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Cornerstones of a Professional Association for the Community Disability Services Sector:

Pulse Check Survey

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for

Alberta Council of Disability Services

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In partnership with the North East Workforce Council and St. Paul's Abilities Network (SPAN) the Alberta Council of Disability Services (ACDS) Provincial Workforce Council is exploring ways to recognize the professional nature of the work in Alberta's Community Disability Services sector. Interest in exploring the development of an association stemmed from recommendations based on previous workforce initiatives undertaken by the Provincial Workforce Council that have aimed to address human resource issues within the sector.

The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRI) was contracted by ACDS to develop a survey to gather the thoughts and opinions of individuals within the sector regarding the value, function, and structure of a professional association within Alberta's Community Disability Services sector.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Survey Instrument

Through a collaborative review process with ACDS, a survey was developed by The VRRI Research Department to be distributed online and in hard copy format. Questions were developed based on: i) research conducted on core elements of a professional association within other sectors and ii) comments gathered from a Discussion Café facilitated by ACDS in November 2008. The survey contained 12 questions answered on a 5-point scale categorized under the following themes: i) previous knowledge of professional associations, ii) value, iii) function iv) structure, and v) overall support. In addition, one open-ended question was included to provide an opportunity for respondents to present additional comments (Appendix A: Pulse Check Survey).

2.2 Sampling and Data Collection

Surveys were distributed over a period of 10 weeks (April 6, 2009 - June 15, 2009) and were submitted online or by mail to The VRRI Research Department in a sealed envelope to maintain confidentiality. A communiqué drafted by ACDS was included with the survey to provide additional information regarding previous initiatives exploring the possibility of forming a professional association (Appendix B: Communiqué).

At the 2009 ACDS Spring Conference, the North East Workforce Council and MacLean Management Consulting Services Limited (MMCS) co-facilitated a Discussion Café to provide conference participants with the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns regarding the possible development of a professional association within the sector. The Pulse Check Survey was launched and promoted at this event and conference participants were encouraged by ACDS to complete the survey during the course of the conference.

ACDS also facilitated additional recruitment activities carried out by a committee established to organize the Pulse Check Survey. These activities included distributing the survey to Alberta Service Provider Councils and to member organizations of ACDS.

2.3 Response Rates

A total of 476 surveys were completed and returned with 104 (21.8%) submitted online and 372 (78.2%) submitted in hard copy.

2.4 Validity

A basic measure of validity is face validity; this is a judgement of whether an indicator measures what it claims to (Neuman, 1994)¹. In this survey respondents were asked to evaluate statements and indicate the degree (e.g., Very Low, Low, Moderate, High, Very High) to which they felt the item presented was of value, priority, benefit etc., to the sector if implemented by a professional association. The participant responses were interpreted as a measure of perceived value of the items presented. Thus, in this survey the indicators measured what they were designed to measure (i.e., the respondents' perception of value, priority, or benefit) and meet the requirements for face validity.

3.0 ANALYSIS

3.1 Respondent Characteristics

Of the 476 respondents, most were:

- Female (78%)
- 36-55 years of age (56%)
- Community Disability Services Workers (32%)
- From the Calgary region (51%)
- Full time employees (85%)
- Graduates of a college diploma or certificate program (35%)

3.2 Limitations

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting the survey results:

- The survey sample was a convenience sample and was not randomly selected. Responses are not necessarily representative of all individuals within the Community Disability Services sector.
- Survey questions were all worded positively. This was done for clarity but may have resulted in response bias (e.g. individuals choosing the same response option for all questions in a section).

4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Quantitative Responses

Responses were given on a scale of 1-5 with 1 indicating very low perceived value (benefit, priority, etc.) of the item and 5 indicating very high perceived value of the item. Mean response ratings have been calculated across all respondents for each item in the survey.

4.1.1 Activities of a Professional Association

To obtain respondents' opinions on the major goals of a professional association, 6 commonly stated activities of a professional association were presented. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each of these items were of priority (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High). Respondents felt all items were high priorities for a professional association with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (influencing public policy) to 4.4 (developing and maintaining a code of ethics) (Table 1).

¹ Neuman, W.L. (1994). *Social Research Methods. Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Table 1: Mean Ratings for Activities of a Professional Association

Question 1: Using the response scale provided please indicate to what extent you feel the following activities are of priority for a professional association.	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Influencing public policy	4.0
Increasing public awareness of a sector	4.3
Developing and maintaining a code of ethics	4.4
Establishing education and training requirements for members	4.3
Protecting the interests of sector professionals	4.1
Connecting professionals within the sector	4.1

4.1.2 Value of a Professional Association

The value of a professional association was defined as the potential long term benefits and sector outcomes resulting from the existence of a professional association. For the purposes of this survey, value was measured with items related to two dimensions of professional recognition; (i) public awareness and perceived prestige of the sector, and (ii) sense of professional identity for people working in the sector.

