

Childcare Governance: Is There Another Way?



Child Care Coalition of Manitoba

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August 2009

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Preface

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba is a public education and advocacy organization, established in 1993. We are a broadly-based coalition of groups and individuals, incorporated in 2007. The Coalition currently has over 55 group memberships. Our members include parents, the labour movement, women's groups, the childcare community, educators and researchers and organizations committed to social justice, among others. Our goal is a fully accessible, publicly-funded, non-profit system of comprehensive and high quality childcare, with worthy wages and good working conditions for childcare staff.

The Coalition's current action project, ***Northern/Rural Women Project: Promoting Economic Security and Balancing Work/Family for Rural and Northern Women in Manitoba*** is funded by Status of Women Canada Women's Program. It builds on our previous social and economic impact studies of childcare. Our focus is on how a universal childcare system can promote local economic development while simultaneously enhancing women's economic security and reducing work-family conflict, particularly for rural and northern communities. These benefits are on top of the gains made to children, who participate in early learning and care settings. As recently as last year, UNICEF (2008) evaluated childcare in a number of countries around the world, noting that “for many millions of parents, childcare can help reconcile the competing demands and pleasures of income-earning and family life” and ranked Canada last, tied with Ireland!

Over January 22-23, 2009 the Child Care Coalition of Manitoba hosted a Think Tank titled, **Childcare Governance: Is There another Way?** in Portage la Prairie Manitoba. The Coalition welcomed 48 informed experts representing local government (e.g. city councilors, provincial senior bureaucrats), business (Maple Leaf Foods, Royal Bank of Canada), education (school boards), Aboriginal, labour, childcare and other community stakeholders who thoughtfully considered new ideas to strengthen the delivery and financing of early childhood learning and care programs for rural Manitoba. In our letter of invitation to Think Tank participants, we offered them this definition of governance:

Governance, as distinct from government, is the process through which communities make important decisions, set priorities, solve their problems, and render account. (CCCABC, 2007)

The Think Tank provided opportunities for business and community leaders to connect with peers who share their commitment to the future. Together, we

learned more about other models and sectors and how they are organized and financed, and the lessons for enhanced childcare in our province.

In addition to Status of Women Canada, the Think Tank benefited from funding support by the Public Health Agency of Canada / Manitoba and Saskatchewan and Manitoba Family Services and Housing, Manitoba Child Care Program.

The Think Tank began with a keynote presentation by **Charles Coffey, O.C.** the former executive vice president, government affairs and business development for RBC and chair, Council for Early Child Development, entitled ***Early Child Development: An Investment You Can Bank On***. His address was followed by a response from **Dr. Susan Prentice**, Associate Professor, Sociology, University of Manitoba who described the ***What is the Now*** - the current context of Manitoba's early learning and childcare system which included information about the economic impact of childcare upon local economies. A second response was provided by **Carol Ann Young**, a senior social planner with the City of Vancouver who has responsibility for the child development portfolio. She inspired us to consider ***What Could Be***, by sharing information about The City of Vancouver's Social Planning Department which undertakes a wide array of childcare and child development related activities including facilitating the design and development of new childcare facilities, overseeing a major grants program for childcare operators, collaboration on major research initiatives and developing municipal policy as it pertains to children and families.

On the second day, roundtable presentations by community experts helped us to consider alternatives to childcare funding and governance models, based on lessons learned in other sectors. These speakers included:

Employers: **Harley Grouette**, HR Manager, and **Gail Scott**, Corporate Six Sigma Coach, Maple Leaf Consumer Foods, Brandon

School Boards: **Lucille Daudet-Mitchell**, Coordonnatrice de la petite enfance, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine and **Dale Peake**, Superintendent, Southwest Horizons School Division

Community Development: **Bryan Spencer**, founding President of the St. Claude Community Development Corporation and Business and Project Manager, Community Futures White Horse Plains

Co-operatives: **David Kerr**, Cooperative/ Enterprise Development Specialist, Business and Rural Development

Municipalities: **Joe Masi**, Executive Director, Association of Manitoba Municipalities (AMM)

Financial Institutions: *Terry Burgess*, Regional Vice President Manitoba West, RBC

In response to these ideas, stakeholder participation was encouraged through Café Conversations and Action Planning sessions. Small groups worked through key questions which included:

1. Ideas for financing childcare centres.
2. Ideas for governance of childcare centres.
3. What might the business community do to increase access to childcare in their communities (re: number of centers and spaces etc.)
4. What might municipalities do to increase access to childcare in their communities (re: number of centres and spaces)?
5. What advice would we give to government (any level) from what we have learned here?

