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Partnerships for Children and Families Project

**Problems and Potential of
Canadian Child Welfare**

K. Swift
M. Callahan

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Problems and Potential of Canadian Child Welfare

K. Swift & M. Callahan

Canadian child welfare has hit troubled times. The system has been widely and publicly criticized. Its processes have become highly litigious and, in many communities, rigidly managed. For many front line workers, time spent on paperwork outstrips, by far, time spent working directly with families and children. Perhaps as a result, recruitment and retention of staff have become critical problems across the country. At the same time, caseload numbers are climbing steeply, while more and more children are being brought into already burdened alternate care arrangements. When things go wrong, individual parents and workers are blamed, while systemic problems are patched up or glossed over.

That child welfare should be so troubled is not surprising. It is a residual, or last resort, service in an increasingly mean-spirited social and economic context. The last decade has seen a substantial retrenchment of the Canadian social safety net, once a source of much national pride. Health care, education and virtually all social services have seen drastic budget cuts in the last few years. Our politicians justify these changes through claims of otherwise insurmountable deficits and loss of competitive edge in the new global markets. Of course, the major victims of this reorganization of wealth and distribution of resources are the poorest and most vulnerable of families, the same families most likely to become involved with mandated child welfare services.

The Partnerships Project asks participants to re-examine our current child welfare paradigms. Given the problems facing the mandated system, and the stressful social and economic conditions in which this system must operate, this is a timely invitation. We take the opportunity in this paper to explore past, present and potential Canadian child welfare services and directions. The first part of the paper describes some historical roots of the Canadian child

welfare system and current trends across the country and concludes with a brief critique of the present situation. Part two explores some contemporary initiatives to address the problems with the present system. In Part three, we examine the contributions of these initiatives to a new paradigm and the organizing that will be required to make significant change.

Part I: History, Structure and Current Trends

In Canada, responsibility for health, education and welfare is provincial rather than federal. Since ten provinces and three territories have legal jurisdiction over child welfare, we cannot describe child welfare in Canada as a single, unified system. Nevertheless, some common traditions and understandings across the country provide the basis for describing Canadian child welfare.

The origins of child welfare in Canada have been described as a gradually evolving response to social and economic conditions of the 19th century (Harris & Melichercik, 1986). The two traditions shaping Canadian child welfare, according to these authors, were the long-held traditions of viewing children as the property of their parents and the more recent British doctrine of *parens patriae*, or the state as parent of the nation. This is the doctrine allowing intervention into the private family for the protection of children.

The first Canadian child welfare organization was established in Toronto in 1891, followed closely in 1893 by the country's first legislation, Ontario's Act for the Prevention of Cruelty to and Better Protection of Children. Most other Canadian provinces soon followed suit, developing similar legislation. In Quebec, child protection was carried out under the auspices of the Catholic Church; legislation generally following the principles of other provinces was not passed until 1977. Newfoundland, which did not become a province until 1949, also has a long tradition of religious influence over child protection matters. The recently proclaimed Territory

of Nunavut, formed in 1997, is in the process of developing its child welfare system.

Jurisdictions developing protection legislation later in the 20th century have tended to pattern provisions on the principles already established by other provinces, while retaining some specific forms and concepts reflecting their history. Consequently, child protection legislation across the country, while not identical, follows similar principles and often uses the same or similar language and concepts. Generally speaking, child welfare services are residual, or "last chance" services, and are highly regulated. Most provincial legislation originally focused on child neglect, while allowing "cruelty" to children a less prominent place. Ozment (1983) argues that harsh parents were viewed as less blameworthy than lax or indulgent parents. Discipline, however harsh, seemed to demonstrate attention and concern for the child, while ignoring children signified a lack of affection and concern. This focus on neglect also likely derived from urban conditions of the late 19th century, a time of obvious homelessness for many abandoned children. Early advocates, many of whom were members of the growing middle class, were concerned not only for the safety and futures of these "street urchins", but also for their own children's safety and for the security of their accumulating property (Swift, 1995a). This dual concern was succinctly captured in the motto of the first Children's Aid Society in Toronto: "It is wiser and less expensive to save children than to punish criminals" (Kelso papers, 1890s). This vision remains embedded in Canadian child protection law and policy today.

For the first half of the 20th century, few changes were made in the original provincial laws. Archival documents show that the everyday responsibilities for protecting children were carried out mainly by women, some trained as social workers, some not. These women responded to "complaints" about the behaviours of reportedly irresponsible parents, often mothers, and unruly children, wrote copious case notes on what they observed, and intervened

sometimes quite actively in the lives of families brought to their attention (Swift, 1995a; Chen, 2000). Gradually, these workers became more professional as social sciences developed and as social work created schools and training programs (Swift, 1995b). Historical records suggest, however, a strong leaning toward British moral traditions of individual responsibility, the nuclear family, and at least the appearance of "proper" morality as central to the style and direction of much child welfare work during this period (Swift, 1995a).

In mid century, a series of changes to child welfare legislation and focus occurred. Attention to the "best interests of the child" as the proper first principle of child protection decisions was among the first of these changes. In Canada, as elsewhere, Kempe's "discovery" of the battered child led to changes in legislation, the most notable of which was the addition of mandatory reporting requirements in the child welfare legislation of most jurisdictions. Another significant event in Canada was the release of the Badgley Report (1984) reporting that one in two Canadian females and one in three males have experienced unwanted sexual acts, and that four in five of these acts occurred in childhood. The report also stated that most of the perpetrators were known to the child and, in fact, often were family members. Prior to the Badgley Report, according to Wells (1990), sexual abuse was not viewed as either a widespread or serious problem. By the mid 1980s, however, sexual abuse rose to the forefront of attention in child protection. Law reform followed, in the form of Federal Bill C-15 (1988), which amended sexual assault provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada and also changed the Canada Evidence Act in order to facilitate the pressing of charges and giving of evidence by children. Some 16 specific sexual offenses were added to the Criminal Code, ranging from unwanted touching to assault with a weapon. This legislation does not remove responsibility from child protection

authorities to investigate and intervene in sexual abuse cases, but it does ensure that police will be involved in both the investigation and criminal charging of offenders.

Changes to other related legislation have also affected the way child protection laws and mandates work. Introduction of a Canadian Charter of Rights in 1982 has not yet influenced child welfare significantly (Vogl & Bala, 2001), but may have long term implications for practice if successful Charter challenges related to security of the person and to apprehension of children without court authorization are mounted. The 1984 federal Young Offenders Act relieved child welfare authorities of direct responsibility for youth convicted of breaking the law, resulting in a substantial change in focus for some jurisdictions. Among other effects of these changes are increased attention to legal issues in child welfare and intensified relationships among child protection workers and both police and the court system.

