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PROTECTING
THEM,
WELCOMING
THEM

Immigrant
and refugee
children



We are not yet fulfilling our CRC commitments to immigrant and refugee children and youth, but there is light in the distance.

LYNNE MELCOMBE EDITOR

IMAGES BY WOLFGANG

► OUR VOICE

Miles to go

This time in *VocalPoint*, we focus on the welfare of immigrant and refugee children and youth. Many immigrant children (and parents) undergo difficult adjustments to their new lives in Canada. Refugee children—perhaps fleeing war or gender persecution, arriving alone or as human cargo—are among the most vulnerable in the world.

About five years ago, boats arrived on BC’s coast carrying human cargo from China, including several children under 18. In response, the BC government designed a mechanism to deal with this small but highly at-risk population. Since then, NGOs across Canada have been working to better address the needs of this population through local organizations like MOSAIC and nationally through the Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR).

We had hoped to include in this issue an article providing a BC government perspective, and regret that it was not possible. But we are fortunate to include a bluntly poignant piece by Catherine Balfour of the CCR on obstacles to reunifying refugee families, and a new campaign to support overcoming those obstacles.

Another important factor in selecting this issue’s theme was the Concluding Observations in the 2003 report on Canada by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, in which the Committee singled out asylum-seeking children as a group that Canada is failing to protect under the terms of the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC).

The Committee noted several requirements that Canada must satisfy to rectify this situation, including: national policy recognizing their situations; health, social, and educational services to meet their special needs; and legal measures to expedite reunification of

their families. We thank Sister Deborah Isaacs of MOSAIC for sharing her insight on these matters in this issue’s *VocalPoint* interview.

Finally, says former SCY ED Mary Clare Zak, “on a personal level, after working for many years in government and with NGOs on immigrant and refugee issues, I saw a need for child advocates and the public to pay attention to this population. Canada is a nation of immigrants, internationally known as a leader in human rights. It is fitting for us to finally begin tending adequately to the needs of these children, who are so in need of attention, but so often under-represented or completely un-noticed.”

Clearly, BC and Canada have miles to go to live up to our CRC obligations to immigrant and refugee children and youth. Yet there are bright spots on the horizon. We include in this issue an article by Kelly Ng of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. about an innovative project designed to help immigrant youth cross the divide that will take them from feeling like strangers in a strange land, to feeling like they belong.

On migrations of a smaller sort, we recently bid a fond farewell to Mary Clare Zak, who has left us after two-and-half years of exemplary service, and welcomed our new ED, Jess Chant, and Communications Coordinator, Sarah Barrett, while also settling into new offices. Look for details in Mary Clare’s final SCY Update.

There have been big changes in our small world in recent months, but nothing that will impede our ongoing efforts to advocate for children and youth beyond our doors.



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inside this issue



Society for Children and Youth of BC

802-207 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC V6B 1H7

Tel: 604.433.4180

Fax: 604.669.7054

EMAIL info@scyofbc.org

WEBSITE www.scyofbc.org

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A VOICE FROM AFRICA

Every 3 seconds: viewpoints on ending global poverty

by Lynne Melcombe

Prominently in the news last summer was the G8 Summit in Scotland and the Live 8 concert organized in Edinburgh by Irish rocker Sir Bob Geldof to coincide with it. There is no doubt that Live 8 succeeded in raising money and awareness, and forcing poverty onto the G8 agenda, but not everyone agrees that it will have real impact in the lives of the world's children.

In the run-up to the G8, the United Kingdom was the site of a steady stream of activities focusing on global poverty. These ranged from Nelson Mandela's February address to a crowd in Trafalgar Square, prior to his participation in the meeting of G7 finance ministers, to the March 1 release of *Click*, a short film dramatically focused on the statistic that a child dies every 3 seconds due to extreme poverty; from a survey released on April 24, World Poverty Day, of British voter opinion on what should be done about poverty, to a report on canceling world debt released on May 16, World Debt Day; from the wrapping of St. Paul's Cathedral in a huge, white MakePovertyHistory (MPH) band on July 1, (www.makepovertyhistory.org) to Live 8, a series of 10 concerts, participated in by 100 artists, attended by 1 million people, and watched by over 2 billion people around the world on July 2, prior to the G8 meeting from July 6-8.

Aside from the G8 and Live 8, these and upcoming events were organized by members of MPH. Self-described as "a growing coalition of 401 aid agencies, faith groups, unions, and other organizations in partnership with the Global Call to Action Against Poverty," the MPH campaign was launched on January 1, 2005 and will run until the end of the year. Its symbol is a white arm band and its goals are to move world governments

"to deliver trade justice, drop the debt, and deliver more and better aid in order to eradicate global poverty."

THERE IS LITTLE QUESTION that such activities succeed in sounding a loud alarm, at least temporarily, about the growing gulf between the world's have and have-not nations, many and some of the poorest of which are in Africa. But what are their lasting impacts? This question was addressed in a research report called "The Live Aid Legacy: the developing world through British eyes," released by British NGO Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) in 2002. (www.vso.org.uk)

Looking into the long-term impact of celebrity efforts such as Band Aid, Live Aid, and Comic Relief to address the devastating effects of the 1980s drought in Ethiopia, the report's key findings included that, 16 years on, the British public still strongly associated life in the majority world with images of "starving children with flies around their eyes." Stereotypes like these supported perceptions by 74 percent of those surveyed that people in the majority world are "helpless victims" who "depend on the money and knowledge of the West to progress."

This, in turn, was found to contribute to an implied relationship of superiority and inferiority, and a belief that, "We are powerful, benevolent givers; they are grateful receivers." The authors noted that, "There is no recognition that we in Britain [or other industrial nations] may have something to gain from the relationship." Those surveyed felt so confident in these beliefs that when "presented with an alternative view of the developing world they often express[ed] anger or a feeling of being conned or misled." The primary target of this anger was the media.

On the positive side, more than half said they wanted the whole story: "They want to see more of the everyday life, history and culture of the developing world on television. They want to see the positives as well as the negatives, and they want context and background ..."

“Meaningless concerts and laughable commissions are not going to fight any poverty.” ~ M



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WITH THIS KNOWLEDGE, and the glaring fact that global poverty has grown worse in the past 20 years, what impact can we really expect Live 8 and other G8-related events to have?

The effect of Live Aid and G8-related events on the G8 was underwhelming. After the meetings, and MPH media release expressed disappointment that, although the G8 agreed that African countries should set their own trade policies, the WTO continues “to force open developing country markets, ... [and] G8 leaders did not set a date for ending export subsidies that destroy the livelihoods of poor countries around the world.” While the G8 agreed to cancel some of the debt owed by some countries, MPH noted this will only ease debt by “the equivalent of no more than one dollar per person in the countries that are due to benefit,” far short of “an estimated \$10 billion a year of debt cancellation [required] to eradicate extreme poverty.” Moreover, the “promise of US \$48 billion boost to aid in five years is mostly made up of money already pledged ... only around US \$20 billion is new money.”

