

SOCIAL PLANNING NETWORK OF ONTARIO

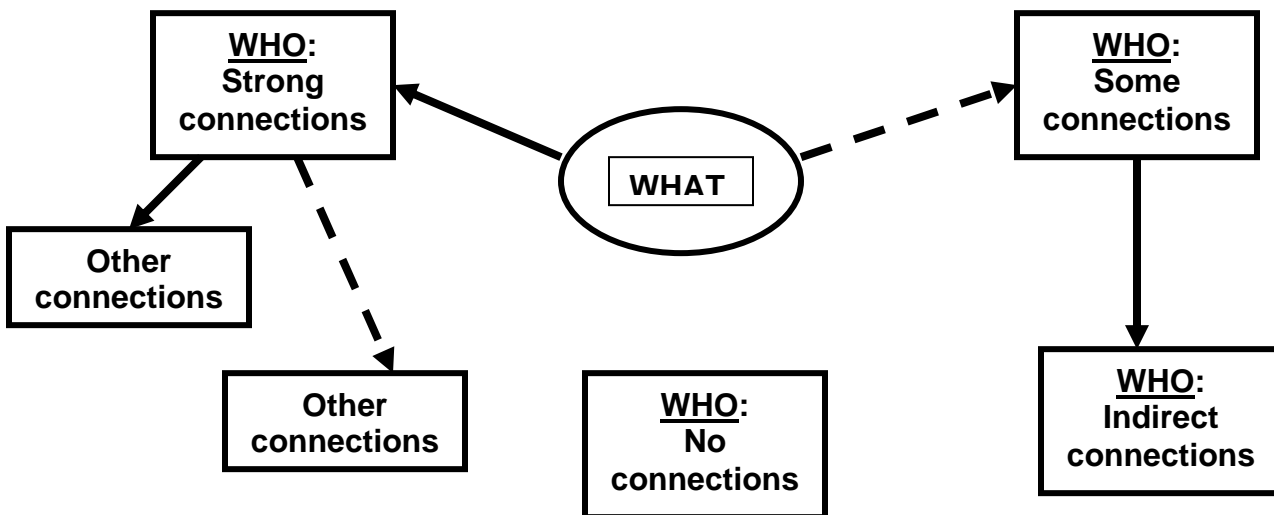
Kids & Community: A Parent Readiness Project

**All-Community Planning Meeting
Social Planning Council of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ontario
February 23-24, 2006**

In February, local Kids & Community Project staff came together with SPNO Central Support to plan further on project implementation.

Who's IN, Who's OUT?

Community project staff worked with SPNO Central Support consultants to define what their projects were about and to identify which groups of parents in their respective communities experiencing exclusion that they have direct and strong ties with, which they have weaker connections with, and other groups from which were they really disconnected.



After each community produced its own “Who’s In, Who’s OUT” map, some common and comparable elements emerged:

- (a) All local project communities have some “starting connections’ with excluded parent groups.
- (b) All have strong connections with service providers to parents in their communities (several *are* service providers – Quinte and Hamilton).
- (c) Several project communities have made clear choices already about where to focus the project (Ottawa – identified population groups; Toronto – EYCs and Parent Resource Centres in five

local areas; Hamilton in specific geographic community of East Hamilton).

- (d) Several projects still have to make choices on their focus but have identified some very isolated and challenging parent groups that are prospects for project attention.
- (e) Together the local projects reflect a range or continuum of capacity-building initiatives, although expressed in different ways (“Giving parents a public voice” – Quinte & North Bay; Building parent capacity for impact on institutions/services/programs – Toronto & Hamilton; Engaging parents in policy change – Ottawa).
- (f) Even though some projects already have a focus, there is an “emergent” quality to the work in all of the communities, i.e. what happens along the journey will be a source of learning and require adjustments to the original plans.

What does all of this have to do with Parent Inclusion?

Over the course of the discussion, participants generated some “belief” statements about their understanding of what parent inclusion means and how to achieve it. These convictions should be guiding the project work in all communities and at the cross-community level also (i.e. Central Support).

Essentially, we believe that:

- The early years (from infancy to six) are very important developmentally for *all* children.
- The stability and well-being of children in these early years in the family can be negatively affected by socio-economic inequities, cultural and racial discrimination, and other disadvantages that many families experience. These environmental dynamics can push children and families to the margins of community life and create in them the sense that they do not belong.
- Still, children start to make the transition from family-based to wider community life in these early years as parents rely on other family or community members for support and as children enter children’s pre-school, recreational and other activities and programs and then school. This transition can be more difficult for children from low-income families or new to Canada or with special needs.
- This transition period is a significant point in time for parents as well -- Will they become more disconnected from the growth and development of their children as the community and its institutions assume a stronger role in their lives? Will they be intimidated by institutional authorities? Do they get any support or encouragement to stay connected and contributing to their

children's learning and development in the larger community environment?

- Many institutions, systems and services are not conducive to participatory processes and meaningful engagement of parents in their children's ongoing growth and development and put up barriers to parent involvement.
- Parents should be able to influence the larger community environment that their children enter in their early years.
- Parents have the capacity to play a meaningful ongoing role in their children's learning.
- There will be resistance to parents who seek to exercise that capacity (suggests "capacity liberating" rather than "building" strategies).
- Strategies for parent inclusion must:
 - (a) address the objective conditions of exclusion that impede and inhibit parents from engagement in their children's ongoing learning and development (e.g. racism, poverty, isolation, disability);
 - (b) reflect inclusive practice that actively engages parents in planning and decision-making processes; and
 - (c) promote substantive change in terms of reducing inequality, bringing people in communities closer together, and sharing resources and power.

While the preceding does not define a common change model in this project, as a shared conceptual framework, it provides a lens for reflection at future All-Community meetings and may help us discover one or several change models from our emergent practice in the five community sites.

Planning for Parent Outreach

- (1) First Outreach – contacts with individuals and organizations already being done identifying both practitioners and parents for involvement in the Project. Conveying meaning of the *Kids & Community* Project and helping people identify their own passions and interests with Project.
- (2) Feedback – propose to prospective participants a reason for convening to develop and focus the Project.
- (3) Community Visioning – local judgment about whether this is done in one day or several days in large group or several smaller groups – but at some point leadership from several smaller groups should probably do this together (likely when Central Support would be involved as a resource). Several possibilities depending on community:
 - (a) Use with Parent Advisory Group

