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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Minutes of February 11, 2009
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

In attendance:

James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Lora Constantinescu
Jasmine Howes – Parent and Student
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families
Lila Murao – Hospital Employees' Union
Philippa Slater – Learning Disabilities Assoc. of BC
Bev Kerr – Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
Andrina Perry – First Call
Radhika Bhagat – Vancouver Community, VCH
Timothy Welsh – AMSSA
Breann Specht - Vancouver Coastal Health – North Shore
Cheryl Mixon – Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth
Anne O'Neil – Society for Children and Youth
Mike Evans – Britannia Community Education
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada
Rachel Douglas – Public Health Agency of Canada
Barbara Atkins – Union Gospel Mission

Ashley Heringer – Union Gospel Mission
Carol Anderson – Westcoast Family Resources Society
Katarina Jovanovic – Pacific Immigrant Resources Society
Kaye Liao – Gastown Vocational Services
Karen Lai – SPARC BC
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
Dianne Liscumb – Westcoast Child Care Resources
Mary Collins – BC Healthy Living Alliance
Jason Chan – SUCCESS
Jazmin Miranda – Vancouver Coastal Health

On phone:

Michael Goldberg – First Call
Kathleen Shiels – Western Society for Children
Wanda Gendron - Western Society for Children
Patricia Ackland – Child and Youth Mental Health

Regrets:

John Millar – Health Officers' Council
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Kathy Berggren-Clive – MCFD Advocacy Team

1. Introductions

Chair Julie Norton opened the meeting.

2. Child and Youth Mental Health Plan

Sandy Wiens, Director of Child and Youth Mental Health Policy:

Sandy has a background in Nursing and Psychology and worked in Pediatrics at BC Children's Hospital. She later worked in adolescent psychology.

The child and youth mental health plan for BC was a 5 year plan endorsed by cabinet in 2003 and completed in 2008. The plan provided a framework and changes to service delivery. More detailed regional plans happened on an annual basis, which were designed to meet specific local needs. The plan is available on the Ministry of Child and Family Development's Child and Youth Mental Health web site here:
http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/mh_publications/cymh_plan.htm.

The plan was based on a significant consultation process, including strong partnership with Charlotte Waddell. Recommendations were made from a joint working group and expert tables including psychiatrists, advocacy groups and parents.

The foundation for the plan was that 15% of children in BC have a mental health problem that affects their day to day functioning. Mental health problems are more prevalent than any other health problems. No standardized approach to screening existed.

3 key elements of the plan were improving support and treatment, reducing risk, and building capacity.

MCFD partnered with the Knowledge Network to do public education work (these videos are available online and in public libraries: <http://www.knowledgenetwork.ca/takingcare/intro.html>). Other education efforts included distribution of books to public libraries and a self-help guide on depression for youth. The Child and Youth Mental Health web site also has a lot of great resources.

Capacity building efforts included increasing engagement with families and Aboriginal child and youth mental health services, and making sure that services were relevant to individual bands and provided by Aboriginal people as much as possible.

The advocacy group Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality (FORCE) was also part of the capacity building.

300 new staff were hired by MCFD to increase the quality and quantity of clinical services.

A Child and Youth Mental Health Network Committee was formed, which worked to improve collaboration across the system of care. A new client database and electronic records were part of a new information technology plan.

Challenges for the plan included short timelines and change overload within Child and Youth Mental Health.

The progress report was released in May 2008. MCFD needed to look at whether they were still on course and how the context had shifted. A consultation was held in May – July 2008 – the report from this was released in January 2009. Highlights of the review include:

- broad stakeholder support for accomplishments of the CYMH Plan
- the need for increased cross-ministry and cross-sector collaboration – still more progress to be made in this area
- strong MCFD leadership required

MCFD would like to strengthen efforts around mental health promotion and risk reduction initiatives. The Friends program is delivered to grades 4 and 5, and a new youth version has been introduced to grade 7 students. FORCE has been involved in parent training, and curriculum has been made available to First Nations students and been translated into French.

Other important points from the review include the need to improve services for vulnerable populations, including children in care and those with dual diagnoses, and provide additional resources for community-based residential services.

Aboriginal CYMH services still need further development.

A huge amount of change is taking place for child and youth mental health teams including new screening tools and new staff. Within MCFD, guidance is coming from the new Strong, Safe and Supported document and highlights cross-ministerial and program collaboration. A 10 year mental health and substance abuse plan has been proposed. The National

Commission for Mental Health is an important initiative that CYMH will link with, as well as advocacy groups such as FORCE, Canadian Mental Health Association and the Representative for Children and Youth.

Next steps will include an inter-ministerial plan and participation in the 10 year mental health and substance abuse plan development.

Keli Anderson, Families Organized for Recognition and Care Equality:

Keli has been active for 10 years, since her son became suicidal and was diagnosed with a severe mental illness. She wanted other parents to talk to and wondered why there was no child and youth mental health plan in BC; she found out there wasn't one in the whole country. BC's plan has been the only way that kids can get what they need. Other provinces are now coming on board and creating their own plans.

Child and youth mental health is a crisis in BC. Keli founded FORCE with another mom. Many parents started to call and they have had an overwhelming response. Mental illness is a family problem – the entire family has to be supported. FORCE is working to be seen as partners with MCFD and other ministries. Keli is the only parent on the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

BC has doubled the number of children receiving services to 20,000, but another 70,000 still need services. Despite this, BC is a leader in Canada. Every other G8 country has a mental health plan for children and youth.

