

Altogether better.

Annual Report 2010-2011



THE FEDERATION
of COMMUNITY SOCIAL SERVICES of BC

Welcome

Did you know that collectively our 132 member agencies employ over 6000 staff, engage an estimated 4200 volunteers and leverage over \$500 million in community investment to deliver an array of social care services and supports that make a positive difference in the lives of many citizens? We are a vital resource for BC communities that is often not recognized or heard. However, this year our collective voice has been taken more seriously than ever before. We have a ways to go before social services are as well recognized and valued as health care and education however we are on the right path. The Federation is a vibrant and progressive organization because of the 132 member organizations that have chosen to be a part of this network. Thank you for being involved.

This report describes some of the activities and initiatives that we have been involved in this past year. We hope that you will enjoy seeing all that you are a part of as a member organization. Please consider joining one of the Federation's committees or working groups or spearheading a new working group or initiative on a topic of interest.

BOARD DIRECTOR REPORTS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT – Shane Picken

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The last year has flown by as the Federation has faced a myriad of challenges. In reflection, this year has been about getting our internal stuff together, while building-on our relationships in the sector and with government. We have worked with new faces on the Board, with new energy and ideas to pursue our goals. The Federation staff team have worked very hard to implement activities in response to the direction set by the Board through our Strategic Planning process, as well as numerous issues arising for our sector over the year. On behalf of the Board I must express our thanks and utmost respect for our team in the office.

When I was elected a year ago, I looked forward to working with the membership, staff and the Board, to create a more inclusive, welcoming and powerful organization; that effectively represents the interests of the Community Social Services Sector of BC. I expressed several goals



training



meetings



advocacy



alliances



services

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and priorities for the immediate future, these included meeting the needs of a more diverse membership, and developing new relationships with other funders in the sector (MHSD, CLBC, Health Authorities, and other Ministries); while continuing our collaborative initiatives with MCFD as their services are 'transformed'. My priorities included growing the capacity of the organization, and the retention of our excellent staff, to support our advocacy and initiatives. I wanted to develop increased opportunities for members to have a voice and get involved in our initiatives; through reviving Federation Committee work, and the new communication systems we have been implementing such as the member webinars and the social-media strategies. I think we have made significant progress in all these areas.

Members will recognize the continuing evolution of how we do business, as reflected in the shifts in general meeting agendas and inclusion of more diverse areas of practice, hosting webinars for specific service streams (CLS, Early Childhood) or to meet identified interests of members (demise of HOMES and identifying new systems). We have continued to advocate for our sector, members and our communities, and through our collaborative approach we have been at the table to address our concerns and issues.

We have been working to increase communication and cooperation with CLBC, and provide new avenues for our members to have a voice in their business practices and service delivery. Over the last year the Federation has played a key role in supporting MCFD in planning the implementation of practice change (formerly known as CAPP), the design and deployment of the ICM client information system, and Residential Services Review. We have developed our Procurement and Business Practices Committee, and are working to engage government Ministries to evolve our contracting processes to reflect a more collaborative relationship with less administrative burden. We also have a new Early Childhood/Intervention Services 'committee', to support agencies delivering early intervention services across the province.

Of course we have continued the course charted over the last several years, in building the profile and strength of the Sector through investing resources in Board Voice, the Roundtable of Provincial Organizations, media and communications, meetings and communications with Ministers and Ministries. We have been exploring new relationships with the intent to collectively find innovative ways to better serve agencies and their communities, as reflected in the board to board meetings with BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centers, the Space Between workshop with Paul Lacerte and Wedlidi Speck, the extensive community consultation process for the Residential Review, and new initiatives for applied research through our CoreBC Centre for Dialogue and Learning on Practice.

The Board has met frequently over the year, and struggled to address various issues internally and externally. With ever increasing activities and initiatives of the Federation, we have been getting the internal house in order, including restructuring to enhance Board capacity to better reflect and respond to diverse interests of membership, building our staff/contractors strength through project work and other funding,

considering ways to continue to diversify our revenues, and setting direction for committee work and liaison with government. Of course there are always issues arising that impact our agencies such as funding reductions, the unresolved HBT concerns, and major RFP processes in the province, that draw our attention and resources as a Board and staff team.

