

Child Welfare League of Canada  
Ligue pour le bien-être de l'enfance du Canada

# Canada's Children...

# Les enfants du Canada

Summer/été 1998

**Child Welfare in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
Innovations, Transformations, Revolutions**

**Le Bien-être des enfants au 21<sup>e</sup> siècle:  
Défis et innovations**





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Susan Sullivan

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**PROTECTION DE L'ENFANCE  
ET MORTALITÉ JUVÉNILE**

Si vous avez une idée pour un texte ou disposez d'un article d'intérêt, veuillez communiquer avec le bureau de la LBEC ou envoyer un message électronique à [sullivan@magi.com](mailto:sullivan@magi.com)

La date de tombée pour soumettre un article est le 16 octobre 1998.

**NEXT ISSUE**

**CHILD PROTECTION  
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We welcome submissions for our next issue of *Canada's Children*.

If you have a story idea or article of interest, please contact the CWLC office or e-mail: [sullivan@magi.com](mailto:sullivan@magi.com)

The copy deadline is October 16, 1998.

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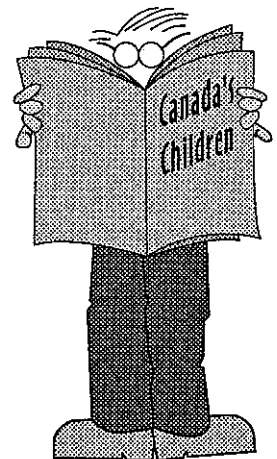


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## Measuring Outcomes in Child Welfare:

# A Canadian Framework

BY BARBARA FALLON, BRUCE MACLAURIN AND NICO TROCMÉ

**T**he *Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project* developed in a context of growing public concern about the safety and well-being of children, increasing government requirements for service accountability, and increasing challenges for agencies to develop better, more effective services.

The project was initiated in January 1997 by the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare, in conjunction with the Employability and Social Partnerships division of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). Its purpose is developing a coordinated approach to assessing the effectiveness of child welfare services and policies across Canada.

The project's main goals are to:

- 1) describe and assess the state of knowledge about outcomes and measurement systems; and
- 2) initiate a national consensus-building process to come up with a common framework for assessing child welfare outcomes.

A multi-university research team has led this project, assisted by a national advisory committee, and the project is slated to end this September.

The following issues were identified by the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare as a rationale for the project:

- lack of agreement on what key outcomes should be for child welfare;
- lack of agreement on what an effective outcome monitoring system should look like; and
- difficulties of current information systems in adequately measuring and reporting outcomes.

The need to explore the use of multiple indicators when evaluating the effectiveness of child welfare services was highlighted by the Directors in order to avoid reliance on single indicators, such as placement rates or family preservation.

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*Various stakeholders have different views about the principal objectives of Canada's child welfare system. Consequently, there is no consensus on what the child-related outcomes should be.*

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Developing useful, valid, and reliable methods for assessing child welfare service outcomes requires addressing a combination of methodological, political, and practical issues which have hampered past evaluation efforts. Various stakeholders have different views about the principal objectives of Canada's child welfare system. Consequently, there is no consensus on what the child-related outcomes should be. Determining the objectives of our child welfare system and the indicators that should be used to measure these objectives is first and foremost an issue for public policy.

### Background

In order to coordinate and build on the work currently being done in Canada and internationally, the *Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project* initially focused on determining what has already been developed. This was done by reviewing the literature, interviewing key informants, and examining provincial legislation, policy docu-

ments, and information/monitoring systems.

We identified a number of key objectives which guide child welfare policy and practice. These fall under four domains: child protection, child functioning, family functioning, and continuity and permanence.

The literature review resulted in an inventory of over 60 outcome initiatives across Canada. (This inventory can be viewed by visiting the Bell Canada Child Welfare Website at <http://cwr.utoronto.ca>)

Three distinct areas of outcome development and utilization were apparent:

- direct client measures;
- systems-based indicators; and
- intervention and ecological research.

