

***CREATING SPACES BETWEEN THE IMMEDIATE AND THE IDEAL:  
FAMILY SERVICE WORKERS IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES***

**Remarks to the Recognition Event  
Sponsored by the Association of Family Serving Agencies  
“Appreciation of Family Service Work”  
October 2, 2006  
Victoria**

**Michael J. Prince  
Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy  
Faculty of Human and Social Development  
University of Victoria  
[mprince@uvic.ca](mailto:mprince@uvic.ca)**

I call my talk “Creating Spaces between the Immediate and the Ideal: Family Service Workers in the Social Services.” The theme in this title is from a quote by Bernard Crick in which he says: “We live in a human condition, so we cannot through politics grasp for an absolute ideal.... But ... being human we ... have many different ideals and ... so equally politics cannot be a ‘purely practical and immediate’ activity.”<sup>1</sup> As with other human endeavours, family service work rests on empirical factors of the immediate plus ethical principles and commitments.

We have some things to be encouraged about on this Family Service Worker Appreciation Day and National Family Week. October is also Community Living Month to celebrate the abilities and achievements of people with developmental disabilities. On occasions such as this, we may be permitted to identify opportunities in creating links between the here and the now front-line work of providing services and of pursuing desirable social goals.

In that spirit, I wish to talk briefly about three signs of family service and social policy reform in British Columbia, reforms guided by ideals of fostering self-determination, empowering families and building more inclusive communities. First, I will discuss the creation and early days of the Community Living Authority; secondly, the new role of Representative for Children and Youth, proposed by the Hughes report and adopted by the provincial government and legislative assembly; and, thirdly, I will talk about the government’s five great goals and how they present opportunities for democratic engagement and policy development.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, p. 15.

## **The Community Living Authority**

After a number of years of practical and immediate activities of study, consultation and transition planning, the Community Living Authority (also called CLBC) is now well underway as a reform that shifts the governance of community living services from a provincial ministry to a community based model. As people here know, CLBC is the provincial authority that oversees the provision of services to adults with developmental disabilities and children with special needs.<sup>2</sup> The vision is of person-centred services within the context of province-wide standards.

The legislation establishing the Authority mandates that a majority of directors of the CLBC board must be individuals with a significant connection to children or adults with developmental disabilities and family members. In addition, two of the directors must be individuals with a developmental disability.

In relation to the provision of community living support, CLBC is directed under legislation to:

Offer a range of funding and planning options that promote choice, flexibility and self-determination;

Promote choice and innovation in the manner in which services are delivered;

Encourage shared responsibility among families, service providers and community resources;

Utilize and further develop the capacity of individuals, families and community resources;

Assist adults with developmental disabilities to achieve maximum independence and live full lives in their communities;

Promote equitable access to community living support; and

Coordinate the provision of community living support with services provided by the provincial government and community resources.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, various challenges accompany this organizational change, as we would expect with any large scale transformation.<sup>4</sup> Challenges include the provisions of timely

---

<sup>2</sup> In BC, the definition of developmental disability for public policy purposes refers to three elements: the onset of disability before age 18; measured significant limitations in two or more adaptive skill areas; and, measured intellectual functioning (IQ) of approximately 70 or lower.

<sup>3</sup> *Community Living Authority Act*, 2004 (Bill 45), Section 12 (2).

and consistent information; the formulation of myriad policies and procedures; confronting a legacy of depleted morale and cutbacks; and clarifying the nature and relationships of various CLBC staff roles such as between analysts and facilitators.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, the CLBC is establishing 17 community councils across the province associated with local community living centres. These councils will comprise seven to 15 members, depending on the size of the area, and will include families, self advocates, local community members, business people and service providers.

In the words of Doug Woollard, CLBC's Vice President, Community Planning and Development:

The council will work with managers to identify gaps, overlaps, issues and service delivery problems within the area. They will set priorities for new or redistributed funding and provide feedback on the impacts of financial decisions.

