



National  
Children's  
Alliance

Alliance  
nationale pour  
les enfants

**"Beyond the Horizon": A National Workshop  
on Developing Strategic Priorities  
for the National Children's Alliance**

**December 7 - 9, 2000**

**Summary Report**

**February 2001**

**National Children's Alliance**

c/o Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations

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## **"Beyond the Horizon": National Workshop Proceedings**

**December 2000**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The National Children's Alliance is a network of more than 30 national organizations committed to improving the lives of children and youth in Canada. The Alliance hosted a National Workshop in December for the purpose of establishing strategic priorities for the next two years. The participants included representatives of national member organizations as well as individuals from across the country who are engaged in working in provincial/territorial coalitions of organizations serving children and families.

The workshop began with a review of the history of the Children's Alliance, given by Dianne Bascombe, who has been involved with the Alliance from the beginning. Ms. Bascombe noted that children's policy is at a crucial juncture, and the voluntary sector must make use of this opportunity to ensure that policy development is participatory and meets the needs of all children in Canada. The Alliance is treating the Early Childhood Development (ECD) agreement as the "test case" of children's policy within the Social Union Framework Agreement, and as such, is putting significant effort into engaging with governments and the voluntary sector on the implementation of the agreement.

The ECD agreement is a positive step but there are several challenges. Firstly, the four priority areas it sets out are a menu from which provinces /territories can choose, not a comprehensive basket of services. Secondly, the indicators for success will be difficult to arrive at in the context of jurisdictional constraints and there will likely be considerable debate over them. Thirdly, the accountability mechanisms will be difficult to reach consensus on, to implement, and to monitor. Lastly, the money will come through the CHST in block funding – making accountability that much more difficult. The voluntary sector will have to be active in ensuring that the dollars allocated are in fact spent on early childhood development programs. Dianne

noted that this is a crucial time calling for action on the part of the Alliance to ensure the effective implementation of the ECD agreement.

Following the introductory session, participants were engaged in the development of a vision for children's programs five years down the road. The vision included:

- the engagement of citizens, communities and organizations in decision-making processes toward the implementation of the National Children's Agenda;
- services for children and youth which are culturally appropriate, high quality, coordinated, equitable, accessible, well funded, integrated, community driven, and comparable across all regions of the country;
- adequate, sustained and flexible funding from federal, provincial and territorial governments, delivered through a mechanism which fosters accountability and transparency;
- the realization of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the provision of adequate income security, education, nutrition, safe housing, a nurturing environment, the right to family services and the inclusion of special needs; and
- the establishment of a Children's Bill of Rights, and a commission designed to protect these rights.

After developing a vision, workshop participants were given an update on the National Children's Agenda and Early Childhood Development processes by Marta Morgan, Director of Children's Policy at Human Resources Development Canada. Ms. Morgan noted that the ECD agreement establishes a new way of developing social policy which encourages collaboration between the two senior levels of government. The structure and content of the agreement will be precedent-setting for child and family policy, and potentially for other social policy areas. Ms. Morgan pointed out that the voluntary sector has a crucial role to play in contributing to the development of mechanisms for citizen engagement and for evaluating outcomes.

Subsequently, workshop participants analyzed the current status and political context of the Children's Alliance in order to decide how to build on existing strengths and opportunities, while bearing in mind how to minimize weaknesses and external threats. Participants suggested that the Alliance's strengths include: skills;

experience; policy capacity; human resources; “good timing”; and an inclusive and democratic way of operating. The weaknesses of the coalition were generally agreed to be: limited financial resources; the challenge of mobilizing at the provincial/territorial level; the need to fill gaps in representation; and the need to further develop relationships with policy makers at all levels. In terms of the external environment, opportunities include: a newly elected government with a mandate to pursue social development and a commitment to children's programs; the growing influence of the voluntary sector; and the ability to collaborate with governments on the development of citizen engagement and evaluation mechanisms. Participants noted that threats to their work include: the shifting of roles and power within government; the impact of globalization on policy making; the unpredictability of political will; and increasing polarization in media and public opinion.

Taking into account these considerations, participants developed strategic priorities for the next two years. These priorities were comprised of:

- broadening, strengthening and supporting the development of provincial/territorial coalitions by providing communications tools and participatory mechanisms, and by sharing the policy expertise of national member organizations
- working with communities, governments and the voluntary sector on the implementation of the ECD agreement
- ensuring participation in federal/provincial/territorial decision-making processes, especially with respect to
  - 1) accountability and transparency
  - 2) developing indicators to measure progress, and
  - 3) encouraging citizen engagement
- advocating for the implementation of the National Children's Agenda to improve the well-being of children and youth of all ages through enhanced programs and services.

In addition to participating in the establishment of strategic priorities, representatives from the provinces and territories had the opportunity to share

strategies for organizing provincial/territorial coalitions, and to provide feedback to the Children's Alliance on how the national structure can facilitate this work. Although some jurisdictions have progressed further than others in the development of coalitions, all participants were eager to exchange reports and strategies, and were enthusiastic about collaborating with each other and with the national member organizations on expanding and strengthening these alliances in order to engage effectively with provincial/territorial governments and, ultimately, to ensure the development of children's programs appropriate to their populations.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The National Children's Alliance is grateful to Human Resources Development Canada and Health Canada for their support. The Children's Alliance would also like to thank Pierre Lacroix for skillfully facilitating the National Workshop.

