Self-Care: An Ethical Imperative

As social workers, we are often so focused on helping others, we fail to care for, nourish and replenish ourselves in order to mitigate the occupational hazards of our profession and thrive within our work.

(full article on page 04) >>
From the BCASW Office

On Board for 2011

WORDS | LINDA KORBIN, MSW RSW, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The BCASW Board is comprised of eighteen members who are responsible for the overall governance and direction of the association. Each year, according to our Bylaws, one half of the positions come up for election to a two-year term. This allows the Board to undergo continuous renewal, while also maintaining continuity.

Our new Board is a microcosm of our membership, mirroring the remarkable diversity that underpins our profession. From a third-year social work student to retirees, our Board is comprised of members with backgrounds in health care, child welfare, education, the not-for-profit sector, research, community development and private practice. The composition of our new Board also reflects the diverse culture of our province. Importantly, it incorporates the voices and perspectives of students and recently graduated social workers, newly embarking on their careers. Together, it’s a Board whose wisdom and experience intersect with fresh ideas, energy, spirit and vision — vitally important at such a critical time for social work.

With a budget that allows for just one professional staff and one administrative staff, BCASW is primarily a volunteer-based association. In our time-challenged lives, finding the time to devote to volunteer work of any kind is remarkable, and I want to thank each and every one of our Board and Committee members for their participation, as well as all the members who keep the branch activities rolling. What keeps them engaged? Just like you, they want our profession to be valued, influential and well understood. They know that social workers truly make a difference in people’s lives, and they are also aware of the threats to our profession from budget cuts, encroachment by other professions, changing demographics, quality of work life concerns, etc. They recognize how crucial it is to have a strong professional association that represents our interests, as well as the interests of those we serve. We need more volunteers just like them — on our committees, as media spokespersons, planning local professional development events, you name it!

And if you cannot volunteer your time, thank you for your membership support. People frequently ask what the differences are between the two social work organizations in BC, BCASW and BCCSW — the BC College of Social Workers. Each plays a distinct but essential role. The sole function of the BCCSW is to protect the public and BCASW strongly advocates that social workers be registered with BCCSW. The role of BCASW is to support our members and the profession with a variety of services (including mentoring, continuing education, communications, insurance and other benefits), promote the profession and advocate for social justice. It’s a lot to do without your help! If you are interested in becoming actively involved, we would love to hear from you.
Self-Care for Social Workers
A precious commodity, an ethical imperative

I had the privilege of presenting Remembering YOU: The Art of Self-Care for Social Workers at the recent BCASW conference in Vancouver. This article highlights three key themes from the conference session and is intended to provide you with information, inspiration, as well as reflective exercises for your own unique self-care and wellness journey as a professional social worker. In addition to exploring self-care at the individual level, the article concludes with a call to action for a multi-level response to enhancing the wellness and quality of work-life for social workers.

SELF-CARE: THE ETHICAL IMPERATIVE
During the course of both my BSW and MSW studies, I recall hearing how important self-care is to being a social worker. Despite this, in my near twenty year social work career to date, I have noticed very little ongoing support, training, or mentoring for enhancing or ensuring self-care among social workers, and I have heard many social work peers voice similar observations.

I believe self-care is an ethical imperative for social workers given the innate occupational hazards relevant within our field including job stress, professional burnout, vicarious trauma and compassion fatigue (Kahn, 2005; Figley; Maslach, 1982; Rothschild, B. & Rand, M., 2006; Saakvitne, K. & Pearlman, L., 1996). For many social workers, the nature of the work itself often involves three elements — high stress, high trauma (direct or indirect), and high touch (high emotion with emotional labour/caring being a key task within many social work roles).

Self-care, the way a person tends to their emotional, psychological, physical, and spiritual well-being, becomes foundational to maintaining health and wellness as a social worker, since it serves to mitigate the occupational hazards relevant within the social work profession. Therefore, it needs to be a top priority for both individuals and the profession at large.

Too often in the helping fields we focus on the tasks at hand and the intense human needs before us, rather than thinking about how we must take care of ourselves if our self, the healing agent, is to thrive for decades within our work (Skovholt, 2001, p.119).

While many individuals experience job stress, it is critical to keep in mind that as social workers we are the tool of our trade — our perspective, mindset, problem solving skills, decision making capacity, analytical skills, empathetic engagement, non-judgemental presence, cognitive abilities, compassionate regard, emotional boundaries, deep listening, and human kindness form the heart and foundation for our work. Who we are being, along with what we are doing, informs the quality, engagement and performance within our various social work roles as well as within our respective workplaces.

Thomas M. Skovholt, author of The Resilient Practitioner (2001), offers:

“Exhausted when saying yes, guilty when saying no — it is between giving and taking, between other-care and self-care. This is the universal dilemma in the human drama. It is just more intense for those in the high touch fields. It gets highly illuminated when intense interaction is the occupational core. Here, giving of oneself is the constant requirement for success. Caring for others is the precious commodity.”

I believe self-care among social workers is also a ‘precious commodity’, as well as an ethical imperative.

Reflective Exercise: Do you agree that self-care is an ethical imperative? If yes, why do you agree with this statement? If no, why do you disagree with this statement? Free write your response (write/journal for 10 minutes and include your thoughts, feelings, reactions, and opinions related to your answer to this reflective question).

AN INTEGRATED & HOLISTIC APPROACH TO SELF-CARE AND STRESS REDUCTION
Self-care is fundamentally about the ways we show up on our own behalf to care for, nourish, and replenish the Self, while also actively working to reduce and heal stress effects. Since job stress and burnout (the accumulation of occupational stress over time) are commonly cited occupational hazards within the social work profession, stress benefits from a closer look.

According to Health Canada (2009), stress and stress-related symptoms account for 85% of all visits to doctors — stress is therefore a serious population health issue. Specifically, stress and mental health issues, including anxiety and depression, are frequently cited reasons for employee absenteeism, as well as both short and long-term disability claims within the health, human and social services sectors.

Some stress is positive (this is called ‘eustress’) and it can be energizing and motivating, even inspiring at times. Distress, the type of stress that causes...
the fight or flight response in the body, can lead to anxiety, depression, burnout and a wide range of symptoms and disease. Persistent levels of any type of stress over time can cause a wide range of negative physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual effects, including the following:

**Physical**: headaches, muscle aches, gastrointestinal problems, sleeping difficulties/fatigue, weight loss/gain

**Emotional**: frustrated, irritable, impatient, sad, depressed, apathetic, hopeless, overwhelmed

**Psychological**: poor concentration, confusion/forgetfulness, difficulties making decisions, decreased self-esteem, loss of sense of humour

**Spiritual**: things feel meaningless, sense of disconnection, interpersonal problems, conflict in relationships, worry about the future

(Source: Canadian Mental Health Association, American Psychological Association)

Clearly, reducing and healing stress is a key aspect of the overall health and well-being for social workers. A holistic and integrated approach to self-care helps to reduce stress and tend to the multiple dimensions of whole person well-being including:

- **Physical (the body)** – to live, move, and breathe
  
  *Physical self-care* involves ensuring an overall healthy lifestyle that includes eating healthy, drinking lots of water, getting plenty of exercise; other self-care activities in this dimension might include de-cluttering your home and office (so you have a feeling of spaciousness and manageability); taking time away from computers, TV, and telephones; enjoying moments to rest and replenish.

- **Emotional (the heart)** – to love, care, and be in relationship with self and others
  
  *Emotional self-care* might include setting clear boundaries on your time and energy; engaging emotional boundaries within helping relationships, surrounding yourself with positive people and affirming or inspiring messages; addressing any issues or problems so that issues don’t build up; giving and receiving love, kindness and support; spending time with people you care about and who care about you.

- **Psychological (the mind)** – to learn, think, and grow
  
  *Psychological self-care* activities might include personal and professional development; giving attention to things that are in your control (sphere of influence); taking time for personal reflection; noticing your inner experiences, thoughts and feelings; cultivating self-awareness through such things as journaling, getting feedback from others, meditation, coaching/counselling, and consultation/supervision where you have the opportunity to grow, learn and reflect.

- **Spiritual (the spirit)** – to connect with essence, purpose, and meaning

*Spiritual self-care* might include prayer, meditation*, visualization, practicing gratitude, spending time in nature, being aware of the non-material aspects of your life; identifying what is meaningful to you in your work/life; practicing mindfulness and being present in the moment.

*If you are interested, you can access my Spirited Self-Care Guided Meditation at [http://creativewellnessworks.com/guidedmeditations](http://creativewellnessworks.com/guidedmeditations).

**Reflective Exercise**: With these four dimensions of self-care and wellness in mind, consider for a moment, your own self-care activities in these areas of your life. How do you nourish your mind, body, heart and spirit? How do you actively reduce and manage stress in both your personal and professional life? How do you feel when you are honouring your self-care needs? How do you recognize when you are neglecting your self-care needs? What are the ways that you cultivate emotional boundaries, making positive empathetic attachments while also separating in healthy ways? The capacity to create and sustain emotional boundaries is a key element of emotional and psychological well-being for social workers, it is also a necessary skill within the cycle of caring.

**WELLNESS WITHIN SOCIAL WORK: A MULTI-LEVEL SYSTEMIC RESPONSE**

Finally, I would like to step into a more macro, systemic and structural perspective specific to addressing and ensuring the well-being of professional social workers, as well as for sustainability and succession planning within the social work profession.

While individuals are responsible for their self-care, there is a great deal that organizations/employers and other stakeholders can do to contribute to the wellness of social workers. Social workers can benefit from information, inspiration, and support with the task of self-care and greatly benefit from working within healthy workplace environments. For example, there are significant sources of systemic stress that many social workers deal with including such things as high workload, lack of supervision, pressure “to do more with less”, and role ambiguity, which are all named in the research to be areas of risk that contribute to both stress and burnout among social workers (Maslach, 1997, 1982).

