

UPDATE TO FAMILYNET MEMBERS AND SUPPORTERS

JUNE 9, 2004

The FamilyNet Board of Directors has been meeting on a regular basis to address the ongoing concerns of service and program cuts and the movement to the proposed governance model.

May 5 Meeting with Deputy Minister

On May 5th, representatives of our Board met with Deputy Minister Alison MacPhail and Robin Syme, Assistant Deputy Minister for Community Living of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). Once again we urged that the Ministry shift its focus to resolving issues in service delivery, including cuts, waitlists, group home closures, increasing risks, service changes being made without family/individual approval and service reforms to improve efficiency and flexibility. While families have a range of views on governance and restructuring and the goal of individuals and families having more control over decisions affecting their lives is long-standing, we stressed that many families would prefer to see more focus on service availability and quality, health, safety and well being. They have watched scarce resources being drained away from these critical service issues to finance massive restructuring under a new governance model. Reports indicate this is still years away from being achievable, and we also note there is little or no analysis of benefits, effectiveness, or financial sustainability of the proposed model.

We further stressed to the Deputy Minister the need for more evidence-based decision making at the Ministry. Major decisions with extremely far-reaching effects, including unprecedented restructuring and budget cuts, are being made without a solid evidence base to justify them or to demonstrate their estimated impact on individuals and families. This is not seen as consistent with good governance.

The Deputy Minister acknowledged communication needs to be improved, and that there should be more opportunities for dialogue with government. Lack of or confusing communication and selective dialogue has been a major flaw in the process to date and has contributed to widespread mistrust. In addition, the primary mode of communication has been computer driven, which excludes some individuals and families. We will continue to emphasize the need for MCFD to provide more opportunities for a broad range of views and input to impact decision making, and to build trust with families in trying to address challenges facing our community.

It was agreed that we would have another meeting in June after the Bert Boyd Updated Readiness Assessment of Community Living B.C. (CLBC, the new governance authority), and the Auditor's report on Doug Walls' dealings with government were released.

Both reports were released on May 12 and have been the subject of considerable media coverage and debate in the BC Legislature, with most attention focused on the Walls audit. This Audit raises many distasteful facts regarding the genesis of the governance model, and serious questions remain. The government announcement regarding the audit can be viewed at http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/nrm_news_releases/2004OTP0039-000394.pdf, and the audit report can be accessed at: http://www.fin.gov.bc.ca/pwc_audit.pdf.

Despite very worrying issues raised in both the Auditor's report and the Boyd report, the BC Government says it intends to proceed with plans to establish the new governance authority, CLBC, with a restructured service delivery model. In addition, BC Association for Community Living (BCACL) issued a press release in mid May endorsing plans to move ahead. Both BCACL's letter and the Interim Authority's comments on these reports can be read in the I.A. Transition Update at <http://interimauthorityclbc.ca/Documents/UpdateMay1504.pdf>

Letter to Media

In late May we submitted a letter to the editor to the Sun, Province and Victoria Times Colonist, thanking their reporters for highlighting the serious problems with cuts and issues in the restructuring of BC's Community living services but it was not printed. We suspect that the Election Call pre-empted interest.

Boyd Report

We have provided some important details on the Boyd report here, but as his findings and recommendations could significantly affect families and individuals, we urge you to read the 20-page report if possible at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/media_site/pdfs/boyd_report.pdf

The report highlights the obstacles and complexities to be overcome that are far more serious than previously anticipated, and will require a significant amount of time and resources to address. Most worrying are the looming budget challenges that Boyd highlighted before CLBC is operational, due to extra costs to meet increased demands on service. **Government insists that there is no budget flexibility and Boyd's report states these extra costs will therefore need to be absorbed by "reviewing existing patterns of service delivery"**. The following is an excerpt from the report:

"This review has reconfirmed the observations of the Panel (in previous Readiness Assessment report released Dec.19, 2003) as to the magnitude and complexity of the changes being contemplated in the proposed devolution of services to the new Authority. While progress has been made in addressing the three key issues identified in the original assessment relating to accountability, the service delivery model, and the provision of services to children with special needs, there are still significant implementation challenges facing the parties. Added to that are the emerging challenges that need to be addressed by the parties. These include ongoing financial sustainability, the transition costs associated with the devolution process, the labour relations impacts of recent agreements between the government and BCGEU (union), and the need for strong leadership and the development of an integrated approach to transition management."

There are also serious concerns about the fragmentation of children's services under the proposed plans for CLBC. The report states:

"The parties have identified, as a guiding principle, the need to have children with developmental disabilities and their families who will require life-long supports effectively supported to ensure a successful transition from children's to adult's services. The Ministry has also identified the need to ensure that intervention programs, generally described as services for children who are under the age of six, remain integrated for the most effective provision of services. Using this guiding principle, the parties have reviewed the original proposal for devolution of services and have determined a different approach. The permanent community living authority will provide family supports to children with developmental disabilities over the age of six and will ensure successful transitions to adult services. All other services for children with special needs and their families, including those with autism spectrum disorder, will be retained by the Ministry."

This raises questions as how to accurately determine which children age 6 and over will require life long supports to be transferred to CLBC to ensure successful transitions to adult services, and whether funding will be adequate to take on possibly 8,000 or more children (the number currently in Community Living services). Also regarding services to children and youth with special needs, Boyd states **"The primary challenge now facing them is to work through the details of how specific programs and services are to be transferred, and how the staff in the various programs are to be aligned equitably and in the best interests of families who will be receiving services."**

Legislation for New Governance Authority

Legislation to establish CLBC was introduced in the Legislature on May 19, but it is not expected to be finalized until the fall. This could provide an opportunity for families to ask questions and provide feedback. It is critical that the Premier, the Minister and MLAs hear the full range of views. Details regarding introduction of the legislation can be viewed at: http://www.legis.gov.bc.ca/37th5th/1st_read/gov45-1.htm

Proposed Changes to Representation Agreement Act

FamilyNet joined other community organizations in writing the Attorney General, Geoff Plant to oppose proposed changes to the Representation Agreement Act. We are pleased to report that the Government has withdrawn its proposed changes which would have effectively repealed the Act.

May 5 Meeting with Vernon and Salmon Arm Families

Our Vice-President, Linda Derkach, was invited to meet with Vernon and Salmon Arm families to hear their questions and concerns. People who met with Linda expressed appreciation for her willingness to travel up to their part of the province to discuss the issues. Key concerns raised were erosion of services, growing waitlists, budget cuts and lack of communication.

FamilyNet Annual General Meeting in Early October

Our AGM, originally planned for late June has now being postponed till early October. We appeal to our members to consider serving on our Board for the coming year. Your energy and ideas will be greatly appreciated so please give it serious thought and contact us if you would like more information.

Membership Renewal

We wish to remind our members that the renewal date for one-year membership in FamilyNet is the day following our AGM, and we would be pleased to receive confirmation of your membership renewal before that date. This can be done by submitting a membership application through our website or to our e-mail address provided below. If you are not a member, we hope you will consider joining. Your membership fees and donations are greatly appreciated as they help cover our operating expenses.

In closing, we want to say that we have been encouraged by the direction and support we have received from families around our province. We are committed to continuing our advocacy role of questioning actions being taken that may have a serious impact on our loved ones. Your letters which we have been able to post on our website have been very much appreciated. **It is critical that we continue to hear and document the impact of changes on individuals and families, and we urge you to submit your stories, letters and feedback through our e-mail address, info@bcfamilynet.org, or via our website at www.bcfamilynet.org.** We look forward to your continued support.

Sincerely,

Anita Dadson, President
FamilyNet Board of Directors