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Boards Together

SOME BACKGROUND:

Association of Family Serving Agencies (AFSA) is committed to developing a coordinated community response to the government's withdrawal of contracts and funding from community social services and recognizes the considerable collective expertise, experience and power that board members possess.

It is the assumption of the AFSA steering group that if a collection of committed directors were assembled in one room, and presented with the broader issues, new and creative ideas would begin to emerge.

To that end AFSA has hosted five forums inviting directors from family-serving agencies in the CRD together for an evening of conversations.

All five forums have had strong support from the social services community. Each meeting has enjoyed both first-time and returning participants. Initially the meetings focused on presenting background information on the state of the sector. Then they moved into surveying the participants with the intention of identifying where people felt that action was warranted, and where they felt that they could do the most good.

Informed by those initial discussions and an on-line survey four main areas of interest were identified as priorities. The following priority was given to the four areas, and meetings have been scheduled accordingly:

- **ADVOCACY & AWARENESS - JUNE, 23**
- **BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS , OCT, 13**
- **BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNANCE , FEB 9**
- **SERVICE & ADMINISTRATIVE , MAY - TBD**

Boards Together – Advocacy and Awareness, held June 23, 2010.

This meeting saw 20 people from the sector gather to brainstorm. The evening was focused on identifying strengths and barriers, and developing strategies around advocating for, and creating awareness around, community social services.

Freelance journalist and community activist, Jody Paterson gave a well-received presentation on delivering a clear message to the public that community social services matter and the lack of funding effects us all.

Boards Together – Building Relationships held October 13, 2010.

The meeting was held at 7:00 pm at the Oaklands Community Centre on Belmont Avenue.

In attendance were 20 people from the sector, with four first-time participants and the majority being returning participants.

The evening was organized by Board Voice and AFSA, with facilitation by Jenelle Cooper of Board Voice and Paul Abra who serves on the board of Big Brothers Big Sisters.

This evening focused on the value of creative collaboration. The discussion began by looking at what may be considered common wisdom around the community social services sector:

- there is a perception that there are too many agencies;
- the community's needs are changing;
- healthcare is being downloaded onto the agencies;
- government feels that bigger is better as far as agencies go – a feeling not necessarily shared by the sector.



Mike Sidhu & Paul

The group then went on to investigate ideas around potential collaboration and how benefits could be increased and barriers overcome. Paul Abra of Big Brothers Big Sisters and Mike Sidhu of Boys & Girls Club presented as an example of the process of collaboration, the work that Big Brothers Big Sisters, and The Boys & Girls Club has undertaken.

Tips for Collaboration:

Clear objectives – be very clear on what you hope to accomplish

Communications – your staff should be included and reassured in the process

Trust - Establish and build trust between the parties involved



Boards Together V - Best Practices in Governance



Patti Sullivan,
ED of Boys & Girls Club

Hosted by Doug Hayman of the Federation of Community Social Services and Board Voice, and Mike Sidhu, board vice-chair of Boys & Girls Club

Special presentation by Patti Sullivan, ED of Boys & Girls Club

The to-capacity meeting was held at the Pacific Centre for the Family's boardroom at their Wale Road location. Light snacks and beverages were provided for the evening session. There were approx. 20 board directors in attendance with several being new to the Boards Together gatherings.

The evening opened with Doug Hayman giving a brief overview of the objective and background of the Boards Together project as well as a brief introduction to Board Voice.

Mike Sidhu then took over and covered off various topics with relevancy to good board governance including:

- what governance is
- operating at the 10,000 ft level, as opposed to on-the-ground operations
- The different perspectives of the organization
 - The board – 5-year-out perspective
 - The staff – today perspective
 - The ED – bridging those two perspectives
- the importance of understanding the financial, operational and legal responsibilities of the board
- hybrid board model which is often the necessary choice for smaller agencies with minimal capacity
- Succession planning
- The benefits of creating diversity on your board
- Making sure that there is a plan for replacing board members
- The importance of being up-front about expectations when recruiting new board members
- The efficient meeting and board through the use of a consent agenda – doing your home work before the meeting. Making sure that you read the reports so there is no need to review them in the meetings, just discuss and analyze.

Patti Sullivan gave an engaging presentation. Some of what she covered off was:

- Using policy questions to frame all reporting
- Using policy to create boundaries for board functioning
- Effective policy can allow a board to self-govern
- Renegade board members – what can be done to bring productivity back to your board
- The value of three-page strategic plans
- The important of an organization having one voice, and what that is
- The benefits and considerations having clients on the board of an organization
- Reporting back to clients – how and why
- The great value of the ED and the Board Chair maintaining clear and regular communication
- Conflict of interest

Patti's presentation is available upon request

BOARD GOVERNANCE RESOURCES:

The Victoria Chamber of Commerce Boot-camp for Board Members

Vancity and Coast Capital board development opportunities

Moving Forward

By consensus the group made several decisions on the next steps of Boards Together.

Mike Sidhu will be the regional lead for organizing future Boards Together sessions.

Boards Together would like to meet as regularly as can be arranged – every three months was decided.

Areas to explore further are:

- Best practices and good governance
- Political advocacy
- Board interaction with other boards
- Fall out from current RFP process
- Sharing success stories
- Managing change
- Hosting expert speaker



Lots to think about!

Written reports are available for all previous meetings, as well as a background piece from AFSA & Board Voice.

Please contact doug@fcssbc.ca for copies.

NEXT STEP Service & Admin

TBD - May 2011

Location
TBD

CONTACT:
Doug Hayman
doug@fcssbc.ca