

**Campaign 2000 – Community Indicators Project – Early Learning and Care  
2<sup>nd</sup> Forum Held March 7, 2003, Burnaby, British Columbia  
Summary Report**

**Background:**

Campaign 2000 is a non-partisan cross-Canada coalition of 85 national and community organizations whose focus is on improving the well-being of Canada's children specifically those living in poverty. To ensure that children have the "best possible start in life" the coalition promotes a coherent and comprehensive National Plan of Action for Children with four goals, one of which is that early childhood education and care (ECEC) should be available to give every child a good start in life. In the interest of achieving this goal Campaign 2000 was successful in receiving funds from the Social Development Partnerships Program of Human Resources Development Canada for a "capacity building" project in this area. The project's objectives are:

- To raise awareness about ECEC.
- To foster and strengthen community links between the ECEC sector and other sectors.

The project's activities include two community forums in each of the participating provinces, Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, Saskatchewan and British Columbia and two reports. The expected results of the forums are "to bring together key individuals and groups in ECEC as well as other Campaign 2000 partners to identify assets and areas needing improvement in ECEC in participating provinces and Canada as a whole and to develop plans of action." The reports are to focus on key indicators of ECEC and to offer a snapshot of services and identify areas of progress and community need.

The activities in each participating province are sponsored by two of Campaign 2000's partners. In British Columbia the partners are First Call and the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC. First Call hosted the first forum held on October 4, 2002 and the Coalition hosted the second forum March 7, 2003.

**Participants:**

All of the participants at the first forum were invited to attend the second forum. Many of them did. Of the twenty eight people in attendance a handful were new participants.

**Presentations:**

The day was chaired by Susan Harney.

Mab Oloman provided an overview of the federal budget from the perspective of early learning and care as well as a very brief review of the status of child care in the country. She also put forward some ideas about how targets could be used to improve service access and quality. She used the European Union's 1996 ten year action plan as the basis for this part of her presentation and provided participants with a synopsis of that work in a handout entitled "Quality Targets for Child Care Services".

Rita Chudnovsky provided an overview of the status of child care in British Columbia. Her presentation included a thorough review of the policy changes over the past year; a summary of the conflicted actions and messages emanating from the various ministries which have child care responsibilities; an analysis of the budget announcements, and a summary of what the child care community has said about how the policy changes have impacted availability and affordability

for families as well as operational matters such as staffing, wages and working conditions and viability.

A panel, comprised of Christine Jackson from Prince George (the North), Sabine Tanasiuk from Vancouver's inner city (Lower Mainland), Ann Marie Bagwell from the Comox Valley (Vancouver Island) and Bonnie McEwen from Nelson (West Kootenays), provided an overview of the child care issues in each of their regions and the strategies that are being used to address them. There was a distressing commonality among the issues presented that reinforced the earlier picture presented by Rita. Clearly, as a result of the recent policy changes, child care in British Columbia is in disarray. However in true ECE fashion each panellist tried to find the silver lining. Christine spoke about the networking and information sharing that had emerged as an outcome of adversity. She cited the Northern Network, the Active Voice Coalition and the Northern Women's Forum scheduled for the end of March as examples. Sabine shared powerful stories of resilience, strategies for day to day crisis management and problem solving. Ann Marie described the development of plans for the "Day of Mourning" scheduled for March 31<sup>st</sup>. Joyce McMann and Kathy Rae, also in attendance, provided information about how they acquired community and board support for the action plan. Bonnie told of a number of developments: a regional resource cooperative, the web site [www.kootenaycuts.com](http://www.kootenaycuts.com) and a parent advocacy group "Friends for Quality Child Care." All panellists emphasised cross-sectoral networking as an important component of strategic action.

### **Discussions:**

Participants chose one of three discussion groups:

- Moving current campaigns forward (facilitated by Susan Harney and Dianne Goldberg);
- Building Cross-sectoral support (facilitated by Gyda Chud and Janice Nelson; and
- Implications of and response to provincial and federal budgets (facilitated by Rita Chudnovsky and Sharon Gregson).

The following summaries of the discussions have been taken from each group's flip charts.

### ***Moving current campaigns forward:***

The key messages that evolved from this discussion group were:

- Three principle strategies are *public education*, *public protest* and *service disruption*.
- Each of these options can be effective but comfort levels may be tested.
- Public education requires clear messages about the use of public funds, benefits for children, countering government messages with truth and personal stories.
- There are risks attached to public protest and service disruption.
- To ameliorate these risks there must be:
  - Thoughtful messaging. Language is important.
  - Information sharing across the province and at the local level.
  - Increased knowledge/understanding, mobilization and collaboration of parents, child care staff and community partners.
- A significant challenge is articulating the long term vision (universality) while addressing short term critical issues (reversing cuts).

### ***Building cross-sectoral support:***

This group started by acknowledging that even when child care people are not at the table the issue is. They also noted that the current thrust of the Ministry for Children and Families "pits" child care against other programs which are funded and free when child care is not. They asked

themselves how they could define a message of partnership as a sector and they asked how to combat “child care fear”. They also recognized that a lack of resources (time, people and dollars) might be a barrier. Their strategies for building cross-sectoral support included:

- Use the initiatives that are underway (e.g. Make Children First covers 80% of BC).
- Use public education forums to educate across all sectors and thus influence political will. Messaging should be positive and non-defensive.
- Use United Way funds to mobilise in communities.
- In some situations child care centres could be the venue for weekend family resource programs or parenting programs.
- A community plan for services across the continuum would stimulate cooperation and collaboration rather than competition.
- Explore both formal and informal links with the education system, health and other social services.
- Develop links with Chambers of Commerce and the corporate sector with the assistance of the United Way. Articulate issues related to statistics, spending and purchasing power, labour force attachment, absenteeism and job satisfaction and provide international comparisons.
- Develop links with the faith community
- Service clubs provide opportunity for public education.
- Enhance existing links with women’s coalitions, social justice groups, the labour movement, and known champions in the business and corporate world.

In conclusion the group recognized the challenge that there is much work to be done but that a sense of “ennui” prevails. (Oxford Dictionary: ennui = mental weariness).

***Implications of and response to provincial and federal budgets:***

The primary focus of this group’s discussion was on goals and criteria for the contribution to child care that was announced but not defined in the Federal budget. However, it is clear that the group also raised concerns about the province’s accountability with respect to both provincial child care programs and use of federal funds. Transparency has been elusive with respect to expenditure of the Early Childhood Development Initiative funding. Accountability with respect to the new federal child care funds should be paramount. It is also clear that the group believed that Federal funds should enhance child care in the province not replace funds removed through provincial cuts. They outlined some parameters for the anticipated federal funds. These included:

- Expenditure of federal funds should be tied to licensed child care. The term regulated which was used in the budget speech needs to be defined as it may mean different things in different parts of the country. A regulated system should include all of the following components: a set of practice standards, monitoring and enforcement.
- There should be clear guiding principles and conditions attached to the federal funding.
- Children from birth to twelve years of age should benefit from the investment.
- In BC expenditures of the federal dollars should be tied to outcomes of affordability, wages and quality and a percentage should be determined for infrastructure.

**Conclusion:**

Some themes and strategies were common to all three group discussions: the need to promote the long term vision of universally accessible high quality child care; the importance of accountability for public expenditures; and, the value of cross-sectoral understanding, cooperation and collaboration on behalf of services for children.