

Child & Youth Strategy

2nd Annual Provincial Symposium

October 5 & 6, 2011

Summary Report

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Introduction

On October 5 & 6, 2011, the second annual Child & Youth Strategy Provincial Symposium was held at the Best Western Glengarry Hotel and Conference Center, Truro. Present were Minister Peterson-Rafuse and Minister Jennex, representatives from all provincial, regional, and community tables within the Child & Youth Strategy, and staff of the Offices of Aboriginal Affairs, Acadian Affairs, African Nova Scotian Affairs, Immigration and the Status of Women. Also present were members of the provincial youth network Leaders of Today (LOT) and representatives of First Nation communities.

The purpose of the Symposium was to:

- *provide an opportunity for all stakeholders to meet and exchange information;*
- *provide a chance to raise and discuss issues of importance to those gathered;*
- *provide an update on the Child & Youth Strategy's Four Focus Areas;*
- *gather input regarding potential future Child & Youth Strategy priority areas and how to advance these priorities.*

Day 1: October 5 2011

Welcome & Opening Remarks

On the first evening of the Symposium, Cathy Martin, First Nations representative, opened the Symposium with a sweet grass blessing. She also spoke about Jordan's Principle and the value of work that advances outcomes for all youth.

George Savoury, Executive Director of the Child & Youth Strategy, also welcomed delegates from across the province. He noted attendance and representation from all the regions in the province and from service sectors serving children and youth. Mr. Savoury was pleased to be accompanied by members of the Child & Youth Strategy Committee, as well as Ministers Jennex and Peterson-Rafuse.

Minister of Community Services and lead Minister for the Strategy, Denise Peterson-Rafuse welcomed the participants to the second annual Child & Youth Symposium. She extended her thanks to those present from all the regions and various sectors, noting the importance of everyone's role in the success of the Strategy. In particular, Minister Peterson-Rafuse singled out the young people present, acknowledging the influence of their energy, leadership and presence. The Minister reminded participants of their impact on strengthening the Strategy's focus areas and direction at last year's Symposium, She encouraged everyone to participate fully in the dialogue and information sharing over the next two days to similarly influence the ongoing work of the Strategy.

In closing, Minister Peterson-Rafuse acknowledged with pleasure the presence of Minister of Education and Minister of Youth, Ramona Jennex and invited her to address the delegates.

Minister Jennex expressed her delight in being able to attend the Symposium. She also welcomed all delegates and noted she and Minister Peterson-Rafuse has been together with several of the LOT representatives earlier in the week as well, and was happy to see them again. Minister Jennex commented on the importance of working together and commended efforts within the Strategy to model this principle. She wished participants well and thanked them for their commitment to young people and families.

CYSC Update

George Savoury provided an update of the work of the Strategy since the last Provincial Symposium. He presented a brief historical perspective of the genesis of the Strategy, noting the value of the contributions of its predecessors; early coordinated youth services work in the regions and across the province, the Youth Secretariat, and CAYAC. He also reiterated that the Child & Youth Strategy's priorities include inter departmental, inter sectoral, and multi layered child centred initiatives to close gaps, decrease barriers and increase collaboration amongst and between government and service providers. While not a funding body, the Child & Youth Strategy supported some early pilots, like Schools Plus, which have since been transitioned to regular departmental programming. Stressing the importance of collaboration and the need to make sure it happens every day as a way of doing business, Mr. Savoury noted the strength of the Strategy's governance model in supporting this. He also commended the Provincial Youth Network in its role of advising government on issues that involve young people.

Mr. Savoury noted some of the operational highlights of the last year, including work on Information Sharing Protocols, expansion of the Schools Plus model to all School Boards, and the progress related to the Early Development Instrument as an excellent data collection tool. While many positive things have occurred in the past year, Mr. Savoury noted we still have a lot of work to do. Specifically related to the Early Years, concerns have been expressed to Inter Governmental Affairs related to the Enhanced Home Visiting/ Early Beginnings program funding. He also recognized challenges in data gathering and analysis and in the sharing of information.

In closing, Mr. Savoury stated he and the Child & Youth Strategy Committee believe there are many opportunities in the Strategy, and that there is much potential to identify and overcome challenges and barriers. He stressed that for change to happen, we need to discuss the need for change in advance and to come together willingly to build on prior successes. Mr. Savoury noted he was looking forward to the dialogue and discussion to be generated over the next two days and in the coming months.

