

"Working Together" Series – Paper #4

**Working together with
COMMUNITY
ORGANIZATIONS**

**Family and Community Support
Services Association of Alberta**

1999

Family and Community Support Services

Family and Community Support Services (FCSS) is a municipal-provincial program through which a municipality or Métis settlement may provide preventive support and community development services. The province funds up to 80% of the net cost of FCSS programs, while local governments contribute at least 20%.

FCSS is an optional program – municipalities and Métis settlements choose whether or not they wish to participate. Within the broad guidelines of the *Family and Community Support Services Act and Conditional Agreement Regulation*, municipalities determine how they will organize their FCSS program, what community issues they will address, and what FCSS services, if any, will be developed in response to local priorities.

Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta

The Family and Community Support Services Association of Alberta ("FCSS Association") is a provincial organization of FCSS programs. The Association is private, non-government, not-for-profit and voluntary (that is, membership in the Association is optional). The Association is a registered society operated by and for the member FCSS programs.

The mission of the FCSS Association is to unite and strengthen the FCSS community by representation and advocacy on behalf of member boards. The FCSS Association fosters networking, education and advocacy; investigates issues of common concern to community FCSS programs; and develops critical tools to assist communities and local programs to meet local mandates and needs.

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- To the 52 individuals representing municipal and provincial FCSS programs, municipalities and Métis settlements, who helped to develop this paper by participating in interviews, and who contributed insights and experiences through phone, fax, and E-mail.
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The FCSS Association "Working Together" project

The FCSS Association's "Working Together" research project grew out of frequent questions and discussions among FCSS programs, about ways to work together within and between municipalities, and with regional authorities that affect communities.

With the support of Alberta Family and Social Services, the FCSS Association conducted a research project to learn the experiences of FCSS programs in working with others, in order to identify models of working together.

The FCSS Association board appointed a "**Working Together**" Committee to oversee the project:

- Sheryl Fricke, Strathcona County
- Colleen Jensen, Red Deer and District
- Greg Pratt, Barons-Eureka-Warner
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Consulting team members for this paper were:

- Bonnie Hutchinson, project manager, writer
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This is one of six papers developed to assist FCSS programs in working together with others. The papers are:

Theme One: Working together overview

- Paper #1: Working together in FCSS – gifts and challenges (*this paper*)

Theme Two: Working together in FCSS communities

- Paper #2: Working together within municipalities and Métis settlements
- Paper #3: Working together between municipalities
- Paper #4: Working together with community organizations

Theme Three: Working together with regional authorities

- Paper #5: Working together with Child and Family Services Authorities
- Paper #6: Working together with Health Authorities

All papers are available on request from the

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"Working Together" Series – Paper #4

Working together with COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

A. THE HEART OF FCSS

What is in this paper

Working in cooperation with local agencies and community groups lies at the heart of Family and Community Support Services (FCSS). From the FCSS perspective, cooperation is both a legislated FCSS responsibility and a means to achieve program goals.

Based on information from interviews and documents gathered and analyzed during the "Working Together" project, this paper summarizes:

- The ways in which FCSS works with other organizations during different phases of a community process;
- Types of organizations and agencies with whom FCSS often works;
- Factors that make working together successful at the community level.

Each community and each FCSS program is unique, and fosters working relationships with community organizations so as to best fit the community circumstances. This paper summarizes over-all patterns, which could be adapted when developing beneficial local relationships.

Mandated to cooperate

For municipalities and Métis settlements who participate in the FCSS program, FCSS participation allows for significant autonomy. This autonomy takes place within the FCSS mandate and guidelines in the *Family and Community Support Services Act and Regulation* Section 2(c) of the Regulation states that municipalities must "encourage and facilitate cooperation and coordination with allied service agencies operating within the municipality." In other words, FCSS programs are legally obligated to cooperate with other community groups.

Cooperation as a way to achieve goals

The *FCSS Conditional Agreement Regulation* states that "preventive social services" means "enhancing the social well-being of individuals and families through promotion or intervention strategies provided at the earliest opportunity," and shows that enhancing social well-being can only be fully done within a context of community cooperation.

Working with others will assist FCSS with such program goals as helping communities "assume responsibility for decisions and actions which affect them;" and helping to "sustain people as active participants in the community." Promoting local partnership and cooperation is therefore legally necessary and essential to achieve objectives, as well as philosophically good.

B. COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

I love doing community development work here. The people here are unbelievable. They are workers. They get the job done. There is an old boys' and girls' network just like anywhere else, but the FCSS community development has kind of produced an "alternative" network too – not intentionally, but just as a result of getting together for other reasons.

– FCSS director

A good community developer knows a lot about negotiating. Everybody's got a Treasurer. I consider him or her a partner.

– FCSS director

In smaller communities, there isn't much of the "not my job description" reaction to requests to work on things. People just do it. The FCSS director is really a jack of all trades.

– FCSS director

1. Two ways to strengthen community

According to the FCSS Regulation, municipalities and Métis settlements that choose to participate in FCSS are obligated by legislation to "promote, encourage and facilitate the development of stronger communities." FCSS, by its very legislated nature, is necessarily involved in community development.

Communities can be strengthened in at least two ways:

1. **By supporting individual people** – Since communities are comprised of people, communities are indirectly strengthened by providing services in support of people. FCSS does this in one of two ways:
 - Through providing direct FCSS services, or
 - Through supporting other groups that provide these services.
2. **By serving the whole community** – Communities can also be strengthened through community-wide initiatives like needs assessments or community planning processes, or the provision of community-wide services like community directories, information and referral services and volunteer centres.

Both these approaches to strengthening communities are aspects of community building, or community development. Community development is not limited to undertaking community-wide initiatives. Even FCSS programs that focus their activities on service delivery are engaged in some kind of community development. To a large extent, community development is what FCSS programs do.

Because community development is what FCSS programs do, promoting partnership and community cooperation is also what FCSS programs do.

Being charged with the task of strengthening communities is an awesome responsibility. Part of the innate wisdom of FCSS is that community development cannot be undertaken by FCSS alone, but is shared by the entire community. This wisdom is expressed in the FCSS vision of "Alberta's diverse people building strong communities through positive, caring interaction and mutual respect," and the FCSS belief that "partnerships are fundamental to community building."

Community development is discussed in "Module Three: Community Development and Principles of Community Planning" in the *FCSS Orientation Modules* series. Module Three functions as a companion piece to this paper.

2. The community development process

A community development process in its entirety resembles a planning model. Community development involves people in identifying issues affecting their community, and finding or developing the means to address those issues. Addressing issues includes identifying skills and capabilities, identifying already existing resources with which to work, implementing plans and evaluating outcomes.

