

MEMBER SURVEY REPORT

September 2011



BC ASSOCIATION *of*
SOCIAL WORKERS

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Why be a member?

BELONGING PROFESSIONALISM
SUPPORT VOICE HUMAN RIGHTS
JUSTICE

CREDIBILITY **ETHICAL** RESPONSIBILITY
DUTY LEGITIMACY COLLABORATION
OPPORTUNITY PRESENCE **STRENGTH**
VISIBILITY ADVOCACY UNITY COLLECTIVE

PRIDE **UNIQUE** IDENTITY
AWARENESS MORAL **DIALOGUE**

ENERGY INCLUSION **ENGAGEMENT**
NETWORK PEERS OUTREACH

BRIDGE

COMMUNICATION STRONG ISSUES SOCIAL

WELCOME FORUM POWER

CELEBRATE **CREATE CARE**

-2011 BCASW Members' Survey

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Executive Summary

This report is a summarization of the findings from the 2011 British Columbia Association of Social Workers' (BCASW) member survey. The survey was designed to elicit information from the Association's members in order to provide guidance as the BCASW engages with members and focuses on being a relevant and vibrant professional association. The responses from the survey indicate an association that is formed of a diverse group of social workers who practice in all areas of the province within all aspects of the profession. While there is inherent variation in the responses from such a diverse group of people, the findings indicate strong commonality that can be used to guide the Association.

There are many responses in a survey of this size; all informative and illustrative of member experiences with the Association. There are, however, a few quotes that stand out due to their positive energy and commitment to the BCASW:

"I have often said that: "If the BCASW didn't exist, we would have to invent it!" I believe strongly in having a collective voice for our profession, and in particular a body that can advocate for the profession and articulate thoughtful professional commentary on matters of public policy and public interest."

"I originally became a member to access the professional liability insurance policy, however as a new member I quickly realized that membership provided so much more including: up-to-date information on social work issues, employment

opportunities, a vehicle for connecting with other social workers... providing a strong united voice and advocacy for issues affecting clients.”

The strengths that these two quotes highlight regarding the BCASW are small pieces of information found in this report, but they encapsulate many of the thoughts and experiences of the BCASW members who responded to the survey.

Looking through the lens of a strengths-oriented framework, which operates by identifying the strengths of a client in order to address the presenting needs, the BCASW's member survey showcases a wealth of strengths held by the membership. Saleebey (1997) discusses that to detect strengths the social work practitioner must be genuinely interested in, and respectful of, clients' stories, narratives and accounts – the interpretive slants they take on their own experiences. By committing to a qualitative members' survey, the BCASW shows capacity for discovering and hearing the membership's views about the Association. The over-arching themes that emerged are:

- The importance of having and protecting a strong social work identity;
- The commitment to social justice and advocacy;
- The need of members to connect with and support each other;
- The importance for members to remain current and participate in training;
- The richness of diversity present through members' work sites, geography and experience.

These five themes resonate throughout the responses to all eight survey questions. Agreement is not always found in the member responses as to how these themes should be actualized, but as Saleebey (1997) posits, there are reservoirs of energy, talents and tools present

that can be drawn on to achieve the Association's goals. This set of strengths provides an outline for the Association's Board to define new directions for the BCASW, while grounding itself in the commonalities of the membership.

Purpose of the Study

The members of the British Columbia Association of Social Workers (BCASW) were invited to participate in a member survey in the spring of 2011. The purpose of this survey was to hear from the Association's members regarding their current experiences with the Association, and their ideas and visions for the future. In the fall of 2011, the BCASW Board will be working on the Association's strategic plan that will provide guidance and priorities for the Association. Due to the limitations of the Association's funds and personnel time, it is valuable to determine where resources should be targeted to meet the needs of members, and to engage and retain new members.

The Association's members know what works well for them, what their needs are, and what would appeal to prospective members. The BCASW is a voluntary association for social workers; therefore, it is imperative that the requirements and visions of members guide the association's future directions. The information gained from this survey can be used to move the Association forward while continuing to be important to the needs of British Columbia's social workers. This paper will be of interest to association members who would like to learn more about the involvement and strengths of their colleagues with regards to a professional association.

