



202 – 1193 Kingsway, Vancouver V5V 3C9
Phone: (604) 873-8437/1-800-307-1212
Fax: (604) 874-9898
info@firstcallbc.org
www.firstcallbc.org

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

In attendance:

Alison Bledsoe – United Way of the Lower Mainland
Kristina Dixon – Canadian Mental Health Association
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association
Julie Norton – First Call
Lesley Richardson – First Call
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Steven Klein – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Mable Elmore – MLA Vancouver-Kensington
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society
Megan Yarema – Canada Without Poverty
Sara Shaw – School Age Child Care Association of BC
Andrina Perry – First Call
Ian Boyko – Canadian Federation of Students – BC
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Jonathan Chapnick – BCGEU
Linda Korbin – BC Association of Social Workers
Kathy Guild – Delta School District

Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Karen Lai – SPARC BC
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation
Jason Chan – S.U.C.C.E.S.S.
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association
Magnolia Villalobos – Richmond Women's Resource Centre
mia amir – Surrey Urban Youth Project

On phone:

Carol Burbees – Northern Lights College
Jennifer Charlesworth – Federation of Community Social Services

Regrets:

John Millar – Health Officers Council
Tami Overbeck – Sea to Sky Community Services
Linda Lucas – Caring for First Nations Children Society
Margaret Antolovich – Public Health Association of BC

1. Introductions

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

2. First Call's Annual Report to the Coalition

First Call has put together a two-page hand out summarizing the work of the coalition in 2009. Because we are not a registered society, we don't prepare a formal annual report. First Call began a strategic planning process in 2009, and partners identified three areas for the coalition to focus on – poverty, early childhood education and care, and youth and adolescent development.

In 2009 First Call had 3 full-time and one part-time staff member. Funding for 2009 came from Vancouver Foundation, United Way, and coalition partner and individual contributions.

Eleven new partner organizations joined the coalition, and First Call's requests for media interviews and coverage continued to grow, particularly around the child poverty report card.

First Call's work around the Four Keys to Success for Children and Youth continues. In 2009 the ECD Roundtable continued to look at how we are supporting young families, and met with Minister Polak to express concern over the lack of a plan for ECD.

Our June forum on youth issues highlighted a number of areas that First Call will continue to work on with the support of our coalition partners in engaging youth, and we are working on a project with the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks aimed at strengthening family and family-like connections for youth in care. At the end of this project, youth in care will

meet with service providers and ministry decision-makers to discuss permanency planning policy and practice.

On the issue of child poverty, First Call has had some success with government responding to the report card release. We are continuing to raise the heat on government to respond to this issue. We are also still working on a campaign to end the refugee transportation loan program.

The Living Wage for Families Campaign continues with several pieces underway – an advisory committee, a group identifying and working with potential living wage employers, and a research group that is documenting the experiences of low-wage workers. Several employers are now registered as living wage employers, and there is a vote coming in the next few weeks over whether or not New Westminster will become the first living wage municipality in Canada.

In the fall First Call released a report on injury rates for young workers and drew concern to the increase in workplace injuries for 12 to 14 year olds. We met with the Minister of Labour, but the ministry's focus has been on educating parents and young employees about workplace safety rather than taking more responsibility for their safety directly through protective policy.

[The report to the coalition is available for download:
<http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/currentissues/2009%20report.pdf>]

Discussion:

The BC Legislature's committee on children and youth has committed to holding a meeting with stakeholders to gather information on addressing child poverty.

First Call is just finishing a powerpoint presentation with data and charts from the child poverty report card, which will be available for advocates to use when giving presentations. Look for it on the First Call website.

First Call is looking for new members of the coordinating committee, which directs the work of the coalition. First Call is also forming a fundraising committee which will need volunteers.

Thanks to the staff and coordinating committee for their ongoing work.

3. Provincial and Federal Budgets

Federal Budget

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) issued a release before the budget asking for equitable treatment in income supports. The budget introduced tax changes affecting how the Universal Child Care Benefit will be dealt with for single parents. CCRC also called for a National Children's Commissioner.

There was no indication of a child poverty plan in the budget. The November 2009 resolution by Parliament to develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada appears to have been hollow. There was nothing on a federal child care plan.

There is a human rights tribunal underway to address the under-funding of child welfare for Aboriginal children living on reserve. The federal government is seeking to have the complaint dismissed.

The Skills Link youth employment program received a \$30 million lift in the budget. Pacific Community Resources Society had made a business case for this program during budget consultations. There was a \$750 million lift overall for training and essential skills development.

Provincial transfers for social issues have stable funding.

There were no additional changes to Employment Insurance in the federal budget. EI overflow is now going into general revenue.