When considering the health and well-being of social workers as a shared responsibility with opportunities for contribution from employers — through creating healthy and responsive workplace cultures where systemic stress factors are addressed; schools of social work — through educating social work students about the occupational hazards in our field, (i.e. offering a BSW and MSW level courses dedicated to these complex professional issues as well as providing information about how to mitigate these risks), as well as professional associations and unions, where relevant, through educational opportunities (such as the Self-Care conference...
A Neighbourhood House is a warm and welcoming place that combines social and recreational services as well as community development in order to build stronger communities. Neighbourhood Houses are part of an international settlement movement advocating social justice. Neighbourhood Houses gave birth to the social work profession. South Vancouver Neighbourhood House in the Vancouver Lower Mainland creates welcoming spaces and programs in a neighbourhood hub that involves people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to make connections with each other, reducing isolation, finding ways to get involved in the neighbourhood. “In the neighbourhood most people care about their communities and would like to make a difference. Yet, it can be difficult to know where to begin and how to make progress”.

WHAT IS DIALOGUE CIRCLE?
The use of circles to bring people together is a traditional technique of storytelling whose value still holds true today. At Dialogue Circles, we use the word ‘dialogue’ to refer to a process of making connections and transforming understanding of oneself and others through the exchange of knowledge.

Dialogue Circle is a rediscovered model for community connections, engagements and inclusion of the Building Welcoming and Inclusive Neighbourhoods initiative at South Vancouver Neighbourhood House.

Dialogue Circles engage a broad cross-section of the community in small group discussions for knowledge exchange sessions in the form of storytelling and presentations. It is a wonderful experience and a unique opportunity for personal and community growth for both newcomers and long term residents.

USE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY A STRENGTH-BASED PRACTICE
Dialogue Circles focus on an appreciative inquiry approach by empowering individuals and groups to action through an emphasis on personal strengths and development of leadership skills. Appreciative Inquiry works because it builds relationships enabling people to know each other; it creates an opportunity for people to be heard; it generates opportunities for people to dream and to share their dreams and it creates an environment in which people are able to choose how they contribute. Through the appreciative inquiry approach, Dialogue Circle participants learn not only to ‘envision a collectively desired future’ as a group, but to develop the means to carry forth that vision. It is a wonderful experience for personal and community growth for both newcomers and long term residents.

IMPACT OF DIALOGUE CIRCLE
Dialogue Circles have been implemented in schools, community centres, libraries, neighbourhood houses and in social housing developments throughout South Vancouver. The purpose of holding Dialogue Circles at different locales at different times increases the opportunity for higher attendance rates and the chances of hearing from a broader range of residents in the neighbourhood. What has become apparent so far has been that the stories, opinions, and perceptions participants hold on a particular topic often vary greatly even within the same community, and every participant has a unique story and history to share whether they realize it or not and is, thus, a great source of knowledge to other participants.

Dialogue is exploratory and is intended to be an unfolding process of creative participation between participants. Through storytelling, the unique experiences and challenges that the participants face are shared. The stories are sometimes told with warmth and humour, sometimes with frustration, but always eagerly shared and received by the group. Common themes are personal narratives of moving abroad, concept of home, social isolation, employment barriers and economic hardships. As well, positive stories of support and assistance are brought forward. Participants relate to these experiences, or gain insight from this new, shared knowledge. A Dialogue Circle participant said that “I feel at home, relaxed in a Dialogue Circle. It is a comfortable and safe place to share thoughts.”

The participants of the Dialogue Circles have wholeheartedly shared their experiences and impact attending the Dialogue Circles. They have felt a sense of belonging, being appreciated, accepted and recognized for who they are. They have been given time and a safe space to speak, to feel empowered, to gain new knowledge, regain confidence and hope and enhance fellowship. A participant mentioned that “this circle is performance in a way; it’s inspiring, moving...this is what I like.”

Karen Larcombe is Executive Director, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House.
Koyali Burman, Community Development Coordinator, South Vancouver Neighbourhood House, planned and implemented the Dialogue Circle.
Self-Care for Social Workers  …continued from page 5

Too often the wellness of social workers is deemed solely the individual’s responsibility. This approach does not serve us well in that it does not offer a person-in-environment, an ecological approach, to building resiliency and creating change that could result in a healthier, vibrant, and sustainable community of social work professionals here in British Columbia and beyond.

As social workers, we are gifted and trained to help bring about change and growth for individuals, groups and communities. Perhaps we should be careful to not be like the shoemaker’s children — we have opportunities for growth and change right here before us.

Reflective Exercise: How can we take better care of ourselves and each other? How can we more authentically ‘walk our talk’? What can grow through a multi-level systemic approach to enhancing wellness within social work? In what ways will this growth support our shared commitment to quality social work practice that continues to improve the lives of individuals, families and communities? What might be possible if we truly held reverence for the precious commodity of caring for self and others within our profession?

In closing, I invite us to turn to one another for the purpose of expanding our dialogue and raising our shared awareness (awareness is prevention) about the stressors, challenges and solutions available to enhance the individual and collective well-being of social workers. We can learn from the wisdom of our experiences, be guided and supported by vast the research and resources available to us, and work, individually and together, towards greater radical inspired wellness within the social work profession. ☑

References provided upon request

Lynda Monk is the founder of Creative Wellness (creativewellnessworks.com) a holistic health coaching business specializing in working with helping professionals who want to reduce stress, cultivate balance, and enhance well-being from the inside out. Lynda is the author of Life Source Writing™, a five step reflective journaling practice for personal growth and integrated wellness in mind, body, heart and spirit.

bcasw

We are your professional association

BCASW supports professional practice
BCASW advances the interests of Social Work
BCASW provides personal and practical support
BCASW keeps members current and informed
BCASW is advocacy in action

BCASW’s success is built upon the support of members who share our commitment to growing a strong and vibrant profession. Please join with us — together we are powerful!

Visit www.bcasw.org to learn more

bcasw  a benefit to you
BCASW  a benefit to your profession
Rights 2 Success (R2S) – A workshop on children’s rights

WORDS | JOYCE HELLAND and KATHY BERGGREN-CLIVE, MSW

R2S is a workshop on children’s rights that has been developed by organizations that share a common role and responsibility to educate children and youth about their rights. R2S acknowledges what a community is already doing to support and promote children’s rights, and builds on those strengths using a common language and vision. It involves empowering young people to claim their rights, participate effectively in decisions that are made about them, and advocate on their own behalf if their rights are not respected.

Specifically, R2S advances the rights of children and youth as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Child Family and Community Service Act (CFCSA) and other legislation in two ways:

- By teaching children and youth about their rights, how to advocate for these rights and participate in decisions that affect them, and;
- By educating parents, caregivers, guardians, service providers, and advocates about their role in actualizing children’s rights, teaching young people about their rights and supporting young people to advocate for their rights.

THE HISTORY OF R2S

Save the Children Canada introduced a workshop for children and youth called Right Way in 1999, which was delivered across the provinces. When the organization made a decision to discontinue this child rights education initiative in 2004 they encouraged the provinces to move forward with the program and offered their curriculum for use and adaptation.

That same year, The Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks (FBCYICN) and the former Child and Youth Officer for BC collaborated to adapt the Right Way workshop and create R2S. This workshop was geared towards young people in government care and “at risk.” The most significant addition to the curriculum was the development of an adult workshop, since creating a culture of rights requires engaging the whole community and not just educating young people. R2S was piloted in communities across BC from 2005-2006. An extensive evaluation was completed and a number of recommendations were made which included developing and implement a train the trainer methodology and co-facilitation of the workshops by an adult and a young person. Shortly after the pilots were completed, there were some organizational changes that took place which impacted the ability to move R2S forward.

In 2008, the MCFD Advocacy Team, the FBCYICN and MCFD Youth Custody Services revisited R2S, and a joint project was established to update the curriculum, develop two new modules appropriate for youth in custody and for Aboriginal youth and implement the first R2S Train the Trainer. In 2010, a second R2S Train the Trainer was completed in partnership with MCFD Vancouver Coastal. A youth in care module was also developed.

WHY IS RIGHTS EDUCATION IMPORTANT?

When children and youth learn about their rights, they identify better with all others because they realize that they all share the same rights. Learning the rights that they share with all others teaches them they must respect the rights of others, and leads to a reduction of behaviours that infringe upon the rights of others (Covell, 2004).

Recent studies report that when children and youth understand their rights, they are able to effectively differentiate between their rights, needs and wants and how to make the connection between realizing their rights and respecting the rights of others. For example, research in Belgium (DeCoene & De Cock, 1996), Canada (Covell & Howe 1999, 2001; Murray, 2002), and England (Hughes & Filer, 2003) consistently demonstrate that when children and youth learn about their rights, they show:

- increased self-esteem
- adult-like understanding of rights as including responsibilities
- more acceptance of children and youth belonging to minority groups
- increased awareness of peer and teacher support
- increased rights-respecting attitudes and more socially responsible behaviours

THE GOALS OF R2S

The overall goal of R2S is to build partnerships and capacity within the community to deliver child rights and advocacy workshops for children and youth in care and receiving services and the adults who care for and work with them. This is accomplished by utilizing a “Train the Trainer” approach that will enable the community to develop a plan for the ongoing delivery of the adult and youth workshops. The goals for the workshops are as follows:

---
Adult Workshop Goals

1. To increase participants’ knowledge about the rights of children and youth, and emphasize the shared role adults have in promoting and upholding these rights.
2. To increase participants’ knowledge about the benefits of rights education with an emphasis on how educating young people about their rights empowers them to protect their rights and facilitates an understanding of and respect for the rights of others.
3. To provide participants with effective tools and strategies they can use to educate young people about their rights and support them to advocate for their rights if they are not being met.
4. To increase participants’ knowledge about young people’s right to participate in decisions affecting them and enhance their capacity to promote and support meaningful youth participation.
5. To bring together MCFD staff, community service providers, parents, caregivers, advocates, guardians and citizens to discuss the ways they can work together to support rights, participation and advocacy with and on behalf of children and youth in their community. To emphasize the collaborative nature of this work and model youth participation, all R2S workshops are co-facilitated by a youth and an adult.

