

DUNCAN SINCLAIR

In the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s, day care was not a priority in the Yukon. The Yukon Legislative Assembly passed its first *Day Care Act* in 1979, providing for licensing of services. By 1986, the only major advancements in day care services were the introduction of subsidies to low income families using licensed care, and the adoption of regulations creating separate standards for day care centres and family day homes.

At the national level, day care advocacy and debate occurred through much of the 1980s without tangible conclusions on the responsibility of, or concrete actions by, the federal government. The Cooke Task Force reported in 1986. A Special Parliamentary Committee reported in 1987, with two minority reports. A National Child Care Strategy, including a federal *Child Care Act*, was announced in 1987 but, with the sole exception of a small initiatives fund, was later withdrawn.

The Yukon case during the latter part of the 1980s is remarkably different. In 1987 and 1988, new programs designed to create more licensed spaces throughout the Territory, particularly in rural communities, and to provide direct financial assistance for day care centres and family day homes were implemented in response to lobbying by parents, operators, and community groups.

In April 1988, a *Green Paper on the Future of Child Care in the Yukon* was released by the Honourable Margaret Joe, Minister of Health and Human Resources. This was followed by an exhaustive community consultation process undertaken by a non-partisan panel whose report, *We Care*, was presented to the Minister of Health and Human Resources in September, 1988. *Working Together: A Child Care Strategy for the Yukon*, the government's response to the panel's findings, was released in January, 1989. All this occurred in just ten months.

Within one year of the release of the Yukon Child Care Strategy, a comprehensive package of new legislation, policies, and programs has been developed and largely implemented. Included are measures to:

may be possible to develop a second "tier" of Indian resource and support service agencies which are the local community's resource for consultation and backup services.

A third approach is to look for a solution along the lines of the New Zealand *Children and Young Persons Act*, 1989. In this new act the authority to remove children from their community and extended family remains vested in the state, but this authority can not be exercised without the court hearing evidence on the capacity of the community and extended family to care for the child. Before a court order is granted, a report must be made to the court on why extended family and community can not make provision for the safety of the child. The effect of this provision is to expand responsibility for child welfare from the nuclear family to the extended family and community, reserving the exercise of the state level jurisdiction until these levels of protection have been fully explored.

Evaluation also remains important. Sharon Hume indicates that "on-going evaluation is now the responsibility of the Band", but beyond the responsibility of monthly monitoring, there is the need to evaluate the effectiveness of agreements over time. The approach here could be more like an accreditation process, combining evaluation with an examination of the community systems which support the effective conduct of the child welfare function. In any such evaluation or accreditation process it is important to recognize the different cultures and belief systems that exist. The issues that this creates are discussed in a recently published article based on the evaluators' experience with the Champagne/Aishihik evaluation.⁶

The Champagne/Aishihik community based approach to family and child service delivery demonstrates what is possible when the community embraces the opportunity to manage its own child welfare. It is a good example of how the problems of size and localism are not insurmountable and sets a precedent which other small communities can follow.

⁶ Frances Ricks, Brian Wharf and Andrew Armitage, "Evaluation of Aboriginal Indian Child Welfare: A Different Reality", *Canadian Review of Social Policy*, No. 25, 1990.

- create more child care spaces;
- provide full financial support to low income, and some assistance to middle income, families requiring child care services;
- extend child development services for special needs pre-schoolers to rural communities;
- initiate new pre-school and after-school contribution programs for services administered by non-profit community groups;
- increase the commitment to full-time and part-time training of child care workers in early childhood education;
- provide wage enhancements for workers and operating subsidies to centres and family day homes; and
- create a new Child Care Services Unit in the Department of Health and Human Resources.

The strategy was backed by a massive increase in territorial government expenditure commitments, including a more than 100 per cent increase from fiscal year 1987-88 to 1988-89 and a commitment for nearly \$9.0 million in additional funding over four years.

Finally, ten years after the first *Day Care Act* was passed, a new *Child Care Act* was introduced late in 1989 and subsequently adopted.

