

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL ISSUES

INQUIRY INTO CHILD PROTECTION SERVICES

SEMINAR

At Sydney on Thursday, 12 September 2002 at 3 p.m

PRESENT

The Hon. Jan Burnswoods (Chair)

The Hon. Dr A. Chesterfield-Evans

The Hon. Amanda Fazio

The Hon. J. M. Samios

The Hon. I. W. West

ALSO PRESENT

The Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, Minister for Community Services, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services and Minister for Juvenile Justice

Transcript provided by CAT Reporting Services Pty Limited

CHAIR: It is a great honour for us, the Social Issues Committee of the Legislative Council, to have our special guest, Dr Fraser Mustard, from Canada here with us. He is in Australia for a short time and is in Sydney for just today, so we are very honoured that he has been able to fit us in.

We are also very pleased to have with us Jane Dixon and Carmel Tebbutt, the Minister for Community Services, Disability Services, Juvenile Justice and many other things that are concerned with children.

I will be as brief as I can, because we want to hear from Dr Mustard and we also want to enable those of you who have come today to participate and ask questions.

You would know that we are doing a number of inquiries at the moment. The one that is really getting attention is our inquiry into child protection and DOCS. One that has had much less attention is the inquiry we have been doing for almost a year now into early intervention for children with learning difficulties, 0-8 year olds. What has struck us more and more, particularly over the last few weeks, as we have had our hearings and visits in relation to the child protection inquiry, is the need for us to not emphasise the crisis and not emphasise the picking up the pieces - I think Dr Mustard's phrase is "the repair shop" - philosophy, but to really try to address - and get Government to address - the areas of prevention and early intervention. So much have we become convinced of the importance of focusing on that that we are at the moment planning to launch, more or less simultaneously, our interim report in relation to child protection and the Department of Community Services and at least the first part of our report on early intervention for children with learning difficulties, because it seems to us that they both provide the opportunity to make that statement, that what we all need to be about is prevention and early intervention.

There are a lot of unsolved questions obviously about how that is done in terms of structural issues; how, for instance, someone like Carmel might deal with it: Would she become the Minister for Children, for instance? There are all those sorts of issues, the bureaucratic issues of how to deal with it, the co-ordination issues, so many of the ones we raised in our issues paper in relation to early intervention for children with learning difficulties, but they are obviously closely related with the way in which we deal with the issues of child abuse and neglect and the child protection inquiry as well. So that is where we are coming from.

We are very pleased to be able to have Dr Mustard with us to share his experience of the report that he was involved in making proposals for how some of these issues should be addressed in the province of Ontario; what has happened since then in that part of Canada and others, and what we in New South Wales can learn both in terms of the directions we might go in and some of the pitfalls to avoid as we do so. I think he will need some of you to say, well, this is Families First or whatever it is in New South Wales, what do you think and how does it go, but we are hopeful that we can learn a great deal from him. I am not sure that we are going to teach Dr Mustard a great deal - perhaps not - but it will be a useful exchange.

At this stage, I would like to ask the Minister, Carmel Tebbutt, to do the formal introduction of Dr Mustard for us.

The Hon. CARMEL TEBBUTT: Thanks very much, Jan, and good afternoon to everyone here. It is great to see that there is such a mix of people in the audience today. I know that we are all particularly keen to hear from Dr Mustard and I would like to extend a very warm welcome to Dr Fraser Mustard in particular. It is great that we have the opportunity to hear your views on an issue that is so important to all of us.

I think that it is probably fair to say that, as Minister for Juvenile Justice, I could not be anything but aware of the impact of a child's early life, of what happens in those formative first couple of years, in terms of their later outcomes because I see, on a regular basis, what happens when children do not have the benefit of support, stability and nurturing in their early years in terms of outcomes with juvenile offenders, so it is something that I have been very focused on and conscious of for some time now. I have to say that my new responsibilities as Minister for Community Services, Disability Services and Ageing have only sharpened that focus and made me more aware of the importance of early intervention and more aware of the importance of prevention.

I guess I am not telling you anything in saying that one of the great struggles, of course, for us in government is to be able to focus on the ever-growing number of reports about children at risk, to

be able to respond to those reports, and at the same time to be able to build up our early intervention responses because we know that that is the only way, long-term, that we are going to reduce those ever-expanding numbers of reports, so I particularly am very pleased to be able to hear Dr Mustard's views on these issues because he is someone who is long renowned for work that he has done in this area.

To share a bit of background with you about Dr Mustard which you may or may not know, he has certainly been known for the groundbreaking work that he did in Ontario and was the basis of major reforms in the early childhood sector in that province. Dr Mustard is President and Fellow of the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. He has had a diverse career in the health sciences research in the private sector and in 1982 he took on the task of creating and establishing a unique Canadian institute known as the Canadian Institute for Advanced Research. This institute does many things, but, in particular, its programs have had a major focus on the effect of economic change on the social environment and the health and well-being of individuals and populations, and it is that type of work that we will be hearing about today. Dr Mustard has been a leader in Canada about the socioeconomic determinants of human development and health with particular emphasis on early childhood and the role of communities. He has received numerous awards for his work, awards I will not document here because it would probably take all of our time.

