

Clause embodied in Report No. 9 of the Community Services Committee, as adopted by the Council of the City of Toronto at its meeting held on October 29, 30 and 31, 2002.

2**Children and Youth Action Committee -
2002 Toronto Report Card on Children and
2003 Action Plan**

(City Council on October 29, 30 and 31, 2002, adopted this Clause, without amendment.)

The Community Services Committee recommends that the Children and Youth Action Committee's 2002 Report Card on Children and its Executive Summary be distributed to the following:

- **Prime Minister, Opposition Leaders, and Toronto Members of Parliament;**
- **Premier of Ontario, Opposition Leaders, and Toronto Members of Provincial Parliament;**
- **Provincial Minister of Community, Family and Children's Services and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and their critics;**
- **Federation of Canadian Municipalities; and**
- **Association of Municipalities of Ontario.**

The Community Services Committee reports, for the information of Council, having:

- (i) concurred in Recommendation No. (1) contained in the communication dated September 25, 2002, from Councillor McConnell, viz:

“that the working group be directed to prepare the 2003 Action Plan”;

- (ii) requested that the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services, the Commissioner of Economic Development, Cultural and Tourism, and the Medical Officer of Health include in their 2003 budget submissions initiatives that may not have received funding in previous years, such as expansions to pre-school and school-age recreation programs, child care spaces, reading programs and child nutrition programs; and
- (iii) expressed appreciation to the staff who participated in the preparation of the Report Card.

The Community Services Committee submits the following communication (September 26, 2002) from the City Clerk:

The Children and Youth Action Committee on September 25, 2002, recommended to the Community Services Committee, the Economic Development and Parks Committee, and the Board of Health the adoption of the recommendations contained in the attached communication dated September 25, 2002, from Councillor Pam McConnell, Chair, Policy Sub-Committee, Children and Youth Action Committee, respecting the Report Card 2002 and the 2003 Action Plan.

(Communication dated September 25, 2002, addressed to the
Children and Youth Action Committee, from
Councillor Pam McConnell, Chair, Policy Sub-Committee)

On behalf of the Policy Sub-Committee, I am pleased to advise the CYAC members that the Report Card on Children, Update 2002 (volume 4) has been completed and is currently being printed.

The Report Card will be launched publicly at a press conference scheduled for October 9, 2002, at 11:00 a.m., at a location to be confirmed. Members of the CYAC are welcome to attend. Copies of the Report Card will be widely distributed by mail.

The launch of the Report Card has been timed to coincide with the City of Toronto's budget process. The role of the Report Card is to provide an update and context regarding the state of well-being for children in the City of Toronto. It has been the practice to follow the release of the Report Card with an Action Plan that recommends strategic investments for the City in order to improve the situation for children. Therefore, I recommend the following:

- (1) the working group be directed to prepare the 2003 Action Plan; and
- (2) City Departments be directed to include in the 2003 budget submissions initiatives that may not have received funding in previous years, such as expansions to pre-school and school-age recreation programs, childcare spaces, reading programs and child nutrition programs.

The Community Services Committee also submits the following Executive Summary from the 2002 Toronto Report Card on Children:

Executive Summary

The Toronto Report Card on Children – Update 2002 was designed to track changes in the condition of children since the last update in 2000, measure progress in improving the situation of children, identify gaps in service, help build public awareness of children's needs, serve as a planning tool for City officials and elected representatives, and stimulate political and community action to improve the situation of Toronto's children. This report highlights some steps forward in improving the lives of children and their families — but it also shows steps backwards.

More Children in Toronto

Recently released 2001 census data indicates that the number of children aged 0–14 years has increased by 2 percent since 1996. There are now 433,820 children living in Toronto, which is 17.5 percent of the city's population. Some census tracts in the areas of Thorncliffe Park, Willowdale, Jane-Weston, West Humber-Clairville and Sheppard-Kennedy experienced increases of over 35 percent in the number of children. This huge influx of children will strain already crowded schools and will put pressure on community and recreation services, when there are no new municipal resources to cope with this demand.

