

1992
March

KARA FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRE ORGANIZATIONAL EVALUATION

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Section One: Background and Introduction

1.1 Background

KARA Family Support Centre Society is a not-for-profit charitable organisation incorporated under the Societies Act of Alberta on November 5th, 1984. KARA offers community-based family support services in northeast Edmonton, and particularly within the communities of Belvedere and Clareview. The agency's programs aim to provide an environment where parenting skills can be developed. Current programs include the Parent Participation Program, the Nutrition Program, and afternoon family life skills programs. KARA serves families which are at risk of crisis and breakdown. Typically, families are headed by a single mother, are low-income, isolated, suffer poor health, lack outside supports, and in general find themselves trapped in poverty.

1.2 Why carry out a comprehensive evaluation?

KARA has been providing family support services since 1984. Like all not-for-profit service organizations, KARA has changed during its seven years of existence. At the beginning, it depended entirely upon the tireless efforts of its founding volunteers. Now there are a number of paid staff, delivering a variety of services.

Development and growth allow an agency to fulfil its mandate, but they also cause stresses upon organizational structures. At the same time, specific programs become entrenched over time, or change from their original intentions for both good and not-so-good reasons. Agencies have a responsibility to their stakeholders (including funders, service users, members, and staff) to assess their current programming and future directions.

1.3 Evaluation format and elements

In the summer of 1991, the Edmonton Social Planning Council was contracted to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of KARA's services and organizational structure.

The evaluation of KARA was carried out using the following categories:

- Agency mission and goals.
- Planning and decision-making processes.
- Board-staff interaction and relationships
- Program effectiveness

- Administrative capacities
- Community and public profile

It is hoped that this evaluation can be used by KARA in planning for the future. The evaluation will be presented at a Board planning session, where its implications for future directions for KARA can be addressed.

1.4 Organization of the Report

This report consists of five sections. The first contains information on the background, purpose, organization and limits of the study. The second section describes how the evaluation was carried out. The third section outlines the issues identified during the course of the study. The fourth section summarizes our findings, while the fifth and final section contains recommendations for addressing the issues identified.

1.5 Limitations of the Evaluation

While we received full co-operation from Board, staff, clients, and references, there were some limiting factors outside our control, which forced us to amend our original plans for this evaluation. Primarily, these were:

1. Past client records are incomplete.
2. Program changes have recently been introduced at KARA.
3. Some pertinent information was not known to the evaluators until late in the evaluation.

In the absence of accurate past client records, we provide only limited cost comparisons with programs offered by other agencies. As it is likely that the records understate the number of clients served, some comparisons would reflect unfairly upon KARA's cost-per-unit-of-service compared with other agencies. Record-keeping systems have been overhauled, and this weakness eliminated.

The rapid change in personnel and programs offered during 1991 limited the usefulness of a historical analysis of KARA programming. Similarly, it was hard to assess the success of programs which have only just been introduced.

Section Two: Evaluation Components and Methods

2.1 Agency mission and goals:

2.1.1 Questions

- How do the mission and goals as described in agency by-laws and founding documents compare with the activities of the organization at present?
- Are the mission and goals consistent with the vision of the organization held by Board and staff?
- What is the community perception (if any) of KARA's mission and goals?
- If KARA's mission and goals are inconsistent with current practice, should practice be brought into line with mission and goals, or vice versa?
- Is there a need for an educative effort within and/or outside KARA to clarify its mission?

2.1.2 Methods

- Analysis of founding documents and by-laws.
 - Interviews and questionnaires administered to Board, staff, and outside references.
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2.2 Planning and decision-making processes

2.2.1 Questions

- Is there an effective and clear long-term planning process? Are all stakeholders involved in the process?
- What are the elements of the long-term plan, if any? Does the plan address issues currently facing the organization? How often is the plan updated?
- Are decision-making processes understood and accepted by all stakeholders?
- Are decisions properly recorded and implemented by the decision-making body?

- If planning and decision-making processes are inadequate, which models will fit the needs of the organization?

2.2.2 Methods

- Examine planning and decision-making records.
- Where planning and decision-making process and methods are inadequate, develop models appropriate to the organization.
- Interview staff and board on their understanding of existing and potential planning and decision-making models.

2.3 Board-staff interaction and relationships

2.3.1 Questions

- Through what channels are board decisions communicated to the staff?
- Through what channels is program information transmitted to the Board?
- Are Board and staff roles and responsibilities properly delineated?
- Are Board and staff currently satisfied with information flows and allocation of responsibilities?

2.3.2 Methods

- Interview and administration of questionnaires with Board and staff members, covering their understanding of the organization, and their level of satisfaction with current practices.
- Analysis of written organizational charts, if any.
- Comparison of KARA structure with accepted structures of not-for-profit organizations.

2.4 Program effectiveness

2.4.1 Questions

- To what extent do the programs meet the formal and informal goals of the organization?
- What are the productivity levels of the programs in comparison with similar services offered by other organizations?
- How successful are the programs in improving client functioning?

- What is the assessment of collegial and referral agencies as to program effectiveness?
- What is the client and staff level of satisfaction with services?

2.4.2 Methods

- Parent Participation Program: administer a questionnaire to parents and KARA workers testing the effectiveness of this component. Observe the program in operation.
- Nutrition Program: interview parents and staff on effectiveness of program. Compare nutrition program at KARA with others offered elsewhere on a cost/benefit basis. The value of this approach is limited by the fact that the nutrition program was changed significantly during the course of the evaluation. Consequently, attention has been paid to the new program's prospects, and the rationale and process involved in changing the program.
- Parenting and Lifeskills Programs: The parenting and lifeskills programs or modules have been modified during the period of the review, which again limited our ability to carry out a thorough examination of the programs. In addition, the proposed method of determining 'success' was to administer the Culture-Free SEI inventory, developed by Dr. Battle at the University of Alberta. However, KARA entered into an agreement with Dr. Battle to have him administer similar testing himself. This information will therefore have to be gleaned from his report, which we understand has not yet been completed.
- The program modules were observed, staff, board and clients interviewed, and we carried out an analysis of attendance records and costs for October 1991. Funders and referral agents were also interviewed.
- Outreach Program: the Outreach Program is designed to provide support and follow-up to families involved with KARA. Only a cursory examination was possible of this program.
- Volunteer Program: the Volunteer Program is funded through a time limited grant. We examine the success of the program to date through staff and board interviews and questionnaires, as well as comparison with other programs.

