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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of December 9, 2009  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Marla Tynan – MCFD Advocacy Team  
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing  
Karen Lai – SPARC BC  
Steven Klein – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA  
Nicole Mate – BC Women's and Children's Aboriginal Health  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Julie Norton – First Call  
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Mike Clarke – BCGEU  
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Julie Renton – Westcoast Family Resources Society  
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families  
Breann Specht – Vancouver Coastal Health  
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Health  
Sanja Sladojevic – Windows of Opportunity Coalition  
Sharon Hoyland – Roots and Seeds of Empathy  
Shamus Reid – Canadian Federation of Students  
Michael McCarthy Flynn – First Call  
Helesia Luke – BC Society for Public Education

Lesley Richardson – First Call  
John Coward – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Donna Tennant – First Call  
Bill Preston – BC School Trustee's Association  
Mae Burrows – Toxic Free Canada  
Colleen Bob – Red Cross – RespectEd  
Sarette Rogers – MCFD  
Susan Papadionissiou – Office of ECD, Learning and Care, Surrey  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Jocelyn Helland – Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks

**On phone:**

Theresa Hermary – Interior Health  
Carol Burbee – Northern Lights College

**Regrets:**

John Millar – Health Officers Council  
Wanda Gendron – Western Society for Children  
Kathleen Shiels – Western Society for Children

## **1. Introductions**

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

## **2. Child Poverty Report Card in Action**

The annual BC Child Poverty Report Card was released by First Call in November. It received positive media coverage with at least 40 newspaper hits around the province. The government responded by releasing a "For the Record" document arguing that the report card is a good news story.

[[http://www.gov.bc.ca/fortherecord/childpoverty/cp\\_poverty.html?src=/children/cp\\_poverty.html](http://www.gov.bc.ca/fortherecord/childpoverty/cp_poverty.html?src=/children/cp_poverty.html)].

### **Presentation by Matt Thompson:**

Matt reviewed the data in the report card. BC has had the worst rate of child poverty in Canada for six years in a row. Despite a strong economy in 2007, the rate was 18.8% (LICO before tax). The national rate for Aboriginal children under 6 years old was 49%. The poverty rates for 2008 and 2009 will likely be higher due to the economic downturn and lack of government action.

The risk of poverty varies by family type; those in female lone parent families in particular are at a much greater risk. Persistence of poverty is common for children; more than half of poor children were poor for at least four of 6 years (between 2002 and 2007).

Causes of poverty include low wages and low welfare rates, coupled with high costs of living. Total income for 2-parent families with two children on welfare in 2007 was \$20,283 a year, or only 50% of the before-tax poverty line. Government transfers (e.g. direct subsidies or tax credits) are effective at poverty reduction, and every other province does better than BC at reducing poverty through transfers.

### **Discussion on taking action and using the Report Card to mobilize:**

First Call is distributing business cards with the messaging "Yes, it's true!" on the front and "BC: the worst child poverty rate in Canada for six years in a row." These are great for handing out at events and leaving in public places. **Contact First Call to receive cards to distribute.**

A Senate Committee report on poverty has just been released which makes a number of recommendations including implementing a federal minimum wage of \$10. On Nov. 24, the House of Commons passed a motion to "develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all".

The For the Record document released by the provincial government ignores the long term trends in poverty. First Call should do a press release every month challenging their statements and clarifying the facts.

BC Teachers' Federation invites submissions to their Social Justice newsletter for distribution at their upcoming conference by January 15. Promote the report card in the newsletters of other partner organizations.

Emphasize the impacts of poverty. Comparisons to action in other Canadian provinces and internationally are very effective. E.g. the World Bank requires developing countries to have poverty reduction plans before giving them loans; 6 other provinces have plans in place.

Get the message out there - make statements available about the report card for people to cut and paste. Add a new fact to your e-mail signature every month. Communications tools would be a good topic for a future coalition meeting.

The Canadian Federation of Students has calculated how much it would cost Premier Campbell to pay tuition while working at a minimum wage today versus when he attended post-secondary. This idea can be expanded to create a table of old and new costs (rent, food, child care, etc.) vs. earning power of the minimum wage in the past and now.

Engage local community tables and networks, e.g. early childhood or business, as centres for action; use the model of Homelessness Action Week.

Target municipal politicians who are easier to access.

Organizations can restructure their wages to ensure that staff aren't in poverty.

The call for a provincial poverty reduction strategy is getting pick up.

Link our message to children's preventable vulnerabilities. Use the research evidence in the Early Development Instrument reporting and the recent Dr. David Butler-Jones report (Public Health Agency of Canada).

Engage social work and nursing students.

Use sound bytes and text messaging – circulate a quote from a student who lives in poverty.

BC School Trustee's Association passed a motion for a provincial action plan to reduce poverty.

Please keep First Call up to date on how you're using the report card.

### **3. Legislative Ban on Sale and Use of Cosmetic Pesticides**

First Call partner organization Toxic Free Canada works to eliminate toxins from the environment and schools, and works on cancer prevention, tying in equity issues.

