

2009 Annual Meeting and Education Day
of the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers
Leadership: We All Play A Part
Wednesday, June 24, 2009
Metro Toronto Convention Centre, North Building



END CHILD & FAMILY POVERTY IN CANADA

Keynote Address
By Laurel Rothman



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For People. For Change.

Campaign 2000 and
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Advocacy: A Working Definition

- Advocacy has been defined as giving active, verbal support for a specific position or cause, and advocates as those who speak in favor of a cause or position or those who intercede or act on behalf of another. Thus advocacy and social work have always been linked.

– Adams, Dominelli and Payne. *Practicing Social Work in a Complex World*. 2nd edition. 2009.

Social Work advocacy practised in a wide range of settings

- Community agencies
- Public agencies and governments including elected officials
- Unions
- Private consulting firms
- Charitable foundations
- Self employment



Advocacy is deeply rooted in our history

- **“ . . . unremitting commitment of social workers to dual roles of alleviating human suffering of the individual and promoting broader social, political and economic change through social action.”**

October, 1926 edition of Social Welfare (journal published by the Social Service Council of Canada)

Therese Jennissen and Colleen Lundy, School of Social Work, Carleton University.

Ambivalence toward social action has resulted in its secondary status

- **Two key modes of practice shaped the nature of social work in Canada**

Recent photos of a Campaign 2000 Town Hall Meeting
on fed. role in poverty reduction –Metro Hall, Toronto, June 1/09



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Charity Organization Societies (COS)

- **Mary Richmond**
- **Social casework method in *Social Diagnosis (1917)***
- **Delineated between deserving, undeserving poor**

Settlement House Movement

- Emerged in reaction to the moralistic paternalism of the COS
- Jane Adams – Hull House -
- Its main contribution was group work – an expression of the link between individual need and the social conditions - and a “less stingy” attitude toward poor people.

Family Service Toronto: A Full Service Agency Woven from both traditions

- **1914 Neighbourhood Workers' Association**
- **Deep concern for welfare of families in Toronto**
- **To give the basic necessities of life to those in need**
- **1930s - Emergency UI relief during depression with other private agencies**

As shape of the family changes, services adapt

- **1950s - began focus on family counselling**
- **1960s - NWA becomes Family Service Association**
- **1970s – re-embrace the settlement model more explicitly to respond to Toronto’s diverse needs; established Social Action Unit**
- **1978 – Establish Employee Assistance Program**
- **1996 – Merge with Lesbian & Gay Counselling Centre**
- **2000’s - Maintains commitment to counselling & social action, including dedicated staffing & resources**

Social Work Leadership in Advocacy

- Child welfare practice
- Child and family poverty policy
- Creative use of collective bargaining



An All-Candidates'
Meeting on Children's
Issues, Toronto City
Hall, Jan. '06 (a pre-fed
election activity)

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Child welfare

- **Research and development of professional standards through such organizations as Child Welfare League of Canada**
- **Championing the critical needs of First Nations' children in state care through Jordon's principle and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society**

Child and family poverty

- **Child Poverty Action Group** – beginning in the 1980s put forward the arguments for child benefits and high quality community services for children and families (housing, child care)
- **Founders of Campaign 2000** – a coalition of more than 120 organizations committed to ending child poverty in Canada

Creative Collective Bargaining

- Child welfare workers utilized their rights gained through their collective agreement to bargain for lower caseloads which improved both services to clients and working conditions for staff
- Collaboration with the labour movement & skills in community practice made this challenge of workload a win-win-win situation

Advocacy in the 21st century: looking ahead to 2030 in Ontario

- **Population growth will continue; from the current 13 million to more than 16 million in 2031**
- **Net migration, of which immigration is the largest component, will account for 74% of total growth**

Ontario's population will age

- **Median age is projected to rise from 39 years in 2007 to 43 years in 2031**
- **Number of people 65 and older will double from 1.7 million (13.2%) to 3.6 million (21.9%) in 2031**
- **Population aged 75 + will more than double, becoming 10% of the population in 2031**

Children – more precious than ever

- **While the number of children in Ontario will grow, their share of the population will fall from 17.5% (2007) to 15.5% (2031)**
- **The proportion of working age Canadians in proportion to non-working seniors is expected to continue to decline**

Growth in Ontario is expected to vary by region

- **Greater Toronto Area (City of Toronto plus Durham, Halton, Peel and York) will grow the fastest and will comprise over half (50.8%) of the provincial population by 2031**
- **Decline of 2.9% in population is projected for Northern Ontario**

Ontario Population Projections Update 2007 – 2031. Ontario Ministry of Finance (Spring 2008)

Building Your Advocacy Toolkit

- **Stay informed on key issues – follow media, list-serves, websites, blogs etc.**
- **Get started with the issues on the current public agenda**
- **Write letters to the editor**
- **Respond to action alerts from coalitions, professional associations**
- **Complete on-line opinion polls**
- **Call or visit your elected representatives (city, provincial, federal)**

Poverty Reduction: Where we are now in Ontario

- **Poverty Reduction Strategy announced Dec. '08 with target to cut child & family poverty rate by 25% by 2013**
- **Strategy includes: increase to Ontario Child Benefit; review of social assistance in 2009; public consultation To develop an affordable housing strategy; new Temp Agency legislation; and a new Community Opportunities Fund**
- **New Poverty Reduction Act 2009 will ensure annual reporting on progress, public consultation and updates to Strategy every 5 years**

What you can do: Affordable housing

- **Government has announced public meetings, June through September in 12 cities to get input on a Long Term Affordable Housing Strategy for Ontario**
- **Check www.stableandaffordable.com for updates**
- **If your community is not on the list, call your MPP to ask “*When and where do you plan to hold a meeting to get input on the affordable housing strategy being developed by Minister Watson?*” Connect with local housing activists to organize a meeting if your MPP won’t**

Social assistance

- The current social assistance system in Ontario “stomps people into the ground,” says Premier McGuinty
- 765,000 people rely on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Soon thousands of newly unemployed Ontarians will be forced to turn to these programs
- See www.incomesecurity.org for updates on social assistance review

Employment Insurance

- Only about 1 in 4 unemployed workers in Ontario is eligible for EI, an insurance program that is part of poverty prevention
- Help *Fix EI*: improve eligibility, increase length and amount of benefits
- Get information and sign a petition at www.goodjobscoalition.ca

Making the personal political

- Advocate with a buddy
- Keep informed about current trends in your area of practice
- Start by taking one action per quarter of the year
- Join the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction and get weekly updates. Go to www.25in5.ca.
- For Campaign 2000 updates, send your contacts to liyugu@familyservicetoronto.org; check out www.campaign2000.ca

ELIMINATING Child poverty is June Callwood's unfinished business.



“When you see an injustice, you have the responsibility to act.”

June Callwood (1924 – 2007)

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