Child Poverty Increases

Despite Toronto's economic prosperity over the past few years, the number of low-income families and children continued to rise and their depth of poverty increased. From 1995–1999, the number of children living in low-income families grew by 9 percent. In addition, the gap between low-income families and the rest of families widened, especially after inflation was taken into account. The real income for the bottom 30 percent of families has actually declined.

Senior Government Decisions Are Now Being Felt in Toronto Housing and Homelessness

No government-assisted housing has been completed since 1997, and Toronto continues to experience a critical shortage of affordable housing. While Toronto's Let's Build initiative is a positive development, rising demand for rental housing, changes in rent legislation, little new supply and sharp rent increases are placing many vulnerable citizens — and children — at risk of homelessness.

Almost 6,200 children stayed in shelters in 2000, 62 percent under the age of nine years. Family shelter occupancy peaked at 2,113 beds in September 2001, and since then has declined to approximately 1,200 beds as of May 2002. This decline is to a large degree due to a decrease in the number of refugee claimants requesting shelter assistance, after Citizenship and Immigration Canada introduced enhanced screening and procedural changes in December 2001. It is difficult to predict if the policy changes will have a long-term impact on the number of refugee families requiring assistance.

Education

The Government of Ontario assumed responsibility for the funding of public education in 1998. Responsibility for many other school board costs have been "sideloaded" to the City of Toronto, including rents for child care and family resource programs, permits for community use of space, and school pools. The new provincial education funding formula has resulted in drastic cuts to school boards. The Toronto District School Board was forced to cut its budget by \$268 million between 1998 and 2001, and is facing further cuts of \$85–90 million in 2002. As a result, many programs that are critical to Toronto's children are under threat of being reduced or eliminated. These include special education programs, youth counsellors, intake workers, educational assistants, teacher librarians, itinerant music instructors, pools, English as a Second Language, Black cultural classes, adult and continuing education.

Child Protection

The child protection caseload (ages 0–16) increased by 40 percent from 1998 to 2001. The number of children admitted to care increased by 8 percent for this same period. The child welfare sector has experienced major changes and increases in service requirements, in part due to new provincial standards governing child protection cases and amendments to the Child and Family Services Act. These have resulted in expanded definitions of child maltreatment, including issues of neglect and emotional abuse, and have changed the way professionals and the public are now required to make referrals.

Social Assistance Caseload Declining, But Numbers May Be Misleading

The caseload has dropped from a peak of 126,000 cases in March 1994 to less than half that number by the end of 2001. The number of children aged 0–12 years in families receiving assistance through Ontario Works dropped by 19 percent between December 2000 and April 2002. However, an exit from social assistance does not automatically translate into an escape from poverty. In a Toronto Social Services survey of people who left social assistance in 2001, only 43 percent of people indicated that things had improved financially. While families that exited the system reported higher employment incomes than the incomes they received on social assistance, their average incomes were still below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO).

The experience of welfare-to-work programs shows the importance of ongoing supports to children and families. Unfortunately, supports such as child care are still not sufficiently available. More than 15,000 children are currently on the waiting list for subsidized child care, and there are only enough spaces to meet the needs of one in five children living in families below the LICO.

Early Childhood Development: Increased Funding But Conflicting Priorities

The federal Early Childhood Development Initiative (EDCI) will invest \$2.2 billion over five years for services to children aged 0–6 in four target areas: promoting health pregnancy, birth and infancy; improving parenting and family supports; strengthening early childhood development, learning and care; and strengthening community supports. However, the EDCI did not set national standards, leaving provinces free to determine spending in any of the four areas. In May 2002, the Province of Ontario announced details of the Ontario Early Years Plan, which basically takes an “Anything But Childcare” approach to allocating funding, even though childcare funding needs are central to the City of Toronto Action Plan for Children and the Child Care Service Plan. The Early Years Centres Initiative will include an investment of at least \$11 million, which will significantly expand the availability of family supports in Toronto. However, several issues remain with respect to the equity of the funding formula and the relationship of the planning process to the City’s established priorities. There is also concern that the initiative could jeopardize the existing networks of community-based family resource programs that have been established in Toronto over many years. There is an increasing need for a “Made in Toronto” approach to implementing the initiative, with licensed child care as a critical component that receives funding in Year 2 of the EDCI.

