

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC Provincial Strategy Session – Final Report September 2002

On August 16 and 17, 2002 the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC hosted a provincial strategy session. With funding support from Status of Women Canada – BC/Yukon Region, the session involved over 40 participants from many geographic communities and brought together child care advocates and activists from women's, labour, students' and social policy organizations – all of whom share a commitment to a publicly funded child care system that entitles all children access to quality child care.

This gathering came at a critical time for child care in BC as we experience a cross-ministerial assault on the progress that we have achieved over the last two decades. The purpose of the provincial session was to develop strategies for keeping our vision for child care alive and well in the current climate.

Our Process

The session began on Friday evening with a quick overview of the Coalition's platform, the strengths and challenges of our advocacy work over the last two decades and key steps forward and set-backs in provincial and federal child care policy and initiatives.

We then heard three outstanding panelists from some of our key allied constituencies. David Chudnovsky, Past President of the BC Teachers' Federation, Joyce Jones of the Senior's Network BC and Jamie Kass, the Child Care Coordinator for the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, each discussed strategies they are pursuing, their views on the relative effectiveness of these strategies and their ideas for how social justice activists can best protect community services and advance our long term vision.

The panel raised stimulating and provocative questions and ideas about:

- ✓ Building coalitions
- ✓ Effective media strategies
- ✓ Developing a new programmatic electoral coalition
- ✓ Recognizing that reversals of specific cuts are 'pauses' not 'victories'
- ✓ The role of labour in bargaining, organizing and advocating for child care
- ✓ Using 'demonstration' projects to push the public policy envelope.

On Saturday morning, the hard work began! Our discussions were 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:

1. Short-term Campaigns/Long-term Vision
2. Saving Services/Protecting Advances
3. Quality of Child Care Services/Affordability of Child Care Services

4. Influencing Government/Resisting Government
5. Child Care Focus/Broader Social Justice Agenda

In a Participant Package distributed before the Strategy Session, each 'tension' was introduced through a concrete example of how that 'tension' is playing out in our child care advocacy work. Some of the resulting dilemmas faced by the Coalition and our members and partners were also highlighted. (Participant Package is available online at www.cccabc.bc.ca)

At the Session, participants were divided into five small groups. Using a 'carousel' process, each group moved through 5 different stations where they had a 30-40 minute discussion on each one of the tensions. A Coalition member facilitated each of the discussions on a tension and provided each incoming group with a brief overview of the key points raised by previous groups. This allowed small groups to build on the work done by others. After the 'carousel' process was complete, facilitators presented a brief summary of the key points, trends, areas of consensus and remaining questions that had emerged at their station.

The small group discussions generated a wealth of specific and far-reaching perspectives on strategic directions for the child care movement as a whole and for the Coalition in particular.

Participants at the Strategy Session then worked in a large group format to draw out and discuss the **key messages** that had emerged from across all of the group discussions. The results of this process affirmed high levels of consensus on over-all strategic directions and on the roles and responsibilities of the Coalition. Some important questions that require further consideration and discussion were also identified.

Key Messages

Participants at the Strategy Session concluded that:

1. As a whole, the child care movement needs to pursue **a wide range of diverse strategies and tactics** which cover the full spectrum of approaches discussed within each of the 'tensions'.
2. The diversity of tactics that are part of our movement's strategy to advance child care within the current public policy environment should be **established through dialogue** within and beyond the child care community.
3. To achieve '**unity in diversity**', the child care community should develop an explicit agreement on 'who' is in the best position to undertake specific roles and responsibilities. This will **foster respect** for the legitimacy of diverse tactics and will **enhance accountability** across the community.
4. Within this diverse range of strategies and tactics, the **particular roles and responsibilities of the Coalition** include:
 - ✓ Holding onto and advancing our **long-term vision** for child care.
 - ✓ Getting our **message out** as broadly as possible.

