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

In attendance:

Andrina Perry – First Call
Lesley Richardson – First Call
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Michael Goldberg – First Call
Rebecca Siggner – Social Planning and Research Council of BC
Kelly MacDonald – Lawyer
Kylie Walman – Legal Student
Ruth Annis – Pacific Community Resources Society
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Sue Irwin – Child Care Resource and Referral, Van Coastal
Cheryl Mixon – Family Services of Greater Vancouver
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada
John Millar – Provincial Health Services Authority/Health Officers Council
Yvonne Hii – City of Vancouver Social Planning
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Lynell Anderson - Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Rita Chudnovsky – Child Care Advocacy Forum
Deb Krull – Aboriginal Moms on the Drive
Wilma Clarke – Institute for Safe Schools and Communities
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
Fred Milowsky – Representative for Children and Youth
Jagrup Brar – Opposition Critic for Employment and Income Assistance
Sheila Davidson – Early Childhood Educators of BC
Nicholas Simons – Opposition Critic for Children and Family Development
Carole James – Leader of the Opposition
Sylvia Bishop – BC Teachers' Federation

Holly Page – BC Government and Service Employees' Union
Andy Wachtel – United Way of the Lower Mainland
Betty Chan – Chief Dan George Centre for Advanced Education
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association
Jane Thornthwaite – BC School Trustees' Association
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
Gary Mavis – Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents
Christine Burgess – Public Health Agency of Canada
Tracy Anne Northey – Vancouver Coastal Health
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth
Monique Gray Smith – Aboriginal Head Start Association of BC
Carol Ross – Parent Support Services
Sanja Sladojevic – Windows of Opportunity
Ruth Fahlman – Consultant
Gyda Chud – First Call
Tina Crouse – Dunbar Make Poverty History Group
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society
Linda Korbin – BC Association of Social Workers

On phone:

Claire Trevena – Opposition Critic for Child Care
Emily Mliczko – Westcoast Child Care Centre
Marcia Julian – Ministry for Children and Family Development
David Coney – Together Against Poverty Society
Sasa Loggin – Terrace Make Children First Network

Regrets:

Lorraine Aitken – Supported Child Development Program
Sarah Chandler – Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children

1) Kelly MacDonald on Jordan's Principle

Introduction

Kelly is an Aboriginal lawyer who currently works with the parole board. She was very involved in drafting Jordan's Principle.

Kelly MacDonald

Jordan's Principle relates to jurisdictional disputes over who will pay for services to First Nations children. Kelly was approached by the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society

(FNCFCs) to draft a paper on jurisdictional principles and propose changes; this paper was published as chapter 3 in the Wen:de report (2005, [click to download](#)).

Case law for jurisdictional disputes has been limited, but the problem is longstanding. A federal contractor first identified it over 40 years ago as a barrier to First Nations community members. The federal government is responsible for Status Indians under section 91(24) in the Constitution Act, but health is a provincial responsibility. Disputes over funding responsibility arise due to First Nations in provinces living on federal reserve land.

Jordan Rivers was a little boy from Manitoba who had multiple special health requirements. After birth, he was in Winnipeg's children's hospital, and after age 2, his doctor decided to send him to a home environment. They found him a foster care home near his family on reserve that could meet his special needs with help from community fundraising, but the federal and provincial governments couldn't agree who would be responsible for the costs of his care in that home. Not only was there a dispute between federal and provincial governments, but also between federal ministries (Health and Indian Affairs, etc.). Due to these disputes, Jordan passed away in hospital at age 5, without ever getting to live in his home community.

On December 12, 2007 the House of Commons unanimously passed a motion supporting Jordan's Principle. This motion sets a moral compass, but does not put forward legislation. We now need to encourage our provincial and federal governments to make Jordan's Principle a reality.

Ted Hughes made note of this jurisdictional issue and recommended that government work this out. BC's Representative for Children and Youth has also encouraged the province to implement Jordan's Principle.

