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First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of March 9, 2011 BC Teachers' Federation Building

In attendance:

Michael McCarthy Flynn – First Call
Jeremy Vis – BC Association for Community Living
Carol Ross – Parent Support Services
Kristen Yarker-Edgar – Dietitians of Canada
Agata Feetham – Gordon Neighbourhood House
Lianne Carley – Vancouver Coastal Health
Karen Moss – Red Cross RespectED
Naznin Dhanani – ELSANet
Tracey Young – BCASW/FC&YJ Committee
Sanya Pighin – Representative for Children and Youth
Emily Mliczko – Early Childhood Educators of BC
Linda Korbin – BC Association of Social Workers
Steve Kersetter – First Call
Mae Burrows – Burnaby Social Sustainability Committee
Andrina Perry – First Call
Maria Nguyen – MOSAIC
Syd Bosel – South Vancouver & Eastside Family Place
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation

Adrienne Montani – First Call
Mike Clarke – BCGEU
Steve Bailey – BC Retired Teachers Association
John Carsley – Health Officers Council of BC
Karen Thompson – SPARC BC
Sue Irwin – North Shore Community Resources
Lanny Libby – City of Vancouver

On phone:

Georgia Peters – CASA for Children of Greater Victoria
Margaret Antolovich – Public Health Association of BC
Louisa Sanchez – School Trustee, Prince Rupert

Regrets:

Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Melissa McDowell – AMSSA
Kris Courchene – Western Society for Children
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates
Jason Chan – SUCCESS
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association

1. Introductions

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

2. First Call Reports and Updates

Party Leadership Candidates Questionnaire

First Call circulated a questionnaire to candidates for the Liberal and NDP leadership in February. We didn't hear back from any Liberal candidates, but got responses from 4 NDP candidates, though not always with the level of detail we requested. Results from responders indicated substantial agreement with our positions on issues touching on all 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth. Responses can be viewed on the [First Call website](#).

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition has the results of their survey of Liberal leadership candidates up on their website. Also, the Canadian Cancer Society surveyed candidates on their support for a cosmetic pesticide ban; Liberal candidates Mike de Jong and Christy Clark, as well as all NDP candidates, were in favour. The Pride Education Network also has survey results available online.

Living Wage for Families Campaign

Two public forums are coming up in Vancouver and Surrey in April. They will feature Deborah Littman on the London UK living wage campaign and 2012 Olympics commitments, New Westminster City Councillor Jamie McEvoy, parents, employers and information on the living wage calculation. Dr. Clyde Hertzman will MC the Vancouver session. Flyers will be

available in multiple languages. An open letter to municipal candidates is currently being circulated for support from organizations and individuals. First Call partner organizations are encouraged to sign the letter.

Letter to Christy Clark

First Call is sending an open letter to Premier-Designate Christy Clark to share our priorities for government action. She campaigned on some proposed actions to address family poverty, including eliminating the training wage, raising the minimum wage and increasing the working income tax benefit. First Call also recommends the following:

- Support families' ability to work and enhance child development opportunities by creating a provincial non-profit child care system that offers high quality, affordable and accessible care to all children. The current situation of high parent fees, too few spaces, and underpaid early childhood educators is in urgent need of systemic reform.
- Recognizing the critical role poverty plays in creating vulnerabilities and risks for children's health and development, adopt a comprehensive poverty reduction plan with legislated targets and timelines and regular public reporting on progress.
- Embrace the government's leadership role in making sure families are lifted out of poverty by encouraging employers in both the public and private sectors to pay living wages, that is, wages that provide a basic level of economic security. No parent should be required to work so many hours that he or she is deprived of time for parenting, which is what happens when wages are so low that parents must work multiple jobs to make ends meet.
- Reform BC's income assistance policies to better support parents and children's healthy development, including raising inadequate shelter and support rates, indexing them, and restoring earnings and child support exemptions. Restore the exemption from seeking work for parents of young children, at least until a quality child care system is in place. Revise the rates for parents/grandparents with children with disabilities to better reflect their extra needs.
- Increase government's efforts to end homelessness and increase the availability of safe and affordable housing for low-income families.
- Work with the federal government to achieve enhanced parenting leave through the
- Employment Insurance system with adequate income supports for all parents of young children.
- Ensure BC's public schools have sufficient funding to deliver on their promise of equitable opportunity for all children, regardless of ability or income level. Parents should not have to fundraise for their children's public education, and the current reliance on this creates inequities between schools. Necessary supports for children with special needs should not be so scarce that help for one child takes away from another child's entitlement.
- Work with relevant provincial ministries (e.g. Children and Families, Health) to ensure equitable access to prevention and early intervention services for children, youth and families in every community throughout BC.
- Ensure the Ministry of Children and Family Development has sufficient funding to carry out its child protection mandate with integrity, based on high standards of practice. Improve supports for youth in care as they transition to adulthood.
- After BC's work-start age was lowered to 12 years old, accepted work-related injury claims for 12 to 14-year-old children increased ten-fold (between 2005-2008). Raise the work-start age in BC back up to 15 and strengthen protections for young people at work, e.g. prohibited hours of work, prohibited occupations, and other best practices.

- Introduce legislation banning cosmetic pesticides to protect children's health and their natural environment.

