

# **Inter-Provincial Lessons on Child Welfare Governance**

Vancouver, BC February 22, 2002

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Centre of Excellence  
for Child Welfare

Centre d'excellence pour  
la protection et le bien-être des enfants

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Vancouver, BC  
February 22, 2002**

An invitational Forum, titled “Inter-Provincial Lessons on Child Welfare Governance”, was held on February 22, 2002 in Vancouver, British Columbia and co-hosted by:

[Child Welfare League of Canada;](#)

[British Columbia Ministry for Children and Family Development;](#)

[First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition;](#)

[Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare.](#)

The purpose of the Forum was to provide policy-makers and government officials with key knowledge concerning child welfare governance models across Canada and policy reforms in Canada and internationally. For this purpose, a background paper titled “Overview of Child Welfare Governance in Canada and Lessons for Innovation from Outside Canada” was prepared by the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. This forum is expected to spark future Forums addressing policy reforms in Québec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta, and British Columbia.

Five guest speakers presented provincial information reviewing current child welfare systems and recommendations for reform. Select the province that interests you for additional information:

Québec	André Brunelle, Les Centres Jeunesse de la Monteregie
OntarioMary	McConville, Executive Director, Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Manitoba	Sid Rogers, Managing Director, Family Services & Housing
Alberta	Al Pierog, President, Catholic Social Services
British Columbia	Chris Haynes, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development

**André Brunelle,  
Les Centres Jeunesse de la Monteregie**

**History of Child Welfare Governance in Québec:**

**1992**

The Cote reform brought about many changes to child welfare governance in Québec:

- decentralization to regions;
- creation of elected regional boards;
- merging of local institutions from 850 to 400;
- introduction of local boards to the general population and users;
- new motto: build the system around the user.

**1995-98**

Child Welfare system changes include the following:

- budget cuts led to a 10% decrease in the resources;
- merging of 60 agencies to 16;
- use of placement became less prominent;
- more focussed on secondary and tertiary prevention;
- increase in partnerships.

The Ministry faced the following difficulties throughout this time period:

- poor long-term planning;
- funding cutbacks;
- strong lobby pressures;
- limited outcome evaluation.

Regional boards, which promoted regional interests, were limited by uneven funding.

**2001**

The Clair Report and review of Québec's Health and Social Services Act brought the following changes:

- Ministry appointed boards;
- introduction of appointed directors at local boards;
- reduction of staff, population, and user representatives;
- regional boards received service delivery inquiry powers;
- new motto: a clearer line of authority.

**Québec's Current Child Welfare Governance Model:**

Governed by the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

Consists of 16 regional boards and 400 local institutions including hospitals, health and social services, 16 youth centres, and rehabilitation centres.

Youth Centres are:

- autonomous;
- 95% funded by the Province;
- responsible for all reporting, emergency services, investigations and evaluations, foster care, treatment centres, adoption, and child custody matters.

Major partners of Youth Centres include:

CLSC:

- serves as an entrance for all health and social service cases, newborn to old age;
- locally-based;
- focuses primarily on primary care and prevention.

Other Partners:

- mental health;
- pediatric services;
- addiction services;
- schools and day care;
- police;
- community organizations.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of Québec's Current Child Welfare System:**

System strength's include:

- integration of the Youth Protection Act and Young Offenders Act;
- integration of neglect and behaviour problems;
- culture of expertise
- coherence between goals and funding;
- train and develop employees to utilize the best child welfare practices available;
- government system support of "best practices" philosophy.

Weaknesses of current system include:

- absence of government leadership;
- lack of standardization of practices and instrument training;
- uneven funding base;
- partnership issues;
- concerns of continuity;
- many structural problems as a result of merging;
- underestimation of the financial cost of change.

**Mary McConville, Executive Director,  
Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto**

**History of Ontario Children's Aid Societies:**

**1891**

- The opening of Ontario's first Children's Aid Society.
- John Kelso established 60 Children's Aid Societies in Ontario.

**1893**

- Implementation of the first child welfare legislation in Ontario.
- Children's Aid Societies expanded province wide.
- Experienced an increase in government funding and professional expertise.

**1940s and 1950s**

There was a shift from social benevolence to professional expertise.

