



*It's About Me, It's About You
It's About Us
A Story About Children's Rights*

Report of the 1999 Public Awareness Campaign and Symposium on the
UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

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Unit for Research and Education on the
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*It's About Me, It's About You, It's About Us —
A Story About Children's Rights*

was commissioned by the **Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children** and produced by the **Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, University of Victoria.**

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This is a story about children's rights

It's a simple story, really...

It's a story about bringing a little known and widely misunderstood Convention on children's rights to the forefront, and promoting its principles to the local community through a public awareness campaign.

It's a story about a partnership of community members from varied backgrounds getting together with young people to promote children's rights. They were bound together by the common belief that the well-being of a child is the responsibility of the entire community.

It's a story about participation of children and youth — direct input, collaboration, and participation of young people in educating others about child and youth human rights. It's also a story about the realization that it takes community partners — concerned organizations, groups, businesses, and individuals — using a powerful tool like the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC), to enable the participation of children and youth.

It's a story about the Symposium on the Rights of the Child held in Victoria, British Columbia — June 24th to 26th, 1999.

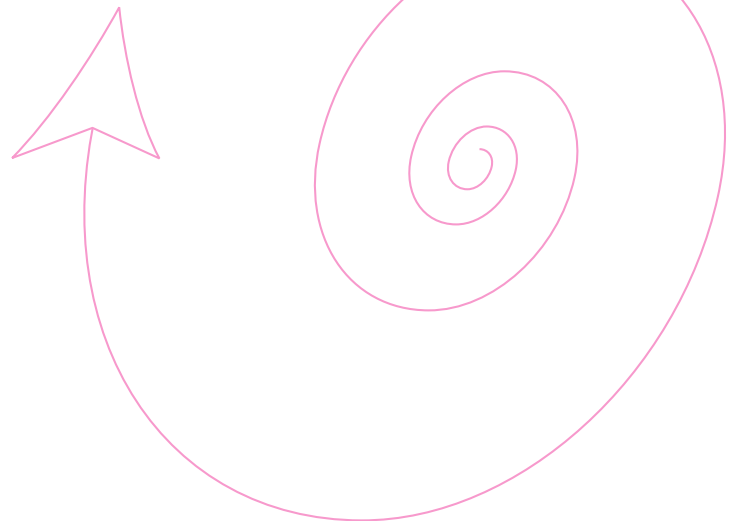
It's a story about what comes next...

It's a story about me, about you, and about all of us...



“We just want our voice to be heard; kids deserve that.”

-Darryl Wilson, age 14



It is a story about using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child to advocate for children's rights.

Whose story is it?

Because this story is about the rights of children and youth, this story belongs to them, but affects us all.

The story involves a wide cast of characters—a unique community of partners—headed by:

- the Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children,
- the Capital Health Region (Child, Youth and Maternal Health Services),
- the British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families, and
- the University of Victoria Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Over a two-year period, these organizations — along with children and youth, families, the educational community, community organizations, businesses and a host of other partners — decided to advocate for children's rights using the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC). They decided to organize a public awareness campaign about children's rights and the CRC, and to hold a Symposium on the Rights of the Child.

But where did this start? Why would this community take on the task of advocating for children using the CRC?

The Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children (QAF) is a funder for the health and well-being of children and youth, and an advocate for children's issues on Vancouver Island. In early 1997 QAF became more aware of the power of the CRC as a tool for advocating for children.



“The Convention has been around for 10 years but we feel there's a lot more that can be done. Many children, youth and adults do not know that the Convention even exists. Increasing numbers of Canadian children are living in poverty and little is being done in the area of children's health care. Early intervention and preventative health care programs for children are virtually non-existent.”

- Joy Spencer-Barry, Executive Director of the Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children

The Foundation already viewed itself as being an advocate for children and their rights. However, after a fresh look at the CRC through the lens of advocacy, QAF realized that it could advocate for children's rights more effectively by using the CRC as a guide — as a tool for advocacy. QAF thought about the agencies which it funds. The agencies, while also advocates for children, were not very aware of the CRC. QAF felt that the agencies which it funds should be aware of the CRC, and should also be using the CRC as an advocacy tool. The whole story took off from there... but we don't want to give too much away yet.

You may wonder... why Victoria? Besides being famous for its natural beauty, double decker buses and gardens, Victoria is also a hot-bed of CRC-related child rights activity. Since the early 1990's many children's rights events and projects have taken place in Victoria with the objective of breathing life into the CRC:

- "Stronger Children — Stronger Families" A Symposium held during the 1994 Year of the Family, and organized by the University of Victoria's School of Child and Youth Care, to discuss and celebrate Canada's first report on the CRC.
- Workshop on Indigenous Children's Rights: A week-long workshop held in 1996 at Dunsmuir Lodge, involving Indigenous children and youth from North, Central, and South America, working together with Indigenous Elders, and academics and professionals, to find the synergy between the CRC and Indigenous culture and traditions.
- Out From the Shadows: International Summit of Sexually Exploited Youth: This 1998 Summit was a prime example of child and youth participation; sexually exploited children and youth created their own Declaration and Agenda for Action and presented it to "non-experiential" adult delegates with the purpose of creating action against sexual exploitation of children and youth.

These are just a few examples of the many projects taking place in Victoria, spearheaded by the University of Victoria's Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the School of Child and Youth Care.

What is the "Capital Health Region?"

In this booklet we refer to the "Capital Health Region." This region includes Victoria and the surrounding suburban areas. Activities throughout the campaign drew the attention of residents of the lower Vancouver Island area, a population of approximately 600,000.

"Use of the Convention is something that affects every single aspect of my life...I believe the region is making more of a noble effort...the fact that they have put together a Committee that includes youth...various people my age I have talked to across the country that work with the Convention aren't doing what we are here..."

- Beau Morin, Youth Stream Leader and Co-Chair of Symposium

But still people said “The United Nations what???.”

“The *Convention on the Rights of the Child* incorporates an innovative message: children should no longer be considered only as vulnerable beings, in need of special provision and protection, but rather as fully fledged subjects of human rights, entitled to their human dignity, a dignity that is innate to them as human beings. Human dignity means not only a dignified existence, but also the freedom to grow and develop to one's full potential and self-autonomy. It means the satisfaction of the need to have an identity, the need to belong to a family, a group or a nation, the need to have a space of one's own and be recognized as someone of worth, the need to be treated equally as a human being and with respect, the need to be taken into consideration, the need for self-assurance and self-expression...”

-Judith Karp, member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

A 1995 survey of British Columbia's service providers reported that the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (CRC) was not known, understood or being utilized. This mirrored our experience in Victoria, where we discovered that although the city was a leader in child rights advocacy activities, the CRC was virtually unknown in the larger community.

The CRC establishes universal legal standards for the protection of all children against abuse, neglect and exploitation, and guarantees their human rights to survival, development, and full participation in social, cultural, educational and other endeavours necessary for their growth and well-being.

