



March 27, 2007

Mr. Alan Markwart
Assistant Deputy Minister, Provincial Services
Ministry of Children and Family Development
PO BOX 9722 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria BC
V8W9S2

By FAX: 250-356-6534

Dear Mr. Markwart:

We are writing to express our profound disappointment with the province's decision to cut funding to the Westcoast Child Care Resource Centre. That Westcoast has been a long-standing pillar to the child care community, to professionals and to parents is well established. Similarly well known are Westcoast's many contributions, services and activities that include: professional development programs for early childhood practitioners; the creation and dissemination of valuable, accurate and updated information; the creation and dissemination of information on multicultural and antiracist early childhood education materials; supporting family child care training programs; and the creation of the "Safe Spaces" program to support children's prosocial development. These important functions performed by Westcoast will be lost if support to Westcoast is cut.

We are writing to you at this time to provide additional information about Westcoast which may not be as widely known as the list of contributions cited in the previous paragraph. For over five years now Westcoast has also functioned as a research partner to the Human Early Learning Partnership and to The CHILD Project. The CHILD Project (The Consortium for Health, Intervention, Learning and Development) is a five-year \$2.5 million program of research that involves researchers from all BC universities. The ten studies involve an interdisciplinary team of researchers from the health, medical and social sciences. Each of the ten studies conducted within the CHILD Project is a collaborative venture of the university-based academic researchers and the community-based partners. These unique collaborations draw on the best characteristics of the respective partners in each project. The university researchers bring their research expertise and knowledge and the community partners bring their experiential and professional perspectives. In this way we hope to ensure that the research projects focus on important topics of research that respond to current and pressing community needs.

Westcoast has served as the community partners to a number of the CHILD research projects. Some examples:

- Child development researchers from the CHILD Project have studied the implementation and outcomes of the Safe Spaces Project mentioned above. This rigorous program of research has proven the validity and reliability of the Safe Spaces Project and these results have been presented to national and international audiences at conferences and in publications. This partnership has enhanced the credibility of Safe Spaces and has also brought national and international recognition to British Columbia.
- A second example is a recent study of children with zinc deficiency in community-based child care programs. It was only due to the intervention, facilitation and credibility of Westcoast that our colleagues
University of British Columbia Vancouver ♦ University of Victoria ♦ Simon Fraser University ♦
University of Northern British Columbia ♦ Thompson Rivers University ♦ University of British Columbia Okanagan

- and graduate students in the Department of Nutrition were able to gain access to participating child care centres, parents and children.
- A third example is the collaboration between CHILD researchers in landscape architecture and child care centres affiliated with Westcoast. The landscape architects worked in approximately 15 child care centres across Vancouver to study the influence of outdoor play environments on children's play. This project has helped to develop guidelines for safe, constructive and enjoyable play for children and has also resulted in the creation of plans for playground design and development.
- Westcoast can proudly boast of having one of the largest and most comprehensive libraries on child care research programs, policies and practices and our research teams from the universities in The CHILD Project have made extensive use of this resource for many years.
- On an ongoing basis Westcoast has also been a key player in a series of "dinner and data" gatherings in which professionals from a wide range of related fields gather with researchers to discuss recent developments in the child care research literature, to explore the relevance of recent research on child care programs and practices and to help articulate new and emerging areas of research.

We hope that this letter begins to convey the fact that the cuts to Westcoast do not only have a seriously negative impact on the many important activities in which Westcoast is involved, but can also inflict serious damage to the many partnerships in which Westcoast participates. Many important and visible programs will be lost due to these cuts. In addition, many equally important but somewhat less visible programs and partnerships will also be lost. As researchers of early child development we rely heavily on our community partners at Westcoast. The partnership enhances our effectiveness, productivity and credibility as researchers and when we present to national and international audiences our partnership with Westcoast is one aspect which always draws much positive attention. Further, I have no doubt whatsoever that our partnership with Westcoast was a major reason for our receiving a five-year, \$2.5 million grant in the first place. We are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada's program in Major **Collaborative** Research Initiatives and it is our continuing collaboration with Westcoast that has helped to define and support our five-year program of research. Here at the Human Early Learning Partnership we know that much of our success is due to the vibrant and energetic partners with whom we have been privileged to collaborate over the years. While we acknowledge the Ministry's desire to "decentralize" certain functions and activities, the loss of a provincial resource and referral agency will deprive the research community of one of its most important community partners.

We would be happy to provide any additional information which may be helpful in your planning within MCFD. We strongly urge the Ministry to rethink and to reverse its decision to cut funds to Westcoast which is a vital and important part of child care in this province.

Sincerely,



Clyde Hertzman, Ph.D.
Director, HELP

Hillel Goelman, Ph.D.
Director, The CHILD Project

Paul Kershaw, Ph.D.
Director, Social Care Network

cc. Minister of State for Child Care, the Honourable Linda Reid
Minister of Children and Family Development, the Honourable Tom Christensen
Premier of British Columbia, the Honourable Gordon Campbell