

National Children's Alliance

Newsletter



Improving the Lives of Children & Youth

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The National Children's Alliance held its annual national symposium, March 24rd-26th, 2004, at the Kananaskis Resort and Conference Centre in Alberta. Over 75 participants, both veteran members and new friends of the NCA from a diverse range of organizations, enthusiastically attended three full days of professional development, panel presentations, stimulating discussion and strategic planning related to strengthening the collective voice advocating on behalf of children in Canada. Apart from the increase in understanding of Aboriginal issues and service delivery challenges and the beginnings of an Action Plan as developed in the PATH

workshop, the other most notable outcomes of the conference were the potential collaborations and awareness-raising that occurred among organizations whose mandates involve children but who were unaware of what the others were doing.

The goal of the two-day conference was to learn about challenges to the health and well-being of Aboriginal children and to understand how all children can be helped to reach their potential through community services, infrastructure, partnerships, public policy and advocacy; and learn from other strategies and policy options in order to advocate for change to improve the lives of all vulnerable children in Canada.

By the end of the conference, participants

had been re-energized to confront, with renewed vigor, the challenges their organizations face on behalf of children. They returned home with the momentum to strengthen the collective voice for children and to advocate for both the tiny action steps and the larger than life visions they had helped develop.

In closing Harvey Weiner emphasized, "The need for relationships is key to sustainable development and continued work with government. Effective advocacy and influence is more than meetings and briefs. It is developing policy alternatives and solutions in collaboration with government at all three levels with the membership. Passion is a key component of effective advocacy."

"The challenges faced by aboriginal children and their families are enormous. It is how we address these challenges will define the character of our nation today and into the future."

Proceedings of the Conference at
www.nationalchildrensalliance.com/

CARING ACROSS THE BOUNDARIES

On February 23, 2004 the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, in collaboration with the NCA, presented "Caring Across the Boundaries". This was the trial-run of a one-day course designed to raise the awareness of the voluntary sector about the capacities and needs of First Nations communities and to facilitate collaboration between the sector and Aboriginal agencies serving children and families on reserves. More than 30 people attended the course.

The course is based on the results of the Voluntary Sector Initiative Project of the same name, which found very little evidence of current collaboration between the voluntary sector and First Nations child- and family-serving agencies. The demographic data on Aboriginal children underscores the need for greater support from the sector to work with First Nations agencies on reserves in confronting the massive problems of poverty, neglect and substance abuse, and their corresponding impact on the physical and emotional health of children and youth.

The participants undertook a "vision quest" exercise to pictorialize how their organizations envisage working with First Nations peoples, assessed their cultural competence to do so, and finally developed action plans to move toward the goal of creating a more inclusive world for Aboriginal and other children in Canada.

The evening banquet was used as an occasion to recognize those organizations that had already taken the first steps towards collaborating with First Nations in trying to improve how the needs of Aboriginal children are served. Ten First Step certificates were presented.

NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE and THE CANADIAN COALITION ON THE RIGHTS OF CHILDREN

(OTTAWA – 10 MAY 2004) It is an important day with the release of *A Canada Fit for Children*, the federal government's national plan of action resulting from its commitment made to the international community at the United Nations Special Session on Children in May 2002. It builds on the foundation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and on the vision of the National Children's Agenda. "Senator Landon Pearson has been the driving force behind this critical document", says Sandra Griffin, Chair of the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children. "Her leadership has made a significant contribution to children's rights in Canada and to our continuing international role that began in 1990 at the World Summit on Children".

A Canada Fit for Children articulates strong principles that not only protect the fundamental human rights of children, but also recognize an inclusive vision for a world where every child in Canada can reach their potential and can participate fully in their society. The Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children and the National Children's Alliance look forward to the immediate next steps that will bring to life the responsibilities of governments identified by the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Their Concluding Observations on Canada's report recommended the establishment of "a set of time-bound and measurable goals and targets", as well as "national monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the impact of our actions on children".

"With the upcoming federal election, we are anticipating a renewed commitment to the National Children's Agenda that places priority on a deepened social investment for children and youth; this should be done within a Canada Social Transfer that reflects the principles and values that Canadians hold for their social programs", says Dianne Bascombe, Executive Director of the National Children's Alliance. She agreed that "*A Canada Fit for Children* can only become reality when we have time-bound and measurable goals and targets, with strong public accountability, assured through support for third-party monitoring".

The release of *A Canada Fit for Children* today brings a new hope that children and youth will become the centre of public policy and legislation. It challenges all levels of government and the community to work together to chart the course with defined goals and targets so that every child in Canada reaches their potential. The voluntary/NGO sector is ready to take up its role in accountability by working collectively to monitor how we are doing in Canada to support children, youth and their families. We call on the federal government today to put children at the top of the agenda – Canadians have been clear that this is their priority.

As the young participants at the UN Special Session told the adult world leaders, "A world fit for us is a world for everyone". We all agree that a Canada fit for children is a Canada fit for all of us.