Through the 1980s, changes to ideas about child protection relating to the notions of risk and harm as criteria for involvement by authorities developed, tending mainly in the direction of raising the threshold of state involvement in the family. The idea of least intrusive action, always a thread in Canadian child protection practice, was encoded in protection legislation, imposing a requirement for child welfare intervention to be at the least intrusive level consonant with protecting children from harm.

During the second half of the twentieth century, the language and racial composition of the country also began to change. Through the 1960s, immigrants to Canada were primarily white Europeans, especially from Britain. A 1967 federal policy change, based on characteristics of individual immigrants, resulted in a significant shift in source countries. Immigrants from dozens of countries in Asia, Africa, South America and the Caribbean now arrive in Canada and settle primarily in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia. In the major reception centres—

Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal—many different languages are spoken, and people of colour make up a large proportion of the population. This demographic change has required the development of new and different social services and has taxed the traditional child welfare service delivery model, as various groups express concern about overrepresentation of their children in care and inappropriate services provided (Hutchinson, et. al. 1992).

The Organization of Child Welfare

The institutional arrangements through which child welfare is administered in various jurisdictions reflect the complexity of Canadian society. Different organizational arrangements across the country relate to religion, language, history and geography. The original structure of child welfare in Ontario has been retained. Following from the first Children's Aid Society in Toronto, 54 different Societies have evolved, serving different geographic and religious populations. These are quasi-governmental organizations, with individual boards of directors guiding their functions, but deriving all of their legal mandates and funds from various levels of government. In Ontario, two separate societies serve Catholic and other religious groups. Quebec has separate organizations for serving French-speaking and English-speaking populations. The overall organization of child protection in Quebec was overhauled in 1993, with the creation of Child and Youth Protection Centres (CYPCs) as the agencies mandated to carry out legislated protection activities. The separation of mandated protection from local social service centres (CLSCs) has created a potential for prevention work, as CLSCs are expected to work with local communities to provide a range of services for families at risk (Davies, Fox, Krane & Schragge, 2002). In a number of other jurisdictions, the organizational structures of child welfare have developed as provincial departments, while Nova Scotia offers a mix of public and private services.

The most recent structural developments relate to Canada's First Nations. Although child protection is a provincial matter in Canada, status (legally registered) Indians come under federal jurisdiction. Until the 1960s, little child protection activity occurred on reserves, where status Indians were likely to reside, because the federal government generally resisted providing services that were under provincial jurisdiction, while the provinces resisted providing services that officially fell under federal jurisdiction. In addition, many Aboriginal children whose families lived on reserves were required to attend residential schools off reserve for most of the year, reducing the number of children likely to be in need of protection. Beginning in the 1960s, and coinciding roughly with the phasing out of required residential schooling, provinces began to extend child protection services to reserves. Within a short time, Native children became heavily over represented in the in-care population. This history became widely known when two studies were published in the early 1980s showing that Aboriginal children were heavily over represented in the care system (Hepworth, 1980; Johnson, 1983). Further research into the issue made clear that Aboriginal children were taken into state care far more frequently than other children, moved in foster care more often, and returned to their own parents much less frequently than Canadian children generally (Rosenbluth, 1995).

Beginning in the 1980s, some provinces began to create tripartite arrangements for the delivery of child welfare services to families on reserves. These agreements allowed bands of First Nations peoples, or groups of bands, to deliver services on reserves, with various combinations of provincial and federal funding and mandated through the relevant provincial legislation. By 1997-98, according to the Department of Indian and Native Affairs (DIAND), First Nations Child and Family Service agencies were delivering services to 70 percent of on-reserve children. The Department predicts this percentage will have increased to 91 percent by

2002. This is an extremely important development, especially given the history of child welfare and Aboriginal people. The agreements now in place mark a new, if still limited, kind of partnership between child welfare authorities and First Nations peoples. The limitation is that protection services remain subject to provincial legislation, and are restricted in their possibilities of defining and delivering services consonant with Aboriginal history and cultures.

Funding Issues

Although child welfare is a provincial responsibility, programs, clientele and levels of service are affected by federal funding arrangements that support health and welfare programs. Between 1966 and 1996, funding for services to children, including child welfare, was shared between the federal and provincial governments under the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP). These arrangements called for the federal government to provide 50% of the costs of providing provincially administered services to children and 100% of the costs of Aboriginal child services. Along with other cost-cutting measures taken in the 1990s, the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) replaced the CAP. In the new plan, federal funding arrangements were changed from cost sharing to a lump sum contribution, based on a per-person calculation. Generally, federal funding of all health and welfare services decreased by as much as 40% with the introduction of CHST in the mid-nineties (Durst, 1999). The new funding arrangement also eliminated the principle embedded in CAP that the federal government had an obligation to ensure national standards of service to protect the interests of the poorest Canadians. This change in funding arrangements has affected child welfare services directly, especially since no special funding has been provided federally specifically for child welfare under CHST. In addition, reduced social assistance, health and education funding has adversely affected families involved with the child welfare system, who tend to be among the poorest Canadians. With a federal

surplus accumulating by 1998, and child poverty rates rising, the federal government attempted various policy measures designed to alleviate poverty levels of some of the poorest families. These efforts eventually produced the National Child Benefit, a supplement for working families, based on net income level. However, as critics have noted, the plan creates a two-tier system of the poor; in most provinces the employed poor benefit at least minimally while the unemployed poor do not (Durst, 1999; Swift & Birmingham, 1999).

In order to contain costs, and perhaps for other reasons as well, some provinces have changed their methods of funding child welfare services over the past few years. Ontario, for instance, has developed a funding formula that, while not formally tied to the standard risk assessment instrument, is frequently evaluated against it. A case rating low in risk is unlikely to qualify for funding. Obviously, less serious cases, that might be amenable to preventive measures, are less often opened since the organization must carry the costs of doing preventive work.

Another trend in child welfare funding is workload measurement, an often complex method of identifying core tasks of child protection work, assigning benchmark times for carrying out these tasks and developing funding formulas in relation to these data (OACAS, 2001). At least eight of the 13 jurisdictions are developing or have already developed workload measures intended to guide funding levels. The northern and less populated provinces and territories demonstrate less interest in this form of management.

Child Death Reviews

A recent development has been the role of high profile media reports of deaths of children known to child protection authorities. Such reviews have taken place in a number of provinces in the past few years, and have lead to or influenced policy shifts in those provinces

(Swift, 2001). The first of these was the Gove Enquiry in BC (1995) into the death of Matthew Vaudreuil, an in-depth investigation leading to major changes in legislation and service delivery in the province. In Ontario, a series of reviews was instrumental in producing changes in legislation and producing pressure for better funding for the child welfare system. In New Brunswick, three death reviews in the late 1990s produced a number of recommendations involving changes in legislation and service delivery. In general, reviews attempt to locate problems with individual worker activity and in organizational systems. General directions of recommendations have been to lower the legal threshold of risk required to intervene to protect a child and also to expand definitions of abuse and neglect in order to ensure cases are identified. Taken together, these changes are sometimes referred to as a “child-centred” approach. Because enquiries focus on mistakes by individual workers and systems, other recommended directions include the development of training programs for child welfare workers and installation of computer-based information systems. In addition, some jurisdictions have toughened up mandatory reporting clauses in legislation and have introduced risk assessment instruments for use by front-line protection workers. Some of these trends are discussed in following sections.