Each community council will act as an ambassador and bridge to an inclusive community. They will collect examples about successful and innovative support and services in community living. They will also recommend ways to expand personal support networks, create safe environments, improve the ways people access community and acknowledge the gifts and contributions of people with disabilities.

In addition, they will help develop and promote creative solutions which improve community access and inclusion. The councils will also identify research that will enhance out knowledge of how best to support people in community.

Finally, the community councils will, through consultation, provide feedback about CLBC performance, results, services and community practice. They will also participate in the recruitment, selection and orientation of CLBC staff and identify issues that require action outside of the community and forward them to the CLBC board.<sup>6</sup>

Expressed here are a lot of ideas, practices and promises. In principle, community councils offer opportunities to engage service providers, family representatives, local advocates and other stakeholders in a dialogue; to listen and learn from one another's perspectives and experiences; to draw this together across councils and the province as a whole; to link with other provincial agencies and ministries; and, to help guide province-

---

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent study on the early years of transformation of community living services in BC, see Cameron Crawford, *Gathering Momentum: Mobilizing to Transform Community Living in BC*, Toronto: L'Institut Roehrer Institute, 2004.

<sup>5</sup> Analysts determine eligibility to designated services, monitor contracts, and assess system gaps; while facilitators assist eligible individuals and families develop and implement personal support plans for meeting disability-related needs. While this division of labour may seem clear on paper, in practice there seems to be some uncertainty as to what the roles actually involve.

<sup>6</sup> Doug Woollard, "CLBC Connects Community with Families & Individuals," *The Citizen: Connecting People with their Community*, September 2006, p. 15. Available at [www.communitylivingbc.ca](http://www.communitylivingbc.ca).

wide priorities and plans for community living services and supports. The CLBC also has recently appointed a self-advocate advisor, a role, as I understand it, meant to support self-advocates at the local level of community councils.<sup>7</sup>

## **The Representative for Children and Youth**

Following on the independent review of BC's child protection system conducted by Ted Hughes,<sup>8</sup> earlier this year, the Legislature quickly passed the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.<sup>9</sup> The Representative was a central recommendation of the Hughes report and of the proposed revised child welfare system in the province. The provisions for establishing, funding, appointing and staffing the actual office of the Representative will help ensure the autonomy of the office.<sup>10</sup> This reflects the Hughes report recommendation of establishing a non-partisan, independent officer of the Legislature.

Although the Act has no preamble or other introductory statement of purpose, one can infer that the vision might be: 'to protect the rights and interests and to promote wellbeing of all children, youth and families in British Columbia.' As written, the law expresses at least three core values: *accessibility* to services for children, youth and families; *accountability* of ministers and public bodies for service provision; and, *answerability* as regards critical injuries and deaths of children in the province.

The mandate of the Representative encompasses programs under various pieces of legislation, including the *Community Living Act*, such as early childhood development and care services, mental health services for children, addiction services for children, child care programs, adoption services, family and community services, youth justice, and community living services.

Functional responsibilities for the Representative embrace several core activities:

- investigative and review of child deaths and critical injuries;
- individual advocacy for a child, youth or family;
- systemic advocacy focused on system change, that is, in the words of the Hughes report, "working towards positive change in policies, practice and service delivery in the child welfare system;"
- quality assurance and performance monitoring of provincial ministries;
- and, advisory and research.

---

<sup>7</sup> There is also the Office of the Advocate for Service Quality, a role that predates CLBC, and is independent from CLBC's direct service delivery. Appointed by, and reporting to the Minister of Children and Family Development, the Advocate helps individuals with developmental disabilities and their families, as well as children and youth with special needs, access provincial and community services, and to participate in decision-making processes that affect them. When necessary, the Advocate also conducts impartial reviews and make recommendations to the Minister and to CLBC staff.

<sup>8</sup> Hon. Ted Hughes, *BC Children and Youth Review*, Victoria: April 2006. See [www.chilyouthreview.ca](http://www.chilyouthreview.ca).

<sup>9</sup> SBC 2006 Chapter 29 – Bill 34. See [www.leg.bc.ca/38th/2nd/3rd\\_read/gov34-3.htm](http://www.leg.bc.ca/38th/2nd/3rd_read/gov34-3.htm).