2.5 Administrative Capacities

2.5.1 Questions

- How functional and effective is the system of financial control in the organization?
- To what extent are the Board and staff qualified and/or experienced in supervising the financial affairs of this type of organization?
- Has the organization sufficient staff and/or accounting resources (either in internal systems or contracted external accounting services) to handle its financial affairs?
- Are record-keeping systems adequate, both for client information and business information?
- Are the Personnel Policies and practices of the agency consistent with the law and those of other not-for-profit societies?
- Is there sufficient secretarial support for agency management?

2.5.2 Methods

- Review of accounting methods and needs by Linda Cheu, C.M.A.
- Review of office systems by Edmonton Social Planning Council staff.

2.6 Agency Profile

2.6.1 Questions

- How effective is the agency in communicating its services and programs to its potential clientele?
- How effective is the agency in communicating the merits of its services and programs to its funders and potential funders and/or supporters?
- Is the community, and particularly potential referral agents (eg. schools, social workers, health nurses, etc) aware of the services being offered by KARA? Do they utilize KARA? If not, why not?

2.6.2 Methods

- Administer questionnaire to references.
- Review agency publicity materials.

- Review public relations plan and fundraising plan, and/or suggest elements of a plan.

Section Three: Evaluation Findings

3.1 Agency Mission and Goals:

- Interviews with founding members of KARA revealed that the activities of KARA remain very similar to the original intentions of the founders. While KARA's first services had been centred on a drop-in approach, it was very soon decided that a more intensive service would be needed to meet the needs of a multi-problem clientele. As a result, a holistic program was developed, incorporating hands-on skills training in the nursery, a nutrition program, and classroom-based lifeskills training. In essence, this core program has remained consistent. A volunteer co-ordination program has been added.

- KARA Board and executive staff defined their organization as being a 'community-based self-help agency'. Yet there was limited input into the organization from the geographic communities of Belvedere and Clareview. An August 1991 list of Board members indicates that only three of fifteen lived in the area, while none of the members appeared to represent the client or potential client group. The organization of the program did not fit the evaluators' definition of 'self-help', which would have involved building individual growth through self-directed activity, whether that be reflective or action-oriented.

- The objectives of the agency as described in the society's by-laws appeared to reflect well (in a general sense) the primary activities of the society.

- Objective (f), "to encourage the formation of a self-help supporting network among one-parent families" does not appear to have been fully addressed, although the reviewers were aware of the typical difficulties encountered in the development of self-help groups among less advantaged people.

- Board and staff appeared properly aware of the broad goals of the agency, and to be in accord with those goals.

- References appeared to have a general sense of KARA's mission and mandate. However not all people making referrals to KARA were completely satisfied that KARA's program met these broad goals. In addition, there were doubts expressed as to the agency's internal ability to monitor its 'success'. In general, there was far more scepticism about KARA from outside the agency than existed inside. This suggested to evaluators that the agency has an inadequate communications

strategy and/or its personnel (board and staff) lack insight as to the challenges facing the organization.

- KARA has several different core funders. However it has only one program. The different demands of these different funders seemed to pull the organization's programs in different directions. KARA has not been entirely successful in simultaneously satisfying all their funders.

- The by-law requirement to hold two general meetings per year is unusual for similar organizations and should be eliminated at a future general meeting. While some members of KARA believe that this provision is important in ensuring that KARA reaches out to the community, others stated that this by-law requirement is not the most effective way of ensuring a higher community profile or responsiveness to the needs and wishes of the community.

- Funders generally prefer societies to have memberships of a substantial size, indicating wide community support. Current membership of forty-seven might be held to be a little low. Staff raised some questions as to the accuracy and completeness of the membership list.

3.2 Planning and decision-making processes

- The agency does have a long-term plan, developed in 1990, and described as a 'vision statement'. Given the many changes at KARA, this plan has been put on the 'back burner'. Further, some of the goals reflect programming which has been changed significantly subsequent to the change in Executive Director.

- In the past, there has been confusion within the organization as to who is responsible to make particular decisions. Some examples include that responsibility for hiring of direct service staff appears to have been shared between board and staff, bookkeeping duties have been shared between board and staff, etc. Proposals for some guidelines to eliminate any confusion and resultant conflict are contained within the Section Five.

- Save for a sole exception that we noted in the minutes of August 20 1991, decisions of the Board of Directors had been properly moved and recorded in the meeting minutes. Some confusion existed as to the meaning of some board decisions, for example the decision regarding implementation of employee benefits and/or salary increases, suggesting that the Board should pay special attention to

clarity in the wording of motions, especially those involving significant expenditures.

- There is no policy manual in which Board policy decisions are recorded. Without such a manual, time can be wasted revisiting issues which have already been decided, or contradictory motions can unknowingly be passed.
- The rapidity with which programs changed during the six months in which the evaluation was carried out was a surprise to evaluators. These changes did not seem to be driven by a long-term plan, but rather were in response to specific problems with individual program operation (e.g. nutrition program) or to the demands of funders (lifeskills programming). Executive staff argued that the changes had to be made prior to the completion of this evaluation or the development of a new long-term plan.

3.3 Formal and informal Board-staff interaction and relationships

- The current Board Chairperson and Executive Director appear to share the same vision of the organization. They believe that there must be clear lines of accountability, with policy decisions made by the Board of Directors on the basis of information provided by the Executive Director, and these decisions implemented by the staff under the supervision of the Executive Director. This is the normal and accepted decision-making structure within mature not-for-profit organizations.
- As noted in the previous section, it appears that some of the practices of the organization remain from the early, developmental phase of KARA's existence. For example, the Ways and Means Committee is responsible "to prepare and submit Annual budgets to Board, in consultation with the Executive Director." Normally, an Executive Director prepares the budgets in consultation with a finance committee, and the end product is transmitted to the Board of Directors for approval. Apparently this is now the practice, but it is not reflected in the written Committee Job Descriptions. Further, the Executive Director's job description dated November 1988 states that the Personnel Committee is to work with the Executive Director to evaluate staff. This is an abnormal practice in mature not-for-profit organizations.
- The Committee Job Descriptions include a number of passages granting them policy-making responsibility (e.g. the program/personnel and ways and means committees are charged with "the drawing up and revision as and when necessary of the salary grid and staff benefits.") Normally, Board committees do not have the

power to set policy, but rather to propose policy to the full Board. While the Board will of course typically take the advice of a Committee which has carefully examined an issue, the requirement for Board approval would eliminate the dangers of having more than one policy-making body in the organization. KARA's Board emphasized that the problem exists on paper only and not in practice, and that they are committed to rectifying the problem.