Dr Mustard, you are very welcome and we are all very keen to hear your views and hope that you will help guide us in some of the difficult issues that we are grappling with in terms of public policy. Thank you.

Dr MUSTARD: Thank you. I don't know whether I can be of any help to you or not. I was asked to speak about what Canada has or has not done. That is actually summarised in a document, which was leaked, not by us, to the press last Friday when I got into the country, which is a rather blunt description of the failure of the Government of Ontario to actually act on the recommendations in the report. You can imagine that caused some concern, which leads to people saying, "What was it you really said and why did you say it?" I will send some copies to your office so that if any of you want to read it you can.

My co-chair is the wife of one of the wealthiest families in Canada, the McCain family. If you know of McCain Foods, you will understand that. Margaret is a strong exponent of what I am going to say to you, and that is: that the programs that we talk about should be available for all families with young children; they should not be called services, they should be called programs; and you should avoid labelling and stigmatising. I say that at the beginning.

Secondly, our crowd, because of the nature of the institute's program, has no difficulty in understanding the concept of experiences in brain development. It begins in utero; it is most dynamic in the early years of life; it peters off as you get older; and so that means experiences in brain development early on tend to stay with us, and that has huge ramifications for each case by the way. One way of thinking about it, since you are Australians, if you learn to swim at three, you will be a better competitive swimmer than if you learn to swim at thirty. In my country it is skiing, and people could understand that.

The things that our report put forward were based on that understanding, and what we want is an integrated system of support for all families with young children, to ensure that the children have optimum circumstances for development. That is why we crafted in our report a thing called early child development and parenting centres. The concept, in part, comes from the fact that all of our programs were very fragmented, they were not integrated. One of our primary school teachers who was on our reference group had been shrewd enough to bamboozle the Comber district school board, which is the largest school board in Canada. Remember our schools are administered through elected boards, not by the central bureaucracy, if I may put it that way.

The story is that Mary realised there were a number of children coming into her classes who could not cope. She was teaching primary school. So she begged the school board for a budget to put in place what some years ago we would have called day care, and they said, "We cannot fund that ma'am". But then she found a loophole in the Department of Education's regulations. They ran continuing education programs. So she asked for a budget for a continuing education program in parenting and the school board didn't understand what she was up to, so they gave her the budget. She then started to attend schools and get the principals on side. The principals agreed to give her a classroom. She stripped all the desks out of the classroom and then brought in mothers with young

children, including pregnant women. She had public health nurses, primary school teachers and she had room then to work with both children and parents. So she had a very novel situation in which the children were being engaged in early childhood development and education so they would learn in this classroom, but with adults present. The adults were acting as auxiliary teachers. The first class, which I went into, it was quite stunning, you had to watch where you stepped because it was packed with human bodies, not like a day care centre, but around each adult was a group of kids. So the mothers that were acting as teachers were learning parenting by doing that, not being lectured at, which meant it was transferred back into the homes. It was quite a story.

The upshot of that is the school board didn't want to shut it all down, and it has now been substantially increased to be placed in close to fifty schools, and we know that the effect of this program on children's performance when they hit the school system, compared to children in the district who are not in it, their performance is five over submagnitude better, and that is a massive achievement if you think about it.

That coloured a little bit our thoughts on this. So we basically recommended that Mary Gordon's parenting centres, so-called, actually should be made into early child development and parenting centres, that is they should also be allowed legally to provide non-parental care. That gets away from the concept of day care, which I no longer will use as a language because most males regard the terms day care and babysitting ---- you may be more superior down here, but we have a culture problem in my country, but if you pick up the theme of early childhood development, then that catches the essence of what the story is.

So when we put in the report and said all these good things, they had a Minister for Children, who was very good, but not in community, social services or welfare, all the departments that you have to deal with, just children, and she had a challenge in how to build capacity in the community to put in place this initiative, and there was a gamble as to whether the community groups would come together to do this. She ran pilot projects. The essence is that they began to really work. There was leadership and the community could do it and work with the school boards to put it all in place, and then the Government got panicked because this meant there would be too much transfer of power to the community, which happens to be in our group when we want to build the capacity, and so the poor Minister who had done all this got dumped and was transferred under a male in community and social services who basically had a large repair shop public service in Government who could not embrace the broader picture.

A large number of community activities became derailed and troubled and the Government decided to create what they called early year centres. Now, in that hand-out, we contract for early childhood development and parenting centres. The early year centres are essentially information kiosks. They are fundamentally different from the story I was telling you. That they should be put in place angered a lot of the community. Because we had worked closely with the communities in the understanding, I was under pressure to say something publicly about this with Margaret McCain. We did not want to do so while the Premier who called for the report was still the Premier, but when he departed, we felt we should issue a report which says the Government's execution of the report which Mr Harris called for, which is very much to his credit, actually had been badly done, and of course the new Government picked up on this and actually made some real gains. The piece of paper that I have given to you embraces some of that material.