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Spotlight on The Alliance

Earlier this year, the National Children's Alliance conducted a member survey, soliciting responses through e-mail and telephonic communications.

Its purpose was to:

- determine the benefits of membership;
- investigate the relationship of members to the Alliance;
- confirm past achievements;
- identify gaps in Alliance activities;
- comment on the organizational model and style of leadership used by the Alliance;
- solicit alternative methods of communication; and
- suggest future directions and priorities for activities for the next 12 months.

The members continue to trust in the leadership of the Alliance and the direction taken by the Steering Committee on behalf of the entire membership. The respondents agreed that more member participation in policy work would be ideal but that the constraints on resources would continue to dictate how members 'cherry picked' their issues. Priority issues need to be relevant to their own organizations and they will try to participate more fully if that 'match' is evident.

E-mails and being directed to the Alliance website were deemed to be the best forms of on-going communications. Attendance at symposia and regional meetings would continue as long as the event had a specific focus (such as the Disabilities and Aboriginal conferences/workshops) and resources were available (internally or through the Alliance). They would continue to distribute Alliance research material and policy statements within their networks.

On the whole, the members felt that the coalition was what they expected it to be.

"The Alliance works well across the issues, keeping members current. Keep up the good work!"

"I feel the greatest benefit is in the up-dates which keeps everyone abreast of any new development with regards to national and provincial

Future actions for the National Children's Alliance

- Strengthening social programs and reducing negative impacts of poverty
- Keeping children and family on the agenda (i.e. ECDI, National Children's Agenda, child care, new public health agency)
- Create an overarching political advocacy strategy regarding children and their families
- Increasing visibility of children's disabilities and their families (0-19 yr)
- More involvement with a Youth focus (6-18 year olds)
- Actively monitoring Canada's National Plan for action implementation and continuing training on monitoring and evaluating mechanisms
- Continuing the vigilance by the voluntary sector to ensure government actually moves forward with its commitments
- Finding a way to formalize Senator Pearson's role as the pan-Canadian Children's Champion within the federal government
- Developing capacity for information gathering on children's health and well being at the national level
- Facilitating and strengthening provincial and territorial alliances of member organizations
- Continuing work with Aboriginal organizations and communities
- Developing a strategic plan that reviews and reaffirms vision, mission, goals, components and activities
- Injury prevention
- Pushing for Community Infrastructure Fund
- Building community capacity for supportive, inclusive communities for all children
- Active Healthy Living

View the entire report at
www.nationalchildrensalliance.com

"Limited resources to contribute to the Alliance mean that our level of participation is dependent on our funding level from the federal

Welcome to Our New Members!

Several new organizations joined the National Children's Alliance this quarter. The addition of the *Students' Commission* and *Street Kids International* will give unique expertise and added momentum to the Alliance's new initiative to develop a national strategy for youth. The *National Association of Friendship Centres* and *Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association* bring two more national Aboriginal organizations on board to continue our important work in fostering collaborations between the mainstream voluntary sector and First Nations social service agencies. The *Canadian Movement for Literacy* offers a perspective that the Alliance has not previously addressed to any significant degree.

NCA MEMBERSHIP

The Children's Alliance membership has grown at a remarkable pace and now includes 60 national organizations committed to improving the health and well-being of children and youth in Canada.

While the Children's Alliance's policy agenda has developed and been enhanced over the years, it has always encompassed three core components: sustaining families; building healthy children, families and communities; and accountability to Canadians and the world.

Inherent in all of these components has been the element of building capacity in the voluntary sector and enhancing the participation of the voluntary sector in policy development.

The Children's Alliance has been extremely successful, with high levels of engagement and participation of its member organizations. The Children's Alliance uses creative ways of working. It remains light, nimble and responsive. It consistently builds on the strengths, expertise and resources of member organizations and maximizes limited resources and staffing to benefit the collective.

If you are not already a member, consider this your standing invitation to join the team and help make things happen.

NCA MEMBERS

Adoption Council of Canada
 Allergy Asthma Information Association
 Big Brothers Big Sisters Canada
 Boys & Girls Clubs of Canada
 Canadian Association for Community Living
 Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
 Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation & Dance
 Canadian Association of Food Banks
 Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
 Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres
 Canadian Association of Social Workers
 Canadian Child Care Federation
 Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
 Canadian Council on Social Development
 Canadian Institute of Child Health
 Canadian Living Foundation
 Canadian Mental Health Association
 Canadian Nurses Association
 Canadian Paediatric Society
 Canadian Parents for French
 Canadian Parks & Recreation Association
 Canadian Public Health Association
 Canadian School Boards Association
 Canadian Teacher's Federation
 Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
 Child Welfare League of Canada
 La Commission nationale des parents francophones
 Family Service Canada
 Fédération des communautés francophone et acadienne du Canada
 First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada
 Foundation for Active Healthy Kids
 Frontier College
 Hospital for Sick Children Foundation
 Kids Help Phone
 Laidlaw Foundation
 Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
 Movement for Canadian Literacy
 National Anti-Poverty Organization
 National Association of Friendship Centres
 National Early Intervention Network
 National Youth in Care Network
 Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association
 Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada
 Pollution Probe
 Safe Kids Canada
 Save the Children Canada
 Scouts Canada
 Special Link: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion
 SOS Children's Villages Canada
 Street Kids International
 The Students' Commission
 UNICEF Canada
 United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada
 Vanier Institute of the Family
 YouCan
 YMCA Canada
 YWCA of /du Canada

