

**WELCOME to our first issue of the
"NGO JUSTICE SUMMIT
NEWSLETTER"**

Our goal is to promote awareness among NGOs about the opportunities arising from the Alberta Summit on Justice. This newsletter is intended to inform NGOs about what is happening with the implementation of Summit recommendations and how to get involved.

What is an NGO?

Non-government organizations, also known as community agencies or non-profits, provide a variety of services and activities in the community and at various stages of the justice system. They are governed by volunteer boards of directors and make extensive use of volunteers in providing programs.

Many of these organizations work on the front lines, witnessing daily the impact of poverty, unemployment, substance abuse and violence. They have come to understand how these factors relate to involvement in crime. This is one of the many reasons why NGOs have an interest in the Justice Summit.

ALBERTA'S SUMMIT ON JUSTICE: WHAT HAPPENED?

By now, Albertans are familiar with the variety of summits held by the government to seek input and recommendations on public policy. The Summit on Justice was held in early 1999 to obtain input about changes to the justice system.

The Summit was planned by two committees made up of representatives from the various components of the justice system, which were called the sectors. There were 14 sectors involved in the planning.

The vast number of non-government organizations (NGOs) that have an interest in justice were represented by Christine Leonard, Executive Director of the John Howard Society of Alberta. Leonard met with over 200 staff and volunteers from NGOs as she traveled the province consulting the NGO sector, getting their input into the

Summit. Each sector representative consulted others within their sector in order to prepare a sector brief.

In addition, an all-party MLA consultation committee was established to coordinate public input. The public responded at hearings and in writing.

Two-thirds of the delegates who attended the Summit were randomly selected public members. The remaining delegates were appointed by the sectors.

Delegates to the Summit

were given a summary of the input received from the sectors and the public so that they could prepare for the discussion. Over 500 recommendations were written by Summit delegates. Results and summary recommendations from the Summit were prepared and submitted to the government in the form of a Final Report.

With the Justice Summit completed, members of the planning committees were re-appointed to the new Policy Advisory Committee (PAC). The PAC is now overseeing implementation of the Summit recommendations, and Christine Leonard is again acting as NGO sector representative.

As NGO representative, Leonard continues to advocate for strong involvement of NGOs in the implementation of Justice Summit recommendations and is seeking input and feedback from the NGO sector.

AFTER THE SUMMIT: WHAT NOW?

The Final report of the Summit included 25 Core Recommendations that captured the essence of the 517 recommendations written by the delegates. Implementing these recommendations is now the challenge for all the sectors. Delegates to the Summit recognized that change has to come at all levels of the system and that it won't be meaningful if attempted by the government alone. More importantly, delegates were very clear about the need for greater community involvement in both follow-up to the recommendations and in the justice process itself.

Alberta Justice included Summit follow-up in its Business Plan and is preparing a "Report Card" that will outline the Department's plans for implementation. There are

"There are opportunities for NGOs in these implementation plans. The challenge now is for all of the sectors, including NGOs, to get active."

opportunities for NGOs in these implementation plans. The challenge now is for all of the sectors, including NGOs, to get active.

We encourage you to review the Final Report. You can phone 310-0000 for a copy or access it on-line at: www.gov.ab.ca/just (Click on Publications).

Focus on the recommendations of most interest to your work. You may notice two things:

? You may be already developing or delivering

programs related to the recommendations. It doesn't matter to us if you have been doing it prior to the Summit. We would like to hear about what you are doing so we can get a better sense of NGO activity related to justice. This helps us build better linkages among NGOs.

? You may see Core Recommendations that interest you. Think about what your NGO brings to the implementation and how you could get involved. We can then tell you who else is interested, who to talk to at Alberta Justice or in other sectors and what is happening with the Recommendations.

In addition, you can take advantage of the two consultations that are described below.

HAVE YOUR SAY ABOUT A UNIFIED FAMILY COURT SYSTEM

Many people who participated in the Summit expressed concerns about the costs and delays in family law processes. Specific examples of these included the costs of lawyers, the cost of filing documents and that court processes are too complex. Delegates acknowledged these issues and wrote recommendations to address them.

One of the core recommendations states that "the language, procedures, and accessibility of the justice system be simplified, made more user friendly, and made easier to understand." As

"Your NGO may assist clients who are involved with family law issues. It is important that your agency and the people you serve provide input into improving the family law system."

a result, a Task Force was established to look into simplifying family court structures and procedures in particular.

A consultation paper, including a questionnaire, is available to as-

sist those who want to provide input. Topics for discussion include levels of satisfaction with court processes, changes that would improve court processes, whether family law matters should be heard by specialized family law judges, and what services should be offered to assist adults involved in family court proceedings, as well as other topics.