A report back of stakeholder discussions and ideas was completed by the Think Tank facilitator, Heather Erhard, which can be found on the Childcare Coalition's website.

What needs to happen in order for the kinds of big system changes proposed by Think Tank participants to actually take place? Inspired by and moving beyond the Think Tank, this paper serves to further develop and expand upon the key governance and financial recommendations generated during the Think Tank. We have attempted to situate these ideas in relationship to policy initiatives, promising practices and policy recommendations made by others who are dealing with or have dealt successfully with similar large scale change initiatives. The remainder of this paper examines some of the lessons learned by others and how these options might be applied in Manitoba, in order to achieve a better model to govern and finance our childcare programs and an eventual transformation to a publicly funded system.

Municipal leadership

Think Tank participants were inspired by the City of Vancouver's role as a leader and system manager for childcare services. The City of Vancouver recommends a move to a more comprehensive and integrated approach to policy development at the local level. (Young, 2004) Participants quickly reached consensus about the value of system governance which kept "community ownership" as a central tenet while expanding the role played by municipalities and school boards in the provision of early childhood services in their catchment areas.

They determined municipalities should be encouraged to play a key role as systems managers (or childcare authorities) for integrated services which would include infant care, preschool programs (full day and part time), school age care, extended hour care, recreation, etc. The service manager would ensure linkages to school based programs and other community programs serving young families. There was also strong agreement with the common sense approach to situating such programs within community owned facilities, such as schools, but also libraries, health centres, community centres, and other municipal buildings.

The Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (2007) confirms that "local authorities determine their own daycare structure on the basis of local needs, the framework and objectives of daycare facilities, and the level of responsibility to be given to parent boards in daycare centres." Many local authorities have merged several administrations in order to establish a single, common administration responsible for young children, schools and leisure time activities.

Often seen as a role model internationally for its childcare service, Denmark mandates overall responsibility to local authorities to provide childcare facilities for children, ensure access, and to provide support for children with special needs.

In England, The Childcare Act 2006 imposed duties on local authorities to improve the well-being of young children in their area and to ensure that early childhood services are provided in an integrated and accessible way that maximizes the benefits to children and their parents. The local authority has overall responsibility for managing the programme in their area, distributing core funding, and co-ordinating and accounting for resources provided 'in kind' or on a 'quid pro quo' basis.

The Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (2009) acknowledges the central service system management role to be played by municipalities and this role is also recommended by Dr. Charles Pascal, Executive Director of the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and author of *With Our Best Future in Mind* (2009). In that report, Pascal states that the operation of early learning and childcare centres in Ontario should occur under the systems management of municipal authorities, with services provided by local or regional governments,

school boards, post-secondary institutions, or non-profit agencies. Based on the report, all service expansion will now take place through Best Start Child and Family Centres and school boards.

By the end of the Think Tank, there was interest in a ***stakeholder governance model*** whose exact composition might vary from one part of the province to another in recognition of community capacity and uniqueness. In all cases, members would include representatives of the school division / municipality / parents in a local partnership. The exact nature and size of the partnership's catchment area and boundaries would be determined by the local communities in a process of "natural selection" (but might mirror existing school division / municipal / health authority / Francophone / business development zone catchment areas).

Think Tank stakeholders were supportive of the role of the local community economic development office in the germination of such a hybrid model, noting with interest the rapid successes of start up operations for new centres where a champion for the creation of childcare services with CED expertise was involved. A community development focus to childcare start up could offer free consulting; business plan writing; proposal writing; finding vision and mission for facility, etc.

As not all community economic developers see the relationship between childcare and its multiplier effects on the local economy, more work within the CED community is required. The Association for Manitoba Municipalities would be a natural organizer for training for its members and municipal staff on the relationship between childcare and economic development. Municipalities may need to be encouraged to take their place at the table.

With Resolution #16/07, the Association of Manitoba Municipalities recognized that 21st century rural infrastructure must include services to help rural families balance work and family, while supporting the early learning and care of rural children. Consequently, the AMM will lobby the Province of Manitoba to provide more capital and operating grants for smaller rural operations to establish local childcare services and through encouraging the provincial government to provide incentives to increase the pool of trained early childhood educators in rural areas.

