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## Boards Together II

### THE OVERVIEW:

The 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.

To that end AFSA has hosted two forums inviting directors from over 85 social service agencies in the CRD together for an evening of conversations.

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.

**And that is exactly what is happening.**

### THE MEETINGS:

The first meeting was held on April 7th at Queenswood. Fifty-one people representing 36 CRD-based community social service agencies were in attendance. It was decided that a second meeting would take place.



The second meeting was held on May 5th at Silver Threads on Douglas St at 7 pm. Twenty-five directors from 21 agencies were in attendance as well as six AFSA steering committee members.

The evening began with introductions of participants and a quick review of the comments, feedback, and survey results from the last meeting. Brenda Wilson of Citizens' Counselling Centre and Liz Bloomfield of Single Parents Resource Centre gave a brief overview of

AFSA and their involvement in this project and then Doug Hayman from the Federation of Community Social Services and Mike Sidhu, vice-chair of Boys and Girls Club both spoke as representatives of Board Voice providing an update on a recent Board Voice strategy session. Brian Hill led a discussion clarifying the role of Board Voice, AFSA, the Federation, and the Boards Together gatherings.



The group was presented with four areas of interest that were identified as priorities in the first meeting:

- BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS
- BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNANCE
- ADVOCACY/AWARENESS RAISING
- SERVICE & ADMINISTRATIVE

The participants were asked to choose two areas that they would explore in two break-out sessions. They would spend approx 25 minutes in each of the groups. Each area of priority was given a host person that would carry the conversation from one group to the next, creating some continuity.

The groups used the following two questions as a guideline to their discussions:

- What would you like to see happen?
- What do you need for your Board to participate?

Each group reported back to the larger group and in the days that followed provided the written reports that are paraphrased in this document.

It was then voted that the group would like to create action plans for these priorities and would begin with what they felt was the most urgent/important, Advocacy and Awareness. This would be the focus of the next meeting set for June 2nd, 2010. **(now June 23rd).**



“unity  
energy  
LEVERAGE  
together  
positive  
proactive  
useful  
POTENTIAL  
outward  
looking  
synergy  
colaborate  
STRATEGY  
hope”

**THE GROUP USED THESE TWO QUESTIONS AS GUIDES:**

- 1. What would you like to see happen?**
- 2. What do you need for your Board to participate?**

**BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS**

**What do you need for your Board to participate?**

A reasonable knowledge of the region’s organization not only at the agency level but also at the provincial or umbrella organization level.

A cumulative and quantitative picture of what services are being cut, by how much, and what effects this has on the community. Look to identify the commonality of the problems and whether they are systemic.

**What would you like to see happen?**

We would like to identify:

- Overlapping services
- Gaps in services
- Opportunities for collaboration
- An understanding of the cumulative effects of shortfalls in funding of social services



To obtain this information a single-page form is needed. Data collected would include, but is not limited to: mission, programs, geographic and demographic areas served, pressures on services (cut or reduced funding).

**Considerations:**

It is important that we not only know what we are doing but why in order to drive advocacy.

Are agencies straying from their core mission to follow funding, which perhaps produces overlaps and gaps?

Are funding agencies/government departments changing priorities without seeing overall effect on services?

**BEST PRACTICES IN GOVERNANCE**

**What would you like to see happen?**

Capacity building for Board members through collective:

- Orientation,
- Training,
- Annual convention.



Leading to:

- stronger governance structure,
- clear understanding of Board and staff roles,
- management and balancing of priorities – operational vs. policy board balance,
- stronger board recruitment and retention strategies, including engaging the next generation of governors.

Ongoing information sharing i.e.:

- Information on policy changes
- Issues related to Board liability insurance
- Understanding of complexities of working in a unionized environment
- Check list for best practices in governance as an on-going reminder for Board members
- Training connected to ED opportunities that exist

**What do you need for your Board to participate?**

Affordability – events and activities need to be inclusive, affordable and accessible for a diverse Board population

Leadership – to inspire Board member engagement

Celebratory recognition – honouring and giving back to Board members, uplifting and energizing opportunities to elevate participation especially in a time of many depleting and difficult challenges.

**“One participant suggested that agencies publicly support each other as they face funding cuts. This both indicates solidarity in the field, and also lets the public and government know that people are watching what’s going on and are concerned.”**

**ADVOCACY/AWARENESS RAISING**

**What would you like to see happen?**

Election coming – all candidates meetings good opportunity to highlight sector and get candidates to speak on the sector – also a VIHA Board meeting in Victoria May 19.

Health, Education, Social Services – we need to be front and centre alongside these huge sectors

Could University help with research?

Get proactive about the current state of affairs – come to the next meeting with info and ideas

Enlarge the table – get to all citizens not just politicians

**Considerations:**

- Concentrate on the overall value of the sector
- proactive rather than reactive
- budget cuts have resulted in some innovative ideas, this is a transitional time,
- getting away from government may be good – social enterprise, at the same time there is also a role for the state in a civil society.
- There will be a federal election before there is a provincial election.

**What do you need for your Board to participate?**

A snapshot profile of agencies would help – mission statement, work being done, stats, programs cut and at risk (directly or indirectly) and the consequences to the community – real life stories

- Issue papers which feature the community impact
- Passion, anger, outrage – getting the mass effect?
- Target your audience – who do we want to talk to about the value of the sector?
- Cost analysis – social and financial costs
- Who isn’t at this table?
- Delineating issues – what options are there for participation?

Some boards may need more concrete plan before choosing to participate.

**SERVICE & ADMINISTRATIVE**

**What would you like to see happen?**

The cuts to services may demand a greater ability for agencies to come together to share resources if they were going to be able to sustain services.

Opportunities for shared services and facilities:

- Shared office space (several are looking right now and one other has extra space). \*This was an important issue for a number of participants.
- Shared admin services (Finance, HR)
- Joint purchasing
- Joint fundraising (e.g. 3 or 4 agencies share costs of fund raiser)
- Shared staff e.g. p/t staff working for two agencies

Survey the agencies asking several questions about needs and resources: e.g. does your agency have any additional space to offer? Or what need does your agency have which might be accommodated by collaboration with another agency?

**Considerations:**

- A hard look at services is required to ensure that there aren’t large overlaps and inefficiencies. This will require a high degree of trust and inter-board support to happen.
- Several obstacles to some shared services and accommodations included: competition between agencies and union and non-union operating in the same facility.
- Although not a shared service per se, one participant suggested that agencies publicly support each other as they face funding cuts. This both indicates solidarity in the field, and also lets the public and government know that people are watching what’s going on and are concerned.
- Webinar training on governance was suggested as an inexpensive way to train new board members.