

**Policy Internships and Fellowships Program
Final Report**

**Government – Non Profit – Communities:
Can they work together to advance the children's agenda?**

Janice Nelson

1. Preamble

Home Organizations/Department

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) was formed in 1993 to consolidate, under one department, the majority of the federal government's responsibilities relating to social and labour market programs. Major portions of the following departments were joined together to create HRDC:

- Employment and Immigration Canada
- Labour Canada
- Health and Welfare Canada
- Secretary of State Canada

HRDC is a large department with 320 offices across the country and more than 20,000 employees. It is a decentralized department with regional offices in all provinces. The British Columbia (BC) regional office also has responsibility for the Yukon Territory. There are 37 local offices, called Human Resource Centres of Canada (HRCC), across BC and there is one office in Whitehorse.

The mission of HRDC is to enable Canadians to participate fully in the workplace and the community. HRDC is responsible for the delivery of:

- Income Security Programs (Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan)
- Employment Insurance
- Employment and Training Programs
- Human Investment Programs (Canada Student Loans, Literacy programs)
- Labour Canada (enforcement of the *Canada Labour Code*)
- National Homelessness Initiative (Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative)

As a federal government department, HRDC receives funding through the collection of taxes and other revenues from Canadian citizens. Some programs such as Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan payments to individuals are mandated by legislation; however, the majority of departmental programs are subject to the funds being available through the budget process, each year.

The department also has a role to play, together with provinces and territories, in developing and maintaining Canada's social programs. HRDC is the federal department responsible for the Social Union Framework Agreement, National Children's Agenda (together with Health Canada), Early Childhood Development Agreement (together with Health Canada), Skills and Learning Agenda, and Labour Market Agreements. It is also responsible for working with provinces and territories to put into practice the federal government's commitment towards Early Learning and Child Care.

First Call was formed in 1993 to ensure that all children and youth in British Columbia have access to the resources they require to reach their full potential. It is a coalition of individuals and organizations working together to create understanding of and advocacy for legislation, policy and practice. It is cross-sectoral and non-partisan and shares a common commitment that arises from the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Canada in 1991.

Research studies indicate that in order to grow and develop to their full potential, children and youth need good health, self-esteem and a feeling that they are a valued part of society. First Call has developed an agenda and a call to action. Extensive discussions in communities across the province resulted in agreement on four priorities children, youth and families need in order to succeed. These "Keys to Success" are:

- A strong commitment to early childhood development
- Support in transitions from childhood to youth and adulthood
- Increased economic equality
- Safe and caring communities

As a result of the agreement achieved around the "Keys to Success" there is an opportunity for people across sectors to work together to raise awareness and improve policy, legislation and practices that impact on the health and well-being of children. Currently 25 local community coalitions and numerous organizations and individuals have adopted the "Keys to Success". These keys serve as a guide to promote the health and well-being of BC's children and youth. Information to communities and partners is communicated in a variety of ways, including the distribution of public education materials, trained speakers, electronic updates and opportunities for networking. First Call receives funding from United Way, Vancouver Foundation and the Children's and Women's Health Centre.

Programs for children, youth and families are currently undergoing massive change in BC. There have been changes to income assistance eligibility, a change to eligibility for day care subsidy, reductions in the child protection and special needs budget and a transfer of responsibilities to regional authorities. These changes and the reductions are having a negative impact on the most vulnerable families throughout the province. First Call and its partners continue to advocate for the funding cuts to be restored and to raise public awareness of the impacts of the cuts.

First Call has developed an Early Childhood Development (ECD) framework document outlining the needs of children in the early years. This document identifies the range of supports and services specific to optimal, healthy early childhood development. It will assist individual communities in determining the supports and services needed by their communities.

First Call plays an active role in disseminating information on, and raising public awareness of, the needs of children and families in BC. The activities of the organization are linked to the "Keys to Success" and advocate the need for children and youth to receive "first call" on resources.

2. Introduction

I have been an analyst with the BC/Yukon Regional Office of HRDC since 1996. I have responsibility for managing a cost-sharing agreement that enhances employability of persons with disabilities, and for monitoring federal and provincial policies impacting children and families.

I have spent my entire public service career assuming responsibility for managing and monitoring federal transfers to provinces and territories for social programs. I began my

public service career in January 1975 in Ottawa with Health and Welfare Canada. In 1981 I transferred from the National Headquarters Office to the Regional Office in Victoria. Responsibility for social programs was transferred to HRDC when it was formed in 1993. In the 1990s the federal government ended detailed cost-sharing arrangements with provinces and territories and moved to funding models with increased flexibility.

I have always been interested in children's issues both at work and outside of work. At work the various cost-sharing agreements for which I have had responsibility have provided me with extensive knowledge of federal and provincial programs for children. During the 1990s I managed a federal/provincial cost-sharing agreement that addressed the affordability, accessibility and quality of child care programs in British Columbia. This short-term agreement tested a number of pilot projects around the province aimed at improving child care services. I was able to visit a number of the projects that were funded and received regular progress reports on all projects. The stories that I heard from staff and those written by clients have helped me to understand the issues and realize the need for improved services for children. Outside of work I have tried to be active in my children's school and in other activities. I have also been active in the programs offered for children at the church I attend.

