

Check Against Delivery

Camrose Rotary Club Luncheon May 27, 2013, Camrose Hon Dave Hancock, Minister, Human Services

Thank you for the kind introduction.

It's a pleasure to be here with so many of Camrose's top business and community leaders.

Your work is extremely important to the continued vitality and well-being of your community members, your fellow Albertans and people around the world.

Your contributions to and leadership in helping to build the Rotary Youth Centre here in Camrose and a new school for children in Belize are perfect illustrations of that.

Those projects personify the Rotarian creed of Service above Self.

Together, you are building hope, opportunity and a strong sense of community that will help young people develop and thrive.

My ministry, Alberta Human Services, shares many of the same goals with your organization.

We work with communities, agencies, businesses, non-profit organizations and other orders of government.

We help keep children and families safe and strong.

We find permanent and stable homes for homeless Albertans, and link them with community support that enable self-reliance.

We assist families so their children get a solid start.

We strive to ensure individuals are safe and healthy at work.

We support opportunities for people to gain the skills they need to get better jobs.

We help persons and families with disabilities, so they can live fulfilling lives.

And we empower communities to identify their own unique needs. And we partner with them to develop solutions.

Our goal is to help create a province that allows every Albertan to live in dignity and respect and have the opportunity to reach their potential.

When all Albertans can participate fully in our economy, everyone benefits.

Our neighbourhoods are safe and welcoming.

Business can attract the skilled employees they need to compete.

And children get the learning and recreational experiences to inspire their future success.

Before Human Services was created, separate ministries developed individual programs to address specific issues – often in isolation.

Albertans said that a siloed approach was not achieving results that were important to them – especially as the province grows and changes.

They asked for stronger partnerships between government and communities.

They wanted easier access to the supports they need, with government using a one-stop approach.

Premier Redford listened to Albertans' call for change.

She recognized the potential for our supports to be more effective and efficient – through increased collaboration and co-ordination at the government and community level.

In October 2011, she established Alberta Human Services.

The intent was to bring Alberta's people supports together under one ministry to strengthen partnerships and achieve better outcomes for Albertans.

Some people had concerns about combining such a wide range of distinct programs in one department.

Despite some growing pains and challenges, Human Services is making tremendous progress to better co-ordinate our supports that create the safety, jobs and opportunities that help children, families, individuals and communities thrive.

One of the first things the Premier asked me to do was begin discussions with Albertans to help create a social policy framework.

Communities, non-profits, government, businesses and individuals were seeking clear direction and consensus about the results Albertans need, and strategies, roles and responsibilities necessary to achieve them.

In 2012, we supported one of the most collaborative, community-driven, and transparent consultations in Alberta's history.

More than 31,000 people helped create Alberta's Social Policy Framework through in-person discussions in communities and online through blogs, surveys, and wiki.

These individuals included Aboriginal Elders, business leaders – non-profit organizations – community groups – service delivery agencies – municipalities, elected officials – Government of Alberta staff – and individuals passionate about creating the future of our province.

In creating this new framework, Albertans have envisioned a renewal of social policy with a system-wide focus on co-ownership, collaboration, and transparency.

They've encouraged all parts of society to work together using shared principles to achieve common goals.

Those goals include:

- protecting vulnerable persons;
- reducing inequality;
- increasing collaboration; and
- creating person-centered delivery and decision-making, aimed at positive outcomes for clients and their families.

The framework will support transformational change, as the primary influence on our decision-making and priority setting for the next two decades.

Where in the past, policy and delivery have often been crisis-oriented; we will create policy that balances prevention and intervention.

Rather than address symptoms and deficiencies, policy will support citizens by providing the resources for success.

Government has been a service provider, funder and legislator; it will now be an influencer, convener and partner.

Silos of need and service will be replaced by integration and co-ordination of resources.

Where policy has been used as a tool to control and regulate behaviour, it will now be used to empower, facilitate – and most importantly – create opportunity.

We will shift from a focus on inputs and rules... to outcomes, quality, values and dignity.

That is just the briefest of overviews of Alberta's Social Policy Framework.

Much more is online and I encourage you to go to the Human Services website.

It will guide absolutely everything we do with communities to make a positive difference in the lives of Albertans – including how we support of children and families.

Our most important responsibility as a ministry is to help ensure the safety and well-being of Alberta's children and families.

This Children First Pin that I wear every day is a constant reminder of where our priorities as individuals and as government should lie.

In political life, one often speaks to groups and organizations that have points of view, priorities and objectives that are very different than that of government.

A lot of precious time is spent trying to reach common areas of agreement before we can even begin to deal with whatever task or issue is at hand.

However, there is one area where Albertans share very similar views – quality of life for children.

Albertans agree that:

- every child is precious and deserves to live in dignity;
- every child needs a supportive and loving family;
- every child should be able to grow up in a nurturing home and vibrant community; and
- every child deserves opportunities to learn and develop, so they can reach for success and realize their potential.

Two hundred and ten years ago William Wordsworth wrote:

The child is the father of the man.

He was right.

In the intervening 22 decades, evidence-based research has clearly shown that what we do - with - for - and - to - our children will in great measure determine who they grow to be as adults.

Most Albertans recognize the benefits that the healthy development of children and families have on our communities and our society... on our businesses and the economy as a whole.

Children in healthy environments with opportunities to succeed have a much greater chance of becoming self-reliant, responsible, caring and contributing members of society.