- There appear to be a number of different job descriptions for the same position. This is a dangerous practice in the event that a disaffected staff member commences litigation over unfair dismissal, etc. Further, the job descriptions for different jobs vary greatly in their format. Finally, there is an inconsistency in usage of job titles in various documents of the organization.

- From our reading, the status of the personnel policy is unclear. The policy was approved 'as amended' in January 1991, but we cannot find out exactly what were those amendments.

- Generally, the personnel policy seems to achieve a reasonable balance between the needs of the organization and the need to maintain adequate working conditions for the employees. It is consistent with those of other not-for-profit social service organizations. However, overtime policy is more generous than normal, and may encourage staff to accumulate overtime unless carefully policed. In addition, the grievance procedure section does not define the procedure with sufficient clarity, e.g. time limits, need for a complaint to be issued in writing, etc.

3.4 Programs

3.4.1 Parent Participation Program

- The Parent Participation Program adopts a 'learning through doing' approach. During the mornings, parents observe and take part in the regular parenting program offered in the nursery. This informal program is unique in Edmonton, and appears to work well. Most of the parents do not learn well in a traditional classroom setting, and the informal teaching-by-example approach was reviewed positively by clients, staff, and outside agencies.

- The nursery workers are well-qualified and competent. They are aware that their role extends beyond simple child care to acting as role models in showing parents examples of good parenting and the need to maintain consistent and positive interaction with their children.

- There did not appear to be a written theoretical framework for the nursery worker role.

- A telephone survey of twenty-one past and present KARA clients revealed that parents had a very positive view of the impact of the program:

"I learned a lot from the nursery workers by how they do their job."

"We found out different ways to keep things happy and keep down stress."

"I discovered a lot about myself and how I could be a better mother without being told I was doing things wrong before. It was my favourite piece of the program."

- We found only one similar program in the Edmonton area, offered by Candora. Interestingly, many of the same volunteers were involved in the establishment of both agencies. The one difference between Candora and KARA was the extent to which Candora used parents taking the program who were paid as "associate staff". This is also part of the KARA concept but is not currently in place.

- Funders, KARA board members, founding members, clients, and references from other agencies all commended the program for its effectiveness, the quality of staff, and positive friendly atmosphere.

- Goals and objectives for this program as well as the others offered by KARA are not as specific or as well developed as is the case for some other organizations offering family programming, such as the Family Service Association.

3.4.2 Nutrition Program

- The Nutrition Program was observed in August 1991. It is an example of the holistic approach adopted by KARA, addressing all aspects of the client family's social functioning, rather than simply treating the 'referral problem'. The Nutrition Program provides a snack in the morning and hot lunch, and in addition aims to teach parents good eating habits, how to prepare balanced meals, and how to shop within a tight budget.

- The program focuses upon mealtime as a significant stressor for many low-income families. This observation, which has led KARA to emphasize mealtimes in its low-key teaching of parenting, is insightful and the approach

appears to be effective. KARA staff show parents through example both how to cook nutritious cheap meals, and also how to maintain a healthy and positive atmosphere at mealtime.

- The evaluators noted through interviewing both staff and clients that many of the clients would not be eating a hot meal if they were not at KARA.

- The evaluators noted that many of the goals of the Nutrition Program were not being met. It appeared that the Program had more of the character of a free meal program than one which could genuinely be described as education-in-nutrition. Parent participation was minimal when the program was observed.

- The staff person does go grocery shopping with the parents from time to time.

- Senior staff and references believed that the program had not enjoyed success in teaching budgeting (objective five of the program). It had been intended to deliver nutritional programs within the client's home, however the current staff person had experienced difficulty gaining access to the home. Several informants hypothesized that this was because he was male.

- In response to difficulties faced by the Nutrition Program, a variety of changes have been made, to be implemented in January 1992. In particular, the position of Nutritionist has been eliminated, to be replaced by Cook-Housekeeper at a downgraded salary.

- While the changes certainly address the question of value for money by eliminating those parts of the program which are more expensive than can be justified on the basis of the current operation of the program, both founding members of KARA and program funders expressed concern that this could be "throwing the baby out with the bathwater." Several references stressed that the program had been successful in the past, and that personnel changes might remedy any current problems.

3.4.3 Lifeskills Programming

Note: the evaluators reviewed all of the parenting and lifeskills modules as a whole. These include the Nobody's Perfect Program, Learned Behaviours, Life Management Skills, etc. It should also be noted that the programs underwent name changes during the course of the evaluation, and thus there may be inconsistencies in terminology.

- The evaluators experienced some difficulty assessing these programs, for a variety of reasons. Past records were incomplete, making comparison with other programs or longitudinal comparisons impossible. There was staff change in this program during the period of evaluation. Finally, the evaluators obtained the impression that negotiations with the funder were to lead to changes in the program, away from parenting skills development to more traditional lifeskills and job readiness skills. It should be noted that KARA staff and Board did not accept our interpretation.
- Parents and staff commented very positively upon the program. Both groups felt universally that the various modules were effective in improving parenting skills, life skills, and self-confidence:

"Life Skills teaches healthier interaction with children - it gets top marks"
(staff person)

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- During the period of the evaluation, KARA stated that lesson plans were developed by the staff. However, they were not provided for the requested time period (September 1991). Programming plans were provided for upcoming modules (January - March 1992). These could have been clearer.
 - Staff logs on module/program progress were extensive. However, there did not appear to be tracking of the parents' progress towards specific goals as defined at entry to the program.
 - Entry and exit criteria were unclear. Clients were often asked to repeat the programs, though there was no accepted system for determining who should and who should not repeat. Several references felt that there were inadequate goals set, and that the focus of KARA's programming was unclear:

"Mandate may need to be narrowed or articulated as to what KARA does... It appears that the programs were designed to seek out funding sources rather than examine how programs address the goals and objectives of the group."