Changes to Legislation

Recently, legislation in a number of provinces has broadened and clarified criteria for determining that a child is in need of protection. Ontario, for instance, has added the phrase *pattern of neglect* to its definitions of children in need of protection. Several provinces (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Alberta) have expanded definitions of need for protection to include children engaged in prostitution. In Alberta, which claimed to be the first to add this issue to its legislation, children thought to be engaging in prostitution can be confined to a safe house for up to 72 hours. British Columbia (BC) can issue a restraining order, while in Saskatchewan, those

who put a child at risk can be prohibited from contact with the child. Several provinces have also included domestic violence in their descriptions of conditions indicating that a child is needing protection. These additions to legislation undoubtedly increase the potential populations likely to come in contact with child welfare services.

The trend toward lowering the threshold for determining need for protection is another policy shift likely to increase the client population. In the 1980s, a heated debate in Ontario concluded with the decision to place the level of risk to a child at the *substantial* level to justify protection intervention. Ontario has now reversed its contested decision, replacing the requirement of *substantial risk* to *risk* of harm as the threshold for intervention. Also changing are policies allowing forceful intervention. British Columbia and Alberta have expanded powers to intervene if abuse is suspected. British Columbia allows power to arrest and to enter dwellings to *facilitate investigation* and, in Alberta, force can be used to enter premises to investigate. These directions stand in some contradiction to Charter protections, but appear to have public support at present.

Since the 1960s, mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse or neglect has been increasingly focused upon in legislation as a mechanism for protecting children from harm. At present, most jurisdictions have mandatory reporting in their legislation. Most acts specify that anyone with concern for a child's safety should report, and many focus on professionals as having a special responsibility to make reports. In the past, legal counsel have generally been exempt from reporting, but some jurisdictions now include them specifically as non-exempt. Failure to report, or making malicious reports, is punishable in various jurisdictions by fines or short-term imprisonment.

Following the introduction of mandatory reporting clauses, introduced in most provinces and territories during the 1970s, the recorded incidence of both abuse and neglect dramatically increased. For instance, in Quebec, the number of reports increased 100% between 1982 and 1989. For protection staff, this increase involved 11,000 additional reports to investigate during this period (Swift, 1997).

There is a general belief that numbers of reports of abuse and neglect and investigations into these allegations continue to climb dramatically across the country. Data from the Federal-Provincial Working Group Report (2001) show that this assumption should be treated with caution. In fact, patterns and volume of both reports and investigations for the larger provinces vary greatly from smaller jurisdictions. For instance, during the month of March 1997, British Columbia authorities received 2502 protection reports. In that same month, the Northwest Territories authorities handled 24 such reports. For March 1999, numbers of reports grew by 19 % to 3094 in British Columbia, while the NWT report number grew 33 % to 36. Both experienced a healthy increase in percentage terms, but the impacts are obviously greatly different.

Another kind of comparison can be shown between Newfoundland/Labrador and Ontario, although the dates are not quite comparable. From March 31, 1997 to 1999, Newfoundland's number of protection investigations actually decreased by 24 cases to 2900. In Ontario, the number of investigations increased by some 3,270 cases to 66,759 between 1996 and 1998. These data remind us that trends are not homogeneous across Canada. Based on the limited data available, it would seem that the larger, more populous provinces indeed are experiencing steep increases in the investigation function of child protection, and that workload increases are heavily weighted to the front end of the system. Perhaps we should be looking to the smaller

provinces, less burdened by huge numbers of cases, to design and try innovations at the service and partnerships levels of child welfare.

Investigations

Formal risk assessment has become a staple of child protection in English speaking countries over the past decade and some jurisdictions in Canada have recently followed suit. Both British Columbia and Ontario have adopted in complex risk assessment instruments, which are required for use by intake workers attempting to make determinations of risk of harm to children. Other jurisdictions, for instance Saskatchewan, have introduced simpler measures, designed as guides for workers conducting investigations of protection concerns. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Manitoba all have safety and risk assessment instruments. This approach is controversial for a number of reasons, including insufficient testing for validity, uneven implementation (Pecora, 1991) and the wasting of scarce resources on unsubstantiated cases (Colclough, Parton & Anslow, 1999).

Recently, the first national study of the investigation and substantiation of child abuse and neglect has been published (Trocme, et. al., 2001). The data for this study were collected from child welfare workers across the country about reports and investigations of maltreatment in which they were involved. A sample of 7,672 investigations was used to derive estimates of annual incidence and some characteristics of cases of abuse and neglect, using 1998 as the base year. Findings of the study estimate an incidence rate of 21.52 investigations per 1,000 children in Canada for that year. Maltreatment was officially substantiated by investigating authorities in 45% of investigations. The rate of unsubstantiated cases, 55%, is similar to estimates in the United States in recent studies (U.S., Health and Human Services, 1997).

The Canadian study confirms some beliefs about the protection system and contradicts others. The study does document a long-suspected truth about child welfare; that neglect is the most frequently investigated form of maltreatment at 40% of total investigations. In 13% of investigations, physical harm to a child was documented and only 5% of investigations led to court applications. These data may contradict an image of child protective services as regularly rescuing children from physical harm, and also correct a misperception of most investigations leading to court proceedings for families. However, a common perception that single parents may be more vulnerable to investigation received some validation. Investigations by household type show that 46% of investigations involved children in lone parent households, the great majority of these female headed. Another perception, namely that many children's living situations change as a result of investigations, received some confirmation. According to Trocme's (2001) report, "12% of investigated children experienced a change in their living arrangements on completion of the initial investigation" (p.58) Unfortunately, although the study examined income source, no data were collected about income levels of families investigated. Source data show just over a third of investigated families relied on social assistance (36%). Because of extremely low rates of social assistance in Canada, it is confirmed that at least this population of child welfare clients lives well below the poverty line. A higher figure, 39%, of families investigated, report that they derive income from full time employment. Since many are female lone parents, however, it is a reasonable assumption that many of these families also live at or below the poverty line. Canadian studies show that families headed by lone female parents fare badly in income level, even when working full time (Swift and Birmingham, 1999).

Children in Care

The turn of the century has seen a dramatic increase in the in-care population. In all

jurisdictions, this population increased in the late 1990s, and in three of the larger and wealthier provinces, Alberta, British Columbia and Ontario, the increases are dramatic.

