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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of January 14, 2009  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Rebecca Siggner – SPARC BC  
Ruth Annis – FASD Collaboration Roundtables (Chair)  
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Karen DeLong – BC Association for Community Living  
Jane Thornthwaite – BC School Trustees Association  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Marilee Peters – BC Council for Families  
Colleen Bob – Red Cross RespectED  
Judy Hayes – MCFD  
Christine Boyle – student  
Kathy Berggren-Clive – MCFD Advocacy Team  
Fred Milowsky – Representative for Children and Youth  
Gary Mavis – Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents  
Carol Anderson – Westcoast Family Resources Society  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Lillian Qiao – BC Council for Families  
Jean Beale – BC Council for Families  
Ruth Fahlman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Drina Read – BC Green Party  
Jane Sterk – BC Green Party  
Nicholas Simons – NDP Critic for Ministry of Children and Family Development  
Cheryl Mixon – Family Services of Greater Vancouver  
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation

Noel Herron  
Susan Lambert – BC Teachers' Federation  
Tanya Sather – Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion  
Sue Irwin – VC Region CCRR Programs  
Rita Chudnovsky – Child Care Advocacy Forum  
Carol Ann Young – City of Vancouver Social Policy Dept  
Chris Kinkaid – BCGEU

**On phone:**

Michael Goldberg – First Call  
Kathleen Shiels – Western Society for Children  
Vicki Austad – Vibrant Abbotsford  
Anna Planedin – Nelson Advocacy Centre  
Jennifer Charlesworth – Federation of Child and Family Services of BC  
Doug Hayman – Federation of Child and Family Services of BC  
Meagan Brame – Victoria Regional Child Care Council  
Jody Bauche – Victoria Native Friendship Centre

**Regrets:**

John Millar – Health Officers' Council  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Population Health  
Mike Clarke – BCGEU

**1. Introductions**

Chair Ruth Annis opened the meeting with a round of introductions.

**2. Presentations from Provincial Parties on Child and Youth Issues and Platforms for the May 12 Election**

The Liberal Party declined to send a representative to this meeting.

**Nicholas Simons, NDP Critic for MCFD**

Nicholas opened by acknowledging that we are on the traditional territory of the Coast Salish Nations.

Everything government does has to do with children and youth. Today he will focus on social policies that directly affect children and youth. The NDP's final platform is not complete, but he will give as much information as he can.

## **Poverty**

A poverty reduction strategy is still in the works. This will be an important part of the platform. It will include a \$10 minimum wage. Nicholas supports an increase in income assistance rates, but the caucus has not reached consensus on this issue. A homelessness action strategy will also be part of it. They are committed to social housing and strengthening the Residential Tenancy Act.

## **Education**

The NDP will cut student loan interest rates by 50%, create new grants for students, and reinstate college funding.

## **Child Protection**

Youth protection has become independence-based, which is not an effective strategy. 52% of children in care are Aboriginal, and 93% of these children are living in poverty. There is an obvious lack of resources for these communities. We are not promoting health and improving social conditions on reserves.

A child protection strategy needs to start with prevention. We're starting from a position of weakness in government. We need to focus on the reserves and schools as centres for prevention. Social workers shouldn't be feared by families. We need to look at workloads and compensation for social workers.

## **Special Needs Services**

Functional assessments should be used to determine services. Government needs to address waitlists immediately. Respite care needs to be available to prevent child protection intervention.

## **Early Childhood Development**

The NDP has committed to establishing timelines and targets for child care, which still need to be identified. We should be seeing specific commitments to supports for young children closer to the election.

## **Discussion** (Responses to questions from First Call members)

We need to recognize the core function of schools in communities and prevent school closures. Schools should be used for community programming.

The current NDP MLA's are working hard to develop a poverty reduction strategy.

The NDP will restore oversight of employment standards for 12 – 14 year olds.

All day kindergarten and pre-kindergarten for vulnerable children are important programs.

The NDP has received complaints from youth and parents regarding the contracting out of youth employment programs. It is unclear if they will end the contracting out.

Government needs to prioritize spending for social services – this is how the NDP will afford new spending. They will not use the economic crisis as an excuse to cut programs.

The NDP will not take the support of the child care community for granted in the next election – Nicholas recognizes that they have to earn their votes. Child care will be brought forward to the caucus in the context of being an economic solution.

The Representative for Children and Youth has been working on some interministerial issues – hopefully this will streamline spending and integration of ministries.

