

Factors for Success in Participative Community Planning:

**Lessons from a Case Study in Child Welfare in the
Province of Alberta**

Peter Gabor and Ian Greene

Factors for Success in Participative Community Planning: Lessons from a Case Study in Child Welfare in the Province of Alberta

Peter Gabor and Ian Greene

Introduction

This paper distils the lessons of an innovative participative community planning project in the Canadian Province of Alberta. The project involved Alberta Social Services, more than twenty privately-run child welfare organizations or service providers, and related community agencies such as schools and police forces. The pilot was started in 1984 and most of the recommendations of this planning project, including reallocations in a one-million dollar budget, were implemented in 1985. Thirteen years later, in 1998, most of the changes that were implemented remained in effect and were perceived by service providers as continuing to have a positive impact.

Participative planning that attempts to involve all relevant client and agency stakeholders does not occur very frequently because it is risky and unpredictable, and it is often thought not to be worth the great effort needed for its undertaking. Moreover, participative planning cannot occur in situations where there is a high level of distrust between community agencies and the government, or between service providers and clients, or in which the chances of implementation are too uncertain for participants to invest time and energy. Nevertheless, participative planning is more likely to result in effective programs than policy development that does not take into account the views and experience of agency stakeholders and clients.

We believe that this particular case study is important because it provides information about the conditions under which participative community planning can be successful in the short run in terms of process, and also in the long run in terms of its lasting positive impact. Although this particular case study is limited to child welfare service delivery policy, we believe that the lessons learned are broadly applicable to any public service where there are a large number of community organizations that are stakeholders, and in which there are clients with varying sets of complex needs.

We begin with an explanation of the 1984 child welfare planning project in the South Region of Alberta Social Services, an area that encompasses the southern part of Alberta from the U.S. border to just south of Calgary. We then analyze the implementation of the project's recommendations in 1985. Next, we assess the impact in 1998 of the changes made in 1985. The discussion section of the paper reviews the factors that led to the success of this particular project, and then provides an analysis of how the lessons learned from this case study could be applied to other participative planning projects in the public sector.

The South Region Child Welfare Planning Project

There were two major factors that made a participative planning project possible in 1984: the political context created by a restructuring of child welfare legislation and the child welfare delivery system, and the personal commitment of the deputy minister of the Department of Social Services of the Province of Alberta, Michael Ozerkevich, to participative planning. His hope was to extend participative planning to all departmental services, depending on the outcome of this particular project.

Changes in the Child Welfare System

The legislative aspect of child welfare restructuring was the proclamation of a new provincial Child Welfare Act in 1984 (Statutes of Alberta: The Child Welfare Act, 1984 cC-8.1). The act was based on three principles that were considered innovative and state of the art at the time: least intrusive service provision, community responsibility, and supporting the family unit to maintain its integrity. The new Act sharpened and clarified the legal definition of child neglect and abuse, and placed more responsibility on social workers to provide support services to troubled families in the home before considering more obtrusive actions such as apprehending a child from a home.

On the organization front, Alberta's Department of Social Services and Community Health had gone through a major decentralization beginning in 1982. At that time, the department was highly centralized, with 50 district offices across the province reporting to 20 central office departments in Edmonton, and with more than 8,500 full-time employees. The department had grown exponentially since the 1950s, when it had only about two hundred full-time employees, and the number of programs the department delivered had grown from a handful to more than two hundred. Centralized control of the operation had become unwieldy and had led to complaints from district office staff that they were unable to get authorization to resolve difficult client service issues in a timely manner, and to complaints from clients and community organizations that the department was distant and unresponsive.

When Social Services Minister Bob Bogle first announced his decision to decentralize service delivery in 1981 this was in part an attempt to ameliorate the problems created by centralization, and in part an attempt to implement the ruling Conservative party's agenda of shifting government spending from Edmonton to smaller centres in order to maintain the ruling party's base of support there. The new structure was based in part on the Children's Services model implemented in Ontario between 1977 and 1981.