## **INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

The National Children's Alliance is a group of more than thirty national organizations committed to the well-being of all children and youth in Canada. Together the member groups of the alliance represent hundreds of thousands of people who work with children and families in the fields of social services, education and health, as professionals and as volunteers. National organizations conducting research and promoting improved economic and social security are also members of the alliance.

The Children's Alliance was founded in the spring of 1996 to facilitate working together. The Alliance has worked to promote the development of a National Children's Agenda by the federal and provincial/territorial governments. Since its inception, the alliance has met with members of the federal Cabinet, MPs from all parties, and federal officials responsible for children's issues. As front-line workers with children, alliance members are acutely aware of both the needs and gaps in services and programs that exist today.

In February 1999, the federal, provincial and territorial governments (excluding Quebec) signed the social union agreement which opened the door for co-ordinated approaches to social policy. The National Children's Agenda, released in May 1999, marks a new spirit of inter-governmental co-operation which has the potential to result in a co-ordinated policy framework to address the needs of children and youth.

Last September, the National Children's Alliance welcomed the announcement of new federal funding to be targeted to Early Childhood Development. Although this funding falls short of the level required to adequately sustain programs for young children, the announcement provided new hope that governments were willing to rebuild the network of supports necessary to guarantee that all children have a good

start in life. The Children's Alliance will be working to ensure that the funds are invested in a way which is appropriate and meaningful to all children and their communities.

The Children's Alliance is treating the ECD agreement as the first building block in the implementation of the National Children's Agenda. They will be advocating for the expansion of ECD funding from federal and provincial/ territorial governments in the near future, as well as working to ensure that programs and services for older children and youth are expanded to fulfill the broader promises of the National Children's Agenda.

In the spring of 2000, the Children's Alliance held forums across the country to build consensus around the policies and practices essential to a national children's agenda. The recommendations communicated by participants were centred on the following principles:

- Public investment in children and youth is essential to the development of a strong economy and a healthy civic society. Governments need to remember the importance of community services in the face of pressure from some sectors for tax relief and reduced public spending.
- Investment in children to ensure that all have an opportunity to reach their development potential will require additional resources. Recent reductions in income security, social, health and education spending and services have had a negative effect.
- Improving conditions for children and families requires a long-term plan with targets, benchmarks and measurable outcomes. One-shot solutions such as limited-year funding for new social service initiatives are unlikely to result in sustained improvement in child and youth outcomes.
- Children and youth need support and services throughout their development, starting with the critical early years of life, and lasting until adulthood. Governments need to better coordinate services, such as child care and education, and health and social services.

The national workshop represented the next step in the process of moving from vision to action. The workshop was held to allow national member organizations and representatives from the provinces and territories to contribute to the establishment of strategic priorities for the Children's Alliance for the next couple of years. The priorities developed at the workshop will allow a coordinated effort from local, regional, provincial/territorial and national organizations toward realizing the goal of improving the lives of all children and youth in Canada.

# Proceedings

**DAY 1: December 7, 2000**

## **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS**

Participants were welcomed by Pamela Heneault, Chairperson of the National Children's Alliance Steering Committee. Pamela introduced those members of the steering committee who were present including Dianne Bascombe, Al Hatton, Janet Davies, Harvey Weiner, Marcel Lauzière, Margaret Fietz, Sandra Griffin, Mike McKnight, Karen Takacs, and the session facilitator, Pierre Lacroix.

Participants interviewed each other in pairs and introduced their partner to the group sharing their expectations for the Workshop.

### **Participants' Expectations for the Workshop**

- network, make new contacts
- find out what is happening at the provincial/territorial level
- see how other organizations liaise with government
- strategize on how to influence government on the National Children's Agenda
- get a clearer picture of how we can work together for a national cause
- develop communications networks across the country
- develop creative ideas on the distribution of funding and moving the Agenda forward
- develop strategic priorities and next steps for the Alliance in moving toward concrete action
- capitalize on the energy in the Alliance

## SETTING THE POLICY CONTEXT

### Dianne Bascombe, Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations

Dianne welcomed everyone and noted that the Alliance was looking forward to supporting the work of the regional representatives and the development of their regional networks.

Dianne reviewed the agenda and outlined the meeting objective – to work towards strategic priorities for the National Children's Alliance for the next five years. Those priorities would be developed through discussion of the policy context, developing a vision of the National Children's Agenda and the National Children's Alliance for five years from now, analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and arriving at strategic priorities.

Dianne provided a brief history of the Alliance which began four years ago when a small group of leaders of national organizations began to meet regularly to discuss ways in which to be more effective in lobbying on children's issues. The monthly networking meetings soon evolved into joint projects and the Alliance is now a strong network of more than thirty national organizations committed to improving the lives of children and youth in Canada. Since its inception the Alliance has worked to strengthen the network of national voluntary organizations; facilitate dialogue on children's issues with government; develop policy recommendations; engage provincial/territorial/regional constituent organizations in working collaboratively on issues; and promote the development, and now, the implementation of the National Children's Agenda.

The Alliance is intentionally without formal structure; for example, members take turns in speaking to media and presenting briefs to governments. The Alliance operates by participatory approaches to decision making through consensus building processes. The goal is to move forward on positions which are based on common ground. The logo and website allow organizations to identify with the Alliance while maintaining autonomy.