**1960s**

Battered Child Syndrome shaped child welfare policy and services i.e. new child welfare act in Ontario.

Extension of provincial authority in terms of government regulation, case management standards, and monitoring activities.

**1970s**

Introduction of the Garber Report which called for systematic training, mandatory reporting, and a child abuse registry.

**1980s**

Increased focus on child sexual abuse, reporting, public awareness and training.

**1984**

Major changes to child welfare legislation took place with the introduction of the Child and Family Services Act 1984.

Principles of this act include:

- an attempt to balance state intervention and individual rights;
- an expansion of services to families;
- a reduction in the number of children in care;
- a decrease in the amount of time children spend in "limbo";
- increased funding for intervention.

## **1990s**

Perceived failures of the child welfare system led to systematic inquests and recommendations for change by organizations such as the Child Mortality Task Force.

The Ministry of Community and Social Services (COMSOC) committed to the reform of child welfare systems in Ontario by amending the Child and Family Services Act with the introduction of Bill 6 (Child and Family Services Amendment Act (Child Welfare Reform) 1999).

Principles of the new act include:

- best interests of the child is paramount;
- proper terminology/language concerning patterns of neglect was inserted;
- duty to report was expanded;
- time limits were placed on children in care;
- threshold for children in need of protection was lowered;
- introduction of new 100% provincial funding formula;
- re-vitalizing foster care;
- increased emphasis placed on professional training;
- mandatory risk assessment

\*\*The above mentioned reforms, in addition to service cuts, have had a direct impact on the number of children in care.

### **Description of Current Child Welfare Governance Model:**

Ontario houses 52 Children's Aid Societies, 4 of which are native specific.

Funding is controlled centrally by the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Children's Aid Societies are:

- non-profit incorporated organizations;
- designated under Section 15 of the Child and Family Services Act;
- each governed by a voluntary Board of Directors responsible for staff and services;
- mandated to investigate claims of child abuse and neglect and provide ongoing protection, residential care, adoption services, and extended care and maintenance.

### **Benefits and Limitations of Current Child Welfare Governance Model:**

Benefits include:

- accountability;
- transparency;
- community responsibility;
- flexibility/adaptability;
- opportunity for integrated services;
- volume sensitive funding;
- case aides;
- volunteer participation;
- development of formal/informal relationships with the community;
- development of written protocols with the police and public health.

Limitations include:

- limitation of government child welfare expertise;
- complexity of system and implementing change;
- lack of integrated local planning;
- lack of outcome data;
- over-reliance on auditing;
- liability for Board of Directors and staff.

**Sid Rogers, Managing Director,  
Family Services & Housing**

**Features of Manitoba's Current Child Welfare System (Historical Context)**

In response to the criticism that child welfare in Manitoba was non-responsive to the needs of Aboriginal clients, the Manitoba government attempted to create a system that allowed aboriginal communities to deliver their own services.

In 1979-80, Manitoba created the first mandated First Nation's child welfare agency in Canada.

In the late 1980's the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry was established to examine all aspects of justice for aboriginal children, including child welfare. In 1991, the inquiry made 4 key recommendations, which unfortunately could not be implemented under exclusive jurisdiction. Recommendations included:

"Aboriginal people are entitled to the provision of child and family services in a manner which respects their unique status, and their cultural and linguistic heritage";

"The jurisdiction of the reserve-based Indian Child and Family Services agencies be extended to include off-reserve band members";

"The Province of Manitoba in conjunction with the Manitoba Metis Federation develop a mandated Metis Child and Family Service Agency with jurisdiction over Metis and non-status children throughout Manitoba";

"A mandated Aboriginal Child and Family Service Agency be established in the City of Winnipeg".

In 1999, the Manitoba government created a commission to implement the recommendations made in the 1991 report.

In 2000, 4 memoranda of understanding were signed with aboriginal leaders.

Today, 65 bands deliver their own services on reserves.

Aboriginal children are over-represented in all social services in Manitoba (78% of children in care are aboriginal, whereas only 10-12% of the population of Manitoba is aboriginal).