Leaders of Today (LOT)

Members of LOT, Leaders of Today, engaged the group with a game called *Mingle~mingle*, which was designed to get to know people in the room. Following this ice breaker, members of Leaders of Today described what LOT is. They spoke of youth networks coming together to connect with government to share information, learn new skills, and promote youth engagement. Youth led grant making was discussed, as was the upcoming LOT Summit. An invitation was extended to everyone to participate in LOT 6 at Camp Brigadoon, and join with other young people and adults trying to make a difference. The young people expressed their desire to create an environment - at LOT and

in the regions throughout the year - where government really talks to and builds relationships with youth.

Social Time

The evening closed with an informal reception. Several youth provided musical entertainment during that time.

Day Two: October 6, 2011

Focus Area Updates

On day two of the Symposium, delegates were treated to a continental breakfast and opportunity to network and catch up with colleagues and new friends. Linda Atkinson, Director of the Child & Youth Strategy, convened day two by welcoming delegates and reminding them that the four Focus Areas of the Strategy were informed by last year's Symposium. Also that energy from last year's Symposium has contributed to the progress to date within the Strategy. Ms. Atkinson invited Focus Area Leads to provide a brief update on their work. She noted the focus areas reflect a shared leadership model with a departmental champion at the executive level, a work group lead, a cross departmental work team and a Child & Youth Strategy liaison. Ms. Atkinson advised that delegate feedback and comments on the work would happen in small group sessions to follow, but general questions would be taken by each presenter.

Focus Area 1: Youth Engagement (Moe Green, Work Team Lead)

Mr. Green, spoke of the great diversity of youth and the need to seek out a variety of ways to engage them. He also spoke of the need to develop and access better tools to communicate with young people. Through his presentation, a variety of issues were raised related to connecting with African Nova Scotian, Acadian, Aboriginal, youth in care and immigrant youth. Mr. Green also noted that much good work has occurred and still goes on. In particular, he mentioned the importance of youth engagement and an understanding by adults, organizations and government of its value.

Focus Area 2: Collaborative Service Delivery (Tara Moore, Team Lead)

Ms. Moore discussed the need to figure out how to work better together to help the youth and families with more complex issues. She noted this seems to be a theme and common challenge affecting many programs. She spoke of the need to build better policies and ways of doing business that not only promote collaborative practice, but require it. Ms. Moore explained that the work team was building on practices which encourage collaborative work, such as Schools Plus, and that they were continuing to identify and respond to barriers to this kind of practice. In particular, significant work has been undertaken related to Information Sharing Protocols.

Focus Area 3: Horizontal Practices (Tonya Comeau, Team Liaison)

Ms. Comeau presented a number of points related to horizontal practices, particularly, the importance of multi departmental involvement and accountability for the successful implementation of the Child & Youth Strategy across government. She referenced the role of not only the Focus Area team, but also that of Leadership Teams, regional and local community tables, and key government committees like the Better Health Care Deputy Ministers to promote the coordination of work, to have an articulation of the four Child & Youth Strategy Focus Areas in all departmental business plans, and to start using common language to operationalize the Strategy.

Focus Area 4: Evaluation and Data Collection (Francine Vezina, Team Lead)

Ms. Vezina commenced her presentation with the suggestion the Child & Youth Strategy is ready to move beyond the evaluation of pilots, and towards building and supporting an environment of evaluation which defines clearly the desired outcomes and goals of the Strategy. She spoke of the challenges related to gathering the kind of research and data that would best support outcome measurements, as the goals of the Strategy are significantly influenced by the work occurring in other government departments and in the community. The work team connected to Focus Area 4 continues to have discussions with departmental data collection staff and are working towards better defining the available baseline data and what is still needed. Ms. Vezina also spoke of the need to evaluate the work of the Strategy with a variety of lenses to help attribute change in the outcome measures more specifically to operation successes, shifts in collaborative practices, or changes resulting from demographic, community, individual, or systems fluctuations.

Immediately after the Focus Area presentations, Symposium participants were given an opportunity to discuss in more detail this work during a facilitated small group session. Participants joined the Focus area of most interest to them and posed questions and provided valuable feedback on the four Focus Areas. The plan is to incorporate many of these suggestions in the ongoing work of the Focus Area work plans.

Information Exchange/ Promising Practices

Prior to lunch, delegates participated in an information exchange of promising practices occurring at sites across the province. Individuals and/ or service providers shared information about what was happening in their communities that others across the province may wish to try in their own communities. These promising practices were simply defined as ‘good things that are happening, which are easy to implement, take few resources, and can have very positive impacts’. Two rounds of eight to ten sessions were held and participants attended those of most interest to them.

CYSC Reflections

CYSC members spoke informally to the gathering about their hopes for the Strategy, and about what excites them and where they find challenges. They mentioned successful programs and collaborations, noted the energy and commitment they had witnessed over the last year and the challenges of trying to do business in a new, less vertical way.