The good news, however, is that that report, Mr Harris, the then Premier of Ontario, gave to all his provincial premiers and colleagues in two sessions of Parliament, which led, actually on September 11, 2000, to the Governments of Canada, the Federal Government and the Provincial Government, announcing a national children's agenda which embraced the basic philosophies in the report, and the Federal Government committed itself to incrementally put this in over a five year period, \$2.5 billion to all augment provinces' role in early child development, with a clear commitment that they would incrementally increase this if the provinces acted on the recommendations in the report sensibly. I have no idea what is going to happen on that. That has therefore led to all the provinces in Canada - with the exception of Quebec, for reasons, if you know Canada, Quebec likes to do its own thing - actually initiating programs. So we now have the province of British Columbia with a Minister for Early Childhood Development, which is quite remarkable; we have a Minister in Alberta for Early Childhood; Saskatchewan I can't answer; Manitoba a clustering of education, including social services and health, which actually work very effectively together. It is very much like the shortcut dynamic in the United Kingdom, the way Manitoba has put its program together, cutting across all its ministries. Ontario has to do something radically different if it is going to achieve anything. The Atlantic provinces are their

own world, but they have things going which are basically positive, but the most striking province is Quebec because it already had a basic core program in place, which we embrace in our report.

Because the behavioural problems of children was hugely influenced by the in utero period and dysfunctional families, the Quebec Government has now mounted a very special program based on the work of Eugene Tomlin (?) to cut back the number of kids who really have severe behavioural problems because of the dysfunctional families early on. They put up a budget of a little over 60 million dollars for the early childhood centres. So Quebec is a province to watch, and why is it different from the rest of Canada, because southern Canada had a French culture with a strong Catholic Church, and Quebec still has many of the social characteristics of that culture, and remember France has creche programs in its preschool programs for early childhood development, and so culturally that culture seems to be ahead of the rest of the country in knowing what should be done, I guess maybe the Anglo Saxon heritage of the rest of the country is a problem. I apologise to those of you who have Anglo Saxon heritage here.

The upshot of all of this is, in terms of Canada and the province of Ontario, Ontario is going to have to get its act together because of the judgment that most of us have misused the Federal Government money, which is going to make it hard or put pressure on continued funding. Indeed, Margaret McCain and Charlie Coffey, who is a senior Vice President of the Royal Bank of Canada, have actually issued a report to continue to bring together the community groups that are building early child development capacity in conjunction with the school system, link or bring them together. They approached the Minister in Ottawa to allow the money for Ontario to be split up and given directly to the communities to bypass the Provincial Government. Now legally she could do that, but politically it is probably explosive. She tried to do it too quickly. Since you are a State Government, you would not want the Federal Government to intrude like that, but it is a small trick that may occur in our country because the irritation level is very high.

In this document which we have we have summarised the most recent evidence that comes about in the world about why investment in early childhood is so hugely important, and it is interesting: Increasingly, the data shows that trajectories that will affect your health - physical and mental - in later life, learning and behaviour are actually being set in this very early period of life because of the mixture of experience they bring about. We know very clearly what needs to be done to ensure you have optimum development of your children. We have a measure which is used from our national longitudinal study of children and youth and we can calculate how many children are vulnerable in the 0-6 age group. We did not do it in the previous document, we presented a graph but did not do the calculation, but since not everybody is mathematically inclined this time we decided to do the calculation. Of 900,000 children in the 0-6 age groups, 225,000 are vulnerable that in terms of their future development they will not reach the level they could have reached had they had a good start. Now that is a massive number. It is not normally talked about and you do not have a data system, as far as I know, in your country that allows you to do that, but that is an extremely important figure and it is important to think about that yourselves in terms of what you are doing and think more broadly about it than just narrowly as a government.

So what did we recommend to the Government in this document? Well, we said several of the world's leading economists have picked up basically on several things, but this World Bank document which was just released says it all: "From early child development to human development". Think about it, because it means that education is part of the process of human development and it means that the base for education development is being set in this early period. When talking with the government of Alberta, the former Minister of Education who is now the Minister of Health, in a discussion with a similar kind of group as you are, last July, we said: Why don't we have a ministry of human development in Alberta in which we collapse the early childhood and education agendas together? Coming from health, he understood how early childhood set health risks in later life. Coming from education, he understood totally that brain development, as well as affecting health, affects learning and behaviour. So why not act and try to link together the biological understanding of human development and get rid of some of the artificial things we have created institutionally in our society?