Your NGO may assist clients who are involved with family law issues. It is important that

(Continued on page 4)

ALBERTA'S COMMUNITY JUSTICE POLICY: WHAT DO YOU THINK?

“... community partnership, and, where possible, community ownership and delivery of justice services [are] seen as important avenues toward creating a system that is an integrated part of community life.”

— Final Report
Summit on Justice

One of the key themes of the Summit was the need for increased community involvement in justice. Communities benefit when we find ways to involve community members and non-professionals in planning and delivering justice services. In order for restorative justice practices to be successful, victims, offenders, and communities must be involved in the restoration process.

NGOs can play a significant role in community justice by demonstrating how restorative justice can enhance perceptions of safety, health and welfare within participating communities.

Alberta Justice has taken action on this by releasing a draft of its new **Community Justice Policy**, which supports the implementation of restorative justice processes. The draft was sent to over 400 government and non-government organizations throughout the province for feedback and involvement regarding the community justice policy. Bruce Anderson, from Alberta Justice, advises that there will be a series of stakeholder

consultations in the fall. You are encouraged to provide feedback or become involved with the stakeholder consultations by contacting Bruce Anderson.

You can obtain a copy of the draft or provide your feedback on the Community Justice Policy by contacting Bruce Anderson directly at:

Bruce Anderson
Alberta Justice
Public Security Division
10th Fl., 10365-97 St.
Edmonton, AB
T5J 3W7
Ph: (780) 422-8318
Email: Bruce.V.Anderson@gov.ab.ca

Advantages of Restorative Justice, as described by Alberta Justice:

- ? is an effective tool in conflict and social tension resolution
- ? offers clear, active and constructive opportunity for offenders to be accountable regarding harm they have caused
- ? can be available at all stages in the criminal justice continuum in tandem with the priority of public protection and safety
- ? is humanitarian and culturally sensitive, providing all parties with equal opportunity for participation
- ? requires fully informed and voluntary participation of victim and offender, recognizing the need for community groups/programs in the restorative justice process



We are forming a network of NGOs who are participating in Summit related activities. Please let us know if you participate in any of these initiatives so that we can keep you up to date on progress or other activities that may interest you about the Summit.

UNIFIED FAMILY COURT SYSTEM

(Continued from page 2)

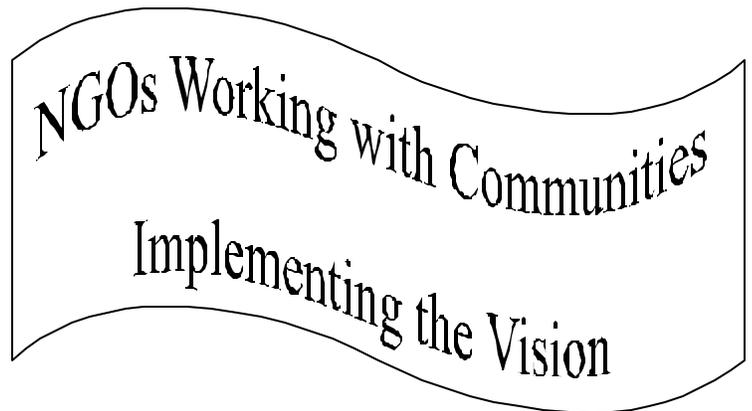
your agency and the people you serve take this opportunity to provide input into improving the family law system. There are several ways to get involved:

- ? Pick up a copy of the Task Force User's Questionnaire at any courthouse, call your local MLA for a copy, or phone 310-0000 to obtain a copy in the mail.
- ? Respond to the Questionnaire online: <http://www.gov.ab.ca/just/> (Click on Initiatives and Events)

- ? Write a letter in your own words instead of following the questionnaire format.
- ? Attend a public hearing in your area. Dates and locations will be posted on the website.
- ? Post a notice of this opportunity in your agency so staff, clients and volunteers can also have their say on this issue.

The deadline for feedback to the Task Force is September 30, 2000. The task force is to submit its report to the Minister of Justice by the end of 2000.

NGOs & THE JUSTICE SUMMIT



CONTACT US

Christine Leonard
NGO Sector Representative
Policy Advisory Committee
info@johnhoward.ab.ca

or

Colleen R. Ryan
NGO Justice Summit Assistant
cryan@johnhoward.ab.ca

c/o The John Howard Society of AB
2nd Floor, 10523 - 100 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5J 0A8

Phone: (780) 423-4878
Fax: (780) 425-0008

One of our goals is to ensure that information about the Justice Summit is shared with Alberta NGOs. We encourage you to pass the word.

Please circulate this newsletter, promote these Summit related opportunities in your own publication, and/or let us know what other organizations might like to receive our newsletter.

WE APPRECIATE YOUR ASSISTANCE IN SPREADING THE WORD

*If you would like us to remove your organization from our mailing list,
please let us know.*