While I was aware of the overall Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), I did not know about the Policy Internships and Fellowships (PIAF) program until I was contacted by the host organization. The regional office regularly seconds individuals from other HRDC offices, from other federal departments, and occasionally from non-profit organizations. The region has not been involved in a situation where an employee has been seconded to a non-profit agency. I had expressed interest in participating in such an opportunity after my responsibilities for a current cost-sharing agreement ended.

HRDC is one of the departments responsible for funding the PIAF program and therefore was supportive of participating either as a host or home organization. The regional office was undergoing reorganization at the time the proposal was submitted. My work unit has been consolidated with the unit responsible for administration of the National Homelessness Initiative in the BC/Yukon Region.

HRDC's regional office is located in Vancouver; however, my position has always been in Victoria, as cost-sharing agreements require detailed analysis of provincial programs and expenditures. I travelled to Vancouver approximately two or three times a month to attend meetings. These trips generally lasted for the day and occasionally overnight. In the past I have occupied space in the same area as Income Security Programs, which has had continuous growth in staff as Canada's population ages. This has resulted in annual relocations. Recently I relocated to the same floor occupied by HRCC Victoria.

My placement with First Call began in September 2002 and will end in June 2003. I am acting as the Policy Analyst with First Call, a position that did not exist within the organization prior to my internship. Other staff members within the organization carried out these activities on a limited basis. I am responsible for monitoring federal and provincial policy decisions that impact children and families. I ensure that information on policy changes is sent to partner organizations and assist in the preparation of First Call's position. I attend First Call's monthly coalition and Early Childhood Development Roundtable meetings. I have assisted with the development of an ECD Framework

document for British Columbia and have had the lead for developing a similar paper on the needs of children aged six to twelve.

First Call's office is located within the Centre for Community Child Health Research (CCCHR), part of the BC Research Institute for Children's and Women's Health. Its offices are in the former Shaughnessy Hospital located within the Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC. CCCHR provides the organization with space, and with administrative and financial services and it collaborates on joint projects. I share an office with two other part-time employees of First Call. I travel to Vancouver approximately three times a month and spend two or three days in the office.

In Victoria I have been assigned an office within space occupied by the Office for Children and Youth. This provincial government office is responsible for providing information and advice to provincial government ministries on policies that impact service for children and families in BC. The office also advocates on behalf of children and investigates child deaths when requested. I am connected with those organizations that are affiliated with First Call and attend various meetings in Victoria and other locations on Vancouver Island. I am also in contact with staff from a variety of provincial ministries.

At the end of May 2002, Cindy Carson, the previous Provincial Coordinator of First Call, contacted me. She requested assistance in finding someone from HRDC who was interested in working with First Call to develop a proposal for the PIAF program. I indicated that I would be interested if I could remain in Victoria. As First Call has connections with groups in Victoria and on Vancouver Island this was not seen as a major hurdle. HRDC and First Call had not worked together prior to this internship. HRDC is supportive of First Call's "Keys to Success" and attends coalition meetings on a regular basis.

The proposal submitted to the PIAF program indicated that I would be working on a number of policy issues related to First Call's Keys to Success. These were:

1. Healthy early childhood development
 - assisting with the development of a framework document
2. Focus of resources on Children and Youth
 - working together with regional, provincial and national partners on issues relating to children and youth
3. Transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood
 - working together with partners to further this key to success
4. Development of issue and policy papers
 - in conjunction with coalition partners, developing a framework document outlining the needs of children aged six to twelve

The scope of the internship has not changed; however, as a result of recent staff changes within the organization, I have been given additional responsibilities.

3. Context

HRDC has as part of its mandate the authority to work cooperatively with other federal departments and provinces and territories on a number of issues impacting children and families. Over the past five years there have been several new initiatives.

In May, 1999 the federal/provincial/territorial Ministerial Council on Social Policy Renewal released the National Children's Agenda (NCA). The NCA is a shared vision and a plan for action to enable all Canadian children to grow up healthy, happy, successful and safe. The NCA identifies six areas of priority that have positive effects on children.

- Supporting parents and strengthening families
- Enhancing early childhood development
- Improving economic security for families
- Providing early and continuous learning experiences
- Fostering strong adolescent development
- Creating supportive, safe and violence-free communities

A process was put in place for Canadians to provide input on the agenda and advise on how governments should move forward.

In 1998, federal/provincial/territorial governments launched the National Child Benefit (NCB). It is designed to:

- reduce child poverty
- support parents moving from income support programs into the labour market and
- reduce duplication and overlap of government programs

The federal government increased payments to low-income families receiving the Canada Child Tax Benefit, including those receiving income supports from provinces or territories. Provinces and territories lowered their income support payments to families with children. The savings incurred were reinvested into new programs and services for low-income families. A similar agreement was reached with First Nations administering their own income support programs.

