

Social policy framework would improve quality of life in British Columbia

Opinion: Need is increasing while resources grow tighter

BY MICHAEL DAVIS, SPECIAL TO THE VANCOUVER SUN JULY 4, 2013



Michael Davis is a volunteer director at Family Services of Greater Vancouver and the Board Voice Society of B.C.

Here is a surprising thought: virtually every family in British Columbia will access social services during their lifetime.

Young families search for daycare. Parents struggle to support a child with developmental disabilities. Victims of domestic abuse, violence or sexual abuse must leave home, deal with the police and justice system, protect their children. Teens find themselves living on the street, coping with homelessness, poverty, sometimes addiction or mental health issues. New Canadians struggle to find their way in new communities. Our parents and grandparents search for affordable, appropriate accommodation and supports as they age.

Social services address these issues. The needs are increasing while resources grow tighter. We can't simply throw more money at the issues, but holding the line, as inflation and population grow, means service providers are stretched ever tighter.

Simultaneously, the services trying to address some of our most pressing social issues cross ministerial silos, bridge across government, non-profit and corporate sectors, and lack a common vision, or measurements of success. There's some duplication, cracks that some fall through, and — for the outsider trying to navigate the system — often a labyrinth of daunting complexity. The government has made it clear there is little new money for health, education or social services. It's timely that five Metro Vancouver social service agencies are calling for a new approach.

Board Voice, a pan-provincial organization of volunteer boards, brought together the boards of Family Services of Greater Vancouver, Greater Vancouver Community Services Society, Options Community Services of Surrey, Pacific Community Resources, and PLEA Community Services. All are

calling for a provincewide discussion to begin creating a social policy framework that would define a vision of better lives for our children, our parents, and ourselves. Communities would be at the centre of this conversation; engaging people in creating the kinds of places where they want to live, work and play.

This social policy framework would lay out objectives guiding us to that vision. It could provide measurements of success based on outcomes. It could provide expectations for ministries to ensure collaborative and co-ordinated policies and services. It would provide the framework for creation of new regulations and policies, replacing outdated or unco-ordinated guidelines. It could streamline the delivery of critical services and improve the results for those who need it most. It could outline a process for communities to become more engaged in thinking about how services and supports work for them. How we as people, as communities, as organizations and governments respond to the needs of our children, our aging parents, new immigrants and victims of violence defines us. Responding to these human needs challenges us all.

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