Yukon's "Working Together" Approach—Why It Worked

Three main features shaped the Yukon's child care initiative. They focused public debate and gave it strength and momentum. They were:

1. a statement of principles by the New Democratic government of the day;
2. a genuine community consultation process on the future of child care, which complemented and built upon earlier public expressions through consultation processes such as Yukon 2000, the Task Force on Family Violence, and ongoing community-based advocacy for improvements in child care services;
3. an emerging consensus seeing child care as a practical matter of both economic and social concern for women, family, community and culture.

1. Child Care Principles

The essential character of the Yukon approach was defined by a set of child care policy principles, which the Yukon Government formally adopted and published in the *Green Paper on the Future of Child Care in the Yukon*. The child care principles were:

1. **Quality:** Child Care services should maintain basic standards in programming, staff:child ratios, staff qualifications, health, safety and nutrition.
2. **Parental Choice:** The well-being of children is the parents' responsibility. The choice of child care is a parental decision.
3. **Accessibility:** Services should be available to all families regardless of income, employment status, or geographic location.
4. **Affordability:** Services should be affordable—cost should not be a barrier to access.
5. **Comprehensive Service:** A wide range of services should be available. A comprehensive child care program will provide for infants, pre-schoolers, school-age children and children with special needs. The range of services must consider the needs of shift work, part-time work, after school care, etc.
6. **Government Responsibility:** It will take active government participation to develop and implement a complete network of child care services in the Yukon.
7. **Accountability:** Regular monitoring and financial accountability should be provided to parents and other taxpayers. Licensing is the best way to make sure these basic standards are met.
8. **Non-profit vs Profit:** The best use must be made of public funds. Assistance must be seen to be going to the best possible child care.

Public consultation focused on the principles and issues arising from them. The question put to Yukoners was "... How should these principles be reflected in child care services in the Yukon? This is what the government can learn from you" (Yukon. Health and Human Resources, 1988 a).

The principles were accepted by some as a clear and credible statement of public policy and were viewed by others as flexible and subject to interpretation. Unlike earlier public hearings on a proposed *Human Rights Act*, the resulting debate gave respect to all points of view and facilitated a sharing of perspectives and ideas. The future of the Yukon's society, communities, cultures, and families was discussed without rancour. In its report, the Child Care Consultation Panel noted, "Sometimes we heard conflicting opinions about the type of care necessary or the choices parents must make, but always the underlying concern was to provide the best possible care for our children" (Yukon. Child Care Consultation Panel, 1988).

In themselves, these principles are not unique. Most have been proposed in the past by national forums and organizations (Special Committee on Child Care; Task Force on Child Care; Canadian Day

Care Advocacy Association), and by Yukon advocacy groups such as the Yukon Status of Women Council and the Yukon Child Care Association.

However, unlike the federal government in its child care consultations, the Yukon Government chose to stake its policy ground from the outset. It then consulted with Yukoners on how best to develop policies and programs based on this foundation. The need for child care and the responsibility of government to support comprehensive, accessible, affordable and quality child care services were not in question.

2. The Community Consultation Process

The government appointed a panel of three citizens to talk to Yukoners about the future of child care. The Child Care Consultation Panel had a simple mandate: to talk to Yukoners, hear and discuss what they had to say, and to record and report their views to the government.

Several major public consultation and participation processes on a range of social and economic issues pre-dated the child care consultation and set the stage for focused and informed debate. Of particular importance were the Task Force on Family Violence and the Yukon 2000 economic development planning process. Ultimately the child care community consultation benefited from an already established and constructive climate.

The Child Care Consultation Panel commenced its work in April 1988. The material distributed throughout the Territory by the government included a booklet, *Let's Talk about Child Care in the Yukon* (as part of the *Green Paper*) which identified a series of questions having a bearing on how the eight principles might be addressed. People were encouraged to speak to the issues as they saw them.

The panel took steps to ensure public input and dialogue. In its own words, its members

... visited 22 communities, attended 66 meetings (26 public and 40 private), listened and discussed the views, concerns, opinions, suggestions, and recommendations of close to 400 individuals, 12 bands (First Nations) and 21 groups, societies and organizations.

