

**FROM STATE TO COMMUNITY:  
Restructuring of Social Services and its Impact  
on Community Based Partnerships**

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Restructuring of Social Services and its  
Impact on Community Based Partnerships**

**By**

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**TITLE: From State to Community: Restructuring of Social Services and its Impact  
on Community-Based Partnerships A Case Study**

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## **Prologue:**

*“In universities, people know through studies. In businesses and bureaucracies people know by reports. In communities, people know by stories. These community stories allow people to reach back into their common history and their individual experience for knowledge about truth and direction for the future” (McKnight, The Careless Society, 1995)*

People learn from connecting with each other and from stories, but, as McKnight (1995) says, professionals and institutions often threaten the stories of communities by counting things up rather than communicating. In order to ensure that I remain faithful to the community and the informants, and as accurate as possible, I have decided to use a descriptive qualitative study to address the perspectives of the informants and document their insightful stories through this paper.

**Abstract:**

*Throughout the public, private, and non-profit sectors, there is increasing experimentation with the use of partnerships, alliances, and networks to design and deliver social programs (Brinkerhoff, 2002). In addition government and private funding initiatives are promoting coalitions, collaborations and other inter-organizational approaches to address complex community, social services and health issues (Mizrahi, 2001). Community partnerships can be developed out of natural collaboration and shared values where there is a general interest in improving services for the community, individuals, families, youth and children. More recently however, community partnership literature has focused attention towards the pressures to partner that are resulting from economic and political restructuring policies. Along with this the social service sector has revealed that the demand to partner from the government can cause un-welcomed structural and organizational pressures while impacting upon the agency's ability to meet their core mission (George, Moffat, McGrath and Lee, 2003). The development of partnerships as community-based alternatives in social programming has raised both hopeful possibilities for and illusions of social change, but this does not come without its struggles. This qualitative case study explores the context of these partnerships, the barriers to community-based partnerships and the impact of government restructuring initiatives on community-based partnerships through a look at one community. Utilizing interviews of five key informants, this case study reveals several struggles to develop relationships between the organizations and ministries set out to meet the needs of children and families in their community. The stories of these struggles to partner have revealed three emergent themes. Firstly, Government Restructuring-The Rules Keep Changing: which looks at the impact of government changes to resources and jurisdiction during Alberta's regionalization process. The second theme, Bureaucratic Imperatives, involves looking at the impact of forced formalization upon these partnerships. Finally the theme of Goal Displacement: which, looks at the struggles to manage the demands to partner and their agency core missions. This exploratory study will conclude that, despite the informant optimism in forced partnerships, outside influences and resources have dominated and overwhelmed their local initiatives and informal partnerships creating barriers to partnership work, which, has seemingly, resulted in a dependency upon government endorsed partnership initiatives.*

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## **Chapter 1: Community Based Partnerships**

### **Introduction**

I went into this research with optimism, and in search of the benefits, and strengths of community based partnerships, hoping to be able to share the story of how well a community harnessed their assets working together to develop innovative and responsive services for children, youth and families. Instead what I learned were the stories of the struggles behind building and sustaining collaborative relationships and partnerships in a community where people and agencies were strained having undergone two regional boundary changes. I will tell the story of these struggles recognizing that building partnerships between different groups, various government Ministries, and individuals is becoming some of the most important and difficult work carried out in social programming.

This study discusses two “ideal” types of partnerships, which will be used to tease out the actual nature of partnerships that exist in the community studied. What many of the key informants called “natural partnerships” are described as involving community cooperation, shared values and a concern for citizens. The second are the partnerships that are formed out of government pressures and restructuring policies. The once “natural”, mutual and informal partnerships that existed are now fraught with issues and pressures from the broader political and economic environment to become formalized and consistent with business management models. The purpose of this paper is to describe the stories and struggles of partnering with a Child and Family Services Agency in Northern Alberta while seeking to understand how partnerships can contend with these

barriers and meet the needs of children, youth and families. In doing this, the paper will discuss the origin of partnerships within government restructuring policies, the influences of globalization on municipalities, and the context and barriers to partnership development.

### **What are Community Based Partnerships?**

Brinkerhoff (2002) states that an ideal partnership is a dynamic relationship among diverse actors based on mutually agreed objectives and encompasses mutual respect, equal participation in decision-making, mutual accountability and transparency (pg.7). The increase in rhetoric and practice of partnership is based on the assumption that partnership enhances outcomes and results (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Shragge (2003) states that partnerships exist for the purpose of complementing and supplementing the public sector, embodying the message that economic, social and environmental issues are the concerns of the whole community (pg. 112). For the purpose of ensuring that I encompass all forms of partnership, I will use the following definition to apply to the term “partnership” throughout the rest of this paper. “Partnership is a relationship that generally involves two or more players (organizations, individuals, government agencies) in a structured arrangement to overcome deficiencies in service provision or as a site for effective social change” (Cox, 1997, Geddes & Bennington, 2001, in Walker, 2004).

Several theories about the development of partnerships in, and between, social service agencies include the ecological theory, the exchange theory, the collaboration theory and the business and management theory. The ecological theory stresses the need for community level change through the insight and collaboration of all levels of

community (Mulroy, 1997). Exchange theory contends that the sharing of resources and giving to members of society is what is necessary in order to receive what we need from those services; therefore, partnerships are formed as formal modes of giving and receiving (Mulroy, 1997). Collaboration theory sees active community members as coalitions working together towards the enhancement of people's voices in program and policy decisions (Mulroy, 1997). Management, or business, theory involves bureaucracies joining together to coordinate and integrate services for efficiency purposes. Carniol (2000) suggests that social programs face persistent pressure to apply business philosophies and techniques in the delivery of social services as a means of providing more efficient services (pg. 78).

Business and management theory of partnership has been very influential and important to the study of partnerships, as it has created a new social service industry preoccupied with financial management. The endorsement of business philosophy has also resulted in “a government entrenched in the need to improve communications and teamwork within government and corporate bureaucracies to heighten acceptance of these new management systems that are now criticized for straying from the original purpose of social service systems” (Carniol, 2000, p 80). The concern about this type of partnership is also expressed by Shragge (2003). His case study found that community organizations that were faced with the dilemma that greater recognition and government funding actually diminished their autonomy and reinforced a service agenda (pg. 55). This has likely influenced Shragge's (2003) favouring partnerships that form as a result of connecting people and building relationships versus partnerships formed on business

goals. These natural partnerships allow individuals and organizations to share their talents through linkages with existing community resources (p.118).

As mentioned above, this paper will focus on two types of partnerships: “natural” and “forced”. Forced partnerships will be identified as those formed from changing the structural framework and organizational culture of social service work. These kinds of partnerships are a result of reduced social funding and the globalization of corporate agendas and a search for new models to meet the diverse and expanding needs of communities (Baines, 2004). As a result, forced partnerships are often mandated for purposes of cost efficiency and organization and structural effectiveness. Natural partnerships evolve through community and agency members forming coalitions and networks to work together to enhance people’s voices in programming and policy decisions. These are informal partnerships, and as McKnight (1995) says, “here transactions of value take place without money, advertising or hype...care emerges with such authentic relationships and replaces imitation service” (p. 170). These natural and informal partnerships are believed to have the ability to improve how agencies serve specific citizens’ needs by making the right connections across public and private sector organizations of government and consequently contribute to achieving results that are meaningful to Canadians (Johnson and Shields, 2002). The so called ‘ideal’ natural partnership would then be one formed out of a concern for people and improving community well being based on shared values, positive connections and community social mobilization concepts. Additionally, and simply put, forced partnerships are managed and natural partnerships are not.

Today local partnerships are expected to play an important role in the re-design of service delivered in communities. It is believed that they hold the potential for more effective, inclusive and democratic forms of social service planning and delivery (Walker, 2004). The evidence of such partnership initiatives can be seen through the development of the government's alternative response to social services in Alberta, which is the focus of this paper. The newly decentralized, also referred to as regionalized, system in Alberta is recognized as the government coordination of community members, representatives from service organizations, health and academic organizations who have pooled citizen's expertise, resources and energies to address the complex issues of children, youth and families.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **Restructuring Policies and the Evolution of Forced Partnerships**

The 1980's were a period of transition between the new role of community and the state, which meant that dramatic social service reform was taking place. Social services were the product of federal and provincial cost sharing arrangements until the mid 1990's when global capitalism was recognized as impacting upon social and state reform (Shragge, 2003, p. 49). Since then, social welfare and social services have become a matter of provincial jurisdiction as the federal government has withdrawn from its former role in cost sharing and monitoring provincially delivered health, community and social services (Aronson, 2004, pg. 5). The change in funding to social service agencies has caused pressures to become leaner and more efficient. This has resulted in many organizations incorporating business-oriented methods of designing jobs, organizing their labor force and managing their agencies (Baines, 2004).

From this restructuring has come pressures for social service agencies to partner. Largely funders, governmental and non-governmental sources, who argue cost containment, efficiency and effectiveness drive these pressures to partner (McGrath, Moffat, George, Lee, 2003). With this restructuring I have identified contentions between the two forms of partnerships. How do partnerships manage and evolve when they are initially formed on a “natural” basis and now need to contend with the particularities that accompany the formalization of partnerships when the government becomes involved?

## **The Role of Globalization on Restructuring Policies**

Globalization has altered the challenges of governance by changing the distribution of power and authority within state institutions. In particular, globalization has created and promotes a new arrangement between the state and providers of social welfare wherein, quality assurance and efficiency are the focus (Dominelli and Hoogvelt, 1996). I will further suggest how this has resulted in a requirement to work collaboratively and that the current nature of our social system today is directly influenced by political and economic policies that are a product of globalization.

Just as importantly, globalization is about powerful global economic and political interests, imposing their will on nations, provinces and communities, forcing governments to restructure their provincial economies, abandon local-based development plans, dismantle social safety nets, and cut public spending on health education, and social services (Stohr, 2001). Globalization is also “a concept that can be attributed to changing the structural framework and organizational culture of social services” (Aronson, 2004). Decentralization or regionalization, terms mentioned by many of the informants, is defined as the devolution of authority to smaller figures at the expense of certain requirements and based on the philosophy that the private sector is more efficient and can therefore deliver the goods and services at a lower cost (Connelly, 1993). This type of restructuring can also be described as a transition from being needs based and people driven, to market based and financially driven. Here in lays the management theory underpinning partnerships; where, global concepts such as marketization and market style managerial concepts have infiltrated social service systems (Baines, 2004).