Direct client measures are those instruments that measure a change in the child or family, such as the Child Behaviour Checklist. Systems-based indicators are usually collected by the child welfare system and when used in meaningful ways and in combination with other indicators, these indicators can provide information. Intervention research is scientific research used to evaluate program effectiveness. Ecological research addresses the context in which many of the children and families involved in the child welfare system live.

### Need for Coordinated Approach

While the discovery of the wealth of outcome initiatives in Canada was exciting, the project also documented the growing consensus around the need for a coordinated approach in developing information and monitoring systems — not only in child welfare but in all services involving children. The fed-

## Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit

<http://cwr.utoronto.ca>

The mission of the Bell Canada Child Welfare Research Unit (located at the University of Toronto Faculty of Social Work) is to evaluate and disseminate effective and innovative child welfare services and "best practices" aimed at preventing child abuse and neglect.

A BCCRU Website is part of the "virtual centre" to help link agency, government and university child welfare researchers and practitioners. This site is intended to help coordinate research activities and facilitate access to Canadian state-of-the-art research and practice expertise.

eral government's recently-announced National Children's Agenda also addresses the need for integration and collaboration.

The *Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project* examined two measurement systems developed using very different outcome models: the British, clinically-driven Looking After Children (LAC) model and the American, information management driven State Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

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*There is growing consensus around the need for coordinated information and monitoring systems — not only in child welfare but in all services involving children.*

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The LAC instruments were designed to help improve case management by monitoring the progress of children in foster care and in group homes. The instruments rely primarily on qualitative measures that were developed using the literature on optimal child development and the effects of growing up in care. The qualitative components of the instruments cannot be easily summarized into scores that could be aggregated on a program basis.

The SACWIS was designed to generate information that could be used to

evaluate program effectiveness. It uses system-based indicators organized under outcome domains delineated by the American Humane Association's outcome framework. Although the SACWIS is useful for management purposes, it does not measure clinically meaningful client outcomes.

### Consensus Building

One of the more interesting findings from the review was the roundtable initiative undertaken by the American Humane Association (AHA) and the National Association of Public Child Welfare Administrators (NAPCWA). In 1993, AHA and NAPCWA committed to sponsoring five roundtables on outcomes measurement in child welfare. The initiative recognized the need to collectively address the issues associated with the design, implementation and utilization of meaningful client-focused measures of service effectiveness.

Using a similar model, *The First Canadian Roundtable on Child Welfare Outcomes* was held in Toronto on March 19 and 20, 1998 (and jointly funded by HRDC, Bell Canada and the Provincial/Territorial Directors of Child Welfare). The Roundtable presented the recommendations of Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project and began to develop consensus on which indicators should be regularly collected and monitored for the Canadian child protection system. A total of 78 participants from across the country attended this two-day conference and

the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Roundtable participants were presented with the findings from the *Client Outcomes in Child Welfare Project* and heard a dozen presentations about a number of outcome initiatives. There were three break-out sessions for small group discussions. Two small groups discussed the development and use of clinical measures and ecological and intervention research. They agreed that there is not yet a need for a nationally-led research strategy in these areas but that national information-sharing and collaboration should continue.

A third group discussed the selection and measurement of systems-based indicators and concluded that a national strategy for coordinating the collection of comparable data is essential. A selection of indicators proposed by the project was discussed and endorsed as an initial framework for pilot testing.

### Outcome Indicators Matrix Pilot Project

An initial draft of the Matrix of Indicators was prepared for the *First Canadian Roundtable of Child Welfare Outcomes*. The matrix was designed to frame the collection of child welfare outcome data across Canada. The *Matrix of Indicators* was well received by participants, which is quite an accomplishment given the significant variations in child welfare legislation and service delivery systems across the country. The *Matrix* provides a first step in an information-sharing and outcomes-coordinating process. We hope to be able to continue developing this process in future round tables.

The *Matrix of Indicators* uses a number of readily-available indicators to measure a number of critical child welfare areas. This multiple indicator approach avoids many of the pitfalls identified with single indicator evaluations (such as the reliance on a single indicator such as placement rates or rates of reunification to determine policy and services) while using data that is readily available in most jurisdictions.