With other guiding principles for the treatment of children including non-discrimination, the best interests, survival and development, and participation, the

CRC's 54 Articles provide a comprehensive framework for delivering and evaluating children and youth services throughout Canada and the world.

The CRC is the most widely accepted human rights document in history; presently 191 of the United Nations' 193 member States have signed and ratified (“ratify” means a promise to honour the 54 articles of the CRC).

Governments are to “take all appropriate measures” to practise the CRC, and when they act on children's economic, social, and cultural rights, governments agree to do the maximum they can with what is available to them. Although the CRC is not a Canadian law, the principles of the CRC must be reflected in Canadian legislation, policies, and programs. When Canada ratified the CRC in 1991, it meant that our country committed to respect the rights of people under the age of 18 to participate in decisions that affect them, to reach their potential, to survive and to be protected from harm.

In addition, Canada must send a report to the United Nations every five years. This report addresses concerns raised from both the previous report and NGO reports with regards to the implementation of children's rights in the nation. Canada is preparing its *Second Report on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, and the country has a rich opportunity to again show leadership on issues relating to children.

Bottom line — what does this mean for children and youth in Canada? Two important underlying principles of the CRC are to take all appropriate measures to ensure “the best interests” of the child and to use the “First Call” approach. Both of these are essential to advocacy efforts.

"Best interests" imply that when family or society members act on behalf of children and youth, their interests will prevail.

The idea of a "First Call" for children and youth came from the 1990 World Summit for Children held at the United Nations in New York. Canada was one of the co-chairs of the event and it was at the Summit that the largest gathering of world leaders ever, said the following:

... together, the Declaration and Plan of Action (from the Summit) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child constitute an ambitious but feasible agenda for the well-being of children to be achieved by the year 2000. In committing themselves to pursue these goals, the leaders of the world have agreed to be guided by the principle of a "first call" for children — a principle that the essential needs of children should be given high priority in the allocation of resources, in bad times as well as in good times, at national and international as well as family levels (UNICEF, 1990, First Call For Children — Forward).

The CRC is most often discussed under the following five themes:

1. Provision

Basic health and welfare, education, leisure, and cultural activities are fundamental rights for all children and youth.

2. Protection

Children and youth have the right to be protected from many things, including abuse, neglect, economic and sexual exploitation, torture and abduction. Security for indigenous children and youth and all other minorities is highlighted.

3. Participation

Participation means that children and youth have the right to be included in decisions and the freedom to join with others, to express themselves, and to receive information from many sources.

4. Promotion

This theme found in the CRC is similar to the first — and leads to public promotion in schools, child welfare agencies, youth justice facilities, and child and youth health care institutions as a starting point.

5. Partnership

When talking about "measures of implementation" of children's rights, you must also talk about the implied vital elements of ongoing partnership in the community to support and enhance this implementation.

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child will review Canada's report, and respond to Canada with their own report and recommendations for action. This elected UN Committee is composed of ten individuals from various geographic locations in the world, and mobilizes help for countries to overcome obstacles they face in implementing the CRC. Their studies and reports, which are released publicly, offer each country an opportunity to reflect on the rights of their children and youth.

Where Do Parents Fit In?

The CRC emphasizes the importance of parents and caregivers in the support and development of children in Article 5 ("the State will respect the responsibilities, rights, and duties of parents..."), Article 7 (the child's right "...to know and be cared for by his or her parents..."), Articles 8, 9, 14.2, 18.1 ("parents...have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child"), and Article 29 ("the education of the child shall be directed to...the development of respect for the child's parents...").

So we decided that a public awareness campaign and a Symposium on the Rights of the Child would be good ideas!



Article 42 of the CRC declares: "(Canada will) undertake to make the principles and provisions of the Convention widely known, by appropriate and active means, to adults and children alike."

In the spirit of Article 42, and for the first time in Canada, a private sector public relations firm was engaged by Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children (QAF) to promote awareness of child and youth rights, and to invite corporate and media support for the campaign.

However, we decided that more than a media campaign would be required to raise awareness of children's rights. It would take the participation of the entire community to promote the principles of the CRC and children's rights. A Child Rights Symposium, open to the participation of all community members, was chosen as the vehicle, along with the public awareness campaign to promote both the CRC and the Symposium.

You may ask why such organizations and institutions would think that a Symposium on the Rights of the Child would be a good idea. Mainly, the Symposium was held to:

- enable all participants to receive a comprehensive overview of the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*;
- develop individual skills, enabling each delegate to become an ambassador for change in child and youth rights;
- create an action plan, allowing each delegate to initiate change in their own communities.

In Victoria, the Symposium, the public awareness campaign, and events associated with the Symposium, were chosen as one strategy to promote the "principles and provisions" of the CRC. In terms of developing a local model for implementation of the CRC, it should be made clear that other communities may choose different strategies, on a smaller scale.

But first we had to create a "community of partners..."

What is a community of partners?

A community of partners is a unique coalition of community members, including children, youth, families, government, children's health care providers, educators and schools, churches, temples and synagogues, universities and colleges, child welfare authorities, child and youth agencies, non-profit and non-governmental organizations (NGO's), as well as members of the media, sports, entertainment, and corporate and small business sectors and members of the community at large.

Partners made different contributions. Some were paid and others volunteered their time. However, no matter what the individual job looked like, and no matter what the reward, everyone was considered a partner.



health care organizations



media



non-profit organizations



public sector

citizens



private sector

educational institutions



youth



religious organizations



"I can't tell you the power I feel that youth have in advocating for themselves... but also in helping the Foundation in its role...I'm amazed...the Foundation will become stronger and have a stronger voice by their input."

- Joy Spencer-Barry, Executive Director of Queen Alexandra Foundation

The goal of the partnership is to act upon one of the CRC's basic aims: involvement of everybody in the community, with the common purpose of improving the well-being of children and youth.

Here is how the community of partners formed in Victoria. As advocates and providers of child and youth health care, representatives of the Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children (QAF), along with the Capital Health Region's (CHR) Child, Youth and Maternal Health Services, the BC Ministry for Children and Families (MCF), and the University of Victoria Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (URECRC) first developed partnerships with other institutional stakeholders in the Region and the province.

8

This initial coalition quickly grew into a community of partners that included:

- children and youth of various ages and abilities,
- Provincial Government Representatives (Office of the BC Ombudsman, BC's Deputy Ombudsman, BC's Deputy Child and Youth Advocate, BC Children's Commissioner, Capital Health Region's Coordinator for Professional Services, the Capital Region Chief Medical Officer)
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) (First Call Provincial Advocacy Coalition, the Greater Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society, the International Children's Project, the United Nations Association, the Vancouver Island Earth Works environmental group, and the Victoria Centre for Dispute Resolution)
- Educators (University of Victoria academics, undergraduate and graduate students, School District administrators)
- Business (public relations specialists and corporate sponsors)

Queen Alexandra Foundation for Children

As a Foundation concerned with the health of children, QAF advocates for the recognition and application of children's rights to food, shelter, and first call to health care. QAF maintains a long history of funding agencies on Vancouver Island, and in 1998 announced grants totalling over \$1,436,000 to child, youth and family services, thanks to Island donors.

