

**WELCOME to our fourth 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.

Building Capacity: United We Stand...

How many of us remember the cut backs of the mid 1990s? Both the federal and provincial governments were having to tighten their fiscal belts and one group that got squeezed was the voluntary sector. Who would have thought that less than a decade later the two sides, government and the voluntary sector, would be coming to an agreement about developing a relationship between the voluntary sector and the government based on trust and mutual respect?

During the past five years, the visions held by key staff of some of our national organizations resulted in the development of a written agreement with the federal government. Since 2000, they have been working hard at developing the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI), which has involved roundtable conferences and discussions on: strengthening the capacity of the voluntary sector; improving capacity in information management and information technology; simplifying regulations for voluntary

organizations; raising awareness about the value of the voluntary sector and, of course, developing the written agreement. Out of the ashes of hard times rises the phoenix called "The Accord."

What is this Accord, you ask? Well, it is a jointly developed document that lays out a road map of the relationship that the voluntary sector and the federal government would like to forge for the future. The document lays out:

CONTACT US

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

or

Madhu Sood
NGO Justice Summit Assistant
msood@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

- ? Recognition of the independence of the voluntary sector and its contribution to Canadian Society.
- ? Principles for the two parties, the government and the voluntary sector, to join forces to achieve common goals in better serving Canadian society.
- ? Principles on how the government and the voluntary sector can move towards greater mutual understanding and more co-operative ways of working together.

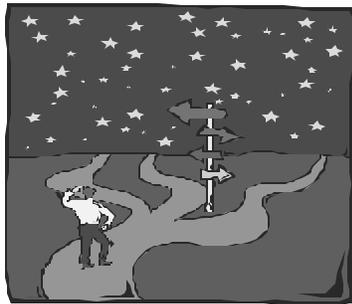
United We Stand cont...

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The Accord is really the beginning of the voyage. While the Accord is important, it is only the first step on this momentous journey. The journey involves a shift in understanding about the importance of the voluntary sector in Canadian life, the development of better practices within government departments in dealing with Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and greater consistency in practices across departments. The relationship with government has at times been difficult, but we now have the opportunity to lay down some basic principles of the relationship that will result in more co-operative ways of working in the future.

Parallel to the Accord and Voluntary Sector Initiative, our provincial government has been involved in the Alberta Charities Round Table. A conference was held in November 2000 that brought together non-profit, charitable and voluntary sector organizations to discuss and act upon issues related to the capacity of the voluntary sector to meet community needs.

The report of this conference, "New Directions New Pathways," (NDNP) has just been published and it includes over 135 recommendations to build capacity in the voluntary sector of Alberta. The four topics the round table focussed on were: Accountability; Collaborations, Partnerships and Mergers; Building Human Capabilities and Resources and; Finances. Over a two day period, the conference discussed how these issues impact on the non-profit and charitable sector in Alberta.



The participants felt that voluntary organizations are already accountable and that the accountability is becoming more rigorous. They felt that there was need to develop clear criteria on accountability. They wanted to develop a provincial body (like a charity commission) within two years that will create standards of accountability. "There should be an equal number of representatives from all three components of the sector (the voluntary organizations, funders and regulators)." They also wanted to "Develop the provincial body which will help to bring together activities in the sector and build upon what is available."

Participants also felt that while collaborations could be beneficial because they raise an organization's profile and attract sponsors, partnerships do not solve all problems and they must be of benefit to all stakeholders in order to be successful. Collaborations could be assisted by developing "a database to be available on the Government of Alberta web site, which includes all registered societies and charities in the Province including their mandates, programs and services" and developing "an incubator fund which supports the development of collaborative efforts."

On the topic of building human capabilities and resources, the participants felt that strong people resources contribute to strong organizations. However, one of the factors preventing the building of stronger organizations was lack of training opportunities. There was a recognition that the voluntary sector has some unique training and education needs. Further, the under-valuation of the sector leads to a lack of commitment to human resource development. They recommended the promotion of "ongoing and systematic research into human resource issues in the sector including recruitment, training and retention of volunteers and paid staff."

In the finances section, participants were asked what hinders access to financial resources. The participants made comments about how they are seen to be delivering programs previously delivered by government and how sustaining their funding is a major concern. The recommendations included that "Governments need to maintain and continue to be the primary operating cost supporter for non-profits/charities" and that participants wished to "Encourage the federal government to improve incentives for donating and volunteering."