This has been both invited and rejected at provincial, municipal and local levels revealing very mixed perspectives on the subject of social service restructuring based upon management style concepts.

### **From State to Community Roles Redefined**

In 1996, both Canada and the United States initiated federal policy reforms designed to solve the problems caused by their respective levels of welfare dependency (Clemens & LeRoy, 2003). By cutting federal cash and conditions from Canadian welfare programs, the 1996 reform opened the door to so-called innovation and experimentation in provincial welfare policy. Shragge (2003) describes his perspective of restructuring the role of the state:

“Not only was the welfare state cutback, but more fundamentally there was an ideological shift. The state was no longer the primary social provider. The market and the community were to share the responsibility resulting in new relationships between the community and the government involving pressured partnerships and hopes of innovative solutions” (p. 31).

Responsibility now lies with individual provinces to exercise their new autonomy in the area of welfare reform. The result has meant variations in social service and health systems in each province, in particular, Alberta, with its “neo-liberal philosophy” (Baines, 2004). This restructuring has created pressures to redefine the role of central government by curtailing many of its economic and social interventions. This has produced decentralization with a diminishing role of the central government, while increasing the relative importance of the roles of provincial and local governments. Alberta has lead the way in restructuring using concepts of privatization, decentralization



and community based responsibility for services that were once under the fiscal umbrella of the federal and provincial governments.

The more recent research regarding social service restructuring demonstrates that provincial and municipal governments are being forced to become independent actors in an increasingly globalized economy (Summerville, 2003). This development can be attributed to the downloading of responsibilities onto municipal and regional governments resulting in communities that will have fewer financial resources and a greater need for the municipality to build and foster local capacities. This need to collaborate, and partner in a formalized manner is often accepted readily by community members. It is sold to communities, on the basis that centralized governments are not able to address the number of different situations that exist at the local level resulting in the need to make use of civil society, the private sector and collaborative efforts to ensure a more responsive and innovative system. Therefore, often without debate, we see social service agencies responding to these restructuring initiatives by adopting business oriented ways of designing jobs, organizing the labor force and managing their agencies (Baines, 2004). In response to this, practitioners involved in such initiatives need to assess and use existing local institutions in the geographic area and cooperate with colleagues to build on family and community development initiatives already under way (Mulroy, 1997) as a means of meeting agency core missions to serve children and families.

Kodras (1997) points out that the major thread running through the arguments against change in government services is the inadequate capacity of local and state governments, not for profit institutions, and individuals to provide goods and services.

The provinces cannot afford to independently operate without federal support. This is further supported by Kodras (1997) who writes that non-profit organizations are generally very localized and geographically fragmented. They are an insufficient substitute for the local state in terms of both capacity and scope (p 13). Responsibility for services no longer provided by government often falls to individuals without the resources to provide them. Inevitably, the number of services will decrease and the ability of many municipalities to provide a wide range of services will fail. Eventually, inequities in service provision will occur. Richmond and Shields (2004) have examined the consequences of this restructuring in terms of growing monopolization within the sector and say that there is a reduction in the diversity of service alternatives, as well as a reduced capacity for public education and community development. Taken together, the combined stress of the restructuring is threatening the capacity of these social service organizations to pursue their missions.

Overall, government restructuring is sold to communities by using a marketing technique that draws upon community values and community based services. This leaves the impression that government restructuring will allow more community control and innovation. In reflection, what this statement also does is disregard restructuring policies, which may include a redistribution of resources and/or funding cutbacks that also occur with decentralization. This quote from the Government of Alberta demonstrates the marketing idea of a ‘made in community’ system:

*Taking a further look at municipal capabilities we can see that Alberta's municipalities have two fundamental and distinguishing features that contribute strongly to Alberta's institutional strength and socio-economic fabric. The first relates to the accessibility, accountability, and responsiveness that come from*

*municipalities; decentralized form of service delivery and from the strong sensitivity of municipal governing bodies to local needs and priorities. Municipalities comprise the “closest” order of government to citizens and businesses. The second significant feature pertains to the board diversity that characterizes municipalities in terms of their population and geographic sizes, their economic structures and rates of growth, their demographic features, their community identities, and their local needs, priorities, and aspirations. This diversity represents an important strength: it offers locational choice to Albertans, fosters competition and supports alternative approaches and “made-in-community” solutions (Government of Alberta, Municipal Perspectives, 2004).*

By suggesting that restructuring offers this “made-in-community” capacity then an expectation is suggested that communities would have the ability to build their own partnerships from the ground up and determine the basis and function of such partnerships. Here, decentralization is being sold with the belief that non-profit organizations are more highly attuned to community needs than the government and that, they, local citizens and organizations themselves are more capable of knowing what they need and how to ensure these needs are met.

The value and belief in community control seems even more influential in rural northern communities, where there is often a sense of alienation and an experience of having been taken advantage of or left out of important social policies. Summerville (2003), a supporter of decentralization and restructuring in rural communities highlights this by stating that regional disparities are not a new problem for rural communities and that decentralization can allow more effective governance through the creation of a policy environment that encourages state and local governments to create institutional innovations that solve their related problems through policy coordination promoting mutually beneficial linkages (p. 5). Her view of decentralization is that it will bring local governance to the communities and that this will mean that local citizens and

organizations will be more influential in decision making and social programming. Rural communities believe that control needs to be closer to the people to allow the most flexible and innovative services to meet their particular needs (Rural perspectives, 1998). For these reasons, government restructuring is welcomed. The following will demonstrate how the Ministry of Child and Family Services are actually driving the context of such partnerships in rural, northern Alberta.

Alberta is the focus of this study as it has been a laboratory for neo-liberal experiments in public service restructuring that is sweeping changes and program redesign (Baines 2004). The provincial Department of Family and Social Services has been reorganized to play a new role in a community-based system of services for children, families, and people with developmental disabilities. Child Welfare (previously under Social Services) is now called the Ministry of Child and Family Services. The Ministry sets overall provincial direction in service delivery, monitoring services, and supporting community-based boards and authorities in their new roles. Authorities, administered by boards have been formed to oversee services for children and families at a municipal level. This restructuring is better known as the Alberta Response model, with a mission to work together to enhance the ability of families and communities to develop nurturing and safe environments for children, youth and individuals (CFSA, 2000). A focus of this model is to form stronger partnerships that have a child-within-the-family focus. This includes partnerships among all Ministries and programs responsible for children's services including Child and Family Services Authorities, Family and Community Support Services and First Nations Delegated Child Welfare Agencies, along

with their regional and local partners. The Alberta Response model is driven by a concern to ensure priority services for Aboriginal persons. This is based on the Aboriginal Policy Framework, which emphasizes collaboration and partnership among Aboriginal people, industry, government and other interested parties as a mode to improve the self-reliance of Aboriginal people and communities (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, in CFSA, 2000).

### **Influences on Community-based Partnerships**

This section explores the key factors that influence the formation of partnerships. This includes a discussion on the social state of child welfare in Canada, the structural influences and the concept of power and mutuality within partnerships, while also exploring the tensions inherent within partnerships built between community agencies and those attached to the government.

#### **a) The State of Child Welfare**

The fact that the system appears to be failing a significant number of children and families is a real concern to child welfare. One of the major challenges is the dramatic increase in child abuse allegations in Canada (Trocme, 2003). There is no consistent understanding of why this is so or how to manage this, which makes it impossible to effectively respond and counteract abuse itself. Additionally, statistics tell us that one in four children in Canada live in poverty and that children and family poverty affects child welfare intake (Scarth, 1993). The child welfare system continues to struggle in response to the needs of Aboriginal peoples and there continues to be a disproportionate number of

Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare throughout Canada (Trocme, 2004). This concern, along with the fact that there is also the issue of the reduction in the number of foster homes available to meet the rising number of children requiring out of home placements, is concerning (Scarth, 1993). Other environmental factors affect the need for alternative child welfare response and include the number of “out of control teens” that we are seeing, the changing racial minority and immigrant groups which is of particular concern in large urban settings, and the increase in marginalized and oppressed persons (Scarth, 1993). This change, or perhaps increase, in persons with particular needs, the cultural inappropriateness, the “one size fits all” type service that child welfare has been providing, has contributed to the system’s inability to protect, support and alter people’s conditions of well-being. Lastly, funding constraints and the system’s inability to sustain a preventative focus further isolates and oppresses those who come into contact with the child welfare system (Scarth, 1993). Overall, however, there seems to be a move from crisis and risk models in child welfare to community based approaches to Child welfare where important links are being made between formal and informal helping networks in many jurisdictions. These partnerships are attempting to evolve in order to help to meet the diverse needs within many communities. Currently in Alberta there are several partnership initiatives underway, including the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund, which was established by the Ministry to encourage community agencies to work together and create a community centre as a preventative and support service to children, youth and families at a community level (Community Partnership and Enhancement Fund, 2005).

## **b) Structural Influences (Politics and Economics)**

Along with the impact of globalization, Alberta's child welfare system has historically seen several political changes fluctuating between centralized and decentralized models. With the Conservative government in Alberta, spending cuts seem to be their priority along with reducing the role of government in welfare issues (New Democrats, 2002). As a result of these recent government cutbacks in welfare spending (NDP, 2002), there has been an increase of demands placed on the Child and Family Service Authorities. In seeking to construct alternative ways to meet these demands various types of partnerships were formed. Partnerships that were enforced through the amalgamation of child welfare services under one roof; partnerships between each authority and the Ministry, contract partnerships that arose as a result of needing to find additional community resources to deliver counseling, educational and prevention services, and lastly, partnerships between the Child and Family Services Authority and other government run services such as the police, health and education. Resulting from such structural changes new forms of democratic control arise impacting upon agency missions, models and modes of delivery and the avenues for participation.

## **c) Power**

Theorists suggest that the capacity of a human service organization to survive and to deliver services is based on its ability to mobilize power, legitimacy and economic resources (Hasenfeld, 1992, pg. 96 in Mulroy, 2003). I will examine democratic control further by looking at issues of power. I have defined "power", in the context of partnerships as having control over the framework of the agency and its finances. This

includes having the ability to manage, influence and decide upon programs and their implementation while including the ability to maintain a community social work philosophy of social justice and empowerment within the agency's service delivery system.