In September 2000, federal, provincial and territorial governments agreed to improve and expand services and programs for children aged six years and under, and their families. The Early Childhood Development agreement commits \$2.2 billion over 5 years to help young children reach their potential, and to help families support their children. These funds will flow through the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Four key areas for action were identified:

- promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy
- improve parenting and family supports
- strengthen early childhood development, learning and care
- strengthen community supports

First Ministers also committed to public reporting on progress achieved in improving the well-being of young children.

In December 2000, HRDC increased maternity and parental leave benefits to eligible biological and adoptive parents. After 600 hours of insured work, parents can qualify for 15 weeks of maternity and 35 weeks of parental leave, up to a maximum of 50 weeks. Parents can share parental leave and only one two-week waiting period will be required.

The federal government announced the Aboriginal ECD strategy in October 2002. Over the next five years, \$320 million will be invested in programs and services for Aboriginal children. The strategy will provide funding for:

- Aboriginal Head Start (On Reserve) (Urban and Northern Communities)
- First Nations and Inuit Child Care
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects
- New Research Initiatives

The strategy will be implemented by HRDC, Health Canada and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.

As part of the February 2003 federal Budget, families with children having a severe and prolonged mental or physical impairment will be eligible to receive the new Child Disability Benefit. Eligibility for this income-tested benefit will be based on the same criteria used for the disability tax credit. Families with incomes of less than \$33,487 will be eligible to receive the full supplement starting in July 2003. Families with incomes above \$33,487 will be eligible to receive partial benefits. The federal government will also work with provinces and territories to ensure that families receiving income support will be eligible to receive the entire benefit.

On March 13, 2003 the Federal/Provincial/Territorial Ministers Responsible for Social Services reached agreement on the Multilateral Framework on Early Learning and Child Care. Under this initiative, the federal government will transfer \$900 million, over five years, to provinces and territories for investments in early learning and child care. The funds will be disbursed through the Canada Health and Social Transfer starting in April 2003. Effective approaches to early learning and child care are based on the following principles:

- Available and accessible
- Affordable
- Quality
- Inclusive
- Parental choice

Ministers will report annually to Canadians on all programs and services beginning with a baseline report for the 2002-03 fiscal year. An additional investment of \$35 million over five years will be provided for Aboriginal early learning and child care programs and services.

In November 1989, Canada signed on to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Parliament in 1991. The convention principles fall into four main categories:

- Participation of children in decisions affecting their lives
- Protection of children against discrimination and all forms of neglect and exploitation
- Prevention of harm
- Provision of assistance for basic needs

At the 1990 World Summit on Children, Canada promised to give children top priority or “first call” on resources. However, the number of poor children in Canada increased by 39% between 1989 and 1999.

In May 2002, Canadian delegates, together with delegates from 180 countries, participated in the United Nations Special Session on Children. The *World Fit for Children* document, a declaration and a plan of action for the next decade, was adopted. Four priorities for the world’s children were identified:

- Promoting health lives
- Providing quality education
- Protecting against abuse, exploitation and violence
- Combatting AIDS

The next step will be for Canada, together with provinces and territories, to develop a National Plan of Action outlining specific actions to achieve the above priorities over the next ten years.

The federal government consults primarily with the National Children’s Alliance, a group of 52 national organizations committed to the well-being of all children and youth. The Alliance and other organizations applaud the federal government for its investments in children and families; however, they express concerns that the funding falls short of what is needed. The Alliance has requested that the federal, provincial and territorial governments be accountable, develop indicators, encourage citizen engagement, and implement all aspects of the National Children’s Agenda. Member organizations of the National Children’s Alliance and various academics from universities across the country provide policy advice to the federal government. They often receive funding to undertake research activities on behalf of either HRDC or Health Canada.

At the same time that the federal government is increasing its investments in services for children and families, many provinces, including British Columbia, are decreasing investments. Since the Liberal government assumed power in June 2001, numerous policy changes and/or expenditure cuts impacting children and families have been made, including:

- Changes in eligibility for income support programs including the child care subsidy program
- Reductions to income support benefits
- Health and Education expenditures have been frozen
- Child Protection expenditures were reduced
- Children over the age of 16 are no longer taken into care

- Reduced expenditures for children with special needs
- Cancellation of the Funding Assistance Program for out-of-school child care programs
- Child Care Resource and Referral funding to end in March 2004
- An end to staff wage enhancements

At the same time that programs are experiencing budget reductions, the ministry with primary responsibility for children and youth is undergoing major restructuring. The ministry is in the process of moving from eleven regions responsible for delivering the ministry's programs and services to five community-based governance structures that will have direct responsibility for all programs, services and staff.

These changes have the potential for negative impacts on children and families. Child care centres are closing, many organizations are facing major reductions in funding, and low income families are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet.

