



Stephen Lewis Inspires Action on Making Children Matter

Cathy Vine, Executive Director, Voices for Children
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You have a society that once upon a time used to do well baby care on a regular basis after the mother came home from the hospital. It doesn't exist in most communities anymore. You had a society where there used to be nurses in every elementary school who identified kids who were in trouble. You don't have that in most schools anymore...You used to have drop in centres, from "The Y" to schools, which made it possible for kids to be looked after...Over and over again, a kind of pattern in your society which said, "Children are valued, families are valued, we're going to respond to it." And in this maniacal obsession with cutbacks, all of that was whittled away, and your quote unquote "poor parenting" is fundamentally a manifestation of a society that doesn't care anymore about the tremendous turmoil which surrounds so many poor and struggling families.

Stephen Lewis, Making Children Matter, May 2004

Stephen Lewis threw down the gauntlet last month at the Making Children Matter Conference: Building Better Communities for Children when he challenged participants to create a community of "shared interests and values" to make change for children and youth in Ontario.

Conference participants and speakers urged the organizers, Investing in Children and Voices for Children, to help them take action in response. By the end of the conference, several initiatives were already underway! The conference received excellent evaluations and 75% of the participants said they would attend a similar event next year. In the meantime, here are the next steps coming out of the Making Children Matter Conference:

Sign on for a Canada Fit for Children

Sandra Griffin, of the Canadian Child Care Federation and Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, worked with the conference organizers to create a pledge in support of the recently released National Plan of Action entitled "A Canada Fit for Children."

"A Canada Fit for Children reaffirms the importance that all sectors of Canadian society--governments, organizations and individuals--place on children. In particular, A Canada Fit for Children reaffirms the Government's commitment to making children and families a national priority and to continue to work with governments, stakeholders and the public."

Led by Senator Landon Pearson, the plan is strongly rooted in Canada's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and includes these priorities:

1. Supporting families and strengthening communities
2. Promoting healthy lives
3. Protecting from harm
4. Promoting education and learning

Participants were able to sign the pledge while at the conference and take copies back to their communities for additional signatures. Voices for Children was asked to coordinate gathering the pledges, which will then be presented to Senator Landon Pearson and Minister of Children and Youth Services, Marie Bountrogianni, on the occasion of National Child Day, November 20, 2004.

In the next month, Voices for Children will launch a new service to mobilize the campaign and involve additional groups and communities. Our goal is to enable many "voices" for children to express their growing commitment to ensuring a Canada fit for all children and youth.

Online community

Participants also expressed the desire to be able to connect with one another beyond the conference and to be able to include others as well. Investing in Children and Voices for Children are exploring a number of models. We welcome your suggestions for creating an online community.

Conference proceedings

We are busily working with all of the presenters to publish their presentations online. Stay tuned for upcoming e-Bulletin announcements.

Hear Stephen Lewis now!

On behalf of the conference organizers, Investing in Children and Voices for Children, we are thrilled to be able to provide Stephen Lewis' speech in audio format so that everyone interested can hear his impassioned plea for building an Ontario fit for children!

Stephen Lewis: Making Children Matter (55 minutes)

(Link to audio and instructions)

Resources

A Canada Fit for Children

<http://www11.sdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/socpol/publications/2002-002483/page00.shtml>

Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

<http://www.rightsofchildren.ca/>

Investing in Children

<http://www.investinginchildren.on.ca/>

Senator Landon Pearson

<http://www.sen.parl.gc.ca/lpearson/>

Stephen Lewis Foundation

<http://www.stephenlewisfoundation.org/>

Voices for Children

www.voicesforchildren.ca

Author Bio

Cathy Vine is Executive Director of Voices for Children (www.voicesforchildren.ca), located in Toronto, Ontario. Dedicated to strengthening children's well-being in Ontario through knowledge transfer, Cathy works with a provincial network of researchers, practitioners, educators, and parents and youth, to track issues and developments and explain new research.

As a Registered Social Worker, Cathy has worked extensively with children, youth and adults affected by child abuse and intimate violence since 1986. She has conducted research, developed and improved information, support, and clinical services, and has taught part time at the School of Social Work, Ryerson University. Cathy co-wrote *Gardens of Shame: The Tragedy of Martin Kruze and the Sexual Abuse at Maple Leaf Gardens*. Cathy is currently co-editing a book on violence in Canadian families called *Cruel but not Unusual: A sourcebook for practitioners and educators*, to be published by Wilfrid Laurier Press in 2005.