- Some references felt that KARA programs were longer than necessary.
- The primary funder for this program during 1991 was Alberta Family and Social Services Income Support Programs. This funder wants programs to be focussed upon work-related lifeskills, rather than basic lifeskills or parenting skills. In response KARA has produced drafts for what appeared to be a dramatically different program (Draft #10, Annual Report for Alberta Family and Social Services), although KARA staff have stated that the changes were minimal.
- The perception that KARA offered good programs but that they were rather expensive was expressed by a number of references from other agencies: "expensive", "a bit expensive", "the cost is high and the results are not always measurable. Goals should be more time specific."

3.4.4 Volunteer Programming

- The volunteer program is funded through the Wild Rose Foundation.
- The volunteer program has undergone considerable staff turnover. Within the past year there have been three Volunteer Co-ordinators. This does not appear to have been a result of any problems at the agency as both of the resigning staff had moved away from the city.
- In September, the Volunteer Co-ordinator reported that there were thirty active volunteers. Volunteers were involved as board members, helping out in the nursery, and a small amount of clerical work.
- Recruitment patterns were typical for agencies of this type. Volunteers were recruited through the Volunteer Action Centre, advertising on radio and in neighbourhood newspapers, and by word of mouth.
- Board members made up the majority of volunteers. They reported their involvement with KARA to be very positive:

"This is a very co-operative Board ... we genuinely care about the employees ... there is no friction between Board members."

3.4.5 Outreach Program

- The outreach program has offered in-home follow-up to parents experiencing emergent difficulties or having attendance problems. In addition, KARA staff attend at the client's home to assess home situations and the extent to which program lessons were being learned. The Board stressed the latter rationale for outreach visits.
- The program was not very well understood by references. It was not identified by the references as one of KARA's services. We felt it might better be described as an adjunct to the other services of the agency rather than as a free-standing program per se.
- The majority of clients served during 1991 had received outreach services.
- The evaluation of this aspect of the KARA program is incomplete due to inability to observe the service in action (for obvious reasons), changes in the manner of delivery of the program during the evaluation, and the probability that emergent issues will be eliminated as a reason for an outreach call (meeting with KARA Board, March 2 1992).

3.5 Administrative Capacities

- The Executive Director has considerable experience in the day-to-day management of not-for-profit organizations. The Board Chairperson has strong business and legal skills and has been a volunteer with several other not-for-profit organizations. Other Board members have professional skills, and commitment. In comparison with other similar organizations, KARA's management skill and experience level is high.
- Several informants who were interviewed by the evaluators raised concerns about the judgement shown by the Board of Directors in decisions surrounding the purchase by KARA of a duplex at 6114-132 Avenue. The duplex was purchased without appropriate zoning approval, which was ultimately denied by the Development Appeal Board. Consequently, the agency will have to secure a new location for programs, move out of 6114-132 Avenue, and sell the property. This will inevitably result in significant costs for the agency. The current Board Chairperson confirms these facts, and recognizes that an error was made by the Board of Directors, which "will not be repeated." Other Board members prefer it be described as a "calculated risk".

- A concern was raised in regard to the dismissal of the Executive Director in the Spring of 1991. Apparently, this issue has now been resolved, and we did not address the matter.

- Client records were maintained in the past, however there was no clear system for determining what information should be included. Client records tended to contain excessive narrative. The Executive Director had already identified this as an issue, and the system of record keeping is being renewed to better meet the needs of both KARA and external referral agencies. Particular attention is being paid to the legal ramifications of information-keeping systems.

- Attendance records were kept. However, they are hard to follow (September - November 1991), and are kept on loose paper.

- Bookkeeping systems were reviewed by Linda Cheu, C.G.A. Her review is reproduced as presented by her in section 3.5.1, while her recommendations are found in section 4.5.1.

- Office management systems were reviewed by Diane Goodall, Edmonton Social Planning Council Executive Assistant. Her review is reproduced in section 3.5.2, while her recommendations are found in section 4.5.2.

3.5.1 *Bookkeeping System Evaluation October 2, 1991*
prepared by Linda Cheu, C.G.A.

A. *Description of Existing System*

I was able to see the books for January to August 1991. Specifically I examined the June and August records.

i) Budget

A budget is approved by the Board annually and is put into the financial presentation of the monthly statements.

Monthly and year-to-date variance is presented in the monthly statements.

ii) Income

Nearly 99% of income is from agencies or government sources and is received in the form of cheques. These are receipted in a two-copy blue receipt book and deposited into the bank (August procedure).

iii) Expenditure

a) Cash: an imprest system of \$100 is kept at the Program Centre (previously \$500). Claims are put through monthly on a summary sheet and vouchers and receipts are attached to the sheet.

b) Cheques: vouchers when paid are stamped requiring the following information (August procedure):

- approved (by 1 Board member at least)
- date
- cheque number
- disbursement code
- GST

The vouchers are chronologically but loosely filed in a folder. This monthly folder also contains the cheque stubs and term deposit receipts for the month.

c) Bank Reconciliation: The bank is reconciled manually on a tape and matched to the running total in the cheque stubs. This reconciled figure is also matched to the balance of the bank account as shown in the Balance Sheet of the monthly Financial Statements. If the figures do not match, the error(s) are located and corrected.

d) Posting of Record: The expenses are inputted directly and chronologically from invoices into the computer program ESi. This program will not proceed unless the entries balance. This provides control of correct data entry.

e) Financial Statements Records: Balance Sheet and Operating Statement, Trial Balance, Transaction Input Sheets, Transaction Audit Sheets (adjusting entries), for each month, are filed in a binder.

f) Staff: The staff responsible for the bookkeeping system seems to know clearly how to operate each step of the bookkeeping process.