Now I am not suggesting that you can do that easily, indeed there might be huge political problems why you cannot do it, but in chatting with Graham and Penny before we sat down here - and I know you have had the people from Sure Start, I'm sure - Blair was clever. Blair understood all of this, by the way, which says there is something about tough political leadership that is so important and to overcome the fragmentation that government sets up in the public services, et cetera, he had started out his attempt to create Sure Start by having I think a person from the Treasury Board chair the

committee and that led to an integrated system beginning at conception, before birth, that provides what is equivalent to what I have been describing as early child development and parenting centres, and they kicked in I think - Graham has my calculations - a little over a billion and a quarter Canadian dollars to the first period of this program. The other clever thing about this document is that the Minister of Education reports to the Cabinet on this program and the Minister of Public Health answers questions in the House on the program, recognising the duality of the strategy.

So we laid it out to the Government of Ontario: Why don't you consider bringing together your early childhood development initiatives and education and why don't you consider the bold step of going through a Ministry of Human Development, properly structured, to effectively get coordinated policy dynamics to put this agenda forward? Now I have no idea how the Government feels about this because here I am talking to you people about it and I am not talking to our Government at home because I have been out of the country. I had the novel experience of speaking on ABC this morning and I realised that here I am talking about this document - which I saw some of the quotes in our press - without ever talking to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, so I suggested to ABC that they might like to send a copy of the tape to the CBC to see if something can happen.

In a brief outline, to summarise this, the country understands the framework of what early child development means today. That is the big gain in the last four years. Our Federal Government understands it. Our Federal Government understands that it has to put additional money into the development of this. Our provinces vary in terms of their capacity and the biggest weakness in Ontario: There has not been developed within the public service a shared framework of understanding. Where the provinces have done this they are making bigger gains. Manitoba would be one example of that. You do not develop a shared framework of understanding easily. Blair did it by his strategy for Sure Start.

I guess my recommendation to you, listening to all of the things which you do and the fact that you have this Committee, you might like to think of how you could power yourselves forward by developing a shared framework of understanding so that you can build an integrated program for enhancing early childhood development. Now I will stop at this point to allow Graham to say a few intelligent things.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Fraser. He mentioned Professor Graham Vimpani two or three times while he was speaking and I think that is a recognition on our behalf as well: Professor Vimpani has been very useful to us in our inquiry into early intervention for children with learning difficulties, and also more recently in relation to some of the child protection issues, so I would like to ask Graham to formally thank Dr Mustard.

Dr MUSTARD: Before he starts, could I say something about this man?

CHAIR: Yes, certainly.

Dr MUSTARD: When I first came to this country Jane Dixon, who is sitting over there, programmed me to go to Newcastle. The medical school of Newcastle had a relationship with McMaster which I helped put in place. So I went up to Newcastle and all of a sudden I found I was supposed to speak the next day at noon to a large audience. Graham had organised it and I went in and there were these technicians from ABC hanging around. I said, "What are you going to do?" "We are going to tape it". I said, "I am using slides". "That's okay. We will condense this down to three 20 minute segments and broadcast it". I said, "Okay, if you want to do it." And what Graham did from my office, and Dorothy, who is not with me, he set up a whole series of phone calls from Australia into our office so people could listen to this and want more information. That is my memory of Graham.

CHAIR: A dynamo.

Professor VIMPANI: Fraser has obviously provided a lot of leadership in Canada and an enormous impetus within Australia to helping us get our programs on the road and I thought, in reflecting upon what he said from the New South Wales perspective, it is interesting that I have just come from having spent two and a half days next door at the obesity summit and we heard on the very first day about the number of reports on the problem of obesity and overweight in Australia that have been shelved and not acted upon. The first point that comes out of what Fraser has said is that there needs to be political will and commitment to actually bringing about change and I think we do have in

New South Wales evidence that that is there. Maybe we would like to see the commitment supported by a few more dollars, but at least there is a recognition and the train is on the rails and heading in the right direction.

The other point to pick up on, again which I found a very powerful argument when I was in the US recently, has been the argument that has galvanised the British Government's commitment to early years investment, and that is the argument around investing in human capital. James Heckman, the Nobel laureate, who Fraser refers to in his report, has really sharpened the focus on this by saying that he comes from a background of working in job training programs, and he said the case for investing in the early years is far more powerful than investing in job training programs because the foundational skills that are laid down in those early years are essential to all subsequent cycles of learning.

When one recognises that human capital comprises around 59 percent of national wealth and in industrial countries comprises around three quarters of all producible forms of wealth, parents' direct investments account for three quarters of all investment in human capital, you can see then why the Blair Government has upped the ante by moving from what they were previously investing. Fraser mentioned about \$1.5 million Canadian a year. The investment annually in the United Kingdom in Sure Start, a range of extended child care provisions and nursery education for three and four-year-olds, is 1.5 billion pounds annually. Converted to a population ratio, and looking at what the New South Wales Government is investing, together with what the Commonwealth is investing through things like Stronger Families and Community Strategy, it is around ten times higher than what we are currently doing.

Leadership is the other point that Fraser brought out in what he had to say, and I think the argument for a ministry of early child development or human development, or something like that that ensures cross-sectoral ownership of the early years' programming, is really very important, and this has obviously been something that this Committee has been giving careful consideration to over the last six months. The United Kingdom arrangements that ensure and lock in all the key government program providing, rather than service providing, program providing departments, is really very essential to whatever new arrangements might come out of the current debate in New South Wales.

