

Creating a National Agenda for Children and Youth in Canada

**Key Messages Report from the Strategy Session
September 12-13, 2012
Mississauga, Ontario**

**Report prepared by *Lise Pigeon & Associates*
Trina Whitehurst, note taker and report writer
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National Alliance for Children and Youth
130 Albert Street, Suite 1705
Ottawa ON K1P 5G4
www.nacy.ca

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National Alliance for Children and Youth
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I. Purpose and Objectives of this Workshop

The purpose of this workshop was to explore how to work together to put children, youth and their families on the national agenda. The specific objectives were:

- 1) To identify the key opportunities for advancing a national agenda for children and youth and their families in Canada;
- 2) To identify strategies and the required resources to collectively advance this work; and,
- 3) To identify, and obtain agreement on, specific next steps to advance this work.

II. About this report

This summary report presents key messages arising from the meeting, but is not intended to be a comprehensive analysis or complete synthesis.

III. In attendance

Close to 50 participants representing the widest possible spectrum of organizations dedicated to protecting and improving the lives of children and youth in Canada attended this workshop. In addition to academics and researchers, participants represented, among others, the fields of health, education, youth organizations, social services, community services, safety and security, foundations and advocacy groups. The complete list of attendees is attached as Annex A.

IV. Agenda

I. Opening

1. Welcome and Purpose of the Workshop (Peter Dudding, Chair of NACY)
2. Review of Process & Agenda (Lise Pigeon, facilitator)
3. Participant Introductions
4. Setting the Context (Orville Wallace, Toronto Youth Job Corps)

II. Taking Stock

(Ensuring everyone is on the same page with respect to the need for putting children and youth on the national agenda and to reflect on the challenges of advancing this work.)

III. Where Do We Want to Be in Three Years' Time?

(Articulating a few “vision elements” and identifying what strategies, at a national level, could be used collaboratively in order to make significant progress over the next 3-4 years.)

IV. The High Level Strategies to put Children and Youth on the National Agenda: Developing and Clarifying Them

(Consolidating and clarifying the key strategies identified in the previous exercise.)

V. Sober Second Thoughts and Moving Forward (day 2)

(Reviewing, consolidating and refining the recommendations made the previous day on the key strategies and proposing concrete steps for moving forward.)

VI. Final Recommendations and Closing Remarks

(Participants' final comments; closing remarks by Peter Dudding, Outgoing Chair of NACY and Janice MacAulay, Incoming Chair.)

V. Key Messages

I. Opening

Peter Dudding welcomed the group, saying NACY wants to address the vacuum that exists regarding the conversation around children and youth in Canada, much of which, he said, has been negative and focused on problems, such as in discussions around the Youth Criminal Justice Act. Mr. Dudding suggested the need for a more positive, developmental conversation.

He encouraged participants to engage with each other as activists, and to think about a strategy that excites Canadians and provides leadership. NACY is looking to galvanize the group's collective efforts over the next two years and use our networks to push the discussion about children and youth onto the national policy agenda—*“to raise the crescendo around the importance of our kids.”*

Greatest Challenges

As part of their self-introductions, participants were invited to share what they felt were the greatest challenges regarding youth and children in Canada. Regrouped into themes/related ideas, here are the key challenges mentioned during these introductions:

Putting Children and Youth at the Centre

- Ensuring children have a sense of agency and personal identity—that they are empowered and have a voice;
- Ensuring children have opportunities for multiple, meaningful relationships in their lives—in addition to their digital connections;
- Viewing children and youth not as a problem, but for their skills and capacity;
- Ensuring a holistic approach that supports children and families at all levels—not viewing children in isolation;
- Ensuring parents are healthy and connected in their communities.

Awareness and Education

- Focussing on health promotion, prevention, and early intervention;
- Raising public understanding of how important the early years are;
- Identifying the role of children in issues on the national agenda, rather than seeing them only through an economic focus;
- Broadening the conversation to include family contributions to children's well-being, rather than only discussing children in non-parental settings like daycare and school;
- Recognizing the importance of the community sector's contribution to health and well-being;
- Overcoming the myth, which breeds complacency, that children's issues in Canada have been solved;
- Changing the mindset of every Canadian to become more focused on children and youth;
- Raising issues faced by newcomer youth, especially regarding access to services and jobs.

Unequal Opportunities

- Addressing poverty and unequal access to adequate services, quality programs, and supports—ensuring access in the right place and at the right time;
- Addressing income and health inequalities;
- Focussing on social policy, particularly income polarization that will see the next generation unable to experience the same standard of living that their parents enjoy;
- Supporting physical and mental health so children can better face an uncertain future;
- Ensuring positive developmental opportunities for children and youth to have mentors and experiences with leaders in their community;
- Combating continued underfunding and lack of support for community-based solutions for Aboriginal children;
- Maintaining a consistent point of contact for youth by ensuring sustained core funding of organizations and positive role models.

The Political Environment

- Addressing the macro issue of the declining role of the state in the social and cultural environment, a situation propelled by current politics and ideology;
- Addressing how elected leaders perceive their duty to children;
- Recognizing the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* to ensure child protection services for youth up to the age of 18;
- Combating the determination of governments to reduce their role in social policy, which reduces public voices and champions on issues like affordable housing;
- Calling for a strong policy role for government that reflects the complicated and interconnected nature of the issues and a recognition that a comprehensive approach is needed to make a difference.

The Gap between Knowledge and Action

- Putting what the sector knows to be true into practice;
- Moving collectively from talking to (really) putting children and youth on the national agenda;
- Implementing coordinated and strategic efforts as part of a consistent and committed coalition to address sectoral fragmentation and ensure positive youth development for all;
- Looking inward to overcome the trap of approaching issues in the same old ways;
- Breaking down silos, sharing resources, and disseminating existing research.

Setting the Context

Orville Wallace from the Toronto Youth Job Corps shared his experience serving the hardest-to-reach youth in a front-line and managerial capacity. He said a strength-based approach is most successful, regardless of community. Many youth are missing parental role models, so it takes a village to raise a child. Communities must be accountable for youth.

Mr Wallace said the four biggest issues facing children and youth are (i) lack of employment, (ii) lack of positive adult role models, (iii) lack of resources, and (iv) lack of community and recreation spaces. He discussed his founding work with the Youth Justice Network of Toronto. Referencing the late Peter Benson who defined the human spark as that which gives hope, direction and purpose, Mr. Wallace said a national agenda must be based on protecting the human spark in youth. He said a national agenda is a collective Canadian-wide approach to working with all youth, having them at the table, and giving them voice and opportunities to realize that the sky is the limit.

Mr. Wallace's full presentation is attached as Annex B.

II. Taking Stock

In small groups and then in plenary, participants discussed the positives and negatives of the current situation regarding children and youth in Canada, as well as the challenges of moving society forward on tough social issues. The actual questions that participants used to guide their discussions in small groups are attached as Annex C.

The following summarizes the key messages that emerged during the plenary session.

What makes you “glad”?

- Science of early childhood development and brain development helps policy development;
- Youth are taking the initiative, forging ahead to make their own impact;
- Canada is a wealthy country so things are not as bad as they might be;
- Organizations and people exist that are committed to making a difference for kids;
- The situation is better than it was 20 years ago;
- The public sector is involved with specifically engaging youth in programs and policy creation;
- Kids today have strong values and idealism, despite a consumer-driven society.

What makes you “mad” or “sad”?