B. Evaluation

i) Computer Program

The computer program for financial data: - ESI, is adequate for the agency at this stage. It is rather rigid and inflexible as it prints line by line as you type in - not allowing checking time before printing. However for the 80 or so transactions a month, errors can be spotted and corrected without spending too much time.

ii) Bookkeeping System

The bookkeeping system has a good audit trail. The system is in place and is in use. KARA received "clean" audited financial statements for 1989 and 1990 which suggests that the controls in the accounting system also existed in the previous years.

In general, the bookkeeping system has a good set of built-in controls. Just some minor fine tuning of the filing system might facilitate retrieval.

3.5.2 Administrative System Evaluation

Prepared by Diane Goodall, Edmonton Social Planning Council staff
October 10th 1991

A. Description of Existing System

The administrative offices are presently in the basement of an apartment building, and there appears to be plenty of space. However, KARA is considering a new location to house both the program centre and the office staff. This will not present a problem to existing administrative staff providing the office space is somewhat separate from the client facilities. In fact, it will save travelling time to and from each location for the Executive Director. All client file records are kept at the program centre.

The administrative duties of the current Executive Director include purchasing, pay-roll, bookkeeping, and record keeping.

A staff person has been employed on a two-day-per week basis since September as Secretary-Receptionist. She performs general office duties such as answering the telephone, photocopying, typing, and filing.

A volunteer is used one morning per week to type confidential client documents.

All of the office equipment is old and outdated with the exception of two telephones which were purchased recently. One electric typewriter is used for all typing tasks, and the photocopier is extremely slow. There was an old Radio Shack computer that had been donated which the Executive Director believed could be made operational, and apparently two other used photocopiers, one of which may be repaired and would be faster than the one presently used.

Storage space for filing and office supplies is minimal.

B. Evaluation

The Executive Director is maintaining a filing system for office administration and Board and committee meetings which is satisfactory and works well for her. The secretary-receptionist assists her with many duties but her time is limited to only two days per week and the Executive Director has to perform all office duties, including answering the telephone, the rest of the time.

Office supplies are picked up as needed by the Executive Director. There was no record kept of quotations for printing supplies or amounts purchased and costs, apart from the accounting records, which do not show an overview of purchasing practices.

Many of the typing tasks that are being performed by the Secretary-Receptionist are repetitive and could be made much easier and faster if a computer was available. The secretary-receptionist enjoys her job but feels limited by the time available to her. The Executive Director has been using her own personal computer for typing and accounting.

3.6 Agency Profile

- KARA's agency brochure is a small tri-fold pamphlet, containing a description of agency programs and philosophy. It is reasonably attractive, but does not stand out among other similar documents. The literacy level of the brochure suggests that it is directed at other agencies, and perhaps the more literate service-user. Given the program changes at KARA, the pamphlet will need to be updated. During this updating, attention should be paid to the target readers, attractiveness of presentation, literacy level, distribution methods, etc.

- We conducted a random survey on October 11 1991 of seven northeast Edmonton social service organizations, law enforcement agencies, and large commercial outlets, to determine both the availability of written information about KARA, and awareness of KARA's services. The results are indicated below:

Alberta Family and Social Services Fort Road District Office	<i>There was no information available in any brochure racks or displays. When asked for information, two staff thought there should be some, but after ten minutes we were just given the phone number.</i>
Londonderry Police Station 6504 - 137 Avenue	<i>No information available - four policemen at the front desk were not aware of the agency.</i>
Hull's Foods 137 Avenue and Fort Road	<i>No information on display. One cashier knew about the agency.</i>
IGA Clareview Village Centre	<i>No information on display.</i>
Edmonton Police Service Belvedere Beat Office 12749 Fort Road	<i>Office was closed but the bulletin board was clearly visible. No information about KARA.</i>
City of Edmonton Community and Family Services, Beverly Office, 11809 - 48 St.	<i>No information on display but the receptionist copied a page from Community Connections.</i>
Edmonton Board of Health Clareview Office 14023 - 48 Street	<i>No information on display, we were shown into an office and asked why we were interested in KARA, and then given the telephone number.</i>

- Existing referral agencies and other references seemed to know quite well the services offered by the agency: "KARA provides parenting skills and budgeting skills as well as emotional support. [Kids] come with the parent to the program which makes it much more convenient for the parent. Group sessions provide moral support as well. Home visits done by staff - excellent follow-up."

- However, three of eight references who responded to the question "do you think KARA should improve its profile among service agencies?" responded in the affirmative. One agency said "we could benefit from a KARA representative coming

to this agency to inform staff of program changes, etc." "Staff could do more in-service training at unit meetings at Edmonton North Income Support Office."

- Five of six community informants believed that KARA should improve its profile in the geographic community, bearing out the low profile which was indicated by our own random community survey: "I'm not sure if residents in the area are aware of the range of services they offer and how they can access them." One reference raised the suggestion KARA should reach out more to the Native and multicultural community.

3.6.1 Agency Profile - Relations with funders

- Relations with some funders have not been without problems. This year, the agency was cut back in funding by one funder (Family and Community Support Services) during the period of the evaluation, while the funder increased its overall allocations to agencies by 2.5% (*Edmonton Journal*, January 9 1992, B3). The evaluators were made aware of problems with this funder through the media. Generally, the evaluators found the agency's perception of their status with large funders to be optimistic rather than realistic.

- These issues were of significant concern to the evaluators and were raised in a November 28 1991 letter to KARA.

3.7 Program Cost effectiveness

We had initially hoped to evaluate each program component separately. However it became clear that, as the same complete program is provided to each client, the only meaningful cost-analysis would be of the whole program. A client is defined as the family, usually a single mother and her child(ren). Two methods were employed:

1) KARA does not keep attendance records so that daily attendance can be easily computed, and 1991 final statistics were not available as of January 1992, so a random sample was taken of the programs offered between September and November 1991:

KARA SEPTEMBER 16 - Nov 1 1991

Number of program days:	22
Programs offered	2
Total enrollment	
- Nobody's Perfect	13 (five started more than halfway through the program)
- Learned Behaviours	7
Total possible days attendance	199
Actual attendance	85
Attendance rate	43%
Pro-rated agency costs for period	\$27,780
Cost per client-day	\$327

2) Based on 1990 figures a simple cost per client was calculated:

Number of clients:	35
1990 Expenses	\$167,316
Cost per client	\$4,780

The evaluators feel that the cost per client-day method (number one) is more useful than the cost per client, which does reflect length of stay in the program, etc. Since KARA's holistic program is not offered elsewhere, comparison of costs would not be completely valid.

