

March 8, 2004

Re: **Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents**

Dear Colleague:

On behalf of the Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition (ESPSC)¹, I'm pleased to inform you that the proceedings for the December 2003 ESPSC forum at Metro Hall are now available online at www.socialplanningtoronto.org. On December 9, 2003, fifty-two individuals from a broad cross-section of sectors and communities came together to discuss the service provision needs of Eritrean and Somali parents in Toronto, gaps in services and possible solutions to address these needs. The forum provided opportunities for community members, social service workers, academics and funders to increase their understanding of community issues, share program information and explore strategies for change.

The forum proceedings include:

- an overview of a 2001 study which explored parenting issues faced by Eritrean and Somali parents in Toronto
- an overview of the study's recommendations
- updates from the Toronto District School Board and the Children's Aid Society of Toronto on actions taken to address Eritrean and Somali parenting needs
- important next steps which identify where change and improvements are needed

We thank all the participants and presenters who took part in the forum. If you are not already involved in the Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition, we encourage you to consider becoming a member. For more information or to obtain a printed copy of the proceedings, please contact Yasmin Khan of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto at 416-652-9772 or kyasmin@cspc.toronto.on.ca.

Sincerely,

Yasmin Khan
On behalf of the ESPSC's Co-Chairs,
Nura Aman and Khadija Sheikh

¹ The ESPSC brings together the Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee, the Somali Parents Liaison Coalition, Eritrean Canadian Community Centre, Children's Aid Society, Toronto Public Health, Toronto District School Board, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, the City of Toronto's (Community Resources), Family Service Association of Toronto, Macaulay Child Development Centre and Community Information Centre for the City of York.

Proceedings from
the Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition's

**Forum on Service Provision for
Eritrean and Somali Parents**

December 9, 2003 from 1-4 PM
Metro Hall, 55 John Street

Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

Table of Contents

Organizers, Facilitators, Presenters, Recorders and Attendance	1
I. Welcome to Participants and Brief Introductions	2
II. Overview of Study Project	2
III. Overview of Study Recommendations	3
IV. Updates: Who is Doing What	
Toronto District School Board	3
Children's Aid Society of Toronto	4
V. Discussion and Reflection	
Toronto District School Board Issues	5
Children's Aid Society of Toronto Issues	6
Settlement Issues	6
VI. Next Steps	7
VII. Evaluation	8
Appendix I: Current List of ESPSC Members	11
Appendix II: List of Forum Participants	12

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

Forum Organizers

- Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition (ESPSC)

Forum Facilitator

- Yasmin Khan, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

ESPSC Presenters

- Nura Aman, Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee / COSTI Immigrant Services
- Doug Hum, Children's Aid Society of Toronto
- Hawa Jilao, Somali Immigrant Women's Association
- Amanuel Melles, Family Service Association of Toronto
- Erica Mercer, Toronto Public Health

**Toronto District School Board and Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Presenters**

- Samsam Ismail, Toronto District School Board
- Sharron Richards, Children's Aid Society of Toronto

Thank You and Closing Remarks

- Khadija Sheikh, Somali Parents Liaison Coalition

Forum Organizing Support

- Rohan Thompson, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

Note-Takers and Proceedings Report

- Diana Cheng, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
- Yasmin Khan, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
- Amanuel Melles, Family Service Association
- Erica Mercer, Toronto Public Health
- Wayne Robinson, City of Toronto
- Beth Wilson, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
- Kristie Wright, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto

Attendance

Over fifty-two participants took part in the afternoon's presentations and discussions. The forum was well attended by a broad cross-section of social service agencies including representatives from 1 Eritrean, 7 Somali and 2 other African organizations, funders, academics, government bodies and community members.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents
December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

I. Welcome to Participants and Brief Introductions

- ESPSC Co-Chair Nura Aman welcomed participants, made brief introductions and described the agenda for the afternoon. Please see Appendix II for a list of participants

II. Overview of Study Project

Nura Aman and Hawa Jilao provided an overview of the study:

- In 2001, Community Information Centre for the City of York, Eritrean Canadian Community Centre of Metropolitan Toronto and SIWA – Somali Immigrant Women's Association completed a study exploring the parenting issues faced by Eritrean and Somali parents in Toronto.
- Praxis Research & Training Consultant Jacqueline L. Scott worked with a community advisory committee and project staff to complete this project.
- Information was collected in four main areas: newcomer children into the Canadian school system, experiences with the child welfare system, parenting in a new culture, and demographic details.
- Some 50 Eritrean and 50 Somali parents completed structured questionnaires and an additional 57 Eritrean and 62 Somali parents took part in parenting workshops.
- Based on the research findings, the community advisory committee put forward 28 recommendations to address the needs of Eritrean and Somali parents in Toronto. The project's report entitled, "A Study of the Settlement Experiences of Eritrean and Somali Parents in Toronto", describes the project background and context, research process, study findings and recommendations for change. The report is available online at <http://www.settlement.org/atwork/>
- Following from the project's recommendations, a research implementation committee was struck. The research implementation committee created two liaison committees to advance community issues at the Toronto District School Board: the Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee (EPLC) and the Somali Parents Liaison Coalition (SPLC). EPLC and SPLC have official status with the Toronto District School Board. To reflect the inclusion of additional agencies and organizations working with Somali and Eritrean parents, the research implementation committee was then transformed into the Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition (ESPSC). ESPSC includes representation from EPLC and SPLC among others. ESPSC's mandate is to ensure implementation of the remaining recommendations from the original study. For a list of ESPSC members, please see Appendix I.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

- ESPSC planned this forum to share information about service provision for Eritrean and Somali families in Toronto, to get input from the communities regarding pressing issues, and to promote greater collaboration among key agencies working with the communities. ESPSC will use the views shared at the forum to inform their short-term and long-term goals, and approach for the future.

III. Overview of Study Recommendations

Amanuel Melles and Doug Hum provided an overview of the study's recommendations:

- The study team put forward 28 recommendations: 12 in the area of Canadian schools, 5 regarding the Children's Aid Society, 1 with respect to basic research, 7 in the area of settlement support and 3 pertaining to parental support.
- Recommendations include increased translation/interpretation services, development of Toronto District School Board programs to promote the inclusion of Eritrean and Somali parents and children in the school system, increased sensitivity on the part of Children's Aid Society workers with respect to religious, cultural and parenting norms in the Somali community and the need for additional research in a variety of areas including research on the Eritrean community.
- All 28 recommendations can be found in the report, "A Study of the Settlement Experiences of Eritrean and Somali Parents in Toronto" online at <http://www.settlement.org/atwork/>

IV. Updates: Who Is Doing What

Toronto District School Board

Samsam Ismail from the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) reported on the school board's activities with respect to the recommendations pertaining to TDSB:

As a result of many meetings and much patience, the EPLC and SPLC have both been given official recognition and formally established by the TDSB. Throughout the last few years, there have been many workshops held which explored a diversity of topics.

Workshops held between SPLC and TDSB have included the following topics: Crime Prevention Planning and Visioning, Understanding School Councils, TDSB Optional Attendance Review, TDSB Parental Concern Protocol, TDSB Program

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

Rationalization, Safe Learning Environments, Ontario Schools Code of Conduct, TDSB Code of Conduct, The Safe Schools Act, Safe Schools Prevention and Intervention Initiatives, Making our Community a Safer Learning Environment, Possible Partnership Intervention Programs, Parental Involvement, TDSB Child Abuse Policies, Special Education.

Workshops held between EPLC and TDSB have included the following topics: Community Planning, Understanding the TDSB System, TDSB Child Abuse Policies, Special Education, Safe Schools Policies, Parental Involvement Policies, Translation and Interpretation Issues, Facilities Issues, and Community Consultation and Planning.

Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST)

Sharron Richards from the Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CAST) reported on CAST's activities with respect to the recommendations pertaining to children's aid:

- Sharron described many actions taken by CAST to address the issues raised in the original study and that were already underway prior to the release of the report. Actions included:
 - The Bridging Diversity Committee has been active for 4 years and includes Somali representation. While Eritrean community members are not represented, they are welcome to join the committee.
 - CAST Human Resources has broadened its hiring process to increase access to foreign trained professionals. 13-14% of new hires are foreign trained professionals.
 - In 1999, CAS Foundation asked three Somali agencies to become involved in a joint project bridging child welfare services to the Somali community. The project involved orientation and training for Somali parents regarding CAST, supporting a volunteer program with Somali parents, translation services, and improving support within the community. Evaluation suggests the program has been successful in building trust and understanding between partner organizations and the Somali community. The \$155,000 in project funding has almost expired.
 - CAS Foundation has provided over one-quarter of a million dollars in funding to support the Somali community since the 1980s.
 - Prior to 2001, CAST accessed funds to translate materials into Somali. CAST is currently applying to Heritage Canada to translate new brochures. All families served by CAST have access to a translator. CAST spends \$272,000 for translation services.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

- CAST offers ongoing training to all staff and foster parents to provide high quality, culturally-appropriate service to families.
- CAST is working with Canadian Immigration officials to advocate for status for children without recognized immigration status in Canada.
- CAST has developed policy to support children exposed to violence in their countries of origin.
- CAST uses radio to communicate with Somali communities and increase understanding regarding the role of CAST.
- At present, there are only 2 foster parent families in the Somali community. CAST is looking for ways to attract Somali and Muslim families to act as foster parents. Research is needed to examine potential barriers that the qualification criteria (physical space, English language) may have on attracting prospective foster parents in the Somali community.

V. Discussion and Reflection

Erica Mercer facilitated a discussion following the TDSB and CAST presentations. The following is a summary of the comments and issues raised:

Toronto District School Board Issues

- TDSB hasn't decided about its current allocation of funds to ESL programs. Increased funding is needed for ESL in Toronto.
- The International Children's Institute piloted a program in Toronto schools to provide counselling services to children who had witnessed war, death, trauma, etc. Despite the success of the pilot project, full funding was never provided. This is a model that works and should be implemented. The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture may be a good partner on this project.
- Older children whose education was interrupted (eg. because of war in home country) are not getting the education and support that they need. Age-appropriate placement is an issue.
- Children need support with language for tutoring. This impacts on self-esteem. Solutions could be sought from communities who have addressed this issue successfully.
- Assessors (who decide which grade newcomer children should be placed in) need to understand the child's cultural background. Assessors may make mistakes because assessment is not culturally-appropriate.
- Learning, Earning and Parenting program doesn't fit for all students but could be reformed and adjusted to meet the needs of more children.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

- There is a need for education to help parents understand how the school system works.
- Somali Immigrant Women's Association (SIWA) has a Peer Parenting Project, which is an initiative designed to train Somali Parents to become active in the school system.
- Suggestions that get put forward are never implemented.

Children's Aid Society Issues

Finding parents from the Somali community to act as foster parents is a challenge. Parents may see CAST as the enemy and feel that being foster parents will be seen as selling out the community.

- A Muslim CAS is needed. There is no alternative to the mainstream. It is important for CAST to build access and equity but a Muslim alternative is also needed.
- Sharron was asked to tell CAST that the Somali community still needs the Bridging Program. Three or four years are not enough time. Funds are needed to continue this program and make it available to other communities.
- 20% admission cases are related to housing problems. People can't find affordable housing. There is a long waiting list. This is a problem that affects parents in the community.
- Group homes are a good idea but it is hard to make community-specific group homes financially viable.
- The CAST could be the Islamic Culture and Values advocate.

Settlement Issues

- "Alone in Canada" is a publication for single newcomers to assist them with settlement, adaptation, social services and employment issues. It is available from the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (416-535-8501) in 10 languages including Somali.
- Community members identified additional issues facing the Eritrean and Somali communities: housing, child care, adult education, family support, employment support, access to social service and government information in appropriate languages, extension of settlement services (beyond 3 or 5 year time limits), funding for Eritrean services, networks between Eritrean and Somali-service providers.
- Along with funding for settlement agencies, communication among existing service providers was deemed crucial in improving access to services
- Funding for youth and youth programs was also identified as very much needed.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

- Support is important from other community groups that have gone through similar challenges.

