
BENEFITS FOR CHILDREN: CASE STUDY ON THE ROLE OF CANADIAN NONPROFITS IN DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY

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Abstract

This paper reports on a case study that examines the evolution of public policy in Canada with respect to children's benefits. The review focuses on the role of Canadian voluntary organizations, particularly the National Children's Alliance and Campaign 2000. It is part of a series of studies in Canada and Southeast Asia. These were sponsored by the Institute On Governance, Ottawa, and funded by CIDA under the Canadian government's Voluntary Sector Initiative, Sectoral Involvement in Development of Public Policy.

The central focus of this study examines the influence of two national nonprofit networks on the development of the National Child Benefit, the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development Initiative. It also offers an analysis of the socio-economic and political context in which these policies and programs evolved, the role of other key actors and influences and identifies strategies for influencing public policy. The analysis is lodged within a framework developed by John Kingdon (1995) in Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies.

The study consisted of more than thirty interviews with key informants from nonprofit organizations, federal and provincial government departments and parliamentarians along with a review of key documents related to the organizations and policy issues at hand. The author of this study was a member of Campaign 2000 and the National Children's Alliance from their inception until 1998.

(Note: A condensed version of this is available in print from the Institute On Governance or at www.iog.ca under the title "Strengthening Social Policy: Lessons on forging government-civil society policy partnerships.")

Analytic Framework

The analysis in this study is built upon the framework for development of public policy developed by John Kingdon (1995). The framework consists of participants acting, and processes occurring, in three distinct but interrelated streams – problem recognition, policy generation and politics. These are "largely independent of one another, and each develops according to its own dynamic and rules. But at some critical junctures the three streams are joined, and the greatest policy changes grow out of that 'coupling' of problems, policy proposals, and politics." (Kingdon 1995:19) "Each of the actors and processes can act either as an impetus or as a constraint." (p. 87)

Problem Recognition

Certain conditions (e.g. child poverty) become identified as problems because they violate important values, reflect poorly on the jurisdiction (country, province or state) in comparison with other jurisdictions as measured by key indicators (e.g. poverty rates), to previous conditions in the same jurisdiction, or to an idealized objective condition or state of affairs (e.g. complete elimination of child poverty).

Particular problems may *rise* on governmental agendas because of such factors as well as immediate or imminent crises, potential embarrassment of governments or leaders,

overwhelming public attention to the issue or support for a policy solution and/or availability of a technically and fiscally feasible solution to the problem.

A problem may also *fade* from view because of one or more of the following factors:

- i. Governments believe the problem has been solved or addressed to the extent possible or as balanced against other priorities;
- ii. A technically, fiscally or politically feasible solution is not available;
- iii. Other impending crises shift attention to other problems;
- iv. Key indicators show improvement;
- v. There is public or political resignation, acceptance or accommodation to the problem;
- vi. Attention of key participants is not sufficiently persistent...champions of the cause disappear, burnout or turn their attention elsewhere;
- vii. Interest groups opposed to a proposed solution create organized constraints on governmental action.

"A focusing event – a disaster, crisis, personal experience, or powerful symbol – may draw attention to some conditions more than to others. But such an event has only transient effects unless accompanied by a firmer indication of a problem, by a preexisting perception, or by a combination with other similar events." (p. 197)

Policy Generation

Policies emerge from a '*policy primeval soup*' through a dynamic process in which "many ideas float around, bumping into one another, encountering new ideas and forming combinations and re-combinations." Some ideas are discarded and others advance to the '*decision agenda*'. "The proposals that survive to the status of serious consideration meet several criteria, including their technical feasibility, their fit with dominant values and the current national mood (*as gauged by elected legislators*) their budgetary workability, and the political support or opposition they might experience." (pp.19-20)

'Policy communities', which may be tightly knit or more loosely linked individuals and organizations, are composed of specialists in a given policy area. (p. 117) They typically include persons both inside and outside government...some of whom move back and forth between the sectors. Those outside government include academics, analysts and advocates for special interest groups, and consultants.

Politics

"The political stream is composed of things like swings of national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration, shifts in partisan or ideological distributions in (legislative bodies), and interest group pressure campaigns." (p. 87)

Elections, political campaigners, campaign promises and political parties influence policy direction to the extent that they are perceived to reflect the electorate's preferences. Party platforms are important as a public record of positions on issues "but the origins of the detailed alternatives seriously considered by policy makers lie elsewhere." (p. 64) Campaign promises affect the agenda when key constituencies attempt to hold legislators to account for those promises, when legislators hold a strong personal commitment to those promises or consider them part of their legacy of political office or when they are viewed as an exchange for electoral support.

"The political stream is an important promoter or inhibitor of high agenda status. All of the important actors in the system, not just the politicians, judge whether the balance of forces in the political stream favors action." (p. 163)

Participants

Participants are either '*inside*' government (elected and appointed members of the House of Commons and Senate, Cabinet and Privy Council Office, appointed staffers and other officials, career bureaucrats) or '*outside*' government (interest groups, academics, media and the general public). Those inside government tend to have the greatest control over both the agenda and alternatives that are considered.

Inside Government

Bureaucrats generally tend to have greater longevity than their political masters, develop greater expertise in specific policy areas, often have longer established relationships with interest groups and act as a link between them and elected officials.

Legislators, "in contrast to most other actors, have the unusual ability to combine some impact on the agenda with some control over the alternatives." (p. 35) They hold the legal authority, have greater public exposure (through hearings, introduction of bills, speeches, etc.) and are in a unique position to "blend the substantive and the political, the academic and the pressure group information, the bureaucracy and the constituency." (p. 35) Their desire to satisfy constituents introduces a 'geographical distributive element' to policy considerations. They recognize that their capacity to advance their conception of good public policy and influence decisions depends on good personal reputation and relationships. (p. 39)

Political 'staffers' may have a significant influence on agenda setting through their control of access to legislators, liaison with bureaucrats and personal interests or expertise. Those closest to the center of power (e.g. Prime Minister's Office) are likely to have greatest impact.

Outside Government

'*Policy entrepreneurs*' advocate solutions to particular problems. They may be inside or outside government (*or move back and forth between the two*). Policy entrepreneurs invest their time, energy, reputation and even financial resources in promoting a particular policy proposal. Their commitment to a cause may be motivated by a desire to advance personal interests or values or because they believe a policy may simply be 'the right thing to do'. They often act as brokers between participants with different interests and between streams and maintain sufficient flexibility to attach their proposal 'opportunistically' to different problems as issues rise and fall in the political and public mood. ((p. 123)

Interest groups may play an important role in identifying problems and generating policy alternatives. However, they appear to have more influence in constraining adoption of a particular policy.

Public opinion "seems to be approximately as important as the factors related to elections – neither insignificant by any means, nor among the most prominent in the total array of sources, but just about in the middle...Public opinion may sometimes direct government to

do something, but it more often constrains government from doing something.” (p. 65) Political parties and governments regularly conduct opinion surveys to gauge the issues that most concern members of the public.

Media play a role in discussing and drawing attention to public issues. The attention of legislators to public opinion as reflected in the media reflects the media’s importance. Some of the communication within policy communities takes place through specialized media such as academic journals and trade publications. Daily media such as newspapers and television affect agendas by magnifying or exaggerating an issue and accelerating its development. “To the extent that expansion of conflict is a central feature of agenda setting, then media play a part.” (p. 60) The attention of legislators to public opinion as reflected in the media imputes a certain importance to it. Media assist in communicating and popularizing results of public opinion surveys.