Jordan's Principle puts forward an alternate dispute mechanism. The government of first contact would pay for the needed services (in Jordan's case for the specialized home). Jordan's Principle is a child-centred approach so that other children won't fall through these gaps or be denied services.

First Call would like to do something as a coalition to support Jordan's Principle, but Kelly also urges individuals to write to Premier Campbell about adopting Jordan's Principle, and copy this correspondence to the First Nations Leadership Council (c/o BC AFN, #507 – 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2; First Nations Summit, #1200 – 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2; Union of BC Indian Chiefs, #500 – 342 Water St., Vancouver, BC V6B 1B6). Individuals can also write to their MP to applaud them for supporting the federal motion and encourage them to do more to make Jordan's Principle a reality, and register their support on the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society web site (www.fncfcs.com).

One of the impediments to Jordan's Principle is that governments say it's too complex to deal with, but if you look through the eyes of a child such as Jordan or many other children, it doesn't need to be so complicated. We need to focus on our children and the governments can focus on their funding issues in their own adult forum without children falling through the cracks based on their race or place of residence.

Discussion

Should Jordan's Principle be implemented through legislation or policy?

It is important to do it by legislation since this is a long-standing issue with money attached to it; we want to make sure that somebody is held accountable.

Are there models of alternative dispute resolution that might work?

We've provided a number of different models that people utilize. With First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies, a tri-partite mechanism is supposed to be built in with their funding agreement with Canada and the province. This hasn't work that well, but if there's passion and commitment, it will happen.

A lot of funding for child and youth services is block funding which doesn't take into account other financial issues. Some funding to first nations is focused on taking children into care rather than supporting prevention efforts.

Why is it that in our society we have to legislate that you have to treat a child who needs medical care?

For First Call's resolution in support of Jordan's Principle, are we urging the federal government to adopt this principle, as well as the province that they will take responsibility as first point of contact?

That would be reasonable, it has to be both levels of government committed to Jordan's Principle.

The Health Officers Council will be interested in supporting and endorsing this. Jordan's story is a powerful one – what are the details of what happened to Jordan?

FNCFCs has more details - Jordan's story is available written up (more information is here <http://www.fncfcs.com/more/jordansPrinciple.php>). His story was also written up in a medical journal. Jordan never got out of hospital.

Assuming that both levels of government agree to Jordan's Principle, who pays for the dispute mechanism?

We should get clearer about who's supposed to do what and encourage them to do it well.

2) Round of introductions

3) Carole James, Leader of the Official Opposition

Carole has spent many years working with children and families. Both Carole and Nicholas Simons, Opposition Critic for MCFD are former directors of Aboriginal agencies. Carole quit her MCFD position in response to cuts to women's and children's programs. When she dealt with a youth suicide at an Aboriginal agency she was told to toughen up by the Ministry. The Elders council at her Aboriginal agency encouraged her to run for the NDP leadership and to share what she learned from their community.

She generally gets very few questions on the issue of support for children and families. When the government says everything is fine despite being #1 in child poverty, we know something is wrong. Children don't live alone in poverty – families live in poverty. We are failing at how we treat our most vulnerable. The government's own Progress Board has told them that we need to do better. We are becoming a more divided society.

The NDP's 2005 campaign was based on "Everyone Matters" – this is just as critical now. When the economy is doing well, everyone should benefit. If we don't make changes now to support children and families, when are we going to address these issues?

The NDP will come out with a full platform in 2009, but Carole will talk today about areas identified for the platform and how we can work together.

Poverty

With regard to poverty, we can't do one-offs. Thank you to First Call for putting out the child poverty report card – it got more attention than ever this year. The NDP challenged the Premier to put together a comprehensive action plan on poverty.

Income Assistance

The NDP have committed to an increase to shelter rates for people on income assistance, but haven't nailed down any specifics. An increase in income assistance is needed. The information on the cost of eating from the Dietitians report is important when reviewing rates.