QAF believes strongly that the commitment of individuals, service groups, and businesses enables it to be a strong team in support of children, youth and their families. For example, QAF works directly in partnership with Child, Youth and Maternal Health Services in the CHR, and with the Ministry for Children and Families on such issues as Shaken Baby Syndrome and child advocacy. With shrinking healthcare dollars, such

partnerships are mandatory to meet community needs and for future survival of quality care.

In addition, QAF's benefactors have established a perpetual endowment that serves an integrated pediatric healthcare system to support rehab care, advocacy, education, and research for thousands of youngsters annually in neighbourhoods throughout Vancouver Island.

Capital Health Region

A major recipient of the Foundation's support has been the Queen Alexandra Centre for Children's Health (QACCH), which supports an integrated pediatric healthcare system under the umbrella of the Capital Health Region (CHR) Regional Director for Child, Youth and Maternal Health Services. QACCH is a family-centred organization providing a broad range of multidisciplinary programs and services to assist children and their families in meeting identified needs, developing effective coping skills and achieving maximum independence. QACCH receives grants for equipment, research, programs, and education, and provides care to over 3,600 children and youth every year from neighbourhoods throughout Vancouver Island.

British Columbia Ministry for Children and Families

As the "parent" for approximately 7,500 children and youth in care in British Columbia, the Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) promotes and supports the "best interests" of all the province's children. In fact, the 1994 *Child, Family and Community Service Act* was rewritten with an entire section looking at these interests of children through the CRC, the first in Canada to do so.

MCF offered their staff and resources in partnership and support for the Symposium and the public awareness campaign. The Regional Director for the Ministry or an MCF

QAF's vision is "to promote and provide financial resources respectful of donor wishes, and commit to the health and well-being of children, youth, and their families by providing leadership in the areas of advocacy, volunteerism, and responding to community need." QAF's Mission is to "raise and invest funds to provide financial support for programs and activities that advocate for and assist in meeting the needs of children, youth, and their families."

"I became involved when my Regional Executive Director was part of the Steering Committee and she asked me to attend... There's a core group within the Ministry who are familiar with the Convention, and I believe that as MCF people become more familiar with what the Convention is all about, there will be more opportunities to use it in terms of policy development and as a lens to review services... We needed to promote awareness first and to highlight what people are doing to use the CRC... then to continue to heighten awareness after the Symposium."

-Jack Boomer, Project Manager, Ministry for Children and Families



project manager came to all planning meetings and weekly youth meetings to give solid backing to the steps that brought awareness of the CRC to the public.

Youth Partnership and Participation

When the community of partners first formed, the partners realized that child and youth participation as outlined in the CRC would inform and direct the public awareness campaign and the Symposium, and engage and mentor the youth involved. Looking back on our project, the greatest learning and contributions towards promotion of children's rights were made through the participation of children and youth.

The awareness campaign and Symposium involved youth through:

- the YouthStreams group, which met weekly to plan and implement several community special events (forums, workshops, etc.)
- writing challenge

- music contest
- logo design
- co-chair, co-facilitators and presenters at the Child Rights Symposium.

Read on to learn more about the participation of children and youth.

Unit for Research and Education on the CRC

The University of Victoria's Unit for Research and Education on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (URECRC) was formed in the School of Child and Youth Care, and traces its history back to the 1994 "Stronger Children—Stronger Families" Conference on the CRC.

With a focus on monitoring and implementing the CRC, URECRC develops research and education to promote the CRC in partnership with a wide variety of local, national and international partners.

In the Child Rights Symposium, the URECRC recognized a unique opportunity to disseminate information about children's health found in the CRC. It became involved in this partnership with QAF to support the public awareness campaign about the CRC, and to share and exchange knowledge and resources with the community.

There was much to do - encouraging community participation took a lot of creativity and hard work....

As the partnership expanded, the need for structure was apparent. Thus, a CRC Steering Committee was formed to direct the activities of the public awareness campaign. A special Planning Committee was created to deal with preparations for the Symposium. Members of both committees are listed in the acknowledgements at the beginning of this booklet.

The structure and size of the partnership changed constantly as new skills and resources were required.

For example, to bring in expertise for the public awareness campaign, QAF contracted with and funded the services of, the public relations firm Copeland Communications. Copeland's challenge was to recommend how public awareness regarding the CRC could be increased (e.g. through advertising, special events, and media attention), and then to either implement, or assist in the implementation of, these strategies. When Copeland entered the partnership, it was with the knowledge that the strategies selected to honour Article 42 by making the CRC "widely known" would represent an entirely new approach compared to those previously applied in Canada.

Early in the development of the promotional strategies, the community of partners agreed that the local private sector also had a stake in the healthy development of the Region's children and youth. A public awareness campaign kit, targeted at gaining the interest and sponsorship of local businesses, was developed by Copeland Communications, in cooperation with the CRC Steering



*“I think there's scepticism from a number of people in the NGO community about whether or not the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* can make any real difference when it comes to policy decision making, or service delivery decision making, and perhaps something that the Committee has influenced me about...is to see and appreciate that institutional decision-makers, at least as individuals, genuinely care about and are committed to the rights of children.”*

-Brenda Copeland, Greater Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society



“If we really want to have children's rights become real, youth have to walk together and not be divided.”

-YouthStreams member

Committee. Many local businesses were approached, and many were eager to support various aspects of the campaign. For example, the West Edmonton Mall, Fantasyland Hotel, and WestJet generously provided the grand prize for a children's writing challenge. All through the campaign, efforts to encourage "in kind" sponsorships and donations from local businesses, other media participants or partners proved significant to its eventual success.

Youth Streams

From the beginning, child and youth consultation, collaboration, and participation was recognized as essential to the planning for the campaign and the Symposium. One of the goals of the

Steering Committee was to foster and develop child and youth leadership throughout the process. As a starting point, Victoria high school senior Beau Morin was invited to co-chair the Symposium with Queen Alexandra Foundation Board Director Gerry Fisher. Beau initially chaired the youth group "YouthStreams," which was formed to develop and implement methods of communicating information about the CRC to youth, from youth. The work of this group focused on:

1. Raising awareness of children's rights in the lower Vancouver Island area.
2. Contributing to the structure and delivery of the actual Symposium.

The youth members of YouthStreams worked with a number of young adults, with other adult participants acting as mentors and resource people. The adults did not direct the process; they were there to be helpers, guides, teachers, and learners. In the months leading up to the

Symposium, the young people played an increasingly vital role in planning activities and providing input.

