

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **Community Governors Join Forces**

**Victoria, BC April 9, 2010:** For the very first time in the Capital Region, and perhaps BC, board members from over 36 different social service agencies in this region gathered for what is the first in a series of brainstorming and strategy sessions, entitled, *Boards Together*.

The well-attended evening was hosted by the Association of Family Serving Agencies (AFSA), an umbrella group of social service agencies that has worked for over 26 years to coordinate services, build cooperation within the sector and provide education and information to their members.

"The AFSA coordinating committee has been developing a coordinated community response to the many government and health authority cuts to resources and services that are affecting our vulnerable citizens and our community as a whole, and this meeting is part of this community's response," Brenda Wilson, Executive Director of Greater Victoria Citizens' Counselling Centre told the group.

The question of the evening: *"What can board members do collectively to support community social services in the Capital Region?"*

The answer: Let's find out!

The enthusiastic group started the evening hearing from several speakers who presented what might be one of the bleakest forecasts in the past ten years for social service delivery in our community. Jennifer Charlesworth, Executive Director of the provincial Federation of Community Social Services, spoke of a decline in the sector's capacity to deliver programs that started with the severe provincial funding cuts in 2002 and have compounded since that time. Now, with the most recent series of changes to funding and cost increases, and with absolutely no discretionary expenses left to trim, the community is seeing essential programming being lost and threatened.

Presenter, Michael Sidhu, vice chair of the Board for the Boys and Girls Club of Victoria, and representative for a new provincial initiative, Board Voice, that is working to become an effective voice for volunteer community-based social service boards, came away from the session feeling very hopeful saying that, "All too often, we as Board members have been working in isolation., focussed on the needs of our organization. For the first time community governors have the opportunity and a forum to work together to support the social services community as a whole."

Following the presentations, Brian Hill, Executive Director from the Greater Victoria Child and Family Counselling Association, led the group through a variety of brainstorming and strategizing exercises. "We're very encouraged by the interest for change here. We are working to strengthen community social services and to put the sector on the map the same way that healthcare and education are. Social service programs are an integral part of the health of our society, and they cannot be lost without great consequence to our community," said Hill. He added, "Many directors expressed enthusiasm for the idea of the boards [of directors] of community social services working together for the benefit of our communities. We look forward to another good turnout for our second meeting on May 5th."

For more information about AFSA, or Boards Together please contact [info@communitycouncil.ca](mailto:info@communitycouncil.ca). For more information on Board Voice see [www.boardvoice.ca](http://www.boardvoice.ca).

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Media Contacts:

Christina Peacock, Interim Executive Director Community Council  
[christina@communitycouncil.ca](mailto:christina@communitycouncil.ca) | 250-383-6166 x106

Michele Murphy, AFSA Coordinator  
[michele@ink-well.ca](mailto:michele@ink-well.ca) | 250-812-4704

AFSA backgrounder attached.