- ✓ Drawing out the broad **public policy implications** of government's child care directions rather than focusing on particular responses that communities may have to immediate and specific problems.
- ✓ Engaging, as appropriate, in a full range of tactics, with a particular emphasis on the **advocacy** → **activist** → **resistance** end of the strategic continuum.
- ✓ Recognizing that our **short-term successes** may only achieve a 'pause' or 'slow down' in the dismantling of child care services in BC.
- ✓ Participating actively with and in the **broader social justice movement** to broaden support for our child care agenda and lend our support to other related causes and issues.

Issues for further discussion

While each of the key messages outlined above require continual discussion and reflection, two important issues were identified that require further discussion and exploration at the community and organizational level.

1. The role of **public protest** in child care advocacy

The Coalition regularly hears from some members about the need for province wide child care actions – for example 'A Day Without Child Care'. While there is consensus that child care advocates should participate in public protests as part of the broader social justice movement, there is less clarity about the readiness and willingness of communities to undertake child care specific public protest. Given our limited resources and the potential negative impact of unsuccessful mobilizations, the advisability and feasibility of organizing public action needs further consideration.

2. Our role in **electoral politics**.

There is consensus that, at a minimum, the Coalition should raise child care in federal, provincial and municipal elections; should seek party and candidate commitments to our child care agenda and should provide the public with an analysis of different child care policies. However, there is a range of views on what else, if anything, we might do. Some feel strongly that we must remain strictly non-partisan; others suggest that we have a responsibility to publicly endorse those who support our platform while others foresee a more active role in building new programmatic electoral coalitions. This discussion needs to continue as the electoral landscape in BC unfolds.

Evaluation

At the end of a long working day on Saturday, the participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the weekend Strategy Session in three ways. From the head "I think..." from the heart "I feel..." and from the feet "I will do...". Here is a sampling of the responses (see attached index for the full list of participant's evaluation comments):

I think....

- I think that “tensions” posed, the guidelines for sharing ideas and the pulling together a summary of those thoughts and a plan of action reached through consensus was an amazing demonstration of how we will change the world and come to a place of rectified social justice of which publicly funded child care is an integral part
- that the honesty with which these difficult issues were discussed can only move the Coalition ahead to achieving victory

I feel.....

- that I can return to my child care community with positive feelings for the first time in months
- frightened for the families, child care services and children in our province. Determined to halt the dismantling of supports or at the very least help to PAUSE the devastation. Exhausted but re-committed to the cause

I will.....

- do more to ensure my organization is able to include child care as part of articulating a larger social justice vision
- do what I can to cause a pause. I will recruit Coalition members. I will stay actively involved.

Conclusion

By all measures, the Coalition’s Provincial Strategy Session met and exceeded our expectations. Together, we were able to:

- ✓ Develop a framework for the child care advocacy community at large
- ✓ Affirm the leadership role of the Coalition in child care advocacy
- ✓ Provide participants with ideas and information to take back to their communities
- ✓ Inform and strengthen links with social justice partners
- ✓ Renew our collective energy and commitment

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC is committed to moving forward on the directions set at the Strategy Session. The results of the Strategy Session will be reflected in our requests to current and potential funders. More importantly, it will guide our work in and with the child care community and the broader social justice movement.

We want to thank Status of Women Canada – BC/Yukon Division for their support. And, we want to thank everyone who lent their wisdom, time and energy to the process. Your commitment to child care advocacy, in spite of recent set backs, is an inspiration to us all.

We hope to be able to host similar events in the future. Until then – we hope that this Report will help strengthen our collective resolve to keep our vision alive and well.

2002 STRATEGY SESSION REPORT EVALUATION

At the end of a long working day on Saturday, the participants were asked to evaluate their experience at the weekend Strategy Session in three ways. From the head "I think..." from the heart "I feel..." from the feet "I will do....". Here were the responses:

I think....