Coalition Response to Child Protection Issues in Bountiful

Final arguments in the polygamy reference case are now being presented to court. The intervention by the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children has emphasized that children's rights are the most important issue in Bountiful, regardless of the decision on the legality of polygamy.

Forum on Youth Issues Organizing Committee

First Call is committed to holding a bi-annual youth forum, which will happen in June of this year, and is seeking volunteers to join a planning committee. Louisa Sanchez is looking at holding a youth forum in the North in June. An Aboriginal youth forum is coming up later in March, organized by the Association of Friendship Centres.

Report on Child Poverty in West Vancouver

A report has been released by North Shore MLA Ralph Sultan, which responds to census data released by First Call. He concluded that poverty is an issue for immigrants and single mothers in West Van. We will invite him to a future coalition meeting for discussion of single parent policy issues. He produced some interesting data on risk factors for child poverty.

YWCA Report on Women with No Status

This report focuses on immigrant women who have left relationships with their sponsors, and therefore now have no status in Canada. Some of their children have not been allowed to attend school, and access to financial support and other services is compromised. MOSAIC is working on developing some poverty statistics based on women they have encountered in this situation.

Fundraising Dinner Committee

First Call is seeking volunteers to help organize our annual fundraising dinner, which will be held in the fall. Call Andrina Perry at 604-873-8437 or email info@firstcallbc.org if you would like to help.

Marketing to Children

The BC Healthy Living Alliance is calling on provincial and federal governments to place restrictions on marketing unhealthy food to children, taxes on non-nutritive foods and increased supports for local recreation infrastructure in a new policy paper called [The Next Generation](#). Other recommendations are offered to reduce health inequities and health hazards.

The federal [HUMA Committee report](#) on a poverty reduction plan for Canada received a [disappointing response](#) from government.

The Ministry of Health Services will be announcing some significant prevention programs in the next two months. One of the priorities is vulnerable mothers and babies.

The Health Officers Council is open to hearing from Coalition partners on priorities for discussion and resolutions at their upcoming AGM. Contact Dr. John Carsley at John.Carsley@vch.ca.

3. Provincial Budget

First Call provided a summary of the budgets of relevant ministries and comments from the minister on the MCFD budget. The ECD Roundtable wrote to Minister Polak last year regarding the unintended consequences of cuts across ministries, something she acknowledged when speaking to the Federation of Community Social Services in February.

We should all take this opportunity to communicate priorities to Christy Clark.

Community services contracts from MCFD seem to be remaining the same.

Vancouver Coastal Health cuts to Pacific Post-Partum Services have been reversed.

One unknown is changes to contracts for employment program service providers.

Transition houses are now under BC Housing, which may lead to changes in those programs.

4. Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Carol Ross of Parent Support Services Society of BC presented about their project supporting grandparents raising grandchildren. According to 2006 census data, over 40,000 children are being raised by grandparents in Canada, 10,000 of those in BC. 17% of grandparents raising grandchildren are of First Nations descent. 50% of these families have an annual gross income of less than \$30,000.

68% of grandchildren being raised by grandparents have severe disabilities; 54% have a clinical diagnosis. The number of grandchildren being raised by grandparents is about the same as the number of children in government care in this province.

Trained volunteers run weekly support groups for grandparents, which meet at least monthly. A grand gathering will be held in New Westminster on May 28.

Parent Support Services partnered with the University of Victoria School of Social Work to do research projects, including a legal guide for grandparents and a resource booklet. MCFD has committed to funding an update of the legal guide.

Parent Support Services makes the following recommendations to MCFD in support of grandparents:

- Make cross-ministry advocate/navigator(s) available to grandparents raising grandchildren
- Recognize the foster parent equivalent role of grandparents in this situation
- Improve training for Ministry social workers in MCFD policies and programs; ensure cultural competence is included in training.
- Create a grandparent advisory committee

- Improve benefits in the Child in the Home of a Relative program (this program has since been cancelled or closed to new participants)

There has been a consistent liaison at MCFD for grandparents raising grandchildren, which has been helpful in getting the attention of the ministry. Still, there are inconsistencies with social workers around the province. The Extended Family Program was launched without concrete policy attached to it, which has been challenging. This new program was the top issue at legal seminars held with grandparents around the province. Grandparents who have guardianship are not eligible for EFP, but those who are eligible (only about 280 currently, compared to 4000 who received assistance on Child in the Home of a Relative) get good services.

Future plans for the project include the production of self-advocacy materials, updating the legal guide, increasing support groups and online networking for grandparents.

Grandparents don't qualify for a child care subsidy if they're not going to school or work, so there is no respite for them.

Discussion

The BC Poverty Reduction Coalition is gathering stories of family poverty – grandparents may want to participate in this.

How can First Call best support policy recommendations for grandparents raising grandchildren? Choose 3 or fewer key issues to focus on. Several attendees volunteered to form a committee to work on this issue on First Call's behalf.

Court Appointed Special Advocates could play a role in advocating for grandparents. They hope to be operating in Victoria by the fall.

4. Partner Updates and Announcements

BC Teachers' Federation distributed a new poster with a timeline of feminist history for International Women's Day. They have a new handbook on gender inclusive lesson plans, and a history of racism in Canada poster.

West Coast LEAF is conducting research on custody and access related to Section 15 equality rights in the Charter of Rights and Freedom.

6. Time and Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, April 13, 2011. Refreshments served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6th Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.