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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Minutes of June 11, 2008
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

In attendance:

Kathleen Shiels – Western Society for Children
Wanda Gendron – Western Society for Children
Stephanie Rich – Union Gospel Mission
Ashley Heringer – Union Gospel Mission
Jocelyn Helland – Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
Dawn Steele – Parent
Raphael Santurette – SPARC BC
Christina Batstone – First Call
Darcie Bennett – Pivot Legal Society
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Lila Murao – Hospital Employees' Union
Bob Kiyoshk – Spirit of the Children
Janice Nelson – Service Canada
Wilma Clarke – Representative for Children and Youth
Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond - Representative for Children and Youth
Tracey Young – BC Assoc. of Social Workers/CWFC
Ruth Fahlman – Consultant
Chris Friesen – Immigrant Services Society of BC
Gwyneth Jones – NDP Opposition Caucus
Andrina Perry – First Call
Lesley Richardson – First Call
Elizabeth Saewyc – McCreary Centre Society
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation
Mike Clarke – BCGEU
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families
Gizachew Adamu – Red Cross
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth of BC
Ginny Gonneau – Society for Children and Youth of BC
Bob Daley – Pacific Community Resources Society

Sarah James – Ministry of Children and Family Development
Sue Irwin – Child Care Resource and Referral – Vancouver Coastal Region
Karen DeLong – BC Association for Community Living
Lisa Chapeskie – Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion
Julie Norton – BC Council for Families
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Annie Smith – McCreary Centre Society
Hannah Moffatt – SFU/Vancouver Coastal Health
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Health - Population Health
Coralys Cuthbert – City of Vancouver
Carol Anderson – Westcoast Family Resources Society
Colleen Bob – Red Cross RespectED Violence and Abuse Prevention
Sherry Simon – McCreary Centre Society
Michael Goldberg – First Call
Tariq Mehboob – Community Living BC
Paula Gallo – UNICEF
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association

On phone:

Marcia Dawson – Success By 6

Regrets:

Mitzi Dean - Pacific Centre Family Services
Kathy Basaraba – Children First Prince George
Jodi Mucha – BC Healthy Communities
Hannah Varto – Vancouver Coastal Health
Shawn Hoey – Caring for First Nations Children Society

Chair Michael Goldberg opened the meeting.

1) First Call Reports and Updates

First Call has partnered with the Law Society of BC, the Society of Children and Youth of BC and the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks to present a forum on youth justice. The forum will take place on June 25 with speakers including Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond. [Visit www.lawsociety.bc.ca for more information.]

Campaign to repeal refugee transportation loan requirement:

- Refugee transportation loans are an important child poverty issue
- This issue has been receiving some media attention
- The Canadian Council for Refugees has passed a resolution seeking repeal of refugee transportation loans
- Refugee families are placed on the equivalent of welfare when they arrive in Canada

- Young people are leaving school to work and help pay back these loans
- Refugees also have to pay back the costs of their medical exams required to enter the country
- There may be an openness to changing this policy now
- Immigrant Services Society has a four year statistical profile of refugees posted on their web site at iss.org
- First Call has prepared a letter to Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Diane Finley [download the letter and background materials here: <http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EconomicEquality/3-refugee%20loans.pdf>]

First Call's fundraising dinner has a new date – Wednesday, October 29, 2008. More details to come soon! Please mark your calendar.

June Early Childhood Development Roundtable:

- They had presentations from the Aboriginal Infant Development Program and the Infant Development Program

First Call has a new Coordinating Committee member – Darryl Quantz of Vancouver Coastal Health – Population Health. Welcome Darryl!

Michael Goldberg is retiring as Chair of First Call; this will be his last coalition meeting as Chair. Thanks and congratulations to Michael! Julie Norton and Ruth Annis will co-chair First Call for the next year.

2) Other News

Ministry of Children and Family Development announcements:

- \$5 million in educational and rehabilitative programming funds for former youth in care. Only permanent wards and youth on Youth Agreements are eligible.
- Another \$1 million was announced in funds for post-secondary education for former youth in care. MCFD does not seem to be actively promoting either of these funds.

Ministry of Education:

- The newly-created Early Childhood Learning Agency is holding a one-month consultation on kindergarten for 3 – 5 year olds [they have stated that this consultation will begin once the following web site is active: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/ecla>]

3) Introductions

A round of introductions was held once our guest speaker arrived.

4) Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond

The Rep's Office has been open for over a year now. She found child care to be a personal challenge when moving to BC; she has four children who attend three different schools.

Wilma Clarke is the new Acting Director of Advocacy at the Rep's Office. The advocacy demand has been very high. Primarily the advocacy focus is on children in care; there are 9200 children in care in BC. The Rep's first annual report will be out in July, and the focus will be on advocacy.

