

FAMILY PARTNERS: *Background of MCFD Restructuring*

Fall 2001: The restructuring process began when Minister Gordon Hogg selected one of scores of Core Review submissions as his restructuring model. This proposal, submitted by a group of service providers and Individualized Funding (IF) proponents called the Community Living Coalition (CLC), promised 20% cost reductions (note, not service cuts) if service delivery were transferred to a new community authority (essentially, a provincial version of our regional health authorities).

Spring 2002: Hogg announced 23% budget cuts over three years: 17% for adult community living; 11% for children with special needs and 30% for other child and family services including child protection. He also appointed a Community Living Transition Steering Group (CL TSC). Most of the 23 TSC members were chosen by the CLC, others were ministry staff and two were independent community voices. They were asked to develop the restructuring model and report back by the fall. Parallel steering groups developed plans to restructure children's and Aboriginal services based on new regional (instead of provincial) authorities.

Sept/Oct. 2002: International experts unanimously warned that the restructuring would likely fail, placing ministry clients at grave risk, if it was accompanied by budget cuts. (www.cltsbc.ca/expert_commentary.htm) The two independent TSC members resigned, citing grave concerns over both process and proposals.

Hogg asked a Joint Budget Committee of CLC members and ministry staff to flesh out financial aspects of the TSC proposals. The committee's report was not made public, only the conclusion that, with some minor adjustments to be approved by Treasury Board, *restructuring within the proposed budget cuts was feasible*. In late October, *the remaining TSC members unanimously endorsed this recommendation in their final report*. The BC Association for Community Living (BC ACL) endorsed the TSC report on behalf of its member service providers.

Nov. 2002: Before the TSC report was finalized, Hogg had drafted legislation establishing an Interim Board to guide the transition of services to the new model. On Nov. 13, Hogg appointed CLC members to a majority of the Interim Board positions. He also signed an agreement with the Interim Authority, formalizing the restructuring process and establishing co-management of ministry services during the transition. Meanwhile, he began seeking input from other families and the public on the TSC proposals to restructure MCFD services.

Meanwhile, concern was growing over both the proposals and the process in which they were being developed. **Key concerns over the TSC proposals include:** the impact of budget cuts & uneven distribution of those cuts; the international experts' warnings; unrealistic assumptions underlying certain proposals; no efforts to retain aspects of the current system that work well; proposals to take over services from other ministries; specific criticisms of the new model such as the elimination of a rural presence for service delivery; inadequate safeguards to assure safety and accountability during and after the transition; tax, choice and other implications of the proposed shift to IF; and the loss of targeted funding for children.

A fundamental complaint was that Hogg was moving ahead without any analysis of the impact of these proposals: there was no feasibility study, no impact analysis, no business case or implementation plan. Serious concerns were raised about the process itself, including inequity in community access to planning and decision-making and concerns that most families were not adequately informed or consulted.

Families and service providers wrote letters and held meetings with Hogg to outline these concerns. The Minister was asked to guarantee no cuts in services, safeguards for ministry clients during and after any transition, a temporary halt to restructuring pending better impact analysis and discussion, and a more balanced representation of the community in the planning process. Hogg has not addressed most key concerns, though he did agree to extend and expand proposed consultation on the TSC proposals.

Dec. 02: The minister's Evaluation Committee submitted its critique of the TSC report, echoing many of the same concerns that parents and critics of the TSC process had raised, though supporting the minister's overall cost-cutting agenda. Feedback from other families and caregivers also voiced many of the same concerns. View the Evaluation Committee report and other feedback at http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/change/cltsbc_comments.htm

Next steps: The Ministry plans to hold consultation sessions throughout the province in January 2003 before deciding on the TSC recommendations at the end of January 2003.