- Downgrading of public discourse—discourse is not at a national level, but at an individual and family level;
- Decline of the non-profit and information sectors—e.g. cancelling the long-form census;
- Canada is a wealthy country, and citizens should be ashamed to have so much poverty;
- Diminishing democracy and the discrediting of civil society which makes some people scared, rather than mad or sad;
- Seeing children and youth as problems to be solved rather than as core to who we are as a country and a society;
- Ongoing disparity and inequality—no focus on groups who lack opportunities;
- Lack of action on a pan-Canadian level and missed opportunities to harness global movements;
- Less time for people to be role models in a non-instructive forum— e.g. recreation or extracurricular activities;
- Level of complacency within our society.

Challenges and considerations to advancing a national agenda

- **Collaborating on a national agenda:** Participants asked a variety of questions to stimulate thinking with respect to the challenges of building a strategy for putting children and youth on the national agenda: For example, they asked: What does a national agenda mean at the grassroots level? What drives that agenda? What are the expected outcomes? Difficult and complex problems, issues, and solutions are made more so by local needs and needs within diverse communities—what single organization has resources to effectively deal with problems as complex as this? Long-term issues require time—it took decades to get to where Canada is now. What is the appetite of the public? Who is responsible for children—governments or individuals? How do organizations make the argument for a national context?

Participants called for the coordinated efforts of people working in a somewhat segmented field. A participant suggested the need for extremely compelling examples to demonstrate the value of investments.

- **Children are on the agenda, but not as the priority:** Children and youth are on the agenda, but as problems or discussed as part of other issues such as childcare, drug strategies, or obesity. The Crime Bill puts children on the national agenda to exploit them as examples, even though the statistics do not bear it out. The federal government does not have the money nor does it use language that demonstrates a commitment to children and youth. It is challenging to achieve a holistic approach towards the life and opportunities of the child, especially in the context of competing priorities for dollars and attention.

When children and youth are not on the national agenda (or not sufficiently), they suffer disproportionate levels of poverty and violence, growing inequality between classes and across generations, and poorer mental and physical health. One challenge is the sense that some children are worth less than others. The consequences are not exclusive to vulnerable groups, but are pervasive across socioeconomic ranges: Canadian society is diminished as a whole. People have to recognize that this issue affects everybody.

- **Solutions do not fit the issues:** Solutions do not address the real issues and may be based on ideology, and not evidence. Society is using an old ideology that is often punitive: *“We need a new deal for families,”* said one participant. There is a pressure for public dollars because expenditures, and not impact, are measured. Governments spend significant money on childcare for example, but a participant noted that it is the wrong solution for larger issues. Rather than evaluation, there is spin and exploitation.
- **Lack of political leadership:** There is a lack of political leadership to put children on the national agenda, with jurisdictions playing *“the provincial and federal jurisdiction shell game.”* While governments have great taxation and resource-allocation powers to overcome balkanization—where geography affects people’s level of services and rights protection—Canada invests far less in children than other countries and no visible mechanisms exist to think about kids at the national level. There is no minister or inter-parliamentary committee focussed on children. Canada’s public leaders are not talking about children and youth and their issues. There is a need for a strong political champion—a minister or cabinet committee. The triangle model, with political, government and strong civil society points, is one framework to consider.
- **Weakened funding and advocacy:** Children’s health and education affect the future of the country at a common-sense level; however, participants said they feel children are not on the national agenda because the neo-liberal environment is co-opting the social services sector and preventing them from criticizing non-progressive policy. *“We can’t take any anti-corporate or anti-government stances without being gutted for funding,”* said one participant. Many NGOs

find they are funded for projects not people, making it difficult to build capacity to advocate in a particular area.

People are not mobilizing and talking to politicians: *“We haven’t articulated our opinion with public officials or in communities.”* Amidst competing interests, a cohesive voice is needed, but one that reflects the unique needs across the sector.

Mobilizing and coordinating youth is a powerful approach, but to be effective, it requires active champions who are affected by these issues and who have strong voices. *“When people advocate for themselves, we’ve seen amazing results . . . The youth absolutely cut through all the rhetoric and tell you exactly where things stand,”* said a participant.

- **Cuts to research:** One group spoke of living in an *“anti-intelligence and anti-scientific era”*, citing cuts to the census and the National Archival Development Program as examples that prevent researchers from finding the evidence to advocate and present progressive policies. *“When we aren’t able to do this, all that we are left to do is reactionary work when something goes wrong,”* said a participant. Ironically, the information sector is being cut during a time of *“never-ending request for research that is never considered”* by government.

The normal practice of looking at reactive solutions—like getting tougher on crime—does not address root causes. One participant noted a willingness to invest in high-end technology and medicine, but not in prevention and research. Participants suggested the need for investments in data, information and knowledge as well as funding for centres of excellence to build a body of evidence. It was noted, however, that governments tend to have short-term horizons; data are useful but often, they are is not what make politicians or people act—values, beliefs, and a vision are critical in addition to research.

- **Accountability, sustainability and relevance:** Participants discussed accountability related to evaluation. Are we measuring numbers or real results? Are we doing meaningful evaluation that involves youth who are affected? Are we making connections between the local level and the big picture? Are we looking forward with our programs, services and policies to the impacts that they may have? Are we still relevant? Are our issues still relevant? How can we evolve to meet the changing needs of children, youth and families? Working with other sectors, some of which may have more influence, can help change the conversation. One participant said that without a broad plan and vision, everything is ad hoc, resulting in missed opportunities.

One table said an aging society means there will be more seniors relying on a small number of youth. *“The lack of conversation in terms of our own sustainability as a society is a critical factor,”* said a participant. Some populations are having many children, but they may be marginalized in society.

- **Reframing and communicating the message:** Certain terms do not resonate with the public—for example; Alberta has done some interesting work around reframing children’s mental health. While discussing poverty does not work, looking at the interdependence of how children are doing in society seems to resonate with people. The issue has to be made relevant and understandable.

Participants said the children and youth sector can learn from campaigns conducted by other sectors. The mental health strategy is a great example—they call it mental health, not mental illness. People need to buy into it, need to see it is possible to change and act on the issue. Governments are less likely to act if they think an issue is not important to citizens.

Sustainable social policy requires engaging people in addition to governments: talk to people across sectors and income groups to reframe issues and create a sense of urgency, get the public fired up around child poverty, nourish that sense of collectivism, rebrand the issue. The same solutions and approaches won’t motivate people to move forward.

One participant discussed the *“disconnect between what we believe and what the general public believes.”* Politicians are making changes based on their relationship to a constituency. The sector could consider reaching out to others who do not share the same perspectives, but it may be very difficult to convince them and require different tools. A participant said the key to reframing is *“to understand the issue from the perspective of everyone else, not yours.”*

III. Where Do We Want to Be in a Few Years' Time?

A Vision for the Future

Participants shared a few elements of their “vision” for children and youth. As with the rest of this report, the ideas listed here do not represent an exhaustive list or consensus. These ideas are the results of a brainstorming session and not a full visioning exercise. The question posed to launch the brainstorming was: *Imagine we are in 2016 and that significant progress has been made on building and advancing a national agenda on children and youth. What would you see? What would be different?*

Values and Language

- All children and youth, including First Nations children, are healthy, educated and proud of who they are, and feel safe, protected, respected, included and valued;
- Every child in Canada grows up aware of his or her rights and responsibilities and is enabled to exercise them within a receptive and respectful society;
- Parents of young children feel respected, celebrated and supported;
- Children and youth are viewed with a nurturing sense of preciousness and compassion;
- The language is different: youth feel it and parents talk to it.