Survey Data and Analysis

The survey was planned from a phenomenological perspective as the goal was to increase understanding of the experiences of BCASW members with respect to their involvement with the association. The survey consisted of eight open-ended questions with each allowing for an expanded qualitative style written response. The survey was administered using *SurveyMonkey* (an online survey website company) that allowed members to complete the survey online at their convenience. Currently, there are 1150 association members, and a total of 151 members chose to complete the survey giving a response rate of 13%. Respondents took the opportunity to share their thoughts, and express their experiences, resulting in a total of 103 pages of downloaded responses.

The analysis of the data followed the six stages of phenomenological data analysis outlined by Creswell (2007, p. 156-157): data management, reading and memoing, describing, classifying, interpreting and representation. The data was coded looking for common topics and words that respondents used to describe their experiences. The process of using ‘in vivo’ codes allowed the respondents’ own words to guide the emerging themes. Readers of this report who participated in the survey will hear their own voices as their words were used to articulate the findings. A strengths-oriented framework has been utilized to give structure to this report and to be congruent with the principles of social work.

Summary of the Questions Asked and Their Response Rate:

1. How would you respond to a social worker who was not a member of BCASW, who asked you why you were a member?

ANSWERED: 150 SKIPPED: 1

2. Is participation at branch meetings or on BCASW committees important in supporting your practice as a social worker? Why or why not?

ANSWERED: 151 SKIPPED: 0

3. Does attendance at the BCASW Annual Conference contribute to your sense of professional identity? Why or why not?

ANSWERED: 150 SKIPPED: 0

4. Currently, we use email communications (including e-bulletins), our website, Perspectives, branch meetings and annual conferences to communicate with our members. Have these been effective communication mechanisms to keep you engaged with BCASW? Why or why not?

ANSWERED: 150 SKIPPED: 1

5. Describe one or two activities you think BCASW could/should do to support your professional work. You may want more of what we are already doing or you may identify something BCASW has not done previously.

ANSWERED: 147 SKIPPED: 4

6. Describe what meaningful involvement with BCASW would look like for you, so that you were using your time and talent well and it was energizing for you.

ANSWERED: 132 SKIPPED: 19

7. Given that communication is at the heart of any relationship, consider your response to question 4 about current communication in our Association and share any suggestions for enhancing or changing how the Association communicates with its members and other important stakeholders.

ANSWERED: 127 SKIPPED: 24

8. What is your vision of what a professional Social Work association should look like?
What are the activities you would imagine BCASW doing if there were no barriers?

ANSWERED: 138 SKIPPED: 13

Question #1

How would you respond to a social worker who was not a member of BCASW, who asked you why you were a member?

The first survey question elicited a large quantity of vibrant responses with regards to why a social worker would choose to be a member of the BCASW. Some respondents state they sense there is confusion between the mandates of the BCASW and the British Columbia College of Social Workers (BCCSW). This misperception surfaces elsewhere in the survey responses, and is appropriately corrected by this quote:

“First I would explain the difference between the BC College of SWs and the BC Association of SWs as people generally do not know they are two separate organizations with different mandates. This would provide the background for them to understand the professional development and advocacy role carried out by the BCASW, compared to the College’s regulation of SW practice.”

For some respondents, their reasons for belonging to the BCASW spanned different themes. For others, there was a single important reason for being a member. The breadth of responses highlights the scope of practices and needs of British Columbia’s social workers. There are seven main identified themes in the responses:

- Professional Identity

- Professional Credibility
- Belonging and Support
- Social Justice
- Ethical Responsibility
- Information Source
- Quantifiable Benefits

The pride and distinctive identity that members hold in being a social worker is clear throughout all the responses. Many respondents feel unique in their profession, and value belonging to an association that promotes their professional perspective. Members talk about being part of inter-disciplinary teams and how important it is to have a strong social work identity in these settings:

“It’s about pride in your profession”

“To have a strong identity as a social worker is essential to doing a good job for my clients. Being a member of BCASW helps me maintain this identity.”

Several respondents mention the theme of wanting credibility and legitimacy for the social work profession. It is felt that by belonging to, and supporting the BCASW, a member’s social work practice has greater weight as a profession:

“I feel it demonstrates my commitment to my profession which is very important for me. I think it’s about professional accountability and assurance to the clients I serve that I take my professional responsibilities seriously.”

“I think it is important to belong to a professional organization that works to keep up the standards of social workers, to communicate important information, and to provide support to social workers.”

