



Children Are Everybody's Business

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My Goal Today

- To explain how a community or a country can give its young people the best possible start in life.

It takes

- Adequate family income
- Good parenting
- Appropriate government investments
- And a supportive community



BC Children Today

- 250,000 children aged 0-5

Of these:

- 150,000 have mothers who work
- 50,000 child care spaces
- Where are the children whose families cannot afford quality child care?

(2001, CRRU data)



BC Parents Today

- 59% of employed men and women are experiencing serious role overload
 - Up from 47% in 1991 (Duxbury and Higgins)
- No adult at home to do the caregiving
- Most families cannot live on one income



BC Employers Today

- Need the best performance possible from all current employees
- Have a responsibility to their community
- And a direct interest in the quality of the workforce in 15 to 20 years
- In short, children are everybody's business



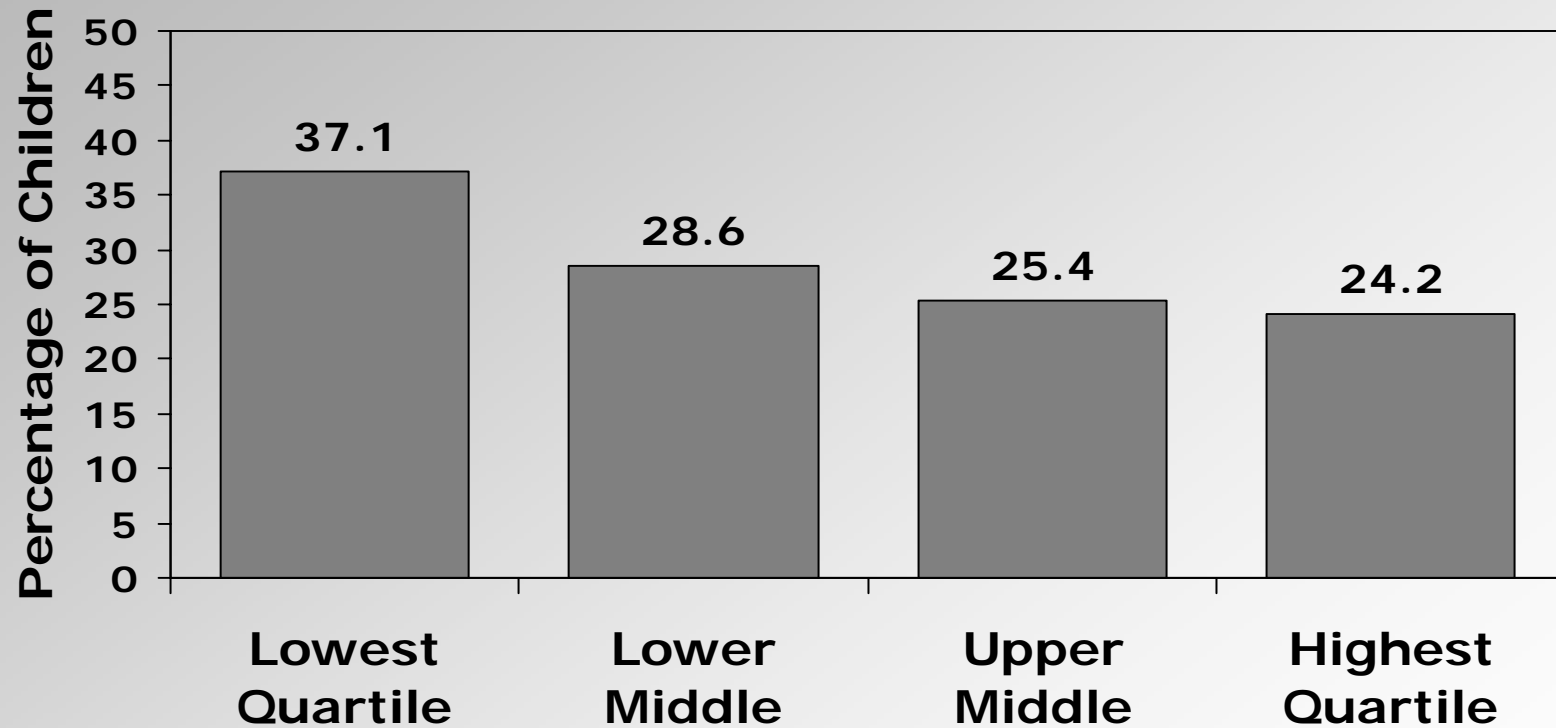
The Problem

- By age 6, 1 in 4 children are showing signs of cognitive or behavioural problems
- These are “vulnerable children”
- Most live in families with modest to high income.
- The problem cuts across our society from top to bottom



One in Four

Prevalence of Vulnerable Children by Family Income



Vulnerable children demonstrate one or more cognitive or behavioural problems

Source: Vulnerable Children, J. Douglas Willms, 2002



Key Messages

- The problem does not go away
- It just gets more expensive. The time to prevent it is early childhood
- The core issues are
 - Early childhood education and care, and
 - Supports for families with children
- Together, they create a “family-enabling society” (Doug Willms)