“For most of the 50 million children who will die of poverty over the next five years,” MPH noted, “the G8 leaders have offered too little, too late. By 2010, we will still see the awful inequity whereby a child dies every 3.5 seconds, just because they are poor.”

This comes as no surprise to commentators such as “M.” Born, raised, and educated in Africa, M posts regular blogs on African issues, remaining anonymous “because my government would object to some of the satirizations I have made of them and prevail upon me to remove them.” (<http://blog.thinkersroom.com>)

IN A JUNE 28 ENTRY TITLED “Live Aid? Please!” M wrote, “Bob [Geldof] is under the fond impression that if he organizes a concert in Scotland, manna, kebabs, and fruit juice will descend from the heavens to fill the bellies of millions of starving Africans. Winged warriors will dispatch dictators and despots into the outer darkness

where they can weep and gnash their gold teeth. Farmers will earn dollars from their produce rather than the cents they currently earn.

“Meaningless concerts and laughable commissions are not going to fight any poverty. Even dubiously benevolent concessions like debt cancellation are meaningless in themselves. It is utterly meaningless to cancel my debt if you do not allow me to earn money. Let us both compete fairly on the international market. Your farmers are already enjoying considerable technological advantages ? they do not need subsidies. Don’t wax lyrical about debt relief if without avenues for me earning my own money I shall promptly be in debt again. ...

“No, I am not holding my breath. The solution will not come from Live Aid or from G8. It will come from Africans who will finally refuse to accept the nonsense they are subjected to by their asinine leadership and throw the lot of the useless cretins out. It will come from Africans who will put their skills and abilities to use for their countries. It will come from Africans who will refuse to acknowledge the empty gestures from Europe and America, whose only concern is how best to plunder the continent of its resources and people without ruffling too many feathers and upsetting too many of their taxpayers.

“It will not, repeat NOT come from Bob Geldof and Tony Blair or any other two-faced, ostensibly benevolent big brothers who shed crocodile tears and conveniently ignore the fact that they spend as much on dog food [as] on their goodwill ‘aid.’ ... The only people who can solve Africa’s problems are Africans.”

Should Geldof and Bono receive the Nobel Peace Prize for which they have been nominated? Will G8 or Live 8 make any real difference in the lives of children in the majority world? Stay tuned. Only time will tell.

Why is Canada failing to make its immigration program fulfil the widely supported objective of reuniting families?

Ending the nightmare

CANADA'S IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE protection system is failing refugee and immigrant children and youth. Systemic barriers hinder youth who are overseas from reuniting with family in Canada, and youth in Canada from reuniting with family who are overseas, leading to separations lasting months, years, even forever.



□ **CATHERINE BALFOUR**
is the Communications and Networking Coordinator for the Canadian Council for Refugees in Montréal. She has 10 years of previous background in working with survivors of torture and refused refugee claimants in Canada.

Such prolonged separations occur in spite of the fact that Canada's Immigration and Refugee Protection Act has as one of its objectives "to see that families are reunited in Canada" (s. 3(1)(d)), and that Canada has signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls for states to give primary consideration to the best interests of child. The Canadian Council for Refugees (CCR), an umbrella group of refugee and immigrant-serving agencies, has recently launched a Family Reunification Campaign to inform the public and politicians of the painful realities of separated families, and recommend how reunification can be better achieved.

Barriers that separate families

The problems causing prolonged family separations are attributable to systemic barriers in immigration and refugee law, and in the practices of Citizenship and Immigration Canada. Legal barriers include:

- A category of "excluded family members" in the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR 117(9)(d)) which excludes a person from being considered a family member if they were not examined by a Canadian immigration officer when the sponsor immigrated to Canada. For example, in 2000 a Chinese couple came to Canada with one son, leaving behind a

Systemic barriers prevent youth from reuniting with parents and siblings, sometimes leading to separations lasting months, years, even forever.

second, whose birth had not been declared to the Chinese authorities because of the one-child policy. Due to their fear of being penalized in China, they waited until their arrival in Canada to report the child to Canadian authorities. At that stage, the son was not yet five years old.

In Canada, the couple was allowed to sponsor the second son. The processing took some time and had not been completed by June 2002, when the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) came into effect. In November 2002, the couple received a refusal letter from the Canadian visa officer saying that under the new law, the son was refused because he was a non-accompanying family member who had not been examined. Two years later, after the couple had appealed the decision, the application was processed again and a ruling was made in the couple's favour because the application had been made before the new Act was implemented. (Reasons and decision, IAD file no.: VA3-00412, 28 June 2004.) The child was by then nine years old. He had been separated from his parents for over four years.

This story is likely to have a happy, though long-delayed, ending. But in the future, children like this one will be subject to the exclusionary provisions of the IRPA.

- **The exclusion of informally adopted children from the definition of family members**, since s. 2 of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations defines a child as biological or adopted. This excludes children who have been informally adopted but have no other family.

- **The lack of a legal avenue for refugee children who arrive in Canada separated from their family to reunite with them here.** While refugee adults can include spouses and children in their applications for permanent residence, refugee children may not include their parents and siblings. For example, a young Sudanese boy has been accepted as a refugee in Canada, after being separated from his family. He is suffering from post-traumatic stress and is in treatment. After desperately looking for his family, he has found a broth-

er living in Kenya, apparently the only family he has left. Medical authorities agree that being reunited with his brother would significantly assist his recovery, but this is impossible under current law.

- **A bar on sponsoring family members for persons receiving social assistance.** (IRPA Regulations 133(1)(k)) In 2001, the assassination of Democratic Republic of Congo's President Kabila unleashed horrific violence. Gisèle (a pseudonym) was imprisoned and tortured, her husband decapitated, and her mother killed. Gisèle escaped and fled to Canada, where she was recognized as a refugee in November 2002. She has since located her four children, with whom she'd lost contact in Zambia. Their situation is extremely insecure, since they face persecution in the Congo and are without status in Zambia.

Gisèle wants her children to join her in Canada, but it is too late for her to include them on her application for permanent residence. She could try a family sponsorship application, but because of her physical and mental health, she is not working and could be barred because she is receiving social assistance, although she might qualify under an exception for the disabled. However, if she resorts to family sponsorship, she will have to assume full financial responsibility for her four children for years to come, something she cannot afford to do.

Practical barriers to reunification include:

- **Slow processing of applications for family reunification, particularly at visa posts in areas from which many refugees have fled.** Fifty percent of cases of dependants of refugees take more than 13 months to be processed. In the Ivory Coast visa office (which covers various countries including the Congo), 50 percent of cases take more than 30 months. And this is only visa office processing time: even before the application reaches the visa post, it has been in processing for some time within Canada.

Mindondo (a pseudonym) came to Canada in August 2000, forced to leave her two children in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Her husband fled separately and later joined her in Canada. In January 2002, Mindondo



Minondo's daughter is still in the Congo, running from village to village to hide from the rebels.

was accepted as a refugee and applied to have her children join her. In December 2002, her 13-year-old son was targeted as a member of a persecuted family and assassinated. As a result, Mindondo was recognized as a refugee, yet processing of Mindondo's daughter has not been expedited. She is still in the Congo, running from village to village to hide from the rebels, sometimes unable to contact Mindondo.

