

Section 4: Conclusion

Every edition of the Report Card tries to assess whether progress has been made in improving the situation of Toronto's children. Yet once again, it is hard to provide a clear, one-sided answer. Much of the necessary outcome data is not yet available in terms of the quality and the detail that is required to permit a conclusive Toronto-based analysis.

On a positive note, child poverty levels seem to have decreased since 1996. However, the level is still much higher than reported in 1991. Further, the decrease did not happen in many parts of the city. In some neighbourhoods, child poverty has actually increased since 1996 and a previously reported decline in the number of children in families depending on social assistance has recently started inching its way back up.



In the past few years, there has been increased public awareness of the importance of children's early years and the need to provide a wide range of supports and opportunities for children and families. Based on available research, service planning and public advocacy, substantial City investments have been made to child care, recreation, libraries and public health programs. Increased service levels and enhanced programming should soon be reflected in improved child outcomes.

The City of Toronto has continued to show leadership in its commitment to better serve and support the city's children and families. Unfortunately, much of the financial commitment has gone to replacing the funding taken out of the system by the provincial government rather than making the necessary improvements in service. The synergy created since 1999 through closer co-operation among the various sectors that serve Toronto's children and families is being undermined by the increasing need to direct all available funds to each sector's "core businesses."

There is widespread belief that reductions in funding can be countered by the significant efficiencies that should be gained through better service coordination and integration. If anything, programs like the First Duty Project show us that although integrating different services under one roof improves the quality of service to individual children and families, very little duplication or potential for savings actually exist.

Finally, at the end of 2003, there appears to be reason to look forward to a better future for Toronto's children as a result of changes in attitudes at the federal, provincial and municipal levels of government. Expectations of a more responsive political, policy and funding environment have risen dramatically. On the other hand, all levels of government are facing fiscal realities. How we deal with the gap between expectations and the ability of governments to deliver the necessary funding supports will have a long-term impact on the well-being of all of Toronto – not just its children and families, but also its neighbourhoods, cultural institutions, employers and businesses. ■