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First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of April 14, 2010 BC Teachers' Federation Building

In attendance:

Kristina Dixon – Canadian Mental Health Association
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association
Julie Norton – First Call
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing
Megan Yarema – Canada Without Poverty
Sara Shaw – School Age Child Care Association of BC
Andrina Perry – First Call
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Jonathan Chapnick – BCGEU
Linda Korbin – BC Association of Social Workers
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association
Magnolia Villalobos – Richmond Women's Resource Centre
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Wilma Clarke – Office of the Representative for Children and Youth

Colleen Bob – Red Cross RespectED
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth
Michael McCarthy Flynn – First Call
Christina Thiele – Society for Children and Youth
Julie Renton – Westcoast Family Resources Society
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
Carrie McLellan-Haqq – Richmond Society for Community Living
Nikki Winter – Public Health Agency of Canada
Rishima Bahadoorsingh – AMSSA
Mike Clarke – BCGEU
Alison Brewin – Westcoast LEAF

On phone:

Theresa Hermary – Interior Health

Regrets:

Tami Overbeck – Sea to Sky Community Services
Jason Chan – SUCCESS
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society

1. Introductions

Chair Julie Norton opened the meeting, and there was a round of introductions.

2. First Call Reports and Updates

Early Childhood Development Roundtable

The Roundtable is making recommendations to government on the implementation of full school-day kindergarten, and had an update from BCTF's Margaret White at the last meeting. In reviewing the state of funding for early years supports and services, \$95 million in one-time only federal funding for ECD has now dried up; this is not noted as a cut, of course, but it is still a blow to the field. It's possible that the government's contribution to Success By 6 funding will be reinstated given the reaction from the other partners involved in the initiative, but at this time government is only committed to funding it until the end of this financial year at 50% of former funding levels.

Living Wage for Families Campaign

New Westminster city council will be considering a staff report that should come out soon on whether or not to adopt a living wage bylaw. A new calculation of the living wage rate for Metro Vancouver is coming out in early May. A Living Wage Roundtable will be held on May 11 to update stakeholders on the campaign's progress [find out more at www.livingwageforfamilies.ca].

Campaign to Repeal Refugee Transportation Loans

First Call sent a poll to BC MP's in 2009 asking if they supported repealing the refugee transportation loan program, and we now have a volunteer helping to follow up with MP's offices so we can publish the responses.

Fundraising

First Call has received a \$4500 grant from Coast Capital Savings to work on strategic planning.

Outreach

Adrienne recently traveled to Prince George with Helesia Luke to do a workshop at the BCTF conference, and Adrienne went to Kelowna for a presentation with the CATCH coalition.

3. Cuts to Child and Youth Serving Sectors

Lists were distributed with cuts tracked by First Call and the Health Sciences Association. There are subtle cuts that aren't clear from Ministry budgets, but money is being moved around and still impacting programs and services. Many government announcements of new money and investments aren't really new and have been announced previously. We should be advocating for transparency.

We can't measure the cumulative impact of cuts until further down the road, and it's very hard to track the actual amounts cut and moved. Please keep First Call up to date on what's happening in your organization.

We could ask the auditor general or ombudsperson to look at budget cuts. The auditor general's office has also been cut.

Uniting around some key messages about the cuts would be helpful, such as "kids are only young once" or "isn't one job enough?" Use cost-benefit information as a focus, e.g. about the cost of poverty or the cost of limited access to child care. The audience for our message is the public. It is also important to send letters to your MLA's opposing the cuts.

Canada Without Poverty is considering doing a cost of poverty in Canada report. Ontario has a similar report, and one is in progress for BC.

4. Provincial Legal Aid Cuts and Impacts

Alison Brewin of West Coast Legal Education and Action Fund:

West Coast LEAF formed to ensure that courts interpret equality legislation appropriately. Inequality often plays out when relationships break down and parties have unequal access to justice.

The best known aspect of the legal aid structure is criminal legal aid; criminal charges mean the right to a lawyer. This part of legal aid has seen some cuts.

Civil legal aid includes family law, poverty law, and immigration law, and the province has cut every aspect of civil legal aid that is not protected by the constitution. The government funds Legal Services Society to provide legal aid and legal education. 40% of their budget was cut in 2003. At that time, the board said they could not continue. The board was fired,

and now government appoints most of the board. Legal Services Society is now more like an arm of government. They are not allowed to run a deficit.

LSS will fund emergency family law, which consists of 14-15 hours of legal support for cases involving physical assault or the risk of a parent leaving the country with their children.

80% of criminal legal aid goes to men facing these charges, while 88% of civil legal aid is accessed by women. In order to access legal aid, you must have a very low income. Lawyers sometimes run out of time and can't get more money from LSS to go to trial.

LSS laid off numerous staff in 2009 and 2010. The Law Foundation has funded some poverty law advocates, and the Canadian Bar Association is holding a people's commission which will travel around the province to collect stories and information on what reduced access or no access to legal aid looks like.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives is updating their *Legal Aid Denied* report. This Saturday is law day, and there will be a panel discussion on legal aid.

Legal aid is more accessible in other provinces – Alberta has a sliding scale system that middle income people can access, and Ontario recently added \$135 million to their family law system.

5. Submissions to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth

First Call partners are encouraged to share information with this committee of the provincial legislature for their planned meeting on child poverty. Send stories from your organization and personal stories about the experience of poverty, and share them with First Call too. More details about this meeting will be circulated when they become available.

6. Alternative Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

To collect input for the alternative report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children, meeting participants worked in small groups to identify their observations about the current situation for children and youth in BC and Canada, and recommendations for public policy change. These observations will be forwarded to the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children and the alternative report will be circulated via First Call's network when it is completed.

7. Partner Updates

Today is the Day of Pink against bullying and homophobia – visit www.dayofpink.org to learn about the day's origins.

April 28 is the international day of mourning for people who have died because of work, and ceremonies will take place around the province. 6 young workers died last year in BC, but WorkSafe BC won't release their exact ages. A moment of silence will take place at 11:00 AM.

West Coast LEAF is launching a youth education web site at the end of April.

BC Society for Public Education held a successful meeting protesting education cuts in Vancouver. A 2-4% shortfall is expected in all school districts. These cuts impact everyone, not just parents and their children.

8. Time and Date of Next Meeting: May 12, 2010. Refreshments served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6th Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.