True to the sense of community and connectedness that is part of the social work profession, the respondents also value the support and commonality found in belonging to the BCASW. Members discuss how important having support is while practicing in the challenging world of social work. Decreasing the isolation felt by members is articulated; both physical isolation due to living in a rural area, and professional isolation working as a social worker among other professions. Members want to feel connected to others, and have the ability to collaborate and network:

“I think it is important to stay connected with fellow social workers, keep up to date with what is going on in the industry, and be part of the social work community.”

“For a small community person, membership provides some connectivity to colleagues.”

“I like getting together with people who have common interests and who have a social work framework.”

“...reduces the sense of isolation I often feel as a result of being the only social worker in my workplace.”

An important theme that runs throughout all eight questions of the survey, and is mentioned often in the responses to question one, is that of the BCASW being an advocate and a vehicle for social justice. Many members feel that congruent with the profession of social work

is the idea of collective action in the advancement of human rights issues and advocacy for marginalized groups. There is a sense that by joining the BCASW, more weight is given to the voice of advocacy which is an integral part of social work practice:

“It is the collective voice for social justice and takes action based on social work values and ethics.”

“I believe there is strength in unity and numbers. As social workers we need a great deal of strength to work towards and to bring about change. Membership enables us to have a united voice on social justice issues...”

“I think that having our own association gives us a forum to discuss political issues, build solidarity and act politically around those issues.”

“I consider it my way of ensuring that advocacy continues.”

The moral duty of a social worker to belong to their professional association is also mentioned by some respondents:

“It’s a moral imperative to support the professional association which advocates provincially for our profession.”

Many members state they appreciate receiving information about the profession, training events, job opportunities, advocacy, upcoming meetings and other information pertaining to the practice of social work; both nationally and internationally. The Association is felt to be a reliable source of information, and a place to have dialogue around important issues:

“...my association with BCASW is one of the ways that I keep current with the news of the social work profession, with current research and training sessions.”

“The organization provides monthly newsletters that contain valuable information about current issues and upcoming workshops.”

“I value keeping up to date on issues that BCASW is following and being made aware of government action or changes in policies or legislation that affect client groups.”

This theme of accessing information accounts for the largest amount of responses to question one. It is clear that social workers like being in touch with their profession, and appreciate the BCASW being a conduit for valuable professional information.

Some respondents speak of the direct quantifiable benefits (discounts, health and liability insurance options) of belonging to the Association as something they value. The strongest voice under this theme comes from members in private practice who are able to access reasonably priced professional liability insurance through the BCASW:

“Being in private practice, I have the opportunity to purchase liability insurance at a good rate and have the option of registering on the private practice roster.”

Many members in private practice state that this is one of the most important reasons for their membership.

Question #2

Is participation at branch meetings or on BCASW committees important in supporting your practice as a social worker?

The responses to question two regarding the importance for supporting one's practice through attendance at branch meetings, or being on a committee, are evenly split between respondents articulating "yes" there is value in participating, and "no" there is no value. The third type of response to this question is from members for whom the question is difficult to respond to as they cannot access the meetings due to their geographic location.

For the members who feel there is value in participating, the themes of value are:

- Connection
- Professional Growth
- Collective Voice

Members enjoy the ability to connect with colleagues in person, knowing they are part of a team and their isolation is thus reduced:

"Yes, I like to have the connection with other social workers and to hear what they are doing/experiencing in their work place and professionally."

"Yes. When I attend these meetings I always enjoy being with other social workers and the presence they give us in the community. I also appreciate the organizing of educational opportunities."

Respondents discuss the opportunities for professional growth when they attend meetings or sit on committees. Staying current and broadening a professional knowledge base are very important to members. People also state that they appreciate the collective voice participation affords them:

“Yes, it is important to have a voice and to be part of “being heard” and being a part of the process toward social justice, social action and planning of change.”

For the members who choose not to participate, the reasons can be organized into the following themes:

- A Sense of Not Belonging
- Not Relevant
- Not Interesting
- Too Busy

Some members state that the meetings and committees are not relevant to their practice, and others are able to find the professional support they need from other places. Some respondents mention that the topics discussed at the meetings are not of interest to them:

“Not to me, the issues that are dealt with locally are not of interest to me or my practice.”