Power within the partnerships will vary depending on the process in which it developed. When the partnership is developed within the community the residents are the change agents working towards community empowerment and well being (Mulroy, 2004), and, will therefore, have the majority of the power. This is not the case when the partnership is created from outside the community. Partnership models assert that agency and community programs are better served when citizens and agencies work together to develop, implement and evaluate initiatives and programs, and call for a balance of power within the community, in program planning and in decision making (Wunrow, Einspruch, 2001).

Barriers to power include a delegated model, privatization, the use of contracts, and resource dependency. Social service restructuring in the form of decentralization has been coupled with an extensive use of explicit contracts. Contracts and privatization are market-oriented approach, consistent with the Klein government (NDP, 2002). These contracts create unequal power between the agency holding the contract, which would be Child and Family Services and the contract partner who could be a counseling agency. This is done through the holder specifying the nature of the performance required and the respective obligations of services from these community providers (Boston, Martin, Pallat, Walsh 1996 in Walker, 2004). This will often contribute to competition between



service providers for money, which leads to unequal power relationships and discontent within partnerships that involve these contracts and/or funder rules.

The fact that the authorities get 80% of their money from the government means that they have resource dependency on the government (CFSA, 2004) and are vulnerable to problems when political priorities and government budget priorities shift and new leaders fail to re-commit previously allocated funds or redistribute funds elsewhere. The Child and Family Services Authorities have little power to affect these political shifts and distribution of funds. Lack of control of the funding framework causes an increased degree of dependency on resources from private donations and partnerships with local business within the child welfare systems.

Many would describe the Child and Family Services model in Alberta as a delegation of powers from the ministry. When looking at delegation and partnership in relation to power it is useful to describe them by using Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969) which, outlines levels of power based upon the degree and/or type of participation/control in the community. Arnstein (1969) describes delegated power as being made up of decision-making committees composed of local people who have been provided with the authority (power) to make decisions. This provides the public power to assure accountability to the programs. In comparison, she describes partnership as, one rung lower (meaning one level of power influence lower). From this point on the ladder of citizen power there is decreasing degrees of influence on decision making.

When citizens and/or organizations enter into a partnership, it often involves the need to negotiate, which entails trade-offs with traditional power holders (such as the

government ministries). Of benefit here is that power is redistributed as planning and decision-making responsibilities are shared, therefore, those with little power would likely gain power, those with lots of power would need to let go of some.

Lastly, Arnstien (1969) states that citizen control, the highest rung on the ladder, entails full power. Citizen control comes only when the local community has full control over the agency at all stages of planning, policy making and management. This would include having control of resources as well, something which many of the agencies do not have. In light of Arnstein's model, it is helpful to understand the degree of power between the Child and Family Services agency and the government as being more like a relationship where there are limited powers given to the local agencies and the community. These are restricted relationships controlled through rules, guidelines, or trade-offs, such as funding restrictions and bureaucratic procedures.

#### **d) Mutuality**

Organization identity is the foundation for partnership; partnerships are pursued based on similar values (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Mutuality exists in partnership to allow all to contribute their ideas and skills. Mutuality can help to ensure acceptance of the partnership's policy and procedures and ease their implementation when each actor has agreed to them and feels a sense of ownership. It is important to discern the degree of mutuality between the stakeholders involved in order to further understand the motivation behind the partnerships. There are likely some shared goals between state and agency, and agency and agency, which has aided in the development and maintenance of their partnership.

## **Barriers to Building Partnerships**

Barriers to the development of community partnerships can include psychological barriers, economic barriers, social barriers and technical barriers. Stohr (2001) asserts that these barriers can be rooted in a sense of helplessness and a psychological abrogation of local power to government authority (Stohr, 2001). This occurs when the community has such a historical reliance of the federal and provincial government that it brings them a lack of trust in their abilities. Additionally, many municipalities and communities lack infrastructure (Warner, 2003) and therefore, lack the capacity to organize and structure themselves, a necessary component to collaborative resolutions to social problems.

Many rural governments lack an adequate revenue base and sufficient professional management capacity. Rural residents have relied more on private markets than government for many services. Rural areas have also suffered from under development due in part to uneven markets (Brown & Swanson, unpublished). These factors leave rural communities at risk to powers outside of them. Community empowerment through partnerships/collaborations and participation can offer important change, but this does not substitute for lack of money or resources that occurs when the federal government no longer provides fiscal support.

Stohr (2001) talks about these challenges by breaking decentralization down into two variations, deconcentration and devolution, both with varying impacts. His preliminary findings, which suggest that deconcentration, which maintains a higher degree of centralized control over decision-making, results in better resource allocation. Devolution, however, seems to encourage innovation in the creation of

public/private partnerships and alternative financing strategies. Stohr (2001) notes, that despite the global discourse of decentralization and local empowerment, decentralization, particularly in the form of devolution, is not yet a widespread phenomenon (p. 22). What passes for decentralization in the name of local control, looks more like deconcentration and can be viewed as a strategy to increase the presence of the central government in order to further its policy goals (Stohr, 2001). Prud'homme (1995) also warns that in general, some activities, cultures, regions, and services are more suitable to decentralization than others. Decentralization is certainly useful in some circumstances, but it is certainly not a universal cure-all.

With the opportunity for increased local decision- making comes the challenge to "do more with less" as social services are targeted for drastic cuts in the federal budget (Weil, 1996, p.41). Successful decentralization and restructuring requires a community to have administrative and financial capacity combined with effective collaborations that challenge and contend with social problems. Here in lies the need for communities to partner with profit and non-profit organizations, agencies and even the government. This paper will discuss these partnerships in more detail, looking at what partnerships do exist, how are they are functioning and the struggles they are encountering.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Research Purpose and Design**

The purpose of this research was to gain a further understanding of community based partnerships with Child and Family Services in a rural and northern Alberta community. This is a key informant study, which will refer to a collection of detailed information about a particular community through the accounts of five intentionally chosen informants. The format for this study was preferred for its qualitative descriptive characteristics that allowed for an ability to derive in depth data and draw conclusions about the nature of community-based partnerships in the social service sector of this one particular community. This study is also, influenced by certain aspects of a modified grounded theory approach: grounded theory according to Glaser and Strauss (1967, pg. 1) is the “discovery of theory from data which is systematically obtained and analyzed in social research” (p. 1).

I interviewed five program managers who were identified as community partners with the local Child and Family Services office, including staff of the agency itself. Their stories are vital towards understanding the nature of community-based partnerships and the struggles to partner in the face of government restructuring. Following grounded theory, I have read and re-read the data to discover and label categories, concepts and properties and their interrelationships (Dick, 2005). My analysis looked for patterns, themes and common categories between the stories. I focused on the informant’s perceptions and understandings, aiming to comprehend the story in a wider context and connecting it to available literature regarding partnerships in the social service sector.

## **Instrument**

“The personal interview is the optimum method of data collection when the questions to be asked are complicated and require extensive explanation” (Atherton and Klemmack, pg. 113). In depth, semi structured interviews were conducted using both constructed questions, open-ended questions and probing questions. “Open ended questions involve interpreting the meaning responses opening the possibility of misunderstanding and research bias” (Babbie, 1989, pg. 140). Probing questions were also used to ensure a thorough understanding of the ideas set forth by the participant. Additionally, data gathering was incorporated as a process where I used constant analysis to form additional questions for the following participants to help to ensure a fuller understanding of the experiences. The structured questions included: What partnerships exist? Are they formal or informal partnerships? How were the partnerships developed? How did the process go for you or your agency? How are the partnerships working? Are these partnerships contributing to enhancing child, family and community well-being? Why do you think they are working this way? What recommendations do you have?

## **Sampling**

I used criterion sampling whereby; community partners and their respective program managers were identified. This type of sampling, selecting people for a specific reason, in a controlled way (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45) occurred after McMaster University Research Ethics Board gave approval. I determined who to invite to participate based on whether they are considered a community partner as outlined in the Region’s CFSA (2004) annual report and through confirmation from the local CFSA

manager that they were indeed considered community partners. Program managers of these agencies were chosen as key informants. Key informants are according to Schwandt (1997, p. 78) are individuals who hold a unique perspective and are articulate about their substantial knowledge. Half of the informants are Aboriginal, and have direct knowledge and experience developing and implementing culturally based services. These key informants have first hand knowledge about how Child and Family Services has been restructured, the restructuring policies that influenced their agencies and the current as well as past initiatives to partner with local community agencies. Each of the informants worked in their agencies prior to, during and after the restructuring of Social Services. As such, this was a purposive sample which allowed for what Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p.78) referred to as a “detailed exploration and understanding” of the restructuring and initiatives within and with Child and Family Services in Alberta. This study was conducted in a small community, therefore to ensure anonymity, as promised, the identities of the informants and their agencies will be kept confidential.

The informants were initially invited to the study via a phone call and follow up information sheet detailing the research study (see Appendix 1 title Information Letter). They were then allowed to respond back on their own as to whether or not they were interested and/or able to participate. Five out of the seven planned interviews took place, with two of the key informants being unable to participate in the end. At the time of the interviews the Consent (Appendix 2) was reviewed and signed (if it had not been signed earlier). This entailed details assuring confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to choose

to participate or withdraw from participating. Reciprocity was provided in the form of a thank you and the offering of a written summary of the final paper.

### **Data Collection**

I have broken down the area to be studied from the regional level to a municipal level to ensure that the area studied was not too large and that variables such as distance and resource issues were less of a factor. Initially, I spoke with the board president in order to verify the agency structure and determined who is in the current role as manager at the local CFSA. Next, I reviewed the regional annual report to verify agency objectives and determined whom the agency identified as community partners. Next, I verified this information with the board president. For further verification, I also meet with CFSA manager to confirm who the local partners were.

Once I verified whom the local community partners were I met to invite them to participate in the project. Providing information sheets that explained the context and purpose of the study. I provided an overlay of the basic questions that to be asked to ensure that they had some context for what the study is about and to ensure that they felt comfortable with the questions. It was not intended as a study guide. At this time I also provided them with a consent sheet, which discussed confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw and the research process. An additional consent was signed between myself, and CFSA manager, at the manager's request (Appendix 3). The manager also requested to be provided with a copy of the thesis proposal and ethics approval certificate. Providing this information helped to ensure transparency of the project and, I believe, provided for a greater level of trust and understanding. Ensuring trust and transparency



of the project is of vital importance in researching in this community in which First Nations and Métis Managers represented 55% of the participants.