Some community development activities in which FCSS is involved do concern new issues and, therefore require concentrated effort to follow something like the complete community development process. Many FCSS activities appear to have little to do with community development, usually because the focus on delivering services and evaluating outcomes of existing programs eclipses the fact that programs themselves are part of a larger community development picture. All FCSS activities have something to do with community building.

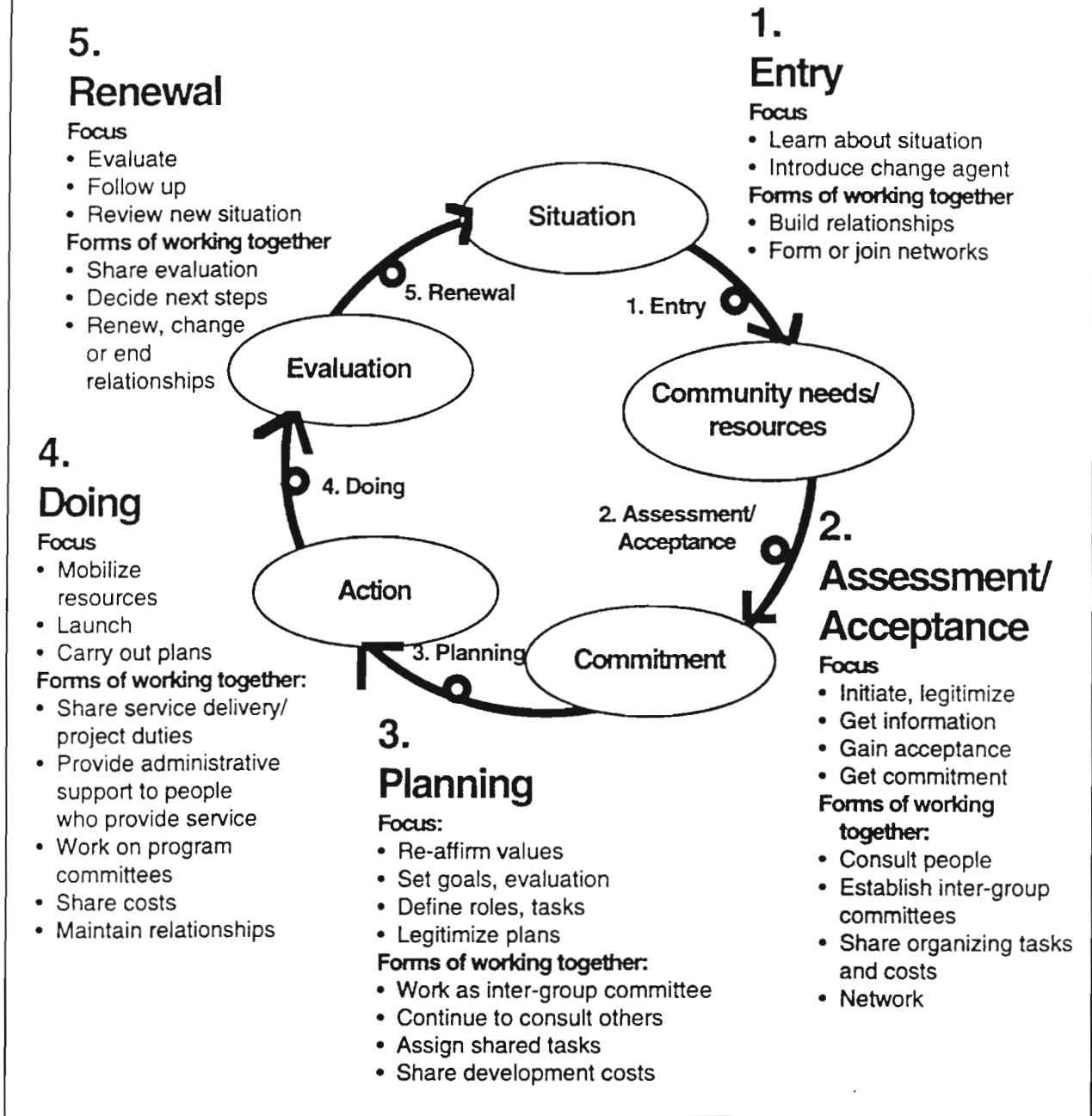
The entire community development process has several stages, as illustrated in the diagram on the next page. People active in community building may not be fully aware of these stages as they go through them. As well, some stages may be experienced less thoroughly. Ensuring a thorough and thoughtful approach to building community is a function frequently undertaken by FCSS programs. For this reason, FCSS is generally considered a leader in community development.

Information gathered during this study has helped to identify ways that FCSS works with others in the community at different stages of a community development process.

3. Cooperation during community development phases

The focus, tasks and forms of working together are somewhat different at different stages of a community development process.

Working together during a community process



a. Entry Phase

Focus – The first stage of a process focuses on existing community conditions.

Major tasks include learning about the environment, determining the impact of environmental conditions, and introducing individuals who may act as change agents in that environment.

Partnership and community cooperation at the entry phase

- **Networking cooperation and building inter-personal relationships:** Learning about other community groups and building relationships with those groups, involves inter-group cooperation. It means creating or joining networking opportunities, and working to establish the knowledge and trust necessary for future collaboration and partnerships.

Note: Networking and relationship-building are part of all stages.

b. Need Assessment/Acceptance Phase

Focus – The second phase focuses on three tasks:

- identifying needs (based in part on the environmental scan and impact assessment in the first phase);
- gaining public awareness/acceptance that the needs exist and that they matter;
- identifying community strengths and resources to address the needs.

Major tasks include gathering facts and opinions about community needs; identifying resources; gaining public acceptance (including that of key people involved in some aspect of the issue); and gaining commitment to action.

Partnership and community cooperation during need assessment/acceptance

- **Consulting community groups and individuals:** Ensuring adequate community input and involvement in fact-gathering activities is crucial. Including a variety of ideas ensures that the need has been properly expressed, and that all resources have been identified. Because the community has been consulted, public acceptance and commitment to action are easier to obtain.
- **Establishing inter-group community committees:** One person or group can undertake a fact-finding mission, but having several people or groups work together is usually better. It helps ensure that all necessary questions are asked; that all opinions and beliefs are canvassed. An inter-group community committee tends to produce greater community confidence in the study, and paves the way for obtaining public acceptance and commitment to action.

Note: For FCSS, key community people include people directly affected by an issue. Thus, for example, it is not only important to consult youth when working on issues related to youth, it is also necessary to have youth involved with the planning or decision-making team.

c. Planning Phase

Focus – The third stage of community development continues the work of the second one. The focus is on finding ways to respond to the environmental impacts discovered in the first phase, and the needs and resources explored in phase two.

