

Shared Responsibility

A Message FROM THE President



Judith Maxwell

“Neither the state nor the family can create this new child [of the 21st century]. The state cannot... because it is not within the role or the capabilities of the state to do so. The family cannot... because we have put families into a position where they do not have the necessary support or resources.” (Lorna Marsden¹)

This has been a year when Canadians have been shocked by reports of horrific crimes — against children and by children. The shock has led many to wonder whether there is something fundamentally wrong with the way Canada supports its children.

CPRN is working on a number of projects that shed light on the challenges faced by families in the 1990s, with a view to creating the best possible framework of policies for children and their families. This essay reports on some of the results to date, and sets a frame for the work to be done over the next year or so.

In dialogue with small groups of citizens across the country to discuss *The Society We Want*, Canadians demonstrate a high degree of concern about healthy child development.² They are aware that the early years are important — healthy babies and children have the best chances of becoming healthy, productive adults. When confronted with three choices, people opt strongly for one that “invests in children first.” They frequently use the expression “it takes a ‘village’ to raise a child,” even though they expect the family to take full control of the caring and nurturing. Village is used here to mean the collective effort of the community, the workplace, and governments. The National Forum on Family Security called this a “partnership of responsibility.”³ (The other two choices were: giving children a debt-free society; or trusting families to raise their children.)

Where the discussion groups stumble is on the question of how to create that village to support the child. Here they struggle with conflicting values. On the one hand, they see the family as a private experience, and are reluctant to intrude into the choices the family makes about the care and nurturing of children (unless there is abuse

or neglect). On the other hand, they recognize the extraordinary stresses on families trying to balance work and family, which leads to suggestions that the “village” may need to provide vital supports if parents are to do the best they can for their children.⁴

The notion that new supports might be needed flows from the radical transformation in family patterns of work in the past 25 years. Even in the postwar period, when the typical family involved one parent working at home and another earning a wage, governments intervened to create buffers between work and family with such measures as the minimum wage, employment standards, mandatory benefits and so on. These buffers protected the family by stabilizing incomes and ensuring that the breadwinner had time with the family.

Now, as the chart shows (see page 4), 63 percent of all husband-wife families have two earners, reversing the pattern of the 1970s. In addition, there has been a persistent rise in the number of lone-parent families. Both types need child care. Since 1970, governments have acknowledged this change by creating maternity and parental leave and some supports for child care. In addition, some employers have adopted family-friendly work arrangements. In general, however, Canadian society has been slow to adapt to this dramatic change in work patterns.

In fact, some of the traditional buffers that help balance the responsibilities of work and family have been eroding:

- Work has become more insecure — more of the work available involves jobs with low wages, minimal benefits, little or no training, and a

WORK AND FAMILY ARE INTERDEPENDENT¹ **Box 1**

Work and family lives have always been interdependent. In earlier times, when most Canadians lived on farms, everyone in the family (including young children) worked to produce food for their own use and for sale to the market. They also worked together to support the elderly and provided much of their own health care.

When families moved into cities and began to work for wages, there was a new division of labour with men doing paid work and women doing unpaid work at home. Together, they took responsibility for the survival and health of the family, and the two were interdependent.

In the 1990s, however, both parents work and they use the two incomes to pay for child care, food preparation, and other services that used to be performed as unpaid work. This pattern of life can significantly reduce the capacity of families to contribute to the emotional and social sustenance of children, the disabled, and elderly relatives who need support. Many couples share family commitments more evenly than they used to, but the new pattern of life reduces a family's ability to contribute to neighbourhood and community affairs, since there is no one at home all day. Or if there is someone at home, he or she is often tied down to a home office.

Family life and work life are interdependent.
As time devoted to work increases, time available for family shrinks.