... visited preschoolers in child care centres and spoke with children in 10 classrooms throughout the Yukon. Fifty written submissions were received by the panel. These submissions and over 90 hours of taped recordings of meetings were reviewed and compiled ...

(Yukon. Child Care Consultation Panel, 1988)

The consultation process ultimately expanded to include education, advocacy, and consensus building. When the panel was asked questions it could not answer or had problems identified it believed could be addressed through existing child care services, the Department of Health and Human Resources was notified of the concern. Responses were expedited through the Day Care Coordinator.

It is perhaps instructive to contrast this effort to obtain public participation throughout the Territory with the record of the two federal processes. The Task Force on Child Care (1986) did not travel and only received one brief from a Yukon organization (the Yukon Status of Women Council). The Special Committee on Child Care established by Parliament visited Whitehorse, heard 24 witnesses and received 3 submissions, all from the community.

While the federal National Child Care Initiative was taken seriously by the territorial government in the context of multi-lateral discussions among all federal, provincial, and territorial governments, it did not receive much attention from Yukoners. Perhaps they were sceptical that a national strategy would offer much for Yukon families, special needs children, or aboriginal peoples. But perhaps more significantly, there was little ownership in what the national initiative promised. It was distant from the practical concerns and interests of families in the territory. It seems that no one, including the Yukon Government, thought changes should await the implementation of the federal initiative.

Following the announcement of the Child Care Strategy, the Yukon Government demonstrated its continuing commitment to public participation. Despite the risk of creating a sense that it was over-consulting, the government again consulted during the development of the Child Care Act, airing specific policy issues and options to be addressed in the legislation with an extensive group of organizations, the Council for Yukon Indians and Yukon First Nations.

Once drafted, the legislation was tabled in the Yukon Legislative Assembly and time was allowed for the public to study the bill. The Council for Yukon Indians and a group of operators and users of family day home services intervened to address specific sections of the proposed Act. The Legislative Assembly, with government support, took the almost unprecedented step of inviting two small delegations, representative of opposing points of view on the issues, to participate as advisors to the Assembly in a question and answer sessions with M.L.A.s on their concerns and proposals.

Ultimately the child care consultation succeeded because the government was committed to fostering the process, and the process

fostered public ownership of the resulting strategy and Child Care Act. Though not perfect, both have managed to reconcile some potentially conflicting viewpoints on a very personal issue.

3. Child care accepted as an economic, as well as social need in the Yukon

As elsewhere, child care has been traditionally viewed as a social issue in the Yukon. Child care services could provide a "headstart" educational experience or provide "time-out" for moms.

In the 1980s, however, child care was acknowledged as an economic concern in the territory. Women increasingly returned to the work force to meet family income needs while their children were young. With a changing labour market, the importance of training grew, and the lack of child care was an identified barrier to skill development and adult education. Many single parent families are led by women who work out of economic need. Finally, many women are seeking economic equality and a balance between work and family responsibilities.

These factors are particularly relevant in the Yukon where there is a high participation rate of women in the labour force and a significant percentage of single parent families with pre-school children. "In 1971 women accounted for 32 per cent of the Yukon labour force. By 1981, they were 42 per cent. . . . The labour force participation of all Yukon women in 1981, at 67 per cent, was the highest of any Canadian jurisdiction . . ." (Yukon Women's Directorate et al, 1986). It now exceeds 70 per cent. And in 1988, 30 per cent of Yukon families with pre-school children were headed by single parents (Yukon, Health and Human Resources, 1989 b).

During the Yukon 2000 economic development public consultation process, child care was promoted as an economic issue. The impetus for this was the discussion concerning women's participation in the economy. Initially, it was women who spoke up through workshops and research papers.

Sound economic development for the Yukon must be based on a strategy that includes all Yukon people, women and men. Women now account for more than 47 per cent of the working age population of the Yukon and they are more than 42 per cent of the labour force . . .