The Mental Health Commission is writing a framework for the country on child and youth mental health. The consultation process will be partly publicized in Today's Parent magazine this summer. An online consultation will also be available.

[Find out more about FORCE at www.bckidsmentalhealth.org.]

Discussion:

The 10-year plan consultation process is holding a workshop February 24. The plan will include child and youth mental health, which is great in some ways, but we don't want child and youth mental health lost in the rest of the plan. There is also a consultation form that will be available online.

A committee at MCFD is looking at next steps in protecting vulnerable youth from suicide. There is a provincial initiative between the Crisis Centre of BC and SAFER working on prevention, intervention and post-vention and looking at gaps in services. There is a lot of attention being given to this issue at this time.

The Ministry of Education needs to do something at the provincial level to protect LGBT youth – currently they put it on local school boards to make these policies, which only eight have done.

MCFD is very aware of the unique needs of immigrant and refugee children and youth. Particular regions have done more work on this issue. This issue needs to be considered in the next phase of planning. No new money is expected, which makes it challenging.

The Immigrant and Settlement sector has a lot of funding available right now, and cross-sectoral engagement needs to happen.

Parents normally get their children into the mental health system through a GP (general practitioner/doctor) or in schools. Many of these children won't even get out the door to school, which alerts the school to the issue. GP's do not always have the necessary training to identify problems.

Ideally children would be identified in schools and even in preschool. Some school liaison positions have been created.

Options have been broadened in treatment and support. More outreach workers and groups for adolescents have been made available. Treatment varies by community depending on demand and availability. Differences in services are not acceptable.

Parents are starting to visit PACs and public health nurses. It can take parents ten years to get the services their family needs. Parents are sometimes offered parenting courses that they don't need when their child is dealing with a mental health issue.

Early Childhood Educators need to receive more training on mental health. Child and Youth Mental Health is providing infant mental health training.

Putting a Canadian Face on Learning Disabilities is a new resource available at www.pacfold.ca – children can and do develop serious mental health issues with unrecognized learning disabilities.

Parents with children with learning disabilities should be encouraged to participate in consultations.

Call your local child and youth mental health office to access Aboriginal mental health plans and culturally relevant materials – they can tell you what is available. Offices are listed on the CYMH web site here: http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/pdf/services.pdf.

3. Federal Budget Presentation by Michael Goldberg

Lowlights of the federal budget – this budget has very little for vulnerable children, youth and their families. The total federal stimulus will be \$40 billion over two years.

EI eligibility rules have not been enhanced – eligibility is limited. General tax relief and small improvements to the Canada Child Tax Benefit are in this budget. Most Canadian families won't see any difference. There is \$4 billion in general tax cuts. Those on income assistance in the 'expected-to-work' category in BC increased by 30% in one year, and will likely continue to increase. The effects of the economic downturn are really starting to be felt here in BC.

There is some job creation in housing and infrastructure sectors. In many cases provinces need to come up with 50% of the funding.

There is nothing around women and children in this budget. There is no real increase in the child tax benefit, and no suggestion around changing the federal minimum wage. There is nothing about child care or new money for programs that would continue beyond the two year stimulus.

This is really small change – the deficit and increased spending is mostly a mirage.

Chapter 3 in the budget details housing stimulus. There is only new housing, including \$1 billion for low income seniors, \$75 million for people with disabilities, and \$100 million for First Nations housing. This money will lapse if projects are not completed on time (and also has to be matched by the provinces and/or municipalities, or in some cases loans are available to municipalities).

The debt to GDP ratio shows how little is happening. Canada could carry a much higher debt load.

The tax cuts are forever, but increased program spending is only for 2 years. Program expenses relative to GDP are falling dramatically.

We need to remember that individual and corporate tax cuts have led to an erosion of the annual revenue capacity of the federal government by over \$40 billion a year. Child poverty could have been eradicated for less than \$40 billion.

Discussion:

Home renovations are rich people's social policy and an unwise use of public funds.

Job creation in this budget is very able-bodied and male oriented. Women and a lot of other people are not benefiting. Youth are also not going to be working in this sector primarily.

There are some earmarked funds for Aboriginal skills training.

This amount of stimulus is going to have very little impact.

4. Provincial Election

A new Provincial Election Kit is available from First Call. Please use it and check our web site for updates and kits from other organizations: <http://www.firstcallbc.org/currentIssues-ProvElection.html>.

A new web site is up now for the BC Poverty Reduction Plan, and the open letter calling on all political parties to commit to a poverty reduction plan was released last week. Individuals and organizations can still sign on through the web site at bcpovertyreduction.ca.

5. First Call Reports and Updates

The ECD Roundtable has been reduced to quarterly meetings, and the next meeting is April 2. First Call's ECD overview has been updated and is on the web site. [<http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/earlychildhood/1-ecd%20overview.pdf>]

We are hoping to hire an organizer for the Living Wage for Families campaign soon.

6. Partner Updates

Family Services of Greater Vancouver – there will be a 1.6% government funding lift for non-union agencies this year, and union agencies will have collective agreements honoured. They've been told to expect no lift for the following two years. No reduction or increases in services is anticipated in the coming year.

Canadian Red Cross is holding a launch of a pamphlet on discipline for the Child Welfare League of Canada on Feb. 26. Check the First Call Weekly Announcements (Feb. 10) for details.

The March coalition meeting will focus on an analysis and discussion of the provincial budget from different sectors, drawing on our partners' expertise.

6. Time and Date of Next Meeting: March 11, 2009, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6th Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.