4.1.2.1 Public perception

For the first question related to professional recognition, respondents were presented with 4 items to gauge their opinion regarding the role they felt a professional association could play in influencing public perception of the sector. Respondents felt roles outlined in each of the items would be highly beneficial with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (generating public interest) to 4.2 (educating the public about the sector, increasing sector visibility and awareness, and increasing the status and prestige of the sector) (Table 2).

Table 2: Mean Ratings for Public Perception

Question 2: To what extent do you feel a professional association could be of benefit in influencing public perception of the sector in the following ways:	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Educating the public about the sector	4.2
Generating public interest regarding the sector	4.0
Increasing sector visibility and awareness	4.2
Increasing the status and prestige of the sector	4.2

4.1.2.2 Professional identity

The second question related to professional recognition asked respondents about 4 different ways in which a professional association could build a sense of professional identity within the sector. Respondents believed each of the goals presented could be achieved by a professional association with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (building a sense of belonging within the sector) to 4.3 (establishing the sector as a career rather than a job) (Table 3).

Table 3: Mean Ratings for Professional Identity

Question 3: To what extent do you believe the goals listed below can be achieved by a professional association to create a sense of professional identity and culture?	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Building a sense of belonging within the sector	4.0
Developing a shared vision and shared values	4.1
Instilling professional pride	4.2
Establishing the sector as a career rather than a job	4.3

4.1.3 Functions of a Professional Association

Functions referred to the role of a professional association to provide tangible opportunities and benefits to its members. Function was measured through five dimensions: i) professional development, ii) sector representation, iii) networking, iv) resources, and v) professionalization.

4.1.3.1 Professional development

Items related to professional development asked respondents about the role of a professional association in providing growth and learning opportunities. The first question asked about opportunities for association members, while the second question asked about opportunities for students.

Respondents felt the 4 opportunities presented for members would be highly valuable, with mean response ratings ranging from 3.8 (association involvement) to 4.3 (formal training) (Table 4).

Table 4: Mean Ratings for Professional Development Opportunities for Members

Question 4: To what extent do you feel the following opportunities for growth and development would be valuable to members if provided by a professional association?	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Mentorship opportunities	4.0
Formal training (e.g. workshops)	4.3
Conferences	3.9
Association involvement (volunteer roles on committees, councils)	3.8

Similarly, respondents rated the 4 opportunities presented for students as highly valuable, with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (internship opportunities for new graduates, practicum placements for post secondary students, and scholarships and bursaries for students in related post-secondary programs) to 4.1 (job postings) (Table 5).

Table 5: Mean Ratings for Professional Development Opportunities for Students

Question 5: How would you rate the value of the following opportunities a professional association can potentially provide for students?	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Internship opportunities for new graduates	4.0
Practicum placements for post secondary students	4.0
Scholarships and bursaries for students in related post-secondary programs	4.0
Job postings	4.1

4.1.3.2 Sector representation

Items related to sector representation asked respondents about the role of a professional association in providing a shared voice for sector professionals. Respondents rated each of the 6 items presented as highly valuable with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (establishing relationship with other sectors and associations, representing employees rather than agencies, and providing consistent and comprehensive messages representing the sector as a whole) to 4.2 (advocacy at a provincial/national level, and responding to proposed legislation) (Table 6).

Table 6: Mean Ratings for Sector Representation

Question 6: How would you rate the value of a professional association in representing sector professionals in terms of:	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Advocacy at a provincial/national level	4.2
Establishing relationship with other sectors and associations	4.0
Representing employees rather than agencies	4.0
Providing consistent and comprehensive messages representing the sector as a whole	4.0
Responding to proposed legislation	4.2
Influencing post secondary institutions to respond to sector needs	4.1

4.1.3.3 Networking

Networking referred to opportunities provided by a professional association to connect members through activities and social events to promote the sharing of ideas. Respondents believed each of the 4 networking opportunities presented would be highly beneficial with mean response ratings ranging from 3.7 (social events) to 4.1 (workshops) (Table 7).

Table 7: Mean Ratings for Networking

Question 7: To what extent do you believe the activities listed below could be beneficial for connecting professionals in the sector if organized through a professional association?	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Conferences	4.0
Social events	3.7
Cooperation with other professional associations (National organizations, associations in other sectors)	4.0
Workshops	4.1

4.1.3.4 Resources

Resources referred to access to information and financial benefits provided to members through a professional association. Respondents felt that each of the 6 types of resources presented would be valuable with mean response ratings ranging from 3.5 (subscriptions to academic journals) to 4.2 (group benefit plans) (Table 8).

Table 8: Mean Ratings for Resources

Question 8: The following are possible resources that can be provided to members through a professional association. Please indicate to what extent you feel each resource could be of value within the sector.	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Group benefit plans	4.2
Group insurance	4.1
Association newsletters	3.7
Subscriptions to academic journals	3.5
Job postings	4.1
Association website	4.1

4.1.3.5 Professionalization

Items related to professionalization asked respondents about increasing the professional status of a sector through the development of standards regarding training and practice. Respondents were presented with 3 tasks a professional association could undertake to professionalize the sector. Results indicated respondents believed all 3 tasks would be highly beneficial with mean response ratings ranging from 4.0 (set educational requirements for membership) to 4.3 (development of a code of ethics for the sector and development of a code of conduct for the sector) (Table 9).