Roads . . . hospitals . . . are all seen as necessary infrastructure to support economic growth and development. If women are to participate equally in our economy, there must be more consideration given to the kind of care available for children before they enter school and after school hours

while parents are at work ... Perhaps child care facilities need to be viewed as part of the necessary infrastructure for economic development. (Yukon. Women's Directorate et al, 1986)

One workshop report noted that participants said "Child care services are an economic necessity" and went on to recommend that "child care should be funded by the department of economic development" (Yukon. Department of Economic Development, 1987).

A broader community consensus began to be reflected in the major conference proceedings as the Yukon 2000 process continued. One report "The Things That Matter," reflected these comments from Yukoners:

Most women have few opportunities for advancement, and the shortage of support services, especially child care, has made it difficult for women to combine home and work responsibilities.

Parents of both sexes who need or wish to gain employment or who wish to take training to upgrade their skills require a range of child care services ... Clearly, parents with children are unable to participate fully in all aspects of the economy without the availability of suitable child care. Child care has become an economic issue as much as a social one. (Yukon. Economic Development, 1987 b)

The Dawson Conference reported that,

Child care must be put into an economic context and not just a social context. It must be provided ... Child care is an essential component of employment training and therefore should be provided. (Yukon. Economic Development, 1987 c)

Through discussion stimulated by the Yukon 2000 process and later focused by the Child Care Consultation Panel, child care was accepted as a necessary, and perhaps essential, public service to meet the social and economic interests of Yukoners.

Yukon Child Care Strategy—Why It Works

The strategy was designed with bold objectives. But as noted by the Hon. Margaret Joe, Minister of Health and Human Resources, "the foundation of the strategy is built on the priority concerns presented by Yukoners in the consultation report. It is a firm foundation on which to build, because the building blocks come from Yukoners themselves" (Yukon. Health a Human Resources, 1989 a).

Strategy Objectives:

- to more than double the number of licensed child spaces to provide services for up to forty per cent of pre-school children in each Yukon community
- to provide full financial assistance for all low income families requiring child care services
- to have the majority of child care operators and workers obtain training in early childhood development
- to provide child development services for special needs preschools in all Yukon communities
- to recognize and support the aspirations of the Indian community to promote and provide culturally appropriate child care services
- to recognize the value of child care employment through pay parity for child care workers with comparable service sector occupations
- to contribute towards operating costs of licensed child care services in order to improve the quality of care and maintain user fees at levels comparable to those charged in 1988
- to support infant, after-school, pre-school, respite, 24-hour and seasonal child care programming in Yukon communities
- to provide and encourage services for parents to enable them to remain at home to care for their children, especially during pre-school years
- to establish legislation which fosters the development of quality child care with community and parental involvement.

(Yukon. Health and Human Resources, 1989 b)

The objectives were supported with six major initiatives addressing facility start-up, financial subsidies for families, child development services for special needs pre-schoolers, training and skill development for child care workers, wage enhancements for workers and subsidies for operators, new legislation and a new program delivery unit in the department of Health and Human Resources. The strategy was backed by significant new expenditures.

The strategy is designed to entrench the child care principles adopted by the Yukon Government, to sustain public participation in order to maintain the relevance of child care policies and programming, to provide for further community and First Nation control, and to foster integrated approaches and comprehensive programming.

Many features of the strategy, the new *Child Care Act*, and the subsequent program design will also ensure the ongoing development of child care policies and services.

1. Participation is Entrenched

The involvement of parents, child care professionals, licensed child care services, and the Territory's First Nations, from both rural and urban areas is guaranteed through a Yukon Child Care Board created by the new Child Care Act. Racial, regional and gender balance is to be considered in appointing members to this board (Yukon. Health and Human Resources, 1990 b).

The community consultation process will be sustained, albeit on a smaller scale, through this new institution.

The board's responsibilities are broad and significant. It may make recommendations to the Minister on any matter pertaining to child care, review policies, programs, services or administrative procedures, advise on the planning, development, standards, coordination and evaluation of child care services, and generally encourage the development and support of child care services that meet the needs of parents and children in the Yukon.