The decentralization resulted in the creation of six Regional Offices in 1982. Operational decisions were henceforth to be made at the Regional Office level, while the central office in Edmonton retained responsibility for program evaluation and policy development. The Regional Offices were also responsible for supervising the provision of income security programs, services for the handicapped, and support for a number of other programs such as day care licensing, and shelters for battered women.

It was the South Region that was chosen for two pilots in participative planning in 1984. In addition to the Child Welfare Planning Project, a parallel Services for the Handicapped Planning Project was piloted in the South Region. This region stretches from just south of Calgary to the

U.S. border, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Saskatchewan border. The population of this region is about 250,000, and the major centres are Lethbridge and Medicine Hat. The new Regional Office was located in Coaldale, a town 20 kilometres east of Lethbridge. With regard to child welfare services, reporting to Regional Office in Coaldale were two assessment facilities, six group homes, a foster parent consultant, an adoptions officer, and six district offices where social workers dealt with child welfare caseloads involving issues such as neglect, and physical and sexual abuse.

The major restructuring of the child welfare delivery system had led to uncertainty among community agencies about how programs were to be delivered in the future, and scepticism about whether the government could follow through successfully with the restructuring. This climate of change could have led government officials to adopt an inward-focused approach that excluded community input into planning, or it could have been viewed as a new opportunity to establish new links with the child welfare community. It was the latter approach that was adopted because of the commitment of the deputy minister to participative planning, as will be shown below.

The Deputy Minister of the Social Services Department of the Province of Alberta

Although the structural changes described above provided an opportunity for a participative planning exercise both to refine service delivery options, it is our view that participative planning is unlikely to occur unless someone with appropriate authority is on the scene to champion the cause and provide assurances that the recommendations of the planning process are likely to be taken seriously and to have an impact. In this case, the Deputy Minister of the social services side of the department, Michael Ozerkevich, saw an opportunity for participative planning and obtained agreement from the South Region Office to pilot the concept there.

In 1984, Premier Peter Lougheed had replaced the controversial and hands-on Social Services minister, Bob Bogle, with Neil Webber, whose style was to rely more on advice from senior officials than Mr. Bogle had. The social services department had suffered a number of public relations disasters under Mr. Bogle, such as an ill-fated work for welfare project for which the government received almost daily drubbings in the media for several months. As well, the regionalisation of the department was perceived to have been poorly thought-out and too hastily implemented. Lougheed hoped that the new minister would take the social services department out of the public spotlight.

Around the time of the new minister's appointment, Lougheed chose Ozerkevich as the new deputy minister on the social services side, with the hope that Ozerkevich's extensive background in social services programming, and his reputed "people skills", would help to repair the damage done under the Bogle regime, and to rebuild trust with community agencies.

Ozerkevich saw participative planning as an opportunity not only to create a more co-operative environment with community agencies, but as a way of working through some of the unresolved service delivery issues resulting from the new child welfare legislation. Moreover, the recession that had hit Alberta meant that any improvements to services had to be carried out with no new funding. From Ozerkevich's perspective, some child welfare services were then underfunded while other funding initiatives were not having the desired effects. Budget re-allocations recommended by community agencies themselves were likely to be more effective than a top-down budget reallocation exercise.

The Child Welfare Planning Project

In August 1984, Deputy Minister Ozerkevich obtained the agreement of the Regional Director of the South Region to undertake a participative planning project for child welfare services in that region. Ozerkevich mandated that all relevant private and public agencies must be invited to participate, and he suggested that these participants, to be known as a “steering group,” should choose a smaller “planning committee” that would report periodically to the larger steering committee. The mandate of the process was (see Child Welfare Planning Committee, 1995):

- 1) To review Child Welfare resources within the South Region
- 2) To review the need for new and/or innovative Child Welfare services within the South Region
- 3) To make recommendations to Regional Management via the Steering Committee for the allocation of funds in Child Welfare for the 1985-86 fiscal year
- 4) To make further recommendations for the projected service needs for the 1986-88 fiscal years
- 5) To provide recommendations to ensure that a mechanism is in place for ongoing Child Welfare Planning in the Southern Region