Since May 1999, with the release of the government's vision statement for the

Agenda, there have been concerns in the voluntary sector about the vision not moving to action. The Alliance has taken leadership. A National Think Tank was convened in April 2000 to look at both policy content and process for the National Children's Agenda, followed by regional forums across the country to stimulate dialogue and to look at the role of provincial/territorial governments in the Agenda.

The Alliance has recently received funding for a two year period to continue to engage the voluntary sector and society at large in an ongoing public dialogue on children's issues and to work collaboratively with the voluntary sector and governments at all levels in the development and implementation of children's policy, particularly the National Children's Agenda. At this workshop, strategic priorities will be developed for the work of the National Children's Alliance over the next few years.

It is important that these priorities are considered in the context of the broader policy context, considering the Social Union Framework Agreement, the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development (ECD) agreement. The Alliance is treating the ECD agreement very much as a first step – the first policy piece under the Social Union Framework Agreement and within the National Children's Agenda. As such it is a critical focus point, even though it does not address the needs of all children or satisfy the priorities of all National Children's Alliance members.

Dianne outlined briefly the principles of the Social Union Framework Agreement including equality of access, mobility, stable and sustainable funding for social programs, accountability, transparency and engagement of citizens, and emphasized the importance of these principles to the Alliance.

The ECD agreement was signed in September 2001 and provides an important opportunity for the Alliance to influence the policy process. There are several challenges for the Alliance in the ECD agreement. Firstly, the four priority areas it sets out are a menu, not a comprehensive basket of services, so the provinces and territories can choose which services to expand, instead of being committed to investing in all the priority areas. Secondly, the indicators for success will be difficult to arrive at and their will likely be

considerable debate around them. Thirdly, the accountability mechanisms will be difficult to reach consensus on and to implement, and the voluntary sector will face challenges in monitoring progress. Lastly, the money will be delivered to the provinces through the CHST in block funding, which makes keeping track of allocated funds even more of a challenge. The voluntary sector and the public will have to be active in ensuring that the dollars allocated are in fact spent on early childhood development programs.

Dianne noted that this is a crucial time calling for action on the part of the Alliance to ensure the effective implementation of the ECD agreement.

### **Al Hatton (Executive Director, Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations)**

The challenges of voluntary sector participation in the National Children's Agenda can be viewed through a larger context. Many voluntary organizations are excited by the prospect of developing a new relationship with the federal government, which is exactly the purpose of the new Voluntary Sector Initiative. Like other organizations, the member groups of the Children's Alliance were interested to know more about the process and how it may affect their work.

Al Hatton provided an overview of the process leading to the Voluntary Sector Initiative. In 1995 there was a program review of the federal government, leading to major cutbacks at the federal level and later at the provincial/territorial level. The voluntary sector was newly characterized as "special interest" groups, instead of public interest groups, and suffered from deep cuts to their operating funding from government. National organizations and institutions in general began to be questioned on their accountability and trustworthiness.

A group of voluntary sector representatives met to discuss responses and this led to the creation of the Voluntary Sector Roundtable. The Roundtable focused on four areas of concern: 1) tax incentives for charities, 2) accountability and governance, 3) building a new relationship with government

(there was at the time a limited understanding of the sector by central agencies of government), and 4) the definition of charitable status.

The Voluntary Sector Roundtable led to the creation of the Broadbent Panel, which was successful in putting issues on the government's agenda. Together the voluntary sector and the federal government then undertook the establishment of three joint tables which culminated in a jointly issued report called Working Together in September 1999.

In June 2000, the federal government announced that it would spend \$94.6 million to implement the recommendations of the Working Together report through the Voluntary Sector Initiative. Seven joint tables (with voluntary sector and government representatives) and two working groups (voluntary sector only) were created.

Responding to a question on how much charitable status rules may be affected by this process, AI noted that the federal government is looking at bureaucratic requirements (e.g. tax forms) to make life easier for charities. These changes have legal and regulatory implications. Voluntary Sector Roundtable members are educating officials in the Department of Finance and other departments regarding broadening the definition without "letting the floodgates open." There's also the question of the 10% rule, where charities can devote no more than 10% of their time/resources to advocacy work.

One participant who is involved in the process pointed out that the Voluntary Sector Initiative is a collaborative effort and that even though changes may be slow in coming, the Initiative is a big improvement over the absence of process prior to the Initiative.

## DEVELOPING A VISION

In small groups, participants discussed their vision for Canada five years into the National Children's Agenda. Elements of their visions were then posted. A number of clusters were evident:

### Poverty:

- there is no child poverty;
- there are no homeless persons or families; and
- there is affordable, safe housing for all.

### Health:

- children's health drives the environment agenda;
- preventable conditions such as FAS/FAE are eliminated;
- the public education system emphasizes health promotion skills; and
- healthy children and families live in healthy communities across Canada, including the North.

### Policy and Legislation:

- governments embrace the concept of a broad definition of family health;
- children's policy is of equal importance to economic policy;
- children are a real priority - society and government has oriented itself to reflect the health and well-being of children as central to the health and well-being of Canada;
- a federal commissioner for children has been established;
- a ministry for children is in place;
- a Children's Bill of Rights (developed with children) is in place;
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is widely know and *realized*;
- national standards for child care are in place;
- human rights frame public policy;
- social policy is dictated by the needs of children and families, not by political agendas; and
- as a result of the National Children's Agenda, provincial/territorial ministries of children and families have developed frameworks for early childhood development (preventive) services and have included stakeholders in the development of the framework.