Toxic Free Canada is asking First Call to endorse the demand for provincial legislation to ban the sale and use of cosmetic pesticides. The call for this ban was endorsed by a Union of BC Municipalities resolution in 2008; 20 BC municipalities have enacted pesticide by-laws; and both Ontario and Quebec have passed pesticide laws. There is no safe level of exposure to these pesticides for children or pregnant women.

The full text of the proposed legislation is available here:

<http://www.toxicfreecanada.ca/pdf/pesticide-act-V7.pdf>

Information on the full campaign is available here:

<http://www.toxicfreecanada.ca/campaign.asp?c=10>

The coalition agreed to endorse the proposal. People are encouraged to ask their MLAs to support the private member's bill being brought forward by MLA Rob Fleming, which is a modified version of the legislation drafted by Toxic Free Canada, the Canadian Cancer Society and UVic's Environmental Law Centre.

### **4. Importance of Youth Specific Employment Services**

Pacific Community Resources Society is requesting that First Call support a youth-specific employment service delivery model. \$280 million in federal funding is being transferred to BC to provide employment services, and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development is undergoing consultations to develop a made-in-BC employment service delivery strategy.

There is a strong case for youth-specific employment services. The youth unemployment rate in BC is twice that of the general population. Unemployed, at risk youth have a specific set of barriers that limit their ability to attach to the labour market. Alberta and Ontario have evaluation data showing significant decreases in youth unemployment from their youth-specific strategies, and existing BC youth employment resource centres in the Lower Mainland have a good track record.

The coalition agreed to endorse this model, while noting that the full one-stop shop resource centre model may not be a viable option in smaller communities around the province, and alternative youth-specific services would need to be developed.

## **5. Education Shouldn't Be a Debt Sentence Campaign**

The Canadian Federation of Students is circulating a petition to reduce post-secondary tuition fees, and their emphasis is to build a broad coalition of support.

Post-secondary is now considered a basic level of education, but there is less public financial support for access than there used to be. BC has the lowest rate of non-repayable student aid in Canada.

Tuition fees have doubled since 2001 and are higher than the national average. The CFS projects that by 2011 BC's government will earn more from tuition fees than from corporate taxes.

The inequity is that students who have to rely on loans, end up paying more for their post-secondary education than students who can afford to pay their full costs without loans. The average additional cost per student due to interest on their student loan is more than \$7000.

## **6. First Call Mission Statement and Name Change**

Comments and suggestions from emails and the discussion:

- Use of the term "advocacy" prevents charitable registration with Canada Revenue Agency. Since this registration is not our goal, we could keep the word in the mission statement.
- Why was statement on "policy" removed from the mission? Our policy advocacy is outlined in First Call's goals.
- The new name isn't any simpler.
- Advocacy is a matter of principle; strong opposition to taking advocacy out of name and mission statement.
- Other name suggestion: "BC Advocacy Coalition for Children and Youth"
- "Engage" and "work together" are too soft – use "mobilize", e.g. "Our mission is to mobilize British Columbians to advocate to ensure our children and youth..."
- Change tense – "Our mission is *mobilizing* British Columbians..."
- A few partners wrote to indicate they agreed with the originally proposed changes.

The proposed new name and mission statement for First Call will be voted on at the January 13 meeting.

## **7. Updates**

Programs funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada have been invited to submit budgets for two more years.

The coalition indicated that a majority of attendees would attend the February coalition meeting despite its proximity to the dates of the Olympics. First Call will look for a different venue for this meeting, likely in Burnaby.

The Early Childhood Development Roundtable is now meeting quarterly. In October, a delegation went to see Minister Polak about cuts to ECD services, and used the message that children are only young once, and we only have one chance to make improvements to services and supports for them. The Minister indicated that she didn't think that the cuts

were meaningful. The Infant Development Program and Supported Child Development Program Advisor roles are to be assigned internally at the Ministry. An invitation was extended to have a representative from MCFD attend the roundtable on a regular basis.

First Call also recently met with the Minister of Labour regarding child workplace injuries. Follow up letters from both of these meetings are now available on the First Call website.

Canada's report to the UN Committee monitoring compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is now available; it includes a section on BC's actions.

(See: <http://www.pch.gc.ca/pgm/pdp-hrp/docs/crc-eng.cfm>) Alternative reports will be submitted by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children and provincial child and youth advocates, as well. See First Call's 2008 submission here:

<http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/communities/4-uncrc%20report%20submission.pdf>

The issue of repealing section 43 of the criminal code to end legalized corporal punishment of children in Canada was addressed in the UNCRC report, justifying this law as compliant with the Convention. Canada has been repeatedly criticized by the UN Committee for failing to repeal this legislation. First Call is polling BC MP's to find out where they stand on this issue.

The Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond will be attending the January coalition meeting.

Outreach work is underway for the Living Wage for Families campaign. New Westminster passed a motion to have a staff report done on implementing a living wage municipally. The Richmond Anti-Poverty Committee is also looking at the living wage. Employer information is available on the website <http://livingwageforfamilies.ca>.

First Call was pleased with the outcome of our October fundraising dinner, we earned close to \$12,000. Thanks to everyone who attended and helped out. At the dinner, we launched our monthly giving program. You can contact First Call to sign up. Donna Tennant will be working with first call on grant writing and planning in the new year.

**8. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** January 13, 2010. Coffee served 9:00 – 9:15, meeting is from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.