The Child Care Advocacy Forum asked child care providers across the province to complete a short survey. The following picture is emerging:

- 57% have fewer subsidized children in their program
- 49% have decreased enrolment
- 31% have had to increase their fees
- 52% are concerned about their future viability

As a result of the changes to the subsidy program, children of low and moderate income families are being withdrawn from licensed care as their parents can no longer afford to pay the fees. A two-tiered system is developing – in neighbourhoods where families can afford to pay, programs are fully enrolled and thriving, while those that rely heavily on subsidies and other government funding are struggling.

The overall question is “Where are the Children?”. After-school programs located in schools report that some children are being told by parents to remain on school grounds even though they are not registered. Libraries have reported an increase of unaccompanied school-aged children on their premises as well. Parents consider these places to be safer than leaving kids at home alone. As a result of these changes, there are many more latchkey kids in communities across the province.

On March 31st a number of service providers held a day of mourning across the province to mark the end of the current funding mechanisms. Some providers closed programs for the day, while others wore dark arm bands in support. Another strategy asks concerned individuals to send a clean diaper to MLAs, ministers and the premier asking that the cuts be reversed. While these strategies have not been effective in reversing funding cuts, the general public is becoming increasingly aware of the issues.

According to calculations by the BC Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, low- and middle-income families have seen their tax savings reduced and in some cases disappear as a result of increases in user fees and other policy changes. As is often the case, those with higher incomes have benefited the most from the tax cuts.

First Call is one the major advocacy groups for children, youth and families in BC. Other groups in the province are the Child Care Advocacy Forum, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, West Coast Child Care Resource Centre and BC Council for Families. These groups are also members of First Call's coalition. Continuous advocacy by First Call and its partners resulted in the reduction of planned cuts in some program areas. However, a reduction in one area has meant larger cuts in other areas. Groups in BC continue to be frustrated by the policies of the provincial government that impact children and families. There is a growing fear that more children will be at risk and that an increased number of children will die as a result.

The provincial government is currently funding the University of British Columbia to conduct a large research project on early childhood development. The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) is being conducted under the leadership of Dr. Clyde Hertzman, a national and international academic involved in early child development. By the end of March 2004 the Early Development Instrument (EDI) will have been used to assess school readiness of most kindergarten children in the province. The EDI is a survey tool that measures a child's development in five areas:

- Physical health and well-being
- Social competence
- Emotional maturity
- Language and cognitive development
- Communications skills

Using mapping software, the information gathered from this survey, community assets and socio-economic characteristics of communities are mapped on a neighbourhood basis. This information helps researchers gain a better understanding of how these factors impact children's development and health. The information also helps communities to assess how well they are doing in supporting young children and their families.

Most major communities across the province have mobilized coalition groups working together to improve programs and services impacting children and families. These coalition groups have developed through First Call or as a result of provincial funding for Make Children First Learning Sites. However, there are still some gaps in smaller and remote communities. HELP and First Call are working to ensure that all communities across the province have the capacity to form coalitions in the near future. It is important that communities establish groups that will be able to use the information from research to plan programs and services for their communities.

Over the years, efforts have been made to gain support for child care issues in the business community. It seems that business leaders are becoming aware of the importance of family-friendly policies and employer-supported child care. They also recognize that there will be less absenteeism, increased productivity and reduced stress when staff has access to quality child care.

Media coverage of issues impacting children and families is generally not front-page news. Announcements by either the federal or provincial government of new programs or changes to existing programs are covered sporadically. Not all media coverage of federal investments in child care and early childhood development has been positive. Opponents to publicly funded child care argue that child care harms children emotionally

and discriminates against stay-at-home moms. There have also been arguments that families with only one parent in the workforce should be eligible for a reduction in taxes equal to that of parents in households where both spouses are working. However, at this time it appears that public support for publicly funded child care has increased over the last few years. A recent opinion poll indicates that 90% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that there should be a national coordinated child care plan and 86% agreed that there should be a system that makes quality child care available to all Canadian children.

4. Summary of Work

From the beginning, it was intended that this would be a fully integrated internship. While the intern and the coordinator identified areas of focus, it was intended that the intern would be integrated into First Call's organization and have opportunities to become involved in a variety of issues as they arose. The identified areas of focus were:

- Assist with the development of a vision paper for Early Child Development in BC
- Support and participate in First Call's activities relating to Early Childhood Development
- Take the lead in the development of First Call's framework paper outlining the needs of children aged six to twelve in BC
- Share knowledge and experience of federal government with staff and partners of First Call
- Provide support to communities in BC that have adopted First Call's "Keys to Success" and link with other regional, provincial and national partners
- Make contacts and network with organizations and communities with expertise in children's issues
- Gain understanding of how government policies impact children, youth and families

In the fall of 2003 First Call commissioned the development of the Early Childhood Development Framework paper. The purpose of this paper was to:

- Build commitment and agreement for action on ECD to guide ongoing advocacy work
- Propose a province-wide framework for use by communities in determining ECD supports needed by (their) young children and families
- Clarify what fits within the ECD framework and determine broader enabling factors
- Identify the range of supports, services and strategies needed to foster optimal health and development

I reviewed and made comments on various drafts of the paper, attended meetings when it was presented for comment and discussion, ensured that communities outside the lower mainland received copies of the paper and understood its purpose, and presented the paper at meetings when required.