Ozerkevich agreed that the central office of the department would cover the costs incurred by the steering committee and the planning committee. He also insisted that the planning process be supported by appropriate research that might include needs studies and program evaluation studies, and central office assisted with these research costs. The Regional Director appointed one of the South Region’s community workers as the co-ordinator for the Child Welfare planning project because of her skills as a facilitator. Ian Greene, Assistant to the Regional Director, was appointed as the Research Officer for the participative planning projects, and Greene worked closely with Peter Gabor, chair of the Faculty of Social Work.

The steering group consisted of six district office managers, six child welfare workers, and the directors of two youth assessment centres, five private group homes, two foster parent associations, eight early intervention projects, two family counselling services, six Family and Community Support Services projects (preventive social services), as well as three other regional office staff connected with child welfare. The first meeting of the steering group, consisting of some 40 members, was organized by the project co-ordinator and held in August, 1984. This meeting was attended by the Deputy Minister, who gave his personal commitment to implement the recommendations of the planning process as long as they were approved by the South Region Management team, were not contingent on changes in legislation, and did not result in additional budget expenditures. In addition, the Regional Manager gave her personal commitment to the planning process, and promised to take the recommendations of the planning process seriously. Although some non-government members of the Steering Group were sceptical about whether, in fact, the government would follow through on these commitments, the consensus of the meeting was that a participative planning process represented the best chance in some time to improve the child welfare system.

The Steering Group elected nine members to the Planning Committee: two representatives of private service providers, two social services district office managers, a child welfare worker, a private group home operator, a foster parent, a youth assessment centre worker, and the child

welfare manager in the Regional Office (Child Welfare Planning Committee, 1995:2). The Steering Group was chaired by a private service provider, and co-chaired by one of the social services representatives. The project co-ordinator attended meetings as a facilitator whenever invited by one of the co-chairs -- typically when a particularly difficult issue was being considered, or when a question arose about process or the committee's mandate. However, the co-ordinator preferred not to be a full-time member of the Planning Committee in order to encourage the Planning Committee itself to take ownership of the project. The Planning Committee met 20 times between September 14, 1984 and April 3, 1985, and reported back to the Steering Committee twice (Child Welfare Planning Committee, 1995:53).

The research component consisted of a survey of 96 children receiving departmental child welfare services, and a survey of 70 heads of community agencies that provided child welfare services, or that were considered stakeholders in the child welfare delivery system. The questionnaires for both surveys were drafted by Ian Greene and Peter Gabor, and discussed extensively by the Planning Committee to ensure that the surveys collected information relevant to the planning process. The Committee approved the final drafts of the questionnaires in November 1984, and the surveys were conducted between December 1984 and March 1985.

The survey of children receiving services included personal interviews with 36 of the 38 children receiving group care services in the South Region, a random sample of 30 children in foster homes, and a random sample of 30 children from the "family support" caseload. "Family support" refers to support services for children identified as "at risk", but who remain in their family homes. In addition, the social workers of all children in the survey were interviewed, as well as their natural parents when available, the child care workers for the children in group care, and the foster parents of the children in foster homes. Children who were nine to seventeen years of age were included in the survey. The in-depth interviews contained a mixture of open- and closed-ended questions, and were conducted by nine social work students and two research assistants who had been trained by the authors. The children were questioned about their perceptions of the reasons for social services intervention, and they were asked to comment on the services they were receiving and the plans for their futures. Natural parents, social workers, child care workers and foster parents were asked comparable questions. The interviewing of children was considered revolutionary at the time, but today it would not be possible to conduct a credible planning process without considering the views of clients (for the results of the survey, see Gabor and Greene, 1991).