Each individual Manitoba municipality can pass a similar motion, and commit to a local target, (such as increasing access to licensed childcare within the municipality to 25 per cent within the next three years); and then engage in these further advocacy and public education activities. Once the resolution is passed, municipalities can be encouraged to send a copy of it to

- Prime Minister Stephen Harper
- Federal Minister of Human Resources and Social Development Diane Finley
- Premier of Manitoba, Gary Doer
- Provincial Minister of Family Services and Housing, Gord Mackintosh
- Provincial Minister of Education Peter Bjornson
- The local MLA and MP seeking her/his support for the resolution
- The local school board(s)
- The local community newspaper
- Their municipality's website

Coordination and Collaboration

Think Tank members recommended further investigation of ways to co-operate and collaborate as related to the development of new governance structures for Manitoba's childcare system, including

- research on governance models
- development of a best practice and recommendation discussion paper for broad – based input
- evaluation of existing governance models and pilot projects
- a review of the UN report card on Canada.

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba will host a policy conference in November 2009 which will help to address some of these important recommendations. However, there is much to learn from the existing literature about successful governance strategies.

According to Carol-Ann Young (2004) coordination and collaboration between municipalities, school boards and regional health authorities in “capital allocation, land use regulation and availability, operations, infrastructure funding, sharing of information and in kind supports is essential to building a high quality, affordable and accessible childcare system”.

Such a strategy is reinforced by the results of an international thematic review of early childhood education and care programs, conducted by the Organization for Economic and Cooperative Development (OECD 2001).

The OECD reviewed early childhood education and care policies and practices in twelve countries to determine what variables contributed to high quality care and positive outcomes for children in the early years. One of the OECD's eight thematic lessons is a "systematic and integrated approach to policy development and implementation". The OECD recognizes early childhood education and care as a foundation of the education process and recommends the services have a strong and equal partnership.

Rhianne Mahon, Director of the Institute of Political Economy and a member of the School of Public Policy and Administration and the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University in Ottawa describes this lesson as coordinated policy development at the central level and the coordination of central and local levels to balance equity and diversity objectives (2008). Mahon further stresses that clarity about the various roles to be played limits or enhances "capacities for overall coordination as well as for adjustment to local needs" (2008) and she and Jane Jenson point readers towards the role that can be played by Manitoba's "parent-child centred coalitions, which bring together local representatives of the various departments along with voluntary associations and the municipality to identify neighbourhood priorities and develop a local action plan" (2006, p.34). They recommend that the province of Manitoba "needs to work in full partnership with municipalities and school boards to plan for equitable distribution of ELCC resources." (2006, p.40)

Toronto First Duty¹ recommends the goal of integrated governance by developing a single body, responsible for financial, human resource and program decisions. Closer to home, in 2000, the Kenora District Services Board assumed the role of 'Child Care Service System Manager' for the Kenora District and has created a BEST START NETWORK made up of eight School Boards, Children's Service Agencies, NW Health Unit Services, Aboriginal Children's Services and Child Care Services. By 2006 the BEST START NETWORK had created one hundred and sixty-four (164) new child care spaces in the Kenora District.

According to Charles Pascal (2009) the new Ontario Early Years Policy Framework expectations will be operationalized through local Service Plans developed by municipal authorities in partnership with school boards and community partners. Outcomes and targets will be set through provincial-municipal collaboration; and funding will flow through municipal authorities and school boards to meet specific and agreed upon targets.

¹ Toronto First Duty is a pilot consisting of five integrated, school-based children's services hubs developed in co-operation with the Atkinson Foundation, the Toronto District School Board and community agencies. The City also covers 100% of school occupancy costs, summer day camp programs, and the Child Care Capital Reserve Fund. The Fund was created in 1998 when the formula for calculating municipal contributions was changed to allow municipalities to count user fees toward their 20% cost share. Half of the municipality's savings were used to eliminate minimum user fees and the other half to create the reserve. The funds are used to support new construction and for interest-free capital loans. (as cited by Mahon and Jenson, 2006, p.44)

Policy Frameworks and Protocol Agreements

The literature recommends the use of protocol agreements and policy frameworks to capture key understandings and to ensure coordination and accountability, especially about goals like space creation and affordability. For example, the OECD (2001) stresses that a systematic and integrated approach requires a coordinated policy framework and a lead ministry that works in cooperation with other departments and sectors.

Pascal's report clearly delineates between municipalities taking the lead on programs for children under the age of 4 while a full day *Early Learning Program* can be attended by 4's and 5's for a half, full, or extended day depending on family choice. It will be "a single program with a single pedagogical and curriculum approach planned and delivered by qualified educators using common space and resources." Education will be the lead ministry in Ontario for the entire early learning initiative, even when services for younger children are managed by municipalities.