Agenda Setting

Elected officials and their appointees have more influence in shaping the agenda than career bureaucrats or nongovernmental actors. “Potential agenda items that are congruent with the current national mood, that enjoy interest group support or lack organized opposition and that fit the orientations of the prevailing legislative coalitions or current administration are more likely to rise to agenda prominence...the balance of organized forces is more likely to affect the alternatives considered.” (p. 19-20) The likelihood that policies will be adopted increases when solutions and problems are joined together coincident with a ‘window of opportunity’ created by favorable political forces and fiscal circumstances.

“Agendas are set by problems or politics, and alternatives are generated in the policy stream. Policy entrepreneurs, people who are willing to invest their resources in pushing their pet proposals or problems, are responsible not only for prompting important people to pay attention, but also for coupling solutions to problems and coupling both to politics. The chances of items rising on a *decision* agenda – a list of items up for actual action – are enhanced if all three streams are coupled together.” (p. 20)

“The combination of national mood and elections is a more potent agenda setter than organized interests.” (p. 199) Those participants with high public visibility have greater impact on the decision agenda and those who work in the background have more impact on design of policy alternatives. “The subject with an ‘available alternative’ is the one that rises on the agenda, crowding out equally worthy subjects that do not have a viable, worked-out proposal attached.” (p.142) Policy proposals often require a long ‘gestational’ period to reach the decision agenda...“A lot of preconditioning has to happen.” (p. 130)

The Canadian Socio-Economic and Political Context

Canada is a confederation of 10 provinces and 3 northern territories established in 1867. It is a parliamentary democracy governed by a Parliament comprised of a House of Commons of 308 members elected as the people’s representatives and a Senate of 105 members appointed by the Prime Minister. The constitution, the British North America Act, was repatriated from Great Britain in 1982 with the consent of 9 provinces and the (then 2) territories, with Quebec being the sole non-signatory jurisdiction.

Canada has a multicultural population of some 31.7 million citizens. Statistics Canada reports Canada's Gross Domestic Product in 2003 as \$1,020 billion. Its federal government revenues in 2002/03 were \$189,939 million. The average household pre-tax and pre-transfer market income in 2001 was \$63,734. (Statistics Canada website) Forty percent of the country's citizens reside in Ontario and 22% in Quebec giving these provinces respectively a third and a quarter of the seats in the House of Commons. This makes political control of the seats in these two provinces critical to securing an electoral majority in this body, which dominates the national legislative and policy agenda.

The constitution gives the federal government exclusive jurisdiction over such matters as defence and foreign relations while provinces have jurisdiction over such fields as health, education and welfare. Federal cost sharing gives the national government some leverage in setting broad national standards in these latter areas. In addition, the federal government may make direct payments to individuals, as in the case of the National Child Benefit. (Payments to individuals under the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Employment Insurance are others.)

Disputes between the federal government and the provinces over jurisdictional issues and cost sharing and with Quebec over these, as well as its aspirations for national identity, have resulted in attempts by Quebec to separate from the rest of Canada. These culminated in two Quebec referendums on separation since 1982, the most recent in 1995 being narrowly defeated. Canada's governance is complicated further by a constitutional provision that confers certain rights of self-governance to the 3% of its population that is Aboriginal.

The formula for amendment of the Constitution makes such amendment virtually impossible in the current context. The Meech Lake Accord, signed by First Ministers in 1987, and the Charlottetown Accord, signed in 1992, both failed to secure the necessary provincial ratification. The federal and provincial governments have therefore sought extra-constitutional mechanisms through which to demonstrate that the federation can work for all provinces and allow them to cooperate and collaborate on national policy and program initiatives. The failed constitutional accords did, however, lay some groundwork for the principles under which such collaboration might succeed. The Social Union Framework Agreement was signed in 1996 to facilitate such collaboration. Although Quebec again withheld its formal approval, it did participate in the discussions.

The "social union" initiative is the umbrella under which federal and provincial governments made a commitment to seek ways to renew and modernize Canadian social policy. It focuses on the pan-Canadian dimension of health and social policy systems, the linkages between the social and economic unions, and the recognition that reform is best achieved in partnership among provinces, territories and the Government of Canada. The primary objective of the social union initiative is to reform and renew Canada's system of social services and to reassure Canadians that their pan-Canadian social programs are strong and secure. In working to build a strong social union, the Government of Canada and the provinces and territories reached a broad consensus that the first priorities should be children in poverty and persons with disabilities.

First Ministers created the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council on Social Policy Renewal in 1996 and directed it to guide the social union initiative. The Council monitors work on overarching social policy issues and, as well, coordinates and supports "sectoral" councils that examine cross-sectoral issues. The Council includes

representation from nine (of ten) provinces, the territories and the Government of Canada. (Social Union website)

The final three-year agreement, A Framework to Improve the Social Union for Canadians, was signed in 1999. This Agreement is based upon mutual respect between orders of government and a willingness to work more closely together to meet the needs of Canadians. The Agreement contains: guiding principles for social policy; commitments to ensure social programs support the mobility of Canadians; commitments to strengthen government accountability to citizens; collaborative practices between governments on social programs; federal commitments on the use of its spending power; and a process for solving disputes between governments. It is a mechanism for development of a national agenda to protect the national dimensions for social policy and undertake the reforms necessary to enhance the effectiveness of social programs in Canada. (Edwardh 2002)

Problem Recognition – Children’s Issues

Child Well Being

Canada is a relatively affluent country (rated by the U.N. for several years as the best in the world) in which most children and youth fare well. However, some indicators of child well being suggest that substantial improvements could be attained for children who fare less well, with a clear vision of the combination of economic, health and social supports that would achieve these ends. Children from families that fall below the poverty line and especially those from Aboriginal communities tend to be at greater risk of infant mortality, poor physical, dental and emotional health, educational underachievement, unemployment, suicide, child protection concerns, criminal activity and incarceration.

There was a major socio-economic shift in Canada as participation of women in the labor force grew dramatically between the 1960’s and the 1990’s. This was accompanied by a demand for more favourable workplace policies, increased childcare supports, greater wage parity and improved parental leave policies. The women’s movement in the 1970s and 1980s had a significant impact in advancing public policy in these areas. It is perceived by many as paving the way for future advances in public policy with respect to children.

Child Poverty

The child poverty rate in Canada stood at 14.4% (1 in 7 children) in 1989 when the House of Commons unanimously resolved to *"seek to achieve the goal of eliminating poverty among Canadian children by the year 2000"*. The measure of poverty upon which these figures are based is the most commonly used Statistics Canada pre-tax 'low income cut-offs' (LICO)¹. There has been considerable debate within Canada about the validity of this

¹ The LICO, the level of pre-tax income at which a family spends significantly (20%) more than the 50% of its income on food, clothing and shelter spent on these items by the average family, is a 'relative' measure of poverty. There has been considerable debate within Canada about the validity of this measure with many on the conservative end of the political spectrum arguing for a 'market basket measure'. There are several of these that purport to be an absolute measure based on a basket of predetermined 'necessities' priced for different geographic locations but not adjusted to changes in community living standards over time. See CCSD 2000 (Ch: 2) for detailed discussion of these and other poverty measures.

measure with many on the conservative end of the political spectrum arguing for a 'basic needs' measure.

