

# **Predictions 2020 Proceedings**

**Forum held November 16, 1999**

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## Preamble

What does the future hold? This is something about which most of us wonder. With a clear understanding of the challenges before us and the development of a common goal, to some extent that future can be molded. It was with this in mind that we held the Predictions 2020 forum. The intention was to bring together the ideas, hopes and concerns for the future that exist among human service providers and members of our community so as to better prepare for the future.

We were pleased to have representatives from several organisations that ranged from neighbourhood organisations and the Self-Help Food Bank to the Regional Municipality of Waterloo Social Services Department. We were also happy to have several students from Southwood Secondary School attend, as youth perspectives are so important, particularly when having a discussion about the future.

What will be the trends of the future? There are several major issues to consider, such as an ageing population, the role of technology, the changing nature of human services, the work environment and volunteering, and the changing role/power of local governments in light of greater globalisation of both business and politics.

The ageing of the baby boomer generation will have significant effects on the future provision of human services. For example, pressure on the health care system will greatly increase which could result in restricted access to some as the system becomes overloaded. It could also mean that attention will be diverted away from other human services. How will human services adapt?

How will our lives be further changed by new technologies? As Donald Norman, a professor of psychology and cognitive science, says, "Technology changes rapidly; people change slowly."<sup>1</sup> Does this mean that the gap in society between the technology (i.e. the Internet) literate and illiterate will grow as time goes on? As academic and writer Dale Spender points out, "Just as the information medium once changed from manuscript to print, now it is changing from print to digital. And just as those who were illiterate in a print based society have been kept 'out of the loop' and unable to participate fully in the community, so now are computer illiterate people facing a similar fate as 'outsiders'."<sup>2</sup> The issue of a societal gap resulting from rapid technological development and adaptation by only a portion of society could easily cause the gap between rich and poor to grow in this age where information (and access to information) is as good as gold.

How will technology affect the functioning and delivery of human services? Will it facilitate how human services operate, or will it marginalise people further? Will community organisations be reluctant to incorporate too much technology for fear of isolating some of their clients? Will small organisations secure greater access to resources, and be able to share innovative ideas better since organising person-to-person meetings can be difficult? Or will there be a loss of innovation through the lack of personal contacts as people meet less and less often? In short, will we drive technology or will technology drive us?

How will human services change? As the definition of the family unit continues to transform, how will human services respond? Similarly, the nature of Canada's population will continue to

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<sup>1</sup> Norman, Donald A. (1999). "Cognitive Prostheses," in *Predictions: Thirty Great Minds on the Future*, Griffiths, Sian ed., University Press, Oxford, p. 175.

<sup>2</sup> Spender, Dale (1999). "A Basic Human Right," in *Predictions: Thirty Great Minds on the Future*, Griffiths, Sian ed., University Press, Oxford, p. 254.

diversify culturally as more and more new people move to this country, requiring more attention to issues of culture and language. Might Canada eventually have more than two official languages? Not only will the type of services change, but so will the way human service providers operate. Will there be a pooling of resources thereby lowering the costs for individual organisations.

What will the working environment be like? Will there be fewer total work hours in a week? Will employee morale, rather than substantial time commitments become the road to higher productivity? Mark Hudson from *32 HOURS: Action for Full Employment*, believes that, "Lower absenteeism, lower burnout, less fatigue, reduced employee turnover and higher morale resulting from reduced work time all contribute to a more productive workplace."<sup>3</sup> Or will the workweek never end as employees are continually connected to the office (virtual or real) through remote communications? Will the working environment be more flexible to accommodate those who need to care for others such as children or dependent parents? At the present time this seems to apply mostly to women, but will that change in the future? Will productivity continue to mean "more" or will it mean "better"?

How will these changes affect the way the next generation grows up, and what values they will have? Are we preparing our youth adequately for the future? Aside from their social and emotional abilities, which author David Goleman<sup>4</sup> describes, what kind of interests will the youth have in social issues and participating in their communities? As Andrew Terry, a speaker who represented the youth in this forum, says, "I don't think the majority of us [read youth] have a perspective on society, and the problems in it." (p.24) Will mandatory volunteering as part of the high school curriculum affect the level of youth (and later, adult) participation and interest in their communities?

How will the role of volunteering change? Will it become something that is a relic from the past due to increased work loads as improved communications technologies allow employees to be reached at any time, and a disconnectedness in society evolves as remote communications become more prominent? Or will volunteering become easier as fewer work hours per week becomes the norm, and small/community organisations gain a stronger position in society.

What do you think? We have transcribed the discussion that took place at the Predictions 2020 forum where these and other thoughts about the future were articulated. Some of the themes you will see in this discussion are: youth issues regarding awareness of social issues, participation and volunteering; social policies and social services; the importance of having a voice; diversity and equity; and community. This type of forum is essential to preparing for the future. However, we must, "ensure that the things we talk about today do not simply become predictions that we sit back and wait to see happen, but become goals that we work toward" (Marco Campana, p.23).

"The future will belong to those who are prepared for it."<sup>5</sup>

Megan Brunswig  
Social Planner

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<sup>3</sup> Atkinson Charitable Foundation (November 6, 1999). "The Atkinson Letter: In the Neck of Time," in *The Toronto Star*, p. K3.

<sup>4</sup> Goleman, David (1999). "Winning the Battle for the Human Heart," in *Predictions: Thirty Great Minds on the Future*, Griffiths, Sian ed., University Press, Oxford, p. 136.

<sup>5</sup> Worzel, Richard (December 1999/January 2000). "Three Keys to the Future: Where are Associations Heading?" in *Association: Canada's Association Management Magazine*, p. 31.