The community agency questionnaire was mailed to the heads of 70 agencies with an interest in child welfare issues, including urban and rural school districts, health units, police forces, directors of nursing, foster parent associations, private child welfare service providers, preventive social services organizations, and government child welfare agencies. The questionnaire allowed the agency heads to evaluate the child welfare programs they were familiar with, and solicited ideas about how child welfare services could be improved. The response rate of the community agency questionnaire was seventy per cent.

In October and November of 1984, the Planning Committee placed a series of advertisements in the local media explaining the planning process, and requesting briefs or submissions from any interested persons or organizations. Submissions were received from 18 organizations and one

private individual; thirteen of the organizations made oral presentations to the Planning Committee between early December and late February.

The Recommendations and their Implementation

Clearly, the Planning Committee had a great deal of information on which to base its recommendations. Its sixteen major recommendations were presented to the Steering Group in late March, modified according to the comments received, and then presented to the Regional Management Team in early April. Six of the recommendations were accepted and implemented in their entirety, one was accepted and implemented in part, three were partly accepted and minimally implemented, one recommendation was accepted and implemented but later abandoned, one recommendation was accepted but not implemented because of a change in jurisdiction, and four recommendations were rejected. The Deputy Minister followed through with his commitment to co-operate in order to facilitate any central office budget or policy changes needed to implement the changes accepted by Regional Management, in spite of resistance from personnel in the central office in Edmonton.

The six recommendations implemented in their entirety were increased resources for family support programs, the development of independent living programs for 16 to 18 year-old youths, the expansion of school-based programs for troubled children, the discontinuance of the practice of sharing residential treatment with incarceration for Young Offenders, the development of remedial treatment programs in the South Region, and increased training and use of professional foster parents. These changes would not likely have occurred without the impetus of the planning process, as no such developments were otherwise on the horizon.

The recommendation that was accepted and partly implemented was the development of better staff recruitment and training programs for residential treatment facilities; training programs were developed but discontinued because of their lack of effectiveness. The three recommendations that were partly accepted and minimally implemented were the provision of home-maker services for some troubled families, increased availability of youth programs, and promoting the development of support groups for children receiving services.

The recommendation that an ongoing participative planning process be established was accepted and implemented through the establishment of a regional children's service committee and six district committees that included child welfare workers, service providers, mental health staff and other professionals involved in child welfare matters. However, within two years, friction among members in most of the committees made them ineffective, and they were abandoned.

The committee recommended that Alberta Mental Health should provide services to children throughout the region rather than only in Lethbridge and Medicine Hat, that specialists be hired to counsel sexually and physically abused children, and that more professionals be encouraged to move into the region to open private practices. However, during the course of the planning process, Alberta Mental Health services were taken out of the regions and out of the social services side of the department, and re-centralized in the community health side. Although Regional Management agreed with the recommendations about children's mental health services, the Region no longer had the power to implement these recommendations. In the end, Alberta Mental Health rejected these recommendations, preferring to continue to place priority on adult

services. However, it is worth noting that, in the 1990s, Alberta Mental Health did move in each of these directions.

Four recommendations were rejected by Regional Management: increased resources to parent aide programs, the development of school-related day treatment programs, the transfer of services for native children on reserves to the reserves, and the provision of group home care resources for younger children.

The result of the participative community planning process, then, was that six of the most important recommendations of the Planning Committee were accepted and implemented, and six others were accepted but encountered problems in implementation. Only four recommendations were rejected, three because Regional Management did not think that the recommendations would be helpful, and two because of unresolved federal-provincial issues.

Clearly, the Planning Committee had a major impact in addressing problems with child welfare service delivery in the South Region, but it is worth reflecting on why a quarter of the committee's major recommendations were rejected. One member of the Regional Management Team served on the Planning Committee, and part of his mandate was to liaise between Regional Management and the Planning Committee, keeping Management informed of the Committee's evolving thinking, and keeping the Committee apprised of potential problems from the perspective of Management so that the Committee could find solutions to potential objections before issuing its report. The fact that the most important of the Committee's recommendations were accepted and implemented is testimony to this liaison function being fairly effective. However, more interaction between the Planning Committee and Regional Management during the planning process, in hindsight, might have been helpful.