- **A requirement in some cases to undergo expensive and time-consuming DNA testing to prove family relationships.** Not only is such testing costly and often difficult to obtain, it can produce completely unexpected results that tear families apart. In one sad example, DNA tests recently revealed that two young Somali boys have different fathers, unbeknownst to them. The consequence may be the seven-year-old will be able to reunite with his family in Canada, but his five-year-old 'brother' will have to remain in Somalia with no one to look after him, as his mother has died and his biological father is unknown.

The costs of delayed reunification

The CCR has become increasingly conscious of the heavy costs of family separation on refugee and immigrant youth. These impacts go far beyond those described, also including:

- **Living in poverty.** Separated families must maintain two households, which often means that people in Canada send money overseas, sometimes requiring that they postpone plans to upgrade skills and education that would allow them to improve their financial situation.
- **Feelings of abandonment and betrayal for children, and guilt for parents.** Ironically, this comes in part from Canada's international reputation as an efficient and caring country. Family members overseas simply cannot understand why there should be such barriers and

delays, and may even suspect that their spouse or parent is not trying hard to bring them over, or simply doesn't want them at all. Relationships can be destroyed as a result of these strains.

Quoting the words of a father separated from his two teenage daughters, the CCR gave its report on delays in refugee family reunification the title "More than a Nightmare," to convey the degree of pain suffered.

The costs to Canada are also significant. The slower the reunification of family members, the more they will have been exposed to unhealthy conditions, deprivation, and danger, increasing their needs from the Canadian health system after arrival. The same applies to education: the longer children have been deprived of adequate schooling, the more support they will need when they enter a Canadian school. Long separation of families retards newcomers' integration into Canadian society and therefore their economic and social contributions. In some cases, families here who are waiting for family members abroad are forced to rely on social assistance until the family can be together and self-supporting. Stresses on family relationships as a result of prolonged separation bring their own costs in terms of mental and physical health.

CCR Family Reunification Campaign

Canadians have traditionally shown broad support for the objective of family reunification, but they also tend to mistakenly believe that Canada is doing a good job in reuniting families: in an April 2002 public-opinion poll, 69 percent responded that Canada is doing a good job at helping bring family members here. (Pollara Institute, 2002) Public opinion is obviously falling behind reality. The CCR believes that, once informed, Canadians will support our recommendations for change.

The CCR will examine these issues at our fall consultation in London, Ontario in November, 2005. In the meantime, we are launching a broad campaign aimed at changing policies and practices to promote speedy family reunification, and we especially invite youth to participate. Young people are ideally placed to portray the neg-

In an April 2002 poll, 69 percent responded that Canada is doing a good job at helping bring family members here. Public opinion is falling behind reality.

ative impacts on refugee and immigrant children/youth of being separated from their families. Our campaign has begun with an invitation to members to sensitize Members of Parliament to the problems and urge them to support simple solutions that are in everyone's interests.

The CCR finds it a mystery why Canada, a country committed to and with highly developed competence in immigration, should not succeed in making its immigration program fulfil the widely supported objective of reuniting families. Internationally, Canada enjoys a reputation for respecting human rights. But from the perspective of a young refugee or immigrant unable to reunite with family, that reputation may be less than warranted.

For more information, please visit:

CCR Family Reunification Campaign
www.reunification.ca

For CCR reports on children and youth and on family reunification such as Impacts on Children of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, November 2004; More than a Nightmare: Delays in Refugee Family Reunification, November 2004; and Families Never to be United: Excluded Family Members, April 2005; see <http://www.web.ca/~ccr/whatsnew.htm>

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Struggling with stress?

Are you a newcomer to Canada? Stressed by immigration, making a refugee claim, ongoing separation from loved ones? Struggling with parenting? Know someone who is?

Parent Support Services of BC offers Parent Support Circles for New Canadian Parents. Parent Support Circles are free, confidential, anonymous, weekly meetings of parents seeking understanding, support, and encouragement in parenting their children in Canada.

For more information on these Circles, or establishing a new Circle in your community and language, please contact

Parent Support Services of BC
604.669.1616 800.665.6880 www.parentsupportbc.ca

CIRCLES FOR NEW CANADIAN PARENTS ARE OFFERED IN THE FOLLOWING COMMUNITIES AND LANGUAGES:

Vancouver North: Latin American Evening Circle (Spanish) • Vancouver South: Latin American Evening Circle (Spanish) • Vancouver: Chinese Circle (Mandarin) • Vancouver: Chinese Circle (Cantonese) • Vancouver: Filipino Circle (Tagalog) • Vancouver Mt. Pleasant: Multicultural Circle (English) • Burnaby: Chinese Circle (Cantonese) • Richmond: Filipino Circle (Tagalog) • Victoria: Multicultural Circle (English)

An innovative pilot project supports young newcomers to do far better than simply “adjust” to life in Canada

Working with immigrant youth: the MAP experience

“THERE ARE CANADIAN EXPERIENCES that can’t be taught in a classroom. Hacking blackberries in the rain is one. Emergency shopping at Value Village is another. [So is] kindness to animals, [and] discovering that sometimes you will get muddy and cold, and that you will live through it.”



□ **KELLY NG** is the Program Director of Family and Youth Services at S.U.C.C.E.S.S. An experienced social worker in Hong Kong, he came to Canada 15 years ago and earned an MSW. He supervises the largest Chinese-speaking counselling team in Western Canada and, in the past few years, started the first Multicultural Early Childhood Development team, the Korean Parenting Program, and the MAP project.

So wrote Kate Trotter of the Tri-City News (December 8, 2004) in a report about the experiences of participants in the Multicultural Youth Advancement Program (MAP), a collaborative project between S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and the Coquitlam School District from April 2005 to March 2006.

Background

Demographics in the tri-city area (Coquitlam, Port Coquitlam, and Port Moody, a cluster of three suburban cities located north east of Vancouver, BC) have changed drastically in the past few years. According to census statistics, in 2001 visible minorities made up 29 percent of the tri-cities population. The same trend occurs in the ESL population, with a large number of students from other parts of the world. Those who immigrate at an older age—15-18 years—find it more difficult to adapt and integrate than do younger children and youth. Many feel overwhelmed by the challenges of developmental transition, language adaptation, and cultural adjustment, and fear that they may not be academically successful or find a rewarding career later on.

To assist this vulnerable group, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. and Coquitlam School District received funding from the Fraser Children and Family Development Fund to implement the Multicultural Youth Advancement

Older youth helped younger ones. Those with better English supported those who were less fluent. A turning point occurred when they taught each other their different cultural dances.