Roger Hart (2008) recommends these specific Governance Strategies:

- Assessment and monitoring of the conditions for children
- A strategic plan for the municipality with a plan for children
- Critical review of municipal by laws in terms of children
- Training of children in citizenship or leadership

Carol Ann Young's advice (2004), based on the City of Vancouver's experience, is that framework goals are to create more coherent approaches to policies and practices, in order to build a comprehensive range of childhood education and care services. Further, city and school boards plan for and develop childcare on City/Park/School land and promote joint use of space for all types of childcare in child development hubs.

Accountability and progress are best assured when partners set specific goals /benchmarks for increasing access (e.g. 5 per cent in the next two years) and regularly measure successes. OMSSA (2009) recommends an accountability framework that focuses on successful outcomes for children rather than outputs for service deliverers.

The framework or protocols has partners committing to address policies and practices which either smooth the way or create barriers to space creation and affordability.

The Portage Think Tank participants recommended a braiding of funding from various departments, and a sharing of resources so that at least one regional staff position could be created in each part of Manitoba. Toronto First Duty recommendations concur, advising a dedicated staff person who is either assigned or hired to be "responsible for the initial start-up and on-going operation

of the project, including the program planning, program marketing, compliance with organizational policies, on-going evaluation, and appropriate representation and liaison to a broad range of stakeholders including, but not limited to the community, families, funders and other community service providers.”

This person reports to the governing committee or regional board of the local early learning system. Our Portage Think Tank participants imagined the board to be a collaborative structure, representing all the stakeholders in the community and ensuring voice and vote for smaller or less powerful stakeholders, including parents and existing childcare and early learning services.

Financing Options

UNICEF (2008) recommends that the minimum level of public funding to support the growth of early childhood education and care (for children aged 0 to 6 years) should not be less than 1 per cent of GDP. Since UNICEF reports that Canada actually spends less than .25 per cent GDP on early learning services (2008), it's clear that there will continue to be a significant shortfall for some time to come, even with Manitoba's own increased funding to childcare expansion. Given this reality, what role might alternative financing schemes play in the growth of Manitoba's system?

Our Think Tank recommended that the province of Manitoba increase funds in areas with decreased local revenue and develop a different type of funding formula that responds to local capacity. This will require a transfer of funds from the province to the municipality, in a dedicated funding envelope- e.g. a Child Care Infrastructure Fund, which might look like 90% direct funding by the province and 10% “in kind” funding from the municipality.

UNICEF agrees, recommending “ that where possible the way forward lies down the road adopted by countries such as the Netherlands – universal services, but with flexible financing systems that can give priority to the disadvantaged by increasing per capita expenditures where need is greatest” (2008).

At the local level, Think Tank participants pointed to the challenges faced by small groups of parents and other citizens when seeking to develop a plan for childcare services in their community or neighbourhoods; the length of time it takes to move from vision to reality; the many steps to be taken before funding is secured; and the personal liabilities borne by some volunteers in order to help speed the process (e.g. volunteers who personally guarantee their centre's mortgage). When early learning services are seen as a public service, financing and other start up obstacles will be more easily cleared.

While municipalities in some parts of Canada directly fund licensed childcare services, this has not been the case here in Manitoba. Think Tank members proposed that rural municipalities make a real budgetary commitment to

childcare and this good idea is supported by Roger Hart (2008) who discusses structural requisites municipalities need to set into place to be considered a UNICEF Child Friendly City. These include a specific municipal budget for children. Carol Ann Young (2004) recommends a move to more unified approach to municipal budget deliberations surrounding education and early care and education. She points out “the balance between fair wages and affordable fees is a delicate one” with little discretionary income in childcare delivery when about 85% of its delivery cost is staff wages. The other 15% are operational costs, such as facilities rent, maintenance, administration, etc.

Municipalities can offer substantial support to help offset these costs, by keeping rents nominal or even better, free; maintenance and infrastructure support, such as coordination and administration are other ways through which to offer important help. Recognizing that the early learning is part of the community’s public services, these can all be offered to the governing body as a service in kind in lieu of direct funding. The Portage Think Tank supported these kinds of ‘in kind’ or on a ‘quid pro quo’ supports as being important ones.

As Portage Think Tank participants valued the role to be played by local employers and businesses, there was interest in possible funding roles especially by larger corporate employers such as Royal Bank of Canada or Maple Leaf Foods Inc.

