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difference



conference summary

Community-based
Social Service Sector Conference
April 1-3, 2007
Edmonton, Alberta



national union
of public and general employees

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c o n f e r e n c e



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The Community-based Social Service Sector conference was a unique opportunity to connect workers in this sector across the country and share concerns about a variety of issues.

Each participant had an opportunity for input into the draft papers as the conference unfolded. Discussion during workshop sessions served to expand the analysis and further shape recommendations for

- action.





The Underfunding and Accountability Crisis in Canada's Community-based Social Service Sector



THE FIRST presentation outlined the historical origins of federal government input into our social services with the Canada Assistance Plan (CAP), the funding foundation for the sector. Accessibility, adequacy, universality, accountability, right of appeal, and right to refuse work were features of CAP spending; shockingly none of these minimum standards exist today.

Beginning in the 1990s, the federal government began to erode CAP, culminating in its destruction when the Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) was presented in 1995. With the CHST block funding, dedicated funds for social services were lost. National funding standards were gone, along with accountability. Eye opening statistics demonstrated that a \$3.2 billion decline in funding exists today as compared with the final year of CAP contributions. Almost \$40 billion of cumulative loss is estimated for the last 12 years.



In order to restore Canada's investment in community-based social services NUPGE calls for three general principles to be upheld; increased funding, accountability and stable funding. Five recommendations on the role of the federal government and five recommendations on the role of provincial governments were proposed to restore funds and accountability to the sector.

Group discussions allowed participants to reflect on the funding crisis and to review, enhance, and prioritize the recommendations asserted. There was no debate about the responsibility of federal and

provincial governments. Workers were clear about the need for government leadership and improved funding. Much of the discussion emphasized the benefit of further educating the public on the need for reinvesting in community-based social services. A cost benefit analysis could be helpful in this public awareness strategy. The human side of what we have lost should be made clear.

A review of the concept of global funding models stimulated further discussion regarding the proper allocation of funds. With regards to fund raising, a variety of opinions surfaced. There was a consensus that fund raising should not be a

necessity for agencies to operate, and should not take away from client services.

With regard to the recommendations, transparency in funding is key. Workers from Nova Scotia and Alberta highlighted past experiences where funding was contingent on natural resource revenue. This led to the assertion that there should be no strings attached to funding or conditional funding for this sector. Participants noted that provinces need to be held accountable to flow their federal funds to the social service sector and that a significant portion of these funds need to be earmarked for salaries and benefits.

A reflection on the language of “stable” funding revealed that “sustainable” funding is really what agencies and organizations needed. Participants put forward several options for calculating the short-fall of funding in today’s dollars.





Health and Safety in the Community-based Social Service Sector



THE SECOND presentation linked the devastation of the community-based social service budgets over the past decade to the health and safety impact in this sector. Due to the commitment of workers, quality care is still provided but at no small cost to the health and stress levels of these workers.

A variety of stats were presented illustrating the impact of violence, bullying and stress in the workplace. Musculoskeletal injuries,

communicable diseases and various work specific environmental conditions were also flagged for worker awareness and for consideration by the Health and Safety committees throughout the sector.

In conclusion five recommendations were made:

- Education and training should be used as a primary prevention tool.
- Policy suggested by health and safety committees will stop small problems from becoming crises.
- Bargaining for best practices to provide a safe and healthy work environment would protect workers

where the provincial Occupational Health and Safety Acts don't.

- Ultimately, changing legislation to recognize issues of the 21st century should be undertaken.
- A restoration of funding would help to reverse the deterioration of workplace conditions.







Framing the Issues



IN A guided discussion participants explored the attributes that described community-based social services, such as client centered, accountable to the community and caring. They took time to consider what perceptual barriers exist towards their services, such as “glorified babysitters” and a charity mentality where proper funding is not a public responsibility.

Reflecting on George Lakoff’s family models, it was easy to place community-based social services in

the *nurturing parent model* as opposed to the *strict father model*. The groups found attributes like working for the common good, collective rights and responsibilities, and fairness and equality, generally fit in appropriately with agencies and their mandates.

Discussions only began to consider frames that might help to position this sector in a positive nurturing light. Some ideas include “every life has a value” and “every life has potential”.





**A Patchwork Quilt:
Service Delivery Models**



An analysis of the shifting patchwork or service delivery models proved to be quite enlightening. In two discussion sessions, participants had the opportunity to examine their concerns with emerging individualized funding models.