Table 1: In-care population in selected* jurisdictions, March 31, 1997 to March 31, 2001, and percent change:

Jurisdiction	3/31/97	3/31,2001	% Change
Alberta	5543	7948	43.4
British Columbia	8232	9956	20.9
Manitoba	5203	5440	4.6
Nova Scotia	1767	2019	14.3
Ontario	11,260	15,792	40.2
Saskatchewan	2416	2906	20.3

Source: Federal Provincial-Provincial Working Group, 2001; Provincial annual reports.

*Jurisdictions shown are those for which relevant data were available.

Some plausible explanations for an increased care population relate to trends cited earlier, including policy shifts toward lowering criteria for protection involvement, increased focus on mandatory reporting and investigation, the introduction of risk assessment instruments, and changes in funding criteria in some jurisdictions that formally or informally link provincial funding to involvement with higher risk and in-care cases.

Table 2: Proportion of total care population represented in children 12 and older in selected jurisdictions:

Alberta:	48.9%
British Columbia	56
Nova Scotia	48.9
New Brunswick	62.1
Yukon	48.3

Source: Federal-Provincial Working Group, 2001. * Those selected a) displayed figures for children in care, and b) categorized ages as 12 or older. These criteria allow for some comparability, although it should be noted that they do not necessarily have the same definition of age for a child in need of protection, and also they have varying policies concerning keeping children in care after that age

Reports of children in care show that the trends of the 1990s (Swift, 1997) toward older age children in care continued to the end of the decade. Jurisdictions have legislated varying ages as the cutoff for identifying a *child in need of protection*, ranging from 16 to 19, making comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, as Table 2 shows, older age children account for at least half of the children in care in a number of jurisdictions.

Given the high proportion of adolescents in care, it would be interesting to examine the care biographies of these children. Many likely have entered care at earlier ages and become ‘stuck’ in the system in adolescence. Another explanation for these figures is that many older children are being brought into care. In relation to placement types and planning for future alternate care needs, more examination of age figures across the country should be done.

Western provinces, which have experienced the most severe criticism over the last three decades concerning this treatment of Aboriginal children and families, regularly include information in their annual reports about Aboriginal children in care. Alberta, for instance, provides separate statistics for children of Aboriginal status, and further breaks down the Aboriginal category to several different groups and legal statuses. This information shows very high percentages of children found to be in need of protection are Aboriginal. In British Columbia, 30% of children in care at March 31, 1999 were Aboriginal; while Saskatchewan’s Annual Report acknowledges that the majority of children in care are Aboriginal. In that province, a “comprehensive” program approach to protection is being developed, one which includes several specific plans to create partnerships with Aboriginal organizations in order to serve these children in appropriate settings and with services that address cultural issues. Recent

figures from Manitoba (March 31, 2002) show over 80% children in care are Aboriginal. These figures demonstrate that issues of over-representation of Aboriginal children in the care system identified twenty years ago remain to be adequately addressed.

All jurisdictions collect information on types of placements occupied by children in care. Because the definitions and categorization of types vary considerably, comparisons across the country are not valid. However, figures from 1999 in the Federal-Provincial Report (2001) do suggest that foster care remains the most common type of care, at around 50% of placements in several jurisdictions (e.g. Alberta, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island), and in some cases much higher (e.g. Manitoba, Newfoundland, Northwest Territories, Saskatchewan). According to this report, care in group facilities and in specialized or treatment homes, where specifically shown, remain much less frequently used. This is much the same picture as reported in a previous survey (Swift, 1997). Many jurisdictions do not count care by kin separately, so accurate comment about trends in this form of care, strongly advocated in the United States and in some Canadian jurisdictions, cannot be made. It does seem, from limited available data, that foster homes are in short supply in many jurisdictions. Ontario, for instance, shows an in care population in 2001 at 15,792, but only 6707 approved foster homes (Annual Report, 2001).

Part I Summary and Conclusions

Canadian child welfare has changed over a century and a half, but its British and middle class roots remain strong. Individual responsibility, care by nuclear family, and moral as well as behavioural standards of care enforced by the State remain hallmarks of the system. At the same time, social, economic and technical changes render the system inappropriate in a number of ways. Increased non British, non European immigration, changed relations with Aboriginal groups, and reduced standards and support by the welfare state of the country's poorest people

are some of the changes that have not been adequately addressed. These changes have been accompanied by increasingly sophisticated technology for tracking and surveillance of “problem” populations and for containing costs; all have produced a pressing need to question and challenge a number of traditional assumptions and methods of child welfare practice.

The child welfare system has embedded in it a number of contradictions that remain powerful and often problematic. It rests on tensions between helping and punishing parents and between its focus on parents and on children. These tensions lead to constantly changing thresholds of intervention, guided at least as much by ideological and political interests as by any evidence of what works.

From the outset, the populations coming in contact with child welfare services have been poor mothers, and this remains true today. With new technology and increasingly rigid management and tracking systems, these women are under unprecedented scrutiny and control. The same management systems also track the efforts of front line workers and managers, who also are predominantly women. The intense focus on reporting and investigation, and the high costs of such efforts, mean a substantially reduced focus on providing service and support. The result, in a harsh social and economic context, is highly punitive for many mothers and their children.

The combination of increasing numbers of reports, investigations and placements of children for protection reasons across the country, along with problematic and insufficient alternate care arrangements, is causing alarm among all key constituencies in the system. In addition, widespread negative media coverage of the child protection system and the very substantial increase in some jurisdictions in paperwork, forms, and accountability procedures (Swift, 2001) contribute to worker recruitment and retention becoming the most worrisome

problem in Canadian child protection at present. Even the usual critics of social workers and the protection system publicly identify worker retention and insufficient resources as blameworthy in contemporary child death reports (Globe & Mail, April 19, 2002). Some social workers have expressed their concerns in the form of protests and strikes against the high level of paperwork involved in child protection, and the concomitant low levels of time for face-to-face work with clients and the lack of resources available to help children and families.

Not every jurisdiction or agency reflects these problems in the same ways. Quebec's efforts to develop community services and the plethora of different arrangements with Aboriginal communities provide evidence of different possibilities. Smaller jurisdictions appear to display more flexibility in service delivery than larger ones.

PART II. LEARNING FROM INNOVATIONS IN CHILD WELFARE IN CANADA

The intent of this section of the paper is to identify some innovations in child welfare in Canada and determine how they inform the development of a positive vision of child welfare¹. We selected innovations based on publications and conferences in recent years that highlight new developments. These initiatives are featured prominently in current thinking about child welfare, although some may be only brief projects or recently implemented ideas. Further, we tried to feature projects and ideas that reflect both the regional, cultural and jurisdictional differences in our country and those that span the broad spectrum of child welfare: beginning with broad policy and preventive measures, to investigations, out of home care and finally to research and education. None of these ideas are without drawbacks and we will suggest some of these. Given space restrictions of this paper and the size and diversity of our country, many important and creative efforts will go unmentioned.