When discussing issues of ethics within a research paper, it is essential to consider self-determination (Babbie, 1998). In order to ensure self-determination, I allowed the prospective participants to respond or not to the invitation. This gave them the right to make their own, un-biased and un-pressured decision to be a part of the project. This in turn helped to ensure that they do not feel pressured to participate. Meeting times and places were guided by and chosen by the participants to ensure their comfort and that it was least disruptive and time consuming to them. The interviews were approximately one hour and a half in length and they were audio taped. I checked back with the participants to clarify their comments, as it seemed necessary. At this time, additional questions were asked to further clarify the content and context of their statements. This occurred via phone calls and email.

Combined with key informant methodology, I also incorporated modified inductive and comparative methods of grounded theory (Rubin & Babbie, 1997, p. 375) as an iterative process wherein several interview questions were built on the previous interviews to allow for the perceptions and experiences articulated by the informants to be better understood. This also led to increased richness of the data. Notes were taken throughout the interviews and observations recorded. These memos were written to capture ideas during the interview and were helpful in extracting themes and meaning from informant's spoken words (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 108).

## **Data Analysis**

In this type of research my task as researcher was to understand what was happening and being said, and how the players managed their roles (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 in Dick, 2002). This was done through the use of conversation and interview. From the interviews transcripts were created. Transcripts were then read and reread. After each bout of data collection the key words and ideas were documented. I used selective coding (Dick, 2002) this allowed me to compare and contrast the presenting data to the literature. As in any qualitative descriptive research, while researchers begin their studies with one or several questions driving the inquiry, a researcher may find new key factors emerging during data collection. These variables may become the basis for new questions asked at the end of the report, thus linking to the possibility of further research”. (CSU, 2005, p.9).

## **Strengths and Limitations**

This key informant approach allowed me to give as much context as possible from each interview for the conclusions drawn. Additionally, a benefit from this study is that it has offered new variables and questions for further research giving specific feedback to the particular community studied which can be used as a guide for additional research in this community and others.

The informants of this study were purposely selected based on their roles in the agency and the knowledge about the community, social service restructuring, and local partnership initiatives. For this reason the program managers were able to provide a wealth of critical reflection about the subject matter. Interviewing other players such as

clients, community members or front line workers would have provided very different perspectives to the study, perspectives that could have lead away from the focus of the study. By interviewing program managers, this study, therefore, only represents a more professionalized managerial perspective.

Interviewing a small sample of people can be beneficial towards seeking to understand as much as possible about a single subject. Therefore, this study specialized in "deep data," or "thick description"--information based on particular contexts that can give research results a more human face (CSU, 2005). The emphasis on in depth understandings of a few experiences can help bridge the gap between research and practice by allowing researchers to compare their firsthand observations with quantitative results obtained through other methods of research (CSU, 2005). With an approach that relies on personal interpretation of data and inferences and perceptions of just a few informants, results are difficult to test for validity, and likely cannot offer a general problem-solving prescription as it runs the risk of generalizing those perceptions over the whole population. Another limitation arises in the way questions are asked and in how data is analysed because coding and categorizing by one individual can bring in possible prejudices and/or biases of the researcher (Boehrer, 1990).

Overall, with this type of study it is difficult to generalize because of inherent subjectivity and because it is based on qualitative subjective data, generalizable only through the particular context of the five key informants. While information here can be used within the community studied, it cannot be generalized for other players or into other communities. Overall, this study would benefit from a greater number of

informants in order to obtain broader perspectives and the full range of community experiences.

## **Chapter 4: Stories and Analysis**

### **Alberta Child and Family Services Authorities – The Story of Restructuring**

At its inception in 1909, the Alberta child welfare system was very much decentralized, with local authorities left to enforce provincial legislation. Over time, the system became highly centralized and hierarchically structured, with the debate over preferences for centralized versus decentralized models of governance persisting to this day. Due to public pressures, a conservative government and major government reorganization in 1999, Child and Family Regional Authorities were formed to replace the existing government child welfare system [previously known as Social Services] as the means to deliver and supervise child and family services in Alberta. Trocme (2003) states the reason for this restructuring is because the failure of the system required an alternative response, one that focuses on well being and intervention at all levels including specialized clinical services, parent child programs, and improved living conditions for children and families (p.2). The decentralization of child welfare services, combined with efforts to engage the community in service provision, led each region to establish community-based, non-profit agencies as the primary delivery mode for child welfare in Alberta.

Alberta Child & Family Services philosophy is, “strong children families communities”. This is a delegated community based child welfare model responsible for delivering services to children and families residing in their regions, and ensuring that provincial standards are met. These services include adoption, child and youth support, child care, child intervention services, delegated First Nations agencies, family and community support, family support for children with disabilities, family violence prevention, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, foster care, child protection, and protection of children from prostitution. This is enhanced through a commitment to working in greater collaboration with the existing strengths and assets of the community residents (CFSA Business Plan, 2004).

These agencies operate with boards of directors according to the administration, statutes and regulations in the provincial legislation. Alberta’s Ministry of Children’s Services is responsible for the following: allocating funding and other resources to the authorities and setting objectives, policies and standards for child and family service agencies. The Ministry is also accountable for services that provide for the safety, security, and well being of children and families. This is done by monitoring and assessing the agency’s ability to carry out their responsibilities. It is also important to note that 80% of money to the Authorities comes from the government of Alberta (CECW, 2002). I will later explain the relevance of this to partnerships by looking at the power of funders.

The roles of natural helpers, support networks, and cultural groups are integrated within the professional service delivery system in each Child and Family Services

Authority. Each region involves community members and staff who have organized themselves around four pillars of service delivery: community-based, early intervention integrated and specialized Aboriginal services. Under this type of system, the Ministry continues to be accountable for the services provided, but is not directly responsible for the deliverance of the services. Although this is so, the Ministry can, however, request particular measurements and particular data to evaluate the agency, such as recording the number of children in care (CECW, 2002).

In the past, many Child and Family Services Authorities had two major roles with community stakeholders; contractor of community based services and representation on region wide initiatives such as Student Health and Early Childhood Development. Child and Family Services Authorities are now required to participate in, shared case planning and management, community activities to identify trends and gaps, and helping to create and maintain community services. They also need to participate in processes to increase the capacity of their agencies to work together to measure, and report, the outcomes achieved through their services, along with participating in region wide management and governance discussions (CPEF, 2005).

In order to meet these objectives many regions are obliged to partner through developing working relationships with community organizations and other provincial ministries in their community. This includes forming partnerships with health, justice, persons with developmental disabilities, family and community support services, aboriginal services and education. These relationships involve working together to

identify community needs, joint service planning and programming and sharing resources for the benefit of providing services on behalf of children and families.

This case study of a Northern Alberta community indicated several forms of community partnerships: interagency groups, shared resources, protocols and joint government partnership initiatives. These partnership models seem to form a continuum where at one end, there is the simple sharing of resources to produce an event or activity and at the other, those partnerships that have grown, or developed into a broader based partnership involving more complex objectives or goals (Shragge, 2003).

#### ***A) Interagencies***

A common form of partnership in this community is the interagency group. This includes groups such as the Aboriginal Interagency, Peace Association for Life Long Learning and a Family Focused Interagency. Most of the informants found that these groups are resourceful and aided the partners in understanding what each other did. The meetings serve as an arena to discuss local community issues, local needs and determine modes of action. In addition to this, these interagency groups also seem to provide the potential for building relationships.

Some suggest that these interagency meetings assist the agencies in identifying community stresses and issues while acting as a venue for a more in depth critical discussion about these issues:

*“Well, we have opportunity to meet, interface with one another; by we I’m talking about the various partners here in the community. We can do that through our interagency meetings and if there are particular stresses in the community those stresses usually come to everyone’s attention at those interagency meetings” (Informant 3).*

These interagency meetings also allow a forum for strategizing and planning

Coordinated responses to addressing community issues and needs. The following quote demonstrates how this can evolve:

*“ So I think that there is kind of an informal pulse on what is happening in the community and hopefully they become part of the agenda at those interagency meetings that we all attend in common. So through those opportunities to strategize and talk about maybe where best to put resources as they become available, resources being funding from ourselves or funding from other sources, we can plan joint responses” (Informant 1).*

### ***B) Protocols as Partnerships***

Another form of partnership is established through the development of protocols. Protocols are formal agreements that have been developed between particular agencies in the community. They serve to define terminology and clarify legal obligations, accountability and practice standards that relate to each of the collaborators (CECW, 2002). One informant helps to define the use and function of protocols by simply stating that it is a way to communicate:

*“There are some protocols in place which help with information sharing and reporting procedures” (Informant 1).*

These protocols seem to serve as a guideline on how to work with each other, often including a more formal aspect in that documents are written and signed between the partners. These protocols often come into play when there is the need to direct how staff of each agency will communicate and work together. The development of protocols can assist the agencies in communicating information about each other and provide a venue for developing more formal working relationships helping them identify ways to



share and distribute information, make referrals and assist clients in which they both have in common.

*“So we now [since development of protocols] have our workers and their workers getting the same information and developing the same understanding and we’ve had a very good working relationship with the child welfare now” (Informant 3).*

Protocol development can also help to ensure consistency in services between the partners:

*“We actually have written, signed protocols to sort of assist in having some province wide consistency in dealing with these issues [family violence]” (Informant 3).*

### **C) Shared Resources**

There is currently at least one partnership in this community, which, entails a shared financial obligation between the two agencies and serves as a mode towards meeting the needs of children and youth. Sharing resources has also meant pressures to ensure that services are meeting the needs of each of the partners involved and adds additional weight and a new dimension for formalization of that partnership. The following comment will help to explain:

*“There have been recent changes in the Child and Family Enhancement Act. This Act changed the qualifications of who is identified as a child at risk. In terms of protective services it is no longer the child’s condition as a contributing factor that can identify a child of need. This puts CFSA in a situation where they needed to refer those children because technically they aren’t able to provide those services any longer. And so what they’ve done is there was funding that was provided to the health regions to supposedly address this gap, but, it hasn’t been qualified at all as municipal money and it is insufficient, but, nevertheless they identified \$95,000 to this health region so that will allow one position in this community and cover minimal travel if any, probably none after benefits and whatnot. So, since the money is sort of designated to these children, Child and Family Services should see a net gain in terms of referrals and service from us” (Informant 2).*

Restructuring of Children's Services and resource adjustments has resulted in changes to existing community relationships, and brings additional issues to contend with in relationships where resources are shared. This seems to include partner commitments to prioritizing referrals with a responsibility to increase services, and a pledge to share resources with their partner. This pressure is relayed through the following quote:

