

## **Commentary after reading the Bradshaw report.**

It was with interest that I read Claudette Bradshaw's report, entitled *An Action Plan to Build the Foundations of Self-Sufficiency*.

What an exercise in consulting! In fact, Ms. Bradshaw went to every corner of the province, rural and urban alike, to hear representatives from different community organizations. According to the report, 1,099 organizations could thus be heard. I must admit that I am pleased with this approach to consulting, because she goes to where the organizations are, which allows for a better understanding of the true realities they face.

The report raises issues related to financing, the lack of personnel and training, exhaustion, low salaries, lack of recognition, the difficulty associated with long-term planning for lack of guaranteed aid, and so on.

Yet, in a second reading, three quotations raised a red flag. In referring to the community sector, the report states:

(1) "It enables savings by reducing costs related to illness, poverty, a lack of education, crime, etc. while still improving everyone's quality of life, easing the burden on government services and boosting local economies."

(2) "The situation has reversed itself: departments now rely on non-profit organizations whose mandate it is to serve the people."

(3) "The real role of government is to facilitate the delivery of services rather than implementing them directly."

There, clearly stated, in my opinion, is the real objective of all this consultation with the community sector. Actually, these three comments support the withdrawal of our governments from public service delivery. Worse yet, they indicate a willingness to destroy our social security net in favour of transferring it to community sectors. Thus, our public services would no longer be based on rights but on privileges. They would no longer be based upon principles of accessibility, equality, consistency and universality. They would no longer have common standards, no obligation to serve all citizens equally, no stable financing and no form of accountability. Personally, I am wholly opposed to this vision of our government.

The report supports a second basic conviction: that there are three basic stakeholders in society: government, business and the community sector.

I agree that there are indeed three stakeholders; however, the third is not just the community sector, but in fact *civil society* comprised of the community sector, labour organizations, advocacy groups, student organizations, women's groups, etc. Furthermore, balance between the three is certainly not equal. Like a family's poor relations, the community sector must look to citizens' generosity and government taxes for its survival. In no way is it independent and to try to make it appear as an equal stakeholder is to pay it a disservice and paint a false picture.

To resolve the financial problems facing community sector organizations, Ms. Bradshaw's report proposes guaranteed financing for five years. I feel it would have been more important to ask, and especially to answer, the following question: why are services for female victims of violence, children, compulsive gamblers, persons suffering from mental illnesses and food banks, to name a few, delivered by volunteers who are primarily women working part-time for little pay and few benefits?

Instead of simply injecting more money into the community sector, should not long-term solutions, such as better distribution of wealth, strategies to eliminate poverty, a public day care system, etc., have been proposed?

In conclusion, I would like to comment on the main recommendation of this entire consulting process, i.e. the creation of a separate agency whose operation is entirely independent from other departments, with ready and free access to decision-making authority (cabinet and cabinet committees). The mandate of this agency would be to intervene in every aspect of the non-profit community sector.

In her report, Ms. Bradshaw proposes the creation of a new agency similar to ACOA, that would be controlled by a deputy minister who is accountable to the minister, and whose responsibilities would include non-partisan distribution of funds to community organizations.

After reading this proposal, I believe the following questions bear asking:

Who would decide on the composition of the agency's board of directors?

How would this new, independent agency be accountable to citizens and our Members of Parliament?

What would this new agency change for community organizations other than that they will be even more reliant on political influences?

What more would this new structure add if not simply yet another structure within the bureaucracy of helping organizations?

Would it not have been easier to simply propose better coordination between the different departments who already oversee the various services delivered by community agencies? Better yet, why not suggest that a good portion of these services be delivered directly by our government? This may seem extreme, but why not look to the very source of the need for all these services?

True, all this questioning might seem risky, politically speaking. Of course, it's better to support the rising liberalism that seeks to withdraw government from its civil responsibilities. Who knows? Perhaps another career will emerge from it.

Jean-Claude Basque

19 Ralph, Moncton, NB, E1C 2V8