One of First Call's "Keys to Success" is A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development. The organization has been involved in a number of activities relating to this key. An Early Child Development roundtable was established in the Lower

Mainland, which included a diverse group of community partners committed to ensuring that young children receive the supports they need. I attended all meetings of the roundtable, took minutes of meetings and ensured that they were distributed to all members. I informed the rest of First Call's staff of the activities of the roundtable. An Early Childhood Development Coalition was also established in the Greater Victoria area. I attended all meetings of this coalition and ensured that information from this group was shared with other First Call staff and partners.

In January 2003, together with Human Early Learning Partnership, First Call co-hosted a two-day forum on Early Childhood Development. The purpose of the forum was to provide opportunities for practitioners and service providers to obtain information on ECD-related research activities currently underway in the province. First Call was contracted to provide the logistics for the forum. I was assigned to be the lead contact for First Call on this contract and to liaise with staff from HELP. I was responsible for designing the forum flyer and registration form, keeping track of the number of participants registered, ensuring that participant packages were produced and included all required information, liaising with the hotel, and finding volunteers to introduce speakers and facilitate workshops. The feedback from participants indicated that they were extremely positive and would recommend similar events in the future.

Another of First Call's "Keys to Success" is Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood. To further the work in this area a *Youth Transitions* paper is under development. First Call also wanted to build on activities started by the National Children's Alliance relating to the needs of children aged six to twelve. I was asked to take the lead on developing a paper that present a framework to guide the organization's work in this area. To develop the paper, I gathered together a number of papers that had already been written on this age group. I held two focus groups to obtain input from service providers and others with an interest in this age group. Once the first draft of the paper had been written it was shared with those attending the focus group discussions and with other First Call partners. The paper was presented at a First Call coalition meeting and, once finalized, will be adopted by the coalition. Once the paper has been adopted by coalition partners, it will be shared with government officials, researchers and others committed to ensuring that children have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

As part of my internship with First Call, I was asked to share my knowledge of the policy-making process in the federal government with First Call staff and community partners. This was achieved by developing a workshop that provided participants with background information on Canada's system of government and on how the policy process evolved. The workshop covered:

- Canada's system of government
- Legislative process
- Policy process and timelines
- Federal/provincial relations
- Making a difference

A role play was developed to enable participants to take on the role of senior federal government officials responsible for developing policy. To develop the workshop I used information obtained from the PIAF summer institute and the Government of Canada website. Participants were provided with a list of federal Members of Parliament,

commonly used government acronyms, and websites where additional information could be received. The workshop was given twice during my internship with First Call. The feedback received from the evaluation indicated that participants found the information to be useful and enjoyed the role play. The role play enabled participants to gain a better understanding of issues faced by politicians in deciding on funding when there are many conflicting priorities and only a set amount of funds available. I also received comments that this information and the opportunity to participate in the role play should be provided to high school students to enable them to understand how government works.

I have shared my knowledge of federal programs for children and youth with a variety of organizations while I have been with First Call. I have discussed strategies for gaining public support and for changing government perception with my mentor and with other organizations. One of the things I learned from my mentor was the difference that human stories make in trying to change attitudes. I have also gained a better understanding of how national organizations such as the National Children's Alliance and their partners operate and work together with the federal government.

I was asked to provide support to communities that have adopted the "Keys to Success" and link with other First Call partners. While with First Call I attended monthly coalition meetings. I attended coalition meetings in two communities on Vancouver Island. At the forum co-hosted by HELP and First Call, I organized a workshop that introduced First Call's "Keys to Success". Representatives from two communities also described their experiences in mobilizing around children's issues and in adopting the keys. The workshop gave forum participants not familiar with First Call an understanding of its work; the event also provided communities with information on ways to mobilize and raise the profile of children and families in their area. The workshop also provided the opportunity to share the various tools that First Call uses to assist communities, such as the training package and video on the "Keys to Success", the postcard campaign, and election packages.

While with First Call I have had the opportunity to network and work together with a number of its partner organizations. The various meetings, workshops, and forums that I have attended have enabled me to be in contact with a diverse group of people committed to improving the lives of children. Partners include service providers, union organizations, other advocacy groups, funding organizations, government, health organizations, adoption associations, foster parents organizations, Aboriginal groups, residential programs, anti-poverty groups, municipal officials and others. This diverse group of partners enables First Call to be truly sectoral. First Call advocates on many policy issues and develops policy papers on a regular basis, which require the consensus of partner organizations. This can entail a complicated and time-consuming process, as partners use different language and have different positions depending on their backgrounds.