**Future Plans for Manitoba's Child Welfare System:**

Conceptual plans include:

- transform the system from an exclusive jurisdiction model to a concurrent jurisdiction model;
- create 4 child welfare authorities to govern the system and absorb some powers now in the hands of the province;
- the Province of Manitoba will oversee the system and maintain executive functions;
- develop an integrated intake system;
- refer children and families to a culturally appropriate service provider;
- services to aboriginal people will be governed and provided by aboriginal people;
- increase emphasis on early intervention, reducing the number of children in care, culturally sensitive practice, and community capacity building;
- determine funding levels for each authority, specifics for regional intake models, and training plan.



**Al Pierog**  
**President, Catholic Social Services**

**Alberta's Current Child Welfare Governance Model:**

Currently, there are approximately 8000 children in care in the Province of Alberta.

As a result of pressures to change the system, 18 Regional Authorities were created (17 geographical and 1 aboriginal). The responsibility of these Authorities is the delivery and supervision of child and family services across Alberta.

Alberta's Ministry of Children's Services is responsible for the following:

- allocating funding and other resources to Child and Family Service Authorities;
- setting objectives, policies & standards for child and family services;
- accountable for services that provide for the safety, security, and well-being of children and families;
- monitoring and assessing the Authorities in the carrying out of their responsibilities.

Alberta is in the advanced stages of planning for a new community-based system of service delivery for children and families. Four key pillars, which have guided Alberta's planning process, are as follows:

- community-based services
- early intervention services
- integrated services (goal of diverting families from the child welfare system)
- improved services for Aboriginal children and families.

**Driving Forces Behind Reform:**

Forces behind Alberta's child welfare reform include the following:

- desire for more effective services;
- an increase in professional caseloads;
- large number of aboriginal children in the system;
- children not receiving the proper attention within the system that they so deserve;
- preference for ecological model.

**Benefits and Challenges to Current System:**

The four key pillars mentioned above are expected to generate the following positive outcomes:

- services will be more sensitive to the needs of the community;
- services will be more tailored to aboriginal needs;
- the visibility of neighborhood centres will improve and as a result will become much more influential.

Challenges to current system include:

- difficult to ensure consistency of practice across regions;
- small centres can not build capacity and resources and are forced to rely upon large centre resources;

- artificial service provision boundaries;
- collaboration between child welfare workers and the community is difficult.

### **Future Plans for Reform:**

Alberta's current child welfare system is under review. Practice and service delivery are being questioned. Differential response is being considered.

New focus will be on:

- shifting emphasis from risk management to risk reduction;
- the effectiveness of the system;
- quality outcomes;
- milestones in child's life;
- aggressive work with families.

In order to successfully change the system, objectives, goals and outcomes need to be very clear.

**Chris Haynes, Deputy Minister,  
Ministry of Children and Family Development**

**Review of BC's Current Child Welfare System:**

In August 2001 a review of the BC child welfare system was conducted, based on the following three principles:

- importance of family;
- building community capacity;
- minimal intervention.

Public ideas for reform of current child welfare system included:

- increased flexibility;
- acknowledgement of the importance of family and community;
- need to shift balance of power away from government to families and community;
- need to move to a community-based model.

**Driving Forces Behind Reform:**

BC has the largest central child welfare system in Canada, however, is often criticized for moving too fast or too slowly to protect children.

There is a considerable need to lower financial/legal costs, primarily due to budget cutbacks from \$1.55 billion to \$1.1 billion.

Over the past 7 years, the number of children in care in British Columbia has increased by 61% to 10,000 children, 40% of which are First Nations children.

**Recommendations for Reform:**

Shift in child welfare focus from protection to building family and community capacity, a new community governance model anticipated to be implemented by 2004.

A new vision: Healthy children and responsible families living in safe, caring and inclusive communities.

A new mission: To promote and develop the capacity of families and communities.

Make strategic shifts and change:

- the culture/nature of work;
- operational system – As opposed to recreating ministries in various communities, develop a seamless array of services and partner with community agencies in order to work more effectively with children and families and capitalize on existing community services;
- service delivery framework – A framework that is flexible and comprehensive, outcome-based, cost-effective, responsive, and shares responsibility is much needed. Joint planning tables for this new framework will include representatives from the community and consumers.