

"Families: Resources and Responsibilities in a Changing World"

Family Policy and Municipalities

**EXAMPLE FROM THE NORTH :
THE QUEBEC EXPERIENCE**

Carrefour «Action municipale et familles»
(Forum on Municipal Action and Families)

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INTRODUCTION

In the Province of Quebec, the Government's involvement in family policy dates back to 1987 when it adopted its first statement on family policy. The Government also created two structures designed to facilitate the implementation of its family policy : the *Secrétariat à la famille* (Secretariat of the Family) and the *Conseil de la famille* (Family Council).

Municipal Government is the decision-making level closest to families. In 1989, the *Fédération des unions de familles*, an organization representing more than 400 family groups throughout the province, established the *Carrefour «Action municipale et familles»* (Forum on Municipal Action and Families).

Today almost 500 out of 1500 Quebec Municipalities are in relation with the *Carrefour* (Forum), and nearly 200 of them have appointed a municipal councillor to be in charge of family issues. The *Carrefour* (Forum) accompanies the municipalities in their actions.

A FEW WORDS ON THE PROVINCE OF QUEBEC

The Province of Quebec is located just north of the State of New York. Montreal, Quebec's most important city, is only a 7 hour's drive from New York City and a 5 hours one from Boston, Massachusetts.

Part of the Canadian Federation, Quebec, with 7 millions inhabitants, is the second most populous province and the largest one in the country. It is important to know that 80 per cent of its population speaks French.

In Canada, as in the United States, the power is divided between Provincial and Federal Governments. The Provinces are given authority to legislate in matters such as Health Care, Education, Municipal Affairs, Civil and Common Law. Therefore, family policy is a matter for the Provincial Government.

HISTORY OF FAMILY POLICY IN QUEBEC

1. The Origins of Family Policy in Quebec

The Provincial Government's involvement in family policy dates back to the early 80's. Yet it was only in 1987 that Quebec adopted its first statement on family policy which had the following objectives :

- To recognize the family as a fundamental community value;
- To contribute to family cohesion and stability by taking various family realities into account;
- To support the parents as those primarily responsible for taking care of their children.

2. The Two Plans of Action

Next the Quebec Government developed two three-year actions plans, the first for 1989-91 and the second for 1992-94. In its first action plan, the Provincial Government identified 13 areas of intervention, namely :

- 1- Financial support for families;
- 2- Parental responsibilities and family support;
- 3- Families and day-care services;
- 4- Families and health, social and community services;
- 5- Families and the school;
- 6- Families and higher education;
- 7- Family housing and accommodation;
- 8- Family recreation and cultural activities;
- 9- Families and the media;
- 10- Families and ethnic communities;
- 11- Family law;
- 12- Research and experimentation in family matters;
- 13- Official recognition of large families.

The second action plan for family policy was an extension of the first and set forth five basic principles, namely :

- 1- Continuity;
- 2- Consultation;
- 3- Coordination;
- 4- Resource reallocation to families;
- 5- Respect for five basic orientations which are :
 - a) To favour prevention;
 - b) To encourage conciliation between the family and work;
 - c) To financially support families;
 - d) To improve living conditions for families;
 - e) To pursue the family orientation.

3. The Two Administrative Levels

The Provincial Government also created two structures designed to facilitate implementation of its family policy: The *Secrétariat à la famille* (Secretariat of the Family) and the *Conseil de la famille* (Family Council).

Founded in 1985, the *Secrétariat à la famille* (Secretariat of the Family), is mandated to develop family-oriented policies and programs, to ensure interdepartmental coordination and cooperation among the sectorial organizations concerned.

The *Conseil de la famille* (Family Council), established in 1988, is responsible for overseeing issues concerning the family. It accepts suggestions, conducts inquiries, advises the Government, carries out or commissions studies and develops means of providing the public with better information on all matters related to the Department's duties.

FAMILY POLICY AT THE MUNICIPAL LEVEL

Municipal interest in family issues stems from a very simple fact : Municipal Government is the decision-making level closest to families. Hence the decisions with the greatest impact on the everyday life of families are made at this level. Essentially, the municipal role in family policy consists in improving living conditions for families.