### Funding:

- adequate, stable and sustainable funding to support services and programs for children and families is in place;
- stable, adequate transfers, progressive taxation and a solid revenue base are in place;
- organizations providing services to children and families receive sufficient funding to be available to all families who want them.

### Services:

- core of accessible and comparable services are available to children and families in Canada;
- families choose services from a variety of coordinated service providers;
- coordinated community services meet needs identified by communities who actively participate in the evaluation of the services;
- children at risk are identified and supported before entering formal school settings;
- there is equal opportunity for and access to services by all children;
- families can access supports and services to the degree they wish to help them in their parenting role;
- high-quality child care spaces are accessible and affordable for all families who require them; and
- integrated services for children and families are a reality.

### Collaboration and Participation:

- voluntary/NGO sector are integrally involved with government in the preparation and adoption of accountability mechanisms and indicators of success;
- voluntary organizations are at the table with government at all levels to set policy;
- citizens, communities and interested organizations engage in participatory decision-making;
- there is increased community awareness and volunteerism;
- excellent communication and collaboration exist among the provinces, territories, the federal government and voluntary organizations;

- governments have mechanisms in place to consult key stakeholders regarding children's policy/programs;
- children's alliance networks exist in all provinces and territories;
- clear, comparable and meaningful indicators exist so that citizens can understand and witness progress;
- the National Children's Agenda has provided strong national leadership;
- harmonized efforts and strategy is the norm for regional, provincial/territorial and national organizations.

Canadian Society:

- children have optimal circumstances for their growth and development;
- we have moved beyond early childhood to extend the Agenda to school-aged children and adolescents;
- we respect, value and honour children;
- all children have equal access to education, recreation and the arts; and
- people working with and for children are valued and have status, and wages and benefits, that reflect this respect.

These elements were further refined into a five-point vision statement:

**A VISION FOR THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S AGENDA  
FIVE YEARS FROM NOW...**

- citizens, communities and interested organizations are engaged in participatory decision-making in achieving the goals and objectives of the National Children's Agenda
- in Canada, services for children, youth and families are:
  - culturally appropriate
  - high quality
  - coordinated
  - equitable
  - accessible
  - funded for stability

- integrated in a comprehensive system (all stages of childhood and adolescence)
  - comparable across all regions of Canada
  - driven by community needs
- funding is adequate, sustained and flexible (the federal and provincial/territorial governments have committed funding); funding is provided through a mechanism which allows accountability and transparency.
- Canada has fully realized the articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (in order to address children's needs), according to three principles: protection, provision, and participation, including:
  - nutrition
  - education
  - income security
  - safe housing
  - nurturing environment
  - inclusion of special needs
  - right to family services
- we have established a Bill of Rights for Children with a commission to protect these rights

## **DAY 2: December 8, 2000**

### **THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT: GOVERNMENT PERSPECTIVES**

Dianne welcomed everyone back, and presented background information on the ECD agreement and how it fits into the broader Agenda. She reviewed the vision developed the previous day, and then introduced Marta Morgan, who is Director of Children's Policy at Human Resources Development Canada.

Marta Morgan, Director, Children's Policy, HRDC

Marta has been working on both the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development agreement and joined us to share some of the thinking behind the ECD agreement .

The National Children's Agenda process resulted in a shared vision to which the federal government and all the provinces and territories except Quebec agreed. The vision for the Agenda was endorsed through a regional consultation process, and revised to take into account the views of participants in that process. Emerging from the process were six priorities for action, and very high among those priorities was early childhood development. While child poverty was an over-arching priority, the Child Benefit was seen as positive action to address, at least in part, the issue of child poverty. Early Childhood Development will be the focus for governments as a critical next step for children and families.

The ECD agreement establishes a new way of working among governments in Canada on social policy, particularly in the area of community-based services, an area in which the federal government does not have a substantial delivery role compared to the wide range of services for which provincial and territorial governments have responsibility.

One of the issues confronting governments in coming to this agreement was to determine how the federal government could support the development of

community-based services in Canada. The structure and content of the agreement will potentially be precedent setting for other social policy areas and at a minimum will set a precedent for child and family policy.

The ECD agreement is rooted in the National Children's Agenda and lays out the shared vision. The ECD agreement discusses the importance of early childhood development and the importance of investment in early childhood development. The agreement is clear that early childhood development is a shared societal responsibility. While Governments have a leadership role, all Canadians have a role to play in ensuring that "children fulfill their potential to be healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, socially engaged and responsible".

The commitment of **all** governments to improve early childhood services over time is reflected several times in the agreement. While Quebec did not sign on the ECD agreement, Quebec has been active in implementing family policy and will continue to expand family and early childhood development programs.

The ECD agreement identified four areas for action. Governments may invest in any or all of these areas and will set their own priorities from what is essentially a policy framework. The areas for action are:

- Promoting healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy;
- Improving parenting and family supports;
- Strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and
- Strengthening community supports.