Elected officials, children's advocates and the general public considered this level of child poverty in an affluent country to be unacceptably high. Yet that rate continued to climb until 1996 when it reached 21.1% (1 in 5). Forty percent of social assistance recipients in 1996 were children. Sixty-eight percent of children from single parent families lived below the poverty line. ('Canada's Children – Canada's Future Final Conference Report', 1997)

Child Care

The Liberal government had established a Task Force on Child Care (led by Katie Cooke) shortly before the 1984 election that returned a Conservative government. That task force reported in 1986 recommending significant investments in child care services. The Conservative government immediately established a Special Parliamentary Committee on Child Care, which reported in 1987 with more modest recommendations on expenditures. However, despite the introduction of a National Child Care Strategy and legislation in 1988, agreements on the exercise of federal spending power in an area of provincial jurisdiction could not be reached with the provinces. (Ogston, 2003) Moreover, childcare advocacy organizations opposed the Conservative government's initiative because a substantial proportion of that investment was to be allocated to private (as opposed to regulated public) childcare.

Evidence suggests that the early years of childhood are especially vital to a child's development and future ability to learn. "ECEC also strengthens the foundations of lifelong learning for all children, supports the social needs of families, and promotes equal opportunities for women in the labour market. While opportunities to participate in ECEC should be available to all children, Canada's ECEC programs fall far short in meeting the needs of families and children.

Even though more than 70% of young children have mothers in the paid labor force, only 12% of children 0-12 have access to a regulated child care space. The supply of high quality spaces is woefully short. High costs prevent many moderate to low income families from enrolling their children in ECEC services; of those children who are in regulated child care, only 22% have a fee subsidy. Although the quality of such services is key to meeting the developmental needs of children, quality – even in regulated settings – varies considerably across Canada." (Campaign 2000 – 2002 Annual Report Card on Child Poverty)

David Dodge, Governor of the Bank of Canada, (2003 speech to the Sparrow Lake Alliance) said that: "at the margin, the total returns to investment in human capital appear, at this time, to be highest for the very young. Moreover, the evidence would seem to be that the returns to investment in the very young of relatively "lower cognitive ability" are about the same as those for the very young of "higher cognitive ability", while the returns are clearly higher for PSE (preschool education) for those of higher cognitive ability... Investment in ECD pays double dividends – one, it increases the efficiency of, and reduces the remediation costs in, the schools; two, it enables people to leave the formal education system earlier, thus helping meet the demographic challenge."

Policy Solutions

The National Child Benefit

The National Child Benefit (NCB) initiative is a partnership among the federal, provincial (except Quebec) and territorial governments and First Nations that aims to help prevent, or reduce the depth of, child poverty, support parents as they move into the labour market, reward them for labour market attachment, even if they have not been social assistance recipients, and reduce overlap and duplication of government programs. First Nations are involved more as residual partners, based on the fairness of the allocation and the benefit for their children.

The NCB combines two key elements: (i) monthly payments to low-income families with children, and, (ii) benefits and services designed and delivered by the provinces and territories to meet the needs of families with children in each jurisdiction.

Under the NCB, the Government of Canada has increased the benefits it pays through the NCB Supplement to low-income families with children, regardless of their source of income. In turn, most provinces, territories and First Nations have adjusted (*clawed back*) social assistance benefits provided on behalf of children by the full or partial amount provided under the NCB Supplement and reinvested it in services. The NCB is both a federal supplement paid through the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CTB) and a series of provincial, territorial and First Nations reinvestments in enhanced programs and services for low-income children and families.

By 2004, yearly funding to families under the Canada Child Tax Benefit was to have increased by \$2.5 billion. Parents would then be able to claim annual benefits of up to \$2,400 for the first child and \$2,200 for subsequent children—up from the earlier maximums of \$1,805 and \$1,605 respectively. And the Canada Child Tax Benefit is now indexed to keep up with the cost of living. (NCB Progress Report 2000) Assessment of the impact of direct provincial/territorial expenditures is beyond the scope of this study. Before the NCB, moving from social assistance into a paying job often meant only a minimal increase in family income for low-income parents. In some cases, it actually meant a loss of real income. It could also mean a loss of other valuable benefits, including health, dental and prescription drug benefits. As a result, families could find themselves financially worse off in low paying jobs as compared with being on welfare – a situation characterized as the “welfare wall”.

The NCB works to reduce the welfare wall by providing child benefits outside of welfare and ensuring that enhanced benefits and services continue when parents move from social assistance to paid employment. At the same time, no family receiving social assistance was to experience a reduction in its overall level of income support as a result of the NCB. Despite these assurances, data published by the National Council on Welfare demonstrate that the purchasing power of welfare families has fallen since 1997 even in those provinces (initially Newfoundland and New Brunswick) that do not claw back NCB payments. Nova Scotia, Quebec and Manitoba have subsequently reduced the amounts they claw back, but families on welfare still lose some of the money. (National Council of Welfare 2002:11-15; 75)

The National Children's Agenda

In December 1997, Canada's First Ministers asked the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal to engage the public in developing, within the Framework Agreement, a vision for enhancing the well being of Canada's children. In an effort to move forward, the Council recognized that a national agenda for children requires a shared vision and a common understanding of children's changing circumstances and needs, both as children and as future adults. Two documents were released to facilitate debate and discussion. They are:

- i. *A National Children's Agenda - Developing A Shared Vision*
- ii. *A National Children's Agenda - Measuring Child Well-being and Monitoring Progress*

These studies informed a community consultation which took place during the spring of 1999, culminating in the June 2000 release of the consultation document, *Public Dialogue on the National Children's Agenda-Developing a Shared Vision*. National non-governmental organizations (NGOs) submitted briefs and held forums across Canada attempting to influence the deliberations of the Council of Ministers on Social Policy Renewal. The posturing and squabbling inherent in intergovernmental relations has not made input easy and, in the not-for-profit sector, has often led to cynicism, submission depression and consultation fatigue. (Edwardh 2002)

In an attempt to create public awareness around the elaboration of a National Children's Agenda and to pressure all levels of government, a number of coalitions concerned with the health and well-being of children highlighted the issues of concern, advocated for the National Children's Agenda and monitored the progress and set backs in implementation.

The Early Childhood Development Initiative

Despite earlier setbacks, the Government of Canada and provincial and territorial governments finally agreed on the terms of an early childhood development framework, with an investment by the federal government of \$3.2 billion over seven years, starting in 2001/02. Provincial and territorial governments are using this increased funding to promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improve parenting and family supports; strengthen early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthen community supports. There has been considerable provincial variation in approaches to implementation, especially around allocation of childcare spaces.

Governments, as part of this agreement, committed to keeping the public apprised of progress in the area of early childhood development. Specifically, First Ministers committed to report on investments in early childhood development programs and services as well as on child outcomes. The level of provincial compliance with this reporting requirement has been very disappointing to most of those interviewed for this study.

Key Participants

Inside Government – Parliamentary

Senator Landon Pearson, a lifelong advocate for children, was appointed to the Canadian Senate in 1994. She has committed herself to using the influence of her office to advance the spirit and letter of the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Her two primary goals on behalf of children and youth have been to advance their interests directly in the legislative process whenever possible and to open up the process so that children and youth are able to participate in decisions that will affect them.

Senator Pearson was named Advisor on Children's Rights to the Minister of Foreign Affairs (1996). She provides advice to the Minister, on a regular basis, concerning children's issues in the foreign policy context and on the impact of domestic policies for children related to Canada's international commitments, notably the Convention on the Rights of the Child. She was named, in 1999, as Personal Representative of the Prime Minister to the 2002 Special Session on Children of the United Nations General Assembly. She is Co-Chair of the National Children's (Liberal party) Caucus Committee.

John Godfrey, M.P., a Member of the House of Commons (Parliament) from Toronto. From 1998 to 2003, he served as Chair of The National Children's Agenda Caucus Committee and was Chair of the Liberal Caucus Social Policy Committee from 1999 to 2003. John also served as Chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Children and Youth at Risk. He has actively promoted the well being of children during his career in public office. He has encouraged policies that focus on a national children's agenda that recognizes the importance of early childhood development, supports for children from low-income families, reduction of child poverty, and mitigation of circumstances for high-risk children and youth.