Section Four: Evaluation Summary

4.1. Agency Mission and Goals

The agency mission and goals appear to fit well with the activities of the organization. However, KARA's definition of itself as a "self help community-based agency" (letter from KARA, December 31, 1991) does not match the evaluators' definition of the concepts. In particular it does not have sufficient input from the local community to meet our definition of a community-based agency.

4.2 Planning and decision-making processes

The agency is experiencing the normal changes which occur when it moves from being board-driven, as it was for its first few years, to being staff driven, as is the case for the bulk of mature not-for-profit service agencies. There had been some confusion over responsibilities for decision-making in the past, and the potential for future problems exists in that the Board and its committees are still theoretically responsible for some duties which are also in staff job descriptions (especially relating to personnel). This problem is reflected also in the existence of a number of job descriptions for both staff positions and Board committees, so that it is hard to know which are the current documents.

The evaluators were concerned by the very rapid changes in programs which occurred during the course of the evaluation. It was very hard to evaluate programs, and in our opinion this rendered the whole evaluative process less useful than it might have been. Extensive program changes should be made as the result of a process of long-term planning. This did not seem to be the case at KARA.

4.3 Formal and Informal Board-staff interaction and relationships

The Board is extremely committed and appears to genuinely care about the well-being of the staff. The rapport between staff and Board seems good at the present time.

As mentioned in section 4.2, the potential for difficulties between Board and staff exists because policy is unclear in some areas due to several written policies being duplicated. Neither we, nor management staff, were able to state definitively which

policy was applicable. This concern was most evident and most problematic in personnel related areas, especially job descriptions.

4.4 Programs

4.4.1 Parent Participation Program

The Parent Participation Program received the highest recommendations from clients, staff, and referral agents. A final judgement on the effectiveness of the program awaits the results of Dr. Battle's pre-test and post-testing of clients (though this could not accurately differentiate any changes caused by the Parent Participation Program as opposed to other programs). Nevertheless the evaluators feel very positive about this element of the KARA service.

4.4.2 Nutrition Program

The Nutrition Program has been altered significantly since the evaluation began. The position of Nutritionist was eliminated effective January 1 1992, replaced with a cook-housekeeper. This reflected a belief within KARA staff that the position of nutritionist had not been effective. Furthermore, Muttart Foundation funding of the program finished at the end of 1991.

The evaluators concluded that an effective nutrition program was essential to the success of the agency. However, it was too early to be sure whether an effective program requires a staff position dedicated to it. Our sense is that, given the number of clients being served, this is unnecessary. Furthermore, given the desire for the KARA program to be a modelling example of parenting, perhaps it would be best if the nursery workers and mothers together worked on lunch and snack preparation. The implementation of a community kitchen at KARA can be seen as a step in this direction. It should be noted, however, that KARA had previously attempted to operate a nutrition program without dedicated staff, and without success. This may have been for a variety of reasons and does not preclude KARA, in the evaluators' opinion, from trying again.

4.4.3 Lifeskills Programming

Again, Lifeskills Programming was altered significantly during the period of the evaluation. The amount of non-program time was reduced by eliminating the planning week between programs. Programs are to be run four days each week. The programs were renamed. The time to deliver the final lifeskills program was increased to permit more employment readiness activities.

Nobody's Perfect is the first module delivered in the lifeskills programming offered in the afternoons. It is a successful basic skills teaching model offered by many different parenting skills programs, including several in the city. Upon observation, evaluators found the program being delivered appropriately. However lesson plans were not apparently available for the random dates requested, and those offered seemed inadequate - lacking emphasis on addressing the particular needs of individual mothers.

The follow-up modules use program materials from the United States (dysfunctional families module) and Grant MacEwan Community College's Life Skills Coach Program. The modules have been changed and expanded, in part to address the needs of Alberta Family and Social Services funders. However, we are not clear as to the net result of these changes. On written request for more information, the evaluators were informed: "there is no curriculum changes to any of our modules". However the letter went on to say "Life Skills has been extended to 18 weeks (from 12) to take in the whole program which now includes nutrition, budgeting, training and employment preparation." This is insufficient information for our evaluators to provide any useful analysis of these most recent changes.

The KARA program is long compared with most Alberta Family and Social Services SFI-funded programs: minimum time to complete all the modules is about nine months. Graduation rates are low: 13 clients graduated during 1991, though KARA emphasized that not all clients are expected to graduate. KARA's FCSS funding application for 1992 stated that "clients are now staying longer and 20% are graduating from the program." Attendance rates are not high: for the programs reviewed at random, attendance was considerably less than 50% of those enrolled. This meant that the program was being delivered to between one and four families on most of the days of service.

Overall, the evaluators had serious reservations about the effectiveness of the parenting and life skills programming offered. The rationale for the use of the particular training materials (which come from three different sources) had been lost over the years. Attendance rates were so poor that it would be hard for the majority of participants to benefit from a structured 'course'. Training of new staff in some of the teaching materials was inadequate.

4.4.4 Volunteer Program

The volunteer program is funded on a two-year grant from the Wild Rose Foundation. There have been three different Volunteer Co-ordinators in the past year. The evaluators noted that the need for volunteers is currently not high - the majority being Board and committee members. Given the time-limited nature of

the co-ordinator position, it was felt to be important for the agency to devote time developing a plan for volunteerism at KARA .

4.4.5 Outreach Program

The outreach program was not evaluated in depth, for reasons outlined in 3.4.5. Evaluators felt that home visits to clients could obviously be useful in assessing home situations, assessing progress, and following-up poor attendance, etc., but that this should be considered as a part of the other programs, especially as many of the visits are delivered by nursery staff who would be working at KARA in any event. *Apparently KARA no longer uses nursery staff for outreach visits (March 1992).*

4.5 Administrative Capacities

Overall, bookkeeping at the agency was determined to be adequate. Some of the minor issues identified should be resolved through the planned purchase of a more up-to-date accounting software package.