Table 9: Mean Ratings for Professionalization

Question 9: To what extent do you believe the following tasks of a professional association could be beneficial in raising the professional profile of the sector?	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Development of a code of ethics for the sector	4.3
Development of a code of conduct for the sector	4.3
Set educational requirements for membership	4.0

4.1.4 Structure of a Professional Association

The structure of a professional association was defined as the logistical organization of a professional association including location, funding, and staffing. Structure was measured through two dimensions: i) governance and ii) membership.

4.1.4.1 Governance

Governance referred to the organizational structure of the association including paid and unpaid positions as well as the location of the association. Respondents' ratings of value for each of the 5 governance options presented were lower than other sections with mean response ratings ranging from 3.1 (executive roles as volunteer positions) to 3.7 (volunteer positions on committees available to sector professionals, and regional subcommittees within the association) (Table 10).

Table 10: Mean Ratings for Governance

Question 10: Please indicate what level of priority the following aspects of governance are to you when considering the structure of a potential professional association:	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
The executive roles as paid positions	3.6
The executive roles as volunteer positions	3.1
Volunteer positions on committees available to sector professionals	3.7
Regional subcommittees within the association	3.7
Centralized location	3.6

4.1.4.2 Membership

Items related to membership asked respondents about membership categories, levels of membership, and options for membership status. Respondents' ratings of value for each of the 3 membership items were also lower in this section than in other sections with mean response ratings ranging from 3.3 (membership is voluntary for professionals in the sector and others who wish to join) to 3.7 (multiple membership categories) (Table 11).

Table 11: Mean Ratings for Membership

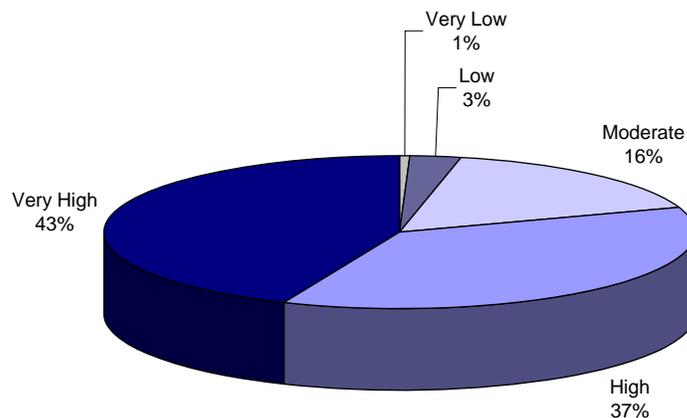
Question 11: How valuable do you feel the following aspects of membership are within a potential association:	
Item	Mean Rating (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High)
Membership is voluntary for professionals in the sector and others who wish to join	3.3
Membership is mandatory for sector professionals	3.4
Multiple membership categories (full member, student, affiliate, etc.)	3.7

4.1.5 Overall Support

The final quantitative question asked respondents to rate their overall level of support towards the potential development of a professional association within the Community Disability Services sector on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = Very Low, 5 = Very High). Respondents indicated a high level of support with a mean response rating of 4.2.

The majority of respondents were highly supportive of the formation of a professional association with 43.5% of respondents indicating a 'Very High' level of support and 36.9% of respondents indicating a 'High' level of support (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Frequency Distribution for Overall Support



For a more in-depth analysis of respondents' ratings of support for a professional association within the sector, responses have been broken down by demographic variables of age (Table 12), position (Table 13), and region (Table 14).

Please Note: These tables are for illustrative purposes only. As numbers of responses vary greatly by category, differences among category means should not be used to draw conclusions.

Table 12: Mean Level of Support by Age Grouping

Age Grouping	N	Mean Level of Support (1 = Very Low; 5 = Very High)
18-25 years	38	3.9
26-35 years	102	4.3
36-45 years	130	4.1
46-55 years	132	4.3
Over 55 years	63	4.1
Total ²	464	4.2

² Totals for responses broken down by category are lower than the sample size because some respondents either did not provide this information or indicated they held more than one position.