There are phenomenal barriers for children and youth, particularly for those with special needs. Mary Ellen had children living in the home of a relative added to her mandate.

Some of her recent work includes:

- Release of a monitoring brief on Community Living BC and other MCFD programs for children with special needs in February 2008
- Established an advisory committee for children with special needs

She will be reporting to the provincial Standing Committee on Children and Youth tomorrow with an update on her work.

Only 20% of children in care are completing high school, and only 13% of Aboriginal children in care. Public education is owned by everyone and is for the children – we have to meet their needs. The Rep intends to conduct an audit of services for special needs children in public schools.

The Rep is monitoring the implementation of the Hughes Review, and will release another report in the fall. The maltreatment recurrence rate is high in BC. A family mediation/development response is still only nominally in use. Social workers need additional time to do more of this. There is insufficient evidence of investment in prevention work.

The Rep has a special focus on Aboriginal children and is contemplating a report in this area.

Mary Ellen is working on a study of the justice system, examining who has been involved in the system of all people born in 1986. The data will be analysed by gender, Aboriginal status, special needs, and whether the youth were in or from care. This report will be out in the fall. The youth justice system is very expensive, and the numbers of youth involved should not be so high. Prevention starts with maternal-fetal support and early childhood.

Mary Ellen is working with the provincial Ombudsman on complaint processes at CLBC and Aboriginal agencies to address whether the voices of children are being embraced by these organizations. The Rep also has reports coming out on sexual abuse intervention programs and medical examinations of youth in custody.

The Rep will have a visitor working out of her office every year from the national or international child-serving sector.

Other areas that she is currently working on include:

- Reviewing critical injuries and deaths, other injuries
- Mental health system and suicide attempts
- Domestic violence
- Maternal-fetal health

She is interested in increasing accountability, transparency and outcomes in systems dealing with “invisible” vulnerable children, not in placing blame.

The Rep is organizing a kids summit which will take place October 20-21, 2008 with Stephen Lewis and Romeo Dallaire as speakers. Save the date! Also, she will be formally announcing the Representative’s Awards on June 23.

Discussion:

There will be an Aboriginal ECD forum in the Cowichan Valley on June 24 and 25 [contact marciad@successby6.ca]. Culture and language are fundamental to support Aboriginal children’s identity. M-E: This is a rights entitlement, not an option.

The timeline on the Rep's report on educational supports for children with special needs is ongoing. She is also doing work around classroom inclusion.

The Rep's office has given parents of children with special needs hope. Everyone involved in the school system at all levels need to meet and work together.

Recruitment and retention is a major issue in child care. The Rep will look at whether child care impacted youth involvement in the justice system.

Sheway is an excellent example of maternal-fetal support in a non-judgmental environment for mothers with addictions. A lot of people are rejecting these parents. The Rep wants to demonstrate why these investments are well worth it. Maternal-fetal support programs should be province-wide.

Lack of supports around the province became very obvious with the lack of government response to the crisis of youth suicides in Hazelton last year. Remember the young parent programs.

With regards to social disparities, Mary Ellen feels that we have no choice but to address them. There are places that are doing a much better job at this than BC.

Parents are surrendering their children with special needs into care because they lack support. Children in care need an enriching home environment.

The Rep noted that it is the Ministry of the Attorney General that is responsible for making the provincial report to Ottawa for the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. Canada needs a national children's commissioner. It is possible that the provincial advocates and commissioners could make a presentation to the UN Committee.

5) Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

First Call and the Society for Children and Youth are preparing to submit comments on the issues which should be addressed in Canada's report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. We have asked coalition partners to consider the list of issues put forward by the Department of Canadian Heritage and specify where the focus of the report should lie and if there are any issues absent from this list.

The Canadian Coalition on the Rights of the Child is preparing an alternative report.

Issues submitted to First Call in writing include:

- Government policy to minimize child poverty and the relationship between poverty, education and health
- Qualified educators for children with special needs
- Child apprehension due to poverty
- Inadequate income assistance and supports for children
- Food and water security
- Enforcement mechanisms for existing government policies (eg. child soldiers)
- Access to clean air and water, recreation

We had a brief brainstorming session and discussed the following issues:

- Need for a National Commissioner for Children and Youth
- Need for a national child care system.

- Rights and voices of children and youth in care
- Right to be active, including equipment for children with special needs
- Equity of access to education
- Honesty from the federal government – does the government still support the eradication of child poverty?
- Federal support for early childhood development
- Child labour issues
- Sexual exploitation of children and youth
- Domestic violence and support for youth victims
- Immigrant and refugee youth needs
- Treatment of child soldiers
- Homelessness, suicide, issues faced by LGBTQ youth
- Community living services
- Seismic safety of schools

7) Time and Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, September 10, 2008, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6th Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.