Program (officially known as Multicultural Youth Entry Project). The major objectives of the program were to help youth in the target group to cope with the challenges of immigration and adjustment, and to develop positive attitudes and problem-solving skills in language, social, psychological, academic, career, and moral development. Through the program, the youth participants were expected to improve in a number of areas including social relationships, community connections, cross-cultural understanding, proficiency in English, positive self-concept, and understanding of available community resources/options for career planning.

Project implementation

Sixteen youth, ages 15-18, from Chinese, Iranian, Korean, Indonesian, African, Ukrainian, and Russian ethnic backgrounds, were referred to the program by their teachers. The group went through four major stages of development:

- **Group Formation (May-June)** Program activities began in May, with a focus on team building and communication skills. They were mostly ice-breaking activities, social activities, and sharing experiences about immigration and adjustment.
- **Group Cohesion Building and Community Exploration (July-August)** Team building continued through a variety of adventure, social, and sports activities. Participants also learned about the community and how public services operate. Students visited GM Place, Coquitlam Fire Hall, Coquitlam City Hall, Vancouver Law Courts, and Coquitlam RCMP. The focus of the last two tours was crime prevention through awareness of the criminal-justice system.
- **Community Spirit and Social Relationship Building (September-December)** Participants reached out to the community through volunteer work at the Coquitlam Animal Shelter, the Boys and Girls Club, Youth Matters, S.U.C.C.E.S.S. Tri-cities, Vancouver Aquarium, the Dugout Soup Kitchen, and the Society for Community Development. These activities fostered a sense of belonging in the community, built a



Giving and receiving: The youth found personal value in volunteer work.

stronger group bond, and nurtured the participants' feelings of importance to the community through their volunteer contributions.

- **Life Skills and Personal Exploration (January-April)** Career planning was a major component of this final phase. A tour of BCIT as well as sessions with a career counselor helped the participants to explore their future career aspirations.

Project outcomes

Outcome indicators included parent reports, academic and school attendance records, teacher reports, youth self-reports, and observations from the youth worker. Parents verbally reported that participating youth were more outgoing, confident, and communicative than before. This was obvious in the youth's willingness to discuss future education and career plans, as well as in their openness to share new experiences. Parents also reported an increased awareness of community resources and Canadian life through their interactions with the youth worker. Information about ELSA (English Language Services for Adults) courses, income assistance, cultural workshop availability, job training,

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A research project examines the situation for youth in care who lack Canadian status, for whom the transition to independence is immeasurably complex

Youth in the child-welfare system who lack Canadian status

BY FRANCIS G. HARE, PhD

This article introduces a research project, which is being conducted in collaboration with Toronto child-welfare authorities and Pape Adolescent Resource Centre (PARC), on separated youth who lack Canadian status and are in transition from the child-welfare system.

The project's origins lie in discussions with PARC staff about information they should have on youth in their database. A recurring theme was the importance of knowing whether the youth had Canadian status. PARC staff help youth in transition from care with education, employment, and health issues, which are immeasurably complicated if the youth lack status. Recent research on the importance of these social determinants of health has shown that a lack of status predicts increased vulnerability. (www.ryerson.ca/~sdohyout)

The two basic ways that a child without Canadian status would end up in the child-welfare system would be to arrive alone at a port of entry, or arrive with family but be taken into care prior to obtaining status. While most of the literature deals



with the former situation, we discovered that this is simply not the case for up to 90 percent of the Toronto youth in care without status, likely because Toronto per se lacks a port of entry. As the project

evolves we hope to conduct comparative research in the Ontario regions of Peel (where the international airport is located) and Niagara (with border crossings) as well as in Montréal and Vancouver (each a major metropolis with a port of entry.)

Our current research is supported by the Joint Centre of Excellence for Research in Immigration and Settlement (CERIS) and based at PARC, where we have been interviewing staff and youth who have been involved in the process of obtaining status. We have also benefited from discussions with the Honourable Elinor Caplan, the former federal Minister of Immigration. Many people associated with the Ontario child-welfare system believe that it lacks the ability to apply for status on behalf of youth in care, a belief that Minister Caplan suggests is neither warranted nor in

the best interests of the child if legal guardianship rests with the child-welfare authorities.

Where do we go from here? One obvious extension is to look more closely at the situations in the three principal receiving provinces of Ontario, Québec, and British Columbia. We could examine provincial variation in the legal and social-support components of obtaining status for youth in the child-welfare system, reviewing existing documents from academic, governmental, agency, and NGO sources, and interviewing youth and other key informants. It will also be important to collaborate with advocacy groups such as the National Youth in Care Network (www.youthincare.ca). It may be worthwhile to organize a national workshop with interested parties to compare notes, share practices, and advocate on behalf of state-dependent children who lack Canadian status.

We welcome inquiries and suggestions, especially from youth who have been or are involved in obtaining status. We also welcome potential collaborators as we develop proposals for the next phases of the project. We hope to take this project to BC at some point and would welcome an opportunity to get together with like-minded people there. Please contact us at fhare@ryerson.ca.

Dr. Francis Hare is a Professor in the School of Child and Youth Care at Ryerson University in Toronto, Ontario.

Volunteer work enabled the youth to connect with the community; for many, it was their first experience of working with people less fortunate than themselves.



The youth worker's enthusiasm was more important than her gender, language, or culture.

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banking, the Canadian school system, Canadian culture, drugs and alcohol, and other subjects were discussed.

Teachers verbally reported that many of the youth who were previously withdrawn displayed improved social and communication skills. This was a significant change for the youth, who reported feeling socially out-cast before their involvement. Several teachers also noted that these students showed an improved ability to speak in front of the class.

The youth verbally reported better cross-cultural understanding, increased sense of belonging in the school and community, and more self-confidence. This was true for those who experienced their first cross-cultural friendships by sharing cultural music and traditions. They also developed a sense of pride in volunteer work within the school and community, and improved their English.

What did we learn?

- **Youth worker enthusiasm is more important than gender, language, or culture.** Initially, the staff recruitment panel was concerned that it might be difficult for a female worker to earn the trust from an all-male group. Ultimately, we recruited a Caucasian, female worker who did not understand Chinese, Korean, or Farsi. Her enthusiasm about youth, her dynamic personality, and her strong communication skills (as

opposed to facility in the languages of the participants) earned her trust from all the youth members and their parents. She built very positive relationships within a short time span.

- **A personal touch is powerful.** Building successful worker-member relationships depended on more than the program alone. Throughout the project, the youth worker connected with individual members through one-to-one telephone and in-person interviews. This allowed students to discuss their thoughts and feelings in detail without being concerned about what the other group members might think. In addition, a number of participants visited the youth worker in their spare time. The youth were able to discuss their ideas for the program, practice their English, prepare resumés, and receive support from the worker.
- **Program design facilitates cross-cultural relationship-building.** The youth worker reported that, at the beginning, youth members tended to cling to their own ethnic groups and speak their own languages. However, the specific program design supported the members to begin establishing cross-cultural friendships quickly. Informal activities outside of the classroom that encouraged group member interaction and cooperation were most effective. In the process, we witnessed older youth taking the initiative to help the younger ones, and those who spoke better English providing support to others who were less fluent. A turning point occurred in a camping activity where youth taught each other their different cultural dances.
- **Community volunteer work provides a venue for building a sense of belonging and self-worth.** Group members ranked their community volunteer work as one of the activities they valued most. Through this, members were able to connect with the community; for many, this was their first experience of working with people less fortunate than themselves. Because of high student interest, volunteer work with the homeless continued until the end of the program. The members organized various fundraisers and with the proceeds made sandwiches to feed the homeless. Anti-

They discovered that academic achievement was not the only way to earn recognition. Being recognized as the best cook, snowboarder, or dancer were equally empowering.



oppression workshops helped them discover special meaning in their community service. By offering active support to the needy, the members found a sense of self-worth.