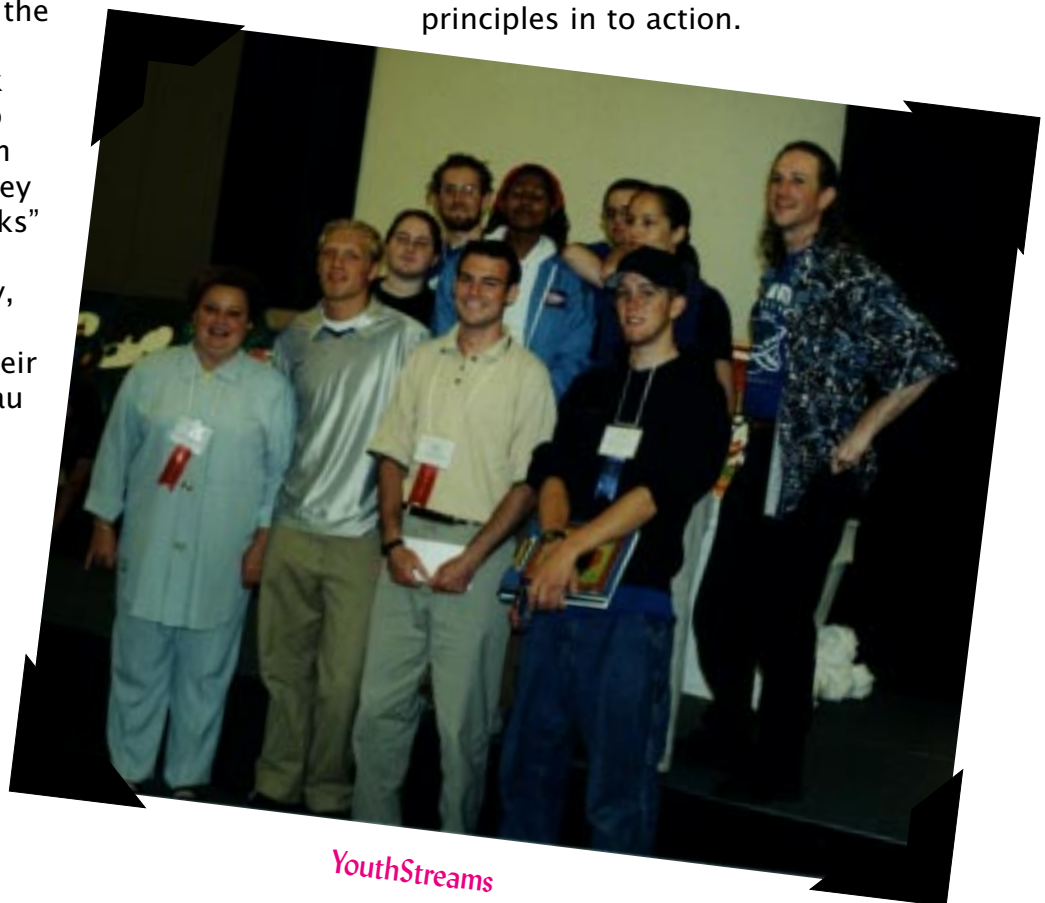
In partnership with local media and Copeland Communications (with funding from QAF) YouthStreams developed public workshops and handouts, written editorials, a website (www.knowyourrights.csp.net) and a Symposium logo, and gave interviews in both print and broadcast media to convey their understanding of how children's rights impact everyone's lives.

Symposium Streams: A call for more partners!

YouthStreams caused profound shifts in organizational thinking upon occasion, as adults learned to really listen to and respect youth input. One example of such a shift is the evolution of the Symposium's structure, and how the youth group got its name "YouthStreams." Early in the planning of the Symposium, the CRC Steering Committee and the Symposium Planning Committee began to talk about how the workshop topics for the Symposium should be structured. They envisioned various "Tracks" with delegates choosing from Research, Advocacy, Decision-Makers, or Children and Youth as their focus for workshops. Beau Morin was quick to point out that conceptually "Tracks run parallel and never actually meet. Our idea is to have 'Streams' that although running from their own sources, may also run together and join a larger body." And so — point well taken — streams it was.

While one task of YouthStreams was to provide input to youth-oriented Symposium workshops, the following individuals and organizations provided input to the other streams:

- **Advocacy:** First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition in Vancouver was invited into the partnership to develop the various Symposium Advocacy presentations using CRC principles and provisions.
- **Research:** Health Care and medical scientists who had originally planned a pediatric conference based on early intervention and prevention science, and the human rights found in the CRC, formed a partnership with QAF.
- **Decision-Making:** Federal and provincial institutional stakeholders and politicians such as the Secretary of State for Children and Youth, the BC Minister for Children and Families, Regional Health policy makers, and educators were invited to provide guidance to delegates in putting "First Call" and other CRC principles in to action.



What a public awareness campaign it was....

The public awareness campaign, entitled "It's about me; It's about you; It's about us — Stronger Children Through Stronger Families," targeted four types of activities aimed at various audiences, showing there is more to a PR campaign than just printed materials:

1. **Getting the Word Out:** The media campaign around raising awareness of children's rights and the Child Rights Symposium.
2. **Kids Reaching Kids:** Special events and workshops to assist children and youth in teaching other children and youth about their rights and responsibilities. These activities were a form of "dynamic, direct communication and promotion."
3. **Circle of Friends:** This portion of the campaign was targeted at raising awareness about children's rights among caregivers, leaders, and service providers.
4. **Events:** Coordination and promotion of special events to support any or all of the other three areas.

Media

Regional and local newspapers were contacted with **press releases** and **stories** on various related events throughout the campaign.

The Victoria BC Regional Transit ran **ads** for both the interior and exterior of buses at a greatly reduced rate, with monthly Buzzer **bulletins** for passengers promoting YouthStreams events by inviting participation in the campaign and Symposium. These advertisements — significantly discounted by BC Transit — developed a highly visible public profile for the campaign which generated a great response from children, youth and adults.

Local Internet service provider CSP Internet was engaged to support development of a **website** — www.knowyourrights.csp.net — run and supported by local children and youth.

Events

In the months before the Symposium, children and youth had many opportunities to develop social skills and media expertise while meeting weekly and developing and participating in several public education and awareness events promoting child rights and the Symposium.

Although not directly connected with the campaign, the International Children's Project director and Grades 6 and 7 classes of Marigold Elementary School released a video to President Clinton during this time, urging the United States to ratify the CRC.

November 20th 1998 — National Child Day — was chosen for the **campaign kick-off**. A vice-principal of Victoria High School asked her leadership class to sponsor an assembly to be held at the school, with cake and balloons, and to invite the Clinton video students as main presenters. Other speakers at the kick-off included:

- author Eric Wilson,
- Mike Corbeil, Deputy Minister for Children and Families,
- Copeland PR firm representatives, and
- other Capital Health Region and Queen Alexandra Foundation partners.