<p>Family life involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day-to-day living – food, sleep, warmth • Emotional sustenance – social connection – personal development • Generational survival – healthy children grow up to be healthy adults <p style="text-align: center;">Mainly unpaid work</p>	<p>Work life involves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Production of goods and services to generate income to buy daily needs • Personal self-esteem, creativity, status • Social connections <p style="text-align: center;">Mainly paid work</p>
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1 Meg Luxton, “Families and the Labour Market: Coping Strategies from a Sociological Perspective,” in David Cheal et al., *How Families Cope and Why Policymakers Need to Know*, CPRN Study No. F|02, 1998.

short employment contract.⁵ Even people in well-paid jobs find that more is demanded of them and hours of work are getting longer. This is a stark contrast to the 1970s, when it was still quite feasible for a breadwinner with limited education to earn a steady wage in construction, forestry, fishing, or manufacturing — a wage that could support a family in its quest to own a home and send the children to college.

The Transforming Family
Husband-wife Families



1 As percent of husband-wife families
2 As percent of all families

- The prevalence of low-paid work and the rise of lone-parenting has created a double bind that has pushed 57 percent of these families into poverty.
- Public spending cuts in the 1990s have hit many of the programs of essential support to families, including health care, education, social assistance, and social services. Just at the time when families were becoming more vulnerable, governments began to shift more responsibility back to family caregivers.

With these burdens on families — rising work commitments, insecure work, and shrinking public services — it is not surprising that families are overstretched. Child poverty, child neglect, the famous “time-crunch”⁶ and the high frequency

of marriage breakdown are symptoms of the extraordinary stress of the 1990s.

The fiscal and economic woes of recent times have delayed the government and employer response to the squeeze on families, but leaders in both sectors have also been paralysed by conflicting values about the right thing to do. In the General Social Survey of 1995, Canadians gave the following responses:

PRO-WORK VALUES

- 68 percent of men believe that both the man and the woman should contribute to household income.
- 64 percent of women believe it is very important to their personal happiness to be able to take a paying job.

PRO-FAMILY VALUES

- 59 percent of men and 51 percent of women say that when women work, the family may suffer, especially the children.
- 46 percent of men and women believe that what most women want is a home and children.

These contradictions lead to paradoxes in the way many Canadians think about families and work:

- Many Canadians believe that women in two-earner families should have the option of staying at home with their children. But parents struggle with this choice because it entails a sacrifice of current income and jeopardizes future earning capacity.
- More women are striving to be autonomous through paid work, and, when asked, are often uncomfortable with measures that support women in their unpaid family roles.
- Lone-parent women are expected to work *and* take care of their children, with little thought given to the best interests of the children; but married women are expected to make choices based on the children’s interests.

The other barrier to policy innovation has been conflicting views on the part of governments at all levels and employers about where and how to invest:

- Programs that transfer income to low-income parents are distrusted because of the suspicion that the money may not be used to support the child. Yet, it is not possible to detach financial support for children from their parents.
- It takes an income above the average to afford licensed child care. Access to child care is uneven and not based on need. Children in families without the means for high-quality care end up in informal arrangements that are at greater risk for poor quality; but some poor families (whose children can benefit most from high-quality care) do have access to subsidized care.
- While money is critical for survival, so are public services, neighbourhood safety and resources, recreation, and parenting information, among other things. Many of these services have been curtailed in the fiscal cuts of recent times and fewer parents are at home and able to provide such services through volunteer effort.
- While some (mostly large) employers have committed to family-friendly work arrangements, by far the majority do not consider the productivity losses associated with work-family tensions.

Other industrialized countries have confronted these tensions and have come up with a range of responses.⁷ Some, like Germany, have stuck to the "breadwinner" model. This model is designed to reduce the economic penalties experienced by women who stay at home with young children. (Only 40 percent of German women work for pay, and just half of them work full time.) Germany requires employers to provide up to three years of parental leave, makes minimal investments in child care, and the tax system favours one-earner families.

While money is critical for survival, so are public services, neighbourhood safety and resources, recreation...



Another model, which focuses on gender equality in the home and the workplace, exists in Norway and Sweden. Norway, for example, has recently introduced a controversial new child care allowance, which becomes a cash grant for families whose children do not have places in child care facilities. It also offers a time-account

scheme that makes it possible for both parents to combine part-time work and partial parental benefits.⁸

France and Australia have opted for a neutral model, more focussed on child development. These countries thereby avoid taking a position on whether women should or should not work and, in fact, support both options, with extended parental leave for those who wish to stay home but generous child care supports (with employers paying a share of the cost via a payroll tax) and a universal family allowance. In France, for example, 85 percent of 3- and 4-year-olds go to *écoles maternelles*, which are accessible whether or not both parents work.