There was also interest in the idea of involving local businesses in the creation of childcare spaces, with various recommendations such as requiring that any new business bricks and mortar in a community must have childcare facilities to support children of employees i.e. 5 employees = 1 early childhood space funding. This would allow a flow of local dollars by local beneficiaries to supplement public funds in the creation of high quality childcare spaces for local children of local employees.

Participants suggested that local businesses might be able to provide in-kind services and support recognizing that it’s often easier for business to offer direct service than a cash transfer, regardless of size. Participants agreed that childcare needs a unified front to facilitate dialogue with business and that the process needs to be as smooth and simple as possible.

Italian childcare providers are experimenting with a unique approach to financing start up costs. Three large third sector (non profit) consortia have partnered with a big bank in a project to finance childcare services set up and run by third sector agencies, which usually do not have access to bank loans to create such initiatives.

The U.S. childcare policy experience seems to include many more examples of partnerships between multi levels of governments, businesses and private foundations in the development and funding of their market driven childcare

system. American approaches include the Bank of America Charitable Foundation, which donated \$10,000 to help the New Hampshire Community Loan Fund conduct “The Business of Childcare” trainings, conducted by professionals from the Community Loan Fund’s Childcare Facilities and MicroCredit-NH programs. These help childcare providers grow or expand their businesses to serve more children. Participants receive training on the core concepts of budgeting and cash flow for business management and on the financial impact of being a licensed provider. Cascadia’s Child Care Fund helps Washington and Oregon child care providers finance major projects such as center expansions, by offering low-interest loans and technical assistance to providers who do not qualify for traditional bank financing.

Anne Mitchell, Louise Stoney and Harriet Dichter (2001) created a catalogue of American financing options, and report that many state and local governments established initiatives to help childcare operators secure the capital they need to build and maintain quality facilities and/or programs. In some cases, governments take the lead on these strategies. They point to Connecticut, “which has made long-term, low-interest construction and renovation loans available through tax-exempt bond funding” and which uses state subsidy funds to repay up to 85 percent of the debt service on these bonds so that selected nonprofit child care programs have the revenue they need to repay the loans.” (2001, p.154) They further report on other states which stream their support through “intermediary” organizations that help to draw in funds and support from many partners. One example is the Massachusetts Child Care Capital Investment Fund, initiated by the United Way, which pools moneys from many sources, including foundations, government, four banks (Citizens Bank, Fleet, Boston Private Bank and Wainwright Bank) and insurance companies. The City of San Francisco pooled public and foundation dollars to seed a private sector child care facilities fund that is now able to leverage additional funding from the federal government and many other sources.

In the US, there are reports of examples of Business/Childcare Partnership Programs. In Seattle, Champions for Children is a fund managed by Childcare Resources, a Seattle-based non-profit childcare resource and referral agency which receives financial support from The Boeing Company, Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce, the City of Seattle and King County to support accreditation efforts of local providers.

In Charleston, West Virginia the West Virginia Kids Count Fund’s Partners in Early Education Program pairs local businesses with childcare centers to improve the quality of childcare by contributing various resources such as funding, supplies, old office furniture and technical support.

The Child Care Coalition of Manitoba supports and encourages the involvement of local small and large businesses in their communities and stresses that businesses need the presence of childcare in their communities to help

employees balance work and family. Just as healthcare and education are important to business, so are early childhood development services. However, even with incentives such as the Conservative Government of Canada's community investment fund which was to offer a \$10,000 credit to businesses that established childcare programs, there was no take-up. To achieve the kinds of ambitious and expansive goals discussed during the Think Tank, businesses and philanthropists will not be the panacea, but can and should play key leadership roles as an influential voices for increased public spending on early learning and childcare, working in partnership with the public sector to maximize and leverage all available funds.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the many excellent ideas generated by the Portage Think Tank participants can help to create a new governance model for Manitoba's childcare system. These ideas are supported by policy initiatives and recommendations from other jurisdictions and international experiences. We can move childcare and early learning from a fragmented, ad-hoc set of stand alone, tiny non profits to an integrated system that ensures access to children and families wherever they live in our province. This will require us to shift our understanding of such services from the market to those that are clearly situated within the "public good" a paradigm shift and systems transformation that requires huge personal and political will. Two more recommendations made by Young (2004) which can help create big systems changes are to

- Advocate for partnerships with the federal, provincial, regional and aboriginal governments to build a publicly funded national childcare/child development system
- Increase public awareness of the benefits of childcare and early childhood development on society.

The Childcare Coalition of Manitoba will continue to take a lead in helping to actualize our collective vision, and thanks the Portage Think Tank members for their ongoing interest in this most critical of issues.

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