Government Policy and Engagement

- All jurisdictions have fully implemented their obligations regarding the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*;
- There is an explicit commitment by all governments to a children and youth agenda with dedicated leaders and champions;
- Canada is on the road to a real national childcare program that is publically funded and managed;
- All jurisdictions, including the federal level, have an independent advocate for children and all ministers have a legal duty to make decisions consistent with children’s rights;
- Meaningful, age-appropriate participation by all children and youth happens across Canada.

Action and Resources

- A network of organizations work together in a cohesive and collaborative way to move issues forward;
- Organizations have gone through a frank exercise of examining the sector to understand what the sector is doing to get in its own way;
- Youth programming in community organizations, schools and recreation centres are planned in part by youth themselves;
- There are recognized core indicators and data to track progress;
- All 21-year olds are ready for school, work and life;
- Organizations are engaged in the *Close the Gap* campaign, supporting First Nations learning within a strong and vibrant civil society network to support children across Canada;
- There is a significant increase in the number of individuals volunteering for youth organizations or initiatives

IV. High-level Strategies to Put Children and Youth on the National Agenda

“As Canadians, we are great talkers, but the essence of a good tennis game or a good golf game is about your ability to follow-through on the swing to get the ball going in the right direction,” said Mr. Dudding in launching the discussion on strategies to put children and youth on the national agenda.

The question asked to launch this discussion was: *“Considering where you want to be with respect to putting children and youth on the national agenda, what most significant things need to be attended to - through a collaborative approach -- in order to make significant progress over the next 3-4 years?”*

As the discussion moved forward, some confusion arose as to the purpose of the exercise; the organisers of the workshop, Mr. Dudding and Ms. Birnbaum, explained that the purpose was NOT “to develop a national agenda on children and youth” but rather “to explore ways of putting children and youth ON the national agenda”. To clarify the meaning of this, it was explained that advancing a national agenda on an issue -- such as children and youth -- usually means that we, as a civil society, agree that the issue in question is important for Canada (and its future) and that as a result, our actions and those of governments at all levels support the advancement of the issue with appropriate policies, legislation, funding and programming.

After regrouping the ideas emerging from this brainstorming into four “high level strategies”, participants broke into small groups to further develop and refine the four strategies.

The four high level strategies for putting children and youth on the national agenda are:

- a. **Being heard—Communications and social marketing**
- b. **Working together—Developing a collaborative approach**
- c. **Sorting through what issues need to be on the agenda**
- d. **Addressing issues related to structures/jurisdictions**

Detailed results from this group work are presented in Annex D. The following represent the key messages emerging under each of these high level strategies:

A. Being heard—Communications and Social Marketing

The most critical elements of this strategy are:

- Engaging the public and youth in the conversation (and in finding out what it is we should be doing for children and youth), understanding the various perspectives (including that of detractors) and deciding on one or two issues that would be compelling for people;
- Using champions and people who can tell the stories in a compelling manner and emphasize urgency;
- Using language that supports the idea of children as a public good;
- Focusing on education and awareness, particularly regarding children’s rights, roles and responsibilities.

B. Working together—Developing a Collaborative Approach

The key points made for this strategy are:

- Leadership is required to bring the advocates together and support their engagement;
- Consensus-building: It is essential to manage tension around what the common issues are and advance specific issues and interests;
- Youth must be a part of developing the approach; youth needs to be at the centre from the beginning;
- The children and youth sector needs to transform itself rather than wait for government to change—as it innovates and collaborates, government will pay attention;
- It is essential to push the different sectors of society to engage youth in a way that makes sense—one way may be engaging Canadians to increase volunteerism because when people volunteer, they take responsibility for their community and this starts to break down barriers;
- It would be useful to examine how those organizations that are trying to survive on a day-to-day basis from across the country can contribute to the national agenda: what support do they need?
- It would also be valuable to consider ongoing work, such as that of Dr. Kellie Leitch in *Reaching for the Top*, a ranking of Canadian children and youth which shows their poor ranking in terms of overall health

C. Sorting through what issues need to be on the agenda

In order to make progress, it is critical to not only find a way to work together but to agree on what issues affecting children and youth are the priorities for action; moving forward therefore requires attending to questions such as:

- What are the issues? Examples: education and awareness, preparing young people for the labour market
- What is the process?
- What are the resources?
- What are the research and data needs?

D. Addressing issues related to structures/jurisdictions

This theme identified issues such as:

- Examining structures that prevent policy from being implemented;
- Targeting structural barriers—equitable access to education or significant jurisdictional issues about what services are available for First Nations children for example;
- Understanding the people who are forming structures that become barriers—working at the national level, it is critical to understand the federal context and the political framework—who is not supporting our initiatives and why not?

V. Sober Second Thoughts and Moving Forward

Mr. Dudding opened this discussion by reaffirming that NACY is an organization that plays a convening role. In terms of leadership, he said NACY does not need to be at the head of the parade, but it wants to ensure that there is a parade with a definable group of participants. He reiterated that this workshop gathered a small group of invested individuals to determine how to reach out to networks to build a larger group; he acknowledged that many important organizations are not in the room and that it will be important to get these people involved. Mr. Dudding indicated that NACY has “*put on the first pot of coffee*” by organizing this session, but indicated that a key question for the future was “*who puts on the next pot of coffee*” to bring people together? NACY is a small organization, so it will need to bring together collective energies and resources. “*To be successful, particularly working in this huge country, we need to figure out how we engage ourselves as a group and others beyond,*” said Mr. Dudding.

One participant said collaboration is a given, and the next step may be to narrow down the strategies and organizations to those that would make the most impact. The social services’ sector understands “*collaboration is a style we like to use, but to what end is a big question—what are we trying to accomplish? Getting on the agenda is not an objective, it’s a strategy.*” Building a coalition requires clarity about how different organizations’ agendas fit into a collective agenda moving everyone forward. This message resonated with people in the room.

A participant said the work done up the day before was fantastic, but the group is still missing the why. “*I don’t know yet what we mean by an agenda or what the goal is—is the goal more money for children and youth, changes in legislation, a new party in power, or more Canadians talking about this issue?*” Goals affect the choice of strategies. Another participant said part of the larger picture has to do with goals and issues, but the other piece is behaviours. “*If we talk about a Canada that has children and youth as a priority, what are the behaviours that support that? We start to think about things in a different way.*”

Arriving at a greater consensus with regards to precise policy recommendations can happen simultaneously with NACY’s interest in putting children and youth on the national agenda, said a participant. Most Canadians however, likely think that children and youth are on the agenda, so “*we’re in the business of myth busting*” in the short term while working on policy.

Mr. Dudding reminded the group that this is the first step after a long hiatus of about six years in a beleaguered national policy conversation. He said his sense of urgency derives from the worrying realization that what is not being done today to positively impact on children will set negative trajectories for five to 10 years from now.

A participant cautioned against saying that children and youth are not on the national agenda at all. In some jurisdictions, children and youth are on the agenda. While there may be no national vision, no national coordination, no priority focus, no media attention, there is some activity. He said a national report card would help to coordinate efforts by showing common trends.

As part of the consideration of next steps, one activity should be to clarify the target audience—is the action to be directed at federal government, provincial/territorial governments, the public or specific types of organizations?

One participant said that when the group maps out ultimate goals, there should also be some short-term objectives and quick wins: *“So we’re not positioning ourselves in an all-or-nothing debate.”* Incremental steps can make a positive difference in children’s lives. He said the tone should be principled, constructive, balanced, fair-minded, and not accusatory. It was noted that having quick wins engages more people, validates early work, and brings in more energy.

