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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of April 8, 2009  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Carol Anderson – Westcoast Family Resource Society  
Ruth Annis – Consultant, (Chair)  
Colleen Bob – RespectED, Red Cross  
Bella Cenezero – Parent Support Services Society of BC  
Lisa Chapeskie – Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion  
Mike Clarke – BCGEU  
Wilma Clarke – Representative for Children and Youth  
Susan Forest – Justice Institute of BC, Centre for Counselling and Community Safety  
Simone Fournel – MCFD Advocacy Team  
Sue Irwin - Vancouver Coastal Child Care Resource & Referral  
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society  
Michael McCarthy Flynn – Living Wage Campaign  
John Millar – Health Officers Council  
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Adrienne Montani – First Call

Andrina Perry – First Call  
Lesley Richardson – First Call  
Magnolia Villalobos – Richmond Women's Resource Centre  
Andy Wachtel – Consultant  
Joanne Wooldridge – Vancouver Coastal Health  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland

**On phone:**

Mary Dolan – Chemainus, BC  
Melissa Hyland – Office to Combat Trafficking in Persons, Solicitor General

**Regrets:**

Anne O'Neill - Society for Children and Youth of BC  
Wanda Gendron – Western Society for Children  
Kathleen Sheils – Western Society for Children  
Michael Goldberg – First Call

## **1. Introductions**

Chair Ruth Annis opened the meeting.

## **2. First Call Reports and Updates**

### **Coordinating Committee**

We have welcomed several new members to First Call's Coordinating Committee: Jocelyn Helland from Federation of BC Youth In Care Networks, Karen Lai from SPARC BC, and Matthew Ross, who is a mental health worker and foster parent. Many thanks and best wishes to Rebecca Siggner who has left SPARC BC for a new position with BC Housing.

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable**

At the April roundtable, Lynell Anderson presented HELP recommendations to government, which she will present again later during this meeting. BC Council for Families reported out on the survey data collected from recipients of the \$20 million in one-time only child care funding they distributed. Their survey had a 10% response rate, which should lead to some caution in generalizing the results. The survey did not track the type of child care centre by respondent, so while only 30% said that recruitment was a top issue, many of the respondents may have been family providers who do not need to recruit. Still, this issue was at the top of the list of challenges identified by respondents. The report is available on the BC Council for Families web site.

Early Childhood Educators of BC conducted a survey of members on wages and working conditions, among other issues, and found that many child care workers don't receive MSP coverage and extended health through their employment. Complete results are available on the ECEBC web site.

### **Living Wage Campaign**

We will have a more extensive update on this campaign at the May meeting. Westcoast LEAF has written an advocacy letter to Vancouver City Council in support of the living wage, and the Richmond Community Services Advisory Committee has also written to Richmond City Council. We have raised enough money now to hire a campaign organizer.

### **Other News**

Last week there was a social services summit to support the formation of a unified, stronger voice for the sector, with the goal of increasing recognition of the value the sector brings to creating safe and caring communities.

A lot of work is underway around the call for a poverty reduction plan for BC and trying to get provincial parties to sign on to it. Many other provinces already have plans, and a deadline has been set for April 28 for them to commit. Their responses will be publicized. Organizations and individuals are encouraged to sign on in support at [www.bcpovertyreduction.ca](http://www.bcpovertyreduction.ca).

### **3. Ministry Service Plans**

Last month we looked at service plans and performance measures for Ministry of Children and Family Development and Ministry of Education. This is an opportunity for additional feedback.

Discussion:

Often the performance measures are very narrow.

The Ministry of Education should include responding to needs based on functional assessments.

Child care needs to be included.

Things that have not been addressed include:

- International measures
- Qualitative measures
- MCFD should focus more on prevention rather than foster care
- Ministry of Education satisfaction surveys are a poor measure
- Investments in education would have a greater impact on health than more money put into health care
- People are voting with their feet by moving their children to private schools due to underfunding of the public education system.

We will continue to revisit the best way to give feedback to government on the performance measures we need for key measurements of child and youth well-being.

#### **4. Human Early Learning Partnership Recommendations to Government**

Lynell Anderson:

Within the provincial government, there is an inter-ministry team working on an early years strategy. The government's strategic plan has set a goal of reducing young children's vulnerability in BC to 15% by 2015 ("15 by 15"). (It currently stands at about 30%, as measured by the Early Development Instrument results.) HELP has made five recommendations to them to help achieve this goal. The BC Business Council has also asked HELP to write a paper on healthy childhood development.