The community participative planning process was intended to be at arms' length from Regional Management for two reasons. First, to be credible, the planning process needed to be seen not as a process designed merely to rubber stamp ideas already being formulated by Regional Management. Second, it was considered that making the planning process independent of Management would be likely to help generate fresher and more innovative ideas. For these reasons, the person suggested by the Regional Management Team as its representative on the Steering Group and ultimately on the Planning Committee had only recently been appointed as a member of the Regional Management Team; thus, he was perceived as more open-minded than longer-term members of the Regional Management Team might have been. On the other hand, he did not have the background to be aware of potential problems in recommendations that a longer-serving member of Regional Management would have possessed.

Although an arm's length participative planning process makes sense, future projects of this type ought to consider more effective liaison mechanisms between management and the planning committee during the planning process. For example, the Planning Committee could have given one or two interim reports to Regional Management, as it did to the Steering Group.

The Long-Term Impact of the Recommendations

Thirteen years after implementation, the recommendations of the Planning Committee that were implemented continue to have a major impact on child welfare service delivery in the South

Region and elsewhere, and are perceived by stakeholders in the child welfare delivery system as being positive developments. Specifically, the development of specialized foster care beds, the creation of treatment services within the South Region, the development of in-home assessment and intervention services, and the expansion of school-based programs represent major steps forward which outweigh in importance the recommendations that were not accepted or not fully implemented. Moreover, the development of specialized foster care beds is now not only a key component of the child welfare delivery system in the South Region, but the innovation was diffused beyond the region. The specialized foster care program model had been previously described in the literature and had been implemented in a few small-scale research projects. However, the South Region was one of the first jurisdictions to commit to this form of programming. Although, no formal evaluations of the model were undertaken, the feasibility of the model was demonstrated and it was ultimately copied throughout the province and beyond. It is not the intention to suggest that the South Region experience was the only factor, but it is worth noting that, today, specialized foster care is a service found in most child welfare jurisdictions.

Lessons for Participative Community Planning

Clearly, this participative planning project was by-and-large a success story. In this section, we will first identify the factors that contributed to its success. Next, we will consider parts of the process that could have been improved. Third, we will consider why this apparently successful process has not been repeated.

Factors Contributing to Success

The key ingredients in the success of this planning process were the commitment of the deputy minister, the eventual lack of opposition of other key managers, the availability of a facilitator for the process, an atmosphere of change together with guarded optimism about the possibilities of change, and a strong research component.

Clearly, the deputy minister was central both to the planning process occurring in the first place, and to providing the assurances necessary for its recommendations to be considered seriously. Prior to taking on senior administrative roles, Michael Ozerkevich had worked as a psychologist in the child welfare field, and had been involved in nearly two hundred program evaluations either as a representative of an agency being evaluated, as a member of an evaluation team, or as a sponsor of an agency being evaluated. As a result of these experiences, he believed in participative community planning, and in planning associated with evaluation research about existing programs and needs studies with regard to gaps in services. His background also ensured that he was painfully aware of the pitfalls associated with this kind of planning process. In particular, his background taught him that the process was not likely to succeed without political support at the highest levels, something he was able to help guarantee. As well, he realized that in order to overcome the scepticism that members of community agencies, as well as government employees, would naturally possess regarding a community planning process, it would be necessary for him to provide a personal guarantee that the recommendations of a planning process would be taken seriously.

Ozerkevich was able to secure the support of the Minister for a pilot project in participative planning in one of the six new administrative regions. He chose the South Region in part because the Regional Director had some familiarity with the potential benefits of participative planning, and in part because a number of community agencies in the South Region had already contacted Ozerkevich with ideas for improving child welfare services in the new decentralized environment in the context of the new child welfare legislation. On the other hand, neither the Regional Director nor other members of the Regional Management Team were self-starting proponents of a participative planning process. But the fact that they were not predisposed to oppose such a process, as managers in some other regions might have been, made the South Region attractive for the pilot project.

