



Laidlaw Foundation's Perspective on Social Inclusion

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**CCSD Conference
What Do We Know and Where Do We Go?
Building a Social Inclusion Research Agenda**

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Mr. Robert Laidlaw established the Laidlaw Foundation in Toronto in 1949 as a private foundation. The Laidlaw family generated its wealth in a vertically organized lumber business in Ontario. There is no family connection to the yellow school bus transport or waste disposal trucks of Laidlaw Inc. The family's remaining corporate interests were sold in mid 70s.

In addition to the Children's Agenda program the Foundation's other programs are:

- Creating New Works in the Performing Arts
- Environmental Contaminants and Child Health
- Youth Engagement
- Youth Recreation Initiative

Each Program has a staff co-ordinator guided by an advisory committee.

I invite you to turn to the Foundation's website www.laidlawfdn.org for more information on the Foundation and its programs.

Child well being (the welfare of children and youth from a multi-disciplinary child development perspective) has always been a core program focus for the Foundation. In the 1990s the Foundation established its Children at Risk program - a seven year multi-million dollar Foundation driven initiative that was organized into three units, research, practice and policy.

Through the Children at Risk Program the Foundation played a leadership role in advancing new ways of thinking and acting to improve the well being of children. The Foundation adopted and promoted a life chances framework for child development. This framework recognized that multiple influences shape the social prospects and life outcomes of children through predictable development transitions. It challenged public policy to move away from a "casualty" approach to children's well being, to focus on strengths, assets and capabilities.

In 2000, the Foundation adopted Social Inclusion as a new strategic and conceptual focus for its Children's Agenda Program (with a significantly smaller budget than the CAR program).

The program seeks:¹

- To re-frame the debate about poverty, vulnerability and the well-being of children in order to highlight the social dimensions of poverty (e.g., the inability to participate fully in the community);
- To link poverty and economic vulnerability with other sources of exclusion such as racism, disability, rejection of difference and historic oppression;
- To find common ground in the struggle for solidarity among those who have been marginalized and alter the more conventional concern about bringing the "outsider" in, leading to an examination of into what the marginalized and vulnerable are being included. Inclusion is not about assimilation. Inclusion if dynamic, must change what is at the centre.

Social Inclusion is viewed as a social lens through which to understand social well being, equality and citizenship. Valued recognition is central to this understanding, as are notions of social and economic proximity and participation.

We recognize that Social and Economic Inclusion is a complex and challenging concept that can not be reduced to a single dimension or meaning.

In 2000, the Foundation commissioned a series of working papers (all the papers can be downloaded from the Foundation's web site www.laidlawfdn.org) to examine social and economic inclusion from a number of perspectives. In November 2001 Laidlaw Foundation and CCSD co-sponsored a National Conference in Ottawa called *A New Way of Thinking? Toward a Vision of Social Inclusion*. The Decision to focus on inclusive cities and communities grew out of that conference.

- It is in cities and communities that children and their parents first experience social inclusion or exclusion. The well being of children and families are closely linked to the civic quality or "social commons" of their neighbourhood.
- It is in cities and commentates that we find public services and share public spaces that advance social inclusion - parks, libraries, recreation programs. Cities offer the benefits of both social and physical proximity

¹ I want to acknowledge that in preparing my remarks I have borrowed liberally from internal documents previously prepared by Christa Freiler.

- It is in the cities and communities that we find the commitment to social change - in community groups, social planning councils, settlement houses, associations for community living, etc.

In 2002, the Program saw an opportunity to introduce a strong social dimension into the debate about "a new deal for cities" and establish an important connection with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. The Foundation supported the FCM to develop a paper on "*A National Social Infrastructure Strategy for Canadian Municipalities*" based on the social inclusion framework.

- Community soundings were organized in 11 cities across Canada during the summer and fall of 2002,
- The findings of these community soundings were documented and formed the basis of a report that was prepared for the FCM entitled, *Building Inclusive Communities: Cross-Canada Perspectives and Strategies*,
- A FCM-Laidlaw Roundtable on Social Inclusion brought together municipal politicians and officials, community leaders and officials from the federal government and representatives from national organizations was held in December 2002,
- Early in 2003, a Foundation grant was made to the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse to develop and pilot test a social and economic inclusion tool kit in a number of Ontario cities. Health Canada's Population Health Fund Branch (Ontario Region) is providing most of the project funding,
- In addition, grants were made to the Canadian Association for Community Living to support the development of a Knowledge Network on Inclusive Education; to the Canadian Policy Research Networks in support of their Urban Priorities Roundtable, and to Campaign 2000 to enable it to continue its important work across Canada and promote social and economic inclusion for all families and children.

Where are we going from here?

Some possibilities:

- A three-year project entitled, *Cross-Canada Civic Initiatives on Building Inclusive Communities*, has been submitted by community social planning councils in four cities (St. John, Greater Toronto Area, Edmonton, Vancouver) and the FCM to HRDC and the Laidlaw Foundation. The project will create strategic horizontal

alliances linking civic panels in four distinct urban regions to develop a common understanding of social inclusion and enable each community to develop their own set of strategies for building inclusive communities,

-The communication and dissemination strategy for the working paper series, an important intellectual contribution of the Foundation, will be broadened. Additional working papers may be commissioned,

- A particular policy area may be selected for application of social inclusion framework, e.g. income security, child welfare, integration of children with disabilities, etc.
- Work is needed to develop a set or sets of social inclusion indicators. The Roeher Institute and the CCSD, with support from the Laidlaw Foundation, convened a first meeting in March with representatives from the Canadian Association for Community Living, the Ontario Prevention Clearinghouse, the federal government's Policy Research Initiative, HRDC's Applied Research Branch, Health Canada's Population Health Branch, Toronto Public Health Department, the Canadian Association of Friendship Centres and others to initiate work on such a project. A follow up meeting is being planned.

Before completing my remarks I want to pay tribute to Christa Freiler, who has brought the Foundation's Children's Agenda program this far and will be leaving the Foundation at the end of April. Christa, with the support of the Children's Agenda Program Advisory Committee has in a very short period of time has put the social inclusion perspective on the Canadian social policy map. We all value the significance of her contribution.