Table 13: Mean Level of Support by Position

Position	N	Mean Level of Support (1 = Very Low; 5 = Very High)
Worker	149	4.1
Practitioner	66	4.0
Team Leader	61	4.3
Coordinator	60	4.3
Director	34	4.6
Specialist Consultant	15	4.5
Supportive Roommate/Respite Provider	7	3.9
Student	2	4.0
Other	62	4.2
Total	456	4.2

Table 14: Mean Level of Support by Region

Position	N	Mean Level of Support (1 = Very Low; 5 = Very High)
Calgary	240	4.2
Central	10	4.2
Edmonton	39	4.3
Northeast	59	4.2
Northwest	4	2.8
South	104	4.2
N/A	2	4.2
Total	466	4.2

4.2 Qualitative Responses

Qualitative responses to the open ended question “Do you have any additional comments you wish to provide?” were submitted by 96 (20%) of respondents and are presented in Appendix C³.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

The Grassroots Professional Association Pulse Check survey was designed to gather the thoughts and opinions of individuals involved within the Community Disability Services sector regarding the potential development of a professional association. Based on the responses received, individuals within the sector believe many of the goals and functions of a professional association included in the survey would be of value to the sector. Overall support for the development of a professional association was strong with 80.4% of respondents indicating a ‘High’ or ‘Very High’ level of support.

³ The qualitative data that was collected was not analyzed as outlined in the contact between the VRRRI and ACDS and has been included within the appendices as additional information.

APPENDIX A: PULSE CHECK SURVEY

Grassroots Professional Association Pulse Check of Alberta's Community Disability Services Sector

In this survey, you will be asked to provide your thoughts regarding a professional association for the Community Disability Services Sector in Alberta. Completed surveys will be collected by The Vocational and Rehabilitation Research Institute (VRRRI) which has been contracted to assist with data analysis. The information you provide will be compiled and any personal identifying information will be eliminated to ensure all responses are anonymous and confidential.

Please complete and return this survey by June 15, 2009. Completed surveys can be submitted by:

1. Placing the survey in the ballot box at the ACDS Conference (April 6th-8th 2009)
2. Returning by mail to: VRRRI Research
(Attention: Professional Association)
3304 33rd Street N.W.
Calgary, AB
T2L 2A6

Demographic Information

Gender

- Male Female

Age

- Under 18 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 Over 55

What is your current position?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Disability Services Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Specialist Consultant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Community Disability Services Practitioner | <input type="checkbox"/> Supportive Roommate/Respite Provider |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Team Leader | <input type="checkbox"/> Student |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coordinator | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Administration, Management, Researcher, etc.) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Director | If necessary, please specify _____ |

Which Alberta region do you work within?

- Calgary Central Edmonton Northeast Northwest South N/A

What is your employment status?

- Full-time Part-time Variable (term/casual) Student

What is the highest level of education you have attained?

- Less than High School
 High School Diploma
 College Diploma or Certificate
 Some Post Secondary (College or University)
 Undergraduate Degree
 Graduate Degree (MSc, PhD, etc.)

Please answer the following questions by checking the most appropriate response on the scale provided.

1. Please indicate to what extent you feel the following activities are of priority for a professional association.

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Influencing public policy	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increasing public awareness of a sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Developing and maintaining a code of ethics	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Establishing education and training requirements for members	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Protecting the interests of sector professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Connecting professionals within the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				

2. To what extent do you feel a professional association could be of benefit in influencing public perception of the sector in the following ways:

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Educating the public about the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Generating public interest regarding the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increasing sector visibility and awareness	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Increasing the status and prestige of the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				

3. To what extent do you believe the goals listed below can be achieved by a professional association to create a sense of professional identity and culture?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Building a sense of belonging within the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Developing a shared vision and shared values	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Instilling professional pride	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Establish the sector as a career rather than a job	<input type="checkbox"/>				

4. To what extent do you feel the following opportunities for growth and development would be valuable to members if provided by a professional association?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Mentorship opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Formal training (e.g. workshops)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Conferences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Association involvement (volunteer roles on committees, councils, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

5. How would you rate the value of the following opportunities a professional association can potentially provide for students?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Internship opportunities for new graduates	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Practicum placements for post secondary students	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Scholarships and bursaries for students in related post-secondary programs	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Job postings	<input type="checkbox"/>				

6. How would you rate the value of a professional association in representing sector professionals in terms of:

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Advocacy at a provincial/national level	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Establishing relationship with other sectors and associations	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Representing employees rather than agencies	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Providing consistent and comprehensive messages representing the sector as a whole	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Responding to proposed legislation	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Influencing post secondary institutions to respond to sector needs	<input type="checkbox"/>				

7. To what extent do you believe the activities listed below could be beneficial for connecting professionals in the sector if organized through a professional association?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Conferences	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Social events	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Cooperation with other professional associations (National organizations, associations in other sectors)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Workshops	<input type="checkbox"/>				

8. The following are possible resources that can be provided to members through a professional association. Please indicate to what extent you feel each resource could be of value within the sector.

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Group benefit plans	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Group insurance	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Association newsletters	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Subscriptions to academic journals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Job postings	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Association website	<input type="checkbox"/>				

9. To what extent do you believe the following tasks of a professional association could be beneficial in raising the professional profile of the sector?