- **Peer recognition is powerful.** Peer recognition improved the participants' self-confidence. Youth discovered that academic achievement, as stressed in their cultures of origin, was not the only way to earn recognition. Being recognized by their peers as the best cook in the camp, the most skilled snowboarder, or the best dancer in the group were all perceived as equally empowering. Teachers reported that, as a result of peer recognition, students were more confident in doing presentations in the class. This, in turn, helped to build greater self-confidence.
- **School support is important.** The project was fortunate in receiving full support from the Coquitlam School District. The assistant superintendent, district psychologist, and school personnel (principals, counselors, and teachers) at Pinetree Secondary and Glen Eagle Secondary participated from the beginning. Their contributions to planning, staff recruitment, research, and evaluation (pre- and post-project measurement), participant recruitment, arrangements for activity space, and granting of course credits were all essential to the project's success. Staff members of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. were impressed by the openness of

school personnel to make changes to accommodate project requirements.

Don't forget the parents

Because many youth come from cultures where parental approval is paramount, the program tried to involve parents in the process from recruitment to evaluation. The holistic support from S.U.C.C.E.S.S. in interpretation/translation, and in other settlement-related services made it possible for the youth worker to interact more easily with parents—and even, in some cases, to connect parents who required assistance with appropriate community resources.

Limitations of the demonstration project

In spite of the success of the project, and although the youth members were fully prepared to mentor a new group of students, the Fraser Children and Family Development Fund only provided funding for one year. We also learned that we should extend this model to an all-female or mixed-gender group. It was unfortunate that we were not able to secure additional support because of late timing in the funding cycle. We have provided feedback to the Fraser Children and Family Development Fund to explore possible transition funding for successful projects and allow other funders to participate.

Overall, the Multicultural Youth Entry Project was successful because of the collaborative efforts of Coquitlam School District and S.U.C.C.E.S.S. It is an example of how combining community expertise and resources can contribute to a valuable learning experience for youth from different cultures, who then have greater willingness and ability to give back to their communities.

For more information, visit:

S.U.C.C.E.S.S., www.success.bc.ca

Association of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies, www.amssa.org

VocalPoint interviews Sister Deborah Isaacs on Canada's failure to protect our most vulnerable newcomers BY LYNNE MELCOMBE

Who cares?



LAUREN MCMAHON, BC CATHOLIC NEWSPAPER

□ **DEBORAH ISAACS** is a Sister of the Good Shepherd at St. Jude's convent in Vancouver. Involved in refugee work in Montreal since 1996, she began working with MOSAIC in 2002. Among other roles, she is founding Project Coordinator of the Separated Children Intervention and Orientation Network (SCION).

VOCALPOINT The Committee on the Rights of the Child this fall published a "General Comment on the treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin," which was "motivated by the Committee's observance of an increasing number of children in such situations." How long has this increase been going on, and to what do you attribute it?

DEBORAH ISAACS It's hard to know whether there has been more movement of children or just that more are getting here [Canada.] Children arriving separated or unaccompanied has been a problem in Europe for ages. There has been increasing movement of people in general. Globalization has led to an increase in poverty. More people are moving, and crime is increasing. Trafficking in humans has become the third highest-paying crime, after the trades in drugs and arms.

VP What is typically the routine for children and youth who arrive in Canada separated or unaccompanied? In what ways do procedures meet up with or fall short of the requirements set forth by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)?

DI First, there is a problem with definitions. There is a difference between separated children and unaccompanied children. Separated children are outside their country of origin or habitual residence without parent or legal/habitual guardian, but may be either unaccompanied or accompanied by adults who are not their parents or legal/habitual guardian. The Canadian Border Services Agency (CBSA) refers unaccompanied children to the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD). But if a child arrives with someone claiming to

If a child arrives with someone claiming to be his or her brother, or says “I’m meeting my uncle,” they’re just allowed in. There is no verification.



be his or her brother, or says “I’m meeting my uncle,” they’re just allowed in. There is no verification that this adult is really their brother or uncle, and there are no data on these children, so there is no way to know how large this problem is.

Some of the children outside of BC who arrive unaccompanied are in detention “for protection from traffickers.” But they’re in adult facilities with no schooling, no play areas, and they’re mixed in with adults. In 2001, a group of Pakistani children remained in that situation for eight months now. All of this clearly contravenes the terms of the CRC.

VP The CRC states that signatory countries are responsible for taking legislative steps to ensure that CRC terms are supported in law. Has that happened in Canada?

DI Canada signed the CRC in 1991, but none of its terms are really in law yet. For example, the law in Canada does not say that children should be with their parents. It identifies the “best interests of the child.” But if the parents of Canadian-born children are deported, and it would clearly be in the children’s best interests to remain in Canada with their parents rather than being returned to a country where their safety may be in jeopardy [due to violent conflict or where gender issues are involved], is it in their best interests for their parents to

leave them in care of the MCFD [or equivalent body] or for them to return to their country of origin with their parents? In this situation in Canada, parents can apply for H&C (humanitarian and compassionate consideration) but it’s often not looked at before deportation because it can take so long to process. They can do it fast if they want to, but it requires cooperation, which happens in some cases but not always.

[Another area of legislative conflict] is that a child who has been accepted as a refugee is not allowed to bring parents or family into the country. A refugee adult can bring children or a spouse, but a child cannot. There appears to be a belief that if separated or unaccompanied children are allowed into the country as refugees and then parents are allowed to follow, parents who might not qualify as immigrants or refugees will send their children alone so that they can follow later. It’s called “pull factor.” But I’ve been working in this area for 10 years. As far as I know, children have never been allowed to bring parents into the country, so I don’t know what experience this belief is based on.

VP What are some of the legislative changes necessary for Canada to comply with the CRC regarding the welfare of separated and unaccompanied children, and what obstacles are standing in the way of these changes?

DI One of the problems in Canada is that responsibility for child welfare is provincial while responsibility for immigration and refugee issues is federal. This creates conflict regarding who is responsible for what and who is going to pay for what. In 2001, Senator Landon Pearson convened a Round Table to look at these conflicts and a working group was created with NGOs. But we’re still waiting for policy. The people who are in charge change, some of them are not interested in these issues, and no concrete policy is created.