- the Coalition is making a positive difference in the childcare field, the message is getting out there. Quality child care rocks!!
- I think this is one very smart Coalition and I have learned a great deal.
- I think that "tensions" posed, the guidelines for sharing ideas and the pulling together a summary of those thoughts and a plan of action reached through consensus was an amazing demonstration of how we will change the world and come to a place of rectified social justice of which publicly funded child care is an integral part
- the key element to the vision is empowerment.
- that there are too many passionate people involved for child care to be beaten
- it's lunacy that we have to advocate for our children and families and the poor and convince government that we are important
- this was a great strategy session and made my plan of action clearer
- that the Coalition is beginning to lead a child care vision again. I know (not think) that I needed to be here
- I am too tired to think. It was a well-organized event. Loved the questions and the examples and moving with the same group through the five stations
- this Coalition has excellent strategic skills
- cross- sectoral, public education, collaboration and action on social justice is #1
- that the honesty with which these difficult issues were discussed can only move the Coalition ahead to achieving victory
- we achieved a great deal this weekend
- that going to grassroots groups and asking where they stand on this issue is important
- the fight is right, the goal is worth it and it's the least our children deserve
- I've learned a lot about the BC scene
- that child care is very important
- there is so much to do! The new era for child care will include more action in the social justice movement
- events like this are especially needed for rural representatives that tend to feel isolated and need ideas/inspiration. (I believe we all need this actually!)
- that this experience has given me many ideas to share with others, to ensure a quality system for our children.

I feel.....

- tired
- nervous about approaching the world with my renewed passion and purpose
- that the growth personally that can be achieved as an advocate for children holds many rewards and satisfactions that can be passed on to others to achieve
- powerful
- this weekend provoked some interesting discussion and debate that I can take back to my organization
- that I can return to my child care community with positive feelings for the first time in months
- physically exhausted but emotionally energized
- like we're heading into exciting times
- that his meeting was very positive and created much good vibes

- I am still grieving our serious set-backs but renewed about trying again with and through the Coalition
- great about re-connecting
- fortunate to be in a community with committed child care advocates
- calmed by the knowledge there is a will to move forward with the vision of a publicly funded child care system, knowing that these times are just a "pause"
- frightened for the families, child care services and children in our province. Determined to halt the dismantling of supports or at the very least help to PAUSE the devastation. Exhausted but re-committed to the cause
- proud to be part of the group that is making a difference in child care. Together we can be strong for our future generation!
- a much stronger connection to the issues facing the child care sector and the people/families who access services
- the Coalition has some clear directions for our upcoming work plan.
- EMPOWERED and full of ENERGY
- we need to connect with grassroots groups
- as if we've all been re-charged with a new "battery"
- re-energized about fight re: clarification about the roles (re-committed to take action)
- much more up to date on the BC child care scene
- glad about the time spent here this Friday and Saturday – much was accomplished

I will.....

- take back the messages of the Coalition to my community! I will work hard at advocating for our future generations
- do more to ensure my organization is able to include child care as part of articulating a larger social justice vision
- a community campaign to bring issues to the forefront of community activism
- send out letters of intent for help to enroll each ECE worker into a collective that will begin to strengthen their working lives
- bring to my organization a sense/opportunity to see where "they" can fit without the need to feel threatened or excluded
- speak for child care whenever I can – working on educating those not involved in our field
- organize a meeting for community input re: the "tensions" and plan a community "what will we do"
- bring the information to my community and get a sense of "where to go from here"
- do what I can to cause a pause. I will recruit Coalition members. I will stay actively involved.
- leave here and share Coalition visions within my community
- join the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
- contribute to the best of my ability to moving child care forward
- all I can to mobilize my community, educate my colleagues and constituents and commit my resources
- my feet will take me to meeting grass roots groups
- connect with the group who is looking at an electoral social coalition process
- focus on child care advocacy with the broader social justice movement
- talk more to BC colleagues about child care actions/issues
- do my best to increase the Coalition's vision
- join the Coalition
- complete the analysis of the child care stories (impacts) by October 1, 2002.
- going to nurture empowerment