It has been agreed that these areas cover what people think of as the range of early childhood development programs and services that should be in place and the agreement includes specific examples within each of the areas of the kinds of services intended. However, the commitment is that this is the *range* and within this range, priorities for action will be decided by each government. This was a very important point for provincial and territorial governments. Provinces and territories have responsibility for early childhood development programs and services and that responsibility is recognized in this agreement. While there is strong consensus on the importance of investments in children

and the early years, there is not consensus among governments around priorities for action. Provincial and territorial governments are currently active in establishing priorities for their jurisdictions. For example, a number of governments are interested in child care in various shapes and forms, while a number are interested in families and children at risk, particularly in the provision of pre- and post-natal services. There is also commitment to ensuring mechanisms for Canadians to participate in developing priorities and in reviewing outcomes.

Within the agreement, there is a commitment to work with Aboriginal peoples. Because the provision of services to First Nations peoples living on-reserve is a federal responsibility, the federal government is currently working with organizations representing Aboriginal peoples to address the development of services for this population.

An important inclusion in the ECD agreement is the endorsement by all governments that effective services around early childhood development are preventative, integrated, inter-sectoral, support the child within the family and community context, and are inclusive of children with disabilities as well as those in different economic and cultural circumstances.

It was agreed that funding should be incremental, predictable and sustainable in the long term. **All** governments made a commitment to investing in early childhood development. As part of the Agreement the Federal Government announced funding to be delivered through the CHST. \$2.2 billion will be allocated over the next five years in support of ECD, but it is important that **all** governments commit resources to this initiative over time.

Another key area of the Agreement is the commitment to reporting. Governments have agreed to an approach to accountability through reporting to the public. Most governments do not currently report on early childhood programs and services in a systematic way. It had not been thought about as an integrated area of programs and activities. Bringing it together and giving early childhood development a strong identity will be beneficial both in terms of tracking progress towards meeting the objectives of the ECD Agreement and in terms of thinking in an integrated way about these services. There are

three elements around reporting in the agreement.

- Governments will report annually on investments against a base-line of current early childhood expenditures and activities.
- Governments will develop a shared reporting framework with comparable program and service indicators across provinces and territories.
- Governments will report on child outcomes.

Developing meaningful and appropriate indicators and mechanisms for reporting will take some time. In some areas, mechanisms do exist that offer comparable information; this is not the case, however, for many of the areas involved. Federal and provincial governments are working on monitoring and reporting on this Agreement. The spirit is to recognize this as a collective priority while understanding that there are things that can be done collectively and things that can be done within separate jurisdictions. One of the main areas that can be addressed collectively is to develop a common framework for reporting for comparable indicators and reporting on outcomes. Currently governments are in the preliminary stages around reporting, looking at what mechanisms exist, what is the capacity of systems to collect the necessary information, what needs to be developed and put in place to ensure effective reporting, and what areas most urgently require focus. It is important to recognize that the ECD agreement covers a broad scope so that all areas will not be addressed at once.

Governments have also agreed to work together on research and knowledge, to share information about effective practice, and to better disseminate the results of research on child development. The federal government is currently examining its own monitoring and research, information and innovative practices to determine if there are areas that need to be changed, re-oriented or expanded to support the commitments in the ECD agreement.

Federal funding through CHST to support the ECD agreement will begin in April, 2001. Provinces and territories are currently undertaking the work necessary to secure the funding and to determine priorities.

Citizens and organizations need to be aware that funding for the ECD agreement is part of CHST, block funding over which, legally, provinces and territories have complete discretion. However, the amount of funding for the ECD agreement has been made public and governments have made a commitment to ensure those dollars are spent accordingly. Governments therefore are both politically and morally obliged to fulfill their commitment to early childhood development. It is the responsibility of all citizens and the voluntary sector to ensure that they do so.

In conclusion, Ms. Morgan noted that ECD funding will go on-stream in April 2001. The provinces are making decisions now about priorities for spending. Funding for ECD will be allocated through the CHST. The provinces and territories have made a moral and political commitment to allocate funds to ECD, but the voluntary sector has a role in keeping pressure on the provinces and territories to ensure that this happens.

There are several areas the federal government is still working on: firstly, the need to develop programs for Aboriginal children living on reserve; secondly, the need to continue the development of research, and thirdly, improving federal/provincial/territorial relations in general.

Ms. Morgan entertained questions from participants after her presentation:

*Question: Will you include the voluntary sector in developing indicators and accountability mechanisms as we have extensive experience in these areas?*

Ms. Morgan responded that the federal government is doing preliminary work internally, and that they would involve the voluntary sector when they are further along. The issue of how others will be involved, at what stages, and for what purposes requires further exploration both at the national and inter-governmental level and with regard to involvement of the voluntary sector. But the issue of involvement is definitely on the agenda. Regarding time-lines, the preliminary background work will be completed by Spring 2001, at which time there will be a meeting of federal/provincial/territorial ministers of social services.

*Question: Could you provide more information about how the federal government is addressing the issue of Aboriginal programs?*

Ms. Morgan responded that there is work happening at the provincial/territorial level for Aboriginal people not living on-reserve. With regard to on-reserve Aboriginal people, the Federal government and First Nations organizations, are doing a needs-assessment, and will ensure comparability with other provincial programs.

*Question: Is there understanding that governments cannot do this [ECD] work alone? There needs to be recognition that the government must involve the voluntary sector not just in monitoring aspects, but in all aspects. There is concern that once things get too far along, it is too late for involving voluntary sector expertise.*

Ms. Morgan responded that there is recognition that government has to involve the voluntary sector at all stages, especially at the provincial level, but also in federal-provincial-territorial collaborations. Some provinces have established mechanisms, and with others, this is not yet the case. Ms. Morgan noted that she will take the message back to the federal government, but that it is important that all levels of government are aware of the importance of the early engagement of the voluntary sector.