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Development of a code of ethics for the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Development of a code of conduct for the sector	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Set educational requirements for membership	<input type="checkbox"/>				

10. Please indicate what level of priority the following aspects of governance are to you when considering the structure of a potential professional association:

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
The executive roles as paid positions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The executive roles as volunteer positions	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Volunteer positions on committees available to sector professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Regional subcommittees within the association	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Centralized location	<input type="checkbox"/>				

11. How valuable do you feel the following aspects of membership are within a potential association:

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Membership is voluntary for professionals in the sector and others who wish to join	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Membership is mandatory for sector professionals	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Multiple membership categories (full member, student, affiliate, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>				

12. Please rate your overall level of support towards the potential development of a professional association within the Community Disability Services sector in Alberta.

	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
Overall level of support	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Do you have any additional comments you wish to provide?

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

APPENDIX B: SURVEY COMMUNIQUÉ



Grassroots Professional Association

Pulse Check of Alberta's Community Disability Services Sector

Have your say! Participate in a Pulse Check and share your ideas and thoughts on a professional association for disability service workers in Alberta. We are asking for a few minutes of your time to complete a quick survey. This survey will provide us with your ideas on a professional association.

You can complete a paper copy of this survey or access it online at www.disabilityworkers.ca

Who are we? The North East Workforce Council and St. Paul's Abilities Network (SPAN) have taken the lead in looking at the value of forming a professional association for the Community Disability Services sector. They have partnered with ACDS Provincial Workforce Council, service providers and interested individuals to seek out information from you.

What have we done so far? We are currently exploring what employees working in this sector think about forming a professional association as well as looking at best practices in other sectors. We hosted a session in late November 2008 to explore the potential value, function and structure of a professional association. Twenty representatives from across the province participated in this session which included seven Emerging Leaders who added a unique perspective to the discussion.

Additional discussion on the topic and information will be gathered through two conference proceedings at the 2009 ACDS annual spring conference on April 6th and 7th.

Why we need this information? Alberta's Community Disability Services sector currently serves 15,000 clients and employs 17,000 people. As the Community Disability Services strengthens its capacity to proactively address its human resource issues, there is renewed interest in exploring the merit of establishing a professional association.

What is the benefit to you? The information gathered through this survey will be compiled into a summary report and will be available on the website in early September. For more information please check out www.disabilityworkers.ca website.

Please complete and submit this survey by June 15, 2009.

Thank you for your help!

APPENDIX C: QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

Responses are included as worded in the surveys submitted. Any identifying information has been removed to maintain confidentiality.

- The time is now!
- A concept long overdue- Thanks for your persistence to move it forward- Thanks St. Paul Association and all involved.
- Without this step this field will deteriorate rapidly and soon. It is fast becoming a non-profession. No graduates - no standards beyond you are breathing and haven't committed a crime recently.
- A professional association would provide credibility for front line workers. Increasing visibility and credibility could only improve employment conditions for staff. We desperately need a minimum education (as for daycare recently) and code of ethics.
- Please do not stop to do the good job in advocating us. I think this is the right time!
- We are professionals and deserve to be valued as we value the people we support and assist.
- Can't make [membership] mandatory unless legislated.
- Change that name!
- Hope this information gives what is needed for future goal development.
- This makes good sense let's just do it finally!
- This survey does not seem to accurately allow us to reflect priorities. Very hard to give information that I feel is pertinent.
- I think a professional association could help the CDS sector to safeguard individuals from workers who have been charged with abuse and give the sector a way to confirm the qualifications of good workers.
- This could be one of the most valuable proposed opportunities that have been suggested in the 20 years that I have worked in this sector.
- I think this is what the sector has needed for years. I think advocacy is the greatest role. I would suggest that the movement toward setting educational standards be done slowly and carefully. We have lost many of the most formally qualified people in the last few years. I fear if the movement on creating educational standards is too fast and does not have some "grandfathering" protection the bulk of our staff who have few formal qualifications will be frightened away (I'm already hearing that concern being raised).
- The association must play an active role in lobbying governments for improved wages as a unified voice.
- Go beyond just Alberta, get it recognized across Canada. Criteria to maintain membership (i.e. working (minimum hours) training (one per year) etc.)
- Let's do it!
- Need to develop a professional association with paid staff to administer. Joining the association needs to be a requirement for all new employees who come into each agency. Standards need to be set and existing staff to be grandfathered in.
- Similar survey for unions. Would like some more summarized info on associations and unions.
- Keep the momentum going!
- Consideration does need to be given to the possibility of combining professional association with unionization like the UNA or ATA- this dramatically would increase lobbying power. This

would also work to eliminate the wage gap between government employees (Michener) and community agencies.