Broad Policy Initiatives: Increasing Income and Other Supports to Address Family Poverty²

Some will argue that focusing upon poverty and material resources in child welfare is a waste of time and energy and that solutions require large scale reform, beyond the capacity of child welfare organizations. While we agree that it is difficult, we believe that a positive vision of child welfare must include action to alleviate poverty. As noted in the first part of this paper, most of the families and children involved in child welfare do not have the luxury of ignoring poverty, but must live it on a daily basis and are further alienated from child welfare services that do not address these fundamental realities (Prilleltensky, Nelson, & Peirson, 1999). As a nation, we have the capacity to ameliorate poverty as we have tackled it for the elderly with some notable success. Certainly, other countries with similar histories and challenges as our own have made more progress than we have in this area (Battle & Mendelson, 2001). While this section highlights federal initiatives regarding child poverty, it is important to remember that First Nations people have proposals for tackling poverty for their nations, mainly land claim settlements, that go beyond this particular discussion but which address poverty through economic and social development, a more holistic and potentially more beneficial approach.

One of the most significant issues on the family policy agenda in the 1990's in Canada was child poverty, provoked in part by a unanimous resolution in House of Commons in 1989 seeking to eliminate child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Campaign 2000, a coalition of more than 85 local, provincial and national organizations, has demonstrated that little, if any, progress has been made on this issue in subsequent years. While poverty rates have gone down slightly over the past three years, the depth of poverty, the gap between the poverty line and the actual resources of families, has remained almost steady (Campaign 2000, 2001).

The Child Tax Benefit (CTB) and the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS),

introduced by the federal government in 1998 to address child poverty has been widely criticized. Most provinces have chosen to deduct the NCBS from welfare payments³ with the result that families on income assistance have received little if any increase in benefits to date (Swift & Birmingham 2000). Benefits are thus tied to source of income rather than to amount. Abrupt cut off lines make irrational divisions between families with almost the same incomes. The program is not universal, making the raising of children the sole responsibility of parents above certain income levels, is insufficiently funded, and, finally, results in little if any relief from poverty (Durst, 1999; McLeen, 2001).

However, we include it in this discussion because of its potential. It is administered federally through the income tax system, is less stigmatizing than current welfare programs, is paid to the main caregiver, usually the mother, and has the potential to provide relief from the assortment of provincial and federal programs for families. Federal funding has increased from 6.2 billion to 8 billion (2001 constant dollars) from 1998-2001. To achieve its potential in reducing poverty, benefits must not be deducted from those receiving income assistance. It must also provide sufficient levels of income. Freiler and colleagues (2001) propose a universal child tax credit for all and an income tested child allowance for families earning less than \$40,000 to provide a base amount of \$4000 per child per year (2001) with indexing, a sum supported by Campaign 2000 and the Caledon Institute (Battle 2001; Battle & Mendelson, 2001). Such aims could be accomplished by revising the present program. The other contribution of the Child Tax Benefit and National Benefit Supplement is unexpected. It has produced a much more knowledgeable, committed and connected policy community with practical proposals for tackling poverty and some growing consensus about what would work.

Preventive Work: Building Community

Probably one of the most well-known and least implemented innovation in child welfare is working in community to foster healthy environments for children and families. Those favouring a community approach to child welfare challenge the definition of child abuse and neglect as individual problems amenable to clinical solutions (Dominelli, 1998; Wharf, 2002). These authors argue that, although child welfare has always emphasized working with individuals, mandatory reporting and risk assessment has reified this focus. As an alternative, they propose community solutions to the challenges facing families involved with child welfare agencies. Wharf (2002) suggests three overlapping strategies that exist in Canada: community social work, community organizing and community control.

The first of these, community social work (Adams & Nelson, 1995; Smale, 1995;), includes the practice of locating child protection workers in community facilities where they work in a more open, collaborative fashion with community members and professionals from other organizations. Presumably, this is the least difficult strategy to implement in the current system. For instance, in Huron and Renfrew counties in Ontario, some child protection workers are situated in the local schools. In Victoria, British Columbia child welfare staff work out of neighbourhood houses in local communities. The Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) has developed joint protocols with Toronto Family Resource Programmes that provide clear guidelines for staff in family resource programs, enabling them to consult with CAST staff before or instead of making a report (MacAuley, 2002).

There are many positive outcomes of these efforts that are well documented. The child who comes to school hungry may not result in a "complaint" to child protection, but rather the involvement of neighbourhood house staff who know the mother and her difficulties.

Community locations provide less threatening settings than child welfare offices. They can also improve assessment of concerns about children within the context of family, school and community realities and encourage the development of resources in the community, so that children who require alternative care remain within their neighbourhoods and have smooth transitions between care and home. (MacAuley, 2002; Wharf, 2002).

There are challenges to collaborative work. Staff in Family Resource Programs report feeling intimidated by the power of child welfare workers, overlooked as partners in the reporting process and sometimes coerced into taking inappropriate referrals (MacAuley, 2002). This latter point is particularly compelling when family resource programs are to be funded primarily through contracts with the child welfare organization. Child welfare workers under pressure may look to staff in their contracted family resource programs to offer the services that they cannot, even if these services do not fit with the philosophy and mandate of the family resource program. Moreover, as managing risk becomes paramount within child welfare, family resource programs fear that their funding may be reduced if they do not appear to be dealing with “high-risk” families. They may have to describe their participants in terms that emphasize the negative aspects of their functioning rather than strengths, a demand that stands in opposition to their central philosophy.

Wharf’s second approach to community work, community organizing, seeks to change oppressive conditions in neighbourhoods and build community capacity to care for residents. The Children’s Aid Society of Toronto has taken longstanding leadership in this regard; assigning specific staff to promote and develop local resources, co-ordinating social planning efforts and taking actions to promote progressive policies (Lee & Richards, 2002). Their achievements are many and parallel those reported by other community workers (Ife, 1998).

Perhaps most important, is the opportunities for previously alienated citizens to become participating members of community organizations. Developing useful community resources for families, building connections among organizations, creating positive identity for disparate communities including their confidence to tackle sometimes overwhelming problems, and learning the skills to face new ones are clear outcomes. Fuchs (1995) has documented how these and other efforts of inner city organizing in Winnipeg resulted in fewer removals of children from families and more likelihood that those removed could remain within the community.

Community control involves transferring authority for child welfare to community systems. First Nations people have pioneered this approach to child welfare, in spite of difficulties in mounting effective responses in communities devastated by poverty and cultural annihilation (Brown, Haddock, & Kovach, 2002).