The other thing that I think is important, and Fraser mentioned this, is a vulnerability index. I think that we in Australia have lacked a solid data base on which to look at how well our kids are doing and how well our programs are changing those kind of trajectories that Fraser indicated are so well established in early life. I think that we are going to get funding for the development of a similar instrument to the early development index that has been used in Canada, developed in Ontario over the last few years. Hopefully we will get that established in Australia, and, of course, we are all looking forward to the commencement of the longitudinal study of Australian children. It is the first time this has happened in our country's history, funded by the Commonwealth Government.

The final point I really wanted to make was in terms of the kind of programs that are happening that Fraser has talked about and that we are looking at in New South Wales. I think this notion of early childhood development and parenting centres in some ways has some similarities to the schools of community centres initiative that is part of Families First. They are certainly an enhanced version of what we are currently offering.

Interestingly, in the discussions next door over the past couple of days, the notion of early excellence centres that bring together a range of initiatives that will support families with young children is certainly there in our final set of recommendations, and to my mind the best that I have seen in operation are some of the new ones that are part of the Sure Start initiative in the United Kingdom. I had an opportunity to visit one in London and several in Birmingham when I was there in July. There is an absolutely amazing range of services being provided in the one location for parents across the cultural and socio-economic spectrum within the neighbourhoods that they were located in. Sure Start has been targeted towards disadvantaged communities, but everybody who lives within a geographical area is entitled to access those services. One of the things that I found very contrasting with what I have seen in Australia was actually the number of men who were involved, both as program providers and also participants.

Just to finish off with, I think the kind of work that is going on in Quebec, that Richard Chamblet (?) is involved in, trying to interrupt this cycle, this trajectory of increasing problems from difficult attachment experiences, setting an environment for very aggressive behaviour in

two-year-olds that continues on, leading to conduct disorder and early juvenile crime, I think we will look with great interest at what that investment in Quebec can achieve, and, in some senses, a lot of the parenting initiatives that we are trying to get going in New South Wales are also focusing very much on improving that early relationship between children and their parents. The whole notion of parenting education being stress based, family centred, relationship focused and building on people's sense of self-efficacy I think is one of the underpinnings of the sorts of things we are trying to do in Families First, and particularly through sustained home visiting to some of the most vulnerable families in our community.

I think we have a nice partnership, in a sense, with Canada in terms of catalysing the development of initiative in each of our two countries and I think it has been a very healthy relationship and I would certainly like to thank Fraser again for continuing this dialogue with us.

CHAIR: Thank you, Graham, for that and could I, in her absence now, thank Carmel Tebbutt for coming. We knew that she had to leave early, so she tried to sneak away.

It is now open to all of you to ask questions of Fraser or perhaps to offer some comments. We thought what we would do is stay in this circle for a while longer. We have afternoon tea coming and we can go on chatting more informally when that happens, but certainly for at least the next 20 or 25 minutes we are able to ask questions of Fraser and I guess to some extent exchange views, but obviously with a lot of people it would be good to keep things fairly brief so that as many people as possible can have a chance. I do not know that we really need the microphones because the acoustics in this room are not too bad. We have got them partly because we have Hansard here so that we have a tape of proceedings that are obviously going to be useful for us in terms of the two inquiries that we are particularly doing, but I think in this room, as long as you speak up slightly, there is no difficulty in us all hearing you. It would be helpful if you said who you were and where you are from when you first speak and then we all know and we have the permanent record as well on the tape. So over to you.

Dr VICTOR NOSSAR (South Western Sydney Area Health Service): Thank you, Fraser, yet again. Ever since I first saw you in Newcastle it has been a kind of opportunity not to miss to hear you present where you are up to in Canada. Can I offer two comments. I have been working now for probably the last eight years with World Bank and Van Leer about looking at setting up early child development programs in Asia and Europe and the weakness that I keep running across is that there has been generally a failure to develop comprehensive systems. People like developing pilots or studies, and with Sure Start I think its core weakness is that they have a program which is covering a few kids in vulnerable communities or lots of kids in vulnerable communities and are planning some time in the future to talk about mainstreaming, which is a very great risk. As you have identified in Ontario, you had a definitive study, and unless you can get governments to buy in a program which covers total cohort, the vulnerability is that future governments, or when conditions change, governments restrict it to just those in need and it then becomes a poverty program or programs only dealing with high risk which attenuates its efficacy straight away. It is fascinating how many people want to avoid doing population programs. That actually is reinforced by the academic institutions where academic institutions want to do more studies rather than build a systemic program even on what is known, so they have actually looked at compromises, which meant you had a few centres of excellence and lack of coverage across the country.