Successive Ministers of Human Resources, Pierre Pettigrew and Jane Stewart, demonstrated a strong commitment to moving a children's agenda forward and advocating within Cabinet and caucus for support. None of the initiatives discussed in this study would have proceeded without their strong leadership and commitment.

It is also important to note here the contribution of the *Hon. Ed Broadbent*, then leader of the New Democratic Party in the House of Commons, who proposed the 1989 Commons resolution on child poverty that was unanimously adopted by all parties.

Inside Government – Bureaucratic and Political Staff

Many officials within Health Canada and Human Resources Development Canada (particularly within their child and family policy divisions) worked actively within government and in liaison between government and voluntary sector organizations to advance initiatives that would address the 'identified problems' noted earlier in this report. Similar support was also found among the political staff of key Ministers. It was beyond the scope of this study to identify all those who provided important support and advice at key times. However, there is no question that their work served to facilitate the examination of issues and policies and the structure of program initiatives that were eventually adopted. Some concern has been expressed over the practice of frequently rotating 'generic managers' in the federal bureaucracy out of areas in which they have developed 'content expertise' slowing the policy development process as their replacements develop sufficient understanding to advance a particular policy agenda.

Inside Government – Provincial/Territorial

While the focus of this study has been upon the development of children's policies at the federal government level, the constitutional realities of Canada reserve jurisdiction over program delivery in these areas to provinces and territories. The exception to this is that the federal government may make direct payments to individuals, as in the case of the National Child Benefit. (Payments to individuals under the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security and Employment Insurance are others.)

The development of policies and programs in the areas that are the subject of this study necessarily require the participation of elected and appointed officials from provincial and territorial governments. The individuals who took leadership roles and served committees working on these policy issues were innumerable and beyond the scope of this study to identify. Suffice to say that they included the elected premiers and ministers and staff of key government departments in these jurisdictions. Their contributions are duly acknowledged.

In-Between – National Council of Welfare

The National Council of Welfare, mandated by the federal government in 1969, advises the Minister of Human Resources Development on the needs and problems of low-income Canadians and on social and related programs and policies that affect their welfare. The Council is comprised of private citizens appointed by order-in-council of the government. It does this by:

- Communicating directly with the Minister
- Informing and influencing public opinion through widely-disseminated reports
- Providing a vehicle through which people concerned with the problems of low-income Canadians can make their views known to government.

Outside Government – Campaign 2000

Campaign 2000 is a cross-Canada public education movement to build Canadian awareness and support for the 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. It began in 1991 out of a declaration (by the Child Welfare League of Canada, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Canadian Council on Children and Youth and the Child Poverty Action Group) expressing concern about the lack of government progress in mitigating child poverty. Its goals are to:

- Raise and protect the basic living standards of families so that no child must ever live in poverty
- Improve the life chances of all children in Canada to fulfill their potential, nurture their talent and become responsible, contributing citizens.
- Ensure the availability of secure, affordable, and suitable housing as an inherent right.
- Create, build and strengthen family support and community-based resources to empower families to provide the best possible care for their children.

Campaign 2000 has become a vibrant network of over 90 national, regional and local partner organizations that actively work on child/family issues from diverse perspectives. Members are asked to agree to its principles, be identified as partners, participate in activities (meet with MP at least once a year) and support the campaign with financial or in-

kind resources. There is a significant overlap in membership between its national members those of the National Children's Alliance.

Core support for Campaign 2000 has historically been provided by grants from the Laidlaw Foundation. The Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA) is the organizational host and trustee and provides the administrative coordination. A 'Steering Committee' provides advice to staff. Campaign 2000 has drawn heavily for research support from recognized experts and the Canadian Council for Social Development.

Staff and key experts, with advice from the Steering Committee, make key decisions. Partners are provided an opportunity to provide feedback on key position papers, although tight deadlines and financial resources have not always made this possible in the past, especially during the earlier years of the movement.

Campaign 2000 annually issues a national Report Card on Child Poverty in Canada measuring the progress, or lack of progress, in achieving its goals. Many partners also produce local report cards. It is involved in public and government consultations around the issue of child and family poverty and government policy. It also engages in non-partisan Ottawa and constituency-based lobbying for improved social policies relating to the national child benefit, social housing, child care, labour market supports, community services and other relevant policy areas. In addition to the report cards, Campaign 2000 has lobbied actively through letters to federal and provincial first ministers, briefs to parliamentary committees, celebrity endorsements, media releases, opinion columns and letters to the editor. It has also published policy discussion papers on topics germane to its goals. It is perceived as having historically tended (to the occasional consternation of politicians and bureaucrats) to stress deficiencies in government policy initiatives over appreciation for the 'sometimes small but important' steps taken to advance policy objectives.

Outside Government – The National Children's Alliance

The National Children's Alliance (NCA) is a network of 58 national organizations committed to improving the lives of children and youth in Canada focusing on issues of common interest to member organizations. Since its inception in 1996 the Alliance has worked to:

- Facilitate dialogue on children's issues with government
- Strengthen the network of national voluntary organizations and NGOs
- Develop policy recommendations;
- Engage provincial/territorial/regional constituent organizations in working collaboratively on issues, and
- Promote the development and implementation of a national children's agenda

The 58 national member groups of the alliance represent hundreds of thousands of people who work with children and families in the fields of social services, education and health, as professionals and as volunteers. National organizations conducting research and promoting improved economic and social security are also members of the alliance. Member organizations maintain their autonomy but commit to operating according to a set of guiding principles and collaborating on issues of common interest.

The Alliance's office had been advantageously located with the Coalition for National Voluntary Organizations in Ottawa, which acted as its organizational host for administrative

purposes. The Alliance has no formal organizational structure separate from this. Leadership is shared among the members for internal and external relations. It is supported by a small secretariat funded entirely by project grants, primarily from Health Canada and Human Resources Development Canada. There are no membership dues although individual members participate in development of research, policy positions and advocacy in their own areas of interest.

The Children's Alliance has worked to promote the development of a National Children's Agenda by the federal and provincial/territorial governments based on its discussion document...a "National Plan of Action for Children" (built on the 1996 *Canada's Children...Canada's Future* post-conference document, "Investing in Children - A Framework for Action"). It has also developed position papers on a range of specific children's issues. Its advocacy efforts have been built upon solid research, nurturing of relationships with key decision makers, a 'behind closed doors' approach to criticism of policy shortcomings, and a public appreciation for 'sometimes small steps taken' in pursuit of policy objectives. (NCA website)

Outside Government – Caledon Institute of Social Policy

The Caledon Institute, a social policy think tank, is a non-profit organization with charitable status. The Toronto-based Maytree Foundation has been a primary source of financial support. Caledon is an independent and critical voice that does not depend on government funding and is not affiliated with any political party. Caledon occasionally undertakes contract projects for governments and non-governmental organizations on the basis that such work fits Caledon's research agenda, but does not define it.

Caledon conducts rigorous, high-quality research and analysis; seeks to inform and influence public opinion and to foster public discussion on poverty and social policy; and develops and promotes concrete, practicable proposals for the reform of social programs at all levels of government and of social benefits provided by employers and the voluntary sector. Caledon's work deals with poverty and other social and economic inequalities, and covers a broad range of social policy areas including income security (e.g., pensions, welfare, child benefits, Employment Insurance, benefits for Canadians with disabilities), community capacity-building, taxation, social spending, employment development services, social services and health.