<sup>10</sup> To give one example: the appointment is for a term of five years, and may be renewed for one additional five year term.

This list shows potential for making this an office of great consequence. The Representative has the capability, for example, to monitor the performance of various ministries against their service plans and identified goals, and to draw attention to successes as well as stalled reforms or setbacks. The Representative could examine the fate of wait lists over time for early intervention services, prevention and personal care supports, and to encourage analysis and research of their impacts.

Given this range of authorities, adequate resources will be imperative so that all aspects of the mandate are effectively performed. Furthermore, attention to communications (information campaigns) will be important to ensure the general public is aware of the office and understand its roles. This will go some way toward building public confidence in the child welfare system and family service work. There is a prospect here of reviving the traditional roles of social workers as advocates and counselors for clients alongside recent emphasis as case managers, gatekeepers to services, and investigators of complaints. As well, there is an opportunity to forge a constructive link to, and role by the Legislature.

Three sections of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act* deal with public reports: sec. 16 on reports on reviews and investigations of deaths and critical injuries; sec. 19 on annual reports; and sec. 20 on “special reports” that deal with a specific ministry or specific public body. These are all fine. However, what is missing is a section that empowers (and requires) the Representative to issue what I would call “general reports” to a standing committee of the legislature; reports that would provide whole-of-government overviews of the state of accessibility and accountability in the province. I would suggest this as a friendly amendment to the Act. The recently released Kendall-Morley report on children in care in BC is an example of this sort of reporting.<sup>11</sup>

I also want to note that children and youth with developmental disabilities will remain vulnerable as long as there is prejudice and other obstacles to acceptance and there is the lack of essential personal supports and community services for inclusion and participation. In this regard, the new Representative’s effectiveness will be enhanced if allied with a larger provincial vision and strategy on disability. This leads me to the provincial government’s long term policy goals.

### **The Five Great Goals and the ‘Golden Decade’**

The BC Government’s strategic framework for this term of office and beyond is expressed rather grandly as the “Five Great Goals” and the “Golden Decade.” First unveiled during the 2005 provincial general election, the five goals to be pursued over the

---

<sup>11</sup> *Health and Well-Being of Children in Care in British Columbia: Report 1 on Health Services Utilization and Mortality*, Joint Special Report of the Office of the Provincial Health Officers and the Child and Youth Officer for British Columbia, Victoria: Ministry of Health, September 2006. Available at [www.health.gov.bc.ca](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca).

following decade have been reaffirmed in Throne Speeches, budget and fiscal plans, ministry service plans and other official statements.<sup>12</sup>

The goals commit the provincial government, through cross ministry initiatives and numerous specific actions over the next several years, to:

1. Make BC the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent.
2. Lead the way in North America in health living and physical fitness.
3. Build the best system of support in Canada for persons with disabilities, those with special needs, children at risk and seniors.
4. Lead the world in sustainable environmental management.
5. Create more jobs per capita than anywhere else in Canada.

Certainly, these are very large, open-ended declarations; a mixture of ambition and ambiguity in policy goals to 2015 that will be shaped by numerous economic, cultural, social, scientific, political, intergovernmental and demographic factors.<sup>13</sup>

There is an easy tendency, I think, to dismiss these as simply rhetoric that will not translate into any meaningful reality for the clients and communities with which you work.

However, I believe that besides being political rhetoric (which is not a bad thing) this set of goals represents a platform for engagement on a host of social issues. It represents a basic vocabulary of “many different ideals” to initiate conversations on services for children, youth and families. It is a framework for policy and program planning in use by the Campbell government with cross-ministry initiatives on seniors, First Nations, a children’s agenda, and a disability strategy, among others.

For those of us engaged in the social services sector, and particularly in the community living sector, we have an obligation, not just an opportunity, to take this up; to work with provincial leaders and officials in putting content to these goals, to propose targets and timelines, identify desired results, and suggest meaningful indicators and measures to track outcomes.