VP The CRC outlines rights in the areas of health and education, which in Canada are also provincial. In what situations do conflicts in these areas pose problems?

DI Unaccompanied children who enter into the care of MCFD go to school and get at least a high-school educa-

In 2001, Senator Landon Pearson convened a Round Table to look at legislative conflicts, and a working group was created with NGOs. We're still waiting for policy.

tion. The problems tend to arise after that. For example, a young person's refugee claim has been rejected, but they originate from a country such as the Congo, and there is a moratorium on returning them there. They remain in Canada, but they're not landed immigrants or refugees, so they have no status and can't qualify for student loans.

As far as health care, it depends on which province they land in. In BC, they wait 8 to 10 months to be accepted as refugees, and if their claim is accepted they wait another three months to get a BC health card. In the interim, they have federal health coverage, but there is a lot that it doesn't cover, such as psychological treatment for trauma. In BC, many NGOs have worked together to provide treatment to people who are in crisis, but there are no provisions for preventive treatment so that people do not reach a crisis state.

If children arrive unaccompanied and find themselves in MCFD care, it is a different story. But say two siblings arrive in Canada together. One is 19 and caring for the younger sibling, who is therefore not identified as unaccompanied. Both of them have been traumatized, and the older one may be overwhelmed by both the trauma and the demands of caring for the younger sibling, who is also traumatized. Yet under Canadian law, neither of them has access to any psychological assistance—unless enough of a crisis arises that they come to the attention of the MCFD.

In the meantime, the older sibling does not have legal guardianship and lacks the money to hire a lawyer to get it, and in BC legal aid does not cover family law anymore. Lack of guardianship is unlikely to be a problem with the schools, because they don't often look into these situations. But if the younger child requires medical attention and the older sibling is not authorized to give consent, problems arise, and there is a rush situation to take the child into care

VP What efforts are being made to overcome some or any of these problems?

DI In BC, we have a specialized MCFD team of one social worker and one supervisor who work with chil-

dren who arrive unaccompanied. It's a good team, and BC is the only province that has anything like that. But they're only two people for the whole province, and they only work with children identified as unaccompanied. A separated child might not come to the attention of the team because the people at the airport don't necessarily call them. So a child who is accompanied by an adult who is not able to provide adequate care, or is involved in trafficking, may not be identified until much later, for example, when that child applies for welfare as an emancipated minor and is finally asked to tell his or her story.

VP As far as unaccompanied children who stay here, how well are their best interests being met with placements that are culturally, linguistically, and religiously appropriate?

DI The MCFD uses the regular foster-family system, and while we can hope that those families will be sensitive to the child's needs, in reality placement depends on what's available. Most refugee-producing nations are not supplying an excess of families that would be considered suitable as foster families. How many Somali foster parents are we likely to have? In Quebec, they have a different system, in which children may be placed with "welcome families" who are from their country of origin but don't have to meet the same requirements as other foster families. But there too, there can be problems. Because of their legal status in Canada, these families may have to apply for welfare, but if they are receiving money to care for children who have arrived unaccompanied from their country of origin, that money may be deducted from their welfare cheques.

VP How often and under what circumstances are young people denied entry and returned to their country of origin? What happens to them then?

DI There are no data on this that can be accessed without a special application. There were two young children who arrived a few years ago with adults, but there was reason to believe the adults were trafficking them. It was decided to return them to their country of origin [despite a CRC provision that children in danger of

Most refugee-producing nations are not supplying families that would be considered suitable as foster families. How many Somali foster parents are we likely to have?

being re-trafficked should not be returned] but they had no papers, so they were refused re-entry into their country.

VP Do we have any reason to believe that children who are being trafficked are being given the special consideration outlined in the CRC?

DI The CBSA is not good at picking out trafficked kids. Although there are laws in Canada to prosecute traffickers, there are no laws protecting children—or adults—from being trafficked. There is no training for border personnel to learn to identify victims of trafficking and there is an attitude that it is not a priority. The priority is to identify smuggling and it is assumed that if smuggling is identified, trafficking will be too. But you have to look more deeply to identify trafficking. Also, there is not enough attention being paid to children who are being trafficked out of Canada. The CRC says that children under 18 can't consent to anything, so if they're being moved from one country to another it's always trafficking, never smuggling. Yet Canadian law says the age of sexual consent is 14, so there's nothing we can do about it.

VP The CRC outlines a number of conditions that must be taken into account before returning a child to his or her country of origin. In reality, how much effort goes into this, and is there any way to follow up on their well-being after they are returned?

DI Here in BC, MCFD contacts family, social services, and so on in the child's country of origin of children when a return is contemplated. Nothing is done at the border when children are not allowed to re-enter their country. We saw this a couple of years ago in the case of two Chinese children who were returned to China, where they were refused entry and returned to Canada. Clearly there was no coordination or planning before hand. There is no follow-up, as far as I know, and no action is possible if criteria are not met.



VP The “General Comment” stipulates that countries should be making every attempt to collect data on these situations. What is the state of this data collection in Canada?

DI Statistics have always been a problem. There aren't even consistent definitions, so the few figures we get are often confusing. Some data are hard to get because of red tape, but the real problem is that the data collection is poor. We have this problem in other areas as well. Programs and systems are not unified and application is not universal. There doesn't seem to be any improvement and there isn't any general policy. The sad fact is that the welfare of these children is not considered a priority by any level of government.

For more information, visit:

MOSAIC BC, www.mosaicbc.com

Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 6, Treatment of unaccompanied and separated children outside their country of origin, [www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(symbol\)/CRC.GC.2005.6.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(symbol)/CRC.GC.2005.6.En?OpenDocument)

International Bureau for Children's Rights, Best Practice Statement, Separated Children in Canada, www.ibcr.org/Publications/Trafficking_SC/2003_SC_Best_Practice_En.pdf

► VOICES FOR CHILD RIGHTS

BREAKING GROUND

A People's Project is engaging youth to speak up for their rights

by Lynne Melcombe

When we introduced the Vancouver Rights Based Monitoring Initiative (VRBMI) in the Spring 2005 issue of *VocalPoint*, a project plan and funding were in place, nine mentor/facilitators had been recruited, and Sara Kendall, coordinator for the youth-engagement phase, had been hired. One of Kendall's first tasks was to select youth facilitators for the child- and youth-rights workshops.

Kendall sent out a call for candidates from across the city using personal and professional networks derived from the many organizations supporting *A People's Project* (see page 21). From those who responded, she says, "we chose youth with personal experiences related to marginalization and rights violations, some experience facilitating youth groups, and clear passion for human-rights work.

The next phase of the project took the shape of a weekend retreat in July, during which 26 participants—nine mentor/facilitators and 17 youth facilitators— assembled at Sts'ailes Lhawathet Lalem-Chehalis Healing House in Agassiz, BC for two days of group building, facilitation training, and project planning. Intense learning was interspersed with fun team-building activities. The "games" helped participants become acquainted, establish personal trust, and embark on working relationships, while driving home in an experiential way the "academic" ground covered.