The office systems require some improvement. Secretarial staffing is inadequate at present. The absence of a computer was a serious concern, which has now been addressed.

~~Non-financial record keeping is inadequate. Client attendance records are confusing and difficult to read. Consequently, program statistical information is almost impossible to analyze. We could not obtain lesson plans for the dates requested. Information provided to funders was insufficient in our opinion, and did not necessarily present the agency in the most favourable light.~~

Overall, despite having being in existence a number of years, the non-financial administrative functions at the agency seem to have been carried out as an afterthought. Many of the other problems of the organization might have been avoided had sufficient resources been devoted to this area.

4.6 Public Profile

The agency is insufficiently well-known in North-East Edmonton, as demonstrated through our survey. While the agency is known by its referral agents, its lack of profile among the broader community must be addressed.

More seriously, the agency does not have an entirely positive relationship with several of its funders. Funders expressed concern to the evaluators about staff turnover, insufficient clarity about program and goals on the part of KARA, and the cost of the services being provided by the agency. Some efforts have been made to improve public relations through funders' meetings. This is viewed positively by the evaluators.

4.7 Cost effectiveness

Cost per client-day appear to be high. It approaches that charged for one-on-one counselling by some psychologists. The cost could be justified if KARA were able to conduct a longitudinal study of its clients compared with a control group. This would need to compare overall costs of government and other services to the client group after the program, compared with costs of serving the control group. This would be a very major undertaking.

A simple calculation of the number of clients compared with number of staff would suggest that the agency is over-staffed or has insufficient clients. On average during the period September 16th - November 1st, there were fewer than four clients in attendance, with eight or nine staff on the pay-roll.

Section Five: Recommendations

General comments

Northeast Edmonton suffers from a variety of social problems which are related to the high incidence of poverty in the area. A recent House of Commons study indicated that Edmonton East constituency, which covers the whole northeast, is Canada's fourteenth most economically needy riding (of 295), with 24% of families living in poverty. Compare this with Edmonton South-East and Edmonton South-West, where only 13.7% and 13.2% respectively of families are below the poverty line. Incidence of crime in the northeast of the city is higher than elsewhere, save the inner city itself. Recently, the province's welfare office in the area has been swamped by new applicants for assistance, victims of the recession.

Human and social services in the north-east are fragmented and under-staffed. This is true of provincial and municipally operated social services, and it is true of the area's not-for-profit agencies.

As one of few services in the area, KARA can play an important role in improving the quality of life for northeast Edmonton's young and diverse families. Yet KARA's present services do not reach enough people, are not sufficiently cost-efficient, and the organization is not adequately rooted in the community it serves. No rationale has been provided by the agency to show that its current intensive work is cost-effective in comparison with organizations offering more open and extensive access to services and involvement.

The evaluators recommend that KARA takes a bold step in opening a discussion among all the area's service providers, a discussion which could begin with these questions:

- what are the most pressing needs for the people of the northeast?
- what services are most effective in addressing these needs?
- how can the people of the area be involved in their community's agencies?
- what services currently exist and how can they be best organized to meet the identified service needs?

All of the following specific recommendations should be read in the light of this general recommendation.

5.1 Agency Mission and Goals

- Become an organization based on the community of northeast Edmonton, as demanded by the mission and goals, by expanding local resident membership. This does not necessarily mean people who are clients or potential clients, rather those who have a knowledge of and stake in the community. In the short-term, this involvement should be built through community meetings and consultations.
- Develop the concept of "self-help" so that the agency's services users become genuinely involved in defining the type and nature of programming which will best suit their needs. There is a very extensive library of materials available both in Edmonton (at Grant MacEwan College, Edmonton Social Planning Council, etc.) or from the National Self-Help Clearing House.

5.2 Planning and Decision-Making Processes

- Involve community stake-holders in the long-term planning process. This would include social service agencies and funders, law enforcement, health-care agencies, educational system, representatives of aboriginal and visible minority groups, businesses, etc.
- Resolve the agency housing problem in the light of an overall agency review. Is the purchase of another house a good way to involve more people in KARA?
- Expand community membership in KARA as noted in 5.1. Encourage community representatives to become part of the Board and committees of the organization.

5.3 Board-staff Interaction and Relationships

- Reproduce the whole current set of policies into a policy book, including job-descriptions, by-laws, etc. Ensure there is only one policy for each issue, one job description for each position, etc.

5.4 Programs

- Engage a professional (e.g. a consultant with M.S.W. and program planning consultation experience) to design and oversee the implementation of programs, based upon the directions laid out by a long-term planning process. The new programs should include clear goals and objectives, organizational structure,

program materials and rationale, staff qualifications required, forms for tracking information, program budget, etc.

- While this process is in progress, the nutrition program should be expanded to reach out to more people than those using the KARA program, in order to increase cost-effectiveness.

- A written framework for the nursery worker role would be useful for both internal and external purposes. Internally, it would act as a training tool. Externally, it could be used by organizations developing similar programs.

- Generally speaking, we believe it would be beneficial for KARA to move away from intensive work with a very small group of clients to more self-help work with a broader range of local people. Drop-in child care to give single parents a time-out, drop-in centre, community kitchens, etc. are all ideas which have been considered or attempted at the agency and should be re-examined as part of a wider re-examination of services.

- The volunteer program is funded on a time-limited basis. The need for this position is to develop a plan for volunteer recruitment after the position of volunteer co-ordinator ceases to exist. There is not enough call for volunteers at KARA to justify seeking permanent funds for the position.

5.5 Administrative Capacities

- The entire client record-keeping system should be revamped. Proper forms should be developed, attendance numbers should be totalled, complete lesson and case plans should be developed, protocols should be developed for information to be kept, etc.

- More professional human service workers should be involved at the Board level.

- The agency should focus on dealing with its existing issues, and not apply for external grants which only further stretch limited organizational capacities.

5.5.1 Bookkeeping systems (Linda Cheu)

The bookkeeping system needs to be supported by a good filing system of the source documents. My recommendations are that:

- All the monthly vouchers be put to a fastener or binder to avoid losing any piece or having it out of order.