Major tasks include examining possible responses, and choosing and developing the most appropriate one(s); developing a shared vision; setting goals; defining roles; acquiring resources; and solidifying public and stakeholder acceptance.

Partnership and community cooperation at the planning phase:

- **Working together as an inter-group or inter-community committee(s):** The same committee that did the work in phase two may do the work of phase three, though shifts in membership often occur to strengthen appropriate representation.
- **Integrated planning:** As the process continues, different aspects of the issue may be handled by several committees. At this point, it is important that mechanisms are created so that the efforts of different committees are all in support of one another. As well, it is important at this stage to keep checking with other organizations and stakeholders who may have an interest in an issue. Several agencies may be planning initiatives related to the same issue, and need to coordinate their efforts to avoid duplication of effort, or worse, efforts which conflict with one another's intentions.
- **Continuing community consultation:** Continued informal consultation of relevant community groups and people helps ensure a workable plan and a commitment to collaborative action when it comes to implementing the plan.
- **Assigning shared tasks:** Responsibility for various tasks is determined at the planning stage. In terms of partnership and cooperation, these tasks are shared by the groups involved in planning. Other groups may also be asked to participate in some specific way.

d. Doing Phase

Focus – The actual program or project is finally underway. The focus is on action.

Major task is implementing the plans of phase three.

Partnership and community cooperation at the doing phase

- **Sharing service delivery and special project duties:** The responsibilities assigned to various groups in the planning phase are carried out in the form of service delivery collaboration, or shared project facilitation. As in the planning stage, there may be parallel streams of activity which require coordination.
- **Establishing program committees:** Committees of service delivery partners frequently oversee the program. These committees range from ad hoc meetings, to advisory committees, to formal boards. Membership may include people who use the services and other community people. Typically, FCSS creates structures – or encourages other service providers to create structures – that enable people who use services to influence how services operate.
- **Provide administrative or other support:** Often an FCSS "service" during the Doing phase is to provide access to administrative support so that a small community organization providing service is able to do so without having to expend much time and money on infrastructure.
- **Share costs:** Participating agencies may each contribute different financial support, either through direct funds, or through providing "in-kind" services.
- **Maintain relationships:** During the Doing phase, partners must continue to maintain relationships with people who use services, people who provide services, and people who are in a position to help support the project.

Note one: A common perception is that cooperation really happens at the doing phase. But in FCSS, cooperation is part of community development from the very beginning. Assessing needs and planning programs are integral active phases that also require community involvement.

Note two: Not all groups involved in entry and need assessment/acceptance phases need be involved in the doing phase. Only one group might actually provide the service, even though several helped plan it. Or, several groups might participate in an advisory committee for one service delivery group. Thus, an FCSS program may be working with different people and have different roles during the life of a community process.

Note three: Partnership, or inter-group service delivery, is encouraged by government and other funders as the most efficient, cost-effective way of doing things. However, inter-group service delivery also requires time and energy for coordination of participating partners (scheduling meetings, no task duplication, good communication, etc.).

e. Renewal Phase

Focus – The final stage of community development helps maintain program vitality and relevance. The focus is on evaluation and rejuvenation.

Major tasks include evaluating the program or project to determine what results have been accomplished; determining what has been learned; fostering self-renewal of those involved (concerning self-satisfaction and commitment); and re-examining the existing (changed) situation.

Partnership and community cooperation at the renewal phase:

- **Consulting participating groups, people who use services, and other relevant community people:** All program partners, and many people who use the program, help to evaluate a program. A significant part of evaluation concerns the impact a program has on its community. For this, community people in addition to those directly involved need to be consulted.
- **Renew or change relationships:** Another shared activity is to assess the relationships involved, and determine whether these relationships should continue as they are, or be changed in light of the new situation which has been created. The Renewal Phase also provides the opportunity to acknowledge and celebrate together what has been accomplished, and to decide together what next steps will be taken.

C. COOPERATION AND COMMUNITY GROUPS

An FCSS program begins being a strong community program by being there for its own board and staff. If it isn't, what's the point? Our board is a working board and it works for the communities and councils know that.

Also, FCSS people just like each other. We have fun. We get to know each other personally and support and celebrate each other. It all filters back to councils. If you're going to talk about working together with other groups and agencies, then you have to see how well your board and staff work together. It's kind of a 'physician heal thyself' approach.

– FCSS director

There's not an obvious overlap in our mandates, but the job security and retraining does have something to do with healthy communities and preventive social services. Really, our FCSS program is filling a gap.

– FCSS director explaining why they provide contracted employment services

FCSS necessarily cooperates with a wide variety of community groups in order to fulfill its mandate as articulated in provincial legislation. As already noted, FCSS has been charged with the task of facilitating cooperation and coordination with other service agencies. Working with these groups through the various stages of the community development process also helps FCSS to:

- promote, encourage and facilitate the involvement of volunteers,
- promote efficient and effective use of resources,
- promote, encourage and facilitate the development of stronger communities, and
- promote citizen participation in planning, delivery and the governance of the programs and of services provided under the program.

These are all FCSS goals outlined in the FCSS Regulation.

Perhaps the most significant benefit of FCSS involvement in forging community partnership and cooperation is that, in most communities, FCSS meets its own goals best by working with others.

Thus, for example, FCSS-funded volunteer centres, or similar services, support volunteers who work with other agencies. Partnership and community cooperation often reduces duplication of services and increases the sharing of resources, which certainly helps ensure efficient and effective use of resources. Cooperative community development can produce amazingly strong communities, with many opportunities for citizen input into programming and service delivery decisions.

Given the diversity of Alberta communities, the specific groups and agencies with which FCSS programs work do vary. While some inter-group relationships are present in almost every FCSS program, other partnerships are less frequent. The following discussion identifies five different types of groups and agencies that have worked in some way with a local FCSS program, and the kind of joint activities FCSS pursues with each. The five types are:

1. The voluntary sector: non-profit organizations and community associations
2. The business sector and service clubs
3. Agencies (government and non-government)
4. Schools and regional school divisions
5. Inter-group committees and boards

1. The voluntary sector: non-profit organizations and community associations

Ways that FCSS works in cooperation with local groups

- **FCSS provides significant on-going funding support.** On-going assistance means groups are funded annually, and a significant portion of their revenue comes from FCSS.
- **FCSS provides consultation support.** FCSS acts as a consultant to community groups with such areas as program development (planning and evaluation), board development, proposal-writing, grant searches, one-time seed funding, networking, and building community partnership. There is no fee for these services, which are part of community development work.
- **FCSS provides administrative support.** Local groups use FCSS meeting space, computers, photocopiers, faxes, receptionist, bookkeepers, and other services and/or staff free of charge.
- **FCSS provides community cooperation services:** Acting rather like a "matchmaker," FCSS helps organizations get together on a variety of projects. A common FCSS response to a group asking for FCSS help is to direct it towards other community groups instead of, or in addition to, direct FCSS support.
- **FCSS cooperates in short-term projects.** FCSS works with other groups on special projects and specific events like workshops, speaker visits, education displays, media promotions, or registration fairs (when individuals "sign up" to take courses, join teams, etc.).
- **FCSS cooperates in long-term projects:** FCSS works with other groups in long-term projects such as community-wide needs assessments or developing new community programs, where a high level of commitment, energy and long-term relationship-building is required.