The auditorium was packed. Most students and school staff present had never before heard of the CRC.

A number of events took place in the months following the kick-off:

- A **mini-Symposium** sponsored by YouthStreams was held at Spectrum High School. YouthStreams members helped coordinate the daylong event with entertainment and various workshops on rights education, media training, and understanding the CRC. Public service announcements and talk show forums with YouthStreams representatives were aired locally over both AM and FM radio stations in the weeks leading up to the mini-Symposium.
- YouthStreams was invited to attend the **Promoting Peace Conference**, taking place at the University of Victoria. The YouthStreams group facilitated a workshop on the CRC and violence issues. The workshop used role plays and discussion to explore how students can take a stand against abuse and violence, and advocate for their rights.
- CHEK-TV, a Victoria-based television station, gave numerous advertising donations of voice and video and sponsored a "**Town Hall**" meeting with YouthStreams representatives, BC's former Ombudsman Dulcie MacCallum, Dr. Roger Tonkin of McCreary Centre Society in Burnaby, and others.

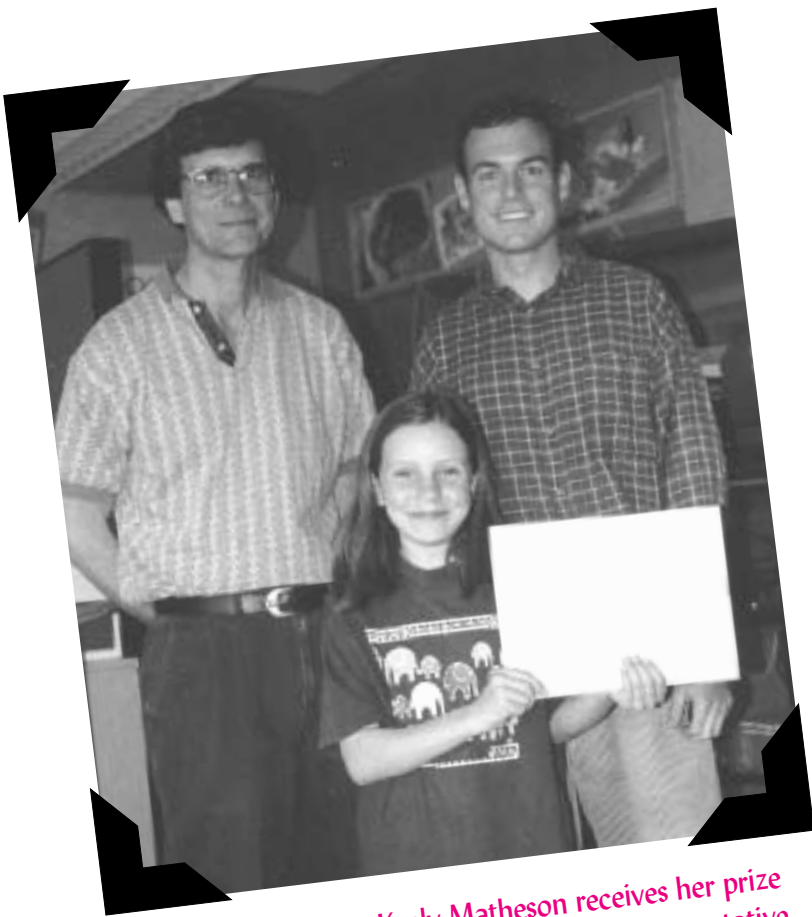
"It (November 20th National Child Day Assembly) was like an Independence Day for Children...like Freedom for the Children Day...the day the treaty was signed. There were a lot of people...It's not really a day to celebrate — it's more of a day to think. I think it's more of a day to think about all the sadness and poverty in our world and how lucky we are here.."

- Grade 7 Marigold Elementary Student on participation in the campaign kick-off

Writing Challenge

Eric Wilson, a well-known and respected BC children's author was invited to be a campaign spokesperson, and to help develop a writing contest for Victoria students using a child rights theme — "UN Convention on the Rights of the Child — right the wrongs [write on rights]". Over 300 children from 18 area schools participated in the contest, with grade six student Keely Matheson's entry — "Kids Rights and Needs" — being drawn from all the





Random draw winner Keely Matheson receives her prize from teacher Martin Marquardt and QAF representative Rolf Warburton

entrants as the winner of a four-day trip to the West Edmonton Mall for her and her family.

Music Composition Contest

Composers ages 10-18 were encouraged to express their musical interpretation of child and youth rights through the **Create a Joyful Noise** music composition contest.

With musical categories of jazz; blues, soul and country; rock/dance; world music; classical; solo/small ensemble and large ensemble, a wide variety of entries were expected. The winners, listed on the following page, received a number of prizes, including a performance of suitable winning entries by the Greater Victoria Youth Orchestra.

Kids' Rights and Needs by Keely Matheson, age 11

Everyone wants to be treated fairly
no matter what their race
So think before you judge someone
and show them a friendly face.

Kids have a right to speak their mind
so remember to be kind
Listen to what they have to say
They'll listen back one day.

When there's enough food and water to drink
Kids have a chance to think.
When there's money for clothes and toys
you have happy girls and boys.

If you don't pollute or hurt the environment
kids stay healthy and smart.
Even when it's not a requirement
always do your part.