Affordable Housing

Government needs to build affordable housing. We need more co-op and affordable housing. We can have people pay for housing based on their income. Last December the NDP put out an affordable housing program calling for 2300 new units a year. The party doesn't disagree with rental assistance, but it doesn't help when there are such low vacancy rates in urban areas. This can help in rural areas. They will bring back earnings exemptions for all people on income assistance. This helps people transition back to work.

Minimum Wage

The NDP will increase the minimum wage to \$10 and index it. Indexing the minimum wage will prevent big gaps developing in the future. Scrapping the \$6 training wage is a no-brainer.

Child Care

The NDP will build a child care system. Claire Trevena (Opposition Critic for Child Care) will be doing a provincial consultation this spring to talk about what it will look like. Government has made so many changes to the system that we need to consult about what the reality is today, and how to transition to a new system without the current system falling apart.

Education

They have talked about freezing tuition as a start and bringing back grant programs. The government should be examining the student loan program and interest rates.

MCFD Transformation

We need to rebuild supports for children and youth and support existing community agencies. We need to look at youth transitions and adults with special needs. We recognize the importance of respecting people who work in the field and that people have expertise.

The current government doesn't respect or consult the people who know best what goes on in their communities, and therefore puts together programs and services that don't work or aren't going to provide sustainable support for children and families.

Discussion

Government needs to act on child poverty soon and set targets and timelines. Will the NDP commit to this?

The NDP doesn't have specifics yet, but we will come out with them sooner rather than later. A target alone won't do it, but it's a start.

Children in poverty go to school every day, but it's becoming harder for teachers to help those students. What can teachers expect in terms of support for children living in poverty?

The current approach is piecemeal – there is a tiny pot of money that is not sufficient. We have talked about reductions in class sizes and would like to legislate this. We've talked about more support for students with special needs. Community schools provide the links by connecting child care, before and after school care etc. There will be more specifics as we get closer to the platform. Rural schools face more challenges, more closures. This has a particular impact for families in poverty, they have further to travel and can't access other programs and activities.

We need supported housing models. We need more support for youth with special needs, particularly those with FASD. The four pillar approach is a great policy, and it's at risk. We need to maximize every pillar.

On supported housing, Carole couldn't agree more. Opposition Critic for Housing David Chudnovsky is currently doing a homelessness tour. He is creating a film interviewing people who live on the streets. People who have gone through detox don't have enough ongoing supports. Society hasn't dealt with FASD, the pressure from this will continue to increase. Supported housing is a piece of this solution.

When the NDP was in government, they were spending more on child care issues. How will you convince BC voters that children are a priority? How would the NDP assure urban Aboriginal children are given equal funding as on reserve children?

There was unanimous support in the Legislature for the new relationship document. The lack of systemic changes has been a disappointment. There is a new census coming out on off reserve Aboriginals. The results will show need for friendship centres and other urban supports. How do you make children a priority? Unless children are well educated, you're not going to have anyone paying taxes in your old age – who's going to look after you? We all have to do a better job of getting that economic argument out there.

Is the corporatization of government services on the NDP's radar?

The NDP raised the child care issue in the house, but received no response from the Minister. Funding is being moved from existing non-profits to less accountable organizations. We're taking apart the fabric of communities. Organizations have to spend more time writing proposals, even though have a proven track record. New agencies have no accountability or track record. The Ministry needs to look at where the funding is going. We can see what's happened in the health care sector.

There are huge issues in child care recruitment and retention. Qualified people can't make a living. How would the NDP deal with this?

The information is there to support child care from a social and economic work force perspective. The child care issue doesn't get the same kind of attention, despite efforts in the House. You can't build a system unless you deal with employees and wages.

How do we get people elected who have children and families as a priority on their platform? Wages is also an issue for Community Living BC and community-based child welfare programs. Fewer people are coming in to these fields. There is a lack of connection with other people. What else can we do?