*"I feel some pressure to show that we're working collaboratively and there's some openings in terms of increased access for Children's Services because I think there's some pressure...at a health region level, in terms of knowing this money came and therefore we need to be seen collaborating with child welfare as to how that money is spent and accounted for" (Informant 2).*

#### ***D) CFSA Community Partnership Initiatives***

Several partnership initiatives are currently underway in Alberta. This is not to say, however, that all communities partake in these initiatives. Through a review of the Government of Alberta, Child and Family Services website, I was able to identify numerous Government partnership initiatives. Such initiatives include the Community Partnerships Enhancement Fund, the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative, the Effective Behavior Support Initiative, Family Violence and Alberta Justice Initiative, Family Violence and Community Incentive Fund and the CFSA Coordinated Response to Domestic Violence. Most of these initiatives are based upon a common goal of "strengthening community-based preventative approaches that help children, youth and families at risk of abuse or neglect to grow strong, healthy and resilient" (Community Partnership Enhancement Fund, p. 5, 2005). The development of formalized community based partnerships were described to me as follows:

*“When the Alberta Response model was developed, so I guess that would be part of the plan for the development of partnerships, and then particularly this region’s annual report, it talked about established goals to partner, and, so there’s budgets set by the Ministry stating that a certain amount of the money is put towards the development of partnerships as a business strategy” (Informant 1).*

This community in particular is currently working towards establishing a program initiated through the Community Partnership Enhancement Fund. This fund is intended to provide a resource to help CFSA create or strengthen relationships of mutual benefit, in support of children, youth and families” (Community Partnership Enhancement Fund, 2005), and acts as an incentive to build and foster on new and old partnerships. One informant identified that the building of new relationships are necessary as their community is just getting to know who is who since the second boundary change. A commitment to the process is expressed within the comment below presenting an understanding that communication is essential within a partnership:

*“We need to be communicating otherwise there’s a lot of roads for misunderstandings” (Informant 4).*

The rest of this paper will look at how this community is managing these Government endorsed initiatives while maintaining the benefits of their natural, and informal partnerships. Through a look at the comments of five key informants, I will tell the stories of how the restructuring of social services in a Northern Alberta community has changed the nature of their community-based partnerships. I will do this by arranging the stories and comments under three themes: Government Restructuring-the rules keep changing; Bureaucratic Imperatives, and, Goal Displacement.

## **I. Government Restructuring – The Rules Keep Changing**

Partnerships are one thing, but when the rules keep changing there is an added complexity to the process. Community organizations have pressures to adapt to the new realities of a restructured environment. The agencies in this Northern Alberta community are continuing to contend with these struggles towards a collaborative approach to serving children, youth and families in their community. The following reflections by the participants bring home the difficulties that these organizations have faced, while at the same time reveal continued confidence and commitment to the process of partnership work

### ***A) Turbulence***

In May 1999, the previously named Social Services split into two separate entities, Income Support and Children's Services. Child and Family Services became the umbrella Ministry that would overlook all protective and preventative services to children, youth and families in the province. Prior to this restructuring, many CFSA's had only two major roles with community stakeholders. They were contractors of community-based services and played the role of representatives on region wide initiatives such as Student Health and Early Childhood Development. CFSA's new roles now include participation in shared case planning and management, participation in community processes to identify child, youth and family trends and gaps, and to help create and maintain community support and intervention services. "Additionally, Child and Family Services participate in processes to increase their capacity at working with other agencies to measure and report outcome success while, at the same time, participate

in region wide management and governance discussions focused on children, youth and families”(CPEF, 2005).

This restructuring seemed, to me, to be driven by a belief in community based social work and endorsed by the value of innovative, culturally appropriate and coordinated services, wherein, each region would be empowered with the ability to determine how they would deliver services. I was a Child Welfare worker in the community at this time, and, as a participant in this process, it felt very promising because we, the citizens of the community and agency staff were actively involved in how services would be delivered in our community. Although there was excitement, it is evident that change was difficult, regardless of whether it was welcomed change or not. Change brings about many questions: Why? What did we do wrong? What is going to be changed? Is my job at risk? What am I going to have to do differently? At the same time, there are those who will welcome change, bringing excitement about how things may be improved. For some, there was an openness to change with the acknowledgement that there could be positive outcomes. This recognition also comes with the knowledge that change will be difficult because change takes time.

*“There are still issues that have to be addressed and every time we make a change of course it opens some doors in terms of opportunity of development, but, it also means changing” (Informant 2).*

### ***B) The Impact of Boundary Changes***

Once, again, in 2002, the boundaries of Children’s Services were changed, increasing the size of each region. This amalgamation of communities meant that the partners would have to compromise their original plans to ensure consistency throughout

the region. One informant spoke about the fact that they had to change the way they did things several times preceding the merge. This meant concessions were made between how they did business.

*“Some of the difficulty with this regionalization process in terms of changes is that there is different boundary changes in the last few years which also has had an impact on planning and collaboration. Your region develops relationships in a certain way, the other region develops its own particular focus, they regionalize, there are merged regions, than all of a sudden, that particular community has to change the way they were going in terms of planning, which is expensive as well as gives very mixed messages to consumers and service providers” (Informant 3)*

As the above informant mentioned, the initial business plans of the communities were readdressed and redeveloped taking into consideration that the region now had to incorporate the plans of each of the amalgamated communities. It was, therefore, considered necessary, that new partnerships were developed, roles and goals of the partnerships re-established, and new decisions made regarding programs and services.

One partner describes how this played itself out in their community:

*“ CFSA at one point were looking at developing a kind of a one stop access centre, but, with the last regionalization, all the work they were doing to set up this one stop center all of a sudden was no longer the focus when we merged regions. So you had staff in the middle of a transition to those positions, a confused community thinking the one-stop center will be there and then all of a sudden they are gone. So now you have the expense of undoing this plan. You’ve got staff that need to be redeployed and people who got laid off. So it is probably an example of the collaborative part getting mixed up with the political boundary changes that occurred” (Informant 4).*

The community studied is in a large region with hours between some of the agencies/partners and adding additional elements in developing and maintaining productive relationships. Several informants talked about this added barrier to their partnership. An important point here is that, the Child and Family Services boundaries do

not coincide with the other geographical boundaries of their regional partners such as education and health.

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*“A further difficulty is that the health region boundaries, for example are not necessarily consistent with CFSA boundaries, school boards” (Informant 2).*

There was a loss of the relationships that had been previously established, suggesting that this second boundary change resulted in setbacks to coordinated community initiatives.

*“I think our offices in this area felt very connected to what Child & Family Services was doing and we felt that we were actually a part of that process, a part of what was happening and there was good stuff happening with that natural development of a relationship, you knew who to call. Now it’s . . . I think the downfall is we’re just starting to redevelop those relationships” (Informant 4).*

### **C) Reactions to Change**

Several of the informants talked about the community confusion that multiple changes have triggered. Citizens may not know who does what, where to go, or what services are available to them. The following comment expresses how this confusion is identified:

*“I don’t think the community [citizens] at large understands what’s happened with CFSA they still call for social services so...” (Informant 2).*

This change seems to have resulted in a lack of individual support for the activities of the government and is suggestive of the government being the reason for this confusion:

*“Part of the problem with government is they change too often that it confuses the community [citizens]” (Informant 4).*

Another informant expressed discontent with this change and frustration at the lack of notable progress:

*“We have had a lot of turbulence, a lot of change, and not much moving ahead” (Informant 5).*

Agencies and community partners have also suggested confusion over CFSA restructuring, suggesting that this can be attributed to the professed lack of job satisfaction and awareness in what the agency is doing.

*“I don’t think you can be a happy camper after all the change they’ve been through and they still don’t have it sorted out. We’re being told they weren’t going to be contracting anything out now they’re just cutting back on some of their contracts but they do not have enough staff to handle what they’re suppose to be doing with this more community based social work idea” (Informant 4).*

This has contributed to difficult working relationships between the organizations and an overall sense of exhaustion in the battle to maintain funding and keep up with the changes and expectations of the government.

*“There are stained relationships because of lost resources and a scarcity of resources” (Informant 5).*

*“What was happening was they were under funded in child welfare and so they were constantly trying to take money away from other programs to pay for child welfare. They dramatically cut early intervention programs they cut out Native liaison officers in schools and they shut down a program here that use to offer extracurricular activities for Aboriginal youth and this kind of thing” (Informant 3).*

#### ***D) The impact of Resource Changes and Downloading of Responsibilities***

Decentralization seemed to be a primary focus when the restructuring of social services occurred. This resulted in a change of roles wherein, the community increased their function in public services, and the government was to become a more distant figure providing the legal mandate, defining the structure and distributing money. With the reorganization of boundaries came, the reallocation of funding further impacted by the federal and provincial shift to block funding (transfer of government funds that may support a program or project delivered on behalf of the government. Funding departments



are responsible to ensure that funded recipients operate in accordance with applicable legislation and government policies and procedures). With this type of an arrangement, and where a community is faced with the growing demands for services that meet more complex and difficult social problems (Shragge, 2003), combined with unstable funding, and, a government that encourages competition for resources, relationships can be challenged. The following quote tells the story:

*“When we went through downsizing and program reductions and whatnot with the 90’s deficit, services became very stretched for all different ministries, and whether that was the health region being funded, whether that was Children’s Services being directly funded and whatnot, a lot of what [relationships] had developed between different agencies in the communities, which had developed over time, and worked well, was influenced when finances became an issue and resources became more tightened. Then people stopped holding hands collaboratively because they couldn’t, they started hiding behind mandates and having to hold on the best they could to man their services” (Informant 2).*

The downloading of responsibilities falls hand in hand with resource changes. In a decentralized system, the downloading of responsibilities from the government to the community is a realized fear with Government programs cut and in many instances pushed to the community and volunteer sector to be absorbed on the cheap by overly busy community organizations (Shragge, 2003, p.131). One informant makes this connection between the slow development of partnerships and the resolution that the true plan behind partnership initiatives is to help prepare the communities to become fully responsible for all social programs:

*“I think that its going to take some time for post collaboration to be positive partly because I think in the inductions there’s a fair bit of cynicism at some levels of management of collaboration and downsizing or regionalization is more of a downloading of responsibility” (Informant 2).*

The above point is further cemented by and informant identifying that the restructuring goes hand in hand with funding cuts:

*“So a new regional authority was set up here and the very first thing that happened was they tried to cut our operating grant which would have decimated our services. So we fought that by educating the Ministry administrators about what we do. Fortunately, it was effective and our funding was maintained but every time our contract came around there was another attempt to sort of get us financially, there was even a suggestion that we should think outside the box and create a profit sector as some sort of tourist attraction to bring in money” (Informant 3).*

One informant discussed tangible rewards as a necessary incentive towards continuing with formalized partnerships. It appeared to be suggested that the partnerships are a strategy enforced by the government to have the communities share resources for cost efficiency purposes.