In meetings with officials, families and advocates, government and opposition MLAs, with our own professional associations, other service providers and community groups, we should set forth ideas about these goals. In so doing, we mobilize networks and raise awareness; we generate evidence on issues, trends, and program impacts; and we can

---

<sup>12</sup> Interestingly, Ted Hughes makes explicit reference to the provincial government’s great goals in his report (see p. 16).

<sup>13</sup> For example, by 2015, at the end of this self-declared Golden Decade, at least half of the baby boomer generation in Canada will be age 60 or older.

provide political traction for senior officials and cabinet ministers responsible for these goals to move forward on initiatives, especially on the always challenging cross-jurisdictional coordination of services.

The new officer Representative for Children and Youth relates directly to the Great Goals. The quality assurance and performance monitoring functions of the Representative will be a valuable tool for tracking progress in building the best system of supports in Canada for children at risk, people with disabilities and those with special needs by 2015.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude: I have described in very general terms three current developments which point to a more explicit, active and progressive approach to social services and social policy in BC than we have seen for a decade. Each is an important step forward in modernizing governance and service provision, revitalizing advocacy and prevention supports, and shifting the culture of child welfare.

If these reforms live up to their expressed values, what would success look like? Let me, for the purposes of encouraging discussion, offer some suggestions. We will have achieved success with the Community Living Authority, the Representative for Children and Youth, and the Great Goals if:

- Individuals and families effectively access needed high-quality services, feeling that their worth and dignity is affirmed with more individualized approaches, funding models and independent planning supports throughout the province.
- A vibrant system of Aboriginal agencies control and deliver services to Aboriginal children, youth and families.
- Provincial ministries and other public bodies are publicly accountable on a regular basis in regards to performance measures and legislative mandates, for the provision of designated services to children, youth and their families. Related to this, collaborative research and evaluation is undertaken to draw lessons and continuously improve service practices and governance arrangements.
- The stock of quality, affordable and accessible child care spaces is expanded in rural and urban communities throughout the province.
- Wait lists for essential aids, devices and personal services, including respite, are reduced in a sustained and significant manner over the next five years.<sup>14</sup>
- Services are designed, delivered and appraised in ways that routinely promote responsiveness, portability, and choice: in other terms, individuals and families feel their definition of their situation is invited, heard and accepted in any plans and provisions. Smooth transitions occur between children and adult services

---

<sup>14</sup> In August 2006, CLBC identified 3,150 adults with developmental disabilities who require new or enhanced community living services but are on a wait list. This number does not include children and youth with developmental disabilities nor people who may need such supports in the future. See BC Association for Community Living, “Thousands of People with Developmental Disabilities Waiting for Needed Services,” Press Release, Vancouver: September 2006. Available at [www.bcacl.org](http://www.bcacl.org).

so that when a person turns 19 years of age essential supports to them and their families do not suddenly vanish.

- The employment rate of working-age adults with disabilities increases by 50 per cent by 2015.
- BC becomes a leader in best practices for inclusive education. Students with special needs and developmental disabilities are educated in regular classrooms, supported with appropriately trained staff and services, in their neighbourhood schools.
- Individuals and families in local communities, across regions and province-wide are supported to network and participate in decision making, including submitting ideas on policy, funding and programming to public agencies. Advocacy services for children, youth and their families exist in communities throughout the province.
- Workers experience increased capacity to exercise professional judgment and competencies.
- Workers are offered opportunities for training and retraining to support revised approaches to governance, practice and organizational culture.
- Workers are able to consider clients' needs and experiences more flexibly, holistically and contextually.

These, then, are some of the qualitative and quantitative indicators of moving forward in child, family and community living services that promote diversity, inclusion and citizenship. As reforms are more fully implemented, spaces between the immediate of our work and the ideals of our professional ethics and personal beliefs are energized.

These reform structures and processes afford openings for family workers and other practitioners to take leadership and to work cooperatively with individuals, families, advocates and others in realizing, in the words of AFSA, healthy communities for all families.