Many members state that they simply do not have the time to attend meetings or participate on committees. Respondents state that they give so much to their jobs already that they need to spend time with their families and non-work related activities in order to protect their work-life balance:

“Not really. I am busy with my practice as a social worker employed full time in a challenging area. I need my own time for pursuits other than committee work which I find stressful.”

There is a strong theme from many members that the meetings are inaccessible. This is generally due to the geographic distances that many of the branches cover:

“The reality is that our branch is very large and members live many miles/many hours apart. Attending meetings is probably not realistic for most members here. I do think there needs to be some means of addressing that in the future.”

The idea of geographic location impinging on participation, and feeling connected to the BCASW, is present in the responses to all the questions.

Question #3

Does attendance at the BCASW Annual Conference contribute to your sense of professional identity?

The responses to question three have the same wide variation similar to question two. Many respondents say that they do attend, or have attended in the past, and state that attendance is very valuable to them both professionally and personally. There is another group of members who would like to attend, but are unable to due to the cost of travel and accommodation in Vancouver in addition to the conference fees. There are some members who are not interested in attending the conference, and other respondents who feel they do not have the time to attend and/or get their sense of social work identity elsewhere.

For the members that do attend the conference, and find it useful, they identify the following themes:

- Meaningful Dialogue
- Connection
- Inspiration
- Commonality
- Training Opportunity

The following quotes summarize the positive feelings members have about attending the conference:

“Yes, I love attending the conference because it is an educational event that brings me up to date on many issues, and it gives me a chance to take a break from my regular life and reconnect with my social work friends.”

“Yes, don’t you just love being in a room full of like-minded people, where people just get it, where we don’t just start from reading the same book but we’re on the same page just naturally because of our values! It’s really important to keep the conference going.”

“I am awed by the talent, the dedication and the breadth of experience at the conference.”

For the members that do not attend the conference, they identify the following themes:

- Not Relevant
- Cost and Location Barriers
- Too Busy
- Professional Identity Met Elsewhere

The following quotes describe the thoughts of members who do not find attendance at the conference helpful and/or feasible:

“I have alternate sources through work to maintain my professional identity. The conference is not essential.”

“No. I attend other conferences and continuing education events more specific to my field. I generally do not find the topics at the BCASW conferences to be relevant to my needs or as an opportunity to network with others in my areas of interest.”

“The timing and cost for those not in the Lower Mainland creates some barriers for attendance.”

Asking if attendance contributes to professional identity was difficult for many members to answer. This survey question had the potential to be more powerful if it had first identified members who are able to attend the conference and others who would like to but cannot. This is consistent with the findings from question two. Many members talk about the conference being a supportive event, but that they are not able to attend due to geography and/or financial constraints.

Question #4

Currently, we use email communications (including e-bulletins), our website, Perspectives, branch meetings and annual conferences to communicate with our members. Have these been effective communication mechanisms to keep you engaged with BCASW?

Question four provides insight into how the Association's members like to engage and receive communication from the BCASW. The scope of responses indicates the diversity among members with regards to geography, work-place and personal comfort level with technology. The vast majority of respondents want to receive information and stay up-to-date and informed. The variation within this group of respondents is highlighted by how they feel communication is best achieved.

Some people find there are already too many emails associated with their employment and would like to receive fewer emails overall. Some members feel that email communication is passive and does not engage the membership into participating with the association. Overall though, the strong majority of respondents like receiving emails as a quick and easy way of communication. The prevalent feeling throughout the responses is that email can be read when it is convenient to the member and offers flexibility:

“Email communication has been very effective. I appreciate receiving the monthly updates and occasional e-bulletins.”

There is also a theme (appearing throughout other questions as well) of wanting the BCASW to be environmentally responsible with regards to their communication strategies. From this perspective, email is seen as aligned with both sustainability and communication goals:

“Email modality has been effective in terms of being efficient and environmentally friendly information sharing.”

Not many respondents commented on *Perspectives*; the majority of responses were centered on email communication. Members that did discuss *Perspectives* generally enjoy reading the publication; some find it indispensable and enjoy receiving something in the mail. There were a few respondents though who do not find it relevant to their practice.