*“The purpose of this restructuring is ultimately a cost reduction plan for child protection and when the province stops funding the partnership will fall apart” (Informant 5).*

The cutback of resources also occurred in Aboriginal services. As I had previously mentioned, one of the pillars of focus during the restructuring phases was to increase Aboriginal Services. For this reason, when these services were cutback there was confusion. “In theory a policy of transferring powers should improve the delivery of services; instead present funding arrangements have had the opposite effect” (Isid Fiddler in Carniol, 2000, p. 127). This is not to say, that Aboriginal services are less of an importance, but, as one informant demonstrates, the change in funding patterns and the lack of money for protection meant cutbacks in support and preventative services resulting in a loss of Aboriginal programming.

*“Our association had to go to bat for us and said that this Regional thing is not working. One of the problems was that the Regional Authorities were getting fixed amounts of money to do all the things they were expected to do including child protection and so they were constantly trying to take money away from other programs to pay for child protection, they dramatically cut early intervention resulting in an Aboriginal service being dismantled, they cut out native liaison officers in schools and this kind of thing” (Informant 3).*

Another informant mentioned that the reason for this was that they were still struggling with what type of Aboriginal services to provide, and, how to go about doing this.

*“Well I think there’s a need to work towards Aboriginal services, but, that’s a struggle, to be honest. Is it a need for more services? I don’t know, I think we’re still analyzing that” (Informant 1).*

Alternative program funding appeared in the form of block funding, wherein community organizations would be required to compete for funding. This type of program funding has added a new dimension to partnerships. One informant talked about how the funding changes have caused a shift in working relationships due to tension brought on by competition with each other for scarce resources.

*“There was conflict with the Ministry of Children’s Services because they were trying to cut our funding, and there was competition for money, and I think it was a very conscious decision on the part of the government to download that responsibility onto the Regions and it isn’t then the big bad government saying no, its your Regional Authority saying no to you. But it certainly caused those kinds of tensions at the local level when scarce resources were reallocated” (Informant 5).*

## **II. Bureaucratic Imperatives**

As the informants have suggested, when restructuring occurs we will often see changes in resources, boundaries and in how the system operates. In Canada, restructuring, and the dismantling of the social safety, along with the managerial ideology and implementation of business practices into the public social sector, has resulted in a

focus on “public agencies, emphasizing efficiency, accountability, targeting and “lean work organization” (Baines, 2004, p. 268). This has caused barriers to, and difficulties partnering, and include such issues as: little time to partner, discrepancies in how to partner and partnerships involving bureaucratic structures mandated by the government. Here, I will discuss the difficulties this community is having when a partnership became managed and formalized, as expressed through the stories of the five informants.

***A) What happens when Informal relationships are Formalized***

The informants suggest that, prior to restructuring, they enjoyed natural relationships that were based on informality, goodwill, mutual goals and free flowing communication. Several of the informants talked about the loss of this type of relationship when they become involved in CFSA partnership initiatives and when competition for resources and block grants were introduced. One informant describes this change in relationships:

*“It was so easy before, now it is a different type of communication, it’s a different type of relationship” (Informant 2).*

Several of the informants suggested that there was a change in the flow of communication post enforced partnership. One informant defines this change as being related to the bureaucracy now entwined within their partnership.

*“As weird as this sounds with all the processes we currently have in place to aid in partnership development, there was definitely a difference between the communication that was happening pre regionalisation to post regionalisation or pre partnership to more forced partnership. There was more ease of flow of information, more active involvement. Now there’s involvement and there is commitment, definitely, but, its strained and tired and seems harder and more*

*complex and bureaucratic. Um...so there definitely were benefits before [restructuring]” (Informant 2).*

As this informant mentions, good communication is important to the building of relationships. This seemed to be something that the informants enjoyed prior to when partnerships became more formalized. Alternatively, another of the informants seemed to be suggesting that they are actually less motivated to partner since the partnerships have become enforced, telling that this is due to the lack of say in the function of the partnership.

*“Prior to some of the more planned collaboration activities, I’d say I was probably more involved in collaborative activities because we saw it as a, it was more of a sense of identifying joint need to be doing this and therefore a political willingness to do that” (Informant 4).*

This theme is continued when several other informants suggest that the political goodwill that many citizens once had, and which drove many citizens to be more involved and concerned in community activities, is lost when the government is the funder and becomes the sole authority on what the citizens should be doing. Government enforced partnerships often come with an outline on what to do and how to do it. “These externally imposed partnerships are driven by centralized planning processes that reflect donor interests and political and bureaucratic imperatives. This type of partnering draws energy away from cooperative development”(McGrath, Moffatt, Lee 2003). Several informants discuss this perception by stating:

*“Political goodwill is lost in imposed collaboration. Lost in the demands of government rules” (Informant 5)*

*“Imposed collaboration means there is no natural good will so you will need to work harder to develop this good will through time” (Informant 1).*

*“Any relationship takes energy to build and to maintain and once that gap happened [changes] it is taking 10 times more to redevelop it. It really is. So those are the negatives to it right now. The real disadvantage is sort of that rebuilding of such a good relationship that we had in place previously. I think the other thing that happened is we just had a lot of fun before” (Informant 2).*

**B) What can happen when one partner has more power?**

At one time several communities in this region had formed school and community partnership teams. This was a community partnership formed between agencies such as public health, mental health, addictions, police, schools and child protection workers. Workers from these organizations would gather on a monthly basis in each local school to discuss and develop strategies to support, assist and prevent problems for children and families. This was a community-based initiative with no strings to the government. Post regionalization, the government offered to fund these programs. The community I studied accepted this funding, another community, within the same region did not. For this community the eventual result was the dismantling of the partnership. This partnership was lost when the funders had the power to redefine the relationship.

*“Community School Partnership program was a local initiative (cross ministerial collaboration) the ministry liked the idea and formalized it/imposed it. It no longer exists in the areas that the government formalized it; it does exist in the areas that said no thank you to government money. This area did not want the imposition of the rules that comes with the money. This is a drawback of imposed collaboration. You follow their rules and you are susceptible to their changes” (Informant 2)*

The community organizations were faced with the dilemma that greater recognition and funding from the government actually diminished their autonomy and reinforced a service agenda (Shragge, 2003, p. 55). In the case of this community, a connection between government involvement and the dismantling of this partnership can be made. Shragge

(2003) says that, “partnerships pull community organizations into relationships that hide power and interest”(p.114). Relationships have the power to co-define the partnership. This must be recognized when involved in a partnership supported by government funding. One informant describes the sense of powerlessness felt when a particular agency’s mission is overpowered by the focus of the Ministry that funds them:

*“Which again is indicative of the political climate in Alberta that its under the Ministry of Children’s Services there’s no acknowledgement that women have needs or that adults have needs even you know there’s no such thing as a dependent adult even temporarily in this province the only people that its legitimate help is either juveniles or severely handicapped people” (Informant 3).*

### ***C) Is there time to Partner?***

Developing and maintaining relationships takes time, especially when relationships have been strained, when they involve more formal processes, and when they are contending with partnering over long distances. The time to develop partnerships and attend meetings was a concern for all of the informants. One informant identified resource limitations as a factor that contributed to having little time to partake in partnership activities:

*“The problem is that we are now on a fixed budget limiting what we can do, but, in order to remain a community player you have to use your resources to attend all these meetings...we are completely exhausted” (Informant 3).*

The administrative tasks that now go hand in hand with formalized and forced partnerships have been identified as a source of strain:

*“Administratively there is a lot more time needed to ensure that you know and everyone else knows what is happening at the meetings” (Informant 1).*

An additional informant, described their feelings about the amount of time forced partnerships demand, expressing themselves as though they were speaking with the Ministry funders:

*“Back off! It’s too much, it does become way too much when you’re already doing so much and then they come up with these greater initiatives which they give you a month to plan, oh its just been atrocious. We were invited to a meeting a week in advance and then were given only two weeks to develop a plan for 960 some thousand dollars” (Informant 4).*

***D) The process is too rigid***

In a system that is concerned with efficiency and cost reduction, it is likely that we will see a rise in procedures that address accountability and an increase in documentation procedures. Procedures that are often used to count up the efficiency of the service. This demand for efficiency is also seen in the bureaucracy of partnerships where there is a requirement that in order to receive project funding you need to have several sign off partners on the proposal (Informant 4). This has meant that partnerships have become more difficult and rigid.

*“There’s a certain degree of when its imposed from above, of collaborations still being done in a fairly rigid manner including rules form above on how they are allowed to develop or not develop, and how they unfold” (Informant 1).*

Shragge (2003) points out that government attention and recognition can actually diminish a program’s autonomy and reinforce a service agenda”(p.55). The following participant statement further suggests how forcing a partnership could be seen as unreasonable:

*“We’re told you must work together, but, you don’t necessarily have the history of experience, or good will and the attitude, which would filter out to the front line. So administratively for example, I could be very well in the know of some of the*



*more senior people in the respective agency at an office level but, that doesn't mean that it is necessarily going to flow down to the front line where partnerships need to also be made" (Informant 2).*

Additionally, with the formalization of these partnerships came rules and guidelines on how to document meetings, what the mission of the partnership should be, and what the outcomes of the partnerships should be. "Such formalized procedures undoubtedly come from the adaptation of business philosophies and techniques in the delivery of social services" (Carniol, pg. 78). One informant identified how the structure of formalized partnerships and the merging of regions impeded the collaboration process:

*"So now it has become more difficult to collaborate because things need to move up the ladder in terms of approval. There's more of a need for everybody to know what you're doing or for regional approval. So when the collaboration becomes more formal it is a little less free and less spontaneous, and a little less localized because of the larger region involved" (Informant 1).*

The final quote shows how one informant connects the rigidity of formalized partnerships with the government's role in accountability:

*"Partnerships are now more planned and more intentional because there's more of a sense of accountability and people were using dollars that aren't our dollars" (Informant 5).*

### **III. Goal Displacement**

All of the informants spoke of encountering struggles in meeting their current organizational mandate while contending with the requirements to establish and/or maintain partnerships with other organizations. The strain in balancing the conflicting needs of different systems, tension in attempting to address several agency requirements of meeting service agendas and partnerships responsibilities, while contending with the

demands of a bureaucratic structure, has presented barriers for partnership development.

