

SOCIAL PLANNING NETWORK OF ONTARIO

***KIDS & COMMUNITY:* A Parent Readiness Project**

All-Community *DESIGN and PLANNING* Session

**Community Development Halton
Burlington, Ontario**

January 12-13, 2006

The practice of the Social Planning Network of Ontario with multi-site projects is for all partners to come together at the outset for joint planning and to follow that with both on-site support and periodic *REFLECTIONS* sessions, which bring all partners together for shared learning, strategizing, further planning, and problem-solving.

Most of the participants at the *Kids & Community* planning meeting in January 2006 were from the local project sites: executive directors of the sponsoring local social planning councils and project staff (Unfortunately, inclement weather prevented the North bay participants from arriving). Members of the SPNO Central Support Team guided the discussion.



Mike Balkwill, SPNO Consulting Associate, served as Principal Facilitator for the Design and Planning Session

Some additional colleagues working on issues of inclusive education and parent engagement also participated. They represented a number of groups that SPNO has worked with on inclusion issues: People for Education, the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition, as well as people involved in evaluation research on Best Start.



DESIGN and PLANNING session participants included (l to r) Roni Summers-Wickens, Community Development Quinte, Miriam Wyman and Donna Joyette, SPNO Consulting Associates, Don Jaffray, Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, Michael fay and Fay Martin, research associates on Best Start, and Valerie McDonald, People for Education

The *DESIGN and PLANNING* session focused on the following questions:

- What is our shared vision of what this parent engagement and readiness project will look like?
- Where are we starting from in our five different communities? (In this regard, we ask our local partners to come prepared to give brief status reports on their respective communities)
- What is needed to get the local projects going?
- How will we create and capture knowledge and learning at the local level to benefit the five communities, the funder, and other interested communities and sectors?
- How will SPNO Central Support and the local leadership in the five communities work together?
- Can we coordinate our work with other provincial initiatives on parent engagement in their children's learning?)



Dave Hasbury, SPNO Consulting Associate, captures graphically the discussion at the DESIGN and PLANNING session

The *DESIGN and PLANNING* session produced the following statement:

What is Inclusive Parental Readiness?

This Project is funded by Social Development Canada as a social inclusion initiative. The SPNO has learned a lot about inclusion in the last three years through study of the literature, discussions and consultation with colleagues working in the field such as the Ontario Inclusion Learning Network, and our own on-the-ground community practice in multi-site efforts across the province.

In the education field, “readiness” is usually associated with preparing and supporting children to enter the school system. There is recognition that not all children have the same advantages with respect to socio-economic means and environmental resources to get a good start to learning. There is also greater awareness, however, that parents need support and encouragement to make the transition from parenting primarily in the home to parenting children who are now becoming more widely connected to community and its institutions such as child care, recreation programs, and local schools. This is not just a child transition but a family transition, which demands attention to the needs of parents as well.

In this current SPNO initiative, how should we think about what it means to combine the concepts of inclusion and parent readiness? The following suggests a conceptual framework for the *Kids & Community* Project.

- (a) Promoting a “culture of engagement and support” with parents, neighbourhoods, and institutions as children move beyond their families into new community environments for learning and development.
- (b) Recognizing that parents and families require differing levels of support for a continuing diversity of engagement in their children’s learning. Some are more vulnerable or at risk of losing connection to their children’s growth and development.
- (c) Facilitating and supporting the interaction and mutual support of vulnerable families with other families and the larger community, all joining in common cause for the creation, implementation, and sustaining of responsive and stimulating early learning programs, institutions, and systems for all children.

**Revised by *Kids & Community* Partners
Social Planning Network of Ontario
January 12, 2006**



Project participants worked on their local project development strategies which are portrayed graphically above (Hamilton and North Bay not reflected here – North Bay participants could not attend the session and Hamilton had not yet hired project staff)

Anticipating resistance (forces working against readiness for our conceptual framework) and identifying opportunities to our conceptual framework

<p>(a) Promoting a “culture of engagement and support” with parents, neighbourhoods, and institutions as children move beyond their families into new community environments for learning and development.</p>	
<p>Potential Resistance</p>	<p>Prospective Opportunities</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Natural institutional and professional resistance to change and including “non-experts” ❑ Ambiguity about roles and responsibilities – include whom for what? Who does what? ❑ Economic forces – costs of inclusive engagement confront lack of resources ❑ Balance point for parents – how can they become more engaged and still cope with daily demands of family life ❑ Complexity – many kinds of obstacles within and across communities ❑ Risk of people seeking participation becoming targets of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Diverse ethnic communities have own support networks – there are models of engagement out there to be discovered. ✓ Use web sites to link and share information.

powerful interests (e.g. people in key places in institutions being challenged to change)	
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(b) *Recognizing that parents and families require differing levels of support for a continuing diversity of engagement in their children’s learning. Some are more vulnerable or at risk of losing connection to their children’s growth and development.*

Potential Resistance	Prospective Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❑ Confusion about how we define inclusion can undermine our efforts with parents and others – need clarity in our definitions. ❑ Must be careful about how we present information about support, especially as it relates to service providing cultures. ❑ If unclear about meaning of inclusion and engagement, we will not be able to measure outcomes and progress and will not have any credibility, legitimacy. (What are we aiming for – inclusion? Engagement? Mobilization? – all three?) ❑ Funders see outcomes in their own way and can resist new perspectives. ❑ Disconnect between what resources exist in the community and what resources people know about. ❑ Assumptions exist within service structures about who represents voices of children and parents are not always presumed to be those voices. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Our belief in this Project that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (a) parents have the right to participate in their children’s learning; (b) parents should be valued and welcomed as contributors to their children’s learning; (c) parents have the capacity to participate positively in their children’s learning (have the necessary knowledge and experience).

(c) *Facilitating and supporting the interaction and mutual support of vulnerable families with other families and the larger community, all joining in common cause for the creation, implementation, and sustaining of responsive and stimulating early learning programs, institutions, and systems for all children.*

Potential Resistance	Prospective Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="284 457 787 598">□ Transience of family situations, while institutions are permanent and can sometimes outlast change efforts. <li data-bbox="284 640 787 850">□ Lack of careful analysis of allies and potential allies in change efforts, as well as clarity on where resistance is and how strong it can be (e.g. use Social Barometer tool) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="868 457 1356 598">✓ Some families have a long history of involvement through several children's experience with system. <li data-bbox="868 640 1356 787">✓ Recognition of the school as a community owned asset to which parents have right of access and use. <li data-bbox="868 829 1356 955">✓ In some communities there is evidence of unrelated intergenerational families working together.