Youth Workshop Goals

1. To increase young people’s knowledge about their rights by teaching them strategies to remember their rights and ways to indentify when they are not being met.
2. To nurture the strengths, interests and abilities of young people to become meaningfully involved in decision-making at an individual and systemic level by providing them with information about their right to participate.
3. To increase the capacity of young people to use their voice and get their rights met by teaching them how to advocate on their own behalf and/or find effective advocacy support if their voice is not being heard.
4. To bring young people together in a safe environment in their community and within the context of their culture to discuss how they can work together and with adults in their lives to advocate for their rights. To emphasize the collaborative nature of this work and model youth participation, all R2S workshops are co-facilitated by a youth and an adult.

HOW IS R2S DELIVERED?
The R2S manual includes a core workshop and modules. The core workshop teaches about rights for all children and youth and is designed to be delivered in the community through a partnership between organizations that share a role in the provision of services to children and youth. The modules focus on the rights of children and youth in care, youth in custody and Aboriginal youth. The modules are not complete workshops on their own and are meant to supplement the core workshop. The workshops are designed to be co-facilitated by a youth and an adult; this is in keeping with modeling child and youth participation and engagement.

TRAINING AND CERTIFICATION OF R2S FACILITATORS

- There is an application process for youth and adults.
- Youth and adults participate in a three-day training.
- Facilitators in training shadow one adult and one youth workshop conducted by a trained facilitator.
- Co-facilitation of a workshop with a youth, demonstrating familiarity with the activities and subject matter.
- After successful co-facilitation, a certificate of completion is issued.
- The certification process can be adapted for youth facilitators in training, to allow for less stringent criteria for completion.

YOUTH INVOLVEMENT

During training and following certification, youth received honorariums for their participation in the R2S project. The involvement of young people has been an invaluable and integral component of measuring the successes and identifying the challenges of a youth/adult partnership. Some of the strengths realized through youth involvement include the experience and knowledge they contribute, and their co-facilitation with adults models youth participation. There were also some challenges for young people, including the ability to make a time commitment to the program due to competing work, school and volunteer obligations; the requirements for training and certification; and the need for ongoing mentoring and support both during training and co-facilitating workshops.

HOW IS R2S EVALUATED?
A detailed evaluation framework and tools have been created to provide a structured approach to determining the effectiveness of the train the trainer and the workshops. Each of the workshop components are continually evaluated using data from questionnaires completed by adult and youth participants. Their feedback, in conjunction with input from the facilitators is used to assess effectiveness of the workshops and the satisfaction of participants.

Highlights of the evaluation conducted to date include:

- Participants were satisfied with training and the certification process
- Participants in adult workshops learned new information about child rights
- Youth reported a better understanding of rights
- Workshop learning outcomes are being achieved

In addition, there is an over-arching quality assurance mechanism in place where workshops are regularly audited and ongoing professional development is provided to the trained facilitators.

NEXT STEPS
As a result of the two recent R2S projects, there is growing interest in this model of community-based rights and advocacy training. We are currently working towards establishing a permanent partnership between MCFD and the FBCYICN so that we are able to create a sustainable model of child rights training throughout the province.

For more information on R2S contact Joyce Helland, Executive Director, Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks, Jocelyn_helland@fbcyicn.ca or Kathy Berggren-Clive, Director of Advocacy, MCFD, Kathy.berggrenclive@gov.bc.ca.
Vicarious Traumatization: from Awareness to Response

Prioritizing the health and safety of transition house support workers

Effective service provision for women and children escaping violence is contingent on maintaining the health and safety of staff. Vicarious traumatization is an occupational hazard that requires our immediate attention. Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) state, “if we do not identify and address the risk of vicarious traumatization, we run the danger of not recognizing its effects on our work”. Current literature, while still in its infancy, strives to identify populations affected, predictive factors, preventative strategies, and attempts to measure workers’ levels of vicarious traumatization. However, absent from the literature is an attempt to understand individuals’ actual knowledge about the topic. Without examining professionals’ knowledge and understanding about this occupational hazard, we cannot identify gaps to offer education and strategies to help ameliorate the impacts of vicarious traumatization.

Vicarious traumatization is defined by Pearlman and Saakvitne (1995) as “the transformation in the inner experience of the therapist that comes about as a result of empathic engagement with clients’ trauma material.” However, in addition to therapists, any professional who works with trauma survivors and as a result is exposed to trauma stories is susceptible. Transition house support workers are one population of front-line workers who work closely with trauma survivors. A transition house is a safe, secure, short-term shelter for women and children escaping violence. Transition house support workers not only hear stories of abuse, they also observe the survivor’s emotions of fear, helplessness, and horror. Support workers were chosen because they continually bear witness to traumatic narratives, yet they often do not receive clinical supervision. Additionally, due to the confidential nature of domestic violence work, they are often isolated from other helping professionals. Through their voices, this research study aims to honour transition house workers’ knowledge of vicarious traumatization, as well as examine individual and agency level attention/action to this issue. It is only through understanding current knowledge of and strategies implemented to protect workers in the workplace that we can start to identify additional needs and implement changes.

Vicarious traumatization alters a helping professional’s cognitive schemas about themselves and others in the world through continual exposure to traumatic narratives. Cognitive schemas include “beliefs, assumptions, and expectations about self and world that enable individuals to make sense of their experience” (McCann & Pearlman, 1990). Cognitive schemas are not formed or altered overnight. Therefore, vicarious traumatization does not occur after listening to one traumatic narrative. The concept of vicarious traumatization is often confused with burnout, compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress disorder (STSD), and posttraumatic-stress disorder (PTSD). However, the literature does identify distinct differences between the concepts. Burnout is defined as “a specific occupational stress syndrome occurring when human service professionals become emotionally exhausted, begin to dehumanize their clients, and lose a sense of personal accomplishment at work” (Maslach, 1982).

Compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress are two terms that are used interchangeably and manifest as sudden adverse reactions as a result of working with trauma survivors. While vicarious traumatization focuses on meaning and adaptation, compassion fatigue focuses on symptoms and emotional responses. Compassion fatigue can also occur suddenly and without warning, thus differentiating it from both burnout and vicarious traumatization. Vicarious traumatization is a unique phenomenon distinct from other concepts because the individuals affected experience alterations to their cognitive schemas.

THE RESEARCH STUDY
This mixed method exploratory research study aimed to understand the knowledge that transition house workers have of vicarious traumatization and identify the level of support and training they receive in order to recognize and deal with vicarious traumatization. Participants in this study consisted of support workers from seven transition houses located in the north central and northwest areas of British Columbia along Highway 16 from Prince Rupert to Prince George. This research study was carried out between February 2008 and July 2008 through three phases of data collection: questionnaires (n=31), face-to-face interviews (n=13), and one focus group (n=8). In total, there were 52 participant contacts, in this study from seven different transition houses. However, the total number of participants is unknown as some support workers chose to participate in more than one research phase.

FINDINGS
The quantitative findings in this study were derived from the questionnaire’s closed-ended questions with fixed response categories. Descriptive statistics were calculated. The majority of respondents (84%) indicated that they heard the term vicarious traumatization prior to completing this research questionnaire. Additionally, 61% identified that their employer talked to
them about the impact of hearing another’s traumatic stories. However, only 32% of questionnaire respondents reported that they received specific training about vicarious traumatization and 61% believed vicarious traumatization is preventable.

An unexpected finding was that 29% of respondents said they felt they were not personally affected by the traumatic stories they heard. Interview and focus group participants tended to explain this response by attributing it to a lack of awareness and understanding of vicarious traumatization, in some cases, a fear of being seen as lacking competence if they demonstrated that the work was affecting them, or workers “shutting down” meaning that they buried their personal sensitivity in order to manage the extreme emotional demands of the work.

Qualitative data was derived from open-ended questions in the questionnaire, interview, and focus group, and analyzed using content analysis.

The following main themes and additional sub-themes were identified through analysis:

**Vulnerability**
Throughout each phase of data collection, the vulnerability of support workers was prominent. With respect to vicarious traumatization, workers are vulnerable to experiencing it and somewhat limited in their ability to ameliorate the effects. An interviewee highlighted her vulnerability by stating, “working in these areas...it just kind of soaks in your arteries and veins and your whole system and you don’t even know that it’s there because it just slowly gets into your system over the years.” Other areas where vulnerabilities were expressed were through the high volume, high crisis nature of the work, systemic issues that have the potential to compromise the safety of clients, as well as working within a northern context where confidentiality, visibility, and a lack of resources are issues faced on a daily basis.

**Impacts**
Whether positive or negative, impacts were another prominent theme. At least one impact, as identified by the vicarious traumatization literature, was identified by 76% of all participant contacts who identified they felt impacted by the work. Disruptions to personal frame of reference, psychological needs, and cognitive schemas were most frequently identified by transition house support workers in individual interviews and in the focus group. One interviewee said: “I became more like the world is a really bad place, like nothing is safe and no one is safe. I just kind of felt it was everywhere so I took it and generalized everywhere. I just felt scared a lot of the time and I just kind of felt it was only a matter of time before it happened to me and it happens to everyone else. People are just cruel and they can be really cruel for no reason.”