The Alberta Charities Round Table also called for developing links with the federal government's Voluntary Sector Initiative and to "Create a "Think Tank" immediately to facilitate discussion on a provincial/national level re: roles of different stakeholders in the sector and how they can best work together."

While the VSI is focussing on developing the infrastructure of how we work together, the NDNP report is concentrating on what we need and want changed within the infrastructure in Alberta. We feel that both wheels of a bicycle are necessary for a person to have a safe and comfortable ride. Likewise, both the VSI and the NDNP initiatives are important to NGOs. The two initiatives may at present be separate, but, like the wheels on a bicycle, both initiatives are essential and will result in a better ride for NGOs on our route to success.

The key phrase in both processes is "building capacity." The Accord is a dynamic development that begins to consolidate a commitment to work on common goals with the government, even though at times we may not agree on everything. The provincial initiative is similarly an innovative development that focusses on the day to day practicalities of NGOs providing a service to their communities. Both initiatives are developing a dialogue which will ultimately strengthen both the government's and the voluntary sector's roles to better serve all communities and, thereby, build capacity in our society. Fundamentally, both these initiatives help to shift the discus-

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Understanding PLE in Alberta: Survey Says...

Core Recommendation #1 of the Justice Summit in 1999 was: "That more information and awareness about Alberta's justice system be provided to young people through the school system and to adults through public education and awareness." One of our key aims in the Justice Summit Project has been to spread information about what is new and what is changing within the Justice system since the Summit. Public legal education is providing information and raising awareness about areas of law to an individual or a group of people. We have been conscious, during our work leading to the Summit and since then, that many Non-government Organizations (NGOs) are involved in public legal education (PLE) in their communities. However, we had no definitive information as to who was providing PLE, what topics of PLE were being provided and in which geographical areas.

Our funder, Alberta Law Foundation, was also interested in finding out where, how and to whom PLE was being provided in Alberta. Therefore, in April we undertook a research project to gather information on the provision of PLE by NGOs in Alberta. We sent out 478 questionnaires across the province to NGOs on our database. A total of 160 organizations responded, and we wish to thank you all for your time and effort in answering the questionnaire. Your responses have proven invaluable in providing a picture of PLE in the province. We are pleased to share some of what we found.

The Survey findings show that:

Overall, 67.8% of NGOs who responded to the survey are providing PLE in the province. Most PLE is currently offered on the topics of: family and family crisis, criminal, youth justice and courts. We also asked NGOs what legal topics they thought needed more attention. The topics NGOs identified for future development were the same as the ones already being provided: family and family crisis, criminal, youth justice and courts. But we also found that NGOs want to expand the legal topic areas to include First Nations and Metis law, consumer law, housing law and issues affecting poverty. The survey indicated that NGOs are identifying non-traditional areas of law where services need to be expanded.

The audiences most served by NGOs currently providing PLE are: client groups, general public and students in a school setting. A key finding in this survey is in the audience section. NGOs are saying that the target audience has to be expanded. NGOs want to carry on providing for children and youth, the general public, victims and families. At the same time, they are also indicating that they see the need to include more people affected by poverty and poverty law issues, immigrants and First Nations/Metis communities.

The most used methods of delivery in PLE are: telephone/personal contact, presentations and brochures. We found that the use of personal contact through one to one or telephone work is the main method of delivering PLE information favoured by NGOs and their clients. Much information is being provided individually, rather than through a formalized, funded program that has a dedicated PLE staff person. Methods and materials were another key area of information in the survey. The depth and breadth of ideas put forward by NGOs are imaginative. For example, NGOs want PLE to incorporate workshops, distance learning and face to face sessions.

The survey results reveal some general trends in delivery of public legal education by geographic location in Alberta. Major centres such as Edmonton, Calgary, Grande Prairie, Medicine Hat, Red Deer and, to a lesser extent, Lethbridge, have numerous organizations offering PLE. Rural areas of the province, particularly those distanced from a major centre, appear to be under served in terms of PLE.

The mapping of PLE in Alberta has been exciting. There are some key findings that relate to the support NGOs are seeking in the delivery of PLE. A need for NGO staff to be trained and brought up to date on areas of law was identified. Many organizations indicated that they are providing public legal education to their colleagues, co-workers and other staff. Many also said that it is a requirement that their own staff are aware of the law in all areas relating to their area of service provision, in order to effectively and properly assist clients. Organizations pointed out that they are working in a complex environment and need updating regularly. This requirement for training and staff development has also been highlighted in the VSI and the Alberta Charities Round Table conference.

