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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of April 9, 2008  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Ruth Fahlman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Gladys Evoy – YWCA Crabtree Corner  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Lesley Richardson – First Call  
Ginny Gonneau – Society for Children and Youth  
Carrie Smith – SPARC BC  
Jill Atkey – SPARC BC  
Jane Thornthwaite – BC School Trustees' Assoc.  
Michael Goldberg – First Call  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Teresa Lum – Representative for Children and Youth  
Tina Crouse – Dunbar Make Poverty History  
Bob Bowles – Langley Students with Special Needs  
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families  
Erin Henderson – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Valerie Inglis – Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks  
Lorette Tataryn – Westcoast Family Resource  
Beatrice Adjouz – Canadian Red Cross – RespectED  
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society  
John Millar – Health Officers' Council  
Mike Clarke – BC Government and Service Employees' Union  
Raphael Santurette – SPARC BC  
WeiHsi Hu – Society for Children and Youth/SPARC BC

Tricia Millman – Service Canada  
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Health – Population Health  
Jason Chan – S.U.C.C.E.S.S.  
Hanna Varto – Vancouver Coastal Health  
Rebecca Siggner – SPARC BC  
Yvonne Hii – City of Vancouver Social Planning  
Karen DeLong – BC Association of Community Living  
Sandy Cooke – Federation of BC Youth in Care  
Sylvia Bishop – BC Teachers' Federation  
Jocelyn Helland – Federation of BC Youth in Care  
Nathan Parnell – Federation of BC Youth in Care  
Summer Rain Bentham – Federation of BC Youth in Care

**On phone:**

Shawn Hoey – Caring for First Nations Children Society  
Laurie Fisher – Queen Alexandra Foundation

**Regrets:**

Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Julie Norton – BC Council for Families  
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Jacqueline Smit Alex – Human Early Learning Partnership

Chair Michael Goldberg opened the meeting.

**1) Coalition Partner Updates**

**New partner organizations:**

A number of new partners have joined the coalition since July 2007. They are:

- Centre for Safe Schools and Communities
- Vancouver Coastal Health – Population Health
- Health Officers' Council of BC
- Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
- Caring for First Nations Children Society
- Autism Society of BC
- Hospital Employees' Union
- Canadian Jewish Congress, Pacific Region

We welcome these new partners and look forward to working with them.

**Law Society of BC:**

The Law Society is holding a Public Forum on Youth and the Law on Wednesday, May 21 at SFU Harbour Centre from 6 – 8:30 PM. Speakers will include the Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. Stay tuned to First Call's Weekly Announcements for more details.

**Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC:**

CCCABC is holding their Annual General Meeting tonight, with speakers Adrienne Montani from First Call and Dr. Deb Brennan from Australia.

**Health Officers' Council of BC:**

Vancouver Coastal Health is holding a symposium on Inequities and Health, taking place on April 29. The symposium is now full, but presentations will be available online.

**Parking at Coalition Meetings:**

Please remember that free parking is available for coalition meeting attendees on the third level of the underground parking lot at the BCTF building, however, the only spaces that we may use are those marked with a red triangle, and you MUST have a parking pass displayed on your windshield. If you park elsewhere in the lot or do not display the pass, you will have to pay the charges. Passes are available from reception and inside the meeting room.

**2) Jordan's Principle Resolution**

The federal and provincial governments have agreed to adopt Jordan's Principle, and we are asking for a commitment to implementation. Partners first received First Call's resolution in support of Jordan's Principle in February, including an overview of the coalition's decision-making policy. We are asking for support of four things from the government. The text is as follows:

*As a Coalition, First Call supports the full implementation of Jordan's Principle through legislation. We call on the government of British Columbia to follow through on its commitment to supporting Jordan's Principle by:*

- *Bringing a bill to the provincial legislature for a vote that confirms British Columbia's commitment to implementing a child first principle, based on Jordan's Principle, to resolve jurisdictional disputes involving the care of First Nations children without disrupting services to or negatively impacting the quality of life of First Nations children;*
- *Including in the proposed bill a commitment to immediate implementation of the principle when the dispute is between provincial ministries;*
- *Including in the proposed bill a timeline for concluding negotiations with the federal government on the implementation of the principle in the case of federal-provincial disputes;*
- *Working on an ongoing basis to ensure adequate support and care for First Nations children across ministries and jurisdictions.*

First Call has received a number of written statements in support of Jordan's Principle from partner organizations, with no stated opposition to date. Does anyone present have a comment on this matter? [Floor opened for discussion.]

The Health Officers' Council is in favour.

Caring for First Nations Children Society put forward the idea of having the document translated into Cree to honour Jordan's family. Shawn will look into this. Lynn McBride may also have a contact for translation.

The resolution was approved by consensus.

### **3) SPARC BC Report on Welfare Rates and Cost of Living**

SPARC BC (Social Planning and Research Council) has been reporting on the adequacy of income assistance rates since the mid 1980's. These reports, including the recently released *Still Left Behind*, analyze the gap between income assistance rates and the actual cost of living. [Download the report at [http://www.sparc.bc.ca/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_details&Itemid=110&gid=252](http://www.sparc.bc.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&Itemid=110&gid=252)]

This report is based on five different family structures; for the purposes of this presentation they will focus on a single adult, a single parent with one child, and two parents with two children.

It is difficult to rent an apartment with the shelter amount allotted on income assistance. Fewer than 1% of apartments in Vancouver are this inexpensive. A single adult can expect to spend \$645 on an apartment, or \$707.84 including utilities and phone, yet this person would only be receiving \$610 in total from income assistance, with a shelter portion of \$375.

A single parent with one child would receive \$945.58 in income assistance benefits, with \$570 allotted for shelter, but should expect to pay \$840 in rent or \$908.33 for rent, utilities and phone.

In addition to rent and utilities, the SPARC report also examines the costs of food, clothing, transportation, child care, personal care and household items. Families are forced to use their child care benefit to cover other costs such as clothing.

The authors found that income assistance rates fall dramatically short of actual costs of living. The shortfalls are: \$752.20 a month for a single person, \$509.46 for a parent with a 3-year old child, and \$790.33 for two parents with two young children. For the families with children, these shortfalls take the child tax benefit and universal child care benefit into account. Without these federal benefits, income assistance would only cover 52% of expenses for the one parent family and 42% of expenses for the two parent family.

The report makes a number of recommendations, including:

- Income assistance should reflect the actual cost of living
- People in the expected to work category should have an earnings exemption
- The child care subsidy should cover the actual cost of child care
- BC should implement a poverty reduction strategy

### **Discussion**

Where does one have to shop in order to afford food while on income assistance? The costs used in the report are based on Canada's healthy food basket, and prices are averaged across the province. The report tries to be conservative in its costs. People on income assistance are having to buy older food and shop around for bargains.

The report doesn't address social housing or housing for people with chronic mental illnesses. This report just assesses costs and supports for those in the expected to work category of income assistance. Affordable housing would be part of a provincial poverty reduction strategy.

On yesterday's release of numbers from the homeless count, the media didn't pick up on the stagnant rate of people in shelters, which reflects the lack of new shelter spaces. The rate of street homelessness has increased by 37%. The essential stock of housing has not increased.

The Health Officers' Council could find resources to fund an economic or business argument for the provision of housing. We know that low income people have poorer health.

There is anecdotal evidence that there are more homeless moms. SPARC so far has counted 17 children living on the street. It is hard to count people living in cars, couch-surfing, etc.

The rental assistance program does not impact those on income assistance, it is only for working families.

Jill (one of the report's authors) met with Minister of Employment and Income Assistance Claude Richmond. They talked about a poverty reduction strategy. The Ministry feels that earnings exemptions prevent people from moving to employment.

#### **4) Introductions**

Introductions took place after all presenters had arrived.

#### **5) YouthSpeak by Youth from Care**

##### **Introductions**

Nathan Parnell was in government care for twelve years as a child, and is currently studying child and youth care at the post-secondary level. Summer Rain Bentham grew up in care. Both are of Aboriginal backgrounds.

##### **Background**

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks is an organization that works to raise awareness, mentor, and do systemic advocacy for and on behalf of youth in and from care. A YouthSpeak manual has been developed for BC, and YouthSpeaks have been taking place since 1999. YouthSpeak is an event for young people to express opinions and make recommendations to decision-makers.

Five priorities for youth in care were identified at the YouthSpeak held at FBCYICN's October 2007 Steering Committee Meeting. In November 2007, these issues were presented to 30 decision-makers at the YouthSpeak Report Out.

The priority issues are:

- More inspections and surprise visits of foster homes and group homes
- More foster homes that are family oriented
- More respect for the lives of youth – youth are people, not numbers
- Support for youth in care to see their families

- More respect for the rights of youth in care

Respect for youth in care: youth in care should be assessed by their strengths, not the risks. Youth in care should have face to face meetings with new foster parents before moving in to help with the transition. Youth should have access to an appeal process within MCFD. Social workers should use youth-friendly language. Youth should have regular meetings with their social worker at least every month – if they're not meeting with their social worker they often struggle to have their needs met. Don't stereotype youth in care – get to know them. Let them know the plans for them ahead of time.

Foster homes should be family oriented and culturally appropriate. There should be surprise inspections of foster homes; currently, most surprise inspections are of family homes after a child is returned from care.

Youth need support in transitioning to independence from care. Youth are currently being lost to the streets and SROs. The transitioning process needs to start earlier so youth are prepared for leaving care. Youth should have access to health care until they are 25. Aboriginal youth should be connected back to their bands and elders for support. Youth should be encouraged to work starting at 16, and moved to youth agreements for their last two years in care. They should have follow up meetings with their social worker after turning 19.

Youth should be supported in maintaining family connections and have a support person attend family visits. Siblings in care should not be separated.

Youth need tools for school, such as computers and internet access. They need support to graduate. Post-secondary funding should be extended to all youth in care, not just permanent wards. Youth need access to extra-curricular activities. Youth should not have to travel long distances to school, and should have the right to stay at the same school even if moving homes.

The decision-makers left the November YouthSpeak Report Out with many questions, particularly Minister Christensen. He said that MCFD have and will continue to benefit from YouthSpeaks.

## **Discussion**

Thanks to Summer Rain and Nathan for an excellent and informative presentation.

What determines temporary versus permanent ward status? The process is complicated. Generally, those considered temporary wards are expected to go back to their families at some point in the future.

Children living on reserve don't have access to the same post-majority funding as other youth in care.

Youth in care do not have any clear support system in schools. Aboriginal outreach workers are helpful, but they don't generally know that much about MCFD and foster care. Individual education plans for youth in care are not necessarily helpful.

Perhaps we should argue that youth should be able to continue living with families into their 20's for increased support in transitioning out of care.

[Download the YouthSpeak report at:  
[http://fbcyicn.ca/files/youth\\_participation/youthspeak07.pdf](http://fbcyicn.ca/files/youth_participation/youthspeak07.pdf)]

**6) Time and Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday, May 14, 2008, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.