For all the strategies, a participant suggested the following plan or approach:

- We need a vision;
- We need to know what exists (data) and what has been proposed already;
- We need to understand what organizations are around the table and what pieces of work they would be willing to connect to and support;
- We need to understand the context with different governments, jurisdictions, Canadians—we need to know what they believe;
- We need to communicate our message broadly while working on policy;
- We need bite-sized pieces of work with a coordinating group.

Participants then offered their specific ideas on additions or modifications to the strategies that were discussed the day before:

Communications and Social Marketing

Stakeholders need to be defined. The sector needs to talk to new people, which will result in authenticity. Some stakeholders are not easily reachable, but parents and youth themselves lend authenticity. This is an opportunity to truly engage with young people and work together. The document is just a beginning to re-engage with young people and other stakeholders. Another participant echoed that this is the place where the message is crafted and delivered and youth should be leading this—*“that’s the most compelling part.”*

Marketing issues would have to be modified depending on the goal. The group should look at marketing research in the children’s sector around the compelling messages that people are interested in hearing and that will get people to act around child welfare—early childhood brain development, rather than child abuse, gets people’s attention for example. Communications must be targeted and use formats that resonate with audiences—policy makers and youth will need different strategies for example.

Some participants noted that communications is a tool or tactic to accomplish goals and support strategies, rather than being a strategy itself.

Sorting through the Issues

In discussing what Canada would look like in terms of behaviours if children and youth were truly a priority, one group suggested having a small number of issues, or even one issue as a focus to get an

early win and test out the notion of collaboration. Waiting for consensus would take too much time, so finding a bite-sized piece that a group can agree on could result in an early win and avoid “*paralysis by analysis*”. This bite-sized piece could allow specific volunteer or financial contributions to give people a sense that they can make a difference.

One participant suggested looking for opportunities, like the upcoming UNICEF report, or common local issues. What opportunities are politically expedient and what messaging would work with the Canadian public? How can children and youth’s perspectives be infused into all debates? The addition—and development—of the criteria used to prioritize issues was suggested.

A participant noted that not only policy makers, but community organizations like the YMCA or foundations, can use the existing infrastructure and their powerful role to convene conversations about the health and well-being of families and children. The pan-Canadian infrastructure could redeploy their resources to talk about these issues; “*that’s doable and incremental and it’s in our control.*”

Structures and Jurisdictions

Participants suggested more detail and clarity was needed around this topic, to demonstrate how a “report card” (recommended by the small group that worked on this topic) would work to achieve the desired outcome. It was explained that the report card was conceived as a concrete action that would focus attention on jurisdictional realities and structural barriers. The report card was a way to surface the issues, grab people’s attention, and focus on selected priorities and actions. “*Jurisdictional barriers come down rapidly when there is political will,*” said a participant.

To address the lack of impact of existing research, a report card is a tool that would get messages out to the public because everybody understands a report card. It is a key tool to paint a picture. A report card is a mechanism for collaboration, for testing out the process, and surfacing the outcomes and the visions of other organizations. It can kick start a process of engagement. “*We saw it as a quick way to gather collective wisdom,*” said a participant. The results of the report card can set the agenda.

Developing a Collaborative Approach

Instead of continuing to talk within the sector, participants emphasized the importance of widening the conversation so the first bullet would read “*To create an effective, inclusive collaboration of a critical mass of organizations and individuals to work together towards getting children and youth to be a national priority.*” One participant said her group discussed the language of “interest” as being somewhat reactive, so they moved to phrasing like “*those who have an impact or involvement*”, not just “interest”.

One group said that if NACY takes on the role of coordinator, they will have to be inclusive regarding how to get the message out that this workshop has been held. The report should not be the only communication, but perhaps a five-minute video clip and direction on how people can get involved should be shared. Be prepared for an influx of responses, said one participant. Engage with young people at the outset before decisions are made: “*If this group is serious about having the youth voice, it needs to be sooner rather than later.*”

A participant said every organization should now decide what they can contribute in terms of time and resources. For example, can organizations afford to have a person seconded to help with issue analysis? Does leadership require a part-time or full-time commitment? Before organizations look at investing in the process, much of the work would need to be defined, thus requiring significant committee work. In this case, organizations contributing time could be very important before projects are ready to go to funders for example. Leadership and structure are key questions.

Some participants mentioned a group in Toronto called the **Collective Impact Initiative**. The Laidlaw Foundation, United Way Toronto, and the City of Toronto came together to ask if there was some kind of collective (as opposed to collaborative) action that could look at impact. After their initial meeting, the collective went through an exercise to examine whether people wanted to be part of a core team that would take away the notes and thoughts to develop next steps to circulate back out to everyone. *“It was useful because it actually allowed for a shared ownership of the next steps,”* said one participant. She noted that advice from cities using the collective impact approach was to rally around a common purpose and act, rather than waiting to perfect a common agenda—getting going under an objective allowed for more action and a happier group.

Another participant said the expanse of geography is a real challenge to collaboration in Canada. He discussed partnership work in major urban areas that has generated results around report cards, policy recommendations, and media work. How to mobilize? How to build links between the big urban centres so we are not recreating wheels? It was noted that other sectors are doing similar strategic work, some involving online connections, resource tools and communities of practice for example. NACY can perform a similar function across Canada and reassert NACY as a safe place for discussion, collaboration, and information. NACY needs to build on work already done by organizations such as foundations and UNICEF, said a participant.

The example of Sports Matters was offered; this is a group of sports organizations that came together to do something collectively. It was loosely conceived and formed, without specific goals. It was observed that the next step from this workshop is to form a core group of leadership or management—people willing to take on the work going forward. Another meeting—virtual or physical—will be needed for more clarity, definition and understanding: *“We need to do more learning about collaboration.”* Hearing from others will allow NACY to marshal resources.

Mr. Dudding said that he is hearing that people agree with a convening role for NACY. *“What is important is to what reasonable extent are people willing to buy in—personally, organizationally and with networks, to help us to continue to grow this convening role?”*

VI. Final Recommendations and Closing Remarks

To conclude the meeting, participants offered their final thoughts and discussed how they might be engaged in the future.

Louise Hanvey said the **Canadian Institute of Child Health** is launching an online portal with universities across Canada, CIHR, and a foundation. She sees a reciprocal relationship where the work that is being done on *The Health of Canada's Children* could be both a contributor and a portal. **Growing up Great**, a group based in Ottawa could be included in future collaborative efforts as well.

Maria Cain said she was excited about a collaborative approach, but as a NACY board member, she wants to make sure the approach is relevant. She said it was good to get feedback at this meeting and see other work that her organization, **HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development** can use and model.

Amy Mapara of the **Canadian Red Cross** said, *"As a collective, we need to self-organize and appear more as one voice to the outside—this is important to move an agenda or strategy forward."* She said she would participate in moving things forward.

Trevor Daroux said the group needs to go further than saying children and youth must be a priority, because the average citizen or a politician would say that children and youth are already a priority. He said, *"The question is to do what—we have to establish national priorities and then establish coalitions behind those."* Mr. Daroux echoed the need for relevance.

Myna Kota from **Girl Guides of Canada** said that once the details of a national agenda are finalized, she would be able to ascertain how her organization fits in and she is *"happy to be plugged in to the discussion."*

Gordon Floyd of **Children's Mental Health Ontario** said that he will likely be joining the NACY board, so he may be part of the core group trying to move this forward.

Dan Clement from **United Way Centraide Canada** said the collective impact model framework is a great frame of reference. He said the group needs a clear and ongoing articulation of the state of children and youth in Canada, catalytic leadership of people who have influence within and outside the sector, and it must park ideology and talk about aspirations. The United Way will be in this picture moving forward.