Another key ingredient in the success of the pilot project was the availability of an excellent facilitator. Although the project facilitator was billed as the project “co-ordinator,” she acted as a facilitator because of her training in community work. She was sensitive to both the issue and personality factors that tended to create friction among members of the Planning Committee and the Steering Group, or between the Planning Committee and Regional Management. She used her skills to help those with opposing views to listen to each other so as to promote mutual understanding, and she created an atmosphere in which participants could find their own mutually-agreeable compromises.

The atmosphere of change created by the regionalisation of social services administration, and the new child welfare legislation, provided an environment both of hope, and apprehension. Because the changes that had occurred had not yet solidified into rigid delivery systems, there was a real sense of optimism that a good participative planning process had a real chance of having an impact. On the other hand, there was apprehension, as in any period of change, that things might go from bad to worse, and that one way of preventing such an outcome was to invest time and energy in the participative planning process. Both the hope and the apprehension resulted in a general view among service providers that the planning process was not necessarily doomed to be an empty shell, but might produce useful results.

Finally, the fact that the planning process was tied in with a strong research component had a positive impact. First, the research component helped to settle differences of opinion about which services were working and which required improvement, and about where gaps in services actually existed. It was important that the research tools were developed in conjunction with the Planning Committee; otherwise, the research results might not have been accepted. All of the Planning Committee’s recommendations were supported by the research findings. Second, the research did result in some unexpected results that led to improvements in service delivery. Among the more important findings was the discovery of a rather high level of disagreement between children in care, their social workers, child care workers, foster parents and natural parents about the reasons why the children had been taken into care. It appeared that service providers were too often following different agendas, and this situation clearly was not helpful to the children in care. Second, it had not been known before the extent to which children in care longed to return to their family settings, in spite of the difficulties that had been experienced there. Third, it was discovered that perhaps one-fifth of the children receiving intensive group care services did not need such a high level of care, and conversely, a small number of children in foster care required more intensive services.

Aspects of the Process that Could Have Been Improved

There were three weaknesses in this planning process. First, there was not enough liaison between the Planning Committee and the Regional Management Team. This problem, as already noted, resulted in four of the recommendations of the Planning Committee being rejected, and several others only partially implemented. It must be remembered, however, that the reason why Regional Management took a “hands off” approach to the planning process were valid ones: to promote innovative ideas, and to encourage the Planning Committee to take ownership of the process. A careful balance must be struck between the involvement of management in a participative community planning process, and a “hands off” approach. In this case, it was probably the right decision to assign a newer, more junior member of Regional Management to the planning process. However, it would have been useful for the Planning Committee to have provided Regional Management with interim reports on the recommendations the Committee was considering, as the Committee did for the Steering Group.

Second, it would have been useful for other relevant provincial government departments or sub-departments to have become involved in the process, and to have provided the same kinds of guarantees of serious consideration of recommendations as those provided by Michael Ozerkevich with regard to the social services side of his Department. Part-way through the planning process, Alberta Mental Health Services were transferred from the Social Services side of the department to the Community Health side. Unfortunately, the Deputy Minister of Community Health did not share Ozerkevich’s optimistic view of a participative community planning process, and as a result the Planning Committee’s recommendations affecting Alberta Mental Health services were ignored. Similarly, the Planning Committee’s recommendations that affected the jurisdiction of the Department of Education were only partly implemented partly because of the lack of commitment to the planning process of the Department of Education and district school boards. A third department that ought to have been involved was the Solicitor General’s department because the overlap between child welfare and young offender issues. (At that time, the senior public service leadership in the Solicitor General’s department was focused on internal issues and not as predisposed to co-operation with Social Services as might have been hoped.)

Third, the time-lines of the planning process were very tight. The process lasted seven months from beginning to end, and all participants, especially those involved in the research component, felt pressured to complete their tasks in time with the quality that was required. Although the timeliness versus quality tension is present in most planning or research processes, given the scope of the tasks required, a ten to twelve month time frame would have been more realistic.