During my internship with First Call I have gained a comprehensive understanding of how government policies impact service providers and ultimately children, youth and families. Government policies are often developed by one department in isolation from other departments that are also responsible for providing programs and services to the same clientele, with the following impacts:

- Decisions to improve services, made by one authority, may have a negative impact in another (area)

- Duplication of services, as more than one department has responsibility for providing services
- Gaps in services as no one assumes responsibility for an issue
- Turf issues between departments/ministries, as they do not want to lose authority for their programs or services

There needs to be improved communication and coordination between all levels of government, in order to address these issues.

Over the course of my internship I have met staff from organizations that have been forced to close, due to reductions in funding and many more that are struggling and uncertain about their future viability. In discussion with these people there is a common thread – while they are concerned about their own futures, they are just as concerned about the future and well-being of the clients they serve. First Call and other groups across the province need to use these human stories as part their advocacy strategies to prompt government change.

There could have been many challenges to face working in the non-profit sector after being with government for so many years. However, I have been pleased that the challenges have been relatively minor in nature and easily resolved.

My position at HRDC provided me with exposure to federal and provincial policies, the language and terminology, some community contacts, and current research pertaining to children and families. As a result I found that I did not have a steep learning curve in this area. I needed, however, to gain a better understanding of First Call's organizational structure, partner organizations, funding sources and relationship with the Children's and Women's Health Centre. By attending coalition meetings, speaking with staff and reading about First Call, I was able to gain this information.

In the beginning, working out of two locations (Vancouver office and at home in Victoria) created challenges relating to keeping on top of issues, communication with the office, and ensuring I had all the office tools that I needed in order to work efficiently. Working at home, I quickly found that I did not have access to a photocopier and fax machine, tools that I had taken for granted working in an office. With the use of e-mail, the fax was not as critical and I quickly learned to do all my photocopying when I was in the office in Vancouver. Once I received access to the e-mail system used by First Call, there were fewer communication challenges. The move from home to the Office for Children and Youth has also provided access to this equipment.

Initially when I started working at home I was using my home computer, printer, internet provider and telephone connections. After a computer crash, an update of equipment, printer conflicts and connection to Children's and Women's Health Centre e-mail system, the technology challenges were resolved. However, I was never able to gain access, while in Victoria, to First Call's electronic files and to the database that contains all the partner contact information. I did learn how to use the database to obtain and add new contact information but never gained an understanding of its full potential. Once I moved to the Office for Children and Youth, I was given access to any technology I required.

Over the last six years, I have worked in an environment outside of HRDC's regional office, even though that is where the rest of the unit was situated. As a result, I have learned to work independently, to negotiate with managers on the time to be spent in the

regional office, to set priorities and to determine areas of focus. I have transferred these same skills to the work that I have been doing with First Call. One challenge is to ensure that, when travelling back and forth from one office to the other, I am able to anticipate what documents I need to have at my disposal. Another challenge is to make sure that I don't isolate myself from the rest of the office and that I keep in contact with staff.

I have enjoyed the work that I have done during my placement with First Call. I hope that I have been able to assist First Call and other organizations in understanding how the federal government works and to provide them with strategies for making change. I have tried to help agencies understand that the current mechanisms for transferring funds to provinces do not include mechanisms for withholding funds if provinces do not adhere to the principles or if reports are not completed. Under these circumstances, it is important for agencies to have the capacity to develop mechanisms for monitoring provincial expenditures of these funds and to find new ways of working together with government to develop priorities for children and youth.

5. Literature Review

When I first joined First Call I wanted to learn more about the organization and its efforts to impact policies targeting children and families. In 2001 a presenter's guide was developed to help raise public awareness around the "Keys to Success". The guide, *First Call: Keys to Success, Building Awareness Through Dialogue and Action*, is a step-by-step easy-to-understand kit for use by presenters in raising public awareness of issues impacting children and families. The kit also includes an eight-minute video, *The Four Keys to Success*, which was produced by one of the mobilized communities. At the First Call/HELP Forum I led a workshop on Community Mobilization, where I outlined the importance of the four keys and used the above materials to develop my presentation. I also handed out booklets and pamphlets, including *A Call to Action*, which was produced by First Call to raise public awareness. Representative from two mobilized communities also spoke about their experiences in their own communities.

In the past, First Call has provided funding to communities for mobilizing activities, including the preparation of a *Community Mobilizing History*. Copies of the mobilizing histories of Kamloops, Duncan and Chemainus, Abbotsford Salmon Arm and Fraser North were shared with the Research and Evaluation committee of the Victoria Early Childhood Coalition (VECC) to help guide their mobilization. I also shared copies of *Working on the Keys to Success: Good Practice Policy Examples and Communities Taking Action for Children and Youth*. The VECC has been together for approximately one year is looking for information from other communities with respect to Terms of Reference, funding guidelines, engaging families, and raising public awareness.