In their case partnerships have become a further drain to their agencies limited resources:

*“We can’t expect, you know, agencies to spend that much time on community coordination when its pulling people away from direct client services that are needed by those clients or when administrative work is required to run the facility” (Informant 1).*

Another noted that the conflicting demands have meant little progress in terms of partnership development and program development for their agency:

*“Redefining mandates and leaving service gaps and those gaps continue today. I think there’s been some recognition at some level that they needed to undo that damage or what was lost. So I think there’s some sense that collaboration was the way to do this. Unfortunately, these collaborations haven’t necessarily achieved their purpose yet, maybe it’s too early to say that Ministerial collaboration funding has had great results” (Informant 2).*

#### ***A) Less Innovation more Consistency***

Through the stories of the informants, I learned that during the planning stages of this restructuring there was a perceived excitement over the freedom smaller and more rural communities could have in developing services for children and families along with services that are more consistent with Aboriginal culture and traditions. Despite the excitement over innovative services, the new focus on efficiency and government partnership models has created “artificial relationships that are often based on routinized and technocratic processes that are conflictual and stifle such creativity”(McGrath, Moffatt, George and Lee, 2003). This study suggested that much of this innovation has been put secondary to the drive towards consistency of services across the province. The following two quotes make this point:

*“Partnerships used to be able to fit more community’s particular needs, there was more freedom ... now I am kind of waiting for a collaborative call to come to do those things, so now the motivation is different” (Informant 2).*

*“Gee! You used to be able to do it that way now you’re telling us because such and such a community does this, we all have to do it this way.” (Informant 4).*

An additional barrier is that “partnerships that are imposed externally tend to be limited to the specific funding project or program. “This can often result in tensions between these structures that shape such initiatives and the ideas that guide them”(Shragge, 2003, p.40) resulting in an inability to apply programs to particular community or agency needs:

*“So CFSA may have certain marginalized populations to focus on, but, if health doesn’t have the same type of funding or maybe the medical community as well they may be independent of the planning process, well, that’s fine, plan all you guys want but we’re not part of the collaboration so we don’t see a huge need to change how we’re going to do things. So it causes some difficulties I think because everybody already feels resourced out and do not want to hear do more” (Informant 2).*

It would seem that these partnerships are restricted in their missions and abilities to implement services that are reflective of Aboriginal cultural traditions and services for other minority/marginalized populations. In speaking with the five key informants, it became evident that the original CFSA goal of increasing and ensuring Aboriginal and specialized services has proven a challenge, the blame being put to a lack of resources.

*“I think there’s the issue in terms of delays identifying working with marginalized populations the other issue is then you get different Ministries who would find different groups as their priorities to get addressed first. So certain populations need help but they get more lip service because what they’re feeling is that another area we need to focus on we don’t have the dollars to do it. So I think there’s probably a certain sense of focus on this area but we don’t have the funding to set up specialized programming.” (Informant 5).*

***B) The role of power in determining whose agenda has priority***

What compromises are made when entering into partnerships with socially and economically stronger partners? Who has the power? What interests are being served? One of the informants talked about how the amalgamation of her program under the Ministry of Children's Services has resulted in important implications for their services. This informant's comment suggested a belief that, as long as funding is generated through Children's Services, the services their agency delivers would have to demonstrate a particular focus on the needs of children and youth that is not rooted in the perspective of the local community. This has meant that it has been difficult to maintain funding that is specific to the needs of their clientele:

*"Because we are under the Ministry of Children's Services there's no acknowledgement that women have needs or that adults have needs even you know there's no such thing as a dependent adult event temporarily in this province the only people that its legitimate to help is either juveniles or severely handicapped people" (Informant 3).*

The focus shifted from what their service was originally intended to be, to a focus on the needs of children and youth. It is not that the needs of the former are more worthy or important than those of the latter. The issue is that in this case, the original purpose has become slightly distorted by the partnership imperative. "Perhaps, until the partnership is truly reciprocal, the partnership will be skewed to one side, with the community sector as a very small player" (Shragge, 2003, p. 114).

**C) Commitment to partnerships or commitment to services?**

As was mentioned above, several of stories suggest that the demand to partner has become very overwhelming and time consuming having the potential to take away from

the agency's ability to focus on services. This has meant a spilt between the community partners where several informants identify the development and maintenance of community partnerships as their priority, while others identify the maintenance of their agency's services as the priority. This split in focus can bring about misunderstandings and unpleasantness between the partners.

*"So we had the various agencies who were saying to the Ministry, just give us your \$152, 000 as our committee's allotment for this region and we'll do some nice programs here, there, everywhere. We said "No!" the purpose of these funds is to develop those relationships between frontline staff, between managers, boards and have a certain level of understanding of what each does, why we do it and how we work together more cohesively" (Informant 4).*

*"So we've invited our staff and their staff to sit down one day and meet each other, tell each other a little bit about what they do, what programs do they offer, just get an understanding of what they do. Our staff was keen and came with fancy little presentations and gave lots of information and their staff came and went all day long. So we realized there's definitely something that we're not quite catching with this agency" (Informant 4).*

It also must be noted that this difference of focus could simply be attributed to an inability to perform both service duties and partnership duties. The following informant discusses how exhausting this is:

*"It is a big job just to run the programs never mind going to all these meetings and doing all this advocacy, we spend a lot of time on those things and it would be nice not to have to spend that much time and be able to focus on clients" (Informant 3).*

#### **IV. Optimism Exists**

Although this paper demonstrates the many struggles this community is facing to partner, each of the informants made very optimistic comments suggesting a belief that government partnership initiatives will prove beneficial to their community.

*“So this is a little harder but maybe the benefits will be greater in the end. Yes the benefits possibly could be greater in the end” (Informant 4).*

*“I think the partnerships have contributed to more of the . . . supportive approach to working with families. More supportive than going in and imposing different types of services on families who labelled as neglectful or abusive or perceived to be neglectful or abusive. I think the partnerships have contributed to more working together with families as opposed to imposing services on them” (Informant 1).*

The initial reaction to change for most people is a defensive stance asking questions of why and how. The next step has seemed to include a degree of acceptance and commitment to the process. Although this is so, the former still causes implications within the partnership. Several of the informants were able to identify positive and successful partnerships within their community:

*“A successful collaboration is student health initiative. Part of the success in that is because they allowed the needs for that type of a service identified through projects in the province so there was more political buy in by the different agencies who worked together to identify the needs. But I don’t think that we would have gotten off the ground at all if there hadn’t been that potential to have a partnership” (Informant 2).*

In discussing the government’s use of partnership initiative grants, one informant states:

*“ So some of this is just spin-offs of the fact that there’s a pot of money the pot have given us a reason to collaborate further” (Informant 5).*

Another informant identified the benefits partnerships have for staff training allowing for coordinated and resourceful educational opportunities:

*“Pairing with the CFSA meant we were able to bring some state of the art trainers here for joint training” (Informant 3).*

Another demonstrated an additional motive to form partnerships:

*“Partnerships can be used to advocate for services with other agencies and to gain understanding of each other” (Informant 3).*

## V. Analysis

“Not only was the welfare state cutback, but more fundamentally, there was an ideological shift. With the state no longer as the primary social provider, the market and the community are sharing the responsibilities. Now new relationships between the community agencies and the government have resulted” (Shragge, p. 31). Within the context of a government driven by economic and political notions of accountability and consistency we catch sight of a community contending with the pressures to partner. New relationships between community agencies have emerged resulting in partnerships that are less frequently based upon goodwill and cooperation, and, are replaced with partnerships that are defined by their funders. It is difficult to see these partnerships as community based.

With Ministry involved in many of these partnership initiatives, the informants talked about a loss of natural and informal working relationships that had been identified as beneficial prior to their formalization. Generally, forced partnerships are not necessarily reflective of a natural relationship or the “ideal” partnership model mentioned by Brinkerhoff (2002) who suggests that, partnerships need to be based upon mutuality, equality, transparency and accountability. The informant’s stories demonstrate how the qualities of an “ideal” partnership can be lost in partnerships enforced by the government. As McKnight (1995) suggests, “the informality of community is expressed through relationships that are not managed (p. 70) and where informal communication takes place, there are transactions of value without the use of money, advertising or hype (p. 170). He believes that, “care emerges with such authentic relationships”(McKnight, 1995. p.171).

McKnight's comments seem to me, to align with the feelings of these informants in that they have a sense of loss over the informal relationships because these partnerships are now stifled in the bureaucratic process.

Through a look at centralization strategies it would seem that several partnerships have developed out of Ministry requirements to coordinate and merge regions and services. Several of the informants suggested that these partnership initiatives are tied to decentralization policies that could involve the eventual downloading of financial responsibilities to the community. Therefore, this study ties the loss of informal relationships with major social service restructuring, boundary changes, goal displacement and competition for resources. With this notion, we can connect formalized partnerships to business/management theory. With partnerships based upon the business/management theory, it becomes possible to state that partnership initiatives serve a larger government cost efficiency plan, whereby, partnerships are developed to enable communities to be more self-sustaining so that the government can eventually download all the responsibility of social programs onto the community.

Drawing upon the findings of this study and literature, it becomes comprehensible to state that, community partnerships have been taken up by the government who are now applying pro-market values to them. On the whole, it would seem that these partnerships are under new pressures to structure themselves in accordance with government standards and to demonstrate outcomes and efficiency. "While principles of accountability and consistency can be good things, the extent that they can stifle innovation and the delivery of services for various cultures and populations is worth further exploration" (Crook



2001, p.4). As the informants acknowledged, this focus has hindered innovative and community based programs. Taking a closer look at the benefits of their informal partnerships, there seems evidence to suggest that community agencies are in a better position to understand the collaborative relations that would be most fruitful and that take up the least amount of energy. Through a look at the dismantling of several community partnerships and Aboriginal services we can see that the drive for consistency, with its one-size fits all notion is actually counter productive, as it negates the energy and local knowledge of community based agencies.