Underlying Caledon's work is the quest for *smart social policy* – for strong, cost-effective solutions to the difficult problems created by changing demographics and economic realities. Caledon emphasizes the vital links between social and economic policy, and its proposals are based on what can be achieved in the world in which we live. (Caledon website)

Its President, Ken Battle, was formerly Director of the National Council of Welfare. He is a poverty activist and policy entrepreneur who played a key role, (alternately occupying positions in the NCW, Caledon and within government) in the development of a technically, fiscally and politically feasible policy vehicle for implementation of the National Child Benefit.

Outside Government – The Canadian Council for Social Development

The Canadian Council on Social Development (CCSD) is a non-governmental, not-for-profit organization, which was founded in 1920. Its mission is to develop and promote progressive social policies inspired by social justice, equality and the empowerment of individuals and

communities. It does this through research, consultation, public education and advocacy. Its main product is information. Its sources of funding include research contracts, the sale of publications and memberships, and donations.

It began publishing the results of its research on the Progress of Canada's Children in six annual reports starting in 1996. These reports provided a body of research and analysis to support policy analysis and advocacy. (CCSD website)

Outside Government – The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research

The Canadian Institute for Advanced Research, was founded in 1982 as a private nonprofit organization committed to developing networks of highly regarded researchers within Canada and internationally. CIAR supports basic, rather than applied, research through multiple public and private funding sources. Where it is appropriate, CIAR works to transfer the knowledge generated by its programs to both the public and private sectors, to other academic institutions and research entities, to governments, and more broadly to society.

Its Human Development Program has shown "that the socio-economic status (SES) gradients associated with health outcomes show a similar pattern in relation to a wide range of developmental outcomes including coping skills, resiliency, neuroimmune responses, neural developments, mathematics achievement, and other learning skills and habits." (CIAR website)

Aggressive promotion of such research findings by Dr. Faser Mustard, CIAR Founding President and Dr. Dan Offord, a member of the research network associated with this project, were viewed by key informants as having had a significant impact in persuading policy makers and politicians to allocate resources to child poverty and early childhood development. Bank of Canada Governor David Dodge (2003) has commended the work of (CIAR) as "instrumental in expanding the frontiers of knowledge" about early childhood development and the benefits of investment in human capital during the early years.

Outside Government – Sparrow Lake Alliance

The Sparrow Lake Alliance (SLA), established in 1989, is a network of professionals conducting research and advocating for the conditions necessary for all Ontario children and youth to have the best start possible in life. The Alliance has invested in the belief that promoting healthy development for all children will improve outcomes for children and youth.

Outside Government – Laidlaw Foundation

The Laidlaw Foundation is a public interest foundation that uses its human and financial resources in innovative ways to strengthen civic engagement and social cohesion. The Foundation uses its capital to, enhance the well being of children and youth, enhance opportunities for human development and creativity and sustain healthy communities and ecosystems. It has been a core sponsor of Campaign 2000 from its inception. (Laidlaw website)

Outside Government – Others

Individual organizations, many of them members of both Campaign 2000 and the National Children's Alliance, engaged in their own research/education/advocacy efforts in addition to those coordinated through these coalitions. The Child Welfare League of Canada, the Canadian Council on Social Development, the Canadian Council on Children and Youth, the Child Poverty Action Group, the Canadian Child Care Federation, the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Institute of Child Health, the Kids' Help Phone, the Coalition of National Voluntary Organizations, Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada, and Save the Children Canada were among those who played active roles nationally. Their provincial and local counterparts as well as many others worked at provincial and local levels.

Analysis

Introduction

Conclusions about the factors influencing the development of the public policies reviewed here are based upon the *'weight of opinion'* amongst key informants, rather than consensus among them. In some cases, there were widely divergent views on critical influences, often depending on where an individual was in the hierarchy of influence and decision-making or the attachment/exposure of that person to a particular participant organization, individual or cause.

For example, Campaign 2000 was credited at one extreme of the opinion spectrum as having played a "vital role" in the cultivation of a public mood and political will conducive to the development of the NCB. An alternative view expressed by one senior bureaucrat was that 'the NCB was achieved despite Campaign 2000 tactics', which were viewed by that person as overly critical of the government to the point of jeopardizing achievement of the ultimate goal. Similarly, while Battle's role in development of the NCB was generally acknowledged as instrumental, some federal and provincial officials expressed the view that the momentum for its development had already been created by work in several provinces and the interplay between them. Some officials gave notable credit to the 'Framework for Action' that arose out of a 1996 conference on 'Canada's Children – Canada's Future' as a valuable reference for development of the National Children's Agenda, while certain others had no recollection of the earlier document.

It is clear, overall, that a dynamic interplay between various actors and organizations is critical, in a vibrant democracy, to the emergence of public policy out of the metaphorical 'primeval policy soup'. It is clear also that attribution of causal links between specific actors and factors and the ultimate policies and implementation vehicles that emerge can be highly speculative.

A more detailed analysis of the impact of these policy initiatives is contained in Appendix 1. The role of key participants and the many factors influencing the evolution of the children's agenda in Canada are analyzed in more detail next in this report.

National Child Tax Benefit

Problem Recognition

Canadian's with an interest in income security issues and children's policy had long recognized that children formed a large portion (approximately 40%) of social assistance recipients and that the structure of social assistance programs created disincentives for employable persons to move from social assistance dependency to low-paying jobs. These disincentives (loss of health and other benefits and extra expenses related to employment and child care, and punitive tax-back rates on earned income) became commonly known as the 'welfare wall'.

Such recognition contributed to the development of programs like the child tax exemption (1918), family allowances (1944), social assistance (1966), the child tax credit (1978) and the working income supplement (1992). Canada has also used progressive rates in its income tax system as a vehicle for income redistribution. Organizations like the National Council on Welfare, the Canadian Council for Social Development and the Caledon Institute had worked for many years to raise awareness and propose policy directions.

Throughout the 1960's, 1970's and early 1980's repeated efforts were made by social activists to address poverty as a generic social problem. However, much of the public saw poverty either as an inevitable byproduct of a capitalist economy or attributed personal responsibility (and deficiency) for their state to those who were poor and marginalized. The strategy to focus more narrowly on lifting seniors out of poverty and, in many instances off social assistance, succeeded with the introduction of the Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement.

Social activists adopted this strategy to focus on '*children as victims*' of poverty regardless of whether their state was due to parental default or economic fallout. This shift in metaphor, focused on 'child poverty', captured the public imagination and opened the possibility of political support for new solutions to an old problem. Activists also adopted the language of 'entitlements' contained in the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child signed by Canada in December 1991.

The creation of Campaign 2000, the release of its first annual report on child poverty, and the 1989 House of Commons resolution were key milestones in the effort to concentrate public attention on the issue. Organizations with an interest in children's issues had lobbied individually for more child-friendly policies.

Program reviews by the Conservative government in the 1980s and the Liberal government in the early 1990s eventually led to significant cuts in funding to national NGOs and created a perception that collective action was needed to respond to these challenges and to seek new opportunities to strengthen the voluntary sector and its relationship with government.

Consultations between the sector and the federal government in the early to mid 1990s explored new models for working together and for advancing the social agenda. Conferences, like those on Canada's Children sponsored by the Child Welfare League of Canada and other partners in 1991 and 1996, helped forge new coalitions and networks that increasingly coordinated their educational/advocacy efforts and media campaigns to raise public awareness of children's issues and develop political support to address the concerns.