That ground was extensive, and the new facilitators kept pace. On the first day, the group learned about



human-rights movements in general before moving on to the CRC and identifying CRC violations in their daily lives. They explored effective facilitation and co-facilitation, and discussed the double-sided coin of oppression/privilege, and how to begin moving beyond it.

On the second day, the youth focused on the content of the workshops, including:

- teaching participants about the four pillars of the CRC (see back cover)
- using community mapping to identify and locate rights violations and best practices within communities
- executing the four goals of the workshops: mobilizing communities into action, applying pressure on local and provincial governments, determining effective ways to monitor rights, and discussing the use of networks to extend the reach of the project and rights awareness.

AS THE WEEKEND CAME TO A CLOSE, the youth shared unanimously positive thoughts about the experience, such as that it felt good to be involved in "something bigger than our individual lives. We will set a precedent as a group, and I hope we will do it well."

And by all accounts, they have. Since July, workshops have taken place at The Roundhouse in Yaletown, GAB Youth Services (for GLBTQ youth) in the West End, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House (for youth working with immigrant and refugee children), Purple

One participant said it felt good to be involved in “something bigger than our individual lives. We will set a precedent as a group, and I hope we will do it well.

Thistle Centre in the Commercial Drive area, Ray Cam Community Centre and Vancouver Youth Visions Coalition in the Downtown Eastside, Watari Youth Drug and Alcohol Day Program in the Main Street area, Urban Native Youth Association in North East Vancouver, and Vancouver Foundation Youth Philanthropy Council in Downtown Vancouver, as well as with young people from the Gordon Neighbourhood House Youth SEARCH program, the West End Community Centre, and King George Secondary School in the West End.

Each workshop has been conducted by two co-facilitators, and proceedings are taken by a recorder/witness. The demographics, says Kendall, are “all over, but a common line is that virtually all participants have experienced some type of marginalization—racial, economic, sexual, you name it.”

Two common trends have been that, “the youth are very troubled by relationships between youth and the police. They regularly report police harassment and violence, especially in Aboriginal communities. They are also report maltreatment in foster care, frustration with social workers, lack of services, and frustration with young parents having their children taken into care in what they describe as ‘inappropriate circumstances.’”

Gibbard Award for Youth



On October 21, facilitators for A People’s Project proudly accepted the Gibbard Award for Youth for their work on this ground-breaking initiative. Named for a teacher and UNA activist who took interest in the affairs of children and youth, the Gibbard Award is presented annually by the Vancouver Chapter of the United Nations Association.

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, youth participants report that there are places across the city where they are receiving significant support, notably through youth workers and youth-serving programs, and at youth-centered spaces like SK8 parks. But even there, says Kendall, it’s not so much that workers are teaching young people about their rights, as that they are simply being supportive.

“To some extent, this project exists in a cultural vacuum,” she says. How can youth workers who lack the language to talk about youth rights teach youth what their rights are and how to stand up for them? Facilitators spend the first half of every workshop exploring and explaining the concept of rights, and what rights the CRC defines, so this project is breaking ground in numerous ways.

This phase of VRBMI will culminate on the first weekend of December in a gathering called, appropriately, The Gathering. Envisioned as “a coming-together of children and youth from across the city with government representatives and child- and youth-service providers,” says Kendall, “it will begin on Friday night with children and youth who have been involved in the workshops getting together with artist facilitators to build a performance that speaks to the issues arising from the workshops, and how we envision positive change. On Saturday morning, we will share this performance as a way of beginning a day of conversation and action building, facilitated in an Open Space format.”

While the planned outcome will be a framework for action, “we won’t know what this will look like until we’re there,” says Kendall. “The idea is to extend an invitation to cooperate in creating change; to facilitate a process where those present take the action into their own hands, with increased likelihood that they will really commit to the plans they create.”

THE PROJECT WILL WIND DOWN with an “easy-to-digest” report, which will offer findings about how children and youth are faring in Vancouver and where to go from here, as well as details about the process involved in

How can youth workers who lack the language to talk about youth rights teach youth what their rights are and how to stand up for them?

creating and executing this project. This is important because *A People's Project* has not only been the first attempt to monitor child and youth rights in Canada, but the first attempt in Canada to engage youth in human-rights monitoring. "A key aspect of the project and report will be laying groundwork for future child and youth rights-monitoring, which it is hoped will be useful in other youth-oriented processes, as well," says Kendall. The report will be distributed in participating communities, to youth-serving organizations, to organizations that will participate in reporting to the Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2009, and to interested individuals – in other words, says Kendall, it will go "far and wide."

Going by what's surfaced during the project to date—that the first and largest step in realizing CRC

rights in Canada may simply be informing children, youth, and those who work with them that they have rights, which have been indelibly written into international law, and which may only be legislated into Canadian law when enough Canadians insist on it—far and wide is indeed where this work needs to go.

A People's Project is grateful to the many organizations that participated in and supported this initiative: Society for Children and Youth of BC, Vancouver Child and Youth Advocate and Youth Advocate Mentor, Vancouver Foundation, Britannia Community Center and Teen Center, Youth CO Aids Society, Knowledgeable Aboriginal Youth Association, Kinex, Ray Cam Community Center and the Vancouver Youth Visions Coalition, Environmental Youth Alliance, Watari, Immigrant Services Society, My Circle Action Team, Redwire Magazine, and many more ...

BACKGROUND TO A PEOPLE'S PROJECT

Although Canada ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, none of its terms have yet been written into statutes. This is a dilemma: A convention is a legal document to which its signatories are bound under international law, so Canada's ratification of the CRC obligates us to codify its terms into Canadian law. But many CRC terms contradict federal and provincial laws, creating catch-22 situations in which obeying Canadian law means violating international law. So politicians, lawyers, and bureaucrats argue over which laws take precedent—while the children and youth who the CRC was written to protect pay the price.

Originating in 2004, *A People's Project: the Vancouver Rights-Based Monitoring Initiative* (VRBMI) evolved out of concerns expressed by numerous child- and youth-serving agencies that changes to provincial legislation governing the delivery of child and youth services not only failed to address this situation, but increased BC's violations of Canada's CRC obligations. As the seed for the VRBMI germinated, it grew into much more than a plan to compile a record of CRC violations, sprouting inter-connected branches that would:

- ▶ bring rights education and skills training to youth representing a cross-section of the population
- ▶ so that they could facilitate city-wide workshops with the goal of mobilizing communities around child rights
- ▶ out of which would come real stories of rights violations and best practices in upholding rights
- ▶ which would culminate in a two-day gathering of children, youth, and child/youth workers with policy – and decision-makers
- ▶ with the goal of creating a framework for action and documenting the project findings
- ▶ while creating a template for other communities to use in nurturing local initiatives and harvesting information
- ▶ all of which will contribute to a report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child when Canada is next reviewed.

That review will take place in 2009. With more initiatives like *A People's Project*, Canada's youth and youth advocates will be ready.

Based on A People's Project materials, compiled by Sara Kendall.