Marvin Bernstein said **UNICEF Canada** is willing to share experiences and knowledge and will talk about their possible commitment. He said the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* provides a positive framework for measuring the promotion and implementation of children's rights. On October 5, recommendations will come to Canada from the committee in Geneva. These recommendations could provide the subject matter to establish working groups. On September 26 and 27, a dialogue will take place in Geneva between Canada and the Committee on the Rights of the Child; for the first time, this dialogue will be webcast so people can see how Canada is responding. UNICEF is encouraging viewing parties to discuss the dialogue.

Sue Delanoy said she plans to remain on the board of NACY.

Jennifer King thanked NACY for holding the meeting and said she would discuss the meeting with her organization, **First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada**.

Tara Stang said the meeting provided clarification for NACY board members to move forward. She said she, and the **Muttart Foundation**, would like to invest time and possibly financial resources.

Grant Charles said the group must not only ask about their message, *“but why aren’t people listening to the message?”* The sector cannot simply repeat the same things and expect people to accept it. There is a societal change around messaging, and the group must move beyond ideology and include people who traditionally may not have been included.

Ida Thomas said that for **YMCA Canada** the topic and themes align with their interests from an advocacy perspective. She noted the challenge of bringing other like-minded groups to this conversation.

Nancy Birnbaum said she is keen to be involved and thanked all participants for their contributions.

Patricia Halajski said that with her background as a youth engagement and communications consultant, she would like to be involved in moving the national agenda for children and youth forward and participate in the on-the-ground implementation phase.

Claude Savoie said that while he cannot commit money, he and the **Canadian Association of Social Workers** are definitely interested in partnership.

Rachel Gouin from **Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada** said she would need to further consider her involvement, but she is interested in doing pieces of work.

Elizabeth Moreau said that broadly, the **Canadian Paediatric Society** supports efforts to put children and youth higher in public debate; however, further commitment would depend on what issues the group moves forward with. She encouraged an approach that would allow some organizations to move forward on issues that they are interested in without having to wait for everyone to sign on to the entire process.

Nathan Gilbert of the **Laidlaw Foundation** offered to circulate studies done on collective impact. There is a need for a backbone organization with two or three people to ensure information and communication flows. He said he would check to see whether the preliminary report from Toronto on concentric circles could be shared. He suggested future meetings should be much more inclusive of young people, especially newcomers.

Carol Matusicky said she wants to be counted in and congratulated NACY on holding this meeting as it has been long overdue. She offered to start conversations with her own networks provincially in BC and nationally.

Stoney McCart said that where her organization, the **Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement**, can be of use and where they align with initiatives, they are interested in being involved; however, they are small, so they will have to be strategic about their involvement.

Katherine Scott said she is happy to help. She said reports are useful in communicating to communities through real stories and the process of gathering and disseminating a report card can be valuable.

Paul Kershaw said NACY's role as a Canadian convenor is valuable to organize a collaboration that reflects on what has not worked in the past. *"I can be an early first follower,"* he said.

Dave Farthing said he and his organization, YOUCAN, are interested in being in the loop and noted that NACY will have to determine how many people should be in the core group.

Barb Willet said this work aligns with **Health Nexus'** priorities so she has a definite interest in being involved in some way.

Andria Teather of the **Vancouver Foundation** said that while foundations often get labelled as the money source, they offer more than that: *"We are identified as a neutral convenor and powerful communicator and we bring strong leaders to the table."* While foundations are not on the ground every day, they fund many programs, so they must understand the landscape to maximize human and financial resources.

Alisa Simon said public policy and advocacy is an important part of **Kids Help Phone's** strategic plan and they would be involved in the group as needed. *"We can help to bring the real voices of young people to these issues."* She emphasized the importance of a report card on the status of kids in Canada.

Closing Remarks

Mr. Dudding said the headline for his closing is, *"Thanks very much. It's not going to be easy."* He referenced Margaret Mead's observation about the power of a small group of committed citizens to change the world. He has been reflecting on the democratic deficit in Canada and how citizens are beginning to react, noting the youth protests in Quebec as one example. *"It's not all as quiet and apathetic as we fear it might be,"* he said. He is compelled to understand the undercurrent of dissatisfaction with the state of the country and how collaboration could tap into that and contribute in a positive way. The sector is small and diverse and faces structural barriers, so focusing efforts will be a challenge. Mr. Dudding concluded by thanking participants, organizers, and the NACY board.

Janice MacAulay recalled that the meeting started with a call to action. For some who want to get to action immediately, the meeting process can be frustrating. Some would like to get going right away and work together on one particular piece. Others talked about focusing on shared goals, identifying who is missing at the table, articulating *"what's getting in the way . . . and why, and recognizing that we all share a sense of urgency."* She said she heard that participants thought a core group was necessary. NACY's board will discuss how to move this forward and engage more stakeholders. She committed to updating the group and thanked all participants.

ANNEX A
Participant List

Name	Affiliation	Contact
Bascombe, Dianne	Vice President, Programs & Research Pathways to Education Canada	Pathways to Education Canada 439 University Avenue, 16th Floor Toronto ON M5G 1Y8 416-646-0123 dbascombe@pathwayscanada.ca
Bernstein, Marvin	Chief Advisor, Advocacy UNICEF Canada	UNICEF Canada 2200 Yonge Street, Suite 1100 Toronto ON M4S 2C6 416-482-6552 mbernstein@unicef.ca
Birnbaum, Nancy	President Riverside Consulting	Riverside Consulting 503 Riverside Drive Toronto ON M6W 4B6 nancy.l.birnbaum@gmail.com
Cain, Maria	Executive Director HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development	HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development 5516 Spring Garden Road, Suite 202 Halifax NS B3J 1G6 902-444-5885 maria@heartwood.ns.ca
Charles, Grant	Associate Professor University of British Columbia	University of British Columbia Rm 337 - 2080 West Mall Vancouver BC V6T 1Z2 604-822-3804 Grant.Charles@ubc.ca
Clement, Dan	VP Learning United Way Centraide Canada	United Way Centraide Canada 56 Sparks Street, Suite 404 Ottawa ON K1P 5A9 416-901-0721 dclement@unitedway.ca
Dagnino, Michelle	Project Director Taking Stock	National Alliance for Children and Youth 130 Albert Street, Suite 1705 Ottawa ON K1P 5G4 416-876-2552 michdagnino@gmail.com

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Name	Affiliation	Contact
Daroux, Trevor	Deputy Chief Calgary Police Service Representing the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police	Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police 300 Terry Fox Drive, Unit 100 Kanata ON K2K 0E3 Bureau of Community Policing Calgary Police Service 5111 - 47 Street NE Calgary AB T3J 3R2 403-428-5965 TDaroux@calgarypolice.ca
Delanoy, Sue	Child Care Advocate Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada	Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada 489 College Street, Suite 206 Toronto ON M6G 1A5 306-241-4952 Suedelanoy12@gmail.com
Doyle, JoAnne	Senior Vice President, Community Impact United Way Toronto	United Way Toronto 26 Wellington Street East, 2nd Floor Toronto ON M5E 1W9 416-777-2001 jdoyle@uwgt.org
Dudding , Peter	Chair National Alliance for Children and Youth	National Alliance for Children and Youth 130 Albert Street, Suite 1705 Ottawa ON K1P 5G4 613-277-6948 pdudd@rogers.com
Farthing, Dave	CEO YOUCAN	YOUCAN c/o St. Paul University 223 Main Street Ottawa ON K1S 1C4 613-230-1903 Ext 221 dave.farthing@youcan.ca
Floyd, Gordon	President & CEO Children's Mental Health Ontario	Children's Mental Health Ontario 309 - 40 St. Clair Avenue East Toronto ON M4T 1M9 416-921-2109 Ext 23 gordon@cmho.org
Friendly, Martha	Executive Director Childcare Resource and Research Unit	Childcare Resource and Research Unit 225 Brunswick Avenue Toronto ON M5S 2M6 416-926-9264 mfriendly@childcarecanada.org
Gardiner, Gail	Executive Director CMHA Nova Scotia Division	Canadian Mental Health Association Nova Scotia Division 63 King Street Dartmouth NS B2Y 2R7 902-466-6600 gailcmhans@eastlink.ca