- I am in favor of a strong voice from a professional association, but not a labor sector association.
- I think agencies need to be on-board as a whole to support this initiative. We have tried this in the past without a lot of success, but it seems that you are more organized and formalized so I hope it takes off now.
- This is a great idea and is very long overdue!
- I think with professionalizing the sector you will need to increase wages - the two go hand in hand.
- It would be nice to have an association to help govern awareness, education for employees as well as being recognized as a profession.
- It's about time! I am also willing to assist in any way with development.
- I would like to see CSW become certified. The pay scale should be adjusted accordingly. All aspects of the job description should be met before employees begin working.
- Re: 8 Retirement Savings Plans. Re: 9 Educational requirements- relevant to the services provided and grandfathering of employees who do not have the 'credentials' with training and professional development opportunities designed to help the employee meet educational requirements or equivalent competencies. Requirements for continuing education. Re: 10 Centralized for purpose of being physically accessible, especially if volunteer involvement is desired. Helpful to look at the value professional associations have in other service oriented sectors such as long term care, social work, nursing etc. who successfully use the power of one representative association to positively speak and act on behalf of members at provincial and national, even international levels. Potentially huge benefit to smaller agencies to access quality education and training resources and be heard as a voice supported by the industry as a whole. Ability to successfully lobby government as a credible, recognized body would be far more effective as representing a services sector rather than an individual or smaller group or agency with their own agenda.
- Questions were vague and not fully understandable.
- I believe a professional association will assist with public and government recognition, improved worker morale/satisfaction with their chosen field.
- I feel an association is needed.
- I believe that education is very important but I also believe that matching subcontractors and clients should be done on compatibility not on educational background. Awareness in the community is very important.
- I feel it is extremely important to develop a professional association. After all if one does not go to university to become a nurse or teacher or a doctor no one can belong to their professional sector, so why shouldn't we belong to one as a lot of us did go to college or university to acquire our skills. So this sector should not be open to anyone who does not have a diploma or degree in Community Rehabilitation.
- Need governing rules and restrictions, ability to go to training, accepting educational degree as liable for the job, accepting/recognizing all training, restrict some staff from management training either poorly qualified or poor attitude.
- It would be of paramount importance to establish and develop a professional association. It will improve communication across the board. It will create a good quality workforce, which will be

able to provide quality service without fear or favour. There will be better advocacy, transparency and fairness.

- Although education and mentorship is of importance there are members in positions of authority who have no desire to move forward. Education and support to move an agency forward needs to be supported. I think ethics should comprise a standard of behaviour and part of an employment agreement with staff. Standard for employment. I think adhering to ethical standards should be training provided by an overseeing body to ensure information is shared with all.
- I feel we would be in a better position to attract educated and professional staff providing this association is "out there." We need to be noticed, have standards (professionally and ethically) and be a professional people are proud to be a part of.
- I would be interested in being a part if further development of this.
- It is essential that for the development of any type of 'codes' - ethic, conduct, etc. that input is gathered from a diverse range of potential membership for a potential professional association; this to avoid too narrow a focus. In my opinion, one of the toughest aspects of any to prevent falling into a 'type-cast' professional association model. If the services are diverse; then any learning and/or educational models must be equally diverse...not an easy thing to do. The minute a professional association promotes training or inservices of any kind they are in effect saying to their members: 'this is the most important aspect of knowledge you require.' it cannot be avoided, the moment this is done you have committed the course for the association itself. Careful planning is then essential with regard to educational component for a professional association.
- Standards across the field vary to such extremes of service providing that standards must be mandatory for the sake of those we serve. A professional association may serve the needs of our clients by aiding to assure the highest care/support standards.
- This topic has been 'bandied' around for a long time!
- It would provide opportunity for professionals volunteering to be in the know concerning job opportunities, contracts, etc; but on the other hand I get a little nervous when speaking about "another" association. The downfalls could be negative as well as positive i.e., certain individuals wielding enough contacts and know how as to be exclusive or biased in certain areas.
- It would make the sector more "professional" and would hopefully attract people to work in this field as their profession, not just a job.
- I think this could be good if it raises the quality of care for the individuals and working conditions of the workers. As long as it remains a human association and doesn't become a bureaucratic machine with no flexibility. As long as it doesn't lose the part of the grass-roots organizations that works.
- Somehow I thought there already was a professional association for individuals with a degree in rehab.
- I believe this profession really needs to be recognized so there will be standardization throughout Alberta especially.
- I believe that to have a well maintained and operated work place it is essential to have organization activities to get to know other employees better, which makes a stronger more effective team. As well as more learning opportunities, the more we know the better suited we are for our jobs.