VI. Next Steps

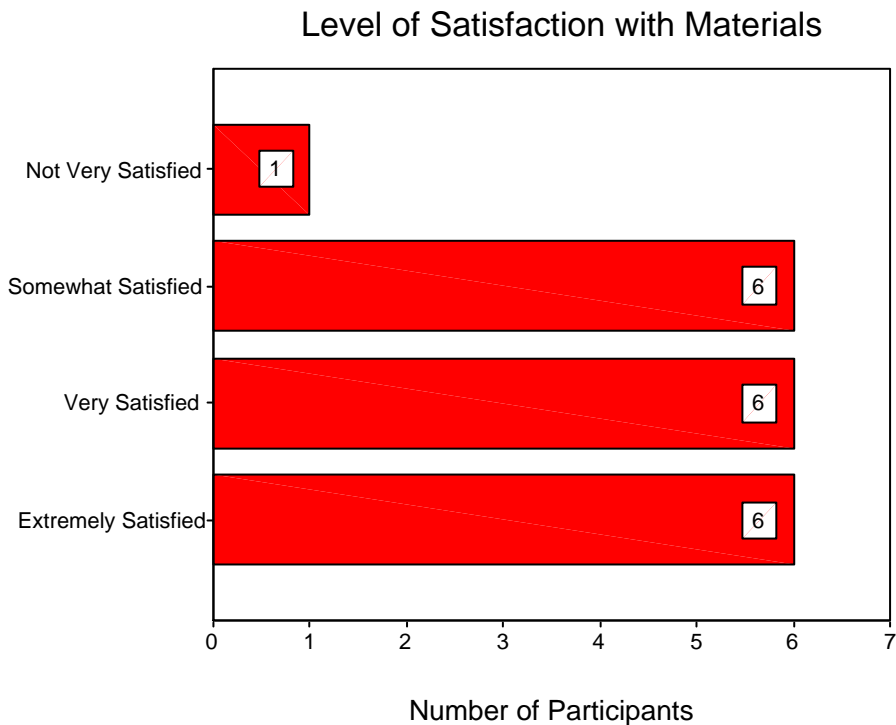
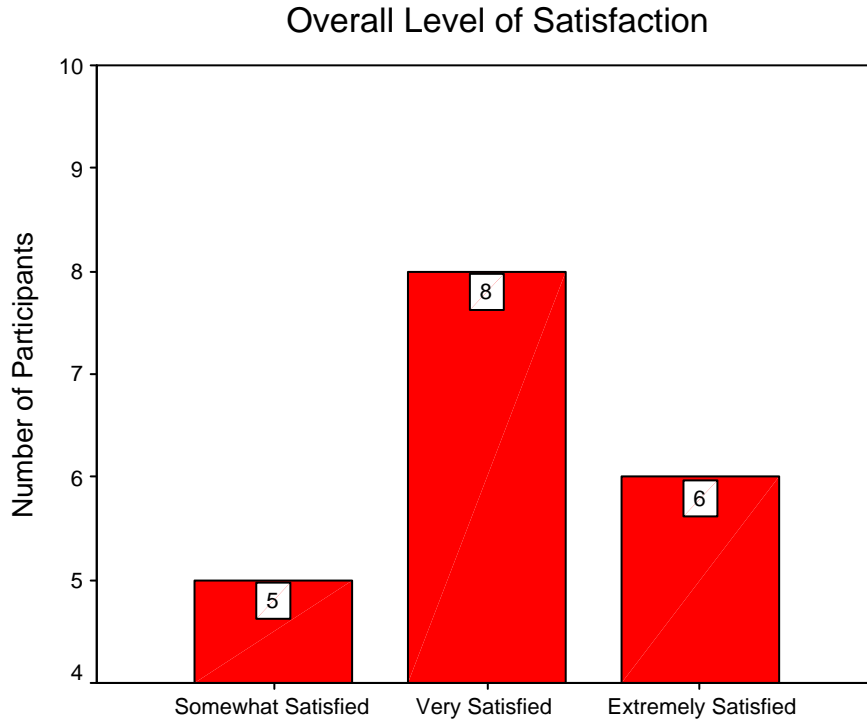
Wayne Robinson continued the facilitation of the discussion in the “Next Steps” segment of the program. The following is a summary of the comments and issues raised:

- Changes in the education system are needed. Now that TDSB is back, we must move to advocate for these needed changes.
- Remove geographic boundaries that restrict where children can attend school.
- More programming is needed for Eritrean and Somali families.
- More LINC programs are needed.
- More research is needed on issues such as school suspension and alternatives to keep children in school.
- Heritage language programs are needed.
- Literacy is one of the biggest issues for single parent families in the community. Parents who have low literacy levels in their mother tongues are limited in their ability to participate in society and advocate for their children. Need new outreach strategies to communicate verbally.
- Children and youth should be part of the discussion to bring their recommendations forward.
- TDSB must return to funding youth workers and community workers. This is critical for communities.
- Need for research to understand better why kids are suspended with the view to develop alternative methods of dealing with challenges.
- Community initiatives are needed to build connections between CAST/Social Services and Muslim/Islamic communities, to address needs in a more coordinated way and ensure the appropriateness of services to the Muslim community.
- There is a need to improve on co-ordination and promote collaboration in service provision among settlement and community agencies in the Somali and Eritrean communities.
- Join ESPSC! Further support is needed to advance these important issues.

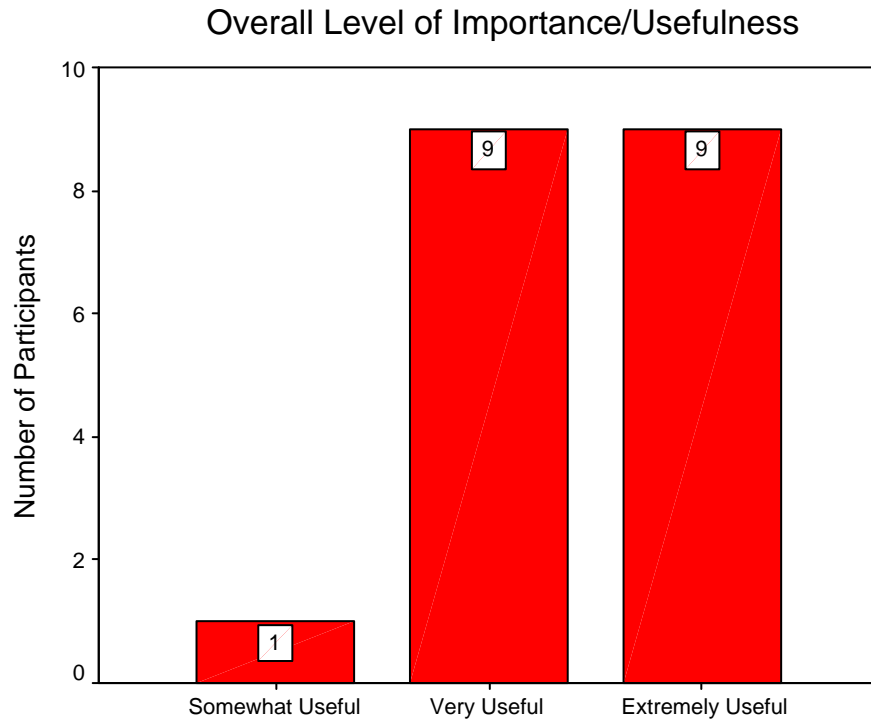
Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents
December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

VII. Evaluation

- 19 participants completed evaluation forms. Here are the results:



Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents
December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street



Based on your experience at the forum, are you interested in being involved with the Eritrean and Somali Parents Support Coalition in its efforts to implement the study recommendations?

- Yes-18 No-1

Any comments that you may have? Or ideas or activities that we can follow up?

- Work with the TDSB to restore programs and services that diverse communities need.
- Radio as communication was mentioned several times. Is this perhaps the way that the Eritrean and Somali community can access information on resources and settlement information? Could there be funding to buy radio time for a weekly program specific for this? Would the station donate ½ hour a week for this?
- Great setting and well co-ordinated.
- We have come a long way.
- Really important to have a coalition or committee where it would be possible to network and build collaboration to meet recommendations and goals.
- Excellent forum -- well facilitated and organized.