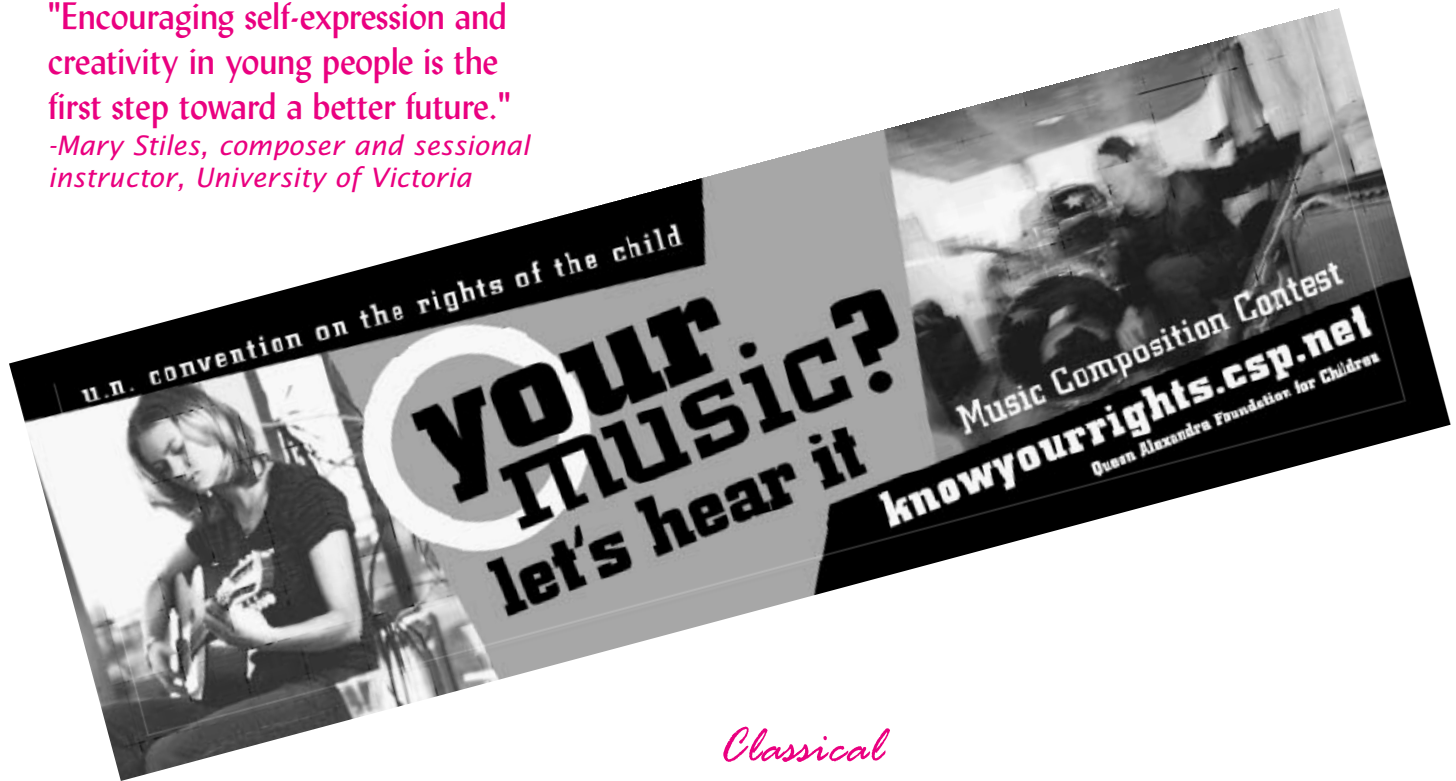
When they're safe from violence
and not have a scare
kids feel good anywhere.
To play in the park happy and free
makes kids jump with glee.

To kids there is no difference in
women and men
no different than pencil and pen.
Both are different and yet the same
for each one is distinct with name.

Kids need love and hope and care
so they learn to give and share.
Help them to see the good inside.
Tell them you're on their side.

"Encouraging self-expression and creativity in young people is the first step toward a better future."

-Mary Stiles, composer and sessional instructor, University of Victoria



Popular Music

Jazz 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Tidal Love" by Ashley Wey

Special Mention: "Ballad in Blue" by Jared Weston

World Music 11 - 14 years

Winner: "By the Sea" by Rachelle Gislason

Blues, Soul and Country 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Walkin' Blues" by Amy Brener

Rock/Dance 11 - 14 years

Winner: "Building Bridges" by Nicholas Church

Rock/Dance 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Be Where You Are" by Ryan Williams, Todd Taylor, Catherine Clayton

Classical

Solo/Small Ensemble 10 years and under

Winner: "Jumping and Running" by Silverio Barbon-Nanni

Solo/Small Ensemble 11 - 14 years

Winner: "Variations on a Moody Doll" by Johanna Bik-Kei Lam

Small Ensemble 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Sleepy Slumbers and Playtime Jigs" by Charlene DeVries

Solo 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Songs of Morning" by Michael Onwood

Special Mention: "Butterflies" by Janice Bik-Shan Lam

Large Ensemble 15 - 18 years

Winner: "Classical Composition" by Christine Root

Before we knew it, it was opening night of the Symposium!

We've gathered lots of highlights and "sound bites" from Symposium speakers which are representative of the participants' important contributions to the success of the event. Over 60 keynote speakers, presenters and workshop hosts were asked to lend their expertise in child and youth rights as found in the CRC, both formally and informally, during the proceedings. Unfortunately, we can't include descriptions of every workshop because then this booklet would be too long!

"We like to share our culture as a way to stop ignorance."

-Dance master, Songhees First Nations youth dance troupe



Symposium Co-chairs Gerry Fisher and Beau Morin

Thursday evening opening ceremonies...

were hosted by Symposium co-chairs Beau Morin of YouthStreams and Queen Alexandra Foundation Board Director Gerry Fisher. Approximately 300 delegates were welcomed by the local Songhees First Nations youth dance troupe with a Prayer Song, a Welcome Song and a Victory Song.

During the opening British Columbia's Minister for Children and Families, Lois Boone announced new child protection initiatives. "Children have a right to be safe, secure, healthy and well educated. They have a right to expect that a prosperous society can solve and will solve the problem of child poverty. Street kids who get trapped in the cold misery of the sex trade and drug addiction have a right to be rescued...and (these new) provisions of the Act that protect children from those who sexually exploit them will be strengthened because child prostitution is child abuse."

All Symposium keynote speakers referred to the significance of early intervention and prevention as necessary to optimum child and youth development. This significance is reinforced in CRC Article 6 and the rights to "maximum survival and development"; Article 24.1 and the right to "the highest attainable standard of health"; and Article 27 and "the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development."



Sinclair Academy Children's Choir

We heard all about where Canada stands...

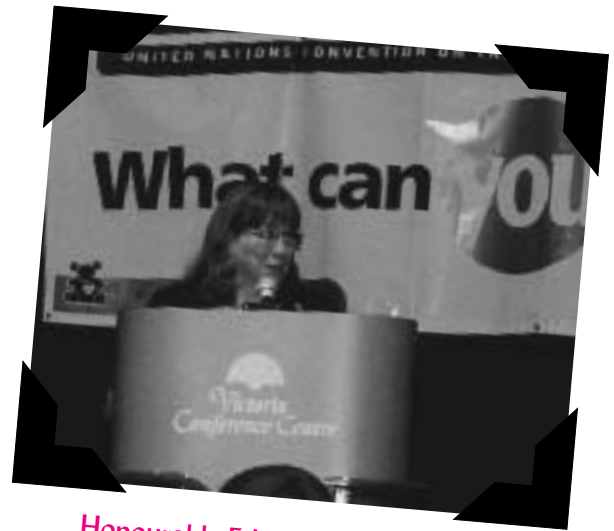
Various keynote speakers from the federal and provincial Decision-Making Stream spoke of where the country had come from in the recent past in terms of children's rights.

*Federal Secretary of State for Children and Youth
Ethel Blondin-Andrew...*

emphasized her colleague External Affairs Minister Lloyd Axworthy's assertion that " 'Promoting children's security is central to promoting human security'...What should a National Agenda for children be?" She maintained that "The CRC is the indispensable standard by which we as a country can be measured for a safer, saner and friendlier world. Every child has the right to every Article. That is compliance."