When looking at the benefits of such informal partnerships, it seems valid to suggest that the government maintain its distance to allow communities the freedom to outline how the partnerships develop, with whom, by whom, and, the identifying roles that these partnerships will play in developing community programs and delivering services. With this in mind, it is important to remember that the local capacity to remain completely fiscally responsible for social services is unlikely. Therefore, it may be important to measure and balance the positive features of decentralization, which could be local power and control, with the benefit of centralization (federal cost sharing and regulations), which will bring the community the necessary resources and regulatory consistencies and protections.

The stories, and all three of the themes overlap each impacting upon the other. This becomes clear when we look at the Community Partnership and Enhancement Fund. From the perspective of the community stakeholders, this government initiative was expected to promote better working relationships but, as a result of an exhausted public

service sector feeling the impacts of resource reallocation and restructuring policies, although close, this goal has not yet been realized. Interestingly however, even though there have been barriers in reaching this goal, the majority of the informants are very optimistic, and support the government's process.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

The restructuring of Child and Family Services in Alberta, along with the influence of global market economy and Alberta's neo-liberal political agenda has resulted in dramatic alteration in the nature and form of social service partnerships in rural communities. The community focused on in this paper, is currently struggling with the experience of previous government cutbacks, restructuring initiatives and priorities and a redistribution of resources. The Alberta government clearly identifies the strengths in community work and community collaboration as the method for meeting the needs of children, youth and families with a focus on establishing and enhancing existing partnerships (CFSA, 2004). The community studied genuinely shares these values. "Experience, research, and recent consultations tell us that the way to influence communities is through relationships of mutual benefit"(CFSA, 2000). This mutually shared value in community-based services and healthy children, youth and families can act as the glue between the government and the communities in this delegated and decentralized model. Although this may be so, it must be kept in mind that, because of its power, the role of the government within these community-based partnerships, cannot go

unrecognized, as it has the potential to shift control and create competition between the partners.

It is important at this time that the barriers to partnerships suggested by the research participants be recognized, and, that the community regain some of its independence and power in order to be able to harness their strengths and benefit from these government initiatives by developing innovative programs. Additionally, in attempts to resist bureaucratic structures within these partnerships, it is worth looking back at what McKnight (1995) points out; “whenever communities come to believe that their common knowledge is illegitimate, they lose their power and professionals and systems rapidly invade their social place” (McKnight, pg 171). In order to meet the needs of their community, critical reflection and the belief in the strengths and assets of their community will help to maintain working relationships and innovation. Communities function best when they are able to harness these strengths within themselves and work together (McKnight & Kretzman, 1993). As Shragge (2003) importantly points out, “without critical reflection we are doomed to fall into patterns defined by those with resources, and, in the process we lose our vision of what we are trying to do in the first place” (Shragge, p 41).

The more the decision making, power and responsibility for outcomes is shared, the more meaningful the partnership is and the more effective the partnership is in addressing its objectives (Wunrow & Einspruch, 2001). Based on this idea several steps can be taken to ensure community success including:

- Decreasing the dependence of the community on the Ministry and government by increasing community strengths through the development of community based partnerships,
- By gaining the support of several key community people,
- Through involving a diverse base of community people in program, planning and evaluation and,
- Ensuring that agency partners exist at all levels of the structure.

“Through community organizing, people can learn to shape decisions in organizations that touch their lives and to exert pressure to create responsiveness from different levels of government” (Shragge, p 42). The problem arises when there are stronger and more influential partners who control the way in which the partnerships within the community operate. When we look at the story of the School Community Partnership teams in Northern Alberta, and the fact that one community has maintained this initiative by maintaining independence, we see the importance of community control. This study has demonstrated that these partnerships can be successful as long as there is the identification of community strengths, goodwill, mutuality, equal power distribution, and shared resources.

### **Future Directions**

Qualitative studies offer vital in depth information and guide further questions to be studied. This study can be used as a guide and duplicated for other communities focusing on partnership initiatives. As well, it would be helpful to offer the Ministry and

local community agencies the opportunity to review this study as a source of information for how one particular community is coping and organizing their partnerships, while contending with restructuring policies, business philosophies and bureaucratic imperatives.

Are formalized community based partnerships beneficial to the community? Are they beneficial to meeting agency core missions? How can informal partnerships be sustained in a province contending with their formalization? These are just a few of the questions that have resulted from this study. I believe that through answering some of these questions, communities will be more capable of addressing barriers to partnerships and contending with government policies and procedures that are inconsistent with their community based philosophy and stifle their potential for innovative and responsive services.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Letter of Information**

#### **From State to Community: Restructuring of Social Services and its Impact on Community Based Partnerships**

December 1, 2004

Dear Sir or Madam:

My name is Wendy Jebb Waples, I am currently a graduate student at McMaster University in Social Welfare Policy and a former resident of (this community), the place I call home. As you may or may not be aware, I have worked in (this community) as a Family and School Liaison, a youth worker and a Child Protection Worker, and continue to have a vested interest in the community's social welfare.

In partial fulfillment of my MSW, I am seeking to complete a research project that will help you, me and hopefully the community gain a stronger understanding of the function of partnerships between the Ministry, Child and Family Services Authority and other community agencies. It is also my hopes that this project will reveal additional recommendations that may aid in strengthening these partnerships. Lastly, I believe that this project could provide helpful insights about community partnerships to other child welfare systems.

As an organization that seeks to enhance the well-being of the community, I am requesting about one hour of your time to talk about partnerships and collaborative efforts with Child & Family Services Authority. I have attached a letter of information, which clarifies this project and what your role could be. If you have any further questions and/or wish to participate, please contact me via phone, email or letter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Wendy Jebb Waples

## **Letter of Information**

Currently, much of Canada is seeking alternative responses to the delivery of child welfare services. Alberta's Response is unique in that it focuses on a collaborative response to child and family well-being at a community level, through incorporating preventative services, supportive services and protective services. Today, the need for community partnerships has become increasingly more important to rural social service agencies due to funding cuts, issues of accessibility and the need to ensure appropriate services to racialized populations.

The purpose of this research is to explore the relationships between the Child & Family Services Agency and the local community organizations that aid in contributing to child and family well-being. The central questions being: How do the formal and informal community partnerships function within the community and with the CFSA towards enhancing child, family and community well-being? Do community partnerships aid towards sustaining community run child welfare agencies? What are the further recommendations? (Interview guide is attached). Overall, this project will be a qualitative piece that seeks to uncover perceptions and understandings about how this model has developed and is functioning from the perspective of partnerships and collaborative efforts.

Your participation in this research will be kept confidential. Every care will be taken to respect your privacy; no names will be used, and there will be no direct connections made between what you have said and your organization. If you choose to participate you will be involved in a one time interview that will be approximately one hour to one and a half hours in length. Your interview will be audio taped, the audio tape will be securely kept at my home and returned to you upon the completion of the research paper. You will maintain the right to withdraw your participation in this study at any time. In the event that you choose to withdraw, all information you have provided will be returned to you.

You will receive a written report of the findings of this research. I will also make myself available to formally present the findings to the community. This project has been reviewed and received clearance by the McMaster Research Ethics Board. Should you have any questions about your participation in this study, you may contact this Board at (905) 525-9140 ext. 24765.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Consent Form**

#### **From State to Community: Restructuring of Social Services and its Impact on Community Based Partnerships**

I agree to take part in this study of community partnerships and the Peace River Child & Family Services Authority. I have been fully informed about this study and I understand its purpose.

I understand that Wendy Jebb Waples is the principle investigator of this study, and that her actions in this capacity are being supervised by Dr. Bill Lee (faculty member of the McMaster School of Social Work).

I am willing to take part in a one interview that will last approximately one hour and am agreeable to having this interview audiotaped and transcribed. I understand that I may decline to answer any particular questions. I also understand that I may access any information that I have provided at any time.

I understand that I can choose to withdraw from this study at any time and that, if I do, any information I have provided, including audiotapes or notes will be returned to me.

I understand that my name and organization will not be directly or explicitly connected with any comments I have made, and that the intention of the research is not to divulge who says what, but, to look at the underlying dynamics of community partnerships and the Child Welfare system.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

### **APPENDIX 3**

#### **CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES CONSENT**

Research Applicant(s):

CC: Proposals File

Proposal Screener: Dennis Whitford

Date: March 31, 2005

#### **REGARDING: Research for Masters of Social Work Thesis**

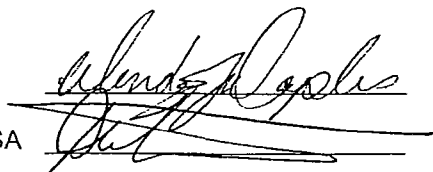
The following terms and conditions are attached to the research for Masters of Social Work Thesis entitled "From State to Community: The role of community partnerships in a newly decentralized Child Welfare Agency" to be undertaken by Wendy Jebb Waples.

- 1) The research will conform to Ethics requirements as set out by McMaster University Ethics Board (MREB).
- 2) The research will respect the confidentiality of children, parents, staff, teams, offices and other entities attached to Region 8 Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority.
- 3) The research will be in agreement with policy as set out by Region 8, Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority.
- 4) The research will be carried out in such a way as to be least disruptive to service provision by staff at Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority. Time required of respondents will not exceed two hours per respondent.
- 5) The research report will be reviewed by the Region 8 Northwest Alberta Child and Family Services Authority, Communications Manager prior to being submitted for publication.
- 6) Research questions asked of Peace River office child and family services authority staff will be the same as or similar to those on the Interview Guide submitted to Dennis Whitford, CFSA Manager, in a letter dated December 31, 2004.
- 7) The research will be consistent with Freedom of information and protection of privacy legislation (FOIP).

Signed:

Wendy Jebb Waples, MSW Student

Dennis Whitford, Senior Mngr Northwest, CFSA

The image shows two handwritten signatures. The top signature is in cursive and appears to read 'Wendy Jebb Waples'. The bottom signature is also in cursive and appears to read 'Dennis Whitford'. Both signatures are written in dark ink over a horizontal line.

## **APPENDIX 4**

### **INTERVIEW GUIDE**

#### **From State to Community: Restructuring of Social Services and its Impact on Community Based Partnerships**

Preamble: Questions to be asked in the interviews are listed below.

- What partnerships exist? Are they formal or informal partnerships?
- How were the partnerships developed? How did the process go for you or your agency?
- How are the partnerships working? Are these partnerships contributing to enhancing child, family and community well-being?
- Why do you think they are working this way?
- What recommendations do you have?