*Question: Some provincial groups have difficulty gaining access to their governments, and that there is no accountability with the CHST. In Ontario, for example, there is no "S" in CHST, so this funding mechanism is creating real accountability challenges.*

Ms. Morgan responded that the government is aware of these challenges, but it is important to note that all governments have committed to the expansion of services and to reporting. If there is no expansion of services, communities will know it.

*Question: Other governments have made commitments and not followed through in the past. What is the federal government's role in holding provinces accountable to the agreement?*

Ms. Morgan answered that this is a multi-lateral agreement. Reporting is expected within the first year. Participants can look to the next budget cycle for measures to be implemented.

*Question: Comparing the ECD monitoring model with the National Child Benefit reporting, which has not really filtered down into the communities, can we expect better dissemination of outcomes?*

Ms. Morgan responded that, from a governance and accountability perspective, the NCB reporting has been a good model, both in terms of transparency and in terms of gathering information for the first time on the action provinces and territories are taking on child poverty. Ms. Morgan did acknowledge, however, that this was a good point, and the government could do more to make this information more accessible to the public.

*Question: What will be the consequences if provinces/territories do not meet their ECD commitments? Would this impact on later stages of the National Children's Agenda?*

Ms. Morgan's answer was that the federal government's working assumption is that all governments will show progress. She assured participants that all provinces are currently working on planning and consulting.

## TOWARD STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Participants carried out an exercise in small groups to brainstorm strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats of the Alliance. It became clear during this exercise that there was a true convergence in participants' understanding in all of these areas.

### STRENGTHS

***Serendipity*** — children are a priority in public opinion and government policy.

***Capacity*** — knowledge, skills, experience, expertise, talent, financial and human resources.

***Advocacy*** — individuals' and organizations' passion, spirit and commitment.

***The way the Alliance operates*** — transparent, diverse, inclusive, level of trust, democratic, flexible; credibility with public and government at all levels; committed to collaborative process; with emerging powerful networks of credible national and grassroots organizations which can be mobilized and which are joined by a common vision.

### WEAKNESSES

***Capacity/Resources*** — geographic challenges; communications networks; limited financial resources; time, energy and workloads of member organizations; lack of experience regarding policy capacity, citizen engagement, communications and political strategy; regional, provincial and territorial networks under-developed; single source funding and resulting instability; relationship with government.

***Recognition*** — not included at provincial/territorial table with consistency; public profile under-developed; voluntary sector lacks self-confidence - unrealized potential.

***Diversity/Inclusion*** — Aboriginal people, Quebec, children/youth voices, faith groups, youth groups, multicultural, ethno-racial and linguistic minorities.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

***Government*** — newly elected federal government with strong mandate; SUFA, NCA and ECD make for important window of opportunity; government promise to preserve Canada's "social fabric".

***Resources*** — government surplus, increasing perception of need for corporations to contribute/give back to society; advances in communications technology.

***Sector positioning/influence*** — growing credibility of sector, public trust is high, collaborative networking of sector, momentum resulting from accomplishments, collaboration and experience; International Year of the Volunteer 2001, citizen engagement called for in SUFA, NCA, ECD.

## **THREATS**

***Government*** — changing nature of government decision-making - shifting roles and powers, impact of globalization; lack of political will; dependence of sector on public funding (fear of being co-opted); narrowing perspective, non-comprehensive approach to children's services (focus on early childhood initiative); possibility of an economic down-turn.

***Public*** — Changing demographics and societal priorities; polarization - have and have-not provinces; polarization in the media, public opinion (declining interest in social welfare).

***Voluntary Sector*** — Being in a reactive rather than proactive mode; competition for resources.

An exercise was then carried out to link these strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats together to arrive at strategic directions for the

next few years.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Small groups worked to identify strategic directions. Again, very consistent themes emerged.

### **Network:**

- strengthen and broaden membership of the National Children's Alliance
- facilitate development/strengthening of Provincial and Territorial Alliances:
- replicate this weekend's process in the provinces and territories (funding for travel subsidies)
- identify leadership in each province/territory and provide support to them in operationalizing provincial/territorial alliances
- National Children's Alliance member organizations promote participation in provincial and territorial alliances and assist in identifying and connecting with key people/organizations
- assist/support provincial/territorial alliances in capacity building, communications, consultation, government relations activities (mentoring role), and the development of implementation plans
- develop a resource to assist in the development of provincial/territorial alliances - suggested models, membership, modes of operation and decision-making
- develop a blue-print of services within the Children's Alliance vision
- clarify and refine the roles of the Alliance and its provincial/territorial affiliates concerning the ECD and the National Children's Agenda

### **Communication:**

- operationalize a communications network for federal/ provincial/ territorial information, policies, successful strategies, important events, political changes etc., to share learning (e.g. national best practices info system); encourage provincial/regional/local groups to provide updates on National Children's Agenda related activities
- provide a broad range of communication materials from which organizations can draw, including a short-form position paper for government and community engagement, brochures, newsletters, materials appropriate for provincial/territorial elections