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Name	Affiliation	Contact
Gemmel, Larry	Strategy Session Coordinator National Alliance for Children and Youth	Consultant 451 chemin Sauv�e Val-des-Monts QC J8N 5A6 819-671-0207 larry.gemmel@sympatico.ca
Gilbert , Nathan	Executive Director Laidlaw Foundation	Laidlaw Foundation 365 Bloor Street East, Suite 2000 Toronto ON M4W 3L4 416-964-3614 ext. 304 ngilbert@laidlawfdn.org
Gouin, Rachel	Manager, Research and Public Policy Boys and Girls Club of Canada	Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada 2005 Sheppard Avenue East, Suite 400 Toronto ON M2J 5B4 613-789-8015 rgouin@bgccan.com
Halajski , Patricia	Community Consultation and Engagement Specialist LURA Consulting	LURA Consulting 614 Concession Street Hamilton ON L8V 1B5 905-527-5499 phalajski@lura.ca
Hanvey, Louise	Principal Researcher, CICH Profile Canadian Institute for Child Health	Louise Hanvey Consulting 77 Ojai Road Chelsea QC J9B 1Y7 819-827-2032 lhavvey@rogers.com
Janmohamed, Zeenat	Executive Director Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development	Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development OISE/University of Toronto 252 Bloor Street West, Room 9-238 Toronto, ON M5S 1V6 416-978-0940 zeenat.janmohamed@utoronto.ca
Kassam, Hanifa	Manager of Newcomer and Settlement Services Agincourt Community Services Association	Agincourt Community Services Association 1911 Kennedy Road, Unit 208 Scarborough ON M1P 2L9 416-427-1127 khanifa@agincourtcommunityservices.com
Kasungu, Erin	Manager, Shared Value Community Foundations of Canada	Community Foundations of Canada 75 Albert Street, Suite 301 Ottawa ON K1P 5E7 613-236-2664 Ext 310 EKasungu@cfc-fcc.ca
Kerr, Jordan	Master of Information Candidate (Archiving) University of Toronto	University of Toronto Faculty of Information 647-618-8747 jordan.kerr@mail.utoronto.ca

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Name	Affiliation	Contact
Kershaw, Paul	A New Deal for Families Solving Canada's Generational Debt Problem	The Human Early Learning Partnership University of British Columbia Suite 440, 2206 East Mall Vancouver BC V6T 1Z3 604-827-5393 paul.kershaw@ubc.ca
King, Jennifer	Education and Public Engagement Coordinator First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada	First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada 309 Cooper Street, Suite 401 Ottawa ON K2P 0G5 613-230-5885 Ext 226 jking@fncaringsociety.com
Kota, Myna	Acting Manager, Girl Programs and Strategist, Programming Partnerships Girl Guides of Canada	Girl Guides of Canada 50 Merton Street Toronto ON M4S 1A3 416-487-5281 kotam@girlguides.ca
MacAulay, Janice	Executive Director Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs	Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs (FRP Canada) 707 - 331 Cooper Street Ottawa ON K2P 0G5 613-237-7667 macaulay@frp.ca
Macqueen Smith, Fleur	Knowledge Transfer Manager, Healthy Children research team Saskatchewan Population Health and Evaluation Research Unit	University of Saskatchewan 501, 121 Research Drive Saskatoon SK S7N 1K2 306-966-2957 fleur.macqueensmith@usask.ca
Mapara, Amy	Coordinator Operations and Youth Engagement Canadian Red Cross	Canadian Red Cross 170 Metcalfe Street, Suite 300 Ottawa ON K2P 2P2 613-740-1900 amy.mapara@redcross.ca
Matusicky , Carol	Chair Early Childhood Development & Middle Childhood Matters United Way of the Lower Mainland	Consultant 1135 Eastlawn Drive Burnaby BC V5B 3G9 604-298-6749 carolmatusicky@shaw.ca
Mayer, Amanda	General Coordinator National Alliance for Children and Youth	National Alliance for Children and Youth 130 Albert Street, Suite 1705 Ottawa ON K1P 5G4 613-292-0569 info@nacy.ca

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Name	Affiliation	Contact
McCart, Stoney	Director Centre for Excellence in Youth Engagement	The Students Commission 23 Isabella Street Toronto ON M4Y 1M7 416-597-8297 stoney@tgmag.ca
Moreau, Elizabeth	Director, Communications and Public Education Canadian Paediatric Society	Canadian Paediatric Society 2305 St. Laurent Blvd Ottawa ON K1G 4J8 613-526-9397 Ext 231 elizabethm@cps.ca
Pearson, Landon	Chair Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood & Children's Rights	Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood & Children's Rights A735 Loeb Building Carleton University 1125 Colonel By Drive Ottawa ON K1S 5B6 613-520-2600 Ext 1453 landon_pearson@carleton.ca
Rothman, Laurel	National Coordinator Campaign 2000	Director of Social Reform Family Service Toronto 355 Church Street Toronto ON M5B 1Z8 416-595-9230 Ext 228 laurelro@familyservicetoronto.org
Ryan MacKenzie, Lynn	Executive Director, Social Services Government of Nunavut	Department of Health and Social Services Government of Nunavut P.O. Box 1000, Station 1000 Iqaluit, Nunavut X0A 0H0 867-975-5947 lmackenzie1@gov.nu.ca
Sahak , Jai	Youth Coordinator Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants	Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants 110 Eglinton Avenue West, Suite 200 Toronto ON M4R 1A3 416-322-4950 Ext 255 jsahak@ocasi.org
Savoie, Claude	Chair Canadian Association of Social Workers	Canadian Association of Social Workers 383 Parkdale Avenue, Suite 402 Ottawa ON K1Y 4R4 613-729-6668 jetta@nbnet.nb.ca
Scott, Katherine	Vice-President, Research & Policy Canadian Council on Social Development	Canadian Council on Social Development P.O. Box 13713 Kanata ON K2K 1X6 613-236-5668 Ext 245 scott@ccsd.ca

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Name	Affiliation	Contact
Simon, Alisa	VP, Counselling Services and Programs Kids Help Phone	Kids Help Phone 300-439 University Avenue Toronto ON M5G 1Y8 416-581-8975 Alisa.Simon@kidshelpphone.ca
Stang, Tara	Grants Officer The Muttart Foundation	The Muttart Foundation 1150 Scotia Place 10060 Jasper Avenue Edmonton AB T5J 3R8 780-421-0311 tstang@muttart.org
Teather, Andria	Vice President of Grants and Community Initiatives Vancouver Foundation	Vancouver Foundation Harbour Centre 555 West Hastings Street, Suite 1200 Vancouver BC V6B 4N6 604-688-2204 andria.teather@vancouverfoundation.ca
Thomas, Ida	Vice President, Children, Teens and Young Adults YMCA Canada	YMCA Canada 1867 Yonge Street, Suite 601 Toronto ON M4S 1Y5 416-967-9622 Ext 206 ida_thomas@ymca.ca
Wallace, Orville	Manager Toronto Youth Job Corps JVS Toronto	JVS Toronto Employment Source Jane Finch 1911 Finch Avenue West, Unit 3 North York ON M3N 2V2 416-649-1743 owallis@jvstoronto.org
Willet, Barb	Executive Director Health Nexus	Health Nexus 180 Dundas Street West, Suite 301 Toronto ON M5G 1Z8 416-408-2249 Ext 2240 b.willet@healthnexus.ca
Wolff, Lisa	Director, Advocacy and Education UNICEF Canada	UNICEF Canada 2200 Yonge Street, Suite 1100 Toronto ON M4S 2C6 416-482-6552 lwolff@unicef.ca