2. An Enabling Approach

The child care legislation and associated policies and programs have been designed to foster development of quality child care services. Some programs are carefully structured to provide resources and assistance, and to eliminate barriers to the start-up of new child care services. The strategy encourages parents and community groups to mobilize to create new pre-school and after-school programs, for example. Capital enhancement grants provide an incentive to improve child care facilities, equipment and grounds for safe, quality, and age appropriate programming and care. Specific incentives have been established to promote the creation of infant care services, including capital grants and higher subsidy rates.

Several measures are specifically responsive to the particular needs of individual parents. For example, part-time child care use is eligible for the parent subsidy.

There are no limits imposed on the number of child care centres, family day homes, pre-schools, or after-school programs or spaces that may be licensed and supported financially through the Child Care Strategy. Neither are there limits on the number of families who, if eligible for support, will receive the financial subsidy to purchase use of a child care service/space.

3. Aboriginal Needs Addressed

Unlike in most other Canadian jurisdictions, Native and non-Native people are equally eligible for child care services and the programs offered by the Yukon Government. Status Indians governed by the federal Indian Act are not excluded. Yukon First Nations may sponsor and administer child care services and apply for financial support. Indian families with pre-school children have access without distinction to all child care programming provided within the territory.

It cannot go without saying that since the late 1980s, Yukon First Nations have organized and are operating the only licensed child care services in some communities. These services are available to all pre-school children in the community. Examples include Mayo and Pelly Crossing. In Dawson, the First Nation operates a workplace day care centre.

4. Comprehensive Programming

The strategy supports measures for families requiring licensed care for their children not simply while the parents work, but also while they attend training or perform volunteer functions. It also supports a parent or parents who may stay at home to care for their pre-school children, through changes in social assistance policy and pre-school programming. The programs and measures provide a range of choices, including licensed child care centres and family day homes and unlicensed pre-school and after-school services.

The new programs have significantly increased the scope of services, the potential ages of children using the services, and parental economic circumstances. New programs have been established to support pre-schools, part-time care, after-school care, special needs programming (including children up to age 16 in certain circumstances).

The strategy also includes a major initiative to stimulate expansion of child development services for special needs pre-schoolers throughout the Territory through the Child Development Centre in Whitehorse. Through its new outreach program, the Centre now provides assessment and program services in several rural communities. The program also supports the development of child care workers where special needs children are using licensed services.

5. Community Control and Aboriginal Self-Government

The new *Child Care Act* specifically enables transfer of responsibility for the administration of the Act to a Yukon First Nation or a municipal council. The Umbrella Final Agreement for settlement of the Yukon Indian land claim provides for negotiation of self-government powers for Yukon First Nations in social services (and other areas) including child care.

It is possible for communities and Yukon First Nations to assume direct responsibility, as well as jurisdiction in the latter case, for developing and administering child care services. Through these provisions, there will be continuing pressure on the Yukon Government to support appropriate and viable services. Or, should new approaches be required, Yukon First Nations will be able to strike out on their own to meet their child care needs in the future.

6. Respect for Community Realities

The need to balance and address regional and community disparities to ensure fair and equal access to child care services has been recognized in the Child Care Strategy. Several of the new child care programs, such as the child care subsidy and the quality enhancement program (operating subsidy aspect), acknowledge that the cost of services and the cost of living are higher in most rural communities than in Whitehorse. This fact has been firmly incorporated in these programs. The child care subsidy is designed to provide comparatively greater financial assistance to parents living in higher cost regions where an income equivalent to a Whitehorse applicant's simply does not go as far. Higher operating costs for rural centres have been acknowledged and are disproportionately subsidized over Whitehorse levels of support.

During the consultation process, Whitehorse day care centres, and the Yukon Child Care Association in particular, sought to phase-in formal standards respecting worker qualifications. In lieu of legislating requirements for child care worker qualifications, the government chose to improve child care workers' qualifications through early childhood education and less formal training and skill development incentives (in the new wage enhancement program). Few rural residents and child care workers have a realistic opportunity to pursue formal training. The reality for the vast majority of rural and First Nations child care workers is that the formal skills and education will be developed over a long period of time.