One of my first assignments was to prepare a submission in response to the federal/provincial/territorial request for submissions to the Social Union Framework Agreement Review process. To prepare the submission I referred to the SUFA review website at <http://www.sufa-review.ca> to determine the deadline and parameters of the review. I also used the SUFA document, *A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians*, to develop a notice to solicit responses from First Call partners to be included in the submission. The submission was reviewed and unanimously approved by all First Call partners and then posted on the SUFA Review website.

As part of my placement with First Call I was asked to share my experience and knowledge of the federal government with partner organizations; to this end, I developed a one-day workshop on the federal government's policy process. To develop the workshop I drew on my experience in the government, on information obtained at the summer policy institute and on other resources. I used the book *Making Policy: A Guide to the Federal Government's Policy Process* by Glen Milne, obtained at the institute, as the starting point for my workshop. The Government of Canada website *How Government Works* at http://www.edu.psc-cfp.gc.ca/tdc/learn-apprend/psw/hgw/menu_e.htm also provided me with pertinent information in developing various sections of my workshop. The Department of Finance has a useful website for those looking for information on Government of Canada transfers to provinces and territories at <http://www.fin.gc.ca/access/fedprove.html>.

In developing the workshop I wanted to give participants the opportunity to be part of a role play where they could experience the pressures of being in government. In developing a role play I referred to the September 2002 Speech from the Throne to find a statement that could be enhanced and turned into a role play scenario that participants could relate to but that did not depict a situation they faced in their day-to-day work. I chose the paragraph from the Throne Speech indicating the government's commitment to working with Canada's largest cities to help immigrant families learn either of Canada's official languages. I developed community roles for School Board Chairs and Executive Directors of multicultural organizations. Roles were developed for all (federal) central agencies as well as for Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) and Human Resources Development Canada. These departments were selected because CIC has responsibility for immigration settlement issues and HRDC has already developed relationships with major cities in Canada around homelessness issues. To build on the role play I referred to several departmental websites to confirm their policy mandate and role. I developed an evaluation form to determine what had worked well and whether changes to the format were needed. While with First Call I ran the workshop twice for partner organizations.

I enjoyed the process of developing the workshop, presenting it and receiving feedback. While I have had some experience in delivering, and presenting at, workshops this was my first opportunity to actually plan everything from start to finish. While it was extremely time consuming and at times stressful, I enjoyed the experience and look forward to finding other applications and venues for delivery of the materials once I return to HRDC. Such a workshop could be beneficial to new government employees who have little or no experience with government operations. With little effort the information could be modified to improve relevancy for government employees. I would develop more than one role play, to give all participants the opportunity to play roles that would enable them to experience both the government and the non-profit sector, not just one or the other.

First Call is a partner organization of Campaign 2000, a non-partisan, cross-Canada coalition of 85 national and community organizations working together to ensure the health and well-being of Canada's children. Working together with partners in Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, they released a report in October 2002 entitled *Diversity or Disparity? Early Childhood Education and Care in Canada*. A forum, hosted by First Call, was held in Vancouver in October 2002 to provide input into the report. One of the goals of the forum was to share information about national, international and provincial policies that impact Early

Childhood Development. I was responsible for presenting information on federal initiatives. To obtain background information for my presentation I referred to *A National Children's Agenda: Developing a Shared Vision*, the *National Child Benefit Progress Report 2000* and the *Early Childhood Development Agreement*.

As noted earlier, First Call's first "Key to Success" is "A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development". To promote this key, an Early Childhood Development roundtable was established. The main focus of this group over the last six months has been on the development and release of *Early Childhood Development in BC: First Call's Framework for Action*. First Call and the roundtable are currently developing a communication strategy for release of the document.

First Call has been active in working with the National Children's Alliance and other organizations across Canada on children's rights issues. First Call has also been part of the process to develop a National Action Plan as required in the *World Fit for Children* declaration signed by Canada at the UN Special Session on Children in 2002. In May 2003, First Call and its coalition partners held a special meeting with Senator Landon Pearson to discuss the National Action Plan.

As part of my policy work with First Call, I have been developing a framework document for children aged six to twelve. This document will outline the priority needs of this age group and will guide First Call's future advocacy work. In preparation for writing this paper, I read papers that had been prepared for the National Children's Alliance to guide their discussions on this age group. The following resources provided useful information regarding the needs of this age group: *From Precious Resource to Societal Accessory: Canada's Children Six to Twelve* by Bob Couchman; *School-aged Children across Canada: A Patchwork of Public Policies* by Rianne Mahon; *What is the Best Policy Mix for Canada's Young Children?* by Sharon M. Stroick and Jane Jenson; and *A Policy Blueprint for Canada's Children*. I also reviewed the proceedings of the National Children's Alliance National Symposium, *Building Momentum*, and the *National Roundtable: Developing a Public Policy Agenda for Children Ages 6 to 12*. I distributed Louise Hanvey's discussion paper, *Middle Childhood: Building on the Early Years*, to participants of the discussion groups and to reviewers. This paper provided useful statistics and background information on the needs of this age group and the services currently in place.

