

Municipal elections will take place across BC on November 19, 2011.

Purpose of the Municipal Election Kit

- To provide an overview of issues and resources to support individuals and community groups in their advocacy for BC children, youth and families.
- To support you in promoting legislation policy and practice that benefit children and youth.
- To provide you with some tools to advocate for children and youth in the upcoming election.

What is First Call?

First Call's mission is to mobilize British Columbians in support of strong public policies and the allocation of resources for the benefit of children and youth through a multi-sectoral, non-partisan coalition made up of provincial and regional organizations and engaged communities. We believe all children and youth in BC should have first call on society's resources. First Call has built a broad provincial consensus around the need to ensure all children and youth benefit from the following **Four Keys to Success**:

1. A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development (p. 2-3)
2. Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood (p. 4-5)
3. Increased Economic Equality (p. 6-8)
4. Safe and Caring Communities (p. 9-10)

Visit First Call's web site at www.firstcallbc.org for up-to-date information.

How Can You Make a Difference?

Elections are the perfect time to speak up because it is a time when politicians and candidates are really listening. Here are some ways you can **make a positive change for the youth, children and families in your community during an election campaign**:

- **Do your own research, gather credible data and prepare your arguments.**
- **Register to vote.** Investigate all candidates and parties in your city and when the big day comes, **don't forget to vote and remind your friends and family to vote!**
- **Speak to your current city councilors, school trustees and candidates** about the types of programs and facilities for children, youth and families that you would like to see funded, as well as which ones they plan to fund. Don't forget to stress that any level of government can take action!
- **Attend meetings or candidate events prior to the election and raise issues you're concerned about.** Check candidate and party web sites for upcoming events.
- **Hold a public forum.** It could be as simple as gathering friends to talk about the issues over coffee. Or, hold a larger event and invite candidates to attend. Include youth and marginalized groups in the planning and organizing if you can.
- **Join a local advocacy group** that focuses on a child and youth issue of concern to you.
- **Encourage any group of which you're a member, such as church or cultural groups, to promote child and youth issues in the campaign.**
- **Write to your local newspaper** about your concerns and what you hope your city will do about it. **Speak with the media** in your city and ask them to run a story on the needs of children, youth and families in your community.

A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development

The Role of Municipal Government

- Cities are often able to offer grants to support local services like neighborhood houses, child care spaces, recreational programming and community events that focus on young children.
- Cities are responsible for many administrative tasks, such as development zoning and registering new businesses, and can:
 - Require that child care spaces be included in new buildings;
 - Require and protect green spaces and child friendly spaces.
- School trustees have growing responsibilities for early learning.
- Boards of Education can provide stability for the many child care and drop-in programs for parents and children that operate on school sites.

The Facts

- There are nearly **223,700 children under the age of 5** living in BC, and **686,500 children under the age of 15** (BC Stats, 2010).
- The percentage of **BC children vulnerable** before entering kindergarten (e.g., struggling to hold a pencil, follow instructions, get along with peers) has **increased 2% since 2008 to over 30%** (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2010). You can find local Early Development Instrument (EDI) data for your area here: www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/maps/edi/nh/
- Full school day kindergarten is now available to all 5 year olds in all school districts.
- **Child care is second only to shelter in terms of living expenses** for families with young children in Metro Vancouver (First Call, 2011).
- Parents across BC continue to pay the bulk of the costs related to their child's care, while public spending on child care and pre-school is the lowest in Canada (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. *Research clearly shows that the early years of a child's life directly affect long-term health, behaviour and learning outcomes, which in turn impact society. What improvements will you bring to city services and supports for young children and their families?*

2. *Many parents in our community can't find quality, affordable child care, in some cases preventing them from working. What will you do to address this issue?*

3. *Will you support and encourage the use of city spaces for early childhood programs? How?*

4. *[For School Trustees] Are you in favour of bringing early childhood educators into kindergarten classrooms to support play-based learning?*

A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development

The Facts (cont'd)

- **950 BC children under age 3 were waiting** for infant **development services** in 2008 (Infant Development Program of BC) and **over 6,000 are on waitlists for early intervention services** (BC Association of Child Development and Intervention, 2008).
- **72% of married or common-law mothers** in Canada who have a **child under the age of 3 and an employed partner also are part of the workforce** (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2009).
- There are **only** approximately **90,000 licensed child care spaces** in the province. The government provides subsidies for 50,000 children (MCFD, 2009).
- A recent survey of 50 licensed child care centres found the **wait lists for available spaces average 1 to 2 years** and are growing. The problem is most severe for those seeking infant and toddler care (BCGEU, 2007).