There is always a role for partnering with local governments.

Waitlists for children with special needs are a priority.

Nicholas is not sure if the NDP will continue the StrongStart program.

### **Jane Sterk, Green Party Leader**

Jane was a public school teacher and a psychologist before becoming involved in politics. The Green Party is the only party aligned with other parties throughout the world. The party's principles are based in honouring diversity. Rather than specific policies, the party focuses more on a set of principles, which include: community-based economy, grassroots democracy, social justice, and non-violence.

Access to services should support families, and services should incorporate housing and health. The Green Party supports a guaranteed livable income. Their health budget would focus on prevention. At risk families can be identified very early, and prevention measures should be taken. People should have a choice in education.

### **Discussion** (Responses to questions from First Call members)

The Green Party supports all day kindergarten and believes that the child care system can be more adequate. Quebec is a good model, but the system still needs additional spaces. Child care workers need living wages. Choices should be available for families with a stay at home parent.

Jane is very aware of the negative impacts of school closures on community. Closures should be the last option, and school land should not become privatized. Funding formulas need to be changed to keep schools open despite declining enrollment. A public consultation should take place.

With regards to a poverty reduction strategy, the Green Party supports a guaranteed livable income and the pooling of services to implement this strategy economically. 1% of the provincial budget should go to new subsidized housing. They also support a living wage that is based on the low-income cutoff.

The Green Party will repeal the child labour laws which allow 12 – 14 year olds to work with the permission of only one parent. They will keep children out of unsafe workplaces.

In order to fund new programs and services, the Green Party would cut expenditures in other areas, such as policing, and use government subsidies differently.

The Green Party does not support the IQ 70 and under cut off for accessing community living services, or the cut off at age 18 for accessing children's services.

The Green Party is a distinct party, but would be open to working in collaboration with other parties, as is common in other countries. The BC Green Party has a resolution against strategic voting.

Home schoolers should have access to the same in-school programs as other children.

Affordable child care and the creation of more spaces is a priority. The guaranteed livable income would give parents the choice to stay home.

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

First Call has sent a letter to Premier Campbell requesting a meeting following his statement that children are his top political priority. We received a call from his office that they will be following up on our letter.

We circulated a draft of First Call's election kit for the May 12 provincial election. The kit is organized around the 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth, and includes an explanation of the province's role and responsibilities relating to various child and youth issues, facts about these issues, and sample questions for candidates. Please send any feedback you have on the kit to First Call. The final version will be available in early February.

First Call is hiring a part-time campaigner for the Living Wage for Families Campaign. We have been doing lots of presentations on this issue and we are looking for research grants to train community members. Let us know if you want to be on the e-mail list to receive updates about this campaign.

Learning Disabilities Association of BC has an excellent advocacy workshop for parents of children with special needs that merits being offered to more parents around the province. We are looking for partners interested in collaborating to help make this happen. Let Adrienne know if you are interested in being part of this discussion.

### **4. Partner Updates**

The Western Society for Children is developing a new space in New Westminster for families to access occupational therapists and other service providers and to get assessments. It will also provide opportunities for students.

BC Association for Community Living has an ongoing campaign to end waitlists – find out more at [www.endwaitlistsnow.org](http://www.endwaitlistsnow.org). They are holding a "virtual rally" on January 30, and are encouraging people to meet with their MLAs on January 31. They will hold a press conference on February 2.

Child Care Advocacy Forum has a new "Smart Solutions" campaign. Contact them to get postcards to send to Premier Campbell.

The BC Teachers' Federation is releasing a discussion paper on poverty and education, which will be available online in early February.

### **5. Emerging Advocacy Issues**

Question to the coalition partners– is anyone doing advocacy around the Bountiful issue? Now that the BC Attorney General has laid charges focusing on polygamy, there is concern that other child and youth rights issues are not getting attention. We are composing a

letter to Wally Oppal outlining concerns about violations of specific child rights under the UN Convention that merit investigation. Please contact the First Call office if you have ideas about this dialogue with the government.

BCTF reported that Irene Lanzinger wrote to the principal of the Bountiful school and issued a press release.

Last year, First Call passed a resolution in support of Jordan's Principle and asked for legislation to ensure it is respected and practiced. Now we are wondering if there are any cases in which Jordan's Principle has been applied in BC, and what kind of follow up work needs to be done. Anyone with information to share is asked to contact the First Call office.

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