Youth Fishbowl- LOT Youth

The youth Fishbowl was an opportunity for young people present to respond to questions posed to them anonymously. The youth gathered in a talking circle and responded openly to some tough questions that had been submitted by delegates. Questions included; ‘*Define youth culture today; Teen pregnancy is happening a lot. What can adults offer to teens as a support?; How important is social media?; What are some qualities that you admire in adults who engage youth well?; How do we increase youth attendance in schools/ programs?; and What should the main focus of the Child & Youth Strategy be to increase youth involvement in the Symposium?*’

Delegates from around the province were impressed by the frankness and genuineness of the responses of the young people. A well deserved round of applause was given to the youth participants.

Putting it all Together and Next Steps

During the *Putting it all Together* session, participants were asked to gather with their colleagues from their regions, group, Offices, etc. Each small group was asked to reflect upon what they had heard, seen and experienced throughout the Symposium and to relate it to the work in their regions, etc. They then came back with suggestions for moving forward. There was excellent dialogue and the following are some of the reports back from the session.

- It was articulated several times throughout this and other sessions that there is a need for better communication from senior staff to front line workers in sharing the work of the Strategy, of Government’s commitment to the Strategy and how to align and connect the work to departmental business plans.
- Youth engagement was a theme which resonated with many attendees. The brutal honesty displayed by the young people during the Fishbowl and other activities throughout the Symposium encouraged many adults in the room to be more willing to listen and value the input of young people. It demonstrated a sense of optimism for the future and what it could be.
- Others articulated the need to create more opportunities to engage with young people and to capture and learn from what is happening across the province.
- Participants spoke of the complexity of the work to be undertaken and that clarity of the roles of the departments and sectors was critical to the success of the Strategy.
- There was a sense that more discussion was needed to understand how to engage newcomers with our work and to be more inclusive of the diverse nature of Nova Scotia.
- From a youth perspective, there is much to be done to support youth engagement, to educate and inform adults and government on how to best approach this, to remove barriers.

- There is a general sense of momentum and forward motion towards the goals and outcomes of the Child & Youth Strategy.

Evaluation & Closing Remarks

An online feedback and evaluation process was explained by Linda Atkinson, noting that participant input is critical to the success of events such as the Symposium. Ms. Atkinson also expressed that the Symposium Planning Committee is committed to including the wishes and expectations of participants in the agenda creation for next year, as this will help ensure the event is a good use of time and resources. This input also helps align the work of the Child & Youth Strategy across the province. She indicated that the regions and tables can further expect to be polled early in the planning process for their input for the next Symposium.

In closing, George Savoury thanked the Planning Committee, the Child & Youth Strategy team and all participants for their efforts over the past day and a half. He said that for him, and the Child & Youth Strategy Committee, the dialogue over the course of the Symposium was energizing and invigorating. Mr. Savoury also committed to elevating the need for validation of this important work - as felt by participants - from senior level staff. He will be sharing the experiences from the Symposium with senior department officials. He wished all good luck and continued success in the work of the Strategy.

After Notes (Evaluation Results)

The second annual Child & Youth Strategy Symposium held on October 5 & 6, 2011 drew representation from all four regions of the province and from most service sectors with mandates to serve children, youth and families. Seventy-five participants were in attendance. There were thirty (30) responses to the online survey requesting feedback. This translates to a 40% response rate.

Overall satisfaction with the Symposium was rated as high, as 90% (n=27 of 30) of respondents rated the Symposium as good to excellent. Many of the participants thanked the Child & Youth Strategy for inviting them to participate in the Symposium. Qualitative feedback from the respondents indicated that they thought the Symposium was successful in demonstrating the following: a) government's commitment to the Strategy, b) the importance of youth voice and c) providing a great opportunity for networking and collaboration.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The second annual Child & Youth Strategy Symposium was a success. Feedback received both during the Symposium and through the online survey supports the continuation of this initiative. The Symposium delivered on its objectives as it provided an opportunity for stakeholders to meet one another and network. It also provided a chance for updates on regional and provincial priorities (including the five year plan) and an opportunity to plan together how to advance these priorities. As a suggestion for improvement, participants have requested more opportunities for interactive activities, more discussion on emergent issues, more representation from the early childhood sector and hearing more from diverse communities.

Administrative Note

This document is a summary reporting of the proceedings of the Symposium. A detailed record of the event is also available, including full evaluation findings. If you are interested, or require a more detailed account of the days' events, please contact your respective Regional Specialist or the Child and Youth Strategy office at 902 424 7049.