Two imminent events on SCY's calendar are National Child Day activities and the Fourth Annual Child and Youth Friendly Communities Awards.

Many Canadians, including young people, are not aware of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) or National Child Day (see back cover), or of Canada's commitment to implementing CRC terms through the 2004 *National Action Plan for Children: A Canada Fit for Children*. This year, over 30 communities across BC have been planning events to increase awareness of the CRC and National Child Day, and promoting the blue wrist band and a 2006 calendar featuring children's art work and messages about children's rights on the theme *A World Fit for Children is a World Fit for All*.

On November 20, SCY and False Creek Community Centre in Vancouver will celebrate National Child Day by hosting a full day of inclusive, educational, action-focused fun for children, youth, and families on the theme *A Community Fit for Children is a Community Fit for All*. The scope of these activities will set a precedent for National Child Day celebrations across Canada, and will include presentation of the Fourth Annual Child and Youth Friendly Awards. Tune in to our website at www.scyofbc.org for who has won this year, and why.

In more day-to-day news, SCY has relocated. Early in 2005, not long after our 2004 move to share space and resources with the BC Institute Against Family Violence, that agency received a severe cut in core funding. For them, this meant staff cuts, staff changes, and a move to more economical quarters. We relocated along with them—our second move in two years.

Although tiring and hectic, the move was a good one. Our new office is in the historic Dominion Building. Upon its completion in 1910, this 14-storey skyscraper was the tallest building in the British Empire. Today, it is a heritage building located on the character-rich border between downtown Vancouver and the downtown east-side. It feels like home.

A Note from Mary Clare

Over the summer, I decided to leave SCY for a position as Manager of Program Delivery and Communications with the Ministry for Public Safety and Solicitor General – Victims' Services and Crime Prevention Programs. My two-and-a-half years with SCY have been some of the most challenging and rewarding years of my working life, so the decision to leave was difficult.

Looking back, I feel proud of my role in several SCY initiatives. One project about which I feel a significant sense of personal accomplishment is *Realizing Rights – Responding to Needs*, a project focused on the rights and needs of youth with disabilities in conflict with the law. We introduced it in the SCY Update of the Spring 2005 issue of *VocalPoint*, and there are plans to devote a full issue to it in the near future.

We also introduced *A People's Project: Vancouver Rights-based Monitoring Initiative* in the Spring 2005 issue of *VocalPoint*, and provide an extensive update on page 19 of this issue. I was particularly pleased to have attended the October 21 presentation of the Gibbard Award for Youth by the Vancouver chapter of the United Nations Association to the youth facilitators of *A People's Project*. It is an apt acknowledgement that this project has involved both young people and communities in a local effort with the potential to have national reach in realizing global law.

Grass-roots and youth-led initiatives like *Realizing Rights* and *A People's Project* are vital to our communities. They help young people develop resilience and build a sense of community and citizenship; they support communities to develop cost-effective, responsive programs and services; and they are crucial as we strive to monitor the rights of children in BC, and enable young people and their adult allies to report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on Canada's implementation of the CRC when our turn rolls around again in 2009.

A People's Project has involved both young people and communities in a local effort with the potential to have national reach in realizing global law.



Outgoing ED Mary Clare Zak and incoming ED Jess Chant.

I am also proud of my participation in the implementation of Bill C-2, legislation that will be proclaimed in November 2005 and January 2006. Written in the spirit of the CRC, and echoing international guidelines on child victims and witnesses, Bill C-2 will better protect children and vulnerable adults who are witnesses in criminal court.

A significant component of this legislation is its recognition of children under 14 as competent witnesses within the criminal-justice system. My involvement includes providing leadership to an inter-ministerial committee, in partnership with various experts, with the goal of improving children's access to supports to enhance their participation in the justice system. In practical terms, children will be supported to testify in cases of abuse, whether their own or that of a parent or loved one.

Implementation of Bill C-2 will require cooperation among various ministries, criminal-justice personnel, victims' services practitioners, and NGOs. Starting with a learning event at the Law Courts in Vancouver on November 21 – also in commemoration of National Child Day – this initiative will continue with development of provincial training and community information sessions. SCY has a history of advocating for this legislation, and I'm proud to be part of this legacy.

Looking to the Future

It gives me great pleasure to introduce SCY's new ED, Jess Chant. We hope to say more about Jess in the next issue of *VocalPoint*. For now, briefly, Jess originated in Toronto, moving to Vancouver to study English literature at UBC. Shortly thereafter, she became involved in the youth community, working to empower young women as ED of Real Power Youth Society; providing peer support for and conducting research with youth with chronic health conditions through the Youth Health Program at Children's and Women's Health Centre of BC; and conducting community mapping projects with immigrant youth and the Vancouver arts community for children and youth with the Youth Community Asset Mapping Team at the Environmental Youth Alliance (EYA). SCY first encountered this dynamic young woman when she worked with us on behalf of EYA on *Realizing Rights – Responding to Needs* and *A People's Project*.

Whatever regret I feel at leaving SCY is offset by the knowledge that my successor is a competent and sparkling individual who will bring drive and dedication to expanding SCY's activities into new and innovative areas, and enhancing SCY's profile in BC and in Canada, while remaining true to SCY's core values and vision. Contact Jess Monday through Thursday at the SCY office, 604.433.4180, or jess@scyofbc.org. I feel grateful for the time I've spent with SCY, and I look forward to continuing to work with many of you in the future.

WE'VE MOVED!

Our new home is in the historic
Dominion Building:

**802 - 207 West Hastings Street
Vancouver BC V6B 1H7**

All other contact information
remains the same.

Celebrate Children!

**NATIONAL CHILD DAY
IS NOVEMBER 20**

National Child Day commemorates the November 20, 1959 signing of the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child, a statement of general principles about child and youth rights; and the November 20, 1989 signing of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child, Canada's legally binding commitment to uphold child and youth rights.

THE CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD SAYS THAT ALL CHILDREN AND YOUTH HAVE THE RIGHTS TO:

Live Well by having all of their basic needs met, including the needs for food and shelter, a decent standard of living, and good health.

Be Free from Harm by being protected from hurtful things, including abuse, neglect, economic exploitation, torture, abduction, and prostitution.

Play a Part by being included in decisions that affect them, and having the freedom to be with other people, express their thoughts and feelings, and receive information from lots of sources.

Reach their Potential by receiving everything they need to develop into the best adults they can be. This includes good education, a loving family, knowledge of their culture, and a sense of personal identity.



THIRTY BC COMMUNITIES ARE CELEBRATING NATIONAL CHILD DAY. To find out about events in your community, or ways your community can participate next year, contact SCY at 604.433.4180, info@scyofbc.org, or www.scyofbc.org.

TO FIND OUT WHAT SCY IS DOING to celebrate National Child Day, including presentation of our Annual Child and Youth Friendly Communities Awards, see page 22.

FOR MORE INFORMATION on National Child Day, visit:
www.childday.gc.ca
www.rightsofchildren.ca
www.voicesforchildren.ca