The branch meetings and annual conferences are seen to be useful to those who are able to attend, but as discussed in the previous questions, many people are unable to attend due to geography and/or expense. Members who are isolated geographically also discuss the possibility of increasing the use of technology to promote connections between members and the association:

“...an expansion to other social media tools such as blogs, Facebook and twitter would be good tools to explore to connect to younger generations.”

The responses to this question segue into the responses to question seven which further describes effective communication between the Association and members.

Question #5

Describe one or two activities you think BCASW could/should do to support your professional work. You may want more of what we are already doing or you may identify something BCASW has not done previously.

The members who responded to this question provided fifty-four different ideas about how the BCASW could support their professional work. There are five main themes that emerge from the ideas regarding types of support:

- Increased Media Presence
- Increased Training Opportunities
- Specific Support for Private Practice
- Specific Support for New Graduates
- Increased Ways for Members to Connect

Members would like to see the BCASW increasingly present in the media representing the voices of social workers to the public. There are two streams to this media presence: one being the social justice perspective, the other being an advocate for the social work profession. This theme is also common to the responses to question number eight.

“BCASW needs to take a more active role of promoting the profession and getting into the public spotlight to speak out on a variety of social issues and concerns.”

“BCASW should continue to build a positive public profile for Social Work in the many fields we work. An increase on marketing and modern communication strategies would likely be helpful.”

Many survey respondents would like to see increased training opportunities offered through the BCASW. The theme of wanting to participate in quality education opportunities is reflected throughout the survey and respondents suggested many ideas for training possibilities. Some of the ideas are: teleconferences, webinars, podcasts, in-person workshops, more clinical training, a continuing education program, regional training, and training opportunities specific to self-care, ethics and running a private practice.

“More education opportunities. I have participated in the phone seminars and found them useful. I would like to see some workshops on professional ethics as well as legislation that is relevant to social work practice.”

“There are a lot of social workers in private practice who focus on clinical work and I would like to see more focus on this area of practice.”

Members who are in private practice would like to see specific support directed at having insurance companies cover the services of social workers in private practice. It is expressed in the survey that other counselling disciplines have more support than social workers in this area:

“I think that the BCASW should be working to ensure that RSWs and RCSWs are recognized on more extended health plans.”

New social work graduates were recognized in the survey as a group of social workers worthy of more time and attention from the Association. Respondents discussed wanting more assistance available for job searches, more opportunity for mentorship, and increased outreach to

new graduates to involve them in the BCASW. Social workers appear to always be seeking connections, and respondents highlighted this need in their answers to this question. People are looking for more opportunities to socialize, join with other members and discuss practice issues. Some respondents who are retired, or nearing retirement, would like opportunities to connect with members in their own demographic.

“There are many social workers retiring (the Boomer Generation), and I would like to have meetings with my cohorts in this group to collectively work together to support my community through the local branch of the BCASW.”

There are three time-periods identified through this survey: new graduates, mid-career (balancing home and family-life with work demands) and nearing retirement. Members articulate that they require different forms of service from the Association at different times in their careers.

Question #6

Describe what meaningful involvement with BCASW would look like for you, so that you were using your time and talent well and it was energizing for you.

The members who responded to this question shared many ideas about how they would like to be involved with the BCASW. The main themes for energized involvement are:

- Bringing Social Workers Together
- Social Advocacy Work
- Mentorship

The theme of bringing social workers together is shaped from the ideas of: social events, training opportunities, self-care and private practice. Throughout the survey, members have placed emphasis on building connections and feeling like “part of the team”:

“Networking with others that share the values and beliefs that social workers do is important, and to continue to support each other in the work that we do. Also, to continue to learn ways to promote self-care, learning about the effects of vicarious trauma, and how to be healthy in the tough work that we do.”

There is a large skill-set present in the membership, and the survey findings indicate members would appreciate direction in how to proceed with social advocacy while using the skills of their social work practice. Members discuss wanting to use their knowledge in the area of social justice in conjunction with the support of the BCASW:

“Contributing to the development of social policy positions and working with other organizations to present those to the public in credible, responsible methods. Challenging the social and political status quo through education of the public through the media.”

Members remark often about wanting to support each other; the theme of mentorship and peer-learning occurs again in the responses to later questions as well:

“I would like to mentor young social workers. Have practice discussions...say bi-monthly via web/video/face to talk about the challenges faced in practice.”

It is stated by a few members that if they were more involved in the Association they would be less likely to feel isolated professionally and geographically.