- Cheque stubs be maintained in the cheque book for the whole fiscal year.

- Term deposit sheets be filed together or firmly attached.

5.5.2 Office systems (Diane Goodall)

- The office would benefit from additional help in the near future. It would relieve the Executive Director of some of the administrative tasks and ensure that someone is available to answer the telephone. The secretarial position would lend itself well to a job-sharing situation, if that was an option.
 - I would recommend that more detailed records of purchasing for office supplies such as quantities, quotations, date of purchase, etc. be kept. It would be easier to project expenses in this area. Presently the supplies are purchased as needed, usually locally, but printers and office suppliers are always willing to visit offices personally and deliver free of charge. Many office suppliers give a generous discount to non-profit organizations and KARA could look into this.
 - Agencies that are funded by the City of Edmonton Community and Family Services are entitled to purchase supplies through the City Central Stores. I would suggest that KARA investigate this through their funding co-ordinator at the City, as there will be definite cost savings on office supplies and also on other supplies for the program centre, if the City stock the item. However, KARA would have to be more organized for ordering in this way as deliveries could take a week or more and should be placed no more than once a month, if possible. Additional office help would mean that more time would be available for cost comparison and record keeping and could relieve Rose-Marie of this task.
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- A new computer and printer were needed at the time of evaluation. It is understood that they have now been purchased.
 - At the present time fax machines for the office and program centre would internally save travel time between the locations, and also serve as a valuable external communication tool. If however the program centre and office are moved to the same location, then only one would be necessary.
 - Even if one of the old photocopiers can be repaired, KARA should plan to purchase or rent one in the long term. Older photocopiers tend to be very problematic and repairs can be expensive. There is also the added frustration of down-time when a photocopier is out of service. The present machine is far too slow.
 - Some additional filing/storage space should be purchased eventually for the front office. A used lateral file cabinet would be functional.

5.6 Public Profile

- As mentioned in another recommendation, KARA needs to initiate a broad-based consultation with the residents of the northeast.
- KARA's relationship with several of its funders needs to be clarified and improved. We recommend that KARA expand on its earlier funders' meetings to host a funders' workshop where agreements could be worked out between the various funders on exactly what each was funding. It would also provide the opportunity to determine whether, overall, the KARA program represents value for money when all the continuing funding is considered together.

KARA Family Support Centre

Board Member Questionnaire

Please complete this questionnaire and mail back to the Edmonton Social Planning Council at 9912 - 106 Street, #41, Edmonton, AB T5K 1C5 in the attached envelope. Questionnaires should be mailed before October 4th, 1991.

1) a) Describe your involvement with KARA.

b) How long have you been involved, and how did you get involved?

c) What skills do you have which make you useful to KARA as a board member?

d) What is your time commitment to KARA (eg, how many hours per week, month)?

2) Did you receive any training as a new Board member?

Yes _____ No _____

a) What kind of training did you receive?

b) How could training have been improved?

3) The Board of Directors is ultimately the highest authority within a non-profit organization. How should it exercise its responsibilities?

4) What should be the role of the Executive Director?

5) What role does the Board play in:

a) fund raising: _____

b) agency management: _____

c) relations with funders and the community: _____

6) Referring to your answers to question 5), assess:

i) How effective the Board's current role is in this area?

ii) How it might be improved?

a) fundraising

i) _____

ii) _____

b) agency management

i) _____

ii) _____

c) relations with funders and the community

i) _____

ii) _____

7) Is the number of Board members adequate to the job that needs to be done?
Yes _____ No _____

a) Are the skills of the board members adequate? If not, what additional skills are required?

8) a) How is the staff involved in Board decisions?

b) How is the Board involved in staff functions?

9) a) Who makes financial decisions in KARA?

b) _____

c) How could financial decision making be improved?

10) a) Who makes program decisions in KARA?

b)

c)

11) a) Given the resources available to KARA, do you feel that funders receive value for money?

b) How is value for money assessed?

12) a) How effective are communications between board and staff?

b) How could they be improved?

13) a) Describe KARA's long-range planning process?

b) How could it be improved?

14) a) What gaps in service exist given the mandate/mission of KARA?

b) How could existing services for KARA clients be improved?

15) a) Describe the committee structure of KARA's Board?

b) Are you involved in any committee? If so, please describe in what capacity, how much time you spend with the committee, etc.

c) How effective is the committee structure?

16) Do you have any other comments?

**EVALUATION OF
KARA FAMILY SUPPORT CENTRE
KEY INFORMANT QUESTIONNAIRE**

KARA Family Support Centre has contracted the Edmonton Social Planning Council to carry out an evaluation of its organization and programs.

As part of this evaluation, it is important that we receive feedback from the community on the effectiveness of KARA's services. KARA has provided your name as a key informant. The information you provide will be incorporated within the evaluation, but individual respondents will not be identified. Please leave blank any questions which are not relevant to you, or about which you have insufficient information to provide a valid answer.

Please return this form in the attached stamped addressed envelope by October 4th 1991.

1) In what capacity are you involved with KARA? eg. funder, referral source, etc. How extensive is your involvement with KARA?

2) How would you explain KARA's services to someone who was not familiar with them?

3) What are your main sources of information about KARA's programs?

KARA Brochure _____ Community Connections Directory

Personal contact with program staff _____ Inter-agency meetings

Colleagues _____ Clients

Other (please specify) _____

3) Do you think KARA should improve its profile among service agencies?
If so, how?

4) Do you think KARA could become better known in its geographic community?
If so, how?

5) Are there any services not currently being provided to KARA's target group
which you think KARA should be providing?

6) Does KARA duplicate other services offered in the community? If so, please
explain?

7) Could communication between your agency and KARA be improved? If so, how?

8) Given your knowledge of KARA and other agencies, do you believe that KARA offers an efficient, quality service? If not, why not?

9) Why do you refer clients to KARA instead of other programs?

10) Are there any reasons you may have for not referring clients to KARA?

11) What would be the impact on the community if KARA's services were discontinued?

12) In your experience, what are the strengths and weaknesses of KARA's programs?

a) Strengths

b) Weaknesses

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