The United States provides a vivid contrast, with minimal supports for families and children, even for those with a low income. Policy development there has been deadlocked by the polarization of the debate between "breadwinner" versus "gender equality" images of family policy. This could be termed the "paralysed" model.

Canada still has not settled on a model that works for its own social and economic setting and it does not make use of all the levers used in most European countries. Yet Canada needs a model more than most:

- 72 percent of women with children under 16 work full time, which is high by international standards;
- Canadian women work longer hours per week and per year than do women in most other industrialized countries;
- there is growing pressure on lone-parent women to work, even when their children are young; and
- the General Social Survey cited earlier shows that people are very concerned about the impact of dual-earner families on young children.

In the past three years, health and social policies for families and children have been evolving in new directions. The National Child Benefit (launched in July) aims to create a more stable base of income for low-income families, who face frequent job changes or who are on and off welfare. It also treats all poor children in the same way, whether or not their parents are working. The amount of money paid out in the first benefit cheques in July 1998 was modest in relation to the cost of raising a child,⁹ but the hope is that the amount will increase over the next few years.

The National Child Benefit is a national initiative, fuelled by a sizeable new investment of federal funds. But it is part of a federal-provincial agreement, which entails provincial investment and reinvestment in services and benefits for low-income families, as well as supports for healthy child development.

Recent provincial innovations highlight the wide diversity of “public services” that can support healthy child development. They are reshaping the “village” in many different ways:

- Quebec is moving in the direction of France — the choice model. It has announced plans to enrich family allowances, parental benefits, and child care capacity. By offering kindergarten services for all 3-year-olds, for example, it attains two goals — equal opportunity for all children and the expansion of child care capacity.
- Saskatchewan's Child Action Plan has adopted a community-based model. It has introduced child care spaces and grants to centres serving high-risk children, an expanded community school model, family literacy, housing, a child benefit and, most recently, an employment supplement. A planned Poverty Reduction Plan is intended to deepen the public commitment to improving the environment in which families live.
- Ontario has begun to screen all newborns to identify those who will require intensive home visiting to ensure effective early interventions to foster healthy development.
- British Columbia is more focussed on the welfare-to-work transition, or making work pay. The B.C. Family Bonus (delivered by Revenue Canada through the tax system) is paid to all poor families (earning less than \$18,000). In 1996, the bonus went to 220,000 families, of which 70,000 were on welfare.¹⁰

Thus it may be that Canada, with its federal system, will end up with many different provincial “models” in support of families. The challenge will be to monitor the progress of children in each province, to learn from all their different experiences, and to understand how these new strategies combine with other policies and programs. Are we weaving a new social fabric, a true “village” to support children? Or are there still holes in the fabric that leave particular families and their children at a serious disadvantage? See Box 2.

There is no question that the economic and social context in which families fulfill their responsibilities has changed radically. Inevitably, the role of governments will have to adapt in this new setting. But so will the roles of the other stakeholders in the work-family nexus. The “village” that Canadians wish to create includes families, but it also includes employers, community organizations, unions, cooperatives, and others who have everything to gain from a country that is investing in the next generation of workers, savers, consumers, and voters.

For every report of a catastrophic crime against or by a child, there are thousands of untold stories of heroic families striving to meet their obligations to employers and to provide the best possible way of life for their children and any elderly relatives whom they support. By far the majority of Canadians take full responsibility for their own kin, and will insist on doing so in the future. Some of them might fail under any conditions. But some of them are not able to manage because Canada has not created the partnership of responsibility that offers parents the supports they need to look after their children well and still cope with the daily challenges of a riskier world.

The paralysis on policies for children and families seems to have been broken, but we have a long way to go to make up for lost time and to begin to flesh out the kind of partnership of responsibility that will serve Canadians in the 21st century.