They become skilled workers, consumers, volunteers, community leaders, moms and dads.

The great majority of children in Alberta DO live in positive environments.

However, despite on-going efforts to support families, not all young people in Alberta are safe and cared for properly.

Some live in dangerous situations that put their future in jeopardy.

Issues such as poverty, neglect and lack of development and learning opportunities can have devastating and long-lasting consequences for children, families and communities.

We have a duty as a society to protect children and create conditions where they have the best possible chance to succeed.

That's why our ministry recently announced a year-long focus to work with communities to improve outcomes for all Alberta children and families.

This focus began with the passing of the *Children First Act*, earlier this month.

The bill includes provisions to strengthen existing legislation and increase support and protection for vulnerable children and their families.

It acknowledges that children are the future of this province.

That supporting children in becoming successful adults will benefit society as a whole.

And, that raising a child successfully requires a stable family, a caring and engaged community and the enabling partnership of government.

It calls for changes to the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* to further enable front-line workers to make timely decisions about the children they serve.

It will help us to further address and prevent family violence.

And it increases supports for victims of crime and children's access to justice.

Additionally, it extends the Alberta's Promise initiative for another five years.

This will enable business, agency and community partners to continue to bring forward their inspiring ideas, actions, and investment to help build a brighter future for Alberta's children.

Children First is about breaking down barriers and encouraging collaboration to identify and meet the needs of young people.

This legislation and our focus on creating better outcomes for children is not about reducing or releasing parents of their responsibilities or rights.

Quite the opposite is true.

Parents are and will continue to be the most important caregivers and teachers in their child's life.

This is about finding ways to work together to better support parents with the difficult job they have in raising their kids.

A child does not come with a parenting manual.

Even the strongest and most caring of families will sometimes face crisis and challenges with their children and need help from family and community members.

Think of a child in a community as a seed in a garden.

A seed is extremely vulnerable and fragile, especially early on.

Planting it is only the beginning. There is no guarantee of future growth.

It needs many things from many different sources in the garden, throughout its lifespan, to help it survive and mature:

- sunlight;
- fertile soil;
- water; and
- protection from pests and the elements.

In short, if we want a seedling to grow and mature, we need to tend to it.

Children need to be tended to by the community – not just their parents.

If they are to grow and mature successfully, they will require:

- health care and nutrition;
- good education, training;
- positive role models;
- healthy relationships with family and friends;
- safety and protection;
- recreation and culture opportunities; and
- inclusion and respect from peers and adults.

With those elements in place, as children grow, they will become stronger and more resilient.

They will put down deep and stable roots and develop their own identities.

As a result, they will need less and less support from the community.

They will be able to weather storms and cope with challenges, as they transition into healthy, mature adults.

Raising a child successfully requires a stable family, a caring and engaged community and the enabling partnership of government.

We know that when all sectors work together with families, we can make a positive difference for all children in Alberta.

You are here today because you, and the businesses you represent, are actively engaged in helping create a stronger community.

You have accepted that change really does begin here – and you have been instrumental in bringing about positive change.

Even though you have done a lot for children your community and for the province, I am going to ask you to do more.

This summer, we are launching a province-wide engagement with Albertans to identify local solutions that create better outcomes for children.

Under the banner, Together We Raise Tomorrow, these conversations will inform strategies to reduce poverty, improve early childhood development and to help create a Children's Charter for Alberta.

I encourage you to participate in conversations online at www.socialpolicy.alberta.ca and in communities across the province.

We are promoting open and honest discussions about complex social issues that affect children and families.

We need active and engaged citizens to continue to drive local solutions forward and implement them.

We need to tap into your expertise, passion and connections with your communities.

I ask you to engage with your community members to make these discussions meaningful.

I will also be encouraging my MLA colleagues to be part of the process.

I am asking you to contribute your leadership abilities to the transformation of social policy in Alberta – for the benefit of this generation and the next.

You are key influencers in Camrose and Central Alberta.

You can take the message to your friends, family members, colleagues and employees and encourage them to participate in the process.

We need people like you to champion transformational change in social policy.

We need you to help people understand that we are not talking about charity, but about developing programs and supports that will enable all Albertans to have the opportunity for success in life.

We need you to help explain why all Albertans have a vested interest in addressing social issues.

They need to know how those social issues determine the health of our economy, the strength of our labour pool and the safety of our communities.

Becoming actively involved in this engagement is a good place to start.

Improving outcomes for children will not be an easy task.

The good thing is we are not starting from scratch.

We share the same destination – a province where children and youth are safe, healthy and can take advantage of the opportunities Alberta offers.

The focused work on issues affecting children aligns directly with the goals Albertans identified under Alberta's Social Policy Framework, which I mentioned earlier.

And we know there is a lot of great work going on in communities in the areas of poverty reduction, parent supports and early childhood development.

Resources such as the Camrose Parent Link Centre and Family and Community Support Services are great examples of that.

We must continue to build on this work and these partnerships to achieve better outcomes for our children.

This engagement, and the conversations that will ensue, are about taking a close look at what's working and what we need to do differently, together, to get better results for our kids.

I believe that with the active support and collaboration of people such as you, we are up to the challenge.

Thank you for your invaluable service to your community...

... for your support of children and families in Camrose and area...

... and for your demonstrated commitment to your social responsibility.

Together, we will create communities where every child and youth in Alberta has the opportunity to succeed and the ability to live with dignity and respect.