Others reported experiencing difficulties trusting others, an inability to watch news programs or difficult movies, and dreaming about their work. In addition, workers identified various physical impacts as well as positive rewards such as finding inspiration in seeing the amazing strength and resiliency of women.

**Knowledge Base**
Transition house support workers were asked what they know about vicarious traumatization. Overall knowledge of vicarious traumatization was limited. When asked what she knew one respondent shared, “not very much, I am assuming it’s being traumatized by other people’s stories, but that’s about it, it’s a big fancy term that I didn’t look up in a dictionary.” While the majority of respondents asked (16 out of 23) were able to provide a definition of vicarious traumatization, only three participants identified alterations to cognitive schemas in their answer. Surprisingly, there are still workers who acknowledge that they have never even heard the term vicarious traumatization.

Only a limited number of workers (19%) indicated they received any formal training about vicarious traumatization. However, almost half of all respondents (48%) indicated that formal training was important and that they would like to learn more about recognizing and understanding vicarious traumatization as well as any coping strategies.

**Agency Response**
Agency response to vicarious traumatization is important because it is generally the agency that sets the tone that workers follow when addressing different issues. As one respondent emphasized, “…the workplace is crucial for making people aware and also making them aware that it’s okay, this really is one of the dangers of the job, one of the realities of the job, and there’s ways that people can process and lighten their load and there’s skill they can build to minimize the impact initially.”

While all thirteen interviewees felt their agency was supportive, 54% also felt more was needed. When asked about staff-management interaction, one respondent shared, “…I don’t think it’s as supportive as and as attentive maybe as it needs to be. I think that a lot of the stuff just kind of gets shoved under the carpet…”

In addition, education and training were reported as limited and debriefing occurs among workers but it is largely initiated by the workers rather than formally structured and built in by management.

**Strategies for Change**
Strategies for change were identified by 87% participant contacts. Formalized debriefing and counselling for support workers were most frequently identified by 44% of respondents. Other ways for management to encourage self-care practices included: being supportive of a support worker’s need for time off, role modeling and encouraging effective self-care, management connecting with staff, supporting staff to take regular breaks, sending emails or memos with self-care ideas, sharing success stories, and providing positive reinforcement to staff.

**Implications for Practice**
Vicarious traumatization is an occupational health and safety concern. Transition house support work is rewarding, yet extremely difficult. Support workers are vulnerable to experiencing vicarious traumatization. Generating supportive dialogues between management and staff, offering formal and informal debriefing opportunities, clinical supervision, providing better education and training, and prioritizing the health and safety of workers are some factors that can address the challenge of vicarious traumatization. Transition house workers provide safety and support to women and children escaping violence, often with no thought about the costs of doing such important work. This needs to change.

References available upon request

Sheri Bishop is a family therapist for a non-profit counselling agency in Merritt, BC. Prior to completing her MSW degree in May 2010, she worked for 10 years as a transition house support worker in Northern BC.
EXECUTIVE MEMBERS

Pam Miller, PhD RSW  
President

I am Director of the University of Victoria School of Social Work. I am pleased to begin the second year of my two-year term as President of BCASW and look forward to working with our Board, committees, branches and staff to advance the work of our Association in support of our profession and the people we serve. Through my visits last year to the branches, I was able to meet with social work leaders throughout our province and hear about the diversity and complexity of their work in the context of challenging budgets, policies and organizational practices. It was humbling to meet such dedicated professionals who give their time to participate in branch and committee activities and remain committed to living out our profession’s values and supporting our profession through their participation in BCASW. I am confident that our new Board will mirror what I experienced at the branch level. Through their collective wisdom, coupled with our staff’s dedication and commitment, the coming year will be one of positive direction for BCASW as together we face whatever the new year brings, with a view to improving conditions for the people our profession is committed to serve.

Barb Keith, MSW RSW  
Vice-President

I have participated in a variety of roles with BCASW including Branch Secretary, Branch Treasurer, Branch President, Board Treasurer, and Branch Representative to the Board. I have been involved in the Northern Branch as well as Richmond/Delta/Burnaby Branch with Vancouver Sea to Sky Branch. Social Work has played a very important role in my life and my career. Over the past six years, I have worked in Addiction Services and Aboriginal Health Services for Vancouver Coastal Health. I am currently on secondment for a year as Manager of the Addiction Recovery Program at Central City Lodge. I represent BCASW on the BC Alliance for Mental Health and Addiction, and hold the position of Co-Chair for the Community Action Initiative.

Phyllis Nash, MSW RSW  
Past President

I have been an active member of BCASW and an RSW since 1968. Since retirement from Selkirk College in 2004, I have been very active in homelessness initiatives both in Nelson and provincially. I have served for many years on the BCASW board, including three years as BCASW President. I am currently BCASW’s representative to the Board of the Canadian Association of Social Workers.

Joani Mortenson, MSW PhD (cand) RSW  
Secretary

I am delighted to serve on the BCASW Executive as Scribe. I have a CYC BA from UVic, an MSW from UBC and am currently a PhD Candidate (ABD) at UBC-Okanagan. I do Interdisciplinary research in: Lesbians who access midwifery services, lesbian and bi-sexual women’s experience with health care provision and work with the Splatsin First Nation and their Kia7as (grandmothers) language immersion program. I teach in Social Work, women’s studies and early childhood education. I am passionate about using arts as a vehicle for social change, and love to perform theoretical and radicalized poetry at conferences on maternity and queer issues. I want to be part of a movement of social workers in British Columbia who are mobilized and energized about regional and global issues, creating a veritable storm of consciousness raising, activism and compassionate action.

Leya Eguchi, BSc BSW RSW  
Treasurer

Work/School: Hollyburn Family Services; North Shore Homelessness Task Force; UBC School of Social Work (completing MSW). I am honoured to join the BCASW Executive as Treasurer. I am close to completing my MSW at UBC, and my research focus is collaboration, community development and homelessness. I have a diverse background ranging from information technology, marketing, finance and project management in the private sector to working with families, immigrants and adults without secure housing in the social services sector. I have also previously served as treasurer for the North Shore Child’s Discovery Centre. I currently work as the coordinator of the North Shore Homelessness Task Force, and the Adult Integrated Case Management Coordinator for Hollyburn Family Services. As a Board member, I look forward to engaging in dialogue about social justice and professional practice issues that deeply affect our work. I believe that BCASW is on the right track to becoming the hub of communication, advocacy and action for social workers from across the province, and will work towards furthering this goal.

STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE TO BOARD

Emma W. Lee, BSc, 3rd year BSW student at UBC  

As I embark upon a career in social work, I am excited to join the BCASW as the Student Representative. Having come from a science background as well as being a business owner for several years, my experiences will hopefully bring a different perspective and allow me to contribute to the BCASW in new ways. In my role as the Student Representative, I am particularly interested in building student awareness of the BCASW and increasing student membership across the province.
MEMBERS AT LARGE

Grant Charles, BSW MSW PhD
I am Associate Professor in the School of Social Work at UBC (Vancouver) where I also serve as the Chair of Field Education. Prior to coming to UBC I worked in a variety of mental health, special education and child welfare settings. I have been the director of a number of specialized community and residential treatment programs working with such diverse client groups as adolescent sexual offenders, Aboriginal adolescent solvent abusers and other hard to serve young people and their families. My current research interests include interprofessional education, young carers, children of parents with mental illness and international service learning. One of my goals on the Board this year will be to promote stronger ties between the social work practice and education communities.

Janette Champagne, BSW MSW RSW
Since 2000 I have worked as hospital social worker in pediatrics, and for two years of my tenure I coordinated the Forensic Child Abuse Clinic with VIHA and MCFD. I am a member of the Pediatric Ethics Committee. Prior to my hospital social work, I was the Manager of Interpreting Services for a Provincial Resource Program for Deaf and Hard of Hearing students on Vancouver Island. My work with the deaf community continues to intersect my social work practice; I have taught Disability Studies at UVic in the School of Social Work since 2005. I want to participate as a Member at Large in order to more deeply look into the current politics and working conditions in hospitals that affect social workers in health care. I am especially interested in those social workers involved in areas of child, youth, maternal, and family health. I would like to shed light on the important work we do in health care and raise the profile of Social Workers in health care.

Glen Schmidt, BA BSW MSW PhD RCSW
I graduated with from the University of Manitoba in 1979 and worked in northern Manitoba for over twelve years in child protection and community mental health. I was a front line worker, supervisor, and regional manager. In late 1991, I started work for the University of Manitoba Faculty of Social Work Access Program. I moved to BC in 1994 to work as a faculty member at the UNBC School of Social Work in Prince George. I am a Registered Clinical Social Worker and work part-time for a local agency. I’m active in the local branch of BCASW. I serve on other provincial Boards including the BC College of Social Workers, Parent Support Services, and the Canadian Mental Health Association. I also serve on the National Board of the Canadian Mental Health Association.

BRANCH REPRESENTATIVES

KOOTENAY
Deb Wandler, MSW RSW
I am an Instructor in the Social Service Worker/Human Services Programs at Selkirk College, Castlegar. I graduated from University of Victoria 1996 and Dalhousie University 2004. I have been attending BCASW Branch meetings for a few years now and encourage past and present students of mine to come out whenever they can. I took on the role of Kootenay representative in order to support and honour Molly Asche Smith’s decision to step down after a long run as Chair. I bring years of group facilitation, generalist counselling and teaching experience to the table, along with my love for the profession of social work. I look forward to filling the position over the next year, learning more about the role of BCASW in the lives of social workers and supporting social workers in the Kootenays.