In Conclusion

There are many lessons to be learned from this successful and comprehensive initiative. It is an example of a government working together with people to identify requirements and define solutions, guided by principles openly espoused.

The Yukon Child Care Strategy—as expressed through new legislation, policy and programs—is designed to meet specific objectives, while fostering the development of quality child care services and while respecting cultural and community differences and the strengths of a pluralistic society.

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Commentary on CHAPTER 5

ALAN R. PENCE

I remember in the spring and summer of 1988, while working in the day care research office at the University of Victoria, receiving almost monthly an in-pouring of child care materials from the Yukon. They were instantly recognizable—most of them were a fairly vivid green colour. Even without reviewing the materials it was apparent that day care had entered a new period in its development in the Yukon, a period of springtime awakening. In my memory, I have witnessed no comparable outpouring of material from any other province or territory over such a short period of time.

Some of us who have worked for many years in the child care field, tend to be somewhat cynical when we hear (quite loudly trumpeted) of “new” initiatives by governments in the area of child care. Too often, the “new” is not new, and the initiative is too little to be truly meaningful. There are no cheap fixes in day care, try as bureaucrats and politicians might to find them. The cost of providing *quality* care for young children is significant partially because we are no longer discussing a relatively small percentage of children in need of such care while their parent or parents work, (since the early 1980s, the majority of children under the age of six have had mothers in the labour force; the figure is now over 62%). Too few Canadian governments have seriously faced the issues of cost, quality, and magnitude of need that are inherent in the Canadian “day care question”. One of the Canadian governments that has, over the last few years, moved to face these issues is the Yukon and in doing so, the Territory of the Yukon has moved from a position of being in the back-waters of day care policies in Canada, to a position of leadership in the country (certainly in terms of process) as we enter the 1990s.

In the early 1980s, the Yukon was among the lowest two or three provinces and territories as regards support for quality child care. Yukon day care expenditures in 1982-83, on a per child basis, were less than 10% of the provincial/territorial average: \$3.67 vs. \$41.43 (Day Care Research Group, 1983). And while the Yukon did have staff-child ratios in place in 1982-83 for infant-care (unlike four provinces and territories which had set no ratios), the Yukon ratio of 1:6 was double the 1:3 ratios of Alberta, New Brunswick, Ontario

and Prince Edward Island. In general, the day care regulations that the Yukon government had in place in the early 1980s are supportive of Mr. Sinclair's statement that "day care was not a priority in the Yukon".

One of the most interesting, progressive, and responsible aspects of the Green Paper initiative undertaken by the Yukon government in 1988 was their position that the question was *not*: "Do we need care?", but rather "what kind of care (is needed)?" (*Let's Talk About Child Care*, p.4, 1988). By clearly establishing that the parameters for discussion focused on "what must be done to provide the best possible care" rather than on "is there a problem?" or "should government do something?", the government was able to solicit specific concrete input from the public and to translate that input into focused activities and policy directions, rather than becoming mired down in the endless positioning of personal beliefs that takes place concerning "the changing Canadian family" and "who should be minding the children". The failure of child care in Canada to move from its position as a major societal concern to a priority for new and effective policy development has been the failure of governments at all levels to focus the discussion on the do-able rather than on the debateable. The result of that failure has been the placing of a generation of Canadian children at risk through their daily experience of caregiving that is all too often at an inadequate level of quality.

The Yukon government is to be applauded for its focusing of the question and its courage in doing so. The results of the focused "Let's Talk" initiative, have been to move the Yukon out of the "back of the pack" of the lower 2 to 3 provinces and territories for child care support, into the progressive forefront of mainstream child care regulations and funding. The next four years will be critical for child care in the Yukon; as noted by Duncan Sinclair, a strong and progressive set of ten objectives has been established and it will serve as the measure of the Yukon's success in better meeting the needs of Yukon children and their families. If those goals are achieved, the Yukon will find itself not only a leader in Canada as regards a sensitive and well thought through *process* of implementing change in the child care area, but also in regards to an admirable *product* in the form of a much enhanced system of child care services.

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