Why this Successful Process Has Not Been Repeated

There are five reasons why this participative community planning process was not repeated again in the South Region, and why it was not extended to the other five regions.

The first is that shortly after the planning process had been completed and the recommendations implemented, Michael Ozerkevich resigned as Deputy Minister to accept a partnership in a major international consulting firm, Price Waterhouse. Subsequent deputy ministers have not had the same commitment to participative community planning.

Second, future attempts at participative community planning in the South Region lacked the support of a skilled facilitator. Participative community planning is, by its nature, fraught with conflict. Unless conflict is anticipated as a normal part of the process, and a system is in place so that the conflict can be dealt with constructively, the process will likely fail. This is precisely what happened when an attempt was made to continue a participative planning process after the initial success: it was expected that the participants themselves would find a way to work through any conflicts that arose. Unfortunately, the services of a skilled facilitator are often required in such situations, and without the provision of such services, the hope of success is remote.

Third, although the Regional Management Team in the South Region had not been hostile toward the idea of participative community planning, neither was it enthusiastic about such an approach. A participative community planning exercise needed the kind of enthusiastic management endorsement that had formerly been provided by Michael Ozerkevich. Without that support, it lacked momentum and the participants in the process lacked the sense that their efforts were likely to be rewarded.

Fourth, future planning efforts lacked a research component. As a result, there was no empirical evidence that could be used to resolve differences of opinion about the effectiveness of particular programs, and about perceived gaps in services.

Finally, a participative community planning exercise demands a great deal of commitment in terms of time and energy from its participants, and therefore it may be unrealistic to expect such a process to be ongoing. Perhaps every ten years or so such a process could be mounted in a comprehensive way, possibly with a less intensive interim review after five years. Our study has shown that the results of the initial planning process had a lasting effect, and clearly there is no need to re-invent the wheel on an annual basis.

Lessons for Public Administration

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the review of the participative community planning process in the South Region is that a good planning process, intended to be as inclusive as possible of key service providers and clients, and grounded in research, can be a highly effective policy development tool that can have a positive impact lasting for more than a decade.

Second, senior administrators need a solid understanding of and grounding in participative planning, including the research aspect, in order to be in a position to promote such projects and to provide the necessary guarantees that the recommendations will be treated seriously. It has often been said that in the public service, the only constant is change, and therefore participative planning is likely to encounter difficulties unless there is enough support for it at senior administrative levels that it will continue in spite of changes in personnel.

Third, planning and research need to be integrated and co-ordinated so that planning has an empirical basis.

And fourth, participative planning is an inherently conflictual process that is more likely to succeed if conflict is anticipated and mechanisms are in place to resolve it constructively, such as through providing the services of a skilled facilitator.

References:

Child Welfare Planning Committee (1995), "Child Welfare Planning Report for Alberta Social Services and Community Health, South Region," mimeo.

Peter Gabor and Ian Greene (1991), "Views from the inside: young people's perceptions of residential treatment," *Journal of Child and Youth Care Work*, Vol.7, 6-19.

Notes:

Both authors played roles in this participative planning process. Ian Greene was Research Director for the South Region of Alberta Social Services, and as such co-ordinated the client surveys for the participative planning projects. Peter Gabor had worked for Alberta Social Services until 1982 and was involved in the restructuring described in this case study. From 1982, he was Chair of the Division of Social Work, University of Calgary, located at the University of Lethbridge, and through his office a great deal of support was provided for the client surveys. Unless otherwise noted, the descriptions of the processes involved are based on the authors' participant observations. The information about the continuing impact of the Planning Committee recommendations was collected through personal interviews with senior government managers and heads of non-government service providing agencies in the South Region in 1994 and again in 1998. The impetus for this paper was a presentation made by the authors to the Democratic Planning Group Symposium, Department of Political Science, York University, November 18, 1994. We are grateful to Michael Ozerevich for reviewing an earlier draft of this paper. However, it should be emphasized that the opinions expressed here are those of the authors.