NORTHWEST
Stacey Szepat, BSW
Greetings from Northwestern BC! I am thrilled to be an active member and strong supporter of the BCASW! I have participated in various roles within my local Northwest Branch including serving as Vice President, President, and now as a Board member this year. I am currently employed as a child protection social worker with the Ministry of Children and Family Development. I received my education from the University of Northern British Columbia. I am particularly interested in Northern remote social work and had the incredible opportunity to begin my social work career in 2008 working as the sole child protection social worker in various Aboriginal communities in a very remote and isolated region of Northern BC. This is where I learned the value of community relationship building and strength-based practice. I now look forward to representing our local Northwest Branch to the provincial Board. Cheers!

OKANAGAN
Shauna Gagnon, MSW RSW
Kelowna General Hospital-Emergency/Acute care Patient/Family Counsellor; UBC Okanagan – Assistant Field Education Coordinator. It is a great privilege to represent the diverse social workers of the Okanagan to the BCASW Board. I have been practicing social work in the Okanagan for the past five years as a member of the acute care social work team at Kelowna General Hospital. I have also recently joined staff at UBC Okanagan as the Assistant Field Education Coordinator. Participating in BCASW activities is a great way to keep my skills sharp and stay connected to practice standards and ethics. I bring with me enthusiasm, clinical experience, and a heart for engaging in social action activities in my home community and beyond! The BCASW is a great vehicle for raising the profile of our chosen profession. I look forward to many more years of active membership.

continued on next page
NORTHERN
Janine Cunningham, BSW
Greetings all! I look forward to being an active member of the BCASW Northern Branch in Prince George. I am currently a full-time MSW student at the University of Northern BC. My roots go back to the Tsilhqot’in Nation of central BC. Prior to returning back to school, I was an administrative/executive assistant for the development of the delegation component for my Nation’s child and family services agency. I am especially interested in broader policy matters, Aboriginal child and youth mental health, and northern practice issues with respects to rural Aboriginal populations. I believe that the Board is a great opportunity to become actively involved at the community level in supporting our fellow peers and colleagues and for advocating for the vulnerable populations that we work with.

RICHMOND/BURNABY/DELTA
Joshabelle Josephson, BA Criminology and Psychology, MSW
I currently work for the PHS Community Services Society as a Mental Health Project Coordinator and a Students’ Advocate for the AMS, UBC. My interest in Board membership emanated from my passion to help make a difference in society. Somehow, I had always found myself working for non-profit organizations that provided services to the least advantaged individuals in society. I also believe that I would be able to assist in identifying issues that affect both our profession and the people we serve. Having had over fourteen years of experience in working with families, youth, children and individuals, I believe that my involvement with the Board will be mutually beneficial while I further my knowledge, skills and expertise in interdisciplinary team environment. Above all, I bring with me passion, sensitivity, enthusiasm, respect and friendliness to the Board. Pleased to meet you all and excited to work with you all.

THOMPSON/NICOLA
Twyla Russell, BA BSW RSW
I am a Field Placement Coordinator with MCFD where I have been employed as a social worker for 25 years. My passion lies in supporting new social workers and practicum students in their professional development. A BCASW membership provides me with opportunities to network with social workers who are in private practices, community agencies, universities, and government programs. Involvement with my local branch keeps me current on social concerns in both my community and the province. I look forward to serving BCASW as the Thompson Nicola Branch Rep. I see this as a privilege and an opportunity to support the social work profession.

FRASER RIVER
Roopchand Seebaran, MSW
A former President of BCASW, I have been a member for 36 years. On a personal note, I’m an Emeritus Professor at the UBC School of Social Work, where I taught for 27 years. Along with other senior members of the Association, I’ve become very concerned about BCASW’s role and performance in meeting its stated mission. This deep concern moved me to stand for election as the Fraser River Branch Representative to the Board, and to submit a resolution, passed at the November AGM, to implement a Membership Satisfaction Survey. My goals are to work with the Board to take stronger actions related to membership engagement and services, and to more effectively fulfill BCASW’s mandate of social advocacy and advocacy for the profession. I’d like to hear your ideas for strengthening our Association; you can reach me at roopchand@shaw.ca.

VANCOUVER ISLAND
Ashley Cowan, BSW
I am excited about the opportunity to continue my role with the BCASW as VI Branch Representative for another term. I first started my involvement with our local branch as Student Representative and have enjoyed meeting all the interesting and passionate social workers over the years. Over the last year, the Vancouver Island Branch has reached out for ideas for events that would be of value to our membership. Out of this came the idea for a speakers series and I look forward to continuing this in the future. It has been great to meet the members that have attended the various presentations and I hope that we will continue to see more faces at our meetings. I encourage all of our membership to share your ideas for how our branch can be more helpful to you to support your practice and your wellbeing.

VANCOUVER SEA TO SKY
Tracey Young, BA CYC MSW RSW
I work full-time in my own business, Catalyst Enterprises BC, offering consulting, counselling & coaching services. I’m excited and looking forward to serving the Vancouver Sea to Sky region as president & Board representative. I’m involved in many different advocacy groups and have held regional, provincial and national leadership positions as a trade union and human rights activist and social work representative. As the former chair of the Child Welfare & Family Committee for the BCASW, I was able to collaborate with members and other social workers around BC, creating visibility for social work expertise and social justice issues through media releases, interviews in the press and submissions to government. As a multi-media human and civil rights activist I use tools, such as my blog and Facebook for advocacy and social justice work. I’m committed to working with other Board members toward increasing membership engagement and inclusion, openness and transparency within the BCASW and increasing the visibility and viability of the social work profession in BC.
Northern Branch, centred in Prince George, meets monthly to share information about events and happenings of interest to social workers. Branch members also stay informed with a regular newsletter containing information about forthcoming events, training opportunities and other announcements.

Northern Members are spread throughout about two thirds of the province. In some of the communities social workers also meet informally and are grateful for news and connections with other social workers as we face isolation in many of our work areas. Our area of the province continues to be plagued with forestry and mine related cutbacks. This summer we experienced a myriad of forest fires that dislocated many people from rural areas. The fallout has included school closures, poverty and unemployment.

This year we celebrated social work week in Prince George, Quesnel, Williams Lake and Ft. St. John. At Christmas BCASW holds an open house within a service area and includes support and acknowledgement of that agency’s work. During Social Work Week we honour one of our members with the Bridget Moran award which recognizes the exceptional work of a northern social worker. This year’s recipient was Jackie Stokes. Northern branch held a day of action which focused on poverty and a living wage/minimum wage. BCASW board member Glen Schmidt addressed Prince George City Council, receiving extensive press and TV coverage. Northern branch also co-sponsored the annual chili blanket event, another anti-poverty event. In 2010 we were happy to have had a spring visit from BCASW’s President, Pam Miller. The connection to our provincial organization is vital and gives us an opportunity to speak about provincial and local issues in an atmosphere that acknowledges and honours our work and the realities of our lives in British Columbia and in the North.

Florence Flynn

Northern Branch BCASW members participated in Chiliblanket, an event which distributes clothing and other donations and raises awareness about poverty.

Kootenay Branch

The Kootenay branch consists generally of about 45 members within a broad geographical area. Our branch encompasses the Boundary area and the East and West Kootenays to the Alberta border. Membership is a mix of social workers in private practice, government and community agencies, health care and social work students. We are a diverse group of social workers with the common thread of rural social work practice. The concentration of our membership is located in the West Kootenays, specifically in the tri-city area of Trail, Castlegar and Nelson. As the branch representative and treasurer live in this area meetings and events are situated in one of these cities.

Since our last annual report, our branch has continued to have (almost) monthly dinner meetings. The members that attend monthly meetings state that what they really want is an opportunity to network and connect with other social workers in a relaxed and social environment. We often have a guest speaker at our dinners, usually a local social worker or allied professional who can tell us about a new program or an interesting project. Recently, social workers have enjoyed the chance to talk about books they have read or films they have watched that have a social or personal message that might inform one’s awareness or practice.

Members in the Boundary and East occasionally ask for sub-group meetings. This is a good goal for the upcoming year. It would take a bit of commitment and organization but is not unreasonable given the desire to make it happen.

The most remarkable event this year was an event in March to celebrate member Phyllis Nash, who was the recipient of the CASW Distinguished Service Award (BC) for 2010. We had a dinner event in Nelson. The gathering consisted of representatives from municipal, provincial and federal government. Colleagues from local non-profits and from Selkirk College where Phyllis taught for many years were there. Many friends, former students and colleagues told of the influence that Phyllis has had in both professional and personal connections. We were very honored to have this opportunity to celebrate the achievements of our most committed member.

In late June, I chose to resign from my position as branch representative. Deb Wandler agreed to complete the 2011 term. Marsha Early remains in the position of treasurer.

Our branch sponsored one social worker to attend the Fall Conference and generous members contributed to a fantastic Kootenay Branch raffle basket for this event, which raised funds to support student attendance at the conference.

Our members value the networking opportunities and the opportunity to promote our work as professional social workers. Our strengths lie in our ability to support one another and to celebrate our successes as they come.