Examples of local groups and associations with which FCSS works:

The following examples were identified by FCSS programs that participated in the Working Together survey (July - September 1998) and in a questionnaire completed at the provincial FCSS Directors' Network meeting in September 1998. This list gives a sense of the range of local groups with which FCSS works, but the list is by no means exhaustive.

- Associations for Community Living
- Big Brothers/Big Sisters
- Boys and Girls Clubs (also known as Neighborhood Youth Centres)
- Churches
- Community Leagues and Neighborhood Associations
- Community Mediation Societies
- Crisis Lines
- Disaster Relief Teams (often with agency and government representation, as well as support of business and service clubs)
- Family Centres
- Family Day Home Programs
- Farm Support Groups
- Food Banks
- Habitat for Humanity
- Interdisciplinary Crisis Teams (similar to Disaster Relief Teams)
- Local advisory committees of regional associations
- Meals on Wheels
- Ministerial Associations
- Native Friendship Centres
- Neighborlink
- Public Libraries
- Rural Crime Watch
- Seniors Groups
- Sexual Assault Centres
- Women's Shelters

FCSS services and programs that work with other community groups

Some FCSS programs provide their own services as well as funding other community groups. Some FCSS programs only fund community groups; some only provide their own services; but many opt to do both. FCSS-specific services include:

- After School Care Programs
- Babysitter Safety Programs
- Community Services Directories
- Counselling Services/Peer Support (as appropriate under FCSS guidelines)
- Driver Escort Programs (for seniors)
- Home Support/Home Care Programs
- Information and Referral Services
- Moms and Tots Services
- Playschool Programs
- Public Education Worker (Women's Shelter)
- Women's Outreach Programs
- Volunteer Centres
- Yellow Ribbon Programs (suicide prevention)

2. The business sector and service clubs

Though businesses and service clubs are very different organizations, they are grouped together in this discussion because FCSS tends to work with them in similar ways.

Less than half of the FCSS programs that participated in the "Working Together" survey mentioned businesses or service clubs as examples of groups with which they regularly work. However, business and service club support may be more widespread than that. Businesses and service clubs are certainly appropriate partners for the human services sector. Since many professional people (i.e., accountants, doctors, and lawyers) operate within a business, they are included under this category.

Ways that FCSS works with the business sector and service clubs

- **Businesses and service clubs help fund FCSS or FCSS-supported projects:** Many business and services clubs fund FCSS projects and FCSS-supported groups, or provide other "in-kind" donations by way of support.
- **Businesses and service clubs help promote FCSS or FCSS-supported projects:** Businesses and services clubs often support FCSS activities by promoting them. Promotion includes selling tickets, setting up window displays, providing poster space, allowing business or service club names to be included in publicity material, publishing press releases and columns in newsletters and newspapers, and providing or purchasing advertising space.
- **FCSS helps coordinate local fundraising:** Most FCSS directors know how and when to submit local funding requests. This is invaluable information for non-profit groups, who want to approach prospective funders in the best possible way. It is also helpful to service clubs and businesses, who very much appreciate community efforts to coordinate fund-raising.
- **FCSS and FCSS-supported groups recruit volunteers from the business and service club sectors:** Business and service club people often sit on the boards of FCSS and FCSS-supported groups, or help organize, facilitate and participate in FCSS and FCSS-supported events.

Examples of business and service clubs with which FCSS cooperates

Few of the FCSS programs that mentioned working with service clubs and the business sector identified specific businesses and clubs with which they typically work, or else named only a few recent examples. Some of the people interviewed pointed out that *it is wise to research business and service club interests, identify likely supporters of specific projects, and target them, rather than opt for "blanket" fundraising appeals.*

3. Agencies (government and non-government)

FCSS programs have relationships with the government and non-government agencies active in the human services sector of their communities. By "government agencies" is meant services that are part of a provincial department or federal ministry, where management lines of authority can eventually be traced to deputy ministers. (Municipal service partnerships are not included here, but are discussed in Paper Three: "Working together within municipalities" in the *Working Together* series.) Non-government agencies are not a direct part of government although most of their funds may come from government and many of their program guidelines are determined by government.

FCSS may work with one other agency on a specific project, but frequently works with more than one other agency. Responsibilities of each partner vary. They are not necessarily "equal," and are more likely based on availability of resources, including staff time, experience and particular skills. Responsibilities are also influenced by differences in the mandates of the participating programs.

Ways that FCSS works in cooperation with agencies

- **FCSS and agencies have networking relationships:** At the very least, FCSS staff and agency staff are acquainted with one another and share information on an "as needed" basis. In many cases, networking is maintained at common staff levels; that is, management people relate to management people, and service delivery people relate to service delivery people.
- **FCSS and agencies cooperate in single-event projects:** FCSS and agencies cooperate in single-event projects like workshops, speaker visits, and information campaigns around specific issues. All participating agencies help share planning and implementation, and contribute dollars, staff time and other resources to make the event possible.
- **FCSS and agencies deliver on-going joint programs:** All partners in joint programming contribute dollars, staff time, and other resources to the program. All partners determine goals, share planning and implementation, and participate in evaluation. Joint programming usually involves inter-group committees to oversee the program, and agreed-upon procedures like records-keeping. Formal agreements are frequently signed. If the service is delivered by people from both groups, they work together on the project rather like colleagues at the same workplace.

Examples of agencies with which FCSS typically works

The examples below illustrate that the FCSS mandate to cooperate provides the ability to FCSS to work with others whose mandate is beyond that of FCSS. The cooperation role means FCSS is able to help strengthen community, even in program areas that would normally be considered outside the scope of FCSS.