Policy Generation

Several provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, New Brunswick) had, in the early nineties (early seventies in the case of the Saskatchewan Family Income Plan), initiated their own

innovations to provide child and family supports in addition to those offered through social assistance programs. Numerous policy alternatives had been debated over the years. Through a process of what Battle calls “*relentless incrementalism* (strings of reforms, often seemingly small and discrete when made, that accumulate to become more than the sum of their parts)” (Battle, 2003:12) policy changes had gradually occurred. This might be better described as ‘*disjointed incrementalism*’ with two steps forward and one step back and at other times two steps backward and one step forward or sideways.

“Successive federal governments implemented a series of changes that rationalized and, on balance, strengthened its child benefits, although partial de-indexation of child benefits from 1985 through 1999 eroded increases to low-income families and reduced child benefits for non-poor families. Today Ottawa delivers a singled geared-to-family-income program – the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) – that pays substantially more to the poor (currently up to \$4,1910 for two children, more than double the 1984 amount)...And in 2000 restored full indexing to the CCTB.” (Battle, 2003:12-13)

“The NCB is one of the rare reforms in the history of Canadian public policy that sold itself to governments of all political stripes and hues by virtue of its substantive policy rationale: to break down the welfare wall that stands in the way of families moving from welfare to work.” (Battle, 2003:13)

Battle is a policy entrepreneur who, in 1990, claims “the first ‘costed’ options for a national, integrated child benefit. In 1996, Battle was appointed (an inside government) senior policy advisor to the Minister of Human Resources Development, wrote the basic document making the case for the National Child Benefit and presented the idea to the Minister of Finance as a ‘down payment’ on the NCB in the 1997 budget which announced the reform. He also served as “a member of the NCB Working Group which, in its early months, was charged with the task of translating the budget proposal into action.” (Battle 2003:15)

Political Stream

A number of factors contributed to create a climate favourable to the introduction of a new national social program:

- Several years of fierce budget cuts in the mid-nineties by the Liberal government had put the federal government in the position of having an annual operating surplus and under intense criticism for cuts to health/education and social transfer payments to provincial governments.
- Paul Martin Jr., the Finance Minister responsible for the deep budget cuts, appeared eager to seek some redemption of the legacy of his father’s reputation for social conscience earned through development of national social programs while his father was a federal cabinet minister.
- The Prime Minister and his government wanted to keep the commitment to a National Child Benefit made in the Liberal Party Policy Platform for the 1997 election.
- Federal and provincial/territorial governments, in the wake of the near win for separatists in the 1995 Quebec referendum (and several years of federal provincial jurisdictional wrangling) were anxious to find a way to demonstrate that they could work together on a national program.
- The Social Union Framework Agreement provided a window of opportunity to demonstrate success in such collaboration.

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- The 1989 House of Commons resolution stood as a clear and often repeated reminder of an all-party commitment to mitigate child poverty.
 - Policy advocates had adopted 'child poverty' and the 'welfare wall' as new metaphors that were more politically palatable than the need for higher benefits for poor adults and families.
 - Child poverty consistently rated among the top concerns of Canadians polled during the nineties. A recent poll conducted by Ipsos-Reid (Federal Budget 2003) again showed increased spending on child poverty as a top priority after health care.
 - Availability and promotion of emerging research on the 'hard-wiring' of the brain in early childhood provided evidence-based research that policy makers needed to build a case for investments in early childhood programs.
 - Easier access to federal officials by NGO leaders working concurrently on several policy files, coincident to the Voluntary Sector Initiative to enhance collaboration on public policy development, capacity building and regulatory reform. (Gill 2003: 4-7)

Agenda Setting

These factors in the political stream, to use Kingdon's terminology, 'coupled' with a generally acknowledged problem and a technically feasible policy proposal that had been in the developmental phase for several years. A National Child Benefit would serve to rationalize existing programs, allow sufficient provincial flexibility within a national funding framework and serve as clear evidence that federal-provincial cooperation was possible within the Social Union Framework Agreement.

National Children's Agenda and Early Childhood Development Initiative

Problem Recognition

The absence of a coherent framework within which to develop children's policies had become increasingly evident during the early nineties. Work was underway in a number of provinces to provide a more coherent approach to children's policies and programs. Saskatchewan had produced the first provincial Action Plan for Children in 1993. Some other provinces were also making efforts to coordinate programs with a focus on children.

The efforts of Campaign 2000 members had heightened public and political awareness of child poverty. Advocacy efforts in the late 1980s and early 1990s of individual nonprofits with an interest in children had served to raise awareness and concern about child poverty as well as such issues as the shortage of child care spaces and early childhood development opportunities. Public policy discussions such as those on childcare stimulated by the 1984 'Cooke' Task Force on Child Care ensured continuing attention to the problem. An expanding body of research supporting investments in early childhood development and growing international attention to children's rights and well-being provided important leverage for advancing Canadian interest in these issues.

Advocacy groups with an interest in children held a conference in 1991 framed around the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The conference finale had participants meeting with members of the House of Commons caucuses to plead their case for development of a

national children's agenda including measures to address child poverty and shortages in available child-care spaces.

A follow-up conference in 1996, with nearly 1200 participants from all economic sectors, drew national media and political attention. This second conference "provided a forum for a report to the nation on the status of Canada's Children. Data from Statistics Canada's National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth, the first report by the Canadian Council on Social Development on the 'Progress of Canada's Children' and information from Campaign 2000's Annual Report Card on child poverty formed a social policy backdrop for the work at the conference in building a consensus on *Investing in Children: A Framework for Action*." (Canada's Children, 1997:i) The results of this conference were presented to twenty percent of the Members of Parliament through individual meetings during the final day of the conference.

Such conferences, though not instrumental to the policy shifts, were important to broadening networks, forming new provincial coalitions and strengthening evolving coalitions including the National Children's Alliance.

Policy Generation

Work had been done both inside and outside government on alternative proposals for a national childcare program and for initiatives in specific program areas. However, there had been little effort to develop a broad vision for children's services and a coherent, integrated policy framework within which to lodge program initiatives.

Investing in Children: A Framework for Action was a draft national agenda for children that received broad endorsement from conference participants. It proposed concrete action on child poverty, early childhood education, youth employment, labour market strategies, education, child protection, youth offenders and other matters. Coincident with the conferences were more detailed discussions within and between governments about policy specifics including the National Child Benefit. The 1996 conference in particular provided a morale boost and encouragement for child advocates within the voluntary sector and government circles.

Political Stream

Conservative Prime Minister Mulroney co-chaired the 1990 UN World Summit for Children. This has been credited with accelerating Canada's endorsement of the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Conservative government, in the early nineties, initiated a number of new programs under the umbrella of the 'Brighter Futures Framework' which created the first Community Action Plan for Children (CAPC), stimulated demonstration projects in the Provinces through formal agreements, started the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY) and established the Children's Bureau in Health Canada to provide some focus for and coordination of children's policies. These provided a foundation for early childhood development initiatives upon which the next government could build.

The 1993 Liberal Party Policy Platform committed, subject to certain conditions regarding favourable economic growth and agreement with the provinces, to increasing the number of child care spaces in Canada by 150,000. The 1997 Liberal Platform again acknowledged the importance of giving children a healthy start and committed to increasing funding for the

Community Action Program for Children and Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program and heralded its accomplishments in a number of other programs such as Aboriginal Head Start, fighting family violence and child prostitution, and promoting the rights of children internationally. However, the primary focus of this election platform was on combating child poverty through amalgamation of several income support programs into a new National Child Benefit System and the negotiation of a National Children's Agenda with the provinces. Its 2000 Platform for the first time committed to investing \$2.2 billion over five years to early childhood development.

Translation of those political promises into practical commitments in Throne and Budget Speeches, Cabinet approval and financial allocations, however, required tremendous dedication and persistence on the part of parliamentarians, political appointees and bureaucrats as well as continued prodding and encouragement from those outside government.