I think important about what New South Wales has done is understood, because we are actually developing a program of Families First which is seeking to get coverage, and I actually fully reinforce what Graham was saying that we do need to look at ways of funding it so that it does provide the total level of program coverage that is required in terms of the scope of the programs, but starting on a population base has been one of the things that we have done that others have not done and that actually, in a sense, put a government stamp on it through the Cabinet Office to say: This is a program which is going to reach the whole of New South Wales' children. Our Federal system of politics prevents States sharing that kind of experience. In my experience everyone wants to do their own thing, including the Federal Government.

The other thing was the issue of leadership. There is a huge vulnerability. When I ask why is ECD, with the evidence so strong, not being picked up by countries, it is almost invariably being led by ministries of education and, with deference to all my colleagues and the Minister for Education, I think that is one of the most central ministries in governments, yet worldwide they are seen as a nice program but not central to the action of governments. That means that you have a very important

message being under-heard because the components are not weighed up by the governments who are hearing those messages, and I think the question was asked of me some years ago in London when I was there presenting the same sort of material as we are doing on Families First. The audience stopped and said: What right have you, as a paediatrician, to come here and tell us of this program? I remember I stopped for a second and then I understood that the audience was full of educationalists who knew this decades ago and I said: We don't have any right. The only difference is that governments, for the right or wrong reasons, believe doctors more than they believe educationalists. I think the strength lies in what Fraser said, having educationalists and doctors and social services getting together and saying the same message. So again the Australian experience of having Cabinet Office lead this - not Health, not Education, not Social Services - has been one of our saving graces.

CHAIR: Did you want to respond, Fraser?

Dr MUSTARD: Well, I would just say that you probably know I am in this book, and the reasons for that, and you will notice the title of this book is "From Early Child Development to Human Development". If you look at the front cover of this report it just says, "From early child development to human development: Enabling communities". That is the theme that the Government should take on; that is the theme I have been trying to work with the World Bank on.

The good news is that next week I am in Karachi, God willing and nobody blowing anybody up, because I have been on the board since the start of the Aga Khan University and we hope to put a program on human development in place to work with the network structure of the Aga Khan people which operates in east Africa, south Asia and central Asia. This could be one of the most important programs in that part of the world if it can be put into place with the right backing and participation because you can penetrate into a wider area through developed network structures which involve health for mothers and children and education programs and we think that the World Bank will provide some of the funding to start this, because you are quite right: Building a sustainable effort in parts of the world is very difficult. That is the good news for all of us in the developed world, we at least can build a sustainable effort, but we have a way to go.

Ms FRANCES PRESS (Institute of Early Childhood): You mentioned earlier the importance of community control in the original programs that you were starting in Ontario and I wondered if you could elaborate a little on that, what you saw as the important elements that needed to be adopted in practice in terms of community control of programs?

Dr MUSTARD: What we meant by that is that there are many activities in the communities which are highly relevant for early childhood development, but there are often different categories and labels, et cetera. If the legislation that the Government created created standards, these things could come together, if I can put that language across to you.

The second thing is that we did not want to see developments fragmented from education because these things tend to digitate.

The third thing we wanted was the private sector to be involved because private sector employs women with young children, so one of the things we wanted the Government to consider was a tax credit for private sector investment in early childhood development centres open to the community as partners in this. So if you start to mobilise the combined resources of a community you actually can build quite a strong capacity without a lot of extra resources having to be put in. You will have to put in new resources, but we estimate in Ontario that about \$1.5 billion is spent on themes in early childhood, but it is too fragmented, it is not integrated enough. If you wanted to put it up in terms of what we think the initial participation rate would be from pregnancy through to age six, you will probably climb to about \$3.2 billion a year. We think a chunk of that modestly can come from the private sector, another chunk from the Federal Government. A fee structure should be part of this because it should be available to all families and some can pay some above it, and so of that total increased expenditure only about \$300 million would have to come from the provincial coffers. The rest of it would come from the other combination if you build the community capacity. What we found was that when you talked with communities and got the framework of understanding out, there were many business leaders who came on side and quite a few of our smaller business leaders said: I hate government taxes, they waste my money, but I like this idea because my dollars are not wasted. Does that give you a feel for it? That then creates a political well at the community base and basically we could see this working in certain areas, so why not exploit it?

Professor WANGMANN: I am currently in one of our Government departments working in early intervention, family and children's services. We have undertaken some work over the last few years, where we are looking at moving towards more integration in our services prior to school and we are in some dialogue at the moment with our Federal Government. One of the things that is an enormous barrier to an integration program embracing the entire school is Commonwealth/State funding and the total inflexibility we find when we start to engage in some of that dialogue.

I am just wondering how you negotiated some of that in Canada in setting up the early childhood development parenting centres. We are trying to get some agreement whereby we can actually move towards piloting some things along those lines that integrate early childhood programs along with parenting programs, but getting funding for it has been an enormous difficulty.

Professor MUSTARD: Are you talking about the interface between our Federal Government and the Provinces?

Professor WANGMANN: Yes, that is right.