This presentation was developed by Clyde Hertzman, Paul Kershaw, Bill Warburton and Lynell. Bill and Lynell are working on costing out the recommendations. Their aim was to bring together a holistic overview of what families need for support. The recommendations are:

##### Family time and resources

1. Build on parental leave, by working with the federal government to:
  - a. Increase duration to 18 months
  - b. Improve coverage
  - c. Improve benefit levels
  - d. Reserve time for fathers
2. Build on income support policies to reduce child and family poverty:
  - a. Raise welfare rates
  - b. Enhance family/individual work tax credits and/or minimum wage levels
  - c. Make ECEC services available and affordable
    - i. Strengthen and increase labour force attachment, increase net incomes
  - d. Adapt employment standards to shorten full-time hours
    - i. improve work/life balance and reduce family time-poverty

##### Community supports

3. Sustain and support ECD coalitions, community planning
4. Pregnancy, parenting and early intervention
  - a. Build on ECD programs and services – pregnancy, parenting and early learning resources, screening and intervention, coalition and planning tables, etc.
  - b. Coordinate and integrate with ECEC services
  - c. Specifically, prior to 18 months add universal monthly trajectory-based monitoring of ECD
  - d. Includes accountability framework to monitor effectiveness of policy implementation
5. Build on early childhood education and care to provide:
  - a. Universal access to quality ECEC, with inclusion
  - b. Seamless transitions to elementary school

The recommendations are built from international evidence. While none are more important than any other, in BC the areas requiring the most attention now, because we are doing poorly on them, are early childhood education and care and income supports.

If women weren't working, family poverty would be three times as high as it is now. There has been a strong dip in the number of unemployed people receiving employment insurance (the rate is now less than 50%). The gender gap closed between 1990 to 1995, but has now opened again, with less than 40% of unemployed women receiving EI. The amount of benefit has also dropped.

In Sweden, child vulnerability is 10-15%. While Canada has a middle of the pack competitiveness ranking among developed countries, we can't stay competitive over the long term without strong family policy.

UNICEF recommends spending of 1% of GDP on Early Childhood Education and Care – BC currently spends 0.2%. BC has licensed ECEC spaces for about 30% of its 3 to 5 year olds, but only 5% for children under the age of 3.

## **5. Update from the Representative for Children and Youth's Office**

Wilma Clarke:

The Representative's office is an independent office of the legislature, and deals with concerns with government funded services. The office is founded on the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The advocacy function of the office works to ensure that voices are heard and needs are met, and to make recommendations for systemic improvement. Advocates assist people to be self-advocates, connect them to community supports, and take on direct advocacy cases when necessary. The office also supports community capacity to do advocacy. They are not a decision making body and cannot act as legal counsel or court representatives. They do have powers to obtain information on children being served by the government.

There are three offices around BC in Victoria, Burnaby, and Prince George, and advocates are assigned regionally. Information is not shared without permission, unless there is a child safety issue. An intake analyst receives all the initial calls, and makes appropriate referrals if the caller is an adult, or assigns an advocate. Children and youth speak directly to an advocate, who may support their advocacy efforts or advocate on their behalf.

Aboriginal issues are common, including controversy around children being adopted by non-Aboriginal families. They have also been receiving a lot of calls regarding the transferring of files to dedicated Aboriginal agencies, and issues with youth agreements and agreements with young adults.

Supported child development funding has been an issue for children with special needs; they are seeing a shift in priorities with older children and teens not getting access to funding, even though they are still vulnerable but the challenges are different.

The Child in the Home of a Relative program has been brought into the mandate of the Representative's office. There are many concerns about adequate funding within this program for high needs children, and the adequacy of information given to caregivers about other, higher resourced options.

Education is not in their mandate, nor is custody and access, except if there is a child safety issue.

They have opened 1560 new advocacy files in the past year, and advocates carry a caseload of 20 active files. The Fraser region is currently the most active. They are doing some advocacy outreach and conducting child rights workshops. Priority communities have been identified in each region:

North: Deas Lake, Fort Nelson, Prince Rupert, Dawson Creek, Smithers, Queen Charlottes/Haida Gwai

Interior: Williams Lake, Kelowna, Invermere, Lillooet, Fraser, Hope, Mission, Coquitlam, Surrey

Vancouver Coastal: Sechelt, Bella Coola, Squamish, Vancouver

Vancouver Island: Campbell River, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, Port Hardy

Outside of the advocacy work, they released a new critical injury and death report in March, and a number of recent monitoring reports on youth justice, child deaths in the north, compliance with the recommendations in the Hughes review, children with special needs, and the health and well-being of children and youth.

They are looking at a new approach to monitoring child and youth well-being, and will undertake a more holistic "state of the child" report, which is currently in the literature review phase. This will bring in recommendations from other reports, and will be released in spring 2010.

**6. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** May 13, 2009, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.