Annex B
Setting the Context Presentation
by Orville Wallace, Toronto Youth Corps

Good morning everyone. Over the past eight years I have been working directly with youth from both a front line and managerial capacity. My passion is serving children and youth who come from the hardest-to-serve neighbourhoods within Toronto: from Jane Finch, Rexdale, Lawrence Heights, Weston Mount Dennis and Scarborough. My work with children and youth can be summed up in the statement, *“The rougher the youth, the better.”* There is nothing better than hearing a youth say *“Yo, that guy can help you find a job.”* In addition to directly serving children and youth in various communities, I have also participated in many research studies related to youth, from the ***Roots of Youth Violence Report*** in 2008 to leading the ***Prevention Intervention Toronto Youth Gang Pilot*** research project, more recently from 2009-2011.

My perspective is local; specifically it is a perspective that has been shaped by working with children and youth who live in the Toronto area. So, before we shift to the national agenda for Children and Youth, I would like to share the successes and challenges I have faced when working with children and youth in Toronto.

I have learned that no matter which community youth are from, they are all more responsive when a strength-based approach is used. Engaging children and youth and involving them in decisions, allows them to build confidence in their skills and supports the development of a positive self-image. This is the key principle of an anti-oppressive framework.

In my experience, I have seen too many of our youth walking with their heads down, looking hopeless and not feeling inspired to achieve their goals. Many of these youth come from a family where they are missing role models and lack the parental supports needed to help guide them in the right direction. This is the reason that I still believe in the old saying: *“that it takes a village to raise a child”*. We as citizens in Canada need to take accountability for each of the youth in our respective communities, because we all have a role to play in supporting our youth to attain their goals and aspirations.

Over the past eight years of working with children and youth, specifically in high-risk neighbourhoods in Toronto, I have found the main challenges to be:

- 1) Lack of employment opportunities
- 2) Lack of positive adult role models
- 3) Lack of access to resources for children and youth
- 4) Lack of community/recreational spaces

My response to these needs of children and youth at a local level was to create the **Youth Justice Network**. This network meets bi-monthly to bring together people within a network of over 270 social service workers city-wide to share information and best practices for children and youth. I have to

admit that I am proud of this network—not because I created it, but because the creation of the **Youth Justice Network** was a response to a need that I realized after the senseless murders of two of my clients.

I doubt you would be here today if you had not also been faced with, and met, similar needs in your respective organizations. So as we begin our sessions, it is with this same “call to action” that I felt when I developed the Youth Justice Network five years ago that I hope will be fired up in us all as we seek to collectively look for ways to create strategies that will put the needs of children and youth on a national agenda.

On a final note, I would like to leave you with a thought about the “*human spark*” in children and youth, from the late Peter Benson, a developmental scientist and founder of the Search Institute. He speaks about the importance of children and youth, knowing and having a “*human spark*”. He defines the “*human spark*” as that which gives us hope, direction and purpose. I believe that any agenda that is to put children and youth’s needs on a national level must be based upon the need to preserve, protect and promote the “*human spark*” in all of our young people.

It is rare to have an opportunity to come together like this: to connect with 50 people of like minds, who share a passion for serving the children and youth of Canada, and explore, discuss, agree—possibly disagree—on what an agenda for children and youth at a national level looks like.

I look forward to participating with you in these sessions today.

Thank you.

Annex C
Detailed Questions discussed during “Taking Stock” Discussion
(Part II in Agenda, page 6 in Report)

- 1 What makes you “glad” with respect to children & youth in Canada? (quick brainstorm only)

- 2 What makes you “sad” or “mad” about the current situation of children and youth in Canada? (quick brainstorm only)

- 3 Intro: Advancing a national agenda on an issue -- such as children and youth -- usually means that we, as a civil society, agree that the issue in question is important for Canada (and its future) and that as a result, our actions and those of governments at all levels support the advancement of the issue with appropriate policies, legislation, funding and programming.
 - a) To what extent do you think that at this time in Canada, children and youth are (or not) on the national agenda and is this sufficient? What do you see or not see that leads you to that conclusion?
 - b) Assuming there is consensus that children and youth are not sufficiently on the national agenda, what are the consequences of this state of affairs?
 - c) What do you think are the major factors contributing to the difficulty of advancing a realistic policy agenda to improve the lives of children and youth?
 - d) While there are undoubtedly many people to blame for this, how might your own organizations collectively (and inadvertently) contribute to the absence of a national policy agenda?
 - e) Based on your experience with this or other issues, what lessons can we learn about what it takes to move a society forward on tough social issues and engage both population and governments?

Annex D

Reports from Small Groups

The High Level Strategies for Putting Children and Youth on the National Agenda

STRATEGY # 1: Communication, social marketing

- Engaging the public and youth in the conversation
- Using champions
- Understanding the various perspectives (detractors)

1. What do you want to achieve with this strategy? What desired outcome(s) are you looking for?

- Getting the messages out:
 - Not just getting new material out, but getting people to understand what we already know
 - Re-packaging the messages
 - Targeting the messages to target audiences; engaging those audiences in the creation of the messages
- Would like to see the community – youth, parents, civil society asking for more on children and youth
- Different stakeholders delivering the messages
 - Different stakeholders embracing the messages and sharing them
- Champions in each of the sectors, in a variety of sectors
 - This could make a difference in raising awareness
 - Champions/sectors talking together
- People feeling safe with the messages – not feeling threatened by the messages
 - Want them to see value to the messages, embrace them
- Have all youth engaged; have youth engaged in all of the discussions
 - Structures need to support their engagement with a variety of approaches to engagement
- Look at the unintended consequences of our messages

2. What needs to be done to build momentum and engagement on this strategy? Whose support is required? How could you go about to obtain it? and What key activities are required to move this strategy forward?

- Determine what is in it for people to become engaged in issues relating to children and youth
 - Make the message fit for whomever the audience is
- Look at how it can complement, build on work that is being done individually by organizations
- Find common messages for diverse organizations
 - e.g., develop a “Workshop in a box” - develop templates, etc. that people can make their own

- Use different tools – look at what is effective in other campaigns and programs
 - Photo, voice, music, video
 - Youth can develop and own these approaches
- Look at other successful campaigns – learn from them
- Make the messages relevant to various segments of the population
 - Make the messages actionable by various populations, groups, sectors etc.
- Define our strategies – physical meetings; social media; traditional media; etc
- How do we get into the mindset of the detractors?
 - Look for ‘low hanging fruit’ – that is, look at what is in the media as an opportunity to put our messages forward
 - Find what you agree on with the detractors and build on that – find the common ground
 - There could always be people you won’t convince – but identify the ‘middle of the road’ that you can sway/convince
- Build the communications capacity within organizations so that they can effectively craft and communicate messages that will reach their target audiences
 - Develop capacity in different parts of the sector in how to get the messages out
 - Each organization has unique relationships with their communities/ stakeholders and can influence them
 - Create the messages and then identify effective ways to engage existing networks
- Look at the new ways of marketing
 - New ways to get someone’s attention
 - Learn from product marketers
 - Needs to be more provocative, clever, and creative
 - Can’t be overwhelming, negative
- Constant evaluation
- Reframe that youth is an audience, and a captive audience
 - Put an interesting message in the hands of a young person and it will go viral
 - Youth are the champions
- Engage provinces
 - Get the dialogue going within the province
 - “Board voice” – bringing board members/volunteers together, get them on board; if they have a common voice they may be more effective with policy makers/decision makers
 - This builds champions at the community level
- Identify international comparisons – and bring pressure based on that
- Get to the values level
 - People connect with emotional story telling