Municipal Administrations can play a useful role in the following fields :

- 1- The family and community development;
- 2- The family, recreation and culture;
- 3- The family and intercultural relations;
- 4- The family, information and cooperation;
- 5- The family, economic conditions and housing;
- 6- The family and security;
- 7- The family and the environment;
- 8- The family and the workplace.

The aim of the family policy is to confirm the intention of Municipal Officials to improve the quality of life for families living in the city and, in so doing, to harmonize the actions already taken or underway. It also recognizes the importance of cooperating with local organizations in the effort to address the needs of families within the bounds of the municipality's powers of intervention.

The municipal family policy could meet the following general objectives :

- To recognize and promote the family as the prime sphere of personal development;
- To develop a family approach throughout the Municipal Administration;
- To provide families with all the services necessary for their well-being in terms of recreation, security and community development;
- To create the best possible living conditions for families living in the Municipalities through concern for the environment, housing and various forms of assistance;
- To inform and promote cooperation among local partners on family-oriented action.

To successfully implement a family policy, the Municipality may adopt an approach which encompasses the steps already taken (appointment of a Councillor responsible for family matters, membership in the *Carrefour «Action municipale et familles »* (Forum on Municipal Action and Families), actions with a family dimension such as family rebates to the municipal activities) as well as eventual projects that call into play the main parties involved in the family policy.

Three steps may lead to the adoption of a family policy :

- A. Implementation of the plan for a family policy and first drafting;
- B. Submission to residents;
- C. Final drafting in keeping with public opinion.

LE CARREFOUR «ACTION MUNICIPALE ET FAMILLES» (FORUM ON MUNICIPAL ACTION AND FAMILIES)

In recent years, the *Fédération des unions de familles*, a provincial organization that represents the interests of more than 400 smaller family groups in the Province, has done a great deal of work for the development of family policy at the municipal level.

«In 1989, the Fédération established a standing committee intended to play a decisive role : the *Carrefour «Action municipale et familles»* (Forum on Municipal Action and Families), a permanent arena for deliberation and action aimed at developing family policy at the municipal level.

Today the Municipalities of the 16 regions of the Province involved in this matter represents more than 75 % of the total Quebec population. Also, many towns now organize a Family Week. An always increasing number of them have implemented a family policy in partnership with their community organizations.

1. How It Works

Every year, a committee defines the priorities and the actions needing to be taken by the *Carrefour* (Forum). The Committee is made of eleven persons : five Representatives of Municipal Administration, two Members of the Provincial Government and two Spokespersons of the *Fédération des unions de familles*.

The *Carrefour* (Forum) aims at three goals : to bring the municipalities together, to inform the population and to provide consulting services. The *Carrefour's* (Forum) most important activity remains the annual symposium which brings municipalities from all-around the Province into a three-day discussion on the matter of family policy at the municipal level.

The *Carrefour* (Forum) serves also as consultant to the municipalities interested in family actions. The range of services offered goes to the simple three-hour information seminar to the complete family policy implementation assistance. In 1993, the Municipality of Saint-Laurent, a suburb of Montreal, gave to the *Carrefour* (Forum) the mandate to write down the family policy for their administration. Last October, the Family Policy was made public by the Mayor of this City.

CONCLUSION

Since the creation of the *Carrefour «Action municipale et familles»* (Forum on Municipal Action and Families), Family Policy has been a field of interest growing at a phenomenal rate. More and more municipalities have decided to give concrete form to their commitment to families by adopting their own family policy. The policy adopted by the City of *Saint-Laurent* last October is the latest example.

Because of important financial restraints and on account of the importance to upgrade the mission of the regional level, the newly elected Provincial Government desires to decentralize powers to the Municipalities. In this context, family policy at municipal level will become even more essential. With the help of the *Carrefour «Action municipale et familles»* (Forum on Municipal Action and Families), Quebec's municipal administrations are ready to meet the challenge.

Acknowledgement

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