Molly Asche Smith

Thompson Nicola

The Thompson Nicola Branch is alive and well and has been actively engaged in social justice activities, educational events and supporting community agencies. In February, we hosted a Branch meeting titled The Roller Coaster of Unemployment. The guest speakers, Megan Gerow and Susan Forseille, provided newly graduated social workers and social workers seeking employment with information about the “how to” of staying connected, continuing with professional development, and gaining experience while

continued on next page
BCASW Branch Reports … CONTINUED

Waiting for employment. We are very happy to report that our spring education event resulted in Kamloops social workers starting a branch of C.A.S.E.Y. (Communities Against Sexual Exploitation of Youth). Branch members participated in a survey outlining their concerns with the many budget cuts impacting local social service agencies and attended the Kamloops march for Peace and Social Justice. In October, the Branch hosted a pizza dinner with special guest Pam Miller, president of BCASW, who met with members to hear their concerns and address outstanding issues.

To mark the Branch’s 2010 Social Work Week theme, Enriching Lives: Speaking up About Women’s Poverty, a panel of local service providers and advocates spoke about the reality of poverty issues for women in Kamloops, highlighting what is being done to improve poverty issues for women and specifically what social workers can do to improve the situation for women living in poverty. The guest panelists were Sara Carroll (E.Fry), Trish Archibald (Women’s Resource Centre) and Michelle Walker (Kamloops Women Shelter). Another guest at the meeting was Michelle Mungall, NDP MLA, for the Nelson Creston area.

In December, we hosted our 4th annual membership holiday fund raiser which was held at the Family Tree Resource Society. Attending were clients and staff from the agency, branch members and community social workers.

Members of the Thompson Nicola Branch executive include Nicole Hale (president), Pat Tomlinson (treasurer), Twyla Russell (Branch rep), Michael Crawford and Jennifer Broughton (members at large). Many thanks to Thompson Rivers University, social workers and social work students who continue to support the Thompson Nicola Branch.

In February, we hosted a social at the Kiva which is a coffee shop located at North West Community College in Terrace. The event included live music from a local musician, and snacks prepared by the culinary students from the college. Donations of non-perishable food items were collected and given to the local food bank. In March during Social Work Week, we held an event at the Terrace campus of UNBC which included keynote speakers, poster presentations, a Copper Shield ceremony for nominated social workers for outstanding social work practice as well as a ring ceremony where new BSW graduates were welcomed in to the profession by practicing professional mentors and presented with a silver First Nations style carved ring. In June, we held a BBQ at Ferry Island which is a local campground surrounded by the Skeena River. Pam Miller was our guest speaker for the BBQ event and attendees enjoyed an open fire BBQ. Branch meetings are also held throughout the year with various guest speakers or topics of interests.

Lori MacPherson

Okanagan Branch

The Okanagan branch looks forward to another year of supporting the diverse social workers in the Okanagan valley. Over the past year, the OKA branch has focused on raising our profile in the community and strengthening our relationship with the School of Social Work at UBC Okanagan. This past May, we were privileged to have Robin Pike present a workshop to our members entitled Working to Combat Human Trafficking. In September, we provided each social work student at UBC Okanagan with a welcome package. The package included BCASW promotional material, a short letter explaining the benefits of joining the BCASW and a colour copy of the code of ethics. As part of our student outreach initiative, we also offered two student bursaries to assist a BSW and MSW student to attend the BCASW’s Fall Conference. In October, we were pleased to host BCASW president Dr. Pam Miller to visit our branch to meet with local social workers and students.

The Okanagan branch continues to look for new ways to support social workers in all stages of their career and area of practice. In order to help us learn member preferences and identify new initiatives we will be conducting an online survey in the New Year. Through the survey, we are hoping to gather information so that we can tailor our upcoming educational and social events to member’s area of interest.

Our branch committee continues to meet on a monthly basis. In addition to organizing branch activities, our meetings provide an opportunity for casual socialization, collegial support, and community event updates. We would like to remind members that we have a standing friendly invitation to join us at our monthly meetings. We love to see new faces! The Okanagan branch looks forward to another successful year in 2011.

Shauna Gagnon

Fraser River Branch

Over the past year our guest speakers included Tamara Holdal, Correctional Services Canada presenting on Behind Bars, and Mary-Jane Wilson on Advanced Care Planning (ACP). Social Worker, Cari Hoffman, drew on her substantial knowledge in this area and added much to this discussion.

For Social Work Week, FRB co-sponsored with UFV’s School of Social Work and Human Services, a presentation by Dr. Krishna Pendakur, Professor of Economics at Simon Fraser University. He spoke on economic inequality and discrimination experiences of marginalized groups in Canadian society. Other Branch members celebrated Social Work Week at their places of employment, including Susan McMillan presenting on Elder Abuse and Bobbi Preston on the Role of the Renal Social Worker to Abbotsford Regional Health Care Centre (ARHCC) staff/disciplines. Another guest speaker was Charan Gill, CEO of Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS) at an event held on-site at PICS in Surrey.
It has been great to meet the members that have attended the various presentations and I hope that we will continue to see more faces at our meetings. I encourage all of our membership to share your ideas for how this branch and your membership with the BCASW can be more helpful to you to support your practice and your wellbeing.

Ashley Cowan

VANCOUVER SEA TO SKY
The Vancouver Sea to Sky branch holds meetings on a monthly basis. This year as part of the guest speaker series, Tasnim Nathoo presented on her work involving a holistic therapeutic approach called “bodytalk” and Darren Usher presented on the health initiative for men (HIM). Thank you to all branch members for offering to participate in the guest speaker series. During this past year, branch members had the opportunity to attend a presentation by Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, the Representative for Children and Youth in our province. Branch members also had the opportunity to attend a presentation on Vicarious Trauma by Dr. Jon Conte. Both of these presentations were held at BC Children’s Hospital at no cost to branch members. In June, branch members were invited to meet with the BCASW president Pam Miller.

During the holiday season, we participated in a holiday event of gift wrapping at the Broadway Youth Resource Centre. In April, we held our annual event in collaboration with the UBC school of Social Work with featured MSW and BSW research poster exhibits and seven student presentations. In March, during Social Work Week, we held a coffee social event which brought members together to connect and celebrate our profession. Thank you to Emma Tang and staff from the Multicultural Helping House Society for providing a consistent space for our branch meetings throughout the year. Thank you to all social workers and students who continue to support BCASW and the branch.

Stephanie Callaghan

RICHMOND DELTA BURNABY
The Richmond Delta Burnaby Branch covers a large geographic area, including the municipalities of Burnaby, Coquitlam, Delta, Ladner, New Westminster, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Richmond, and White Rock. We have an active Board who work on issues such as advocacy, regulation, and membership development. After a few years of holding joint meetings in conjunction with Vancouver Sea to Sky Branch, RDB began holding separate meetings, and hosted a variety of guest speakers this past year. Joshabelle Josephson is our new Branch Representative to the BCASW Board and looks forward to active engagement with the members of RDB Branch.

Duncan Stephen

Be a BCASW Mentor!
If you are interested in volunteering with the BCASW mentoring program, download the information at www.bcasw.org or contact bcasw@bcasw.org for further details.

Fraser River Branch members Bobbi Preston, Georgina Marson, Roop Seebaran, Elizabeth Dow and Jeff Wood celebrate the launch of UFV’s MSW program

Bobbi Preston

VANCOUVER ISLAND
Over the last year, the Vancouver Island Branch has reached out for ideas for events that would be of value to our membership. We requested feedback from our membership on topics that would guide us in the development of a Speakers Series and received an overwhelming response.

Over the year, we’ve had some interesting speakers and topics including: Maxine Gibson’s thesis on Can Spirituality Save Social Work? and Susan Noake’s presentation, Answering the Call: the Processes of Developing the Social Work Identity.

At the annual UVIC School of Social Work event for Social Work Week, we presented our past president, Carol Hale, with a Recognition for Outstanding BCASW Member award. And to help prepare students for life after graduation, we organized an employer’s panel with representatives from non-profits to talk about the work they do and what they look for in an applicant. We also joined with AFSA to celebrate the UN International Day of Families with David Turner and Barbara Whittington presenting their topic on Helping Build Capacity in Ethiopia: Possibilities and Challenges for Respectful Social Work.
**CHILD WELFARE COMMITTEE**

Current Committee members include: Jackie Stokes; Leah Dawson; Michelle Hake; Chuck Fraser; David Roy; Marg deMello; Mary Miller; Tammy Stubley; and ex officio, Linda Korbin. The committee always welcomes new members. This report covers some of the highlights of the committee from February 2010 (when I assumed the position of Chair) to the present. It cannot begin to reflect the total work of the committee.

First let me recognize the valuable input of all committee members. Each busy volunteer willingly contributed their insights, words and analysis often on very short notice and with careful professional attention. The majority of our work was carried out via email and the circulation of draft submissions. Three conference call meetings were held with lively discussion. In the initial weeks we worked on sharing our personal and professional (short) stories so that we would have better understanding of our different needs, interests and perspectives. Representation comes from several geographic locations across the province as well as varied social work disciplines. This certainly added to the richness of input for our collective work.

We spent some time reviewing the terms of reference for the committee with a special focus on a strict need for confidentiality. Our draft wording for inclusion in the terms of reference is: “As a member of the BCASW Child Welfare and Family committee I agree to: be an active contributor to the work of the committee; share my opinions and thoughts directly and respectfully with committee members; keep confidential the words and opinions expressed by my colleagues unless direct permission for release is provided”.

The committee’s work included press releases, letters to editors, and letters to MCFD Minister Mary Polak and others. Each action required significant research, consultation and collaboration and benefited greatly from the skill and wisdom of Linda Korbin. We also shared information on emerging social research, consultation and collaboration and benefited greatly from the skill of my colleagues.

Major highlights include the following: We addressed the loss of Child In Home of Relative program; identified limitations of the MCFD Extended Family Program and provided strong recommendations to government; voiced our concerns re proposed legislation that would have limited the capacity of the Representative for Children and Youth to be an effective advocate; responded to a complex family matter in Kamloops media; prepared a carefully considered brief on the MCFD CAPP initiative. We also addressed the impact for families of the cuts to Legal Aid, especially the loss of the LawLine and the closure of all but two of the regional Legal Services offices.

