

**From Lori Harris**

***WOFO thoughts, reflections and experiences***

The issues follow common themes but the solutions come from many different strategies.

As a center director, I took advantage of the center tour opportunities available on Tuesday May 17. I was randomly assigned to see a community based center in St. Laurent and a hospital based center closer to downtown at St. Mary's Hospital. I considered myself particularly lucky to get this "assignment" since I am the director of an on-site hospital based program in the United States.

Our tour director, the current assistant director at St. Mary's, along with the director of the community based program were very informative about the program features and the issues that plague them as they run their programs. Both programs I saw, while different from the one I run in some ways, are very similar in others. Both St. Mary's and DHMC, where I am the director, use the same curriculum tools and many of the same pieces of equipment.

It was interesting to begin to understand the funding stream for programs in Quebec Province. My understanding so far is that there are government supported centers – public, and there are private centers. The private centers can also get government money and can charge on top of that too up to another \$7.. The government supported centers charge parents \$7 per day, free for low income. Those centers can, and have to, pursue other funding streams to fully fund their services. This is no different than most programs in the United States in that there is inadequate funding to fully fund the services necessary for a high quality of care. Certainly that the Canadian system answers the question of affordability for parents; it will take an ongoing commitment from the government and private funding to maintain the quality and accessibility variables for programs.

The issue of pay for early childhood workers came up once during the tour and I know it is the experience of one center; don't know how universal it is. When I was visiting the hospital based center we were talking about pay and benefits as a way for me to compare my center. The benefits are similar; the pay is equitable as well. A typical early childhood teacher is making \$12 - \$14 per hour which would be considered on the high side in the United States. The range for teacher in my program is \$10.50 - \$14.00 per hour. While both countries are still pitiful in their pay for teachers overall it seems, the qualifications in Canada are so much more rigorous for that title of teacher that it makes their pay seem even lower in comparison to mine. My lead teachers are equitable to the teacher title in Quebec programs in regard to qualifications and that range is \$14 - \$19 per hour and they are paid on a salary basis. I know the pay and benefits at my program are better than the typical/average program in the United States but am not really sure how typical St. Mary's is of Canadian programs.

In addition to seeing the physical spaces of the two centers and talk to the people who worked there but I was able to be part of a group that included people from all over the world. My colleague from my own program, Kim, and I met a woman from Slovenia while waiting for the bus. Darja works in a preschool program and develops curriculum. She is married and has two children, all of whom were with her at the World Forum. She presented in one of the sessions on curriculum. I sat next to a woman, Elindra, who is a principal of a preschool program in Malaysia. She and I talked about the similarities and differences in our two cultures and how we approached education – it was interesting to hear about the Malaysian culture and their approach to education for young children.

Anyway, the center visits combined with the conversations on the bus and in the restaurant were my first opportunity to think about the similarity of the issues we all face as early childhood providers. I thought about how I have always tried to get the staff at my program to think broadly about the way they think about families and their needs and the approaches they take to how they take care of their children. Talking to just a few other people from other countries made me realize how much more broadly I had to think myself.

## **SHARING**

This theme of similar issues kept popping up for me at every workshop and the ability we all had to be part of a world wide solution somehow. That by sharing our ideas we could continue to mobilize towards that common purpose. One of the issues is accessibility of information and how to support families. This came through on at least three occasions; the first was at the AIDS/HIV plenary session, the second at the service delivery systems session and the third at the trends session.

AIDS/HIV problems as they affect young children and women is in part due to the lack of services available in all areas. As Michael Kelly stated, only 10% of sub Saharan Africa have access to clinics that provide care. There is a lack of medicine. It is an example of access.

The issues I could identify boiled down to at least the following:

- Maintaining culture while being more cross cultural
  - Get the right services to nations – “new solutions for new nations”  
(speaker from Australia, Glen Palmer, who is working in East Timor)
- Funding stream coordination
- Sustainability of services
- Quality of care and education of caregiver
  
- Maintaining culture while being more cross cultural

Sessions on leadership and advocacy, trends, and to a certain extent all of them to some degree were cognizant of the need for awareness and respect for the cultural norms of the society needing service. It is not a matter of the Western idea of what is best being supplanted throughout the world. The model should be to understand the needs of the

people who are to be served and then move to meet those specific needs. It is interesting to think about the idea that as we become a more global world and learn more and more about each other's cultures we are bound to borrow some ideas from each other. It makes the idea of preserving culture an interesting one. How does the shifting and ever evolving cultural norms preserve the customs that we all hold so dear in our individual histories?