There is a large group of respondents who feel that at this time they are already doing what they can due to personal interest and time constraints:

“I’m not sure right now. I’m very busy just doing my practice, raising my family and going to one meeting a month.”

Some members discuss that they are “good” with the way the Association is at this time, and are not interested in other forms of involvement. Others members feel like they do not know enough about the Association to be able to contribute. Respondents discuss wanting to be able to contribute, but not knowing how to go about this and wanting more direction from the BCASW about various ways to be active. The earlier finding of members being at different stages in their careers resonates in the responses to this question about what meaningful involvement with the Association would look like.

Question #7

Given that communication is at the heart of any relationship, consider your response to question 4 about current communication in our Association and share any suggestions for enhancing or changing how the Association communicates with its members and other important stakeholders.

Respondents to this survey question were divided between members stating that communication is presently adequate, and other members having new ideas to improve communication. Many members say that the current strategies used by the BCASW meet their needs and they have nothing to add. Similar to the responses from question four, members appreciated the emails that are sent out and feel this system of communication works well:

“I believe that communication is being done well at this point. There is less paper (environmentally that is good), the emails arrive consistently with updates that are important, and keep me informed about branch meetings and the annual conference.”

There is a sense that members who have access to branch meetings, attendance at annual conferences and in-person training are more satisfied with current communication. Members who are located geographically away from the available opportunities discuss increased use of technology to support communication strategies.

There are a lot of further communication ideas from BCASW members. The overall themes are:

- Discussion forums relating to specific topics of practice
- Increased local gatherings
- Personalized communication to new members
- Improved communication with the media
- Communication for members outside the Lower Mainland (technology based)

The largest communication idea response relates to the BCASW having a stronger social media voice through mediums such as Facebook, blogs and twitter:

“Facebook allows members to communicate more spontaneously on relevant issues as well as contribute to a sense of community.”

“I would like to see the Association be more active on social media such as Facebook. I think there are lots of missed opportunities here to share quick bites of info and generate discussion among social workers. ”

Responses to how the Association communicates with Stakeholders were fewer in number than how the Association communicates with members. The majority of these responses are centred on increased communication with the media to support the identity of the social work profession and to advance social advocacy opportunities. A few members wonder how information is distributed to non-members working as social workers in British Columbia.

A wonderful response to this question that explores communication is:

“We need more input from inactive members...”

This response highlights the fact that 13% of the membership participated in this survey, and given that this question asks about enhancing communication, the other 87% of the membership likely holds helpful insight into how the Association can better communicate with its members.

Question #8

What is your vision of what a professional Social Work association should look like? What are the activities you would imagine BCASW doing if there were no barriers?

Members generally provided the longest, and most descriptive, answers to survey question number eight than any other question. The findings from this question illustrate a group of thoughtful, passionate and inspired social workers in British Columbia. It is a challenge to aggregate the responses due to their individual depth and quality of ideas. The five main themes that emerge from the responses are:

- Increased Advocacy for Social Justice and for Social Workers
- Increased Public Awareness and Celebration of the Profession of Social Work
- Protection of the Profession of Social Work at Employment Sites
- Increased Opportunity for Continuing Education
- Promotion of Mandatory Registration with the British Columbia College of Social Workers

Members want to see the Association promoting the ideals of social justice as a strong and on-going strategy:

“More action on poverty, racism, and human rights. Advocacy for our clients.”

“I wish we would be more together as a group, getting together for passion and passion-driven action on social justice issues. That we made stands as a group more – and get more coverage in the media.”

Members also want advocacy for social workers themselves and for the profession. Respondents discuss how social work positions need support and protection; especially in the field of health care:

“I want to belong to a professional association that fights for social work jobs, employment, voice and esteem with employers around BC”

“More advocacy work for social workers. We advocate for client issues very easily, however I see over and over again the rate and cost of burnout in the field of social workers and it breaks my heart. As a profession, we need to take a stronger stance on wellness in social work so that we can be the best we can be.”

Members in private practice would like to see the BCASW pursue increased advocacy to access better coverage for their clients with insurance companies.

Members firmly want to see their profession viewed confidently by the public and feel that the BCASW is the vehicle to help make this happen. It is felt that the profession could be moved further into the public’s awareness and be seen by the public in a positive and optimistic way:

“Some more public awareness re social work and the various aspects of the profession, including the clinical nature...I often find that the general public still associates social workers with simply taking children away.”