“Children who participate in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs fare better in school, have better home lives, and are less likely to engage in criminal activity than their peers who do not attend such programs.”

Robert G. Lynch, Economic Policy Institute

Great resources for more information on this issue:

- Community Plan for a Public System of Integrated Care and Learning: www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html
- Early Childhood Development in BC – First Call’s Framework for Action: www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-framework%202008.pdf
- Human Early Learning Partnership: www.earlylearning.ubc.ca
- Children First sites: www.bcchildrenfirst.ca/communities.html
- Success by Six: www.successby6bc.ca

Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood

The Role of Municipal Government

- Boards of Education and municipal councils can give power to Youth Committees and find other creative ways for youth to have a voice on issues that concern them. They can organize youth forums so that young people can gather and discuss issues and provide valuable perspective to municipal leaders.
- Civic leaders can emphasize youth-friendly spaces in areas such as parks, community centres, schools and libraries, and cities and towns can create more safe spaces for youth to congregate.
- Municipalities can create events that children and youth can help plan and be involved in, such as art shows, festivals, performances, or sports events.
- Schools can facilitate mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers and Big Sisters.
- Cities can subsidize and increase accessibility to after-school programs offering sports and arts activities, homework clubs, and safe places to meet friends.
- Schools and cities can ensure that children and youth have access to counselors and youth workers to talk about anything from sexual health to family problems to employment.

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. *[For School Trustees] School funding for students with special needs, ESL students and Aboriginal students is in short supply. How will you advocate for these students' right to an education that meets their learning needs?*

2. *Our school/community centre has good recreational programs, but they're too expensive and the kids who really need them aren't able to afford them. How can you change this situation so that everyone has access to recreational programs?*

3. *The youth in our city have limited places to socialize safely. What are your plans for creating more public youth-friendly spaces?*

Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood

The Facts (cont'd)

- Middle childhood (ages 9-12) has been identified as a unique and critical period for developing competencies and a sense of self-worth. **Problems that arise during middle-childhood can develop into lifelong issues if left unchecked** (United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2007).
- **The 2009/10 graduation rate in BC was at one of the lowest points in 5 years** (less than 80%). The graduation rate for Aboriginal students was 50%. Low graduation rates were more common among students who were male, Aboriginal, lacked English-language skills, or had special needs (BC Ministry of Education, 2010).
- An estimated **21% of youth in care graduate from high school**. One third of these children struggle with mental wellness and behavioural issues (Representative for Children and Youth, 2007).
- **BC offers the lowest level of non-repayable student financial aid of any province**. The 2011 budget shows that BC's contributions to student **financial assistance have shrunk by nearly 20% since 2009** (Canadian Federation of Students – BC, 2011).

“...youth who feel connected and safe at home with their family, at school, and in the community have better health, take fewer risks, and have higher educational aspirations.”

[McCreary Centre Society](http://www.mcs.bc.ca)

Great resources for more information on this issue:

- McCreary Centre Society: www.mcs.bc.ca
- Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: www.fbcyicn.ca
- First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada: www.fncfcs.com
- BC Teachers' Federation: www.bctf.ca
- Representative for Children and Youth of BC: www.rcybc.ca/Content/Publications/Reports.asp
- United Way of the Lower Mainland: www.uwlm.ca/why-united-way/overview?quicktabs_3=3#quicktabs-3
- Canadian Federation of Students-BC: www.cfs.bc.ca
- Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement www.engagementcentre.ca

Increased Economic Equality

The Role of Municipal Government

- Cities can pay their employees a living wage and can agree to only contract for services with companies that pay a living wage.
- Public schools can reduce or eliminate fees that act as barriers to inclusion for low-income students.
- Cities can demand that the provincial government address poverty and inequality issues through tax and social policy investments.
- Cities can stop low-income housing from being demolished, or they can require that new developments have a mix of market housing and social housing.
- Municipal governments can advocate for reduced fare or free transit passes for low-income families.
- Municipalities can increase food security. Governments can ensure through zoning that low-income neighbourhoods have access to reasonably priced, quality fruits and vegetables. Cities can support community gardens, and schools can provide healthy meals and nutritional information to students.
- Municipalities can provide free or discounted recreational services and access to programs for low-income children, youth and families.