Agenda Setting

Members of the National Children's Alliance had been conducting quiet one-on-one lobbying with cabinet ministers, key MPs, opposition leaders and senior bureaucrats. The NCA is given some credit for influencing the Liberal Party's election platform and the subsequent intergovernmental work on a National Children's Agenda. The Alliance was a multi-disciplinary, cross-sectoral coalition representing dozens of national voluntary sector organizations. Campaign 2000 was a multi-disciplinary and cross-sectoral coalition with grassroots support at provincial and local levels. Both brought their respective educational and advocacy resources to bear individually and collectively in support of greater and more coherent attention to children's policy. Their diverse nature served to counter criticism from certain quarters that voluntary sector organizations were 'special interest' groups.

The efforts of policy activists, particularly within government, to translate the party platform into Throne and Budget speech commitments was essential to turning political promises into program reality.

Conclusion

John Kingdon's "Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policy" (problem recognition, policy generation and politics) provides a useful, logical and systematic framework for analysis of the development of Canadian public policies related to children as they evolved during the last decade.

The three children's policy areas examined in this study: the National Child Benefit, the National Children's Agenda and the Early Childhood Development Initiative undertaken by the federal, provincial and territorial governments over the last decade were positive initiatives resulting from the confluence of a number of propitious factors...The favourable federal fiscal climate opened a *window of opportunity* for implementation of policy proposals that had been under development for several years. The provincial and territorial desire to recover federal transfer payments for program expenditures lost during the previous decade. Public concern, about child poverty in particular, encouraged a positive political response. Similarly, a desire to improve federal/provincial relationships with a concrete demonstration of cooperation under the Social Union Framework Agreement broadened this

window and allowed political leaders to seize upon a well-developed policy proposal as the first major initiative under this framework.

Campaign 2000 and the National Children's Alliance, with their overlapping memberships and growing credibility, certainly had some influence in encouraging and supporting the implementation of these children's initiatives. The annual Report Card on Child Poverty and the active advocacy of Campaign 2000 combined with the 1989 House of Commons resolution to 'seek to eradicate child poverty by the year 2000' were important factors in cultivating the political will to implement the National Child Benefit (NCB) and to seize the opportunity to improve federal/provincial relationships.

However, a viable policy alternative was essential. The work done on the NCB by a variety of people and jurisdictions paved the way for the detailed work on the benefit undertaken by policy entrepreneur Ken Battle. In that sense he was the 'man of the hour'... the right person at the right time with the right conceptualization of the problem and solution. However, some believe that previous bureaucratic and political momentum made the development of this initiative inevitable because of the confluence of factors and actors described in this report.

The popularization of findings on early child development, by Dr. Fraser Mustard, Dr. Dan Offord and others, provided the evidence-based research necessary to support the significant investment in children's services encouraged for years by policy advocates. The work of Parliamentarians M. P. John Godfrey and Senator Landon Pearson both within government and between government and the voluntary sector are perceived as instrumental in advancing the children's agenda. And political leadership and dedication from Ministers and their officials in Human Resources Development, Health and Finance as well as the Prime Minister were, of course, absolutely essential. These coalesced at a time when the federal government was looking for a way to soften its image after the deep budget cutting that occurred during its first three years in office.

Although many of its members had been consulted since the early 1990's as part of an informal Reference Group, the National Children's Alliance had not yet established itself, or its later credibility, by the time the decisions to proceed with the NCB had been taken. It is, however, given some credit for accelerating the momentum for development of a National Children's Agenda sparked by debate on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the 1996 national conference on Canada's Children. Both the National Children's Alliance and Campaign 2000 are credited with having been very influential, if not instrumental, in persuading political leaders to proceed with the Early Childhood Development Initiative. The development of a broad-based consensus on issues and solutions, without strong dissenting voices, was clearly critical to the development of the ECDI. The successful opposition of childcare advocacy groups to the childcare initiative of the Conservative government in the late 1980's gives credence to Kingdon's contention that interest groups can have as much influence in constraining policy as in advancing it.

Campaign 2000 was credited with having a strong focus on child poverty and childcare. However, the perception that it focused its critiques on policy inadequacies rather than positive steps was regarded by some as potentially more risky than constructive. The National Children's Alliance was perceived by some as less focused in its policy objectives but its less public critique of policies was well appreciated by bureaucrats and federal cabinet ministers allowing the development of a degree of trust and reciprocity. There was a degree of constructive tension that evolved out of the combination of approaches of the two

organizations. While their influence on moving the policy yardsticks forward was acknowledged, there were many actors and factors that led to the implementation of the children's policy initiatives that grew out of this primeval policy soup. As one interviewee put it: "Victory has many fathers."

Strategies for Influencing Public Policy

This study reveals many strategies that voluntary sector organizations may use to increase their influence on public policy. Some of these are implicit in the manner in which the children's policy initiatives were developed and implemented. Others are derived from the consensus of direct advice offered by interviewees. Many of them are suggested by Kingdon's analysis of the manner in which public policy is developed.

- ⇒ Identify the problem(s) early and express them clearly.
- ⇒ Understand and seek to influence the public mood and the political possibilities.
- ⇒ Develop a solid base of research support.
- ⇒ Start with a clear objective or desired outcome and keep your eyes on the ball.
- ⇒ Construct a strong 'business' case for investment and a strategy for measuring outcomes.
- ⇒ State the case in clear, easily understood language.
- ⇒ Use international conventions (e.g. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) and inter-jurisdictional comparisons to leverage local progress.
- ⇒ Communication is critical to keeping stakeholders on side and generating public and political support.
- ⇒ Timing and context are everything. Anticipate windows of opportunity. Be ready to act, with well-developed solutions and advocacy strategies, when they open.
- ⇒ Regularly review the metaphors used to promote your policies to ensure the language attaches your cause to current public and political concerns that may be used as 'proxies' to advance your interests. 'Hitch your wagon to a winning horse.' (For example, children as 'victims' of poverty.)
- ⇒ Balance passion for a cause with pragmatism for solutions. Appreciate what is achievable within the current context but don't lose sight of longer-term objectives. Be satisfied with 'half a loaf' rather than pursuing an all or nothing agenda.
- ⇒ Seek champions for the cause...inside and outside government and the voluntary sector.
- ⇒ Individual personalities and personal relationships may move the agenda forward when all else fails.
- ⇒ Offer praise generously and criticism in constructive, but measured, doses.
- ⇒ Seek allies and build alliances. Broaden these to include non-traditional partners (business and labour) wherever possible. This becomes even more powerful when it is an alliance of the unlikely...those previously on opposite sides of an issue.
- ⇒ Seek consensus without abandoning individual organizational mandates.
- ⇒ Find effective ways to share leadership nationally (or locally), and divide the workload among organizations with specific areas of expertise.
- ⇒ Build trust, respect and credibility amongst key stakeholders.
- ⇒ Nurture personal contacts...build constructive relationships.
- ⇒ Understand the political and bureaucratic structure and processes, how decisions are made and the key players. Build relationships with key players.

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- ⇒ The incubation period for a new policy is often very, very long. It may be easier to build incrementally on existing policy foundations than to construct the entirely new.
 - ⇒ Persistence is the key to success.

Appendix 1 – Analysis of the Impact of Developments in Children’s Policy

National Child Benefit

The National Child Benefit consists of two policy streams: A direct payment by the federal government to families with children (the Child Tax Benefit); and, reallocation of provincial money, previously allocated to welfare payments, to support early childhood development initiatives.

