1. Children who are in care are exceptionally vulnerable children and they face extraordinary risks. Their life prospects are different than children in the general population. Children in care are over represented by minority groups and families living below the poverty level.

2. For decades there have been ongoing debates in the field over what to do to best serve the needs of these children.

3. Although debates rage on about what to do, there is a serious failure to consistently evaluate what we are doing. This makes it difficult to determine what is working and what is not. Different agencies keep different records and measure different things. Without consistent evaluation of programs and policies, it is hard to inform future decisions.

4. Children in care have extraordinarily high incidences of juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, school failures, and mental, emotional and cognitive problems. For the most part, problems are getting worse, not better. Debate about the extent to which problems are caused by experiences in the home or in care rage on.

5. The stress of multiple placements (children moving between foster homes and back and forth between foster home and birth parents) has been associated with poor outcomes.

6. Most children in the system experience 3 or 4 changes of placement. Many children experience 5, 6, 0r 7 changes. These changes are painful for the child.

7. Attachment Disorder is a very serious condition that affects an individuals ability to be in relationship, form bonds, develop a conscience, experience empathy, learn impulse control and have good mental health.

8. Multiple care-givers, abrupt changes in care-givers and chaotic care-giving in the first years is associated with the development of attachment disorders.

9. Many children in care are on the attachment disorder spectrum. Many of these children have full blown Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD).

10. Preventing family breakdown in the first place, preventing foster care

breakdown and putting in proper supports for family reunification (reuniting children with their birth parents) can help prevent a child's drift through the system. New information and research from the American Pediatric Society indicates that children may continue to experience abuse and neglect when they are reunited with family. It is important that there is ongoing support and monitoring for sufficient amounts of time.

11. There has been concern raised about how we deal allocate resources to prevent family breakdown, support reunification with the birth family and provide permanency for children in care. There is a concern that we could be doing more in areas of prevention and supports for reunification.

12. Developing a permanency plan (what the goal is for the child: reunification with the birth family, adoption, etc.) early is important to the child's well being. There have been concerns about our ability to do this in a timely fashion. When we do not do this well, children can get lost in the system. This has been a real problem.

13. Changes in legislation (example: broadening the definition of child abuse) and new public awareness about reporting suspected child abuse have resulted in a flood of calls to Children's Aid Agencies.

14. There is a finite amount of resources to deal with these changes. This leads to concerns about the reduced amount of time workers are spending with clients.

15. Many front line workers report feeling taxed and overwhelmed. Many agencies report high turn over of staff. Many protection workers, who are responsible for making tough decisions, are often working at their first job.

16. Although agencies can be private they are under the mandate of the provinces. There are provincial standards, which include a set of recognized best practices and regulations, to be followed. There is concern about the lack of adherence to established policy on the part of some agencies.

17. Some agencies have been taken over by the Provincial Government for these, among other, reasons.

18. Child protection involves complex and dynamic circumstances. It is imperative

that procedures which allow for good communication between agency staff be in place. There is concern that communication between Agency staff, in some agencies, is problematic. This can and has resulted in tragic consequences.

19. It is imperative that communication between agency and birth family be open and mutual. Many birth families report feeling confused about their relationship with a social worker who is there to support the family, but may later give testimony against the family in court. Many birth families have a distrust and adversarial relationship with the agency.

20. It is important that families who are experiencing difficulty know how to reach out. The Nunn Report (Nova Scotia) highlights many of the problems families face when they try to navigate through Community Services. Lack of integration of services and communications between departments has led to serious concern and response from the Province of Nova Scotia's "Our Kids are Worth It" report.

21. It is also important that communication between agency and foster parents be consistent. Foster parent recruitment and retention have proven a huge challenge over the last number of years. In many areas, it is very hard to recruit foster parents, and when they are recruited it is very hard to keep them. Children taken from homes sometimes find themselves in motels, supervised by staff, for periods of time. When there is a lack of foster homes, matches between foster parents and children can be made on the basis of what is available instead of what is most likely to work. This can lead to multiple placements for children.

22. Children who are apprehended (removed from the home against the parent's wishes) and placed in foster care settings represent the most serious cases agencies

deal with. Removing a child from the home is always the last resort. Making sure the depth and scope of the problems that led to the child's removal have been dealt with, before returning the child to the home, is crucial. To date there is some concern about our ability to measure the effectiveness of clinical interventions with parents (ie. Imposed counselling, parenting classes, etc.). The concern lies in whether or not these measures can realistically address the severity of the problems that have led to the child's removal. This is particularly important in light of new information from the American Pediatric Society which indicates that abuse often continues when the child is reunited with the birth family. It also highlights the need for strong and ongoing supports for reunification. If children are placed back home without real changes in the conditions that led to their removal in the first place, they may be taken again. Multiple moves are very traumatic for children.

23. Among other things, foster parents report feeling devalued by the system. Many report being given little if any say in the decisions being made on behalf of the child they have come to care about. It is not unusual for foster parents to deeply dispute the decisions made by the agency. Foster parents sometimes believe lip service is paid to including them in decision making. Although some agencies do a better job than others, many feel that they are not heard. For many years, some agencies have not even included foster parents in care planning sessions. Issues with the agency is one of the leading causes of foster parent exit.

24. Foster parents can report serious and specific concerns or disputes with the agency to the agency or government officials for in house investigation. They cannot discuss the specifics of their concerns outside of the system, or make the specifics known to the public. If they do they will be asked to leave the system for breach of confidentiality. Many are concerned about exiting the system and not being there for the children they have come to care about.

25. Foster parents report making specific concerns known to the agency regarding policy and practice only to have the exact issues repeated again.

26. There are many inconsistencies within and between agencies. There are no National Standards of care across the country.

27. Even the definition of who is eligible to be considered a child varies across the country. Some Provinces do not consider someone over 16 a child. Some do. This affects services offered to the child.

28. Transition to adulthood is an extremely difficult time in any child's life. It is a particularly risky time fore children in care. Many children loose their way at this time if they do not have proper support. Many children in care age out, leaving the system to face life challenges on their own. A child in care costs the community 40 to 50 thousand dollars a year (more in some instances). A child who becomes a dysfunctional adult costs the community hundreds of thousands to millions of dollars.

29. There can be no price put on a lost future.

30. It is both unrealistic and unfair to believe that any agency can deal with these issues independently, without the insight and support of the larger community.

31. So again, children who are in care are exceptionally vulnerable children and they face extraordinary risks. Their life prospects are different than for children in the general population. What are we going to do.