NGOs are also seeking to establish links and to spread their information amongst the NGO community about the services they offer. For example, one respondent wrote that they hold public meetings on a variety of social justice topics and provide contact and material lists from other organizations to local teachers who really appreciate this resource. However, the NGO pointed out that listings grow outdated too quickly and need constant updating.

A key theme within the responses was the desire to not only provide PLE to the present clientele, but also to expand PLE services to sections of the community that may have been left out in the past. One respondent wanted services to be extended to groups including those on low income, people from minority communities and people who have difficulty reading or writing. Another respondent felt that the target audience should be extended to include child welfare clients and Aboriginals: *There is a large percentage of aboriginals that are unaware or no one has informed them of what rights or options they have when dealing with child welfare system or the criminal justice system.*

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Survey Says cont...

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NGOs also want to expand the non-traditional PLE work that they are doing. NGOs are focussed on providing services to best meet the needs of their clients and this, more often than not, means working one to one with the client on his or her terms and at his or her need level. For example, one respondent felt that there is a need to develop methods of delivery that include interactive video presentations, question and answer sessions and peer mentor programs for youth so that they can relate to someone who has been involved in the justice system. Another respondent wanted materials developed that are easy to read, grade 3 - 8 reading level, and include information in a picture format. Many NGOs also pointed out the desire for legal clinics to be established in the province.

The wealth of information NGOs provided has been extremely useful in drawing a picture of PLE in the province. Thank you for your contribution. It is critical to us that NGO voices are heard and action is taken upon what you are saying. To this end, Alberta Law Foundation has welcomed the report on the survey findings, and is considering the recommendations. Alberta Justice, who was a partner in developing this survey, is establishing a web based PLE database that will hopefully include information about NGOs and their PLE work. We hope to use the survey results to ensure that NGOs are well represented in the database. We will be contacting NGOs individually to ask for consent to put your information on this web site. Finally, we have also had the pleasure of attending a federal government meeting about the planning and delivery of Public Legal Education, and the report produced from the survey was provided to the federal government representatives. The aim of the meeting was to develop a Canada wide strategy on PLE and it was clear to us that what Alberta NGOs had said was timely and extremely relevant to the federal government's agenda as well.

Our NGO Justice Summit project has several roles: to listen to what NGOs are saying, to share your views with government and other sectors, and to work collectively with the sectors and the government in implementing core recommendations from the Justice Summit. Recommendations such as # 23 "That the justice system encourage communities to work in partnership with it to develop and implement crime prevention strategies" and # 24 "That a public input process for the justice system be established to foster ongoing communication and information sharing" are what this project is about. The PLE survey is a great example of how we are working with NGOs to bring your voices to the attention of the government and other sectors.

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.

United We Stand cont...

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sion from crisis intervention to pro-active policy development. The opportunity to be fully involved in partnering as equals with government in service delivery to Canadians is a culmination of the decades of hard work by the voluntary sector. This is a once in a life time opportunity to build a partnership, based on a strong foundation, upon which government and the voluntary sector can survive any storm, any financial downturn, any disagreement.

While life as we know it and live it will not come to an end if NGOs do not buy into the partnership, the possibilities are endless if we do buy into this partnership. It reminds us of a similar type of initiative undertaken jointly by stakeholders and the Alberta Government over two years ago called the Justice Summit. The Justice Summit, through the hard work and involvement of NGOs like yours, is bringing about tremendous changes in justice in Alberta. The Summit is recognised provincially and nationally as an extremely successful participation process that furthered the causes of community involvement, accessible justice and accountability among government, stakeholders and Alberta communities. The change that has come about through the Justice Summit is like a runaway train; it cannot be turned back and it continues to gain momentum. This is how we feel the VSI and the NDNP initiatives could also unfold if they are given the momentum of your involvement.

The question is, where do we go from here?

If you are interested in the VSI and the Accord, you can get involved by visiting their web site www.vsi-isbc.ca. This site is an interactive web site that provides up to date information and seeks your views on differing topics, including the Accord, as they relate to voluntary sector needs.

If you are interested in finding out more about the provincial initiative, then we suggest that you get a copy of the report from **Mr. D. Scott Hood** Policy Advisor Government Services 3rd Floor, Commerce Place 10155—102 Street NW Edmonton, Alberta T5J 4L4.
Ph: (780) 422-8166 Fax: (780) 427-3033.
E-mail: scott.hood@gov.ab.ca