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

- Implementing all needed actions and making accountable those who are responsible.
- Continued forums that would bring together representatives from the different components. Continued communication between the community resources and government service agencies.
- Excellent job.
- My comments are for CAS and TDSB - to educate the Somali and Eritrean parents about cultural background.
- Could facilitate the forum better according to the ground rules.
- Less research and more action.
- Need for parents/youth to be involved in their community. Many parents need \$. A chance for Canadian work experience. Developing peer projects. Dealing with intercultural and intergenerational problems. Projects such reunification and adoption. Having parents/youth involved in the process. We have enough research, we need to implement programs and access funds.
- We need more open minds with good ideas and less open mouths.

**THANK YOU for participating in the
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents!!**

**For more information or to get involved in the Eritrean and Somali
Parents Support Coalition, please contact:**

Yasmin Khan

Tel: 416- 652- 9772

Email: kyasmin@cspc.toronto.on.ca

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents
December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

APPENDIX I: Current List of ESPSC Members

Toronto Public Health
Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee
Somali Parents Liaison Coalition
Toronto District School Board
Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Family Service Association of Toronto
Eritrean Canadian Community Centre
Community Information Centre for the City of York
Macaulay Child Development Centre
African Canadian Social Planning Council
Somali Immigrant Women's Association

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents
December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

APPENDIX II: List of Forum Participants

Kadija Hayi, Across Boundaries
Saqal Mohammad, Across Boundaries
Darnace Torou, African Partnership Against Aids
Sharron Richards, Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Doug Hum, Children's Aid Society of Toronto
Neelu Bajwa, Citizenship and Immigration Canada
Wayne Robinson, City of Toronto
Marion Newrick, Community Information Centre for the City of York
Maria Williams, Community Research Associates of Women
John Campey, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Yasmin Khan, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Rohan Thompson, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Beth Wilson, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto
Nura Aman, COSTI Immigrant Services
Wendy Poole, COSTI Immigrant Services
Michou Gatali, Culture Link Newcomer Youth Centre
Sima Zerehi, Culture Link Newcomer Youth Centre
Louisa Stewart, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre
Rebecca Rabinovitch, Delta Family Resource Centre
Aalia Jadavji, Distress Centres of Toronto
Sadia Aman, Eritrean Canadian Community Centre
Negusse Michael, Eritrean Canadian Community Centre
Tekle Araya, Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee
Khadija M, Eritrean Parents Liaison Committee
Habiba Adan, Family Service Association of Toronto
A.A. Sabriye, Family Service Association of Toronto
Yves Savoie, Family Service Association of Toronto
Amanuel Melles, Family Service Association of Toronto
Daniel Abebe, Horn of Africa Parents Association
Lul Sabrie, Islamic Social Services and Resources Association
Farzana Shaikh, Islamic Social Services and Resources Association
Sharon Allen, Macaulay Child Development Centre
Chris DeGennaro, Macaulay Child Development Centre
Ibrahim Absiye, MIDAYNTA – Association of Somali Service Agencies
J.L. Scott, PRAXIS
Rebecca Basse, Toronto Public Health – RAP
Moadi Al, Regent Park Community Health Centre
Myer Siemiatycki, Ryerson University and CERIS
Nur Musse, Somali Canadian Working Group for New Generation
Idris Madar, Somali Family and Child Skills Development Centre
Mohamad Ali, Somali Immigrant Aid Organization
Hawa Jilao, Somali Immigrant Women Association (SIWA)
Saida Sabrie, Somali Parents Liaison Coalition

Proceedings from the Eritrean and Somali Parent Support Coalition's
Forum on Service Provision for Eritrean and Somali Parents

December 9, 2003 from 1 – 4 PM at Metro Hall, 55 John Street

Khadija Sheikh, Somali Parents Liaison Coalition

Mohd Ahmed, Somali Canadian Working Group for New Generation

Stella Ng, Status of Women Canada

Annette Grossi, Toronto District School Board

Samsam Ismail, Toronto District School Board

Erica Mercer, Toronto Public Health

Fawzia Ratanshi, United Way of Greater Toronto

Zeinab Asir, Yorktown Family Services

Hoda Samater, Yorktown Family Services