*CPRN will be a leader in informing the policy choices — helping Canadians to discern which model works best for them. We will make our contribution through the rich array of publications planned for the coming year; through an open and interactive research process, which engages policy advisors, academics, social advocates, and other experts; and through ongoing dialogue with citizens on *The Society We Want*.*

While the Family Network program described on p. 17 is most directly focussed on the issues raised in the President's message, the Work Network contributes through its understanding of the changing workplace, and the Health Network offers insights on the formation of policies in support of a healthier population. In the year ahead, the Networks are planning to pool their resources to address the family-work-health nexus. These research programs are all designed to help make Canada a more just, prosperous, and caring society.

TRACKING THE SUCCESS OF POLICIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND FAMILIES Box 2

- Is there a consistent framework for healthy child development across Canada to address the common needs of children and their families?¹
- Are efforts being made to address the root causes of disadvantage – poverty, discrimination, exclusion – which afflict children and families in distressed neighbourhoods?²
- Are there information systems in place to show whether new investments are actually leading to better outcomes for Canada's children?
- How is the cost of these policies being distributed among taxpayers, families, employers, and others?
- Are there ways for citizens to shape these emerging strategies and to help set priorities?
- Does policy balance:
 - the need for early intervention for children in overburdened families (e.g., anger management versus incarceration);
 - income support for those who need it with the social and community services that enable families to fulfill their responsibilities;
 - the needs of middle-class and low-income families (e.g., many services, such as pre- and post-school care programs, are required by all families, but children in low-income families have special needs that cannot be ignored); and
 - the need to expand the options for family time for parents?
- Are there hidden biases in established programs that contradict the efforts of others? Does the tax system accurately reflect the overall policy strategy?

¹ For a discussion of these issues see Christa Freiler and Judy Cerny, *Benefiting Canada's Children: Perspectives on Gender and Social Responsibility*, Status of Women Canada, March 1998.

² Analysis of the census data for the 1980s indicates that poverty in Canada has been shifting toward inner cities, and that an increasing percentage of poor people are now concentrated in very poor neighbourhoods. Michael Hatfield, "Concentrations of Poverty and Distressed Neighbourhoods in Canada," Working Paper W-97-1E, Applied Research Branch, Human Resources Development Canada, Ottawa, 1997.

NOTES

- 1 Lorna Marsden, "Children, Women and Our Economy: Building Reconciliation for the 21st Century," in *Family Security in Insecure Times*, Volume II, National Forum on Family Security, Canadian Council on Social Development, Ottawa, 1996.
- 2 *The Society We Want* Newsletter, Number 3, August 1998.
- 3 Forum Directors Group, "Building a Partnership of Responsibility," in *Family Security in Insecure Times*, Volume III, National Forum on Family Security, Canadian Council on Social Development, Ottawa, 1996.
- 4 These vital supports include basic infrastructure like the education and health services, income supports for low-income families, direct services in support of children including child care and parent resources, and community-based services for recreation and safe, active living. In a forthcoming report from the Family Network of CPRN, Suzanne Peters explores the policies that parents would choose as the best mix of policies for healthy child development in their town.
- 5 Gordon Betcherman et al., *Training for the New Economy — A Synthesis Report*, CPRN, 1998.
- 6 Sylvia Hewlett estimates that total contact time with American children has fallen 40 percent in the last 25 years. See Sylvia Hewlett, *Child Neglect in Rich Nations*, UNICEF, New York, 1993, p. 7.
- 7 Kathy O'Hara, *Comparative Family Policy: Eight Countries' Stories*, CPRN Study No. F|04, forthcoming 1998.
- 8 Shelley Phipps summarizes the broad objective of Norwegian policies as "social solidarity" — acknowledging shared social and private responsibility for children. In contrast, she describes the U.S. policy as one of "charity" — helping children in serious need. She points out that the Canadian tradition is closer to the charity than the social solidarity model. See Shelley Phipps, "What Is the Best Mix of Policies for Canada's Children?: An International Comparison of Policies and Outcomes for Young Children," CPRN Study, forthcoming.
- 9 Ken Battle and Michael Mendelson, *Child Benefit Reform in Canada*, Caledon Institute of Social Policy, Ottawa, November 1997, p. 29.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 59.