### **GLOBAL / INDIVIDUAL**

"New solutions for new nations" Glen Palmer in the global trends session. She spoke pretty well about the need for individual solutions and understanding the people and the history and all the variables affecting the solution. I heard over and over again in sessions about the infrastructure problems that existed as barriers to implementation of many policies that would assist young children and their families. A colleague told me a story about a country (I think in South Pacific somewhere) that mandated teaching all elementary students English as a second language and all classes would be bilingual. It got by them that most of the teachers in the elementary schools did not speak English so the implementation needed to include that training dilemma.

Glen Palmer suggested a list of things to keep in mind when developing new services in any country/area.

- ↳ Build on strengths, traditions, achievements, and resourcefulness of families and community
- ↳ Be sustainable
- ↳ Improve the quality of children's lives
- ↳ Provide better life opportunities for children

I heard over and over again about sustainability of service and this struck me as such a critical issue. I worked at a company in Boston, Work/Family Directions WFD, for nearly 10 years and one of the services we provided was bringing corporate dollars to communities with those employees. Those corporate dollars would support programs and services that were identified by the employees as a need. It was the feeling of those of us at WFD that the money spent to improve the services for employees would improve the service overall in the community, which would be true if the projects were successful and could be sustained over time. The project dollars from the corporations were for start up only and would fund most projects for no more than two or three years. The local project was then responsible to find the funding to sustain the model if it was working. Some communities were able to achieve success and others were not. It depended on lots of variables of course but nonetheless there were still projects that were successful that were not able to be sustained over time.

I think the fact that some of the world forum projects are funded at a relatively low level will create opportunities for greater success to sustain. I say that because it creates a situation where the project is not dependent on large sums of money for success. The Global leaders is a good example of this. The projects are funded at \$2000? and the projects are very creative and far reaching. I know several of us from the communication team were there but I was struck by the fact that they were able to accomplish so much

with little to no money. Hopefully this does increase the chance for sustainability in that it increases the number of organizations that might be able to support those particular projects in the future.

### **QUALITY AND TRAINING**

The other issue that I thought was universal and yet had many solutions is the whole notion of quality of care and training of caregivers. We truly do struggle with this all over the world. As a current director of a child care center I certainly feel very close to these particular issues. It was so interesting to talk to Elindra Yap from Malaysia about how the parents value teaching and then compare it to the families who use the center where I work. Her families expect that there will be a strong educational component to the program and that children will do more than “play all day”. She is challenged by this in the way that she provides a program that values play and the academic demands of the parents. I am at a child care center that is on-site at a major medical center that serves as a clinic and as a teaching hospital for an Ivy League college in the USA. The clientele come from all the different jobs available at the medical center including those with higher education degrees who have similar expectations to my colleague’s families in Malaysia. We both struggle with how to explain the value of play while showing the learning that is taking place.

The session on quality standards also supported the idea of quality care for young children. It is a great way to create an opportunity to go beyond the floor established by licensing standards. It is interesting how many countries are thinking about how to raise the quality of care and do that through the incentive of additional government dollars for reaching a separate set of criteria.

All this brings me to the last issue I want to address and that is funding stream coordination. And here I was thinking that the USA was the only country who couldn’t figure out how to cut through the beaurocratic BS and help stream the money more efficiently. How nice (and somewhat depressing) to know that many other developed and still developing countries are struggling with this very same issue. Fascinating to me how human behaviors such as territorialism play a role in situations like this. While I understand the motives of each individual agency/ministry to a certain extent, it would be in the best interest of the people they serve to do some coordinating and it frustrates me that we still struggle with this dilemma.

### **SO MUCH IN COMMON**

The most compelling learning for me at this forum was the fact that the issues throughout the world are so similar. We just need a variety of different solutions. It was great to know in a personal sense that there are so many people working for young children around the world. And as Heino said in the global trends session – someday early childhood will be funded and expected just like the primary grades.