We should encourage bold, courageous political leadership and build a new consensus. We need to move quickly so that people know by the next election what they stand to lose. In the child care community, people are angry and frustrated. They won't wait through 2008 to hear what will be an issue in the next election. What are the principles for a child care system that the NDP will use in their provincial discussion? Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC has a proposal for a community-governance model.

Claire Trevena will probably sit down first with child care advocates about the principles. How do you do build a system without taking apart what's already there? This is what we need to discuss. What does the transition to quality, affordable child care look like?

Child poverty impacts the incidence of chronic disease. The burden of poverty will bury the health care system if we don't take action. The child tax benefit is getting clawed back – ending this clawback is the single most important thing you can do to end child and family poverty. Homelessness costs \$50,000 to provide emergency resources – supported housing would cost \$28,000.

The child tax benefit needs to be looked at. The impact of family poverty on health care has not resonated in society. Economic arguments are helpful – we need to get them out there.

We appreciate the NDP's efforts in the Legislature on the release of the child poverty report card. Child and family issues should receive greater emphasis on the NDP web site.

There is a tension between cheap and good – the erosion of our ability to pay may need to be reversed. What will you do with public services when the economy is slower?

We will see debt after the Olympics, which will be a challenge for the government. I'd rather have that challenge then continue to sit in Opposition. It will take some time, but we need to get started.

4) Continued Discussion with Nicholas Simons, NDP Critic for Children and Family Development and Jagrup Brar, NDP Critic for Employment and Income Assistance

Nicholas Simons - we need to make sure that we don't abandon children with developmental disabilities when they turn 19.

There is a strong connection between what MEIA and MCFD do, so it's good to have both of the critics here. I'm pleased with the kinds of initiatives outlined by the NDP to decrease poverty and decrease family stress by increasing their capacity to provide for their children. The Volunteer Incentive Program was very successful at supporting the development of children and families on income assistance and transitioning off of assistance.

Jagrup Brar – you are the voice of people who have no voice. With regard to the devolution of programs from the federal government to BC, we are working with ASPECT and a number of other organizations to find out where we are with that process. We are very clear about the earnings exemptions. Even the Fraser Institute supports them, and we are the only province that doesn't have them. For example, single mothers who have been at home need to start with part-time work. Is combining the shelter and living allowance portions of income assistance a good thing or not? This is something we need to learn from you. The two year independence test is also an issue.

The general public has a real ignorance of welfare rates. As critic, you should try to educate the public. I would be in favour of combining the rates so people have the dignity to get all their money and spend it as they choose.

One drawback to combining the rates is that it doesn't allow the public to see how little people have available to spend on rent.

People in other social security programs across Canada don't get told how much to spend on what.

An increase in shelter causes landlords to raise rent.

Claire Trevena – as a former critic for MEIA, I saw Minister Richmond create the idea of "worthy" and "unworthy" poor.

The government talks down to us, no input is allowed. The living wage campaign is a great thing – it asks, how much does a family need to make to meet all their needs? Can you use that research and connect to this campaign? A living wage is community-based. US municipalities have adopted it, as have the London Olympics.

Jagrup Brar – the living wage makes public policy more complex, but it's a good idea. We're committed to a \$10 minimum wage. Discussion of the living wage does come up.

The minimum wage should be indexed - \$10 was based on 2005 costs. It should be \$11 in 2009, then indexed.

5) Reports and Updates

First Call has received a letter from Lesley du Toit, Deputy Minister for MCFD, in reply to our comments on the Good Practice Action Plan. The letter says the Plan is nearing completion, and it will include a comprehensive Early Years Plan that is now being finalized.

First Call's Early Childhood Development Roundtable meets next week. We wanted to meet with Lesley du Toit about the forthcoming early years plan, but have not been successful to date.

The BCGEU has a new child care calendar.

6) Time and Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 13, 2008, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6th Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.