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First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of May 12, 2010 BC Teachers' Federation Building

In attendance:

Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Meredith Sheperd – Canadian Mental Health Association
Megan Yarema – Canada Without Poverty
Rishima Bahadoorsingh – AMSSA
David Halme – BC Teachers' Federation
Brad Morrison – UBC Alma Mater Society
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Denise Nelson – Family Support Institute
Clara Rutter – Society for Children and Youth
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Robyn Matthews – First Call
Daisy Kler – Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter

Kayla Pompu – Vancouver Coastal Health
Duncan Stewart – McCreary Centre Society
Jocelyn Helland – Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
Andrina Perry – First Call
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families
Mable Elmore – MLA Vancouver-Kensington
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Rita Chudnovsky – Child Care Advocacy Forum
Clifford White – Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre

On phone:

Carol Burbee - Northern Lights College
Margaret Antolovich - Public Health Association of BC
Cindy Andrew - Psychology Foundation

Regrets:

Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society

1. Introductions

Chair Jocelyn Helland opened the meeting, and there was a round of introductions.

2. Trafficking of Women and Children

A collective member and volunteer with Vancouver Rape Relief and Women's Shelter shared her personal story of being prostituted in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside as a child, and encountering horrendous violence, rape, and abuse at the hands of pimps and sex buyers. She and Daisy Kler, also of the Canadian Association of Sexual Assault Centres, presented facts and recommendations for ending prostitution and violence against women and girls.

The demand can be stopped for the bodies of women and children. Rape is an enactment of the various forms of power men have over women. 500 Aboriginal women and girls have been murdered or disappeared in Canada.

In terms of the arguments for the legalization of prostitution, there is no evidence that indoor sex work is safer than outdoor work. The evidence shows that women and girls rarely make the choice to enter or remain in prostitution. Pimps posing as boyfriends often trick young girls into prostitution, and violence keeps the girls from leaving their pimps. 52% of prostitutes started working before they were sixteen, and the majority of these entered the sex trade between the ages of twelve and fourteen.

Research by Melissa Farley found that, over a period of six years in Vancouver, 6 men were charged for buying sex from children, while 354 children were charged with involvement in prostitution. Rape Relief is asking for the decriminalization of women and children involved in prostitution, and the criminalization of men who buy sex.

In 1997, 12 women and girls were trafficked into Canada each week. Legalization of prostitution is expected to increase trafficking. Prostitution is now regulated or legal in 22 countries, and imperialism, colonization and patriarchy continue to make women vulnerable.

Aboriginal women and girls are over-represented in prostitution. Exit services are needed, including child care and detox beds. The fight against prostitution is the fight of all women, as all women face the fear of rape.

Demands from government include a guaranteed livable income, compliance with the Palermo Protocols (<http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CTOC/index.html>) and CEDAW (<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>), supports for refugee and immigrant women that are funded but not controlled by government, and Aboriginal self-determination. Government should criminalize buyers, pimps and traffickers, which is the model used by the Nordic countries, and include a public education campaign and a strong welfare system.

Coalition participants commented on the powerful impact of the information presented and the importance of this topic.

3. First Call Reports and Updates

Living Wage for Families Campaign

A great victory was achieved with the passing of a bylaw in New Westminster that all city staff and contracted employees working on city sites must be paid a living wage. An updated calculation has just been released, and the current living wage for Metro Vancouver is \$18.17. Yesterday a successful roundtable was held to update stakeholders and the public on the campaign. Find out more at www.livingwageforfamilies.ca.

Refugee Transportation Loans Campaign

We re-sent a prompt to BC MPs asking where they stand on this issue. We will be posting a list of responses soon and asking constituents to follow up with their MPs to have this legislation changed.

Early Childhood Development Roundtable

At the next meeting on May 26 we will have a discussion with the new provincial early years senior policy person.

Representative for Children and Youth in Court

The Representative is going to court tomorrow to fight for access to cabinet documents stemming from her investigation into the Child in the Home of a Relative program.

BC Poverty Reduction Coalition

There is a new open letter calling for a poverty reduction