- As society becomes aware of the gifts and skills the disabled are able to contribute to society, public and community, the ostracizing will cease, and the individuals will be accepted and drawn into the community and not treated or handled as being un-normal. The community would be set up and utilize all the tools available to give the individual all the independence that they want and need to give them self worth and assurance.
- My experience from other sectors is that professional associations can fulfill a valuable role for sharing information/expertise in the form of conferences and workshops. They have the potential to raise the stature of a profession by improved public/regulatory profile and accreditation. They also run the risk of being irrelevant by creating busy work and excluding members by rigid standards.
- Sounds like a good way to connect people together within this type of employment. May help develop consistency throughout agencies and professionals to help maintain and promote quality of life among people with disabilities.
- Personally I prefer community based with consistent standards rather than centralized location. Also, staff advocacy is very important. Some staff do not have English as their first language and maybe at risk of not properly representing themselves against abuse allegations.
- The justice systems needs to be educated on the levels of disabilities and not judge caregivers for pressing charges against a disabled person who knows right from wrong. Most police and the lawyers believe that anyone with a developmental delay should not be charged.
- In this field to be taken seriously by gov't funders and to improve the community's/society's impressions of the services we provide and to attract a more committed workforce and emerging leaders, it is necessary to change from an employment opportunity to a career choice.
- My only concern is that it may limit employers from hiring suitable positions based on personal quality and experience and make formal education the priority. This would be detrimental to the sector because it is the people as individuals that make the difference in quality service.
- As a professional, I already belong to CARNA and the AUPE. Membership is mandatory and I pay monthly and yearly dues. I do not wish to belong to another association especially if it is mandatory with dues. I am currently experiencing information overload attempting to keep current with ongoing issues within these associations.
- Status and prestige of the sector is low. A professional association is badly needed. I support this initiative in particular for the sake of the clients we serve.
- Cannot establish sector as a career unless there are provincial educational standards for qualifications. It will also not be a profession unless there are true educational standards.
- Consider how you structure membership dues- Concern that cost may be prohibitive especially to younger staff.
- It is vital that salaries-wages are high enough so that more people can see this area of services as a long term visible career, not just a temporary step to something.
- I would like to have a professional association, but if that means that I would be required to have a certain level of education to keep my job, I don't believe that is fair. I am willing to attend any and all provided workshops and training sessions to further my knowledge and skills.
- If this sector is going to have people come in and make this their career they will need to offer an increase in wages as they will be required to have higher educational requirements. This will encourage people to stay longer within this field and make this a career. If the executive roles as a volunteer- This would not be that persons main role/job and may not be able to put in the

work necessary. If it was to be paid it would depend on the amount of work necessary. Maybe it could be paid in the beginning and move into a voluntary position.

- I'm very pleased with the excellent standards of the professional association our own agency has which may have been reflected in some of my neutral responses.
- How well protected are workers in this sector? Since it seems that clients are overly protected from abuse and all sorts whereas their workers are at risk of abuse and assaults from clients and it really seems that no one cares about this situation.
- I feel that the educational level of front line workers is not high enough, as some cannot read or write properly, or deal with the persons they are paid to support. Also, front line workers should be paid higher wages due to high stress levels, burnout and dangerous situations (e.g. physically violent/aggressive individuals). A training course for supporting individuals who need anger management would be beneficial to service providers.
- It's about time.
- It would be great to be part of a professional association which offered workshops etc. to the disability workers on the front lines. Long overdue!
- It's about time!
- Where can I sign up?!
- If unionized employees are part of this association, how will that affect how the organization will look?
- Please include me as a volunteer member.
- My position is that there is such a large number of uneducated employees in this sector, that I feel there will be few who can qualify for a professional designation.
- While I support the concept behind a professional association within the disability sector, I believe there should be no hierarchy of disability categories created (i.e. cognitive over physical or physical over sensory etc.) I have also witnessed far too much mandatory "certification" being part of professional associations (where members are required to "maintain certification" through attending certain workshops or programs over the course of a year). It is vital professionals keep up to date - granted - but it is also vital we fully recognize, and tap into as an asset, the tacit knowledge informally developed over the years (both by individuals and by groups - e.g. "learning organizations").
- Go for it. Long time coming, but very necessary, pride is paramount in a field which is sorely undervalued.
- I have a Diploma in Disability Studies (Services) and have been in the field for 22 years. This Professional Association is long overdue. I would not have recommended this field to anyone up until the past six months due to the level of respect and remuneration that my Diploma has afforded up until recently and would not have entered the field myself given my experience with the above. I love my work with the Clients, that is certainly not the issue. The issue has always been low pay, lack of professional status, and hiring and promoting practices within the Agencies for which I have worked.
- I commend all who are involved in pursuing the endeavor of a professional association. It is my belief that the time is right for this initiative to be launched and I am very hopeful that the momentum will build over the next few months.
- I have worked in this field for over 25 years and have always been a strong advocate of ways to get this type of work to be looked at professionally and as a career. It's going to be difficult to develop a professional association and several attempts have occurred over the years but no

success. We can learn from the history. It's always difficult to recruit people at the forming stage as it's a lot of work and people are very busy. I truly hope that finally we will be able to develop and have a provincial association and I see great potential and benefits. I hope there are people in the field in Alberta who are up for this challenge. I'll be following the progress on the website.