Made in Toronto Solutions

Toronto is Canada's largest city, and is the most diverse both in its multi-ethnic, multicultural population and in the growing disparity between the poorest and richest segments of society. The design of programs must reflect the unique nature of this community. Several policy, advocacy and program initiatives are underway to ensure that Toronto's unique needs are being addressed in a responsive manner that is mindful of community needs.

Children's Strategy

The Children's Strategy approved by Toronto Council in 1999 calls for equity of outcomes for Toronto's children rather than equity of investments. Various sectors under the City's jurisdiction have developed service plans with a view to achieving equity while being responsive to the needs of individual communities.

The City of Toronto has also been innovative in finding opportunities to consolidate service for children into one integrated system. This Report Card on Children, the Action Plan for Children, several multi-service capital projects and the "Welcome Baby" package are all examples of successful joint projects involving Toronto Children's Services, Toronto Public Library, Toronto Parks and Recreation and Toronto Public Health.

Toronto First Duty Project

The Toronto First Duty Project is an innovative partnership between the City of Toronto, the Toronto District School Board and the Atkinson Charitable Foundation. This partnership combines child care, parenting programs and kindergarten into a seamless service linked to health and other community resources.

Commission on Early Learning and Child Care

The City endorsed the establishment of this commission, which was co-chaired by Charles Coffey, Executive Vice President of Government Affairs, Royal Bank of Canada Financial Group and the Honourable Margaret Norrie McCain, former Lieutenant-Governor of New Brunswick and co-chair of "The Early Years Study." In May 2002, the Commissioners released a final report that recognized Toronto's strong contribution to early learning and child care. In a series of recommendations directed to the federal, provincial and municipal governments as well as to business and the community at large, the commission calls for new, more productive partnerships within a stronger Early Childhood Development Initiatives framework that includes child care as a central building block.

The City of Toronto Can't Do It Alone

Even during difficult financial times, the City of Toronto has continued to show its support for children through strategic investments outlined in the Action Plan for Children. Not all initiatives have received increased funding, but there has been commitment to funding increases in the areas of child nutrition, playgrounds, increased per diems for child care, family resource programs and special needs, library reading programs, recreation programs for pre-school and

school-aged children, and the York Before and After School Programs. However, too much effort and too many resources have had to focus on purely maintaining the status quo. Many of the City's "new" investments are in fact only replacements of resources taken away or constrained by provincial "reforms" and fiscal policies.

While progress has been made over the past year, it is not enough, and the needs continue to be significant. More children are living in Toronto, and more are living in low-income families. There are not enough services for children and the services we have are not accessible to all families.

The City of Toronto cannot do it alone. There is a need for increased investment and support from the senior levels of government. Advocacy efforts aimed at the federal and provincial levels are essential. There is a need for "Made in Toronto" approaches that use local planning expertise, build on municipal and community infrastructure, and recognize the importance of services to children and families in contributing to a strong social infrastructure.

(A copy of the 2002 Toronto Report Card on Children was forwarded to all Members of Council with the supplementary agenda of the Community Services Committee for its meeting on October 10, 2002, and a copy thereof is on file in the office of the City Clerk, City Hall.)

Councillor Pam McConnell, Chair, Policy Sub-Committee, Children and Youth Action Committee, appeared before the Community Services Committee in connection with the foregoing matter, and gave a presentation on the 2002 Report Card on Children.