- **AADAC (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission):** Cooperation is generally informal and connected to common interests and clients, or co-sponsoring special community events. There are also several examples of AADAC/FCSS sharing housing and administrative/receptionist support
- **Canada Employment** (also Human Resources Canada and Alberta-Canada Service Centre): Cooperation involves networking and information-sharing, and providing joint services. In one special example, the Stettler FCSS office is contracted by Canada Employment to provide the employment-related services usually found in a Canada Employment regional office.
- **Health Canada:** Health Canada is a funding partner of several FCSS and FCSS-supported projects, often through Health Canada's "Brighter Futures" program. A frequent third partner in Health Canada/FCSS ventures is a provincial health authority (via community health offices or the province's Healthy Communities project).
- **Justice departments:** Federal and provincial justice activities can overlap with FCSS activities. Cooperation involves networking, coordinating separate services, and some joint programming. Specific examples include cooperation on youth justice, and with the Guardianship Program. Métis settlement FCSS programs often work closely with the Settlement Justice Committee.
- **Mental Health:** The cooperative relationship between FCSS and Mental Health includes informal networking and formal program collaboration. FCSS programs participate in Mental Health outreach projects; co-sponsor workshops, presentations and promotion campaigns with Mental Health; and contract Mental Health counselling services for FCSS clients.

Mental Health and FCSS are often both involved in Family School Liaison Projects and school-based Early Intervention Programs. (Community Health is a frequent third partner.) The City of Leduc's FCSS program funds a Mental Health Family Violence Prevention Coordinator, and also works with Mental Health on H.E.A.L. - Help End Abuse in Leduc.

- **Police** (including municipal police services and RCMP): FCSS does joint programming with police through its support of school-based D.A.R.E. programs (or a similar anti-drug, alcohol and violence, self-esteem building programs), and through cooperating with community-based Victims' Services programs.
- **Regional School Divisions and Schools:** The FCSS experience working with schools and regional school divisions is discussed separately below.
- **Regional Health Authorities and Child and Family Services Authorities :** FCSS works extensively with these two regional agencies. The ways in which FCSS works with them, including possible effects of recent regionalization processes, are discussed in papers five and six of the *"Working Together"* series.

4. Schools and regional school divisions

Given that FCSS clients are children and families, and that a significant part of the FCSS mandate is educational in nature, it is not surprising that FCSS activities are connected with school activities. The FCSS experience with schools and regional school divisions is different than the FCSS experience with other community groups and agencies. In many respects, it more closely resembles FCSS experiences with regional authorities for health and children's services

Ways that FCSS programs work with schools and regional divisions

- **FCSS locates educational and outreach programming in schools:** Education collaboration within schools usually involves FCSS working with regional administrators, school principals and individual teachers to schedule and facilitate a variety of information-based programs. Audiences include children and youth, as well as parents (through parent councils) and teachers (through professional development training, or assistance with resources).
- **FCSS develops relationships with individual teachers and principals:** FCSS staff get to know teachers during other activities, and build those relationships. For example, directors often have children in the school system, or they may sit on the same committees as a principal or teacher. Since "getting into schools" is often a challenge, this informal connection can come in handy.
- **FCSS funds or supports other groups that work with schools:** In this example, collaboration with the school is mainly indirect. The focus is on the other group that works in a school setting. However, third-party collaboration may help FCSS strengthen its relationship with schools and school divisions, paving the way for future cooperative ventures such as after school care programs.

- **FCSS participates in regional school division planning activities:** When school divisions are investigating region-wide issues (like bullying), or considering new programs (like D.A.R.E.), FCSS may be invited to participate on special planning committees.

Examples of school-based programs supported by FCSS

FCSS usually works with other community organizations, as well as with the schools and regional school administrations, to provide the following school-based programs and services.

- After school care programs
- Anger-management and bully-proofing presentations/resources for teachers
- Azimuth Theatre
- Babysitter courses
- Boys and Girls Clubs/Neighborhood Youth Centre program coordination
- Bicycle Safety presentations
- Career Planning support (for "high risk of drop-out" youth)
- Child Identification services
- Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Services (in the event of fatal accidents, suicides, and similar losses in the school community)
- Date Rape Awareness presentations/resources for teachers
- Drug/alcohol abuse prevention programs like Alternatives to Substance Abuse, D.A.R.E. and High on Life (presentations to students; resources for teachers)
- Early Intervention Programs
- Family School Liaison Programs
- Headstart (an Early Intervention Program)
- Parenting presentations (through School Councils and parent groups)
- Peer Counselling training and support
- Self-esteem (presentations to students; resources for teachers)
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases presentations
- Sexual Assault/Abuse (presentations for students; resources for teachers)
- Teens in Action, and similar in-school/after-school youth groups
- Vandalism prevention (FCSS has participated in regional inquiries)

Special challenges and other considerations

In some cases, relationships between FCSS and schools are positive and satisfying to both partners. There are, however, challenges involved in working cooperatively with schools. Some FCSS directors have noted a kind of "cultural" difference between running an FCSS program and running a school or a regional school division. (Paper #1 of this *Working Together* series provides background information about working across organizational cultures.)

While there are special challenges to working with schools and regional school divisions, there are also conditions that seem to facilitate strong relationships between FCSS and school systems. The following comments from survey participants provide some insight into what may be an "inter-cultural" relationship. Please note that these comments reflect observations made by FCSS representatives. School representatives might see the situation differently. The comments are in no particular order.

- **Just as there is no uniform way for others to work with FCSS, there is no uniform way to approach working with school systems.** Sometimes it is easier to work with individual schools (principals, teachers, school councils, or a combination of the three). Sometimes it is easier to work with regional administrations. Sometimes it depends on the project.

FCSS programs must determine their own approach based on project specifics, past experiences, and personal contacts. Some FCSS programs need to work with several divisions, which increases the challenge.

- **School-based budgeting, or site-based management, is a mixed blessing.** Some FCSS programs have found that principals have more control over decision-making regarding "extra-curricular" programs like FCSS. Others have found that site-based management detracts from region-wide policies. Responsibilities of principals have increased enormously; many are now too busy to work with community agencies. Site-based management in a context of limited school budgets presents the greatest challenge in terms of community agencies "getting into" schools.
- **Effect of regionalization on school board management has been a challenge.** Site-based management has resulted in a difficult transition experience for some school boards. School boards are expected to be policy boards only, leaving management to the discretion of individual schools.

However, some school boards still operate like management boards. In those divisions, FCSS must go to the school board to get permission to do a program in a particular school or group of schools. Getting on a school board agenda can take months. The timing of the project may suffer. As school boards become more accustomed to the changes, building relationships with them may be easier.

- **Lack of resources may limit availability of guidance counsellors.** Guidance counsellors are an obvious FCSS ally. In some communities, half the schools have no guidance counsellors, while other communities don't have as many schools with guidance counsellors as needed by students (according to FCSS). Some FCSS programs believe that having a local inter-school guidance counsellor group to work with on a regular basis would be helpful.