We considered ways to increase collaboration with MCFD social workers and to encourage their membership in the association. We also discussed strategies for gaining the ears of decision and policy makers within ministries that have an impact on the lives of children and families.

Thank you to all BCASW members who gave us such thoughtful and welcome feedback on the documents we produced. Thank you to each committee member and consultant for the time, expertise and commitment you shared for the benefit of children and families in BC.

**Carol Ross, MSW – Chair, BCASW Child Welfare Committee**

---

**MULTICULTURAL AND ANTIRACISM COMMITTEE**

BCASW’s Multicultural and Antiracism Committee (MARC) has been actively examining social justice issues pertaining to human trafficking, migrant workers and the treatment of refugees (including recent changes to the refugee system and the public discourse following the recent arrival of Tamil refugees by boat). In the spring of 2010, MARC hosted a lawyer with expertise in the refugee system, for a presentation on legislative changes introduced by the federal government. The committee also worked with the BC Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons (OCTIP) to develop a workshop proposal for BCASW’s 2010 Fall Conference. As a result OCTIP presented on how social workers can intervene effectively and safely with victims of human trafficking.

Thanks to the work of Leah Pomerantz and support from BCASW’s President and Executive Director, MARC was able to participate in an exciting initiative aimed at disseminating immigration-related research to BCASW members using social networks. With funding from Metropolis, Leah has spearheaded the launch of the launch of the Immigration Matters in Canadian Social Work blog (http://bcimmigrationmatters.com/) and a related Facebook page, and has also prepared regular newsletters for distribution to our membership. This initiative runs until April of 2011, so we encourage you to visit and leave your thoughtful comments at the Immigration Matters blog.

Sadly, Sri Pendakur and Augusta Lokhorst stepped down as MARC’s co-chairs but, happily, they remain actively involved on the committee. Duncan Stephen (thestephens@shaw.ca) and Cristina Crovara (xtinacrovara@yahoo.ca) became the new committee co-chairs. The Multicultural and Antiracism Committee meets on the third Tuesday of each month at MOSAIC’s office on Grant Street in Vancouver. BCASW members who are not able to attend in person are also welcome to join the meetings by teleconference.

**Duncan Stephen, RSW and Cristina Crovara, RSW – MARC Co-chairs**

---

**HEALTH PRACTICE COMMITTEE**

The Health Practice Committee currently consists of nine social workers from different areas of health care practice around the province. We had two new members join the committee this past year. We meet monthly by teleconference. The committee engaged in the following activities this year:

- We developed an information paper called Social Work Registration in Health Care: Why it Matters. This is posted on the BCASW website.
- We wrote a letter to the federal government, objecting to the cancellation of the Mandatory Long Form Census.
- We had a letter published in the Vancouver Sun, expressing concern about the introduction of user fees for convalescent care.
- We responded to a variety of enquiries from social workers and allied health professionals.

After many years co-chairing the committee, Megan Saul is stepping down, and we welcome Wendy Smandych to the position of co-chair, joining Fiona Lewis. Thank you to Megan for her many contributions to the committee! We encourage BCASW members to contact us with any health-care related issues or to get involved with our committee.

**Fiona Lewis, BSW RSW, (filewis@shaw.ca) and Wendy Smandych, BSW (wdsych@shaw.ca)**
First Call, the BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, produced the 2010 Child Poverty Report Card, the latest in their series that tracks the rate of child poverty in British Columbia and compares it with that of other provinces.

They note that from time to time, BC politicians express concerns about poverty, but none of the major political parties has actually mounted a sustained campaign for fighting poverty.

When individual MLAs are asked about child poverty in BC, their response is often very general and without much substance. In deference to that old party game Twenty Questions, First Call suggests twenty questions about poverty (and a few supplementary questions) that you can ask your local provincial politicians:

1. First and foremost, do you believe poverty is a real and pressing problem in British Columbia? (If the answer is no, then what do you say about all those people who try to look after their families on incomes of $25,000 a year or less?)

2. Will your party enact a law that commits the provincial government to cutting the poverty rate in half by 2020?

3. Will your party develop and implement an action plan to cut the poverty rate in half? (If the answer is yes, will you publish annual updates and will you make improvements in the action plan each year that the poverty rate does not come down as targeted?)

4. Are you prepared to accept Statistics Canada poverty lines in British Columbia and use them as a benchmark for measuring poverty?

5. Will you raise the BC minimum wage in stages to $11 an hour to boost the incomes of low-wage workers? (If the answer is no, how do you expect a minimum wage worker working full time full year to get above the poverty line? How do you expect a single parent earning minimum wage to provide adequately for his or her children?)

6. At a time when most other jurisdictions in Canada have minimum wages much higher than BC, is there any convincing argument that BC would be hurt by an increase in the minimum wage?

7. Will you support indexing the minimum wage every January 1 so the incomes of BC’s poorest workers do not lose ground to inflation?

8. Will you encourage employers in both the public and private sectors to pay “living wages” to parents to provide essential opportunities for themselves and their children? (Living wage calculations have been done for Metro Vancouver, Greater Victoria, Abbotsford and a number of other municipalities. Contact info@livingwagefamilies.ca for more information.)

9. Will you support increasing BC welfare rates to the after-tax poverty line? (If the answer is no, is there any rational, ethical or practical reason for keeping BC children in deep poverty simply because their parents do not have decent jobs or can’t work?)

10. Will you support the annual indexing of welfare rates every January 1 so people on welfare do not lose ground to inflation? (If the answer is no, how do you expect parents on income assistance to afford nutritious food and appropriate shelter?)

11. Will you support restoring earnings exemptions for income assistance recipients classified as employable and allowing parents on income assistance to keep at least some of their child support payments?

12. Would you be prepared to live on a welfare income for one month to test the adequacy of current welfare rates? (If the answer is no, then how do you know that current welfare rates are reasonable?)

13. What specific steps is your party prepared to take to remove the financial barriers to higher education and to lower student debt levels?

14. Will your party introduce a comprehensive plan for early childhood education and child care that features high quality care, is universally available to parents with children and is affordable for all who take advantage of it? (If the answer is yes, in what year will these programs become universal and affordable in BC?)

15. More specifically, what new services is your party prepared to provide for infant care, toddler care, preschool care, and before-school and after-school care?

16. What additional supports are you prepared to provide for youth in government care when they reach 19 to help them start their lives as adults?

17. Do you believe that income inequality is a problem in British Columbia? (If the answer is no, how do you accept the reality that the poorest ten percent of BC families with children have average total incomes of only $17,367 while the richest ten percent of BC families with children have average total incomes of $248,701?)

18. Does your party believe that the current system of taxation in British Columbia is fair and reasonable? (If yes or if no, explain your answer.)

continued on bottom of next page...
As I am writing this, I am looking out my window at a dreary fall day. It is overcast, the air is crisp, and I know that we will soon have our first snowfall. But among the shades of grey, there is a maple tree that is a brilliant shade of red. As a matter of fact, if I look beyond the tree to the mountainside, I can see splashes of bright autumn hues — shades of red, orange, and yellow.

Today I am thinking about trees a bit differently. This week I attended the Regional Leadership Gathering at 3 Valley Gap. Not only were we surrounded by spectacular scenery (including trees), we were given an opportunity to partake in activities that allowed us to reflect on what brought us to this work, what values are meaningful and guide the work that we do with people, and what gifts we bring to our work and to our teams.

John Yakielashek, Team Leader in the Revelstoke office, led us through an exercise entitled The Tree of Life which was really about our professional identities and how they tie into our personal experiences, values, and talents. It provided a unique way for us to tell our stories.

What was particularly engaging about the exercise was how inclusive it was of all of us — Team Leaders from all program areas, Office Managers, Senior Management staff — it was relevant to everyone.

As I worked through the exercise, it also struck me how holistic it was — taking into account our ties to family, friends, hobbies, and life outside of the office. We can’t separate who we are in terms of our work and personal lives any more than a tree can separate its roots from its trunk. We are who we are because we are shaped by our experiences. One of the presenters at the conference, Doug Egan, talked about how truth is “socially constructed”; that is, what we know to be true is dependent on our experiences and our social context. This is a cornerstone of Narrative Practice.

What does all of this have to do about learning? Well, when we are able to recognize and acknowledge our values, beliefs, skills, and gifts, we can better understand how they might influence our relationships with others. We become a part of the process of shaping the ‘social construct’ of others, of sharing our resources, of working together to create an environment that promotes professional growth and development. To return to the tree analogy, we become a forest of trees — rich in resources and benefiting from symbiotic relationships with those around us.

And, to take this tree analogy one step further, for me the colours of fall on a dull autumn day represent passion. It’s the passion that we feel for the work that we do. It’s the reason why we keep going, even when we feel tired and stressed. It’s the drive to move ideas to action, to be creative, to improve, to inspire others, to be the best we can and to do our best.

Rhonda Shears is the Kootenay Learning Committee Chair.

John Yakielashek and Doug Egan also presented on their work at the BCASW Fall Conference.
Issues arising from professional liability are of great concern today. There was a time when the professional (or quasi-professional) was not a target for lawsuits; clients would never have considered bringing an action against a professional, not even in instances where negligence or errors were obvious.

Times have changed. Today, the public and our legal system expect more and are much more inclined to initiate a lawsuit. When adjudicating cases, the courts have based their judgements on an increasingly higher standard of care and responsibility. The ever-increasing levels of education, training, experience and reputation of professionals have led the courts and the public to expect service which is superior compared to the average person. This expectation can be overwhelming.