Professor MUSTARD: If you read carefully the September 11, 2000 communique, you will find almost the same thing, which is extremely important. There is a reason for that. The then Deputy Minister of Health had been the Deputy Minister of Finance and the Deputy Minister of Human Resources Canada was the former chief bananas, as we call bureaucrats in New Brunswick. Both of these people we knew extremely well, Margaret McCain had a bit of a turn at government in New Brunswick and she also knew David Dodge, who I knew very well. They understood the subject completely, that investment in this thing was a high priority. So those two brought together all the senior bureaucrats from the provinces while Harris was pushing this with his provincial Ministers colleagues and so what you had was a blueprint for a national program compatible with the Early Years Report. That is how it came about. It was a kind of subtle dynamic of interfacing in leadership to do that. David Dodge is now the governor of the Bank of Canada, unfortunately, because he is an extremely bad economist but had no problem at all coping with the ramifications of that. Part of his legacy was getting the Department of Finance to understand it. Paul Martin, who was our Minister, actually picked up the children's agenda in 1993 and came into my office with his assistant and spent a half a day, and I was told later I got him to understand the children's agenda. So that also facilitated that. Where the funding was allocated, it then was the provinces' responsibility to make use of that with their funds to build capacity. So there was no bureaucratic interference centrally on what the communities would do. Does that help you?

The Hon. Dr ARTHUR CHESTERFIELD-EVANS: More than 30 years ago I went to a lecture called "The Syndrome of the Psychologically Invulnerable Child", in which an American giving the lecture, whose name I forget, said that he had identified a whole lot of children who had had horrendous childhoods but had turned out okay as adults. The only factor he could identify as being protective was that the first 12 months of their life had been well structured, everything had gone wrong after that in their childhood and adolescence and they still turned out okay.

Then, only a little while ago, we had a guy talking about measuring brain circumferences and the changes in neuron numbers over time. The suggestion was that the younger you intervened the better. So, in fact, presumably you have to intervene before birth, that is the maximum time I think, from birth, and after that it matters less and less. You have diminishing returns as they get older, as opposed to politically when they become more powerful, they have increasing returns as they get older, and so where the money should go and where it goes is inversely proportional.

As a logical consequence, if what I am saying is correct, once you start with parenting programs calling them educational programs and really take your money back right back to that level, is that what you are really saying, because the parents have such a key influence, you have got to talk about parenting education rather than children's education, aren't you, as a means to an end?

Professor MUSTARD: That is not a bad conclusion. If you turn to page 33 of the sheet I handed out to you, you see a contrast between ECD and parenting centres from the Government's early year centres. The early year centres are a kiosk to pass information to parents, in fact to educate parents. That will not give you a big gain. In Mary Gordon's early child development parenting centres you learned the parenting by doing, which is totally different, radically different. Contextually we are trying to really move this agenda forward and Mary Gordon takes the hardest core of women with young children into her program, because in southern schools in the lower part of the city, actually it is

close to where we live, there are a lot of young single women on drugs. That is the hardest group to get into the program, but Mary found a subtle way to do that, which is you do not lecture them, et cetera; you actually go down and cultivate a relationship to get them into the school, and if you can get enough of them to come in, they signal to others to come in. She actually did the lead on this. She would wear the crappiest blue jeans, borrow somebody's baby. Other mums with babies will talk to mums with babies, and she could get them comfortable. They then would come into the program, which was a tremendous advantage to the children, and they were learning the parenting role and doing that. But you could never have got them into an education program. You have to think very much of using your instrument as a community socialisation function, if I can use that language, with people sensitive to it to help them.

So you are right in much of that, but the thing I would say to you is that if you think about experiences in brain development, it is true it begins in utero, so you want to get support to that period. That is why we argued, and partly why Sure Start does this, that type of women should be part of the subject. That is extremely important in terms of social support. And it is true that the early years have big effects.

What we now know genetically, a concept with short alleles and long alleles and genes that affect the frontal brain, which affects memory, indirectly affects behaviour, it affects cognition, and the way the genetic machinery gets turned on in your head is dependent upon the experiences which you get at different periods. If you have a short allele, which has got a compound called serotonin, and you do not get them both turned on, you will have significant behaviour problems. If you have good experiences and get them totally turned on, you are okay. If you have a long allele, you have much more reserve capacity, so you are more resilient, if I can use that language. So when you look at the percentage of children or adults with a short allele who get into trouble, it is quite high. The percentage with long alleles is much lower, but they all can get into trouble. So if you think about it, you now collapse it all together.

One of the issues you have to face in society, and I do not know what the paediatricians here would say, but the paediatricians from my culture will tell you that about 10 percent of our children are subjected to significant physical and mental abuse as young children. That screws up the worrying about the key control systems in the brain and you have got to find a way to really break that down by involving people in your program, because repeatedly it tends to lock things in which you cannot change at the present moment.

Ms BOWES: My name is Jennifer Bowes. I am from the Institute of Early Childhood. Just to take up a couple of points that you were talking about, first of all about like teflon coated children and everything can be all right if you inject them in the first year and they are right for life. I think we have got to be careful about that. No matter what how good a background we have, we are vulnerable at various parts of our lives, we are not resilient all the time, and I think we have got to keep that idea of resilience waxing and waning through the life span.

