to do it – most do not want it to be just another organization saying it is doing something and actually not doing it
- This means we require more research on trends and need to know what the evidence is – perhaps a collaborative effort could be a receptacle for information
- However, the challenge remains with NACY, as the name itself does not denote nationalism – there needs to be more francophone, aboriginal, and youth involvement which will be more inclusive
- We also need to resolve the funding approach, and a voice from the broader sector (an “advocate”), while promoting a message that makes children and youth important

Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, March 23, 2011

- 5:00 Arrival, registration
- 5:30 – 6:45 Dinner
- 6:45 – 7:00 **NACY Overview: Peter Dudding**, Board Member of NACY
- 7:00 – 7:45 Introductions (name, organization, what's one thing people may not know about your passion for supporting children and youth?)
- 7:45 – 8:30 **Guest Speaker: Mike DeGagné** – Executive Director of Aboriginal Healing Foundation
- 8:30 – 8:40 Wrap-up

Thursday, March 24, 2011

- 8:00 – 9:00am Continental Breakfast in meeting room
- 9:00 – 9:20 Opening Remarks: Michelle Dagnino, Taking Stock Project Director
- 9:20 – 9:50 **Guest Speaker: Grant Charles, MSW, PhD. University of British Columbia**
- 9:50 – 10:50 Small Group Discussion: How has your organization(s) been impacted by the changes in the sector in the last two years?
- 10:50 – 11:10 *Health Break*
- 11:10 – 12:00 Large Group Discussion: Sharing main issues
- 12:00 – 1:00 Buffet Lunch
- 1:00 – 1:40 **Guest Speaker: Katherine Scott** – Director of Programs, Vanier Institute for the Family

- 1:40 – 2:20 Small Group Discussion: What is your organization doing to address current and emerging issues impacting the non-profit sector?
What is the sector doing to address current and emerging issues impacting non-profit organizations?
- 2:20 – 2:45 Large Group Discussion: Sharing Solutions
- 2:45 – 3:00 *Health Break*
- 3:00 – 3:45 Changing Tomorrow by Rethinking Today
- 3:45 – 4:00 **Closing:** Next Steps & Thank You
- 4:00 Adjourn