

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Provincial Strategy Session - August 16 & 17, 2002
Participant Package

Discussion at the Coalition's provincial strategy session will be organized around five 'tensions' or 'polarities' that advocates are experiencing in our efforts to protect the progress we have achieved and keep our vision for child care alive and well in the current climate.

Based on our experiences over the last year, we are providing short, concrete examples of how each of these 'tensions' is playing out in our advocacy work. We know that there are many other examples that could be used. Some of the resulting dilemmas faced by the Coalition and our members and partners are also highlighted.

The questions we are posing are hard, provocative and potentially divisive – but we believe that they need to be honestly addressed. To develop effective advocacy strategies, our strategy session needs to be a safe place for critical conversation.

We offer this package as a starting place for discussion – knowing that you will have other tensions, examples, experiences and strategies to share.

Please read and talk about the issues raised in this package with colleagues and friends in your community before the strategy session. Feel free to use the bottom of each page to make notes about what you and others have to say.

1. Short-term Campaigns / Long-term Vision

Example:

The current provincial government has made drastic cuts to the child care subsidy program. These cuts are having a devastating impact on low and moderate income families' access to child care and are destabilizing many child care services. It is clear that in the short term these cuts must be reversed.

However, the Coalition has never supported the subsidy system as an effective and accountable way to fund child care. We advocate for a publicly funded system – with adequate levels of funding for licensed and regulated child care services. This would make quality child care affordable for ALL families. Low and moderate income families would still receive subsidies to offset the remaining, but reduced parent fee.

So – how do we reverse the subsidy cuts while maintaining our position in support of a publicly funded system? Do we focus on protecting subsidies now, in the hope that the climate for a publicly funded system will be better in the future? Or, will a short-term focus on subsidies further entrench public opinion and inadequate government policies? Is there a way to make the short and long term case together? In a 30 second sound bite? Or?????

2. Saving Services / Protecting Advances

Example:

We advocate for child care services in larger public institutions like colleges, universities, hospitals and schools because they increase access for families; make effective use of public facilities and provide a stable financial and administrative home for child care. Many of these child care programs have become 'benchmarks' – setting the standard for quality and wages and working conditions.

But, as other public bodies face their own budget pressures, they are cutting child care programs. Advances made in quality and wages are often the rationale for these cuts. Some public bodies are seeking other 'operators' to deliver on-site child care. But, any operator will have to lower wages and benefits and/or increase fees to make a go of it.

So – do we do whatever is required to keep services open? If fees are increased – who will be able to afford the services? Will child care providers be subsidizing the cost of child care for affluent families? Do we need to accept some short term loss of services to demonstrate that services can't survive without adequate funding? Will some program closures mobilize a new group of parent advocates? Are there innovative ways to keep services open while pushing the public policy envelope? Or?????

3. Quality of Child Care Services / Affordability of Child Care Services

Example:

As subsidies for low and moderate income families are reduced and support for child care programs from other public bodies declines (see #2 above), parent fees for quality, licensed care will go up. These services will increasingly be out of reach of most families. And, the current review of child care licensing and regulations indicates that government might deregulate child care as a way of 'creating more spaces'.

The tragic irony is that the policies of this government, which campaigned on a platform of 'targeting' child care dollars to those most in need (a position the Coalition never supported), are driving the care of poor children further underground while programs that are models of 'how it could or should be' serve the affluent.

So, how do we make child care programs affordable without compromising quality? Do we put energy into advocating for programs that are out of reach of the children and families who need them most? How do we support low-income families and communities to get the care they need – not down the road but today? Do we work harder to build bridges with the unregulated child care sector and if so, how will we do this without provincially funded Child Care Resource and Referral Programs? Or????

4. Influencing Government / Resisting Government

Example:

The child care advocacy community in BC has a tradition of being constructive and polite in our relationships with governments. We have always been non-partisan, believing that once decision-makers from across the political spectrum understood the importance and value of quality child care – they could be allies.

Today, there is a growing ‘fight back’ movement across BC to the policies of the current provincial government. This movement uses tactics such as public demonstrations and work stoppages to make its points and will likely be involved in the next provincial election with the goal of defeating the current government.

The Coalition has participated in a number of the large public demonstrations organized to date because we believe that child care and other much needed services and entitlements for children, women, families and communities are under attack. But, some have criticized us for this. They feel that these actions make it easy for government to dismiss us or that by working with groups who are seen to have ‘political agendas’, we will burn our bridges with this government.

<p>So, is there a way to influence government and resist government at the same time? Do we put child care at further risk by taking more ‘confrontational’ approaches? Will our more traditional approaches have any impact on this government? What are pros and cons of more active involvement in electoral politics? How angry is the child care community and what actions are they prepared to support? Or????</p>

5. Child Care Focus / Broader Social Justice Agenda

Example:

Our advocacy is focused on building public support and political will for quality child care. While we have always worked with advocates on other issues, our job has been to speak for child care and to ensure that child care is on everyone's agenda.

Within the child care community, the Coalition's role has been to take cutting edge and, at times, controversial positions. Over the last few years, our messages have gained wider support. Through the work of the Child Care Advocacy Forum, which the Coalition initiated and supports, a broad consensus and consistent voice on a child care advocacy agenda has emerged in BC.

But, in the current environment, the challenges of effective advocacy on a single issue are growing. We are all stretched beyond our capacity to respond to cuts, changes and losses on so many fronts. And, the link between child care and other social justice issues such as women's rights, poverty, Aboriginal rights, and the rights of working people - just to name a few - are clearer now than ever.

So, how do we balance our focus on child care with a host of other social justice issues? Should we become more actively involved in broader coalitions? If so, could this undermine the unity of the child care community that we have worked so hard to build? Can we achieve the kind of child care system we want without addressing the other issues facing families, children and communities? Will child care get lost if we broaden our focus? Or????