- **FCSS and school representatives may have a different focus.** Schools and school personnel often have a focus on children's education, which is their mandate. FCSS often has a "kids in community" focus, which is consistent with the FCSS mandate. The differences in focus can create different priorities and communication gaps when FCSS and schools try to work together.
- **Schools and FCSS often have different styles of approaching problems.** People with different styles of approaching problems tend to approach the same situation differently – and may frustrate one another. School personnel who believe it is their responsibility to solve problems themselves may perceive FCSS offers of "shared problem-solving" as "outside interference" (at least, this is the FCSS perception of how some school personnel may perceive FCSS!). On the other hand, FCSS may perceive schools as being more separated from other community agencies than FCSS would prefer.
- **Personality conflicts and community/family rivalries can affect FCSS-school working relationships.** Especially in some smaller communities, the present is much affected by the past. This can be a benefit or a limitation.
- **Some teachers and principals tend to be more open to FCSS than others.** Seeking out teachers and principals with a philosophy of working with others to benefit the "whole child" may be helpful in finding avenues into schools.
- **One secret to involving schools involved is to make the project a community project.** Schools are encouraged by government to be part of the community. Choosing to be involved in a community project, or to help address a community issue that affects their students, is easier than allowing outsiders into the schools.
- **As with everything else, developing good working relationships with schools requires regular, open communication.** The "culture gap" can be bridged by opening up lines of communication through frequent letters, phone calls and in-person visits that are information-based and are not viewed as intrusive.

5. Inter-group committees and boards

Much of the cooperative work that FCSS does at the local community level is by way of participating in inter-group community committees, or sitting on the boards of particular agencies and organizations. The cooperative functions of the inter-group committees vary, depending upon the committee's reason for existing in the first place. By participating in these inter-group committees, FCSS increases its ability to play a "matchmaker" role.

The main types of committees, and their functions

- **Standing networking committees** like Interagency, that facilitate networking and information sharing among a diverse membership.
- **Ad hoc organizing committees** responsible for time-specific projects (like needs assessments or special events) that function as a partnership responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating the project.
- **Standing program committees**, like Family-School Liaison Program Committees, that oversee specific joint programs and function to coordinate service delivery, set policy and develop procedures, and solidify the partnership by providing opportunities for networking, information-sharing and relationship-building.
- **FCSS representation on program-specific boards and advisory committees:** FCSS also works cooperatively with particular programs by participating on their boards and advisory committees, often in a representational capacity.

Examples of FCSS participation in inter-group committees and boards

Inter-group committees

- Committee of Volunteer Managers (standing networking committee)
- Committee of Funders/Funders Forum (standing networking committee)
- Community or Adult Learning Councils (standing networking committee)
- Family Violence Public Education Group (standing networking committee)
- Housing Committees (ad hoc organizing committee)
- Interagency (standing networking/program committee)
- Prevention of Family Violence Week Organizing Committee

Program boards and committees (Some FCSS programs are involved during developmental stages, and then phase out as a community board becomes stronger.)

- Adult Literacy Programs (advisory committee representation)
- Community Police Advisory Committee
- Critical Response Team/Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Team
- Daycare and Family Day Home Boards (board representation)
- Family-School Liaison Program Committees
- Living With Loss - grief support (advisory committee representation)
- Multi-Cultural Association (board representation)
- Native Friendship Centre (board representation)
- Nobody's Perfect - parenting support (advisory committee representation)
- Victims Services (advisory committee representation)
- Women's Shelter Board
- Youth and Teen groups (advisory committee representation)

Regional and provincial committees

- Inter-city Forum on Social Policy (standing networking committee)
- Regional Interagency (standing networking/program committee)
- Regional School Division Joint Planning Committees (standing program and networking committee)
- Regional Community Committees (inter-community standing networking and program committees, of particular relevance to multi-municipality FCSS community programming partnerships)
- South Peace Social Planning Council (ad hoc organizing committee growing into a standing program and networking committee)

A note on Interagency

A common FCSS experience is of Interagency as a networking committee of "like-minded" people, agencies and organizations that do "show and tell over lunch." There is often inadequate meeting time. Even though FCSS is a consistent leader in facilitating Interagency work, many FCSS directors wish Interagency would do more. However, that vision would need to be shared by other community partners in order for the Interagency role to expand.

The potential for collaboration growing out of Interagency is there. Interagency gatherings create an environment for building relationships. Partnerships often develop behind the scenes between groups that might not have joined together without prior contact through Interagency. Other Interagency groups have standing committees to facilitate partnership and cooperation.

Some conditions hinder Interagency participation and program collaboration. Some Interagencies charge a membership fee, so not every group belongs. As well, the burn-out common to human service activities produces regular turnover in Interagency leadership and group enthusiasm. With this in mind, Interagency activism has been described as cyclical.

D. MAKING IT WORK

Partnership and cooperation at the community level may be natural, inevitable, and necessary, but it is not necessarily easy. On a daily basis, FCSS people don't often think about what makes cooperation work. Many of them are so engaged with their communities that cooperation has become part of their way of being, woven into the very fabric of running an FCSS program. Where does the impetus for specific program partnerships come from? How is it that people with different backgrounds, needs and experiences manage to get along, particularly since they frequently do disagree with one another?

1. Initiating cooperation and program partnerships

When asked which groups tend to initiate community cooperation, FCSS directors often begin their replies in one of three ways:

- "Hmmm. I guess **we** do, primarily."
- "Hmmm. I guess the groups themselves do, although we might help."
- "Hmmm. I'm not really sure."

Because FCSS has a mandate to be a leader in community development and is also charged with the task of ensuring effective use of resources and bringing groups, agencies and citizens together to meet community needs, it makes sense to think of FCSS as a leader in initiating community cooperation and promoting program partnerships.

But how does FCSS fulfill this role? As already indicated, Interagency sometimes helps. Since many FCSS programs administer Interagency groups for their communities, FCSS can facilitate community cooperation through influencing how Interagency operates. Yet Interagency seems to have only limited success in this area, so it cannot be the primary means available to FCSS.

- **Most community cooperation is begun behind the scenes.** Someone involved with one group or agency might have an idea, or sense a community need. That person then contacts others (perhaps people met at Interagency) whom she or he believes will have sensed a similar need, or be open to the idea. In this way, cooperation is born. But how does the first person know whom to call? Where does the idea go from there?
- **The person knows whom to call because there is a well-established foundation of knowledge and information-sharing among community groups that enables connections to occur.** The person is likely active in Interagency, as well as other inter-group committees and program boards. FCSS helps facilitate that networking, but so do most of the groups involved.
- **Where does the idea go from there? If it has not yet crossed an FCSS director's desk, it probably will.** At that point, FCSS may act as matchmaker, suggesting the involvement of other groups, agencies or community people not yet considered by the initiating partners. Most FCSS directors – particularly the experienced directors – know more about what all the groups and agencies in their communities are up to than almost any other community person.