Respondents give ideas such as highlighting the great work done by individual social workers throughout the province, and finding ways to become more visible as a profession through both print and visual media.

The BCASW's members value continuing education highly throughout the survey. Members would like to see more opportunities for training; both in-person and through the use of technology:

“It would be great to have more professional development in the rural areas. It is a challenge, I know, but it would be great.”

Continuing education is seen as something that can be accomplished through many different avenues, and survey respondents state they are looking for opportunities to engage in both formal and informal training opportunities.

The theme of mandatory registration appears throughout the whole survey. There is also some apparent confusion regarding the roles of the British Columbia College of Social Workers and the British Columbia Association of Social Workers. A finding from this survey is that a sector of the membership feels that all people practicing as social workers in British Columbia should be registered with the College. Respondents suggest that the BCASW could support this move from a professional perspective and that it is important for the profession. The responses regarding registration, combined with the statements relating to advocacy for the profession of social work, indicate that members want social work to be recognized as a strong and legitimate profession in British Columbia. This professional strength carries through the responses from all eight survey questions.

Discussion

A component of generalist social work practice is the use of a strengths-based perspective when working with clients. This perspective is an appropriate way to frame the findings from the BCASW member survey. Saleeby (1997) states that strengths-oriented practice implies that practitioners should be able to assess clients in light of their capabilities, talents, competencies, possibilities, visions, values and hopes. Strengths practice includes the following principles (Saleeby, 1997):

- Every individual, group, family and community has strengths;
- Struggles can be a source of challenge and opportunity;
- Assume that you do not know the upper limits of the capacity to grow and change;
- We best serve clients by collaborating with them;
- Every environment is full of resources.

The BCASW showcases a collection of vast talent, experience, vision and possibility that can be identified and utilized to meet the needs of the Association as it moves forward. The over-arching positive characteristics of the Association identified by members are:

- The importance of having and protecting a strong social work identity;
- The commitment to social justice and advocacy;
- The need of members to connect with and support each other;
- The importance for members to remain current and participate in training;

- The richness of the diversity present through members' work sites, geography and experience.

These characteristics can inform the Association's work in being relevant to current members, attract new members and make an impact for all social workers.

Being an association that is all things to all members is perhaps unrealistic, but it is possible to focus on the main themes spoken by the members when making decisions about allocating resources. Saleebey (1997) states that one must never assume the upper limits for growth, and that every environment is full of resources. The Association has the collective strength of 1150 members to address the needs of the Association during times of growth and change. Survey respondents share an abundance of positive responses that describe why they choose to be a member of the BCASW, and they also have many constructive and creative ideas about how the BCASW can further meet their needs as social workers in British Columbia.

Respondents discuss the ideas of book clubs, summer get-togethers, coaching circles, media branding, discussion forums and increased client advocacy. There are members who feel passionately about pursuing a strong and vibrant social justice mandate. They have ideas about how to use the opportunities of social media to address advocacy, and appeal to new social workers who may be more familiar with different forms of media. There are members who would like the opportunity to focus on their practices and connect with other members who share the same commonalities. Some members would like the opportunity to be more involved with the Association, but they cannot attend face-to-face meetings, and are searching for alternate forms of communication. There are members who have years of experience and would like to connect with new graduates and support them as they begin in the profession of social work.

Interpreting the survey data was a complex process due to the wide diversity present in the membership. It has been important to give voice to individual member experiences, while looking for commonality that can guide the Association. The overwhelming sense after reviewing the responses is one of pride in a unique profession, commitment to both practice and each other, and investment in the future of the BCASW. The geographic and work environment diversity of the BCASW's membership means that social workers truly are everywhere, and thus have the opportunity to celebrate the profession and make positive impacts throughout the province. To summarize this report, the following member experience with the BCASW is offered:

“An important human trait is to belong and to feel a part of. Belonging to the BCASW has been very helpful to me personally and as a professional in many ways. I am proud to be a social worker and to gain continued knowledge and experience from others in my chosen profession. The Association gives a base from which to work - ethics and guidelines to follow. Socializing with other members is gratifying and being part of a peer consultation group provides ongoing education and a chance to improve services to clients.”

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