Why have public attitudes changed towards the professionals? There are a number of causal factors. Part of the answer is that the public has become more informed of its legal and contractual rights, and, rightly or wrongly, has been led to believe that a legal action may be initiated from any turn of events that was not an expected outcome by the client.

In addition, the media has brought to public attention the litigious climate of our modern society. Many legal actions have been sensationalized in the press. Lawyers have become much more aggressive in the demands for compensation, seeking ever larger and more extensive settlements.

Another reason why public attitudes have changed is because the relationships professionals have had with their clients have evolved. Traditionally, the connection between the professional and the client was much more personalized than it is today. In the past, clients’ trust and confidence in the professional was absolute. Our changing society and financial constraints felt by many clients have heightened their awareness and increased the professional’s accountability to the client.

Professional liability insurance is one form of protection for professionals and their clients. Coverage will shield personal assets and help maintain a good reputation through the defence of allegations of wrongdoing which might be frivolous or false. For the client who has suffered some damages through the actions of a professional, liability insurance will ensure that there are adequate funds available to make amends for the wrong that has been done.

A professional liability policy covers errors, omissions or negligent acts that may arise from the normal or usual duties carried out by the insured.

When the professional is an employee of a firm, the firm, as the employer, is responsible for the actions of the employee. However, a court of law may find a professional personally responsible for an incident that occurred due to error, omission or negligent act committed by the professional as an individual. To date, we know of no such situation ever occurring; however, it is our opinion that given the behavior of the courts in recent times, one may be made personally accountable.

In another scenario, the employed professional may offer a professional opinion or ‘moonlight’ professional services on his or her own time. In this case, the professional would be personally responsible for any consequences of these actions. It is highly probable that the policy of the employer does not provide coverage for the liability exposures of the moonlighter.

Should the limits of the employer’s insurance be insufficient to meet the settlement of a claim in which the professional was co-defendant, then personal assets of the professional could be at risk. The difference in limits between the employer’s insurance policy and the professional’s policy is available to cover any shortfalls in these instances. A professional liability policy offers the insured peace of mind by knowing that he or she has independent coverage and by knowing what limits of that coverage are available.

When claims do occur, the professional’s decision to have obtained professional liability insurance coverage will remove the financial consequences of a legal action and provide him or her with a solid, reputable insurer upon whom they may rely in full confidence.

For more information, please visit http://extranet.aon.ca/casw or call 1 800 951 CASW.

Please note: CASW-Aon Professional Liability Insurance is a BCASW member benefit and one must be a BCASW member in good standing to qualify to obtain the insurance.
Partnerships in Social Work Education
A strategy to increase the number of Aboriginal Social Workers in Child Welfare

WORDS | JOANNA PIERCE, MSW RSW, DAWN HEMINGWAY, MSW RSW and GLEN SCHMIDT, PhD RCSW

Child welfare is a challenging area of social work practice. Errors in decision-making are subject to intense media scrutiny that frequently casts social work in a negative light. This was the case in British Columbia in 1994 when Judge Gove conducted an inquiry into the death of 5-year old Matthew Vaudreuil. The resulting Gove Report recommended sweeping changes to the child welfare system. Schools of Social Work in British Columbia responded to the recommendations concerning education by introducing a child welfare specialization option as part of the Bachelor of Social Work degree (BSW) and graduates wishing to work in child protection required the specialization.

Although the specialization requirement may have increased the preparedness of new graduates for child protection work, it also reduced the pool of potential candidates by excluding new social workers who lacked that qualification. The specialized training requirement also had an effect on Aboriginal BSW graduates, as many were reluctant to enter child protection work in the first place.

The University of Northern British Columbia School of Social Work responded to these various challenges by developing a post BSW Child Welfare Certificate that emphasized practice with Aboriginal people. The Child Welfare Certificate (CWC) was a special funding initiative developed in partnership between the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and Delegated Aboriginal Agencies. The CWC provided another option for students who did not undertake a child welfare specialization during their undergraduate degree, but after graduation decided to work in the area of child protection at MCFD, a delegated Aboriginal organization, or in another agency or organization focused on children and families.

The three partners: MCFD, the UNBC School of Social Work, and Carrier Sekani Family Services (on behalf of delegated Aboriginal agencies in northern BC), all worked collaboratively towards the development of the post-degree certificate. Several meetings and lengthy discussions guided the design and implementation of the educational program. In particular, the partners sought to develop an approach that recognized and supported the holistic nature of the well being of children, families, and communities. Central to the approach was recognition of the considerable (but often unacknowledged) strengths and knowledge of families and communities. The broad objective was to facilitate a process that would ultimately eliminate, or at least greatly reduce the need for social work, and create an environment in which the welfare of children was safely and solidly in the hands of the community.

THE FIRST COHORT GETS UNDERWAY
The CWC’s first cohort consisted of nine students. This (as with two subsequent cohorts) was a closed cohort consisting of students with Aboriginal ancestry and was part of MCFD’s Aboriginal recruitment strategies. The students in this cohort all held a BSW, were recruited from a number of different northern communities, and hired by MCFD with the clear understanding that they would complete the requirements for the post-degree Child Welfare. UNBC faculty delivered courses face-to-face in a compressed format as well as on-line over a 5-month period. A CWC Coordinator and part-time Administrative Assistant, responsible for assisting with the organizational aspects of program delivery, were hired by UNBC. The CWC Coordinator assisted students with admissions issues, course details, and technical learning concerns. MCFD and Carrier Sekani Family Services also assigned staff to act as support and liaison for the students. In addition to the UNBC-based courses, delegation training and practical skill application for the newly hired CWC students were provided by MCFD. MCFD also had management staff and agency mentors dedicated to the process. Mentors, who were MCFD social workers, provided support to the students in order to ensure smooth integration into Ministry positions.

Carrier Sekani Family Services (CSFS), in partnership with other northern delegated agencies, played a pivotal role in the delegated agency component of the certificate process. Specifically, a CSFS staff person, assigned as agency...
coordinator, organized opportunities for the students to spend time in a delegated agency near their home community. The CSFS coordinator also provided cultural training and support to the students while they were enrolled in the certificate.

**SIX KEY THEMES EMERGE**

The certificate development included an evaluation designed to reflect on the process and outcomes of this new initiative. Evaluation forms were provided to all participating MCFD staff, both front line social workers and management employees, delegated agency staff, UNBC faculty, and Child Welfare Certificate students. The evaluation revealed six key themes.

First, there was an overall positive response that reflected a perception of changing attitudes and practices. One student said, “I’m seeing practice changing in that MCFD is wanting children to remain with parents and family as much as possible.”

A second theme highlighted the effort put into the development of the certificate initiative. The responses suggested the course work was directly beneficial to the students at a practice level and that offering this certificate in the north, for students from the north, was a benefit. A student reported, “The courses are awesome learning for child welfare work.” Another commented on the level of support: “Being paid for our courses, tuition, books and time is great. I couldn’t do it otherwise.” A third student commented that: “Feeling welcomed by the team, and the ability to get the certificate relatively quickly were important.”

The third theme described the importance of training located in the north. Students were able to participate in a certificate that was designed with a northern focus. The students also benefited from the ability to build relationships with delegated agencies in their practice areas. For example, one student noted, “The delegated agencies were supportive of the project.” The suitability of the students was noted by one mentor who said: My student was a very quick learner and brought herself and her knowledge to the field.”

The fourth theme was negative as students noted that they felt overwhelmed by the amount of work they had to complete within the five-month time frame of the certificate. One student summarized this concern very clearly when she said, “It’s a lot to do in a short space of time.” The level of course work was heavy and completing the written work and required readings was somewhat overwhelming. The frequent movement between classroom and the practicum/employment affected the students.

Agency staff and faculty agreed that the timelines could be modified to lessen the burden for students.

A fifth theme that came out of the evaluation identified the need for role clarification, specifically that of student versus employee. Comments like, “There is a lot of confusion over our roles/positions” highlighted this challenge. Students expressed the need for clarity for all involved in the process and believed that some agency staff didn’t have enough background information.

Joint planning meetings between UNBC, MCFD, and CSFS discussed these concerns and resulted in modification of the program for the subsequent intake of two additional cohorts of certificate students. For example, efforts were made to decrease the number of trips from community to the university and additional time was spent to ensure that MCFD employees were more familiar with the CWC.

The UNBC School of Social Work delivery of the post-degree Child Welfare Certificate in conjunction with MCFD and delegated Aboriginal agencies has been a valuable experience. It marked an advance in collective efforts to “do child welfare differently.” One graduate from the certificate said, “I want to make a difference. I want to be able to work with families using a strength-based and family oriented approach. I believe with the shift in paradigms I am able to use this model and make changes that strengthen families and keep them together. I took the opportunity for myself and for the families I will be working with.”

The delivery of the certificate brought UNBC, MCFD, and delegated Aboriginal agencies together to collaborate on a strategy and deliver a program designed to increase the number of Aboriginal social workers in child welfare service. The certificate has had some very positive short-term outcomes in the area of retention. After two years, 22 of the 28 Aboriginal social work recruits continue to work in the North Region either for MCFD or a delegated Aboriginal child welfare agency. In northern BC, especially in the area of child protection, these numbers represent positive retention rates. The location and type of education, as well as the collaborative nature of the program and the support that was built into all levels, helped to contribute to this outcome.

Joanna Pierce is Director of Field Education at the UNBC School of Social Work; Dawn Hemingway is Chair of the UNBC School of Social Work, and Glen Schmidt is BSW Coordinator at the UNBC School of Social Work.
FACES FROM THE
BCASW FALL CONFERENCE

November 5 - 6, 2010