The Facts

- The child poverty rate in British Columbia rose to 12 percent in 2009, according to the latest figures published by Statistics Canada (LICO after-tax). The number of poor children was 100,000 - or about one of every seven BC children. The poverty rate for all British Columbians was also 12 percent in 2009 (First Call, 2011).
- Lone-parent families headed by mothers have one of the highest poverty rates of any families in BC (First Call, 2010).
- The vast majority of BC's poor children live in families with some income from paid work (First Call, 2010).

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. *New immigrant and Aboriginal families are far more likely to live in poverty than other families with children. What would you do to help these families in our community?*

2. *Most poor children come from working families. Will you commit to adopting a municipal bylaw requiring the city to pay a living wage to both its employees and contract staff?*

3. *The Federation of Canadian Municipalities was instrumental in getting the Campaign 2000 agenda to eliminate child poverty into the federal spotlight. What is this municipality going to do to ensure that child poverty is not ignored?*

4. *School and community centre fees remain a significant barrier to low-income families. How will you ensure that children and families have equal access to the benefits of school and community programs?*

Increased Economic Equality

The Facts (cont'd)

- **40% of BC Aboriginal children under the age of 6 who were living off reserve lived in a low income family**, compared to 18% of non-Aboriginal children under 6 (Statistics Canada, 2008, Census 2006).
- **The gap between low and high income earners in BC has been growing.** The income ratio between the richest and poorest deciles of families with children in BC rose from 9 to 1 in 1989 to 14 to 1 in 2008 (First Call, 2010).
- **8,000 families with children were on welfare in BC in 2010, compared to under 5,000 families in 2007** (annual averages, expected to work category)(BC Statistics, 2011).
- **A BC two-parent family with two children aged 10 and 15 on income assistance received a total income of \$21,179 in 2009. That's a whopping \$20,128 less than the Statistics Canada poverty line** for a large urban area like Vancouver. A BC lone-parent family with one child aged 2 received \$16,899, or \$10,775 less than the poverty line (National Council of Welfare, 2011).
- See next page for more information on the **Living Wage for Families Campaign**.

"The ... major source of revenue for municipalities – charges and user fees – can have a serious impact upon access to locally supported programs, such as cultural events and recreational facilities and programs. User fees inadvertently have become an insidious form of exclusion."

Sherri Torjman and Eric Leviten-Reid, Caledon Institute of Social

Great resources for more information on this issue:

- First Call: www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/economicquality/3-reportcard2010.pdf
- SPARC BC: www.sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/43/poverty
- UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre: www.unicef-irc.org
- Campaign 2000: www.campaign2000.ca
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives: www.policyalternatives.ca
- National Council of Welfare: www.ncw.gc.ca
- For **poverty statistics in your community** go to: www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/dd/facsheet/facsheet.asp

Increased Economic Equality A Living Wage for Families



54 BC organizations, representing over 300,000 people, are calling on candidates and parties running for municipal council in 2011 to commit that, if elected, they will adopt a Living Wage Policy that ensures that all staff and contracted workers are paid a Living Wage.

- **High living expenses and low wages mean that tens of thousands of working families are living in poverty in BC.** For eight years running, our province has had the highest child poverty rate in Canada. Child poverty in BC is very much a low-wage story; the vast majority of BC's poor children live in families with working parents.
- **Parents in low-wage jobs are trying to bring up children with one hand tied behind their back.** Families who work for low wages face impossible choices — buy food or heat the house, feed the children or pay the rent. The result can be spiraling debt, constant anxiety & long-term health problems.
- **Municipal government is paying a large price for the low-wage sector.** When children live in poverty, or when parents are compelled to work multiple jobs to stay afloat and end up with little time with their children, all of society pays the price, and not least the municipal governments and school boards that must consequently pay in additional services and policing costs.
- **Living Wages are a simple and just solution.** Receiving a living wage would allow families with children to escape poverty and severe financial stress. It would support healthy childhood development, and permit families to participate in the social, civic and cultural lives of our communities.
- **Local government has a responsibility to play a leadership role.** We look to our local governments to help raise the bar — to set a higher standard. If enough local governments become living wage employers, they will create a market for those local service contractors who in turn pay the living wage.
- **Living Wages are good for business.** Better pay translates directly into a healthier local economy. Low-income families spend almost all their money close to home. And businesses that have adopted the living wage report higher productivity and reduced turnover.