Advocacy Activities

Speak Out for Children

The National Children's Alliance has put together a Community Action Guide for you and your network to use when preparing and meeting the candidates leading up to the election date.

Presented in an easy-to-use format of statistics followed by sample questions you can ask your candidate, *Speak Out for Children* can be modified to suit your local areas of interest. Here are some samples.

Did you know?

- A 2-income family, with two children, that lives on minimum wage in a large Canadian city, lives below the poverty line.
- Youth community participation has been shown to result in decreased risky behaviours such as substance abuse, smoking and criminal activity.
- While Canada has consistently ranked among the top ten countries in the world in which to live, according to the United Nations Human Development Index, First Nations people living on reserves in Canada rank 78th using the same scale.
- In the last 5 years, user fees have increased for programs delivered by municipal recreation departments in Canada. Access to recreation, sports and cultural opportunities is much lower for children living in poverty.

Ask the questions:

- Does your party support increased funding for social programs such as the National Child Tax Benefit, which supports the incomes of lower and middle class families?
- Will your party stop the cuts to social programs that help children and youth reach their full potential?
- What will your party do to address the huge disparity in quality of life that Aboriginal children experience compared to their non-native counterparts?
- Will your party invest in community recreation opportunities for children?

Visit www.nationalchildrensalliance.com to download your copy.

**SPEAK OUT
FOR
CHILDREN**

COMMUNITY
ACTION GUIDE



NEED A QUICK TOOL TO EXPLAIN THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE?

"... speaking out for canada's children ... " provides Alliance members with a quick reference for presentations to Boards, volunteers, local politicians, funders, community members, anyone

Visit www.nationalchildrensalliance.com to download your copy.



COMING UP...

**June 28, 2004
VOTE!!!**

**November 2004
Youth Roundtable**

**March 2005
Annual Symposium**

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD AND PUBLIC POLICY

This was a two-day discussion on how to monitor and ensure implementation of the commitments made by the federal government under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The meeting was organized by the Society for Children and Youth of British Columbia, the International Institute for Child Rights and Development at the University of Victoria, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, and the National Children's Alliance.

The presentations and discussions looked at the existing international and domestic agreements under which the federal government agreed to uphold the rights and needs of children. Most of the public policy measures of the past few years have been encouraging in terms of their intent, but implementation is far from complete and the goal of the conference was to see how the foundational framework of the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be used to promote the fulfillment of those public commitments. Awareness of the Convention in general is still limited, not only among the general public, but also among policy analysts and decision-makers in government.

The courts are one avenue for seeking enforcement of the rights provided for children in the Convention. In Canada alone, over 100 cases have made reference to the provisions of the Convention, several at the Supreme Court level. Other jurisdictions have also cited the CRC in their courts, as well as using other means of promoting the principles behind the document, such as through other legislation or through political offices to protect children. There is some question within the NGO community as to whether our advocacy efforts should focus exclusively on promoting the CRC or whether we should explore other ways to realize its principles.

Another tool for raising awareness of the Convention has been created by the Canadian Coalition on the Rights of Children and its partners. The *Community Monitoring Toolkit* is ready for distribution and will be used to measure how the promises attached to the CRC are being implemented, and what impact they are having at the community level.

The involvement of children, in monitoring the fulfillment of promises made to them, is a critical element and right enshrined by the CRC. The Youth Engagement group made the compelling case for young people's right to participation.

Evidence-based advocacy is also a critical factor in ensuring the successful implementation of the CRC. As outlined in the opening session, there are a plethora of domestic agreements that have come out of signing the CRC and out of the UN Special Session on Children. Data on how Canada's children are doing is being collected in different places, yet it is inconsistent and it is not being shared. The National Children's Alliance is proposing a collective data strategy to supplement and support the existing statistics to get an overall picture of the health and well-being of Canada's children. Hopefully, it will then be easier to determine whether the Convention is being respected or not.

The National Plan of Action is the overarching document for carrying out the commitments made at the Special Session. Senator Landon Pearson explained the most recent progress (or lack thereof) on the Plan being adopted by Cabinet. Her determination and commitment ensures that the Plan will be the cornerstone of the national public policy agenda for children.

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[For more information: www.rightsofchildren.ca]

NEW HOME!

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