Altogether, community work makes the case for improving individual and family circumstances by developing community capacity to respond to its residents. Although the outcomes are consistent across these efforts, financial and organizational support for community work in child welfare remains marginal. Our vision for child welfare would underscore the central place of community building.

Collaborative Investigations: Protecting Children by Responding to the Circumstances of their Parents

The longstanding contradiction in child welfare practice and policy, to exert authority while offering help, confronts child welfare workers on a daily basis. Both community workers and child protection practitioners have developed significant approaches to engage parents in relationships, founded on the belief that “mother the mother and you mother the child”.

For example, Family Resource programs encompass a wide range of services promoting

“social support, co-operation, collective responsibility (civic mindedness) and citizenship through a mix of education, information activities, material support and other resources to family members and groups of families” (Kyle & Kellerman, 1995, p.55). These programs place emphasis upon voluntary services that build on the strengths and needs of family members and encourage collective action. Located in every province and territory, and funded by a range of federal programs (Community Action Program for Children, Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program) as well as provincial, Aboriginal, municipal and non-government funding sources, they constitute a valuable resource for many Canadian families. Their usefulness in confronting daunting issues such as the use of substances during pregnancy and violence against women is encouraging (Rutman, Callanhan, Lundquist, Jackson, & Field, 1999). Another strength of these services is the thousands of hours of volunteer labour that they generate, often provided by those with few resources (Reitsma Street, & Neysmith, 2000). Family resource programs are major asset for child welfare in Canada.

While evaluations of the effectiveness of these diverse research programs are fraught with all the difficulties of assessing prevention programs, some encouraging evaluation studies have been done, demonstrating the positive contributions of these mutual aid, informal helping and prevention program approaches on several dimensions, including decreasing the need for protective intervention and reducing the removal of children from their families (Cameron, 1995; Fuchs, 1995).

Child protection workers within statutory services also have a lengthy, if largely unknown, history of protecting children by supporting parents. Their innovations take place quietly, often behind the closed doors of homes and offices. One study of best practices in the British Columbia child protection services focused upon the definitions and outcomes of best

practice provided by parents, child protection workers, their supervisors and community agency staff (Callahan, Field, Hubberstey, & Wharf, 1998). Remarkable consistency emerged in each group's responses, even though participants experienced child welfare practice from very different vantage points. Best practice is a complex process whereby parents and workers move to the same side, setting aside their differences, jointly planning for the care of children and developing necessary and appropriate resources so that plans can be realized.

While there are obstacles to achieving best practice, workers and parents using this approach reported their immense satisfaction with their work together and positive outcomes for children, even though some were removed from parental care. These findings were reaffirmed by another study in the United Kingdom (Farmer & Owen, 1996) in which researchers identified families who had a successful outcome with child protection services. Success was identified as children being protected from harm, children's welfare being enhanced and parents' needs being met. In those cases where all three outcomes were positive (23% of the cases), the researchers concluded that "the alliance between the social worker and the parents, which occurred when the parents' needs were recognized and at least partially met, was an important factor in securing the protection of the child" (p.294).

At the time of writing this paper, the Canadian Association of Social Workers is completing a national study *Creating Conditions for Good Practice in Child Welfare* that aims to identify the features of good practice in child welfare, to recognize the barriers to its implementation and to make recommendations for changes⁴.

What these studies and others demonstrate, is that it is possible to protect children through the development of collaborative rather than combative relationships with parents and family members, and through relationships that acknowledge that parents' own well being as

individuals is directly linked to their parenting capacities. While these truths seem obvious, child welfare policies and practices rarely reflect them.

Reforming Court Process: Group Conferencing

Child welfare work is often dominated by formal legal processes that can be daunting, even to experienced social workers and lawyers. One approach to making these processes less formidable and more useful is illustrated by family group conferences. These conferences, introduced in New Zealand in 1989, have their roots in aboriginal understandings of justice that concentrate upon restoring harmony between offenders and their communities through a problem solving process, generally implemented in circles including offenders, victims and community members (Barsky, 1999; Hudson, Morris, Maxwell, & Galaway, 1996). The theory of reintegrative shaming explains the power of the process whereby the offender experiences the disapproval of victims and community, seeks genuine forgiveness and then works with community members to plan reparations and a return to community.

In Canada, family group conferences in child protection have taken hold here and there⁵, but the outcomes have been most thoroughly examined in Newfoundland and Labrador (Pennell & Burford, 1996; 1998). Three distinct cultural and geographical communities participated in the Family Group Decision-Making Project, a demonstration project designed to implement and evaluate family group conferencing for children and families where abuse had been confirmed through child welfare investigations. In their analysis of 20 family group conferences, Pennell and Burford make some interesting observations. Family group conferences unfold in similar ways, but have the potential to respect cultural and community differences, including differences among an Inuit community in Labrador, a rural community with French, English and Mi'kmaq residents, and an urban community in St. Johns. Family members' interpretations of the causes

of difficulties overlapped somewhat with those of professionals (single mothers neglecting their children, fathers abusing women and children, children being “out of control”), but family members emphasized day-to-day struggles with poverty and deprivation. For instance, one family in Labrador noted that neglect was a certainty without wood for the fire.

Although families’ reactions to their common experiences of shame differed among communities and cultures and between genders, researchers report that this collective feeling of shame helped families move to struggling for solutions. These solutions for the most part require ongoing involvement and support from child welfare services, a finding supported by other studies, but which change significantly the role of child welfare workers. The sheer exhilaration of families, many of whom were considered “multi-problem through multi-generations”, creating their own solutions and being heard is perhaps the most important outcome.

Provincial Court Judges in British Columbia have introduced another approach to conferencing, one that substitutes for a family court hearing in cases of child protection (Metzger, 1997). Under authority of the British Columbia Act, 1996, all child welfare apprehensions that are not settled by consent are subject to a mandatory case conference chaired by a provincial court judge. Attendance for parents, their lawyers and social workers is required. If not successfully mediated, the judge can refer the case for a formal trial. Since the inception of this requirement, two-thirds of the cases that would normally be heard at trial have been successfully dealt with at the case conference level.

Although these and other studies indicate the success of finding consensual processes to replace adversarial ones, many issues are still unresolved including the potential for cultural tokenism, the assurance that less powerful members of families are not subsequently punished, and that governments do not renege on the resources required to carry out conferences and

implement plans. However, there are several nuggets contained within these approaches. They show potential in addressing the alienation of parents resulting from traditional investigative and court processes. They also can reformulate definitions of problems and solutions in ways understood by families and children themselves, rather than solely based on the views of professionals, and can identify alternative ways of working in non Anglo-Canadian traditions.