New service delivery models like adult fostering, “life sharing”, and “kin care” are appearing across the country and are of considerable concern to workers. Many shared real concern for the diminishing quality of care for their clients.

The National Union commits to creating a research paper to explore the trend to new service delivery models and their associated problems.





Human Resource Issues in the Community-based Social Service Sector



The third presentation provided a picture of human resources in this sector. It highlighted factors of employment, age, gender balance, education and wages to name a few. There is a broad diversity of contract language and provisions

in this sector. Within a province, indeed within a region, different agencies may have significantly different wages, benefits and conditions of employment. This makes the process of concisely and precisely comparing collective agreements across the sector nearly impossible. When comparing collective agreements, the aim was to provide a snapshot of common collective agreement provisions.





Worker Appreciation Day



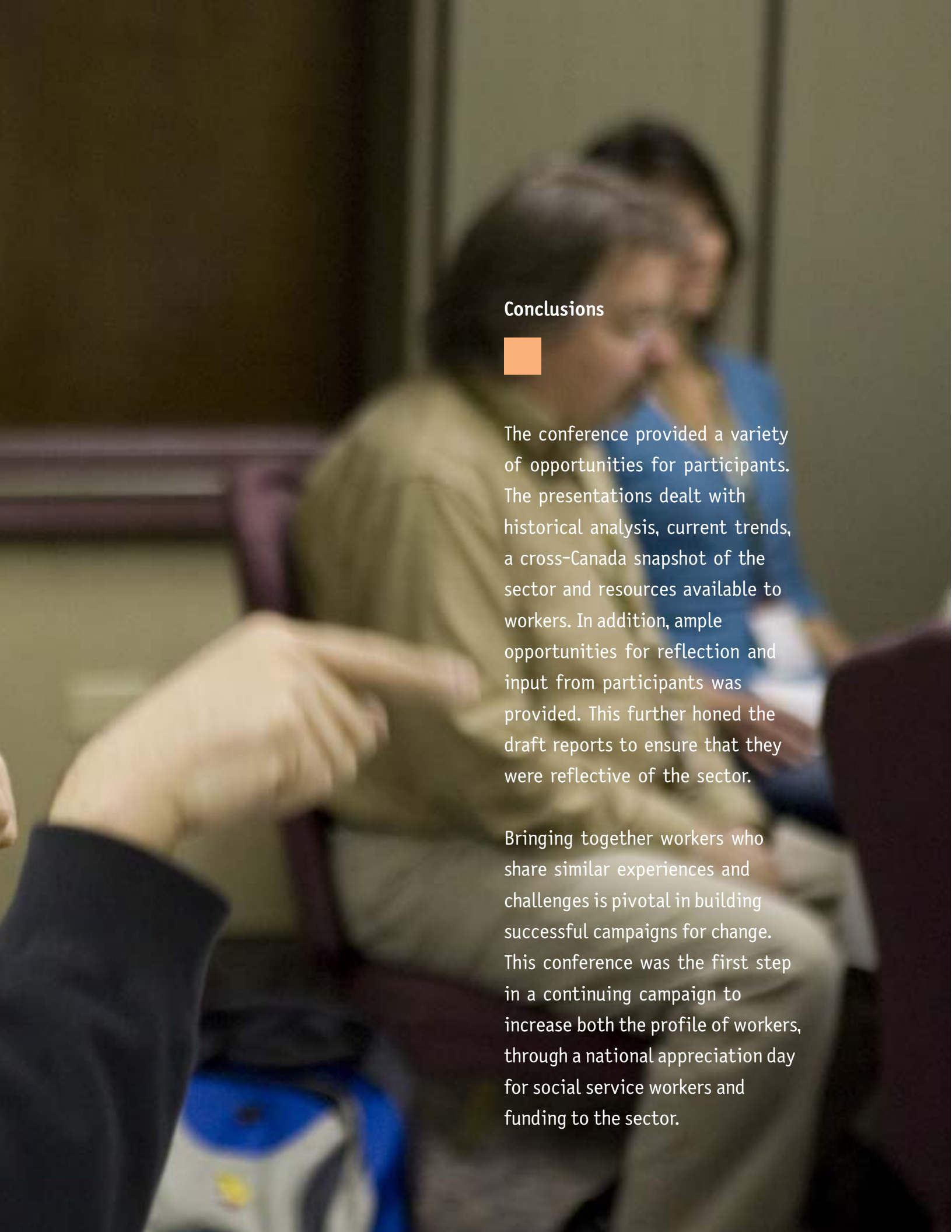
Participants were unanimous in their enthusiasm about a Worker Appreciation Day. They felt this would help to raise awareness about their contributions.

