

**National Children's Alliance**  
**April 23, 2002**

**RE: Knowledge Matters Response from the National Children's Alliance**

In launching Canada's Innovation Strategy on February 12, 2002 the Honourable Jane Stewart Minister of Human Resources Development Canada described the strategy as "supporting both economic growth and social development". Minister Stewart stated that this is a long term agenda and said that "as a result of our work on the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development strategies, we have built strong stakeholder partnerships focusing on our youngest citizens. I'm absolutely convinced that, by placing our work in support of children in a broader and dynamic skills and learning strategy, we will re-energize those partnerships and continue to find the best approaches to make sure our kids have the best start possible".

In her foreword to the paper Minister Stewart states that "This paper is an invitation from the Government of Canada to participate in a national dialogue..." The National Children's Alliance looks forward to continuing to play a leadership role in shaping public policy that improves the well-being our children and youth. Prior to the release of the paper Minister Stewart met with the National Children's Alliance to provide a briefing on the upcoming announcement. Minister Stewart made a clear commitment to children's issues and to ensuring that the Alliance would play an important role in the upcoming consultation process to support HRDC policy development on the skills and learning agenda.

It is important to note that in "Knowledge Matters" the federal commitment to the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development agreement was highlighted several times. A working group of the National Children's Alliance met to review the paper and provide feedback to HRDC. The paper lays a foundation for the upcoming dialogue and the Alliance is preparing to contribute to the policy development process. As a starting point, the working group highlighted some key areas that were not clearly identified in the paper that need be addressed in the consultation process. The

following key points will strengthen the dialogue and provide a more comprehensive, realistic and inclusive approach to human development, skills and learning:

1. Women have special needs in order to participate fully in a dynamic and skilled labour force. Biological considerations due to conception, birth and parenting lead to different career patterns that require options for training, retraining and updating.
2. The labour force is largely comprised of parents with family responsibilities. While the paper discussed early childhood development there is no reference to how children are cared for while their parents are participating in the skilled labour force. Learning from our European colleagues, the approach used to address the needs of working parents is a child care strategy. This is important for all families but the need for lone parent workers is critical.
3. Early labour force experience often begins in adolescence. A strategy needs to address the unique challenges and opportunities for young people. As they are often working part-time while continuing education, a strategy needs to ensure they develop appropriate skills in a healthy and safe environment free from labour force exploitation.
4. There are special challenges faced by many segments of the population that need to be addressed. Entry into the labour force for many is severely compromised by a lack of necessary skills and learning due to the adverse circumstances they have faced such as for children in care of the state, FAS/FAE, learning and physical disabilities etc. For example, the education and training needs of those children with FAS/FAE require different learning supports throughout a lifetime, not only in early childhood development. While disability issues were included in the document there is also a need to consider the growing number of children with learning disabilities who will enter the labour market. Providing lifelong learning opportunities and skills development for all our children as they grow will be the challenge of a comprehensive system and inclusive society.
5. Occupational health issues are also part of inclusive strategy. All workers need to work in environments safe from contaminants. It should be noted that women in

- childbearing years need particular protection from fumes and other contaminants that affect their and their children's future health.
6. Self-employment and small business development are increasing important economic drivers and need to be supported within a skills and learning strategy.
  7. The paper focuses on the formal education system but it is important to recognize that children and youth also experience learning and skills development through a variety of community supports and programs. Recreation, sports and the arts are critical to child development and the capacity to participate in a complex knowledge based economy.
  8. In the paper there were some suggested milestones for skills and learning. Recognizing the changing nature of our skilled labour market means that the indicators we use to assess how our people are equipped to participate must be broadened to include all aspects of human development and well-being. Access to training opportunities is not enough, we should also consider access to the broad range of social and community supports, particularly for children in assuring they reach their potential.
  9. Another issue identified by the working group was the role of third party monitoring in measuring progress. To quote the paper monitoring progress will "require a better understanding of the relationships between learning outcomes and key learning determinants in the home, school and the community". This is an area where the National Children's Alliance is already taking leadership in our work on monitoring and child outcome indicators in the context of the Early Childhood Development agreement.