Improving Life in Care: Monitoring Child Well-being

Many more children are entering the care system in Canada and a longstanding problem is the quality of the care offered by government. The Looking After Children program (LAC), introduced in the United Kingdom in 1991 and implemented in 15 countries, attempts to address the issue of children “lost in care”. It identifies seven dimensions of development: health, education, identity, family and social relationships, social presentation, emotional and behavioural development and self care skills. Social workers, caregivers and others are trained in the implementation of the guidelines, called Assessment and Action Records (AAR), to help them monitor progress of children over time in each of these developmental areas.

LAC found fertile roots in Canada in the 1990s when various scandals and concerns about accountability were featured regularly in the media and when many, including foster parents and youth in care, continued to express longstanding concerns about the quality of government care. In 1997, three pilot projects were launched (in the Maritimes, Quebec and British Columbia) resulting in modifications of LAC to better suit Canadian realities, leading to additional funding from the federal government to support implementation in all participating provinces and territories⁶, and further development of models for diverse communities, including First Nations.

There are some crucial elements of the Looking After Children initiative that have

potential to contribute to positive child welfare systems. Most importantly, LAC shifts attention to the day-to-day care giving of foster and group home parents and to the realities of children in care. Moreover, LAC can promote broader cooperation, as it is not fraught with the ideological and professional divisions that torment other child welfare processes. The initiative emphasizes consistency in record keeping for children to provide continuity and a basis for assessing how well children are managing individually. As well, information can be aggregated at provincial, national and international levels. This steady, comprehensive and comparative data can influence policy to improve conditions for children in care. For instance, a recent study using LAC data documents the major educational needs of children in care (Kufeldt, Simard, Vachon, 2000). Finally, from the outset, the LAC involved a wide range of constituencies in child welfare, including those most likely to advocate for and implement findings: youth in care, foster parents, social workers as well as members of interprovincial networks, federal and provincial governments, Children's Aid Societies, and other child welfare organizations as well as university researchers.

Expanding Choices for Out-Of-Home Placements

While recent developments in child welfare have resulted in more out-of-home placements for children and youth, child welfare has been slow to recognize the potential of variations to "traditional" permanent placements in a nuclear family. The introduction of open adoption policies permitting parents, usually mothers, to choose adopting parents for their children and to have some kind of continuing contact with their children and the adoptive families is one response to this need. The Adoption Council of Canada supports open adoptions and is currently consulting with provinces on this issue, using the British Columbia statute as a model (Section 59, British Columbia Adoption Act). In British Columbia, openness can vary

from sharing letters or pictures through a third party, to birth parents having personal contact with the adoptive family throughout the child's life, or adoptive parents entering into agreements with other important people in their child's life, such as foster parents, grandparents or Aboriginal community members. As a result, adopted children may de facto have two sets of parents, larger extended families and continuing community affiliations. Mothers who have resisted adoption in the past, because it permanently separated them from their children, may now be amenable to this option if they can continue to have a place in the lives of their children.

The British Columbia Adoption Act also recognizes the possibilities of customary adoption for First Nations communities, whereby the court can recognize adoptions carried out under the custom of an Aboriginal community or band as having the same status as adoptions carried out under the Act. Customary adoption recognizes the traditional approach of some First Nations who place children with families within their communities when parents are unable to offer care.

Over the past fifteen to twenty years, a growing volume of social science research has addressed questions about children being raised by gay men and lesbians. Studies have failed to find significant differences between parenting abilities of heterosexual and homosexual families or significant mental health differences between children raised by lesbian and gay parents and those raised by heterosexual parents (Arnup, 1995; Laird, 1993). A national study, Adoption in Canada (Daly & Sobol, 1994), which prompted national debate on the topic concluded that:

Policies and attitudes with respect to home study criteria and selection guidelines are strongly focussed on marital status and stability as the pivotal criteria. This focus no longer corresponds with increasing diversification of family forms. There is no evidence to demonstrate that the best interests of the child are better served in any particular family constellation. Thus, the increasing acceptance of various family constellations should be reflected in the selection criteria. Among other things, this will require a change in policy and legislation that allows for the adoption of children by single and unmarried couples, regardless of their sexual orientation...(p.103).

Since that time, some changes have occurred making it easier for gay and lesbian individuals to adopt the children of their partners. While child welfare laws make no mention of same sex couples, each provincial statute (with the exception of Manitoba's) allows for single adults to adopt children. Select provinces allow for two adults, married or not, to adopt, paving the way for same sex couples to adopt children outside their own families. For instance, in British Columbia "two *adults* jointly may apply to the court to adopt a child" (British Columbia Adoption Act, 1996, section 29(1)). In Quebec, "any *person* of full age may, alone or jointly with another person, adopt a child"(Quebec Civil Code, SQ 1991, c.64, article 546, as amended by SQ 1995, c.33, sections 30-32, article 549). These initiatives stimulate a re-thinking of the concept of family emphasizing instead the importance of supportive relationships to nurturing children.

Improving Advocacy: Listening to Different Voices

One of the developments occurring over the last decade is the development of local, provincial, and national advocacy groups designed to give voice to those who are the children, parents and workers in child welfare⁷. While there are many such groups, we feature in our discussion, the National Youth-in-care Network [NYICN]. This organization began with the organizing efforts of Kathleen Kudfeldt who coordinated a conference for youth-in-care entitled "Who Cares" in 1979. This conference, and other developments during the International Year of the Child in 1985 (Strega, 2000), prompted the formation of a non-profit organization run by youth age 14-24 who are or have been in care in Canada. The organizations aims "to facilitate an empowering, constructive dialogue between young people in care and adult service providers in which youth are taken seriously and treated with respect, dignity, and sensitivity" (National Youth-in-care Network, 1998, p.2). It emphasizes mutual support, giving voice to issues as youth

experience them, research, public education and lobbying for change.

The accomplishments of this group are remarkable. In 2001, their public education efforts alone included over 50 presentations and consultations. Representatives gave three press conferences on Parliament Hill last year, addressing issues related to Section 43 of the Criminal Code as well as family violence and education. Also, documentaries on the organization aired on CBC TV's The National, CBC Radio, and CPAC. Members undertake their own research and lobby other research organizations to focus on youth issues. Along with other priorities, they have identified the lack of policy supporting youth leaving care, including those youth who are also mothers (Martin & Palmer, 1997). Most provinces provide little if any sustained services and youth are expected to make their own way at age 18 or thereabouts⁸. It seems obvious that the opinions of those who receive child welfare services should be central in policy and practice development, but the venues for hearing their voices are few and far between. It is essential that such advocacy groups speak out and that they have access to those in child welfare who can make changes.