Annual maximum CCTB (including NCBS) for the July 2003 to June 2004 benefit year for families with net incomes below \$21,529 in 2002

> Number of Children	Basic CCTB*	NCBS	Total	Monthly Benefit
1st child	\$1169	\$1463	\$2632	\$219.33
2nd child	\$1169	\$1254	\$2423	\$201.92
3rd & each additional child	\$1251	\$1176	\$2427	\$202.25

- Families that had net income below \$21,529 in 2002 qualify for the maximum base benefit of the CCTB and maximum NCB Supplement.
- Families that had net incomes between \$21,529 and \$33,487 in 2002 qualify for the maximum base benefit of the CCTB and part of the NCB Supplement.
- Families that had net incomes above \$33,487 in 2002 qualify for a part of the base benefit of the CCTB.
- In 2003-2004, there is also an additional supplement of \$232 provided for each child less than seven years of age for whom no childcare expenses were claimed.

The number of children living in low-income families dropped from one in five, to one in six in 2002. “The change follows four consecutive years of falling child poverty rates. But that figure is still higher than in 1989, when one in seven children was poor, prompting the House of Commons to pass a unanimous resolution to eliminate child poverty. Child poverty rates fluctuate with economic cycles. However, residual programs are essential to support those children whose families are unable to adequately provide for them through employment income.

“While the overall trend is encouraging, poverty retains its stubborn hold on over 1.1-million children. 16.5% of Canadian children are living in poverty, substantially higher than the 14.4% figure that prompted Parliament to act in 1989. In the intervening years, circumstances for lone parents have stagnated while the conditions of two parent families have actually deteriorated.” (Campaign 2000 – 2002 Annual Report Card on Child Poverty)

“According to the after tax LICO...the national poverty rate for ‘economic’ (working) families with children – after the provincial claw back of the NCB supplement (NCBS) from social

assistance recipients and the provincial re-investment in cash or income-support programs are factored in – fell 4.6% between 1996 and 1999 because of the introduction of the NCBS. The drop in the poverty gap was even greater: 8.7%. Under the rules to be in place by 2004, the decline in the after-tax LICO poverty rate is projected to be 11.8% and that in the poverty gap 18.0 % relative to the rate and gap that would have prevailed in the pre-NCBS world. The improvement in the economic well-being of low-income families with children would be even larger if the impact of provincial in-kind programs financed by the NCBS through the social assistance claw-back were included.” (Centre for the Study of Living Standards, 2002)

However, this analysis did not account for cuts to welfare rates beyond the claw-back in some jurisdictions and the fact that the Child Tax Benefit was not indexed to inflation between 1997 and 2001. These factors combined to make some welfare families worse off in 2001 than in 1997.

The National Council of Welfare estimated that because of the ‘claw-back’ of the Child Tax Benefit (from children of families receiving social assistance) 64% of poor children and 83% of poor children of single parents do not receive any increased income support from the CTB. In fact, inflation and reduction of social assistance benefits in some provinces has increased depth of poverty for the children of some welfare families. (Shillington 2000: 65)

The National Child Benefit, in summary, was successful in beginning to break down the welfare wall, reducing the depth of poverty for working families and developing a range of social supports for poor families generally. It had little to no positive effect on income support for children in social assistance families except in the few provinces which did not effect the claw-back as noted earlier.

National Children’s Agenda

The National Children's Agenda represents a commitment of federal, provincial and territorial governments to act to ensure that all Canada's children have the best possible opportunity to develop to their full potential as healthy, successful and contributing members of society. The National Children's Agenda, when fully elaborated, will act as a far-reaching, long-term action plan for coordinating and advancing actions in a wide range of children's issues. (Edwardh 2002)

Some of the programs described under the Early Childhood Development header were initiated prior to the adoption of the National Children’s Agenda. However, the attention focused on children’s issues by the discussions leading to the agenda did support development of new programs such as the NCBS, Parental Leave and Centres of Excellence. The ‘agenda’ also provides a ‘values and vision’ framework for building child and youth friendly policies and a lens through which to view progress.

Early Childhood Development Initiatives

The programs described below fall generally under the umbrella of the ECD initiative involving federal spending. There is additional spending allocated by provincial and territorial governments to early childhood development initiatives within their jurisdictions that is not accounted for in this analysis. A significant portion of this results from

reallocation, to ECD programs, of money 'clawed-back' from social assistance families with children.

Parental Leave – Recognizing that parents have primary responsibility for the well-being of their children, the Government of Canada is also making it possible for them to spend more time at home during the critical first year of life. Maternity and *parental benefits* have doubled from six months to one full year, and the leave available to adoptive parents has tripled, from 10 weeks to 35 weeks.

Tax Breaks – The government of Canada contends that recent tax cuts made Canadian families its first priority. Families with children got tax breaks averaging 21 per cent from the 2000 budget measures. This may be true as far as it goes. However, it could be argued that overall tax measures are less progressive when placed in the context of the entire package of personal and corporate income and other tax measures.

Research – The Government of Canada is actively engaged in a number of targeted research initiatives. The National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth is a long-term study of Canadian children that tracks their development and well-being from birth to early adulthood. The survey collects information about factors (family, friends, schools and communities) influencing a child's physical, behavioural and learning development. This forms the basis of a directed policy-oriented research program.

At the community level, Understanding the Early Years is a research initiative that focuses on children under the age of six and involves teachers, parents, guardians and community agencies. It helps communities understand how their children are doing and how best to respond to their needs. With this information, communities can put in place specific action plans that will help their children—both before and after they enter school—to reach their full potential.

Centres of Excellence for Children – Five Centres of Excellence have been established to improve our understanding of and responsiveness to the physical and mental health needs of children and the critical factors for healthy child development. The mandate of the Centres is to ensure that important knowledge about children and their healthy development is broadly distributed among families, community-based organizations, educators, health professionals, non-government organizations and governments. Each focuses its research, educational and advisory efforts on one of five topics.

Aboriginal Head Start – This early intervention program for young Aboriginal children and families living in urban and large northern communities directly involves parents and the community in the design and implementation of pre-school projects and includes the promotion of culture and languages, education, health, nutrition, counseling and improved social supports.

The Community Action Program for Children (CAPC) – Addresses the health and social development needs of children from birth to six years of age living in conditions of risk such as low-income families, teenage-parent families and children experiencing developmental delays. CAPC is now serving 70,000 parents and their children in over 300 urban, rural and remote communities across Canada.

The Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program – Helps communities develop or enhance programs for pregnant women at risk by providing support, education, referrals and counseling on issues such as alcohol abuse, stress and family violence. The program offers services to about 26,000 women at risk.

The Fetal Alcohol Syndrome/Fetal Alcohol Effects (FAS/FAE) initiative – Aims at preventing one of the major known preventable birth defects. FAS occurs in about three of every 1,000 births in Canada and can cause intellectual deficits and learning disabilities that may also lead to other secondary disabilities such as early school drop out, trouble with the law and alcohol and drug abuse problems. Prevention is achieved through increasing awareness and supporting community action.

Child Care – In addition, federal, provincial and territorial ministers, in March 2003, reached a framework agreement to enhance the supply and quality of regulated child-care spaces with the federal government committing \$930 million over five years. The money is allocated to improving access to quality regulated care. Additional direct provincial/territorial expenditures are not accounted for in this analysis.

The key objectives of this agreement are to promote early childhood development so that, to their fullest potential, children will be physically and emotionally healthy, safe and secure, ready to learn, and socially engaged and responsible; and, to help families support their children within strong communities. Funds are to be targeted to promote healthy pregnancy, birth and infancy; improve parenting and family supports; strengthen early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthen community supports.

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