Provincial Budget

Jennifer Charlesworth shared some budget details – there are \$7.39 million in cuts by MCFD to contracted service providers, and another \$5 will be transferred from current service providers to Aboriginal services. Regional conversations are now taking place about how the cuts will be made. \$1.085 million will be cut from the North, and \$3 million from the Fraser Region. The specific areas of reduction will become clear in the next few weeks. Reductions will be concentrated in early years, youth services, and family support, because other areas are protected.

Community Living BC will likely see a \$20 million reduction in funding, and is changing its service delivery model. Community living services for under 19's are now with MCFD. Employment programs are being cut by \$10 million from a budget of \$80 million. Direct impacts of this are unknown at this time.

Cuts to the welfare system include trimming of dental care, medical services and supplies and nutritional benefits for welfare recipients, persons with disabilities and other low-income families. The press release from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development used political spin to make these cuts sound positive. These changes to welfare are the first of many similar announcements expected to come out of the budget. Health authority cuts are expected in addition to what we saw last year.

The Federation of Community Social Services of BC has received 72 documented cuts reported by its membership.

Bill Preston of the BC School Trustees Association expects that the next three years will be the toughest ever for school boards. They have consulted within school districts to understand the real impacts of the budget. The Secretary-Treasurers' Association successfully advocated for an HST rebate for school districts. The good news is that more education partners are working together around budget issues.

The Community Link funding for inner city schools and other vulnerable student services has been moved back to the Ministry of Education from gaming.

This is the first time that BCSTA has declared that education is under-funded.

Margaret White and James Chamberlain reported that, while education funding has increased, it is not enough to cover new costs to the system. It is not clear if the Community Link funding has remained stable in its move between ministries. While

facilities grants have been restored, they have been cut by 50%. The government has not funded salary increases for the past three years. Partial funding is in this budget for all-day kindergarten, but it does not include supplies and spaces. Class size and composition needs are not being met by the Ministry of Education.

An additional \$300 million is needed for education to match 2001 funding levels; about half of this need was addressed by the new budget. Up to 44 schools are threatened by closure.

This budget provides \$1.4 million less for early learning and literacy. While Parent Advisory Councils' funding has been restored (through gaming grants), there is less funding available for food banks from gaming grants, which will have an impact on poor students.

800 Vancouver teachers have been put on lay off notice. A list of those laid off will be used to fill new kindergarten teaching positions despite lack of kindergarten training. There are concerns that Aboriginal students will lose the added lift they got from accessing all-day kindergarten with an enriched focus on Aboriginal cultures, as all students will now be attending.

Linda Korbin noted the current lack of employment for social workers. The Child in the Home of a Relative program is ending this month, and will morph into an extended family program that has some enhanced benefits, but some who were eligible for CIHR will lose out in this new program. [See analysis by BCASW [here](#)].

A 10 year plan on mental health is to be released this spring, but there is no funding attached to it in the budget. There is no clear impact on mental health in the budget, but health authority cuts are expected to have further impact. Proposed additions initiatives are unsupported in the budget. The Alliance for Mental Health and Addictions is meeting with the Minister of Health soon. There is a conversation happening about moving mental health services to the Minister of Housing and Social Development.

Ian Boyko reported that students are paying more in tuitions fees in 2010 than corporations are paying in tax in this province. There was a 28% cut to the student aid budget, but it is not clear how this will play out. This is in addition to student aid cuts made last summer. Funding for post-secondary education is currently frozen. There is no funding for a provincial u-pass to give students increased access to public transit.

Constituency offices are hearing from people who are unable to access skills training. There is no capacity for them in the college system. Private colleges are trying to fill in the gaps, but they are very expensive, and MHSD capped funding for college training at \$4000. Capacity needs to be increased in the public sector for skills training.

The Coalition to Build a Better BC is holding a teach-in and conference on March 20 and a rally on April 10 against provincial budget cuts. Organizations can also sign on to endorse the campaign.

A group of university presidents is working to deregulate tuition fees for professional programs.

Groups being rejected for gaming grants are being told that they're not allowed to reapply or question the criteria in any way. A government press release about gaming grants discusses changes to the funding criteria.

Mable Elmore's office is interested in receiving information from coalition partners to inform the NDP's early learning and child care plan. The NDP is currently engaged in a strategic planning process.

Concerns were raised that MCFD is moving away from foster care to other programs, which is worrisome as foster care's budget is never capped the way other programs are. MCFD is taking a family development response to child protection.

Cuts are anticipated to services for families and kids with FASD. There has not been an administrative increase for frontline contracted services in 9 years; admin costs will be coming out of funding for frontline services. There are no efficiencies left to make in these services. Smaller agencies are supposed to be protected from the cuts.

We don't yet have any budget analysis from the early childhood development sector or Aboriginal agencies. Please send any further information or commentary on the budget to First Call.

4. Time and Date of Next Meeting: April 14, 2010. Refreshments served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6th Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.