

**Remarks by the Hon. Margaret Norrie McCain  
to the Philanthropic Foundations Canada Symposium  
October 16, 2012, Montreal, Quebec**

We are the Early Child Development Funders Working Group – it’s a mouthful and we could have devised a more pithy handle but we are not about branding; we are about a goal – publicly funded early education for every child from the age of two. This objective underpins our respective equity and social justice agendas. It is progressive, ambitious and achievable.

Ours is a collaboration of eight family foundations - some old and some new; some large, some small, stretching from Alberta to Newfoundland. We first met in Toronto in an exploratory meeting to see how and if we could expand the effectiveness of our philanthropy with respect to young children.

We didn't have a prototype. Our process has evolved with the work. First with a few foundations joining around small projects. Ultimately with all coming together to produce and promote *Early Years Study 3*. It has been a unique experience. No one has asked for their logos to be featured. All were willing to leave their egos at the door to join around a common purpose.

*Early Years Study 3* is designed to provide the public and policymakers with the rationale for investing in early education. It introduces the Early Childhood Education Report which provides arms length monitoring of governments’ progress toward meeting this goal.

The back story is a two decade journey. In 1992, the Bouchard report – *A Quebec Crazy for its Children* - galvanized public opinion and ultimately changed the lives of Quebecers. The catchy title was a reminder of how important it is for every kid to have a least one adult who is crazy about them. At the same time as Quebec was launching its children’s revolution, Fraser Mustard and I released the first *Early Years Study*. It became a conversation changer for traditional stakeholders and sparked interest in the scientific, financial and health communities. Meanwhile the Atkinson Foundation put science into action with Toronto First Duty, a real life model showcasing the Early Years recommendations -- a place where policymakers and others were able to touch and feel how communities could effectively support their children. The Andre and Lucie Chagnon Foundation took this further in a legislative partnership with the Quebec government to create Avenir d’enfants, the next step in Quebec’s family policy.

Knowing you can’t manage for improvement if you don’t measure change, the Lawson Foundation committed to the multi-year research and development of monitoring and assessment tools that are now used by researchers and practitioners across Canada and abroad. Our diversified portfolio includes the Muttart Foundation’s ongoing commitment to child care access and quality; the voice and space for innovation in First Nations communities supported by the McConnell Foundation and the work of regional foundations such the Pratt and Hallman is facilitating new studies, and identifying and promoting new voices for early childhood. The work of these foundations has fostered a remarkable convergence of stakeholder and public opinion.

The Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation was committed to the third Early Years Study before the other funders agreed to coalesce behind it. But with this powerhouse we got so

much more than we initially imagined. It was the Funders Working Group who developed the main ask of the report. Chagnon provided the inspirational story of Québec's successes in developing its extensive array of early childhood services and research quantifying the enduring social and economic changes that have resulted. Through our network we have been able to brief every provincial government on the findings. We have made over 70 public presentations and have given even more media interviews. We are collaborating with organizations including the OECD and Aga Khan to promote the findings internationally. Most compelling, we are seeing results on the ground. Policy makers have taken note, and many are applying the advice we provided to revamp their early childhood delivery. Often they are partnering with the regional members of the Funders Working Group around research and innovation.

We coordinate all this through a cost effective and efficient secretariat. I serve as honorary chair and we function with a shared leadership model with one conference call every 2 months and two face-to-face meetings a year. Our composition is also varied and includes Foundation heads as well as executive directors and program staff, with support from ECE experts.

Our takeaways have been transformational:

We have enjoyed cross-training on how foundations can influence policy change.

We have shared tools that can be adapted for local use.

We have gained a new understanding of the vast regional variations in values and approaches that make up Canada.

We have been energized by the success of our joint venture.

Most important we have new colleagues, indeed new friends, who are available to us.

What's next? The ongoing work of monitoring government progress toward our goal continues with the Early Child Education Report, now anchored at the Atkinson Centre at the University of Toronto. Some of our group have indicated an ongoing interest in continuing to support the use of this monitoring tool. We have also discussed adopting other projects to move the public policy yardstick forward for kids. As new projects or ideas emerge there is no expectation or pressure that ALL must sign on.

Following this symposium the group is meeting to affirm our mandate and emerging operating principles and to determine future priorities. As we decide what to do next and how to do it, we enter the discussion knowing that knowledge exchange is as valuable as the results it creates.