3. What needs to happen next to move forward? (What, who, when, how and where?)

- This all takes resources – human, financial, etc.
- We need to look at what we have and what we need to move forward

- Need to keep it realistic
- Engage with youth at this point
 - Many of the organizations in the room are engaging youth
 - Build a network of youth from the various organizations
 - They can communicate virtually; they can communicate in creative ways
 - Youth need to be partners, the champions and the spokespeople
- Identify who is going to lead/overlook this process
 - NACY?
- Make sure we have all of the research compiled, see what the messages are, develop the messages, develop the strategies to:
 - Engage more with the provinces; look at resources at the provincial level
 - Engage various ministries, organizations
 - Engage champions – where are they? Who are they? Look for unusual champions – not the obvious choice
- NACY/Board of NACY/Groups that NACY identifies take this information forward and decide how/who
- Continue the dialogue
 - Among the groups who were here
 - For example, starting a webinar series:
 - Bring people in who know about communications for webinars
 - Enable people to share experiences through webinars
- Approach national advertising agencies for pro bono work on developing capacity
- Identify key segments, do/cull research
 - Make sure we understand who the target audiences are
 - How to reach them
- Engage health promotion folks in driving the messages
 - Governments like putting out positive messages
- Have small successes that will build the momentum
- Seize opportunities

STRATEGY # 2 : Develop a collaborative approach for working together:

- **Leadership**
- **Consensus building**
- **Making youth a part of the approach**

1. What do you want to achieve with this strategy? What desired outcome(s) are you looking for?

- To create an effective, inclusive collaboration of a critical mass of participants of the child and youth sector to work together towards getting children and youth to be a national priority.
- To create one common voice around this goal that complements participants' own efforts.
- To create a neutral entity that is able to advocate on behalf of the sector.

2. What needs to be done to build momentum and engagement on this strategy? Whose support is required? How could you go about to obtain it?

- Identify and engage early leaders in the effort
- Reach out to more sector participants, to ensure an inclusive, broad group that is open to all.
- Ensure there is youth involvement and engagement as well as all other segments of the sector.
- Establish NACY as the facilitator and convener of interested participants.
- Use the NACY website and e-digest communication vehicles as communication venues for the development and maintenance of the collaboration: to keep participants informed and to communicate and promote with rest of sector to build involvement,
- Identify some/one initial area(s) of focus, ones that have the potential to demonstrate the effectiveness of the collaboration. We don't have to address all issues from the get go.
- Establish a small "management/leadership team" to
 - Oversee the process
 - Ensure culture/vision stays on track
 - Manage logistics
- Ask participating organizations and individuals to provide financial and in-kind contributions to secure the resources necessary to support the activities of the collaboration. "Give until it feels good"
- Keep in mind:
 - No need to solve everything right away. This is a marathon, not a sprint.
 - We have to accept that the process to create an effective collaboration is messy and organic
 - We need to be open and flexible rather than proscriptive or restrictive

3. What key activities are required to move this strategy forward?

- Identify early leaders: who are critical to bring to the table?
- Establish management/leadership team to keep the forward movement

- Report back to participants and rest of invitees and others suggested by participants to start moving forward

4. What needs to happen next to move forward? (What, who, when, how and where?)

- NACY to issue report from this session to participants and rest of invitee list and others suggested by participants, along with invitation to participate in next meeting. (by end Oct.)
- Volunteers to identify the early leaders who need to be at the table.(before report goes out)
- NACY to convene teleconference/skype session to continue the discussion, identify management team, agree to decision process and agree to next steps.

STRATEGY # 3 : Sorting Through the Issues

1. *What do you want to achieve with this strategy? What desired outcome(s) are you looking for?*

In sorting the issues, we are hoping to identify the key issues that require national attention:

- Identify a set of common issues that are pertinent to all the organizations in the coalition
- Review reports that have been written already and what recommendations were made (Canada)
- Find a global goal and then work our way back
- Ensure we engage a broad group of people (inclusivity, involving more than the usual suspects)
- Timelines are important – identifying short-term wins, long- term principled objectives
- Look at underlying issues – ensure we are not just proposing solutions to downstream issues
- Map goals and identify timelines and identify different strategic goals
- Understand the political context in which your issue is situated
- Look at our international obligations – where are we falling short?
- Look globally at how kids in the world are doing (benchmarking – UNICEF has some of this information)
- Consolidate reports and research on what youth have been saying is important. Look at what exists already. What have youth recommended that has never gone anywhere?
- Look at the government’s priorities – how they are framing the issues and solutions
- Look at provincial priorities and strategies – how are issues and solutions being framed?
- Look at what other comparable countries have done in similar NGO coalitions and governments to come up with a national children’s agenda and strategy (UK, EU, Australia- Every Child Counts.org.nz, US – some advocacy organizations in the US are very targeted in their advocacy and have great models at the state level)
- School climate surveys may provide some insights as they engage youth in providing their thoughts on what issues are important in their school

2. *What needs to be done to build momentum and engagement on this strategy? Whose support is required? How could you go about to obtain it?*

- Secure the support of organizations on specific short-term and long-term goals
- Identify priorities within the coalition (internal)
- Find who is sympathetic, outside of typical champions. Who are the unlikely allies? Influence the influencers.
- Build momentum with youth, engage youth and youth-led organizations on sorting through the issues; validate issues with youth, perhaps going through national youth organizations who could hold focus groups
- Need to share what has worked elsewhere with regular Canadians – what has been done, what could we do here?

3. ***What key activities are required to move this strategy forward?***

- Get a group together to review reports and recommendations
- Many of the items listed under the first and second questions are activities.

3. ***What needs to happen next to move forward? (What, who, when, how and where?)***

- We need a structure to coordinate all these activities in a legitimate and transparent way
- Review and conduct a meta-analysis of reports by youth and by organizations that consulted youth (5 years back). Ask organizations if they would be willing and able to contribute staff time into doing this, financial resources? Could we work with universities? We would need a committee of people to pull together the documents and then coordinate the analysis of the documents.
- Prioritize identifying short-term and long-term timelines

STRATEGY # 4: Address Issues related to Structure/Jurisdictions

1. What do you want to achieve with this strategy? What desired outcome(s) are you looking for?

- Canada has an objective, independent, annual national report card on the status of children and youth that informs government policy and the public dialogue, driving holistic change
- The focus is on shared responsibility between government and the public

2. What needs to be done to build momentum and engagement on this strategy? Whose support is required? How could you go about to obtain it?

- Start with summary/environmental scan of existing reports, data, indicators and templates
- Core of academic institutions and non-profits produce the report
- Seek funding for the initial project
- Involve all children and youth organizations, foundations, and funders

3. What key activities are required to move this strategy forward?

- Create the structure
- Prepare the report
- Only produce the report electronically
- Review and tweak the report
- In the long term, move to have a Child and Youth Advocate/Representative with a youth parliament and advisory group

4. What needs to happen next to move forward? (What, who, when, how and where?)

- Task NACY to hold a meeting for interested parties to get this started