***Public Education/Citizen Engagement:***

- educate the public on National Children's Agenda and ECD agreement and support their engagement in the process
- support grass roots and citizen engagement by raising awareness of resources/expertise/knowledge in the Alliance's collective networks which will enable them to hold their governments accountable for the implementation of the NCA and ECD
- undertake policy development work on engagement mechanisms, indicators/outcomes, accountability, etc. for communities to use in order to hold governments accountable
- increase public understanding of the value of supporting children and families

***Government :***

- focus on getting Children's Alliance members to all decision-making tables
- focus on both federal and provincial/territorial levels of government
- push for funding commitments for programs and services for 6 - 12 and 12 - 18 year old children
- continue to promote National Children's Agenda with all levels of government
- establish a presence in decision-making process, agenda, evaluation mechanisms and indicators
- focus on national leadership role to enable the Alliance to move into the specific program areas it wants to influence
- develop and implement strategy to pressure governments to work in transparent processes
- make political connections to take advantage of new government - insert ourselves into the political process

## WRAP-UP

### Al Hatton

Al spoke about the recent work of the Steering Committee, which has been preparing over the last few months to get the resources necessary to move the agenda forward. Funding has been received from two departments, HRDC and Health Canada, both of which have important roles to play in the National Children's Agenda. Dianne Bascombe and Liz Sutherland, who have been working on a half-time basis on Children's Alliance work will be full-time as of February. This marks the beginning of an infrastructure.

Funding will be delivered through a secretariat at the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations for the Alliance. The Alliance's expectations for the ECD agreement and the broader Agenda are somewhat different from those of the government, so there is some work to be done.

The Alliance will be working on being responsive to regional needs, but members are also hearing the need for national leadership. The level of resources which are currently committed are not sufficient to meet these expectations, but it represents a beginning.

Al thanked Pierre for his great abilities as a facilitator, pointing out that many facilitators take you where *they* want you to go, but Pierre has the special ability to take you where *you* want to go.

### Dianne Bascombe

Dianne advised participants that there would be a number of opportunities for feedback and critical thinking on the vision we've developed here. The first opportunity will come with an invitation for feedback distributed with these proceedings.

Even though the National Children's Alliance has no formal consensus-building process, the Alliance has been successful in finding places where commonality and support already exist. This has allowed us to move forward quickly and flexibly.

The strengths noted today are great – but it is also important to recognize that the success of the Children’s Alliance has come from a lot of work over four years. The Alliance has a couple of years of hard work ahead – the desired changes are difficult to achieve and will come only over the long term. The Alliance will have to “inch” toward them.

One of the challenges is to manage expectations, both those of the Alliance as well as those of our coalition partners and communities. The Children’s Alliance aims to change the world but this will not happen in two years.

Dianne reminded the national partners that they were welcome to attend the Saturday provincial/territorial session. She noted that this session will include a discussion of concrete action plans.

In terms of next steps, the Steering Committee will take the priorities established today and create a two year action plan. The committee will be looking for feedback from participants on this.

## **DAY 3: December 9, 2000**

### **PROVINCIAL/TERRITORIAL REPRESENTATIVES MEETING**

Dianne welcomed everyone and reviewed the purpose of the session: to share information on progress within the provinces and territories and to explore ways in which the National Children's Alliance might provide support to organizations in the provinces and territories. The session began with a brief discussion on issues that arose from the National Workshop.

One major topic of discussion was the question of funding for early childhood programs, and the perception that this focus may be at the expense of other age groups. Dianne observed that a central role for the Alliance is to reinforce the message that everyone is working together on a broad agenda. Participants noted that there is the potential for tension between early childhood organizations and those working for older children and it may be a considerable time before older children's needs are addressed by additional government funding. It is important that realistic expectations are fostered, and that the National Children's Alliance and provincial/ territorial alliances actively address the needs of all children so that efforts are collaborative and messages are harmonized.

The point was raised that there must be a more formal mechanism for sharing information on expectations and that coalitions need to aim for a framework that brings groups representing the needs of older children onside. Coalitions must also reinforce the message that the work on the ECD agreement is a starting point in addressing the National Children's Agenda and may serve as a model for working on all issues within the Agenda.

Other highlights from the opening discussion include:

- When money is available, the Alliance affiliates will have to work to ensure that it is spent in a way that makes sense in the provinces/ territories
- Part of the task will be to help create a culture in government around

consultation; another challenge will be to create sustained pressure on governments so they cannot say they have “done” children’s issues

- With reference to the debate around income vs. services, it is important that coalitions continue to reinforce the message that both are of crucial importance
- Differences in level and range of services available in different provinces/territories were discussed. Building the networks will ensure information is shared, so that comparisons can be made and used to pressure government to ensure equity across provinces and territories.
- The National Children's Alliance is looking at how to involve Quebec in its processes and will be holding a consultation in that province, driven by Quebec organizations, to explore ways of collaborating despite the fact that Quebec did not sign the Social Union Framework Agreement, the National Children's Agenda, or the ECD agreement.
- Several participants commented on the need to engage with Aboriginal communities. National Aboriginal organizations ended up with a separate stream of services within the ECD agreement. It was emphasized that Aboriginal Head Start must work integrally with ECD programs. At a minimum the Alliance must make connections with the Aboriginal Head Start Program Board. It was noted that the Canadian Child Care Federation is working to strengthen links with Aboriginal groups. Different collaborative models must be used in working with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. Pressing needs within Aboriginal communities must be considered.
- There was discussion around sharing information on consultation models – both voluntary sector and government-initiated – as some provincial/territorial governments seem unsure how to proceed.
- Finally, there was discussion around the expectations that the National Children's Alliance has for provincial and territorial representatives and provincial and local organizations. It was confirmed that mutual goals cannot be reached unless players at all levels are working together. The National Children's Alliance will be focused on supporting provincial/territorial and regional work as much as possible through the development of its communications networks.