Sometimes the person or group with the initial idea contacts FCSS first, usually to request funding. Whether or not FCSS funds the group, it will offer consultation support. Part of this consultation support involves helping the group find other agencies and organizations with which to work.

- **Thus, FCSS frequently serves to connect initiating group(s) with other community groups**, thereby solidifying the cooperative partnership and helping to ensure a more successful program.

In some cases, FCSS may be the first community organization to get a project underway. But in most cases, FCSS functions as an early support to a suggestion made by someone else. FCSS usually stays involved while the project is being established, and then chooses to leave or stay involved once the project is fully operational.

- **Of course, it is still hard to say where that first idea really comes from.** Is it the result of a "Eureka" experience on the part of the initiator(s)? Or, has it slowly taken root during the course of many inter-group committee meetings, and many more informal conversations around the ever-present FCSS coffee pot?

2. Words of wisdom

How can people with different backgrounds, needs and experiences work together to meet the various needs of their diverse communities? The following points are from the comments of the FCSS people who participated in the "Working Together" survey.

- **Is it better to know everyone well, or to not know everyone well?** Groups and people need a solid network of familiarity, but they can know too much about each other, especially when some of that knowledge comes from gossip. Gossip can be a big hindrance, no matter how big or small a community is. Knowing everyone too well can drag you into other people's rivalries.
- **Knowing your community helps.** It is better to know your community well. FCSS programs successfully participate in community cooperation because they know their communities. They know the "culture" of the public at large, and the operational styles and mandates of potential program partners. FCSS directors know how to network both on and off the job. They network so well they often have trouble turning off their networking antennae and taking a break from it all.
- **Networking and working together are easier when the other partners live in the community.** So much sharing is done socially or after-hours. In some smaller communities, agency representatives may live elsewhere. Relationship-building then becomes a challenge. Sometimes, FCSS people perceive that residing elsewhere decreases community commitment. This may be true, but it may be a bias requiring further consideration.

- **Knowing your own organization helps, as does knowing about yourself as an individual player.** Self-knowledge is useful to all groups that work cooperatively with others. It is important for people to be clear about when they are representing themselves and when they are representing their organization. They need to know their group's history, mandate, goals, resources and lines of authority. People must also consider their own working styles, biases, passions and beliefs.
- **The active involvement of FCSS board members is valuable.** Especially in multi-municipality programs, others are as likely to connect with an FCSS board member as with an FCSS staff person. As one FCSS director put it, "All the groups and agencies FCSS works with see themselves as working with the FCSS Board." Board longevity is also helpful. As another director pointed out, "It really helps when at least some board people are around for a while . . . as in years . . . as in ten years!"
- **Including citizens on the FCSS board facilitates community cooperation.** Some participants in the survey for this project believe that having non-elected citizen representation on the board connects FCSS programs to other community groups in a way that having all elected board members cannot. Non-elected citizens often represent other groups, or are also involved with other community organizations.
- **It helps to have "authorized" people at inter-group meetings.** Authorized people can make many decisions, and know their own organizations well enough to anticipate what other decisions requiring additional authorization will be.
- **Include both "detail" and "idea" people in the partnership (although they may not always understand one another).** Idea people often gravitate towards the early stages of planning, when brainstorming is most creative. Without detail people to keep reality in check and the process moving, however, brainstorming could go on forever. Detail people also help when it comes to task allocation and follow-up. At that stage, idea people can ensure the specific tasks are consistent with the initial intentions and goals. A good mixture of "detail" and "idea" people who appreciate each others' strengths keeps frustration at bay and success at hand. The skill for FCSS is to know when to assist an open-ended creative process to shift and become "linear."
- **Open, inclusive communication is a key ingredient in cooperation.** As much as possible, all players should be represented at all levels of community development and program partnerships. Information must be equally distributed. Participants must be equally heard. Diversity is a gift and a challenge – it can lead to disagreement and conflict, or disagreement and diversity can be the heart of creative programming. **Tolerance, respect, patience, trust, forgiveness and letting go need to be honored, and not just named, as partnership values.**

- **When conflict is a threat, partners help each other keep their perspective and focus on the issue at hand.** As one director put it, "Almost without exception, what spurs collaboration is the issue; commitment to the issue helps collaboration keep going through disagreements, differences and conflict." It is easier to get back on track when partners remember the people their programs serve, and the healthy communities they are creating.

3. A final note on taking credit, letting go and moving on

It seems impossible for FCSS people to do community development without becoming fully engaged in their communities, specifically in the lives of those groups, agencies, organizations and people with whom they work. Yet, a significant part of FCSS activity involves deciding when it is time to let go.

FCSS programs are active in many ongoing partnerships. But FCSS frequently fosters collaboration behind the scenes, where it is not immediately visible. Indeed, a successful collaboration story often means a new program is ready to leave the nest. FCSS can watch the program flourish, but often does so from the sidelines. Rather like the parent of a grown child, FCSS can be proud of its work, but rarely turns to its neighbor to say, "Look at that! I had something to do with that!"

In other words, FCSS programs don't always "blow their own horns." If the main purpose of the "*Working Together*" project is to help strengthen the FCSS capacity for working cooperatively with other groups, then part of that purpose is to remind FCSS to acknowledge, celebrate and find strength in its achievements, and then to move on.

"Working Together" Series – Paper #4

**Working together with
COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Examples of community cooperation**
- 2. People who participated in developing this paper**

Attachment #1: Special examples of community cooperation

Working together not only helps meet community needs, it also provides a valued social benefit to those involved. Many examples of enthusiastic, productive cooperation were described during interviews for this project. Here are a few examples.

- **"Making the Connection" in Athabasca:** Various community groups in Athabasca have been working hard to organize a workshop related to Prevention of Family Violence Week in November. Participating groups include the RCMP, Mental Health, AADAC, and FCSS. The FCSS program anticipates a successful workshop, partly because collaboration behind the scenes has been so positive. This is one example of many successful cooperative efforts to organize special events.
- **"Great Working Partnerships" in Breton:** Breton's FCSS program has what it refers to as "great working partnerships" with other groups. With the support of several service clubs, Breton hosted a community Hallowe'en Party that also benefited the Food Bank, since admission was by Food Bank donation. Breton has also joined forces with the Breton Elementary Parent Council and the federal Brighter Futures program to organize Family Day activities. Many other FCSS programs will recognize these kinds of cooperative efforts as typical of what they do.
- **Joint housing initiatives** – In a number of urban municipalities, FCSS has been a partner with other community organizations to address issues of availability of affordable housing. FCSS has in some cases helped to raise awareness of the issue, and helped to get it on the agenda of the municipal council and other stakeholders. Some of the most successful initiatives have involved collaboration with the business sector as well as community agencies with an interest in housing.
- **Leduc Interagency Working Group:** Both the City of Leduc (a single-municipality FCSS program) and the County of Leduc (a multi-municipality FCSS program) participate in the Leduc Interagency Working Group. The Working Group is an example of how Interagency can successfully foster inter-group collaboration and program partnerships. The group defines issues, identifies problems and works towards solutions, generating projects and programs to address a variety of community needs.