We urge those seeking office in November to run on a platform of turning our cities and towns into living wage communities. In doing so, our BC local governments would join with more 140 US cities that have a living wage policy in place. The living wage would help make our communities truly livable for all.

For more info visit: www.livingwageforfamilies.ca

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. *High living expenses mean that many families aren't earning enough to make ends meet. Will you commit to making our city a leader in the fight against poverty by passing a Living Wage Policy?*
2. *Do you agree that our tax dollars shouldn't be spent on city contracts that pay below a living wage?*
3. *Given that Municipal Government and Boards of Education are paying a large price for the low-wage sector due to the cost of additional services and policing costs associated with rising poverty and inequality, shouldn't our city be showing leadership by passing a Living Wage Policy?*

Safe and Caring Communities

The Role of Municipal Government

- Cities can create green spaces and parks that are diverse in use and location, and schools can make sure they have safe playground equipment and sports resources.
- Municipalities can support and promote free, low-cost and family-friendly festivals, celebrations, public performances and sports events.
- Schools can ensure they create safe communities for *all* students, including Aboriginal; gay, lesbian, and transgender; immigrant and refugee; low-income; and special needs students.
- Municipal and regional governments can pass restrictive use bylaws regulating cosmetic pesticides to protect residents and the environment. [Over 170 cities and towns](#) across Canada have passed partial or full bans on pesticide use. Local governments cannot stop the sale of pesticides - this is a provincial responsibility.
- Simple structures such as small walls, fountains, designs in the pavement, or water ways have a positive effect on children's lives and are relatively easy for cities to work into their design plans.
- Creating more bike routes and including them in new road structures will positively affect recreation, health and community cohesiveness, and increase bicycle safety.

Sample Questions for Candidates

1. *[For school trustees] Research shows that youth who are strongly connected to school have higher self-esteem and better mental health. How do you plan to strengthen connections between youth, especially marginalized youth, and their schools?*
2. *If you are elected, how would you make sure our city is family, child and youth inclusive?*
3. *Recreation and parks play an important role in keeping children healthy, particularly those from low-income families. How will you ensure that all children have access to safe and diverse ways to play in our community?*
4. *Are you aware that our community has [or doesn't have] a ban on the cosmetic use of pesticides? Will you support a provincial ban on the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides?*

Safe and Caring Communities

The Facts

- A recent survey of children's after-school experiences found 43% of children were involved in technology-based activities after-school (TV, computer), and **49% said they wished they could be doing more physical activities**. 12% wished they could be spending more time with friends (United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2007).
- 15 % of parents surveyed were 'somewhat' or 'very dissatisfied' with the way their children spent their after-school time. Parents identified **transportation, time availability, and cost as the most significant barriers to having their child in a supervised activity after school**. **Over 10% of children ages 9-12 were left unsupervised after school** (United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2007).
- **Injury remains the number one cause of death among children and youth in BC**. Drowning and motor vehicle crashes were the leading causes. From 2003-2007 an **average of 104 BC children and youth died annually from unintentional injuries** (BC Injury Research Prevention Unit, 2010).

Local governments are in a position to promote awareness of the pressing social needs in the community and of the importance of social investment. They can foster a sense of responsibility for social well-being among all sectors including business, community groups and other levels of government.

Sherri Torjman and Eric Leviten-Reid,
Caledon Institute of Social Policy

Great resources for more information on this issue:

- BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities: www.bccssc.ca
- Canadian Association for the Child's Right to Play: www.ipacanada.org
- BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit: www.injuryresearch.bc.ca
- BC Crime Prevention Association: www.bccpa.org
- BC Association for Community Living: www.bcacl.org