Ideas were shared regarding activities that could be undertaken on this day from billboards to video documentaries. Finally, the month of October was considered one of the best opportunities for the Appreciation Day, so that public education campaigns could be coupled with funding campaigns. A key wind-up date for any such

initiative would be prior to budget release in March. This date provides a full 5 months, between October and March for a thorough campaign to unfold.







Conclusions

The conference provided a variety of opportunities for participants. The presentations dealt with historical analysis, current trends, a cross-Canada snapshot of the sector and resources available to workers. In addition, ample opportunities for reflection and input from participants was provided. This further honed the draft reports to ensure that they were reflective of the sector.

Bringing together workers who share similar experiences and challenges is pivotal in building successful campaigns for change. This conference was the first step in a continuing campaign to increase both the profile of workers, through a national appreciation day for social service workers and funding to the sector.

Appendix 1



CONFERENCE FOLLOW-UPS

Project	Description
Report of meeting	Summary of conference.
Report amendments and reprinting	Funding and Accountability Report; Health & Safety Report; Human Resources Report.
Two Pamphlets	Funding Recommendations; Women Support Services.
Day of Appreciation	Poster and action kit for the purpose of raising the profile of workers within the union and among the public. Ready for ratification at the June convention.
Report on new individualized service model (adult foster care)	Critique on its drawbacks and potential outcomes.

Appendix 2



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RE-INVESTMENT IN THE SECTOR

General Principles

- *Increased funding*
- *Stable funding*
- *Accountability and transparency*

Role of the Federal Government

- *A separate Social Service Transfer*
- In order to renew and strengthen

Canada's social safety net, the federal government, in an open and transparent consultation with the provinces and territories, must establish clearly demarcated funding mechanisms for post-secondary education and for social services in combination with social assistance.

- *Predictable and stable federal funding* – The federal government must also begin to rebuild transfers

for social assistance and social services and work with the provinces and territories to establish a new formula that provides sufficient, stable and sustainable funding.

- *Restore federal funding to 1994-95 levels* – The federal cash contribution available to social services in 2006-07 was 40 percent lower than 1995-96. Federal funding should be restored to 1995-96 levels of the last year of CAP funding; an immediate annual increase of approximately \$3.85 billion.

- *Canada Social Services Act* – To ensure greater accountability of the federal transfers, Ottawa should enact a *Canada Social Services Act*. Such legislation would set out the purposes of all monies transferred to the provinces and territories for the provision of social services and programs.

- *A reasonable national financing formula* – Any formula for federal funding of social services should be calculated in a way that ensures a

reasonable amount of federal cash, year after year, to support programs run by the provinces and territories.

Role of Provincial and Territorial Governments

- *Funding the full cost of services* – Provincial and territorial governments, when contracting with a community agency to deliver a service, should pay the full costs of service provision, including the agency's actual operating costs of service delivery.

- *Moving to global budgeting* – Provincial and territorial governments should implement a transparent and accountable global budgeting approach, where they approve a total budget amount and allow service providers to determine how best to spend the funds within their service delivery mandate.

- *Dedicated funding to improve salaries and benefits* – Provincial and territorial governments should provide annual funding to community-based social service agencies to upgrade salaries and

benefits of workers to the level of their counterparts employed in health care, post-secondary education and municipal and direct government sectors. This would ensure a more stable and qualified workforce.

- *Coordinated approach to labour relations* – As a means to improve the quality of services and ensure stable and qualified staffing, provincial and territorial governments should promote a positive labour relations environment by encouraging employers and unions, with representation in the sector, to participate in coordinated bargaining with the view of negotiating sector-wide collective agreements.

- *Labour market strategy* – In order to ensure an adequate supply of skilled and qualified staff within the sector, provincial and territorial governments should work with employers and unions, with representation in the sector, to

develop a long-term labour market strategy.

- *Funding to support organizational capacity* – Provincial and territorial governments should provide undesignated funding that agencies can apply for to assist in building their service and program capacity to meet local needs.

- *Limits on fundraising and donations* – Provincial and territorial governments, as a condition of receiving funding, should ensure that workers responsible for the delivery of supports and services to individuals, not be required to raise funds.

Taken from:

“The Underfunding and Accountability Crisis in Canada’s Community-based Social Service Sector”, as amended by participants at the Community-based Social Service Conference, April 1-3, 2007, Edmonton, Alberta. Published by the National Union of Public and General Employees.

Appendix 3



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