The other thing is, while the early years are very important, we also cannot forget that later years are also important in changing the trajectories in children's lives. All is not lost in the fight by the time children are five or by the time they are eight. There are things later on that can change things for the better in children's lives. So, while I think this is a very important window of opportunity to make a difference in human development, there is hope later on. I get concerned that people are sort of saying once your brain sets you can never get out of it. Some of the research is showing that later changes can make a difference in children's lives.

Professor MUSTARD: Let me not be too sympathetic to your comment, and I should tell you a bit of the background. I have one son who does foster parenting and he has learned about what you can do with older children versus younger children who have had a bad start. He does make some gains, but it is monumentally difficult with the older children to gain from what he does.

I have a daughter who teaches in our primary school and I have two grandchildren that are in the school, and it is a borough part of Ontario. I take these granddaughters skiing, and my anecdotal evidence is that I say, "Tell me about the children that had difficulties starting in your school and how they have progressed". The trajectories tended to hold in that school system, and my daughter was even involved in special education and the burden of doing that.

So as it became clearer and clearer to me about trajectories getting set in early life and the

difficulty to change them, not to say you cannot change some of them, I said: What is the evidence that the special education programs in schools really changes things? So far in my country there is absolutely no evidence. I come from medicine, where evidence based medicine is key. Somebody needs to do a randomised controlled trial of the value of these programs, special ed programs we put in to try to change outcomes for children. At the present moment, it is not an easy thing to demonstrate that you really make gains, and the thing that really upsets me, as the molecular biology of understanding the brain gets forward, the pharmaceutical industry will devise more and more drugs to modify behaviour and you will simply put more and more human beings on drugs, which I think is highly inappropriate. So I am a bit hard nosed about the early years to that extent, and let me complete this.

If you read the book "Meaningful Differences", which is the most exquisite study I have ever seen, given to me by another scientist, who was brilliant, it looked at the acquisition of verbal skills in early life, which directly relates to the intensity of the verbal interaction with the child. The trajectories are clearly set by the age of three and those trajectories carry through to the age of nine. I do not think they followed it any further. I do think you should think about that and if you remember that literacy, if you look at it on the scaling of ability, which is what the OECD has been doing with international statistical inventory, the scale goes from zero to five. Zero is illiterate. One you can read a prescription but you do not understand it. Two is slightly better. In your country and my country 42 percent of the adult population is at levels one and two. We have a huge problem in our cultures because we know you can drop that figure down substantially and, if you are in education as a minister, this is a real challenge for you and I do not believe you can change that dramatically unless you really make the proper investments in early child development.

CHAIR: I should say at this point that Dr Mustard absolutely has to leave us at 4.30, so we are sort of squeezed into his schedule today, but the tea and coffee have arrived. We can probably have one more question I think, otherwise you are certainly welcome to go on talking to him over a cup of tea.

Ms SHARON PERKINS: May I have the author for Meaningful Differences, please?

Dr MUSTARD: It is referred to in this thing: You cannot get it, it is out of print. It is a funny story. I asked a neuroscientist from the Rockefeller University that I work with, "What's the best documentation of early childhood development?" He said, "Meaningful Differences". I have an open office, as Jane and Graham know, and I shouted across, "Get me a copy of Meaningful Differences". They shouted back, "It's out of print". "Oh", I said. Then Cheryl, who runs the library section of my office, came around and said, "We actually have a copy". "Oh", I said. She said, "You haven't looked at it". I said, "No, it was given to me by some hucksters" - I refer to them as "hucksters" - "and I didn't believe it was important". I opened it up and I saw verbal skills development. I will try and find the authors for you, but you would probably have it in some library here.

CHAIR: I am sure we will be able to find a copy.

Professor VIMPANI: I have actually got two of the figures from it that Fraser gave me while I was there, so you are welcome to have a look at them if you would like.

Dr MUSTARD: The sheets I carried out are kind of a quick summary of key things that we had to say to the Ontario Government. They may find them useful, but you will find in the last section - sorry, it is a little bit blurred - what the Ontario Government should do. We have absolutely no evidence that they will do anything, but at least we have said it, and the nice thing is I got interviewed by a national newspaper this morning in Sydney about this and so maybe they will confuse me with somebody in Australia--

CHAIR: I guess it is true always that the visitor is often a prophet more so out of his country, and so we can certainly celebrate you here and thank you very much for being with us. We have a small memento and thank you for you from all of us, particularly from the Social Issues Committee, and, as I have said, we have 20 minutes basically for those who can grab Fraser's ear over a cup of tea or coffee to do so, but could I just thank all of you for coming, thank Fraser in particular, thank Professor Vimpani also for his words, and invite you to share with one another, but also please with the Social Issues Committee because we are working on these inquiries and we need, I think, all the help we can get from everyone whose beliefs tend in the same direction as ours do. So thanks, once again.

(The seminar concluded at 4 p.m.)