- **Common "Application for Funding" form in Red Deer and District:** FCSS and the Further Education Council, as members of the Funders Forum in Red Deer, played a lead role in pulling together a cooperative venture of organizations who fund community projects. The funders recognized that community organizations spend much time completing funding application forms for different funders. The Funders Forum also realized that they all required some of the same information from organizations who request funds.

Over many months, the Funders Forum developed a two-page "Application for Funding" which will eventually be used by all of them. A community organization can complete one single Application for Funding, and have it reviewed by any or all of the Funders Forum members. This saves time for community organizations, and also provides a vehicle for funders to coordinate their efforts and make the best use of all the available resources.

In the first year, the group is piloting use of the shared application form by local funders such as FCSS, United Way, Community Foundation and Lottery Board. Agencies are delighted that they need to fill out basic information only once – and this is kept on file so they don't need to repeat information in subsequent years. Funders too are pleased that they can coordinate their efforts. After the first pilot year only minor changes were required. The hope is that in the next few years, the common funding application process will also be used by the Child and Family Services Authority, Regional Health Authority, and Mental Health.

- **Bringing services into the community (Tofield-Ryley-Beaver):** Working with Interagency, the Tofield-Ryley-Beaver FCSS program successfully convinced AADAC to serve the area, and also convinced Alberta Family and Social Services to locate a Child Welfare worker in Tofield. FCSS probably couldn't have done this on its own, but was instrumental in generating momentum through Interagency. Other communities have also "banded together" to get the services they need.
- **South Peace Social Planning Council:** The City of Grande Prairie FCSS program has been instrumental in bringing the regional community together to form the South Peace Social Planning Council. A good example of community development, the Planning Council began with "Town Hall" public meetings. An inter-group committee has been responsible for organizing it, but public support has been maintained throughout the process. Council activities will focus on research and advocacy. Regular FCSS involvement will end once the Council is fully functioning.

Attachment #2: People who participated in developing this paper

Between April 1998 and January of 1999, the consulting team of Hutchinson Associates had contact with 60 representatives of FCSS programs and municipalities, Most of these contacts were through interviews, while some were via letter, fax and E-mail messages. Of these 60 people, the 52 listed below discussed working together with community organizations.

As well, 35 FCSS directors participated in focus group discussions in September 1998. One of the discussion questions was, "What are all the ways in which FCSS works with other community organizations?" There may be some FCSS directors who participated in a focus group whose names do not appear in the list below.

*CAO = Chief Administrative Officer or
Municipal Administrator*

• Evan Parliament, CAO

Alberta Family and Social Services:

- Veronica Facundo
- Mic Farrell
- Debbie Trachimowich

Athabasca FCSS

- Diana Johnston, Town Accountant
- Alan Taylor, Director

Barons-Eureka-Warner FCSS

- Greg Pratt, Director

Beaverlodge FCSS

- Betty Miller, Director

Breton and M.D. of Brazeau FCSS

- Deanne Young, Director

Buffalo Lake Métis Settlement FCSS

- Terry Burke, Director Community Services

Calgary FCSS

- Frank Hoebarth, Manager
Community and Social Development

Camrose and District Support Services (CDSS)

- Wendy Gregorwich, Director

Claresholm FCSS

- Randy Ell, Director, Community Services

Coronation and District FCSS

- Linda Bunbury, Community Liaison

Didsbury FCSS

Edmonton Community and Family Services
• Kathy Barnhart, Director (FCSS)

Elk Point FCSS

- Deanna Easthope, Director

County of Flagstaff FCS

Gail Watt, Director

Fort Saskatchewan Community Services

- John Bruijn, Director

Gibbons Community Services

Marg Clark, Director

Grande Cache FCSS

- Kelly Smith, Office Administrator

City of Grande Prairie FCSS

- Lana Wells, Director

County of Grande Prairie FCSS

- Mary Ann Eckstrom, Councillor

Hanna Community Services

- Kim Neil, Director

Hinton Parks, Recreation and FCSS

- Betty Osmond, Director

Innisfail FCSS

- Valaine Vienneau, Director

County of Kneehill FCSS

- Shelley Jackson, Director

Lacombe and District FCSS

- Trish Mayner, Executive Director

Lac Ste. Anne Regional Community Services
Council

- Donna Geiger, Coordinator (FCSS)

Lakeland (Cold Lake) Community Services

- Claire Crawford, Director

City of Leduc FCSS

- Ted Tymchuk, Manager

County of Leduc FCSS

- Betty Ann Nemish, Director

Lethbridge Family and Human Services

- Rosalind Annis, Coordinator

Morinville FCSS

- Cathy Clarke, Director

Village of Morrin

(Starland Resource Program)

Annette Plachner, CAO

Prairieland Regional Division #25

(Starland Resource Program: Morrin FCSS, Delia
FCSS and Starland County FCSS)

- Art Aitkin, Superintendent of Schools

Okotoks Community Development

- Linda Blasetti, Coordinator

Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement FCSS

- Joanne Ducharme, Coordinator
Community Services

Provost and District FCSS

- Cindy Morrow, Program Coordinator

Red Deer and District FCSS

- Colleen Jensen, Manager Social Planning

County of St. Paul FCSS

- Linnette Newby, Director

Town of St. Paul FCSS

- Cheryl Snider, Director

Stettler and District FCSS

- Faye Blakely, Administrator

County of Strathcona FCSS

- Sheryl Fricke, Coordinator
Community Development
- Jackie Winter, Manager

Sylvan Lake FCSS

- Carman McKee, Director

Tofield-Ryley-Beaver FCSS

- Yvonne Allan, Director

Village of Trochu

(County of Kneehill FCSS)

- Maureen Makala, CAO

Viking-Beaver FCSS

- Joanne Stewart, Director

County of Wheatland FCSS

- Sharon Thibeau, Program Coordinator

Village of Standard

(County of Wheatland FCSS)

- Ken Larson, Reeve

Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo FCSS

(Fort McMurray and district)

- Joe Bath, Superintendent

Yellowhead Community Services

- Debbie Charest, Director