Activist and writer June Callwood...

discussed the country's most pressing social issue as she suggested, "November 24th should be a National Day of mourning. It has been 10 years since Canada decided we would end child



Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew

Decision Makers' Stream Workshops

- The Honourable Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Secretary of State for Children and Youth
- The Honourable Lois Boone, Minister for Children and Families
- *What's Right* by June Callwood
- The Hon. Landon Pearson, Senate of Canada
- Judith Karp, Member, UN Committee on the Rights of the Child
- *Youth Decision Making at Home and in the Community* by Brent Parfitt, Joyce Preston, Laurie Duncan, and youth representative

poverty by the year 2000, and we have not. UNICEF suggested children and youth have 'First Call' on our country's resources in good times as well as bad, but in Canada, children have last call. Being a poor child in Canada means having to pretend you forgot your lunch..."

Senator Landon

Pearson...

appeared live via video link from Ottawa to wish delegates success. "In 1979, during the International Year of the Child, children felt not valued. But now there is a real interest in children. I have seen a real change over these years, a lot more openness and activities by young people themselves. The reporting process has been a real spur to thinking about children in a different way." YouthStreams delegate Nicki Blatchford asked the Senator about efforts underway to broaden Canadian educational curricula to teach high school students about their rights.

In "Youth Decision-Making at Home and in the Community"...

British Columbia's Deputy Ombudsman Brent Parfitt and British Columbia Child, Youth and Family Advocate Joyce Preston spoke of the province's efforts to engage young people meaningfully and respectfully. "We have to walk the talk! Many adults are poor at this. We are overdue to open the doors of participation...We have to learn from the young people what participation looks like. Youth often contribute to decision-making but don't have any real power," declared Ms. Preston. Laurie Duncan, youth policy advisor for the BC Ministry of Children and Families also spoke of power-sharing as she suggested the CRC "is part of a major societal change, but there are no solutions overnight. How do I share my power as an

adult? How can we make it work? As government, the structures and systems are based on different models..."

In response, a teacher in this discussion suggested, "We are telling youth our agenda. Let's invite participation, not dictate it." Youth facilitator Sandra Pelkey shared her experience about being told by youth, "We trust you because you listen to us and because you do what you say. Adults must move beyond tokenism when engaging with youth...In my own culture, children are the gifts of the Creator...our culture involves youth from the beginning."

Judith Karp, UN

Committee on the Rights of the Child member...

spoke through a prepared speech read by a YouthStreams delegate. She declared, "It's time to stop talking *about* children, and to start talking *with* children!" The theme of what defines child and youth participation in meaningful, collaborative, decision-making and power-sharing with those in authority was a prevalent one throughout the proceedings.



Writer and social activist June Callwood

And just what is child and youth participation?

The “Competing Rights” workshop...

addressed the controversial issue of competing rights and balancing meaningful participation of children and youth with adult interests. Jane Cowell, local Regional Director for the Ministry of Children and Families, asked an important question which comes up often for her front-line child protection staff: “Under what situations are we able to decide that the child is unable to have input to decisions in their ‘best interests,’ and which decisions must be made by adults? Children and youth in foster care often come up against this issue — safety versus privacy. How do we do it?... It begins with respect as part of the process.”

Sara Ninnie, a youth and children's advocate from Saskatoon, suggested that adults need to “...show you care and mean it! That's how to get participation. Get involved with youth groups and with youths who are advocating for themselves. Spread knowledge of the Convention so youth know they can use it...Don't be afraid to encourage youth to be involved — youth have great gifts. We should be teaching kids their rights.”

BC native artist Roy Henry Vickers...

facilitated meaningful collaboration among children, youth and adults during an art workshop in which participants created two large murals expressing their image of children's rights. A profound silence embraced all of the participants towards the end of this creative process.

Youth Streams and youth-issue oriented workshops

- *Victoria CRC Youth Initiative*, by Beau Morin, Nicki Blatchford, and Amanda Bartle
- *Youth Rights Project*, by the Greater Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society
- *Making Youth Rights Real*, by Brian Hill and Susana Guardado
- *Competing Rights*, Panel Discussion
- *B-4: Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges*, by the McCreary Centre Society Youth Advocacy Council
- *Making Safety*, by Richard McGuigan
- *Interactive Youth Anti-Violence Presentation*, by Rock Solid
- *The Voice of Children and Youth in the Media*, Panel Discussion
- *Puente Theatre — Youth Rights*, by Puente Theatre
- *Youth Activism — Two Case Studies*, by the Marigold Elementary Youth Project and Julie Green
- *Youth Rights Mural*, by Roy Henry Vickers
- *YOU Make a Difference*, keynote speech by Roy Henry Vickers

As the meeting place for many of the child and youth presentations at the Symposium, the YouthStreams Coffee House was an informal setting providing a relaxed alternative to traditional workshops.



These beautiful murals were presented by YouthStreams delegates at the closing ceremonies.

*The International
Children's Project
with the Victoria
Marigold
Elementary
School students...*

"I was so stoked on this workshop — I learned stuff I never knew about my creativity and style."

-Youth participant, art workshop with Roy Henry Vickers

"During an intimate conversation or during creative times like the one we are now sharing, we lose track of time — we step out of time for a while and into timelessness. That is when our Creator, the Eternal touches us and we reach out and touch Eternity."

-Roy Henry Vickers, artist and speaker

confirmed the gifts and power of younger children in teaching others about children's rights when they presented their BC Human Rights award-winning video addressed to President Clinton urging the United States to ratify the CRC. They also read poetry and stories that had been entered into author Eric Wilson's writing challenge on children's rights. In addition, some of their grade 6 classmates presented their most recent children's rights video. Expressing their views against a backdrop of dramatic photos of children around the world, the students interpreted the CRC in their own language. "In this film the students express their view on what they believe to be the true right of the child...I am covering Article 13. This Article states that I would have the right to tell people how I feel. We can express ourselves by paintings, drawings, letters, and stories, songs or play...To me this also means that people shouldn't interrupt me when I'm trying to say something important or serious. That makes me feel good..." During the process of creating these multi-media projects, these students have become local and provincial ambassadors for the rights of all children while educating many hundreds of their peers, older teens and their parents.

*"B4: Breaking
Barriers, Building
Bridges" – McCreary
Centre Society of
B.C...*

delegates grappled with a definition of participation which suggests adults recognize and nurture the strengths, interests and abilities of youth. Input from workshop participants suggested youth participation youth should:

- join in on their own terms
- have a voice
- have fun
- increase self-esteem and confidence
- make a difference
- be heard
- learn from mistakes
- get involved
- be supportive of each other

*Youth Streams represent-
atives and Symposium
co-chair Beau Morin...*

presented their experience of participation, promotion and partnership from the Victoria CRC initiative during their months of leading the public awareness campaign and planning for the Symposium.