It has been a challenging and rewarding process over the year. I believe we have increased our capacity to meet the diverse needs of our membership, and look forward to more progress in that regard. I also believe we are making a difference in the way that the sector is understood and valued, and hope that our collective voice has increasing influence in planning service delivery in our communities. I look forward to working with the excellent staff team and our new Board, to pursue our common goals for the sector.

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT – Lynda Edmonds

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This has been a full and interesting year for the Board and for me personally, having taken on the position of Vice President. One never knows what one will get involved with in the beginning, and I suspect this is a good thing!

Several new Board initiatives were undertaken through this office over the past year, including a Board restructuring project and a new early childhood committee.

As the chair of the Board restructuring committee, I worked with Shane Picken, Tanya Behardien, Jeanette Anderson and Doug Hayman to examine how we could meet the objectives we had set in a strategic planning session last fall. At that time, we had decided that we wanted to expand the capacity of the organization; better represent the interests of Board members and include more members in the work of the Federation. To accomplish these objectives, we needed to undertake a review of the Board's operations.

The result of this work was a report to the membership on a new approach and a recommendation to add two more members to the Board to accomplish the new directions. I'm excited about seeing how things will progress as we begin implementation.

The second key initiative, a forerunner of the new structure, is the Early Childhood Committee of which I am the Board Lead. We have developed Terms of Reference for this committee and have a membership of about 12 now. This committee and others like it that might develop, are there to look at policy issues and other strategic developments in this program area. The intent is not to duplicate the work of other organizations which may have this specific focus, but rather to have a place where our members can give thought to the issues and provide the Board with any needed policy advice in this area should that be required.

Although I have been involved in a host of other issues such as the HOMES meltdown, my other key Board role has been to chair the General

Meeting Planning committee. With three General Meetings a year, this is a busy committee.

My thanks to Jennifer, Susan, Donna, Rebecca and Doug for all their support in these endeavours. What a great team!

REGIONAL REPORTS

All of the regional directors have been actively engaging member agencies within their regions this year and have hosted at least three meetings, convened either face to face, or via teleconference or webinar. During these meetings information has been shared on issues affecting agencies and suggestions for action have been brought forward. Regional directors bring these concerns, issues and ideas forward to the staff and/or monthly Board meetings for consideration and possible action. Consistently raised concerns and interests this year have been: agency sustainability and mounting cost pressures, procurement practices and emerging trends in RFP processes, need for clarification about MCFD's CAPP initiative, concerns about ICM and implications for community agencies, concerns about the system's capacity to meet the complex and growing needs of vulnerable children, youth, families and adults with mental health concerns, substance misuse concerns or disabilities.

Distinct issues were raised in several regions primarily associated with differences in contracting practices and expectations and these were addressed with the ADMs responsible and contributed to the board decision to form the Procurement and Business Practices Committee.

The hard-working regional directors are:

Fraser Region

Director: Ian Mass, Pacific Community Resources Society

Contact: imass@pcrs.ca Telephone: 604-412-7950

Vancouver Coastal Region:

Directors: Teri Nicholas, Family Services of Greater Vancouver (to December 2010) and Ann Kutcher, Westcoast Family Resources Society

Contact: ann.kutcher@westcoastfamily.org Telephone: 604-254-6169

Vancouver Island Region

Director: Mitzi Dean, Pacific Centre Family Services Association

Contact: mdean@pcfesa.org Telephone: 250-478-8357

Interior Region

Director: Tanya Behardien, Penticton and District Community Resources

Contact: tbehardien@pdcrs.com Telephone: 250-402-5814

North Region

Director: Dana Gorbahn, High Road Services Society

Contact: dgorbahn@highroadservices.org Telephone: 250-847-2285

COMMITTEE REPORTS

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

Chair: Michelle Fortin, Watari Youth, Family and Community Services

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Since June 2010 the Federation has welcomed 12 new member organizations, including 8 full members and 4 associate members. Our newest members represent the diversity of the social profit sector across the province. They range from one of the oldest non-profits in Western Canada to those that are brand new, from research and academic institutions to those that provide direct service to children, youth, families, adults and older adults.

