

October 18th, 2001 - In October 2001 child care advocates from Kamloops (and region) impressed Minister Lynn Stephens and the rest of us by arranging a community meeting with not just the expected 20 participants but rather **175** participants. We asked Marilyn Lavack of the Thompson Nicola Regional Childcare Advisory Committee, just how this fantastic event was organized. This is what Marilyn shared with us.

The Role of Advocacy and Collaboration in Trying Times

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, concerned citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has"

- 'Margaret Mead'

-
As an advisory committee we are constantly re-examining strategies and processes. Our goals included ways to promote collaboration between organizations, groups, individual care providers and families which would result in collective success for all. What could we do to remove or change assumptions of powerlessness and foster instead personal vision and an ability to challenge the forces of change?

As a committee our objective was to consider the requirements of our community based on the knowledge of the both the particular needs of the community, an understanding of local realities, and available recourses. We felt we had collective knowledge of:

- the barriers to providing high quality, affordable, accessible child care services
- the complex and changing needs of families
- the supports needed for the ongoing challenges that care providers confront.

As we face unprecedented challenges (what we always feel at the time), we as members of the Kamloops and region community Childcare Advisory Committee, recognizing the need for more than a cursory response to the recently distributed Child Care options survey, felt that this would be the catalyst to work with families, the child care community, media, local and provincial politicians. We felt we could begin a process that (with lots of optimism and vision) could bring about change.

This then was our opportunity to reach out, communicate issues, mobilize the community, take some risks, think creatively and collaborate.

In our first meeting we established goals, evaluated feasibility and decided 'yes' this small group of (maximum) five people could do this! In the three meetings that followed we divided tasks based on each persons particular interests skills contacts and recourses. We then proceeded to:

- Find a location (free access to school board resource building, microphones and set up)
- Contacted a number of media sources including the local cable channel.
- Set a date based upon the Ministers availability ---- panic in two weeks!
- Shared responsibility for developing, copying and distributing posters.
- We shared information with families, copied more surveys in addition to those supplied by our local child care resource and referral office. Information was sent also through the CCRRF newsletter,).
- Family and social service agencies were invited as were students from our university - ECE, Education, Social Service Worker and child and youth care programs.
- Advertising was provided through community bulletins in local papers and one advertisement sponsored by B.C.ACCS

I would like to say we all provided home baked goodies but thank goodness for Safeway!

On the day of the meeting we finally found a moderator and it was important to set guidelines for presentations. We really were optimistic, but what if only 10 or 12 people came? We had a meeting shortly before the Minister arrived where we "fine tuned" the meeting outline, put question sheets on the table, for those people who are uncomfortable speaking publicly, helped the video crew set up, and waited -- ---

We were astounded, we ran out of surveys, and actually had people lining up to join us! The presentations we had prepared in advance (in the event that important issues were not addressed) were not needed. The participants were reflective, and clearly articulated their problems and realities. Members of the committee presented additional information/statistics to reaffirm the concerns expressed.

We had in a small way helped the community to speak in one united voice; it was worth the work and the risk.

If you want one year of prosperity, grow grain.
If you want ten years of prosperity, grow forests.
If you want one hundred years of prosperity, grow leaders
_Chinese proverb

Marilyn Lavack
For the Thompson Nicola Regional Childcare Advisory Committee