I have made many contacts across the province as I had hoped to achieve as part of my placement. It is my intention to keep in contact with these organizations after I return to HRDC, in order to track what the community thinks about federal government policies for children and families. I will use the information to apprise government officials - working at the regional and/or national level - of stakeholders' opinions and concerns. I hope this information will be used to make informed decisions regarding programs for children and youth.

At this point in my career, I have five to seven years before I am eligible for retirement. As a result I am not likely to be looking for paid work in the non-profit sector at this time. However, once I retire I plan to use the various contacts that I have made to enable me to be involved with these issues either as a volunteer or on a part time basis. I certainly anticipate that I will still have an interest in children's issues and that there will be issues that will need to be addressed at that time.

6. Voluntary Sector-Public Sector Comparisons

In my experience, work in HRDC tends to be more defined than it is in First Call. HRDC works within the confines of its departmental mandate, legislation, Treasury Board terms and conditions, union agreements, etc. First Call does have a vision statement and objectives to guide its work; however, these are fairly broad and provide opportunity for flexibility in planning activities. The voluntary sector does not operate under the confidentiality and secrecy constraints that apply to government unless it is dealing with information pertaining to individuals.

Government departments work within a unionized environment. As a result a lot of time and energy are spent in the classification of positions and separation (differentiation) of duties. Generally the lines between clerical staff, program officers and managers are well defined. In the voluntary sector where the majority of organizations are non-unionized these lines are not as well defined. If something needs to be done, the person who happens to be free at the moment takes it on.

Government protocol and processes are extremely complex and often difficult for outsiders to understand. There are generally many layers of management between front line staff and senior management both at the regional and the national level. A (draft) response to a letter received by the minister or a briefing note/package requires approval and sign-off at all levels. As a result, the process is time consuming and the finished product may be very different from what was initially written. For the most part, the process is not as complicated in the voluntary sector. However, First Call is a coalition of partners from across British Columbia and therefore requires collaboration on position papers and policy issues.

Government and voluntary sector organizations that share the same interests often have very similar language and acronyms. There can, however, be differences in definitions between government and the non-profit sector. Generally I have found that definitions in the non-profit sector tend to be as broad and inclusive (of the maximum number of people) as possible, while definitions used by government tend to be narrower and less inclusive. There are some acronyms that are specific to government and are foreign to the voluntary sector. I have also found that in many cases government tends to use a passive writing style while the voluntary sector tends to use stronger language. For example government might use words such as “should”, “could” and “may” while the voluntary sector would not hesitate to say “must”.

Government often assumes that voluntary sector organizations are special interest groups, not well coordinated, a group of complainers, and not aware of government priorities. This may have been the case in the past; however, the current reality is that voluntary organizations have joined together, are well coordinated, and bring forward issues impacting services and clients.

7. Conclusion

The Voluntary and Public Sector as Partners in Public Policy

In the past, government departments have not adequately involved the voluntary sector in the development of public policy. Often consultations exercises were really

information sessions, where government informed the voluntary sector of its plans for proceeding on policy issues. Over the years the voluntary sector has been consulted many times on various issues but has felt that many of its underlying concerns were not addressed by government. When the voluntary sector was consulted, it was not clear what happened to the concerns they expressed or how the information was used to impact the policy process.

In recent years the government had adopted a more collaborative approach to consultation with the voluntary sector. The voluntary sector can speak with a coordinated voice on issues and bring forward individual stories of the impact of policy decisions. Government officials do not have the time to read large reports and detailed research findings. To get their attention the sector needs to ensure that they present clear and concise information that can be used easily within government to influence policy decisions.

During those times when expenditure reductions are the norm and programs and services are being cut, it is important for the voluntary sector not to give up. It is very easy at times like this to become frustrated and to decide that government is not listening. Voluntary sector organizations need to collaborate with one another and put together a coordinated effort. It is still important to seek out those officials (in both sectors) who may be able to make a difference and to continue to build on relationships.

Government needs to involve voluntary sector organizations at the very beginning of the policy-making process to ensure that they are true partners. The sector needs to know that their issues are taken seriously and are not just falling on deaf ears. Issues brought forward by the sector often involve more than one government department and level of government. The voluntary sector should not have to spend time and energy going from department to department and to different levels of government to make their case. Nor do they want to hear from one department that an issue is the responsibility of another department and that they are therefore not in a position to address it. Government consultations with the voluntary sector need to include officials from all departments with a stake in an issue. Government funds the voluntary sector primarily to provide services or implement projects; it rarely provides core funding for the day-to-day operations of the organization. This creates vulnerability within the sector and requires that voluntary organizations spend a lot of time seeking out and obtaining sustainable funding. Government needs to include this type of funding in their contracts with the sector to enable organizations to have the resources they need to be true partners in the policy-making process.

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