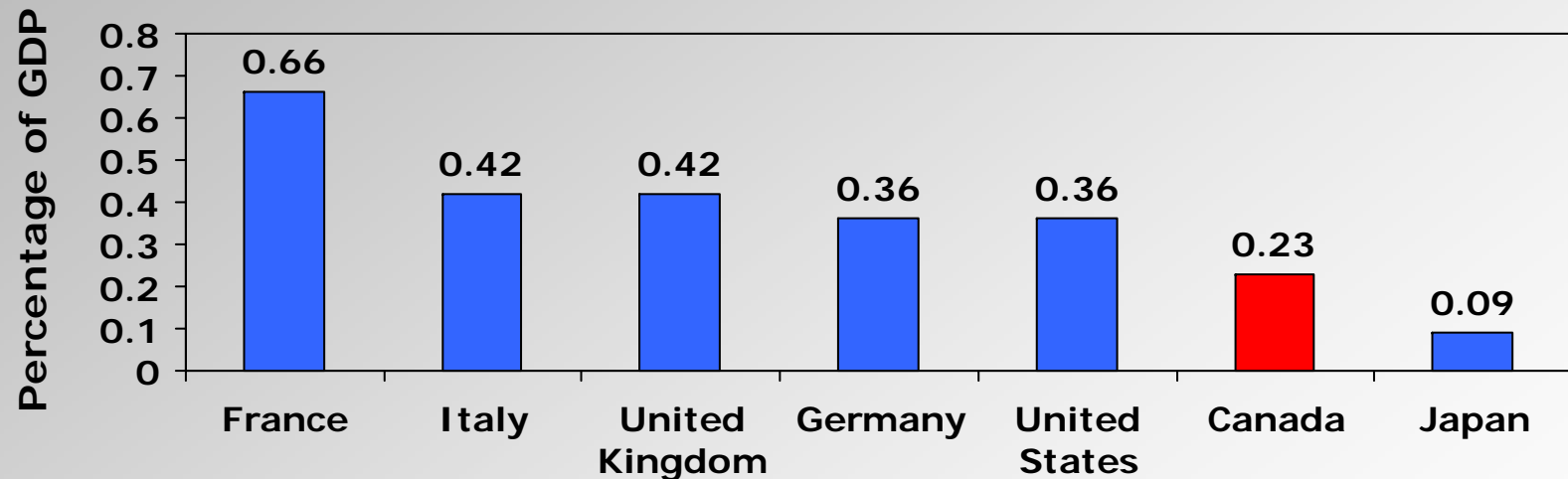
Canada's Record

- Government programs focus on poor families with young children
- Europe and some US States focus on all children
 - Centred around education and care
 - With effective diagnostics and early interventions
- Key interventions include
 - Home visits, parent resource centres, counselling, accessible recreation, affordable housing
- Canada and BC fail on both dimensions



What Others Are Doing

Public expenditure for pre-school education (age 3-6 years), 1998



Source: Statistics Canada, based on OECD, 2001



“In future, the optimal mix of investments in human capital will include more public investment in Early Childhood Development and Care”

David Dodge, Governor of the Bank of Canada, speaking at Sparrow Lake in May, 2003



We Have A Stratified Society

- Until children are 5 in BC, parents are responsible for their care 24 hours a day, *unless*
- They are poor enough to qualify for a child care subsidy (about 25% of registered spaces in BC)
- Or rich enough to pay for what they need (about \$9000/yr)



With Stratified Neighbourhoods

- Access to family-enabling services varies dramatically across Vancouver (Hertzman)
- Shortfalls are greatest in poorer districts
- For child care, parent resources, libraries, safe and stimulating places to play, etc
- People live there because housing is more affordable



What Governments Do Now

- Income transfers to low income families with children
- A patchwork of services
(with modest funding from Ottawa)
- B.C. focuses on the poorest and most seriously troubled children
- Otherwise, it is up to our schools



What Schools Do And Can Do

- Schools in most provinces have experienced cuts and been told to get back to basics
 - Many schools are locked at 4 pm to protect property
- Schools could become the focal point for family-enabling services, providing
 - Child care, safe recreational space, reading circles, public health training, family resource centres and referral services



What Governments Can Do

- Federal and provincial governments can invest in good quality child care
 - This is expensive but essential
- With the help of communities, they can foster stronger neighbourhood efforts to become family-enabling places to live



What Employers Can Do

- Create family-friendly workplaces
 - Flexible hours, predictable schedules
 - Paid family leave -- 5 to 10 days per year
 - Salary top-up during parental leave
 - Access to referral centres for caregivers
- Create youth internships and apprenticeships
- Be a community booster:
 - Encourage staff to volunteer
 - Join neighbourhood associations to learn what is needed – then respond with in-kind help



What community activists can do

- The YWCA, Success by Six, Big Brothers/Sisters, etc do a remarkable job with limited resources.
 - They too focus primarily on the poorest and most troubled children
- They could, with more support from the community (and governments), do much more



The Buck Stops Here

- Somebody has to take responsibility here
 - Children and youth can't vote
 - 18-30 year olds don't vote as often as elders
- Children are everybody's business



Change The Future

- Twice in our history, we have changed the future for the elderly
 - In 1960s, created a retirement income system, and reduced poverty among elderly from 67 % (in 1967) to <10% today
 - In 1990s, revised the CPP to make it sustainable for an ageing society
- Now, we need to become a society that invests in children
- A “family-enabling society”



Conclusion

- Look at the communities you serve
- Find out what you can do to build a better future
- Tell governments that all families with children need our support
- For happy children and parents today
- And for a healthy society tomorrow

- . . . the Canada we will become





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