

Board and Staff  
BC Association of Family Resource Programs  
203 – 2590 Granville Street  
Vancouver, BC V6H 3H1

August 16<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Dear Board and Staff,

We have followed with interest your recently posted position papers and were pleased to attend the presentation about your BC Parenting Centre Proposal at the July First Call ECD Roundtable.

As you know, we encourage all of those in the early years sector to develop and share ideas about how to best meet the needs of young children and their families. We are pleased to respond to your request for comments and questions about your BC Parenting Centres concept.

Regrettably, your initial discussion paper on Parenting Centres is no longer available online but we will do our best to respond to that document and your presentation.

First, we want to affirm significant areas of agreement in our perspectives including:

1. Our shared understanding about the importance of the early years. We are well versed in the research you cite and we have contributed to Canadian research that also demonstrates the efficacy of investing in families with young children.
2. Our shared understanding that families matter and that positive outcomes for children are dependent on comprehensive supports for families. Today's families need time, resources and services. That is why our recently released Plan calls for extending parental leave to 18 months, income supports and a full continuum of services including pre/post natal health, family resource and parent education programs, and early intervention.
3. Our shared understanding that children are born 'ready to learn' and that a downward extension of a narrow, school readiness agenda is not appropriate. We are committed to early care and learning programs that are play-based, holistic, and experiential – approaches at the core of early childhood education.

We are confident that these areas of agreement make it possible for us to work together to ensure a full basket of services for BC families with young children. Towards that end, we hope you can answer our questions about your Parenting Centre concept.

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WE APPRECIATE THE FINANCIAL OR IN-KIND SUPPORT OF:



1. The paper is silent on the biggest gap in services for BC families – their lack of access to quality, affordable child care. Similarly, the paper is silent on families’ needs for income supports, employment, housing, etc. We are left to question:
  - a. how Parenting Centres will support the majority of BC families who need quality early care programs?
  - b. what evidence you have to suggest that Parenting Centres should be a top priority for new public investments?
2. Your concept paper indicates that BC Parenting Centres would develop partnership/service agreements with a range of services. Yet, there is no reference to the existing community ECD tables across BC. Nor are we aware of any dialogue with some of the possible partners – including Child Care Resource and Referral Programs – about this concept. We are left to question:
  - a. Why the proposal doesn’t build on existing ECD Tables by extending to them the resources and mandate they need to implement their plans?
  - b. How existing community services have participated in the development of this concept?
  - c. How a RFP process, as described at the Roundtable, will affect existing community partnerships?
3. Your proposal indicates that Parenting Centres would be required to offer or partner to offer services in 5 core area – Family Support, Play-based Learning, Early Learning and Literacy, Parent Education and Learning, and Information and Referrals. Given that young children learn through play – we would like to understand the programmatic distinctions you make between “play-based learning” and “early learning and literacy”. Will these services be delivered as discreet programs and if so, what research supports this division?
4. Your paper calls for 80 parenting centres across BC. We are interested in the demographic and needs assessment data that supports this number.
5. You recommend an annual budget of \$300,000 for each of Parenting Centres. Given that StrongStart programs operate on annual budgets of about \$30,000, we wonder about the rationale supporting a ten fold increase in funding. At the Roundtable, you also indicated that the \$300,000 could fund both coordination and new services. Does this mean that under-serviced communities will have less to invest in coordination because more of their budgets have to go into creating new front line services?
6. The initial paper posted on your website suggested that \$75-150,000 is required to develop an Implementation Plan for BC Parenting Centres. Can we assume that you expect these funds will come to your organization? And, given the urgent needs of front line services and

our recent experience conducting an extensive community process and developing a Plan for considerably less, we are interesting in learning more about how you arrived at this amount.

Finally, while our mandate, focus and expertise are in early childhood care and learning, as you know, we actively work for comprehensive family policies, supports and services. We are requesting a reciprocal commitment from your organization and ask that you:

- publicly acknowledge that licensed child care, which connects on a daily basis with the families of over 96,000 children under 12, is a family support program
- publicly support significant public investments in early care and learning programs that serve working, studying and at home families.

We are confident that this kind of mutual support is the best way to move forward a progressive agenda for children, families and communities. We look forward to your response to our questions and would be happy to meet with you to continue the dialogue. Thanks for your ongoing work on behalf of BC families.



Susan Harney, Chair  
Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC



Denise Marshall, President  
Early Childhood Educators of BC

cc.

Honourable Mary McNeil – Minister of Children and Family Development  
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Kiva Glynn – Senior Director Early Years Policy, Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Susan Kennedy – Executive Director Early Years, Ministry of Education  
Adrienne Montani, First Call – for distribution to the First Call ECD Roundtable