As part of the Federation's commitment "to live into our name" we saw the creation of a new staff position this year. Rebecca Ataya, who began with the Federation on contract as a researcher stepped into the role of Director of Member Services and Engagement in October 2010. The creation of this role demonstrates the Federation's desire to ensure that while we look outwards to build relationships and develop strategic vision that furthers the sustainability of the sector, we also ensure that we are responsive to our core - our members.

The membership committee worked with the Federation office to collect and review all member applications and presented them for ratification for membership when deemed appropriate. Recognizing that every dollar matters we have offered new opportunities to those considering membership to help agencies feel confident in their decision to invest in Federation membership. Four information webinars have been held in the past year-specifically geared towards those considering membership. These sessions have been well attended, and better yet, have helped people make a decision to join the Fed!

Because we truly believe that we are 'Altogether Better' we will be working in the coming year to connect and engage with others in the sector who may benefit from membership, and whose expertise and experience in community would add to our collective strength. We are in the process of developing a new brochure for the Federation. One of the best endorsements for the Federation is simply to look at the members-as we move forward we'll be asking you to invite your colleagues to learn more about the work we do.

Watch for a comprehensive member survey this summer. Our last survey of the membership was in 2009. With new members, and changes in funding, programs and organizational structure we are keen to ensure that we have an accurate sense of the sector and the needs of the membership.

Recognition and thanks to membership committee members Maclynne Bourquin and Vicki Dobbyn for their work on members' behalf.

STAFF AND CONSULTING TEAM REPORTS

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT - Jennifer Charlesworth
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I have a new favourite quote by the incomparable Bono of U2, African and AIDs activism fame:

"When the story of these times gets written, we want it to say that we did all we could, and it was more than anyone could have imagined."

As I write my fifth annual report for federation members and reflect on what we have faced and achieved this year, as well as what lies ahead, I am so proud of our work. I am very proud to work alongside such an amazing group of agencies and people that show up every day doing *all they can* to make their communities healthier. But I am also getting impatient – people are doing what they can, however resources are limited, demands and pressures continue to mount, and many of the social issues affecting people in our communities are not getting any better. I wonder *what else might we imagine*, what are the possibilities that we haven't discovered yet, how might we uncover these?

These are important questions for the Federation and for me as a leader within this organization and this sector. Of course we have to take care of the day-to-day interests and concerns of our members, and we have to make sure that the Federation is strong and sustainable. But we also have to push ourselves to ask tough questions, take risks, try new things, learn from our mistakes, try again and ask for help and ideas.

This year has been characterized by four things: getting our internal house in order; living into our name and enhancing supports to our member agencies; promoting service quality; and being a champion for community social care.

Getting our house in order has entailed developing a plan for Board restructuring (described in the Vice president's report above), building our team and shifting roles, and ensuring that we have a sound financial base by diversifying our funding sources.

With respect to our staff team, Amy Woodruffe moved on to the BC Association of Aboriginal Friendship Centres and although we miss her talents here we are thrilled that she is at the BCAAFC and that she continues to help our two organizations stay connected and work together. Rebecca Ataya moved from a contract position to the policy and practice analyst role and then to the new Director of Member Services and Engagement role. This position ensures that the Federation is even more responsive to member interests.

As we were successful in a few grant and contract proposals we managed to sustain as well as recruit some new contractor talent: Warren Helfrich has worked on the Residential Review and Applied Promising Practices

(APP) projects, Diana Ellis has supported the Upper Fraser region's APP looking at family resource programs and early years supports, Marshall Watson has tackled research projects and developed our social media presence and online learning capacity and Paul Riley has started work on Leadership 2020 related tasks. Jody Paterson has also continued to serve as our strategic communications counsel.

Membership dues contribute about 33% to our revenues and ensure that we can sustain our core staff team of Susan and Jennifer, keep the office open and offer the general and regional meetings. However, the Federation has become so much more than this and resources are needed to continue to deliver incredible service to members as well as build the strength of the sector. We have grown revenues in three key areas:

- **Member dues:** Dues have not increased in many years and given the fiscal pressures on agencies an overall dues increase is not being considered at this time. However we have put energy into growing our membership base which has enhanced our revenues and, even more importantly, strengthened our profile and voice with government— size and scope does matter!
- **Member benefits and insurance products:** We have been working with Schmunk Gatt Smith and Associates who offer the Federation Association Benefit Plan (FABP) for extended health and dental and long term disability, and with Marsh Canada who offer property and liability insurance. Our business in these areas has doubled in the past few years and now represent about 18% of our revenues. We hear rave reviews about the FABP and this is a credit to the dedicated services provided by Bob and Darren Schmunk. Earlier this year we heard concerns from members about the Marsh plan and staff responsiveness and have worked this through with them. The Marsh staff that are now assigned to the Federation program are very knowledgeable, responsive and helpful. We also reviewed coverage and asked Marsh to market to different underwriters to make sure members were getting the best products and value for money. We are confident that this has been achieved. Rebecca has taken on the insurance portfolio and will keep a watchful eye. We are now looking at developing some new products and partnerships, ranging from group pension programs for non-union agencies to an extended health and dental program for staff retiring from our member agencies.
- **Fee for service contracts and grants:** We have negotiated several contracts to provide support, consulting and research services to other organizations including the CEO Network, Board Voice Society and Ministry of Children and Family Development. We have been successful in securing three foundation grants that are enabling us to build CoreBC, and continue our work on recruitment and retention issues. Overall, fees, grants and donations make up about 45% of our revenues.

Next steps in getting our house in order include updating all of our policies and procedures, developing a personnel plan and reviewing staff compensation.

Living into our name and supporting our members effectively has meant that we needed to build our capacity to understand and serve the diverse needs and areas of practice represented by our member agencies. We have been learning a great deal about what is really going on in our sector – and there is a lot still to learn! The proposed Board restructuring will enable us to take some more steps forward in this regard.

As Rebecca notes in her report below, we have spent a great deal of time dealing with matters that have challenged the sustainability of our member agencies, ranging from speaking out about the need for government funding to meet unionized agencies' Municipal Pension Plan commitments to talking about equity for non union agencies; from tackling the HBT issue to gathering information on alternatives to the HOMES information system.

We have also put energy into leadership development as part of our recruitment and retention plan. From engaging Ian Chisholm for a year to help us think about and develop skills for leadership in challenging times to working with a graduate student (now contractor) to learn more about succession planning and leader recruitment in the sector – we have been thinking about possibilities. As we move into the 2011-12 year we will be launching the Leadership 2020 initiative.

Promoting service quality is done through our regional and general meetings and through our work in CoreBC. Of particular note this year has been the Residential Review that we have undertaken in partnership with MCFD. A lot of detail about this project has been shared with members already and documents are posted to the Federation website but suffice to say that we are very hopeful that the recommendations and supporting actions that will be brought forward as a result of this review will make a very significant and positive difference to the experience and outcomes of children and youth in residential care in BC.

Special thanks to the Federation representatives who have served on the Advisory Group: Heather Bayes and Melanie Filiatrault (BC Federation of Foster Parents Associations), John Belfie (North Okanagan Youth and Family Services), Laurie Birdsall (Pacific Community Resources Society), Michelle Fortin (Watari Youth and Family Services), Jocelyn Helland (BC Youth in Care Network), Gary Mavis (Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents), Shane Picken (ARC Programs), and Nanette Taylor (Hollyburn Family Services). Federation member agencies were also very engaged in the community focus group sessions held throughout BC in the Spring and Fall.

We have continued with our Applied Promising Practices (APP) projects, despite having no new funds to do so, as these communities of practice have been exciting to be a part of. For example, a new APP looking at Youth Housing and Homelessness has been launched in the Capital Region, the residential services APP in the Interior is now positioning itself to implement some of the ideas that have arisen through the residential review, and our Upper Fraser region APP on family resource programs will be reporting out their research findings and best practice ideas in the summer.

Being a champion for community social care has entailed using our influence wisely to raise government and public awareness and understanding about the value of social care, working with other provincial organizations to create a strong collective voice, and initiating research and dialogue into the key elements of a strong and progressive social policy agenda for BC.

Raising awareness and understanding has come about through meetings with government ministers and senior officials, participation in key working groups and stakeholder meetings and through public presentations and media.

In addition to working with the provincial organizations that are also members of the Federation, such as BC Council for the Family, BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations, Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents, Boys and Girls Clubs of BC, Parent Support Services and many others, we have been a member of a core team that is building the Roundtable of Provincial Social Services Organizations. While some people call for a consolidation of provincial bodies and lament the diversity of voices, we celebrate this diversity, and respect the talents and value of each organization, while also working together to find a collective voice on matters of shared interest and concern. We don't have to think alike, but there is great benefit in thinking and acting together! In particular, we would like to acknowledge the following provincial organizations that have put time and energy into building collective strength through the Roundtable: ASPECT, AMSSA, Association of Substance Abuse and Allied Professionals, BC Council for the Family, BC Society of Transition Houses, Ending Violence Association, PARCA, and United Community Services Cooperative. The BCGEU and HEU have also contributed information, communications and research resources that have been very helpful.

Another shift this year was that we ended our formal association with the CEO Network as they had developed sufficient capacity to manage their own operations and decided to become an independent society. Despite this, we have sustained an informal connection and we extend special thanks to Melinda Heidsma from AimHi in Prince George who continues to be involved with and supportive of the Federation, while also leading and working tirelessly for the CEO Network. Information sharing and joint action between our two organizations, particularly on MPP and HBT, has illustrated that we are indeed stronger together.

Being a champion for social care has also meant that we need to think about how to promote social change and progressive public policies. A number of our members encouraged the Federation to get active on poverty issues. Upon review of who was doing what and what we could contribute, the Board recognized that there are many strong organizations that are already taking a lead role on poverty issues, such as First Call and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and we support these initiatives. However, we felt that we could offer something unique by providing leadership on the development of a comprehensive social policy framework for BC. In the absence of such a framework and clear priorities, decisions

are being made that have unintended negative impacts on other parts of the social, health and education systems. An open space session was convened at the February general meeting and Marshall is now researching what other jurisdictions have done, what we might do in BC, how best to engage stakeholders in these discussion, and how we might take this idea forward to ministry staff, elected officials the Families First Cabinet Committee.

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT REPORT – Doug Hayman

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A key focus of the Federation and this department continues to be the development of a more organized and better understood community social services sector. Two key areas of activity have been pursued in this regard: the Board Voice Initiative and Roundtable of Provincial Social Services Organizations

The Board Voice initiative continues to grow. Over the past year, the membership doubled to a current 67 member boards, with a goal of representing more than 100 by the end of the year. The annual conference was a big hit, with the social determinants of health being a key focus for education.

One encouraging advance has been the spread of local community inter-board meetings being organized in the province by Regional Leads. In June, board chair, Dave Stigant will continue this effort as he travels across the north meeting with board members in many smaller communities.

Elaine Murray has joined Board Voice as a volunteer and is assisting the Governance Committee in developing Board Voice governance policies. Board members have been active in meeting with various ministers, MLAs and senior bureaucrats to ensure that the issues are brought forward and understood. Board Voice is hoping to expand its activities and reach with several strategic partnerships in the next year.

The Federation has also provided leadership to the Roundtable of Provincial Social Services Organizations, a loose affiliation of provincial umbrella organizations representing social services. There is a list of some 90 organizations on the mailing list, and about 30 of the largest have been regularly involved with the Roundtable. This initiative has been difficult to move forward in that all of the organizations are stretched and have difficulty committing to new work; however, several key things have been produced by the Roundtable over the past year. These include: a communications package with key messages about the community sector; an opinion poll conducted by Angus Reid to assess the public's knowledge of and support for the sector; and the development of a research platform to provide detailed quantitative and qualitative information about the community sector.

Work in 2011 will be directed towards the development of joint policy positions and a better capacity for coordinating activities and communications across the sector.

The Federation's strategic development office also coordinated the Board committee leading towards a restructuring of the Board. The result of this

work is a report on restructuring passed by the Board and a motion to the AGM in June to approve changes to the Bylaws increasing the size of the Board. The focus of this activity was to extend the capacity of the Federation and find better ways to include more of the membership in the work of the Federation. This report will be implemented by the fall of 2011.

Other activities have included involvement on various issues such as the development of a lobby effort with other provincial organizations to try to mitigate some of the more difficult elements of the Employment RFP; further development of the Research to Practice Network; grant proposals for the Federation and Board Voice; relationship discussions and webinars with CLBC; and organizing and research related to South Vancouver Island social services.

MEMBER SERVICES AND ENGAGEMENT REPORT - Rebecca Ataya

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The Director of Member Services and Engagement position was created in the fall of 2010. As the Federation continues efforts to 'live into our name' the development and commitment of staffing resources was viewed as a necessary step in ensuring that the Federation is both responsive to the membership and also fully engages the expertise and passion of the members in being the voice for the community social services sector.

A key focus this year has been to better utilize the technology at hand to communicate and connect with the Federation membership. Webinars have become a useful method by which to share information with Federation members, and perhaps what is most exciting is the way in which this technology has provided another forum for members to share information with one another. We hear often that one of the aspects of membership that people find most beneficial is the opportunity to learn from their colleagues, and to have a sense of collegial support when addressing challenges. General member webinars are held at least once a month. These sessions are truly guided by those on the call. The agenda is set at the beginning of the session and these are set up as safe spaces to have frank conversations with one another. We hold true to the idea that whoever is on the call are the right people-whether it is 10 people or 3 people the conversations are dynamic, courageous and informative.

As sector issues have arisen we have utilized webinars to more effectively share information and determine a course of action. Issue specific webinars have been held on such topics as HOMES/Database management systems, HST, and Healthcare Benefits Trust (HBT).

In matters such as these, the Federation has been active in leveraging our strategic relationships with government and sector allies to advocate for the social profit sector; at the same time we have endeavored to source as much information as possible to assist agencies in addressing the changes and challenges they face. We hear often that agency leaders must devote more and more of their time to sector issues, leaving them less time to focus on agency specific functions. It is for this reason that the Federation seeks to share the load of some of this work, hopefully leaving

community service leaders more time to focus on the important work in communities.

Like all British Columbians, Federation members grappled with the changes and potential impacts that HST would bring. We held information sessions, worked with government to clarify how the HST affected contract payments, lobbied government for an increase in the rebate levels to mitigate financial impact on non-profit agencies and have continued to document the financial and administrative impacts the sector is experiencing.

The sector continued to face an array of administrative and fiscal challenges this year. The demise of the HOMES Database system in late March 2011 left many agencies scrambling for new data management systems. Webinar sessions and member communiqués were used to share information about potential systems. Additionally members were supported to share information about systems that they used with one another, assisting in the decision making process.

The challenges for the sector arising out of the unfunded liability issues with Healthcare Benefits Trust (HBT) have been a major focus over the past year and at the time of writing we are awaiting a response from government regarding a resolution. The Federation response and advocacy efforts around this issue have presented multiple opportunities to consider what we stand for in terms of equity and sustainability for the sector. In particular we have been committed to a solution that is fair for the entire sector and as such have worked with and reached out to our sector allies in an effort to stand together for a fair resolution that gives agencies a choice of benefits provider and which does not leave them holding responsibility for the unfunded liability.

We are mindful that it can be easy to become immersed in the latest crisis facing the sector. While we respond to emerging issues in the sector we are also focused on actions that will strengthen the sector in the long run. Initiatives such as Leadership 2020 and the Applied Promising Practice Projects across the province offer members an opportunity to be involved in work that will further the quality of service and support available to community members across the province. A prime example of this balancing act at work is the effort of the General Meeting planning committee to achieve a balance between relevant and emerging issues, sub-sector interests, and the 'big picture' learning opportunities that members are keen to engage in. Our meetings continue to be well attended, serving as both learning and networking opportunities. Feedback from each meeting is used to guide and inform the next; suggestions for topics, speakers and format are always welcome!

A member organization such as the Federation poses some unique organizational challenges. In as much as we aim to provide our members with services and benefits that make membership a worthy investment, we are also keenly aware that the Federation is only as strong as our members' engagement in Fed activities. We are able to act in more focused and strong ways when we have information from the front-lines of community service. Our fairly frequent requests for information from members are

often met with speedy responses, thoughtful comments, and timely updates; all of which allow us to move forward as advocates for the sector confident in our understanding, and sure of our role in representing community.

Over the summer members will be asked to complete a survey that will help us to paint an accurate and comprehensive picture of the community social service sector. The results will support our efforts to describe and "brand" the value and essential nature of the social care infrastructure of which you are a part. Thank you for the work that you do everyday!

COMMUNICATIONS COUNSEL REPORT – Jody Paterson
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The Federation continued its emphasis on building public awareness of the sector in 2010-11, through diverse initiatives that included media coverage and opinion pieces, a monthly newsletter with a growing reach, letters to B.C.'s political leadership candidates, and information packages for members wanting to strengthen their own communications with government and funders.

Developing the "brand" of community social services remained a key communications priority for the Federation in 2010-11, and will continue to be in the coming year. The Federation capitalizes on the opportunity in any external communications to underline the importance of community social services in the lives of British Columbians and the diverse supports across a lifetime that come under that banner.

Here are the highlights from our communication work in 2010-11:

1. Toolkit - A guide for agencies presenting to the Select Standing Committee on Finance provided material and speaking notes for members to work into their presentations. The package also included tips for more effective presentation and personal background summaries on each of the committee members. Whether the toolkit played any role in a much improved turnout of the sector at committee hearings last fall, what was obvious from the 2010 committee report is that the sector's messages were heard much more clearly than in the previous year. The select standing committee received presentations from a larger representation of the sector in 2011, and was considerably more supportive of social services in its final report.

That report endorsed social services as one of the top three services British Columbians valued most, along with health and education. That message - that social services are as important as health and education in determining the future health of our citizens and communities - remains a critically important point that the Federation will continue to emphasize in 2011-12.

2. Media - The Federation had two newspaper opinion pieces published over the course of 2010-11, one on the potential savings that could be had in health by investing in prevention and early intervention, and a second that

advanced the federal election and urged people to gauge their candidates' commitments to child and family issues.

The Federation also worked with Board Voice and the Provincial Roundtable on two additional newspaper opinion pieces stressing the effectiveness of community social services in preventing spiralling health-care costs and supporting British Columbians.

Federation executive director Jennifer Charlesworth was featured in five media articles related to issues in the sector, an indicator that media are thinking of the Federation as a "go-to" body for stories about social services. Jennifer also had a letter published in the Vancouver Sun correcting media coverage around the level of HST reimbursement for the sector.

3. Newsletter - The monthly newsletter started by the Federation in the fall of 2009 has continued to build readership with its combination of sector news and features on the people, programs and initiatives at work in community social services. The Spotlight on Success monthly feature not only provides a venue for highlighting the extraordinary work of Federation member agencies, but doubles as a story-telling device and media handout for helping the public and funders appreciate the importance and effectiveness of the work done in the sector in a more personal way. Spotlights can also be useful to agencies as a way of highlighting best practices.

Special features are a regular part of the newsletter. In the past year, the newsletter has featured a series on alternative practices in the sector and is currently in the fifth month of a series on social innovation. A new series on leadership begins this month. If you'd like to contribute articles, photos or a story idea - or have your agency or a particular program featured in a Spotlight on Success - please contact newsletter editor Jody Paterson at jodypaterson@shaw.ca.

4. Communiqués to government and MLAs - The Federation supplemented its one-to-one work with government with written communications on a number of critical issues that emerged in 2010-11. It was a year of ominous three-letter acronyms: HBT, MPP, ICM and HST. The Federation sent letters and sector backgrounders on all of those issues to key government and political figures to ensure they understood the sector's concerns and unintended consequences that could result from a particular policy change or shift in service. (With HBT an ongoing concern, a media news release and backgrounder has been prepared in the event that a solution can't be found and the Federation is forced to take the issue public.)

The Federation also sent letters and backgrounders to all candidates in the B.C. Liberal and NDP leadership races earlier this year, summarizing the work of the Federation and its member agencies and urging candidates to consider the role of community social services in the lives of British Columbians across all ages, incomes, and needs.

Questions for candidates on leadership and social commitment will be circulated to members in advance of the next provincial election. We hope members will use the questions to gauge awareness and commitment of their candidates and identify areas for greater communication efforts.

5. Social media - A revamped Fed HUB has set the stage for increased social-media activity among members. The private site continues to provide a platform for the sharing of information, interesting Web sites and sector news. Member queries have been switched from an email distribution format to the HUB, which allows for the often lively discussions sparked by the queries to be archived indefinitely as resources for future queries of a similar nature.

For 2011-12, the Federation has identified the following areas of focus for communications:

Most immediate and of highest concern:

- Cost pressures for agencies (contract reductions, rising costs, declining grant amounts, etc)
- Resolution of HBT issues (choice in provider, government responsibility, exit fees)
- Resolution of ICM concerns (privacy, visibility, ownership of information)

Needing attention:

- Ongoing issues around aboriginal transfer
- Response to any revised 2011-12 provincial budget
- Provincial election and candidate awareness of sector
- Gaming grant allocations and provincial review
- Issues around new employment contract (Fall 2011)
- Response to Premier's "Families First" agenda as details emerge
- Residential review
- Preparation for 2011 Select Standing Committee hearings
- Prep for other B.C. committee hearings as new committee structure is reawakened

Proactive and ongoing:

- Compensation levels for sector
- Branding of Federation and community social services

Board Voice Society of B.C. – A Short History

The idea began with a thank you. In 2007, as we thought about the membership of the Federation, we realized that a large number of volunteers gave freely of their time to provide governance in many agencies and often weren't recognized provincially for this important work. So the Board of the Federation sent a thank you note and a print to all member boards in recognition. A small gesture.

From this simple act and the conversations that followed, we realized that boards of directors represented a huge untapped resource of committed citizens in every community in the province who could help to bring a new understanding of community social services to the public – something the Federation Board had realized would be important as we faced an unstable economy and uncertain future.

One of the Federation's strategic objectives then and now was to engage in progressive social change initiatives through initiating projects to raise public awareness and engage citizens and communities on child, youth and family issues. Considering the development of a whole new organization called Board Voice wasn't in the plan that year, but this far reaching objective opened the door to new thinking and allowed for those early conversations to flourish into something new.

In 2008 these internal conversations were shared externally with several executive directors and a few board members and led to a first meeting of board members from across the province to consider the idea of creating a provincial board presence of some kind. From this meeting, a leadership team was created, supported by Doug Hayman from the Federation. A year later, the founding conference of the Board Voice Society of B.C. was held.

In this, the sophomore year of Board Voice, we've seen the membership grow to 67 agency boards and the creation of an organization and voice that is gaining recognition as an important ally and supporter of community based social services. Focused on creating healthier communities, Board Voice has taken the opportunity to meet with politicians and bureaucrats to raise sector concerns from the perspective of community volunteers. Another exciting development has been the outreach to board members in their own communities where discussions have been held on a variety of topics, including governance, community development, advocacy and opportunities for collaborative work.

Through all of this growth, the Federation of Community Social Services has provided secretariat services to the Board Voice board and continues to subsidize the work of this new organization. Board Voice hopes to be able to carry its own weight in time through new memberships and funding supports from interested foundations and other funders; however, the Federation will always be a key supporter, believing that the governors of this broad and complex sector can, through coming together in an organized way, add a dimension and depth not available previously.

Sponsoring and supporting new ideas and progressive approaches will continue to be an important part of the Federation's work going forward. The success of the Board Voice initiative shows what can be accomplished when we step into the realm of innovation and possibility.