*"The Voice of Children and
Youth in the Media" ...*

was moderated by the Regional Director for Child, Youth and Maternal Health Chuck Schactman. Local columnist and associate editor of the Victoria Times



Why is it important to honour child and youth participation?

- Children and youth gain experience
 - Involves everyone in community and civil society
 - Builds communication and leadership skill towards careers
 - Promotes resiliency
 - Focuses on positives rather than problems
 - Enhances health and reduces risk
 - Ensures healthy, maximum development
 - Youth and children are involved in decisions that affect them
 - Brings about social and societal change
- B-4: Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges - Participant Definition of Participation

"Where is the balance between parents' rights and children's' rights?"

-Participant, Competing Rights workshop

"Nice to see some of the philosophy in action (i.e. ending [workshop] with youth)."

-Participant, Competing Rights workshop

“Media has to take responsibility to cover children and youth CRC issues!”

- Participant, Voice of Children and Youth in the Media workshop

“Put a gag on adults!”
“This was the best! We had fun...just talking is BORING!”

- Participant comments, Puente Theatre workshop



Media panel (left to right): June Callwood (writer and social activist), Dev Aujla (QAF Youth Council), Jody Paterson (Victoria Times Colonist), and Meribeth Burton (CHEK-TV)

Colonist newspaper Jody Paterson, local CHEK-TV representative Meribeth Burton, social activist and writer June Callwood, and QAF Youth Advisory Council member Dev Aujla answered questions from the standing-room-only crowd.

Dev opened the discussion with a declaration that “Youth have a negative representation in the media — there are far more negative stories than positive.” June Callwood agreed: “We live in communities that are not child- or youth-friendly...look around at the lack of smaller sized seating and drinking fountains in our parks for example. It is as though children do not exist...this is also reflected in the media. There are no stories unless the kids are bad or score 100% in chemistry.” Ms. Burton countered that “...bad kids will get the coverage just like bad adults do...[however] we have decided as a station that we would focus on one positive story per day about children or youth.” Ms. Paterson volunteered that there are still stereotypes of both the young and the old in print media. She encouraged children, youth and their advocates to become more media-friendly and understand how news is actually constructed

Ms. Paterson suggested that advocates support children and youth to develop contacts with journalists interested in child rights in their own communities. She related her own experience of taking news of the Symposium and children's rights to her colleagues in the newsroom, where the response was “The UN what...?”

The forum was extended to accommodate the number of participant questions; obviously there is a high level of interest in media issues which are prevalent in most communities.

Puente Theatre...

invited adults and youth from the Symposium to create short skits for a dramatic presentation during the closing ceremonies. This was a rare opportunity for younger children, older teens and adults to participate together using theatre to convey messages about child rights issues. The issues included family separation, the right to be heard in decisions affecting their lives, child maltreatment, and the right to safety from emotional, physical and verbal abuse.

We took the pulse of advocacy in Canada...

The "Spotlight on Children and Youth Campaign" workshop...

was presented by Cindy Carson, Provincial Coordinator of BC's First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Ms. Carson had been active for many months behind the scenes as a Symposium planner. Based on current research findings about increasing the health and well-being of children, this provincial advocacy campaign is solidly grounded in the 54 Articles of the CRC. "The Spotlight on Children and Youth Campaign highlights community action to improve children's development in BC...I believe this is the right place to start. Improving the environments where children live, grow up, and go to school ought to be our number one investment in the future," declared Dr. Clyde Hertzman in the campaign booklet. The four Keys to Success from the advocacy campaign are:

- A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development
- Support in Transitions from Childhood to Adulthood
- Increased Economic Equality
- Safe and Caring Communities

"Youth Advocating for Youth" ...

was moderated by Vancouver advocates Jennifer Horgos of GAB Youth Services, Tiresa Dawe of Vancouver Youth Voices



Advocacy Stream Workshops

- *Spotlight on Children and Youth Campaign*, by Cindy Carson
- *Youth Advocating for Youth*, by Jennifer Horgos, Tiresa Dawe, and Angie Kirby
- *Bringing the CRC to Life in your Community*, by Dulcie McCallum
- *Community Advocacy Initiatives*, by Jo Rothenburger
- *Canada's NGO CRC Report*, by Fernande Meilleur and Damian Solomon
- *CRC Model for Measuring Our Laws*, by Lex Reynolds
- *Systemic and Individual Advocacy*, by Janet Phillips
- *Youth Self-Advocacy in the Education System*, by Ellen Murray
- *Youth Rights Project*, by the Greater Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society

and Angie Kirby from the Office of the Child, Youth and Family Advocate. "The youth-for-youth model works best and helps youth step into a more positive direction," affirmed Ms. Kirby, a systemic advocate and a former youth-in-care. Tiresa used the story of Thomas Edison's one thousand attempts before successfully inventing the light bulb to inspire delegates to be more optimistic when looking at things that are being done to advocate for the best interests of children. She suggested that we can stop seeing things as simply "working" or "not working," but rather as collective "steps" being taken to reach our goal of making children's rights a reality.

Fernande Meilleur and Damian Soloman...

from the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children discussed the process of compiling Canada's NGO Report on the CRC, which will be presented parallel to Canada's Second Report on the CRC at the United Nations later in 1999. Mr. Solomon further suggested "...there is a need for a distinct Ministry in Canada to deal with children's issues."

The "Youth Rights Project" workshop...

sponsored by the Victoria Child and Youth Advocacy Society emphasized that two groups of children and youth in BC — those in foster care and those in youth detention centres — have their rights protected by effective legislation. It was also brought out that social workers often violate rights if they themselves are not informed or knowledgeable about the CRC. "A lot of children in care still don't know their rights. Social workers hand out a booklet for kids to read regarding rights — kids need to know how it relates to them and their new reality."

The presenters also discussed findings of the yearly Youth-in-Care Network study, which showed there are three rights within the CRC that are most often violated — Articles 12, 27 and 30 which provide youth with:

1. The right to be consulted about significant decisions affecting them.
2. The rights to be fed, clothed and nurtured.
3. The rights to culture and heritage.

Dulcie McCallum, former BC Ombudsman...

in the workshop "Bringing the CRC to Life in Your Community," spoke first about what is wrong with the "system" when looking through the lens of the CRC. Some issues discussed included fragmented and short term funding, no funding for youth beyond age 18, no increase in funding even when positive measurable results are obtained, and the funding focus on crises and not prevention. The workshop then focused on advocacy within the community, highlighting that advocacy begins with "me" as a parent, community member, or worker, and reinforcing the importance of campaigns to raise awareness about children's rights. The specific rights of education and family were discussed in greater detail, questioning how the approximately 7,500 children-in-care in BC have their right to a family fulfilled!