## **ACTION PLANNING**

Provincial and territorial representatives clearly felt that facilitating the development of new and existing provincial/ territorial alliance groups and developing communications tools and resources were of paramount importance. Suggestions were offered for activities that both the National Children's Alliance could undertake at a national level, as well activities that provincial/territorial representatives or groups could undertake.

### Suggestions for national-level work:

- Replicate this national workshop in each of the provinces and territories
- Develop a model which could be replicated by provincial/territorial alliances for structure, process, membership, etc., with consideration for the circumstances organizations face (e.g., limited resources)
- Establish a core group of interested individuals in each province and territory (national organizations could recommend participants) who could host an invitational event to draw organizations into the process
- The National Children's Alliance member organizations can encourage and facilitate participation of their member organizations in provincial/territorial alliances
- Develop a short communications piece with key messages and positions of the National Children's Alliance and illustrating the importance of provincial/territorial alliance groups.
- Develop a central data-base and list-servs of local/provincial/territorial and national organizations affiliated with the National Children's Alliance and provincial/territorial representatives to facilitate communications
- The Children's Alliance can provide support in government relations by promoting the Alliance work with provincial/territorial governments and enhancing the skills of provincial/territorial organizations in working with government
- Develop communications/public education pieces and a concise media strategy with key messages to ensure that messages are consistent
- Utilize existing pan-Canadian networks (e.g., "Nobody's Perfect" parenting programs) to bring experienced individuals into the process
- Disseminate proceedings of these meetings and suggest a joint plan for

conducting similar meetings in the provinces/territories

- Develop a news bulletin to provide timely information on progress at the provincial/territorial and national level on the National Children's Agenda
- Develop election kits for use in provincial/territorial elections with questions for candidates, ideas for forums/town halls, op ed pieces, etc.

Suggestions for provincial/territorial level work:

- Review groups currently involved in collaborative processes with a view to identifying and filling gaps
- Keep the National Children's Alliance informed of progress, issues, successful strategies, copies of letters/presentations to provincial/territorial governments, etc.
- Capitalize on opportunities to build collaborative networks

## **CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS**

The proceedings from these meetings will be widely disseminated . The Children's Alliance Steering Committee will be working on a two year work plan which will benefit greatly from the input of the provincial and territorial representatives. This work plan will take into account the recommended strategic priorities developed at the National Workshop, and the needs expressed by provincial/territorial representatives in terms of the ways in which the National Children's Alliance can foster provincial/territorial coalitions.

The Alliance will develop a mechanism for feedback on the work plan and encourage active participation from affiliates at the national, provincial/territorial and local levels.

## National Workshop Participant List

### National member organization representatives:

|                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| Angela Bell         | YMCA of Greater Toronto (for YMCA Canada)                      |
| Janet Davies        | Canadian Nurses Association                                    |
| Margaret Fietz      | Family Service Canada  |
| Norma Freeman       | Canadian Public Health Association                             |
| Sandra Griffin      | Canadian Child Care Federation                                 |
| Al Hatton           | Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations                  |
| Pamela Heneault     | Canadian Living Foundation                                     |
| Kathryn Ann Hill    | United Way of Canada – Centraide Canada                        |
| Alla Ivask          | Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs               |
| Wendy James         | Child Welfare League of Canada                                 |
| Marcel Lauzière     | Canadian Council on Social Development                         |
| Cynthia Magloughlin | Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada                      |
| Pauline Mantha      | Learning Disabilities Association of Canada                    |
| Mike McKnight       | Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada                             |
| Marie Pierce        | Canadian School Boards Association                             |
| Margaret Potié      | Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada |
| Dianne Rogers       | Canadian Institute of Child Health                             |
| Sandra Schwartz     | Pollution Probe  |
| Karen Takacs        | YWCA of/du Canada  |
| Harvey Weiner       | Canadian Teachers' Federation                                  |

### Provincial/territorial representatives:

|                          |                             |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pedro Barata             | Toronto, Ontario            |
| Marianne Drew-Pennington | Vancouver, British Columbia |
| Heidi Fisher-Phillips    | Regina, Saskatchewan        |
| Lyda Fuller              | Yellowknife, NWT            |
| Mary Goss-Prowse         | St. John's, Newfoundland    |
| Anna Marie Leblanc-Hayes | Woodstock, New Brunswick    |
| Doug McGiffin            | Winnipeg, Manitoba          |

Sara Middleton  
Elaine Owljoot  
Ann Robertson  
Angela Stewart  
Irene Szabla

Fallis, Alberta  
Arviat, Nunavut  
Charlottetown, PEI  
Dartmouth, Nova Scotia  
Whitehorse, Yukon

**Hosts/facilitators**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Dianne Bascombe | Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations |
| Lee Dunster     | Consultant                                    |
| Pierre Lacroix  | Facilitator                                   |
| Liz Sutherland  | Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations |