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## **First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of February 10, 2010 BC Teachers' Federation Building**

### **In attendance:**

Julie Norton – First Call  
Elsie Kipp – Kinex of PeerNetBC  
Lesley Richardson – First Call  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA  
Michael McCarthy Flynn – Living Wage for Families Campaign  
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing  
Sharon Hoyland – Roots of Empathy  
Tim Beachy – Provincial Social Services Roundtable  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Colleen Bob – Red Cross RespectED  
Joel Milgram – Court Appointed Special Advocates  
Chris Friesen – Immigrant Services Society of BC  
Shan Lavell – CATCH Central Okanagan  
Ian Boyko – Canadian Federation of Students – BC  
Kim Johnson – Masters of Public Health Student, SFU  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Desiree Sattler – Canadian Red Cross  
Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Julie Renton – Westcoast Family Resources  
Carol Ross – Parent Support Services

Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Bella Cenezero – Parent Support Services  
Michelle Fortin – Watari Youth, Family and Community  
Marla Tynan – MCFD Advocacy Team  
Shirley Paterson – Family Support Institute  
Mike Clarke – BCGEU

### **On phone:**

Carol Burbees – Northern Lights College

### **Regrets:**

Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Donna Tennant – First Call Fund Development Contractor  
Karen Lai – SPARC BC  
Wendy Qureshi  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Shamus Reid – Canadian Federation of Students  
Lila Murao – Hospital Employees' Union  
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society  
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Susan Tatoosh – Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre

## **1. Introductions**

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

## **2. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) Initiative**

Joel Milgram is a new Canadian who is promoting the establishment of the CASA initiative in BC. He previously ran a CASA program in Michigan on a volunteer basis. CASA initiatives are also being developed in other provinces.

CASA volunteers are representatives of the court in the area of child protection. The founding judge wanted to be able to see into homes to see what was happening, and the CASA volunteer acts on the judges behalf as a layperson with some training. The volunteer is appointed by and reports back to the judge, and has the same status as other representatives in the court.

The American CASA program is not entirely relevant to the Canadian judicial system, but the concept can be adjusted to make it work in Canada.

CASA volunteers can have more time and energy for each case than social workers because they have a caseload of one. They gather a lot of information and share it with the social worker.

Joel has formed a sub-committee of a few volunteers, and is looking for judges to experiment with a CASA program in BC. The program will need funding and may require

legislative changes to privacy laws. Volunteers need to be trained; they undergo extreme vetting as they would have access to confidential information.

One objection to the program is that social workers will see increased work loads as government may perceive that CASA volunteers are doing part of their work, which is not the case.

#### **Discussion:**

The next step forward for a local CASA project is more volunteers to get things off the ground. CASA volunteers would be used in more difficult child protection cases only.

In Joel's experience, 99% of the time the recommendations of the CASA volunteer matched those of the social worker.

Clinical supervision and support of volunteers is not part of the CASA model, but happens informally. Social workers are part of the training of volunteers.

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

#### **Vote on participation in Coalition to Build a Better BC:**

This coalition is advocating against provincial funding cuts in all sectors. They are currently mobilizing around the provincial budget lock up and having voices available to speak to the new budget and advocate for public and community services. They are holding a teach-in on March 20 and a rally on April 10.

It is a broad-based coalition, not strictly union involvement. There are 5 co-chairs representing each sector.

The First Call coalition voted in favour of endorsing the Coalition to Build a Better BC and ongoing participation.

#### **Living Wage for Families Campaign:**

A living wage by-law is being considered in New Westminster. The city has requested a staff report on the issue, which should be out in March or April.

The campaign is recruiting Living Wage employers, and a Living Wage roundtable will probably be held in May to update the community on what's happening with the campaign.

#### **Fundraising Dinner Committee:**

First Call will hold our annual fundraising dinner in October this year. Coalition participants are invited to join the dinner organizing committee, which will meet on February 22. Volunteers can contribute in a number of ways, including organizing entertainment, soliciting auction items, and selling tickets. We welcome the creativity of volunteers. Contact Andrina at [info@firstcallbc.org](mailto:info@firstcallbc.org) if you're interested.

#### **Partner Updates:**

Shan from the CATCH Coalition reported that she has launched a new website – [www.heart2heart4all.ca](http://www.heart2heart4all.ca) – asking folks to engage with their MP's and MLA's and be champions against poverty.

Carol from Parent Support Services is now chairing the child welfare committee at the BC Association of Social Workers and would like volunteers for that committee. She also noted that cuts to legal aid are expected to be devastating for families, and there are rumours that there will be changes to the Child in the Home of a Relative and Kith and Kin programs.

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable:**

The Roundtable is meeting about every two months, and is currently focused on the roll out of all-day kindergarten. There is a lack of information about it and concerns over the impacts on community child care. The Roundtable is working with Early Childhood Educators of BC and Coalition of Child Care Advocates on a framework for kindergarten for children younger than 5. The Roundtable is also tracking MCFD funding cuts affecting young children.

### **Endorsement of Report from BC CEDAW Group:**

First Call's coordinating committee has endorsed a report to the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the BC CEDAW Group. *Nothing to Report* is in response to the CEDAW Committee calling on Canada to report back within one year on two issues of major concern: women's poverty and social assistance rates and government failure to prevent or effectively investigate violence against Aboriginal women and girls. The BC CEDAW Group found that the provincial government has taken no action to address these recommendations.

## **4. Trends Within Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in BC**

Chris Friesen of Immigrant Services Society of BC reports that temporary foreign workers have surpassed the number of permanent workers entering BC. 34% of new permanent residents are children and youth under the age of 24, compared to 29% of the general population. The top three source countries for these children and youth are Mainland China, India and the Philippines.

7500 Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) come to Canada every year. Between 800 and 900 of those settle in BC, and make up about 5% of all permanent residents who arrive in the province. More children arrive in Canada as refugees compared to other permanent residents. This year, 5000 Bhutanese are expected to arrive in Canada from Nepal.

Young GARs face difficulties including lack of formal education and difficulty adjusting to the education system. Drop out rates are high. Solutions could be found to keep these youth in school and end the waste of human capital to address the projected labour market shortage. Dr. Lee Gunderson of UBC has undertaken a study on the drop out rates of English as a Second Language students.

49% of children in recent immigrant families are poor. Families are provided with one year of federal assistance, which is matched to provincial income assistance rates. Their poverty is exacerbated by the refugee transportation loans program, which requires them to pay back the costs of their travel to Canada with interest. First Call has taken a strong stance on this issue, advocating for the federal government to remove this debt burden from immigrant families.

Federal funding for immigrant settlement has increased from \$40 million in 2005/06 to \$120 million in 2009/10. Significant investment has been made in multi-year pilot projects and new program initiatives with third party evaluators. Current programs in BC include Settlement Workers in Schools, which is now a permanent program with over 70 workers around the province that is able to serve temporary foreign workers through their family members' schools who otherwise do not receive any support; the step ahead pilot project, which is home-based intervention for GARs facing multiple barriers; the early years refugee pilot project working with children ages 6 and under in 6 communities; and refugee immigrant youth and young adults projects that focus on youth who are not in school and work on labour market attachment.

Funding for immigrant services is fairly secure for the next three years.

### **Discussion:**

The Welcome BC website lists government contacts for referrals to immigrant services programs.

The early years program includes a modified version of the mother goose program, outreach, and introduction of a play-based approach to learning.

The City of Surrey and the Union of BC Municipalities have passed motions in support of the eradication of the refugee transportation loans program.

Canada is fast-tracking family reunification and adoption applications for Haitians. Earthquake survivors wouldn't qualify as refugees.

There is information available on the Welcome BC website about welcoming communities, which is a multi-sectoral initiative trying to address accelerated demographic changes.

The coalition would be interested in future meetings that focused on immigrants to rural areas and the BC interior, as well as government projections of future immigration and settlement trends.

## **5. Roundtable of Provincial Social Services Organizations**

Tim Beachy works for the United Community Services Co-op, which is a business that helps non-profits save money. He is part of the Roundtable of Provincial Social Services Organizations, which is a network that is building a provincial voice for the sector. Currently they are campaigning for an HST rebate for non-profits. There is disparity between provinces on the rebate that non-profits receive.

The Roundtable has undertaken a research initiative to develop economic guidelines, reports and responses on government budgets and funding changes. Tim noted that the social services sector represents 7% of the provincial economy.

Public polling will be combined with economic research to inform the public about the social services sector. They are developing strategies to keep issues and cuts at the top of mind with the media. The three key messages of the roundtable are:

- Investment in social infrastructure is a smart fiscal decision.
- All of BC benefits from safe, healthy communities.
- Help should be there when you need it!

Organizations will be asked to participate in public education. There will be consultation on messages from the sector using online surveys to see if there is agreement and commitment to promoting these three key messages.

## **6. Throne Speech Reaction**

16 points for families in the throne speech included a property tax deferral for young families, which is not a good idea as it puts them into more debt. Government says they're working toward affordable housing, but it's not clear what that means.

The speech mentioned private sector partnerships in early childhood development and neighbourhood learning centres. There is still no consistent plan for children. How will these be developed with the projected cuts to social services?

**7. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** March 10, 2010. Coffee served 9:00 – 9:15, meeting is from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.