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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of March 12, 2008  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Wilma Clarke – Centre for Safe Schools and Communities  
Ruth Fahlman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Gladys Evoy – YWCA Crabtree Corner  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Lesley Richardson – First Call  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland  
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth  
Ginny Gonneau – Society for Children and Youth  
Gizachein Adamu – Canadian Red Cross  
Carrie Smith – SPARC BC  
Jane Thornthwaite – BC School Trustees' Assoc.  
Michael Goldberg – First Call  
Jenny Sanders – SPARC BC  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Chris Kinkaid – BCGEU  
Iglika Ivanova – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

Jane King – Representative for Children and Youth  
Marc Lee – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives  
Lynell Anderson – Human Early Learning Partnership  
Teresa Lum – Representative for Children and Youth  
Tina Crouse – Dunbar Make Poverty History  
Coralys Cuthbert – City of Vancouver Social Planning  
Bob Bowles – Langley Students with Special Needs  
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families  
Janice McDonald – Dietitians of Canada

**On phone:**

Mitzi Dean – Pacific Centre Family Services Association  
Lesley Anderson – Prince George United Way  
Norma Strachan – ASPECT

**Regrets:**

Shawn Hoey – Caring for First Nations Children Society  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC  
Sylvia Bishop – BC Teachers' Federation  
Lindsay March – AMSSA

**1) Welcome and Agenda Change**

Chair Michael Goldberg opened the meeting and noted a change in the agenda. The SPARC BC report *Still Left Behind* will not be presented due to illness.

**2) First Call Reports and Updates**

**Living Wage for Families Project:**

First Call is working with the Hospital Employees' Union, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and a table of other researchers to calculate a living wage for Metro Vancouver. We are doing a third consultation in the immigrant community tomorrow to test the wage. Previous consultation attendants have noted the importance of funds for adult education to enable career advancement.

The wage has been decided on, as well as the number of hours worked by each parent and the ages of the children in the family on which the calculation is based. The report should be out in June.

Another Living Wage Roundtable is planned for May, which will focus on building a campaign for the fall. We are looking for allies in the campaign, and discussing a focus such as a particular municipality or sector.

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable:**

The Roundtable on March 5 had representatives from the BC Council for Families (BCCF) to discuss the distribution of the \$20 million grant they received for child care in 2006/07. There were many concerns voiced over how the money is designated. They were asked to be courageous in giving their feedback to the government about what the child care field needs. Child care programs are concerned about receiving more one-time funding for equipment when what's really needed is a long term plan to lower parent fees and raise wages for trained staff. However, BCCF feels their hands are tied in terms of disbursement. They are soliciting feedback online.

Because of the way the Ministry of Education funding formula works, boards of education are being forced to close schools and bump early childhood programs out, including child care and new StrongStart centres, leaving empty school buildings. An example of this is the Cowichan Valley, where several schools are closing and 237 child care spaces are being lost. School boards cannot count child care spaces or other early childhood programs in their seat counts.

### **3) Introductions**

Introductions took place after all presenters had arrived.

### **4) Impacts of Provincial and Federal Budgets on Children and Youth**

#### **Marc Lee, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives:**

Apart from the "green" aspect, the provincial budget was pretty status quo. The new carbon tax is revenue neutral. It will flow into tax cuts and a low-income tax credit. The low-income tax credit piggy-backs on the GST credit, and will be \$100 for adults and \$30 for children. Low-income families will be ahead until the carbon tax is raised in 2012 and the tax credit will no longer compensate for it – the tax will be increased more than the credit. The carbon tax includes natural gas and heating oil.

Health care gets a reasonable increase in this budget, but we need more investments in home care and residential care. We need to prevent the need for primary care.

Social services get the short end of the stick. Despite the fact that the surplus shows us that there is enough money for investments in child care, affordable housing or other social services, these are not in the budget.

All government entities will be carbon neutral by 2010. Schools districts are scrambling to meet this requirement, and if they don't make it they will have to pay into an offset fund.

There is very little in the federal budget for children and families. It includes a \$10 billion debt payment and tax cuts for the wealthy. There is \$7 in tax cuts and debt reduction for every \$1 spent in this budget. The only item for children is \$3 million for medic alert bracelets.

The federal budget includes new tax-free savings accounts for \$5000 a year. Individuals can pay tax on the money now and withdraw it tax free; this account benefits high income people, and very few people have the extra income to invest this much. This government has a pattern of making investment income tax free.

## **Lynell Anderson, Human Early Learning Partnership:**

Budgets are about choices and priorities. The federal budget continues to choose debt and tax reduction over poverty reduction and other social investments as the priority for surpluses.

A brief analysis highlights 4 points from the federal and provincial budgets:

1. Government's budget documents provide information that's helpful in understanding finances from various perspectives (of course, it takes time to analyze it). For example, provincial budget information may be provided both in actual dollars and expressed as a per cent of GDP. Regarding the latter: between 2001/02 and 2006/07, as a share of the BC economy, provincial surplus grew 388%, total public spending dropped 16% and public spending on social services dropped 38% (2007 Financial and Economic Review, July 2007).
2. At the same time, budgets do not always provide detailed expenditures by program. For example, the provincial MCFD budget for 2008/09 combines child care, early childhood development and supports for children with special needs in one line item. [See Ministry of Children and Family Development budget available at: <http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2008/sp/cfd> (click next at bottom of page until you reach the budget)]. Note the footnote for this particular line item. While MCFD received \$33 million in federal transfers in both 2007/08 and 2008/09 specifically for child care space development, the note suggests that these particular transfers are reflected differently in each of the two years. This may be an area to request clarification from MCFD, to help understand the actual changes in the Ministry's budget between these years.
3. One may refer to other reports and communications for program expenditure details. For example, the February Reid Report and the March 7 2008 'For the Record' (MCFD web site, under child care) indicate the child care budget for both 2007/08 and 2008/09 is around \$290 million. The HELP Financial Fact Sheet #2 shows that, despite their recent volatility, federal child care transfers have been key to recent growth in the child care budget, providing approximately \$80 million in total in both 2007/08 and 2008/09 and more than offsetting provincial reductions (see Child Care Papers at [http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/resources\\_reportspubs.htm](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/resources_reportspubs.htm)).
4. Finally, despite the termination of the most significant federal child care transfer effective 2007/08 (the bilateral agreements on early learning and child care), total federal transfers to provinces and territories actually increased between 2006/07 and 2007/08 by over \$3 billion (2008 Federal Budget, Table 5.5, p. 205). Moderate increases continue for future years. While the federal transfers are frequently 'earmarked' for specific goals, generally they can be used to address government's chosen priorities. Governments are to report to their publics on how these funds are used.

## **Discussion:**

The lost revenue from the new tax free savings account will grow to \$3 billion a year.

There is no breakdown of early childhood development money in the budget. It may come out in the estimate debates, or we could ask the Ministry for figures.

Money for employment training is being devolved from the federal government to the provincial level. This money will be tracked by ASPECT (The Assoc. of Service Providers for Employability and Career Training).

There is a new crown corporation to manage Employment Insurance, but it may not be able to handle an economic downturn.

How do we measure the effectiveness of any changes in the budget? We could do a better job of presenting the budget to the public. First Call does a good job of commenting on how the budget affects various communities.

One-time grants are not effective. We need sustained funding, and could raise public awareness of this issue more.

An economic recession would likely mean service reductions – government is reluctant to raise taxes or run a deficit.

We should remember what we used to be able to do as a society, and what used to be part of the budget. For example, MCFD used to have over 100 social workers (called child care workers) just in the Vancouver School District. We also used to have nurses and more youth and family workers in schools. We need to keep questioning this apparent inability to take care of ourselves.

Thanks to First Call for continuing to focus on these important issues.

The carbon tax is unequal in that it will be higher in rural areas due to lack of public transportation and the need to transport goods.

The government has underestimated revenue estimates, particularly corporate revenue, with the effect of hiding actual surpluses expected.

## **5) First Call Reports and Updates – Continued**

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable:**

We are still pursuing full accounting of the spending of one-time only funding from 2006/07. There is little public information on the feasibility study for kindergarten for three and four year olds.

HELP conducted an evaluation of StrongStart which is available online. (See: [http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/documents/2007/strongstart\\_2007-09-30.pdf](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca/documents/2007/strongstart_2007-09-30.pdf))

Participants continue to point out the need for additional programs that meet the needs of working families, as StrongStart is a drop in program for parents or caregivers with their children. The attendance rate is relatively low in some programs. StrongStart will be expanding to 400 centres from 80.

There was no funding announced to accompany the planning for StrongStart expansion and all day kindergarten. First Call should take action by highlighting these contradictions.

Lesley du Toit, deputy minister of MCFD may be coming to the April Roundtable [update: Ms. du Toit will be attending this April 23 meeting. Contact First Call for details]. We need

to have both MCFD and Ministry of Education in the room to explain how the two ministries are working together to meet the needs of children.

### **Communications and Outreach Work:**

First Call has done a number of presentations over the past few months, primarily on advocacy and child poverty. Audiences include:

- Fleetwood Church in Surrey
- Rotary Club
- Nursing Students
- Education conference
- Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology
- Online Chat on the Child Poverty Report Card

We will present a write up of our communications and outreach work at a future coalition meeting.

### **Move to Family Services of Greater Vancouver:**

First Call's office is moving on March 18. Visit our web site for details.

### **6) Coalition Partner Updates**

The NDP child care consultation is underway now.

Red Cross RespectEd is presenting an anti-bullying drama called Seeds of Respect. Seeds of Respect will be performed Thursday, March 27 and Sunday, March 30 from 7:30 – 9:00 PM at the Jewish Community Centre, 950 W. 41<sup>st</sup> Ave. in Vancouver. Tickets are \$10. Proceeds will go to a post-secondary education fund for the participating youth.

The Dietitians of Canada met with Claude Richmond, Minister of Employment and Income Assistance. He thought that Statistics Canada's poverty rates were over-estimates. He didn't comment on shelter rates for those on income assistance. He stated that a lot of people have been moved from income assistance to work, and their average wage is \$13 an hour. The Dietitians also met with the Minister for Act Now, Gordon Hogg. They asked him and Minister Richmond to take a leadership role in implementing a poverty reduction strategy for BC.

SPARC BC conducted the homeless count this week; the data will be released on April 8.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is completing contract extensions for early childhood and pre-natal programs for 08-09. They still don't have a budget for these programs.

### **7) Future Coalition Meeting Agendas**

April 9 will be a YouthSpeak presented by the BC Federation of Youth in Care Networks. Partners will also discuss and come to a decision on First Call's proposed resolution in support of Jordan's Principle at this meeting.

The May meeting will feature presentations from the three communities involved in First Call's Leveling the Playing Field for Families project.

At the June meeting our guest will be BC's Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.

First Call is seeking new members for its Coordinating Committee – please contact Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator for more information at [amontani@fsgv.ca](mailto:amontani@fsgv.ca).

**8) Time and Date of Next Meeting:** Wednesday, April 9, 2008, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.