Building Capacity in Research and Education

Until recently, most child welfare research has taken place within provincial jurisdictions⁹ creating difficulties in making comparisons across jurisdictions. Recent developments are making national research more possible. The Federal/Provincial/Territorial Working Group on Child and Family Services Information produces intermittent bulletins (www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca) on child welfare developments within each province and territory, and occasional statistical reports on child welfare that, while not providing comparative data, can at least present some overall picture of trends. Funding for five Centres of Excellence for Children's Well Being, part of the federal government's National Children's Agenda (agreed to

by the Federal/ Provincial/ Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal in 1997) has provided support for a number of research ventures. One of these is a long overdue national study detailing the incidence of child abuse and neglect in Canada (Trocme et al, 2001), a snapshot that can provide some base line data for future comparisons. These Centres also have the potential to develop national networks of researchers and enter into partnerships with advocacy and professional organizations.

An overlooked feature of research in child welfare is that the research agendas have been largely controlled by academics, senior policy makers and those in research institutes and rarely shaped by the families and workers within the system. As a result, we know a lot about particular subjects and very little about others. The development of advocacy groups, their presence at conferences, and their insistence that research address their concerns are very positive developments. Not only do these advocacy groups suggest areas of research, but they also promote for research methods that incorporate their understandings of the system and involve them from the outset in the research process.

Finally, although schools of social work are pressed to prepare more workers for immediate practice in child welfare, particularly front-line child protection, and to teach competencies developed by child welfare organizations, new partnerships that have the potential to respect the roles of the employer and the academy in preparing practitioners are emerging. The development of child welfare specializations within three schools of social work in British Columbia which feature anti-oppressive knowledge and skills for work in community and with aboriginal peoples, as well as with general child welfare populations is an example of partnerships that may support retention of workers and improved practices (Armitage, Callahan, & Lewis, 2001).

Part III: Towards Reform in Child Welfare

We have identified several characteristics of many of these child welfare innovations that contribute to new conceptions of child welfare:

Collaborative Decision-Making

Most initiatives are based upon a fundamental belief that decisions affecting the lives of children and families are best made in an open fashion with the important parties involved and within the context of relevant values and realities. This approach challenges traditional perceptions of professional expertise and confidentiality.

Attention to Diversity

These initiatives emphasize the importance of context in individual decision making and call into question the application of universal standards of child well being, measured by yardsticks developed from “scientific” and professional standards. This presents a fundamental challenge to Eurocentric thinking about children and families that it is usually ignored.

Strength-Based

Implicit throughout these innovations is the belief that most situations, however challenging, contain positive elements that can be enhanced. The movement away from documenting shortcomings of parents to open discussions of strengths and development of practical child safety plans is decidedly different from what occurs at present in most jurisdictions.

Balance

At present, the child welfare system seems out of balance. The majority of funds are provided by provincial governments to investigate complaints of child neglect and abuse; in many cases, however, nothing further happens for children or their families and they are often

undermined in the process. Little money remains to fund innovations like these highlighted in Part II, yet their potential to change the need for and the process of investigations is clear.

Child and Family Focused

Much of our activity in child welfare at present is shaped by organizational requirements, funding formulas and workload management. Social workers are increasingly charged with administrative tasks. Yet all of these innovations have as their focus the well being of children and families and attention to their definitions of issues

Building Relationships

These initiatives demonstrate the need for positive relationships between child welfare workers and those they serve.

Partnerships for Reform

Can these innovations lead us to a new paradigm for child welfare? We conclude that these ideas are necessary, but not sufficient, building blocks of a reformed system. In spite of these initiatives, many of which demonstrate courage and creative thinking, child welfare remains isolated from the forces which might shape positive reforms. Thus, we conclude with a discussion of the nature of these types of partnerships necessary for real reform.

First, this notion of partnerships involves a rethinking about the definition and nature of work. Those traditionally seen as “clients” and lay people are in fact undertaking a large part of the work involved in child welfare. The idea of their role as “receiving help” rather than as working, usually without remuneration, requires change. Current funding formulas do not recognize the labour involved in developing and maintaining real working partnerships.

Second, although these initiatives have much in common, they appear as somewhat isolated endeavours. For real change to occur, child welfare has to become active in social

reform, and to do this strong connections have to be forged. Our key partners in this endeavour, at the ground level, should be social movements advocating for reform: women's groups, anti-poverty organizations, Aboriginal governments, and groups concerned with resource issues such as housing, employment and the environment. Child welfare can provide direct evidence of the impacts of current policies on the most vulnerable Canadians, while these advocacy groups can help us work toward a vision for change.

Finally, child welfare should develop partnerships at national and international levels. At present, child welfare agencies are constrained by provincial mandates and have few opportunities to develop national perspectives and to create partnerships on overarching issues such as poverty and child care. On the broader stage, local child welfare organizations should form partnerships with child welfare efforts in other countries. If we remain in isolated constituencies, we diminish our resources and our power.

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¹ Conference organizers provided writers with some criteria of a positive vision. These criteria included: (a) providing assistance in ways that are welcomed by the parents and children involved; (b) using helping strategies which take advantage of up-to-date knowledge of programming for disadvantaged and distressed families; (c) focusing on holistic concepts of well-being for children, parents, families, and communities; (d) placing a priority on keeping children safe from harm; and e. ensuring that service providers in the system feel their work is meaningful and worthwhile.

² The term in current parlance and government initiatives "child poverty" is misleading and ignores the connection between children and their families.

³ New Brunswick and Newfoundland in 1998-99, New Brunswick in 1999-2000, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Manitoba in 2000-01 are exceptions. Some provinces and municipalities have put funds previously spent on income assistance into family services, however there is no demand that they do so by the federal government.

⁴ The results of this study, while unavailable at this time, will be presented at the national conference of the Canadian Association of Social Workers in June 2002

⁵ British Columbia is the only jurisdiction to include family group conferences in child welfare legislation but has yet to proclaim those sections of the act.

⁶ In February 2002, all provinces and territories had named a LAC co-ordinator and all with the exception of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Nunavut were at some stage of implementation. See http://www.lacproject.org/pubs/Canadian_LAC-Eng.pdf for a complete review.

⁷ A few key groups include Caring for First Nation Children Society www.fernweb.com/cfnsc; Child Welfare League of Canada www.cwlc.ca; FRP Canada www.frp.ca; Parents Anonymous www.parentsanonymous.org; Canadian Foster Parent; Caledon Institute www.caledoninst.org; Campaign 2000 www.campaign2000.ca

⁸ Post majority legislation and services are poorly conceived in Canada. A few provinces have taken some action. For instance, the province of Saskatchewan has included specific sections in its child welfare legislation permitting the director to continue services beyond majority for youth between 18-21 who are continuing education and need support to do so or who have particular mental and physical impairments requiring special attention (section 56.1).

⁹ Exceptions include the National Council of Welfare, the Laidlaw Foundation, Status of Women Canada and occasional national publications by individual authors.

SOCIAL WORK



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