- Far to long in coming, I do not want dues or fees to go to paying people to run an association. I want to further our cause as a collective network, electronics and other forms of media allow our boundaries to disappear. I am tired of education lagging behind as I work and experience the best practices I should be able to apply my learning to a degree. We are writing the research of tomorrow, today.
- I have been very interested in participating in a professional association since I joined this field from a bookkeeper 3 years ago and would be willing to help out in any capacity.
- The need to be considered a career will hopefully open the doors to the community. I hope this will bring in more opportunities for not only the clients but the staff as well. We need advancements in this field, like schooling, courses to further our qualifications and they need to be provided from the association to help this become a career path for the long term employees working in the support field.
- I think this is a great idea. It would force lower end agencies to improve. This would impact how services are viewed by the public as well as the government.
- I think that this idea is a long time coming. I just finished school and some form of association or another is a big factor within this community. I fully support this idea.
- Where would the professional association stand in union/non-union environments?
- I believe in being there for the individual's that I work for and along side of. I believe that working for an agency has it's benefit's but also has it's draw back's. I always thought that if you worked as a team you were to be treated as a team member that is not always so.
- Some form of a pension needs to be established no matter how small it may be.
- I would like to see an association set educational standards for entry into positions, management positions etc. An association should also be for the front line employee and by the front line employee, if we can't get together and unionize, we should at least have one voice.
- A professional association is a must if we want to provide the best possible service to our clients.
- After years of observation, the field is filled with unskilled workers who view our individuals with disabilities as "poor helpless handicaps" who need pity and compassion. Training in the field is limited to what agencies offer their staff in the value areas of ethics and behavior management. All I need to do is take a trip to the local pool or rec. centers where ppl with disabilities congregate with their staff to see how unskilled supports are. An association is an excellent idea and will set minimum standards for staff qualifications and ethical conduct.
- If wages aren't at rate (they aren't now) that allow the workers to support themselves with, it won't really matter how much an association provides, the view of the field will not change. I think something to look into is being a part of a union.
- Although I support a professional association within the disability field, I strongly recommend that fees to belong to an association need to be very cost effective (LOW) as those who work in the field are not compensated well enough to pay for fees such as belonging to other professional associations (RSW).
- Education is very important in some ways but can not be used to exclude those professionals with a wealth of practical experience. Making membership mandatory for certain key members

may be the most plausible idea, however, it may not be enough to simply make it voluntary for all. Paid positions will be necessary to see that the association is impactful. The association should also have a certain amount of power or leverage, whether it be implicit or explicit. It will be important to recognize which areas are the least likely to be addressed by individual agencies as these areas should probably be the focus of the professional association (i.e. codes of ethics, standards, sector vision and mandate etc.). While I answered slightly differently in the survey, I think it is important for the association to be involved in the process of training its members, however, it should not be responsible for the training as a whole. The overall need for a board would be to standardize and set the level of training requirements as well as being a social and political voice.

- What will this mean for the future of [our agency]? Does this mean a pension plan may be established? Will this mean in the near future we will all need recertification or further education to remain in this field?
- I would be interested in participating in the development of this professional association.
- An association is very much needed in this sector. I hope it will create a professional image of our work within it and attract new graduates to the field. I also hope it will be used effectively for public policy change and government lobbying.
- I believe a Professional Association could improve recognition of those in the field, being a part of a recognized Professional Association may open doors to our clients. Our sector would be accountable to the Codes set by the Association, improving our overall image. Agencies could decide how and if they wish their staff to be members.
- One of the difficulties of the field is that professionals are made so at least as much by aptitude as by training. While education is helpful, it does not replace aptitude. Simply put, we can teach an apt but poorly-educated employee on the job. There is no way, however, to instill aptitude in an educated person who has marginal aptitude. Presently, workers typically begin in an agency with relatively low hiring standards, and graduate to better agencies with more experience. In this, the sector has stumbled onto a method whereby there is an informal method of starting as a beginner in the field, and slowly gaining practical experience. This has allowed us to take advantage of a pool of individuals with tremendous aptitude but limited post-secondary training. Such people include persons with disabilities themselves, and people making late career changes, such as retirees and injured trades people. All of these persons, while lacking in related formal education, have made significant contributions to the field. When we speak of "professionalization," the dominant model is one based on academic qualifications. This tends to remove the real arbitration of membership and professional prestige from the professional association, and place it in the hands of the universities. This, in turn, will lead to us leaving out the pool of apt employees with limited access to post-secondary education. Indeed, the normal course of academic chauvinism is likely to lead to a preference structure for employment, which has no regard for actual practice skills. With the possibility of chauvinism, in turn, comes the possibility of arrogance: that "the professional knows best," to the point of dismissing the ideas and concerns of clients and parents. For this reason, I recommend eschewing a "professional" model of qualification based on academic qualifications. Instead, we have two options. One is the "trades" model of apprentice, journeyman, and master. The other would be a new model which would have to be created from scratch. The common threads of either form would be as follows: 1. There would need to be an entrance qualification, set as low as possible: this could be a secondary school diploma or GRE, or an exam as alternative. 2. Advancement for each level would be a matter of time in service, professional education hours, and a standardized examination administered by the Association. 3. Persons with appropriate education should be allowed to skip the entry stage. 4.

The final level ought to include a graduate degree OR publication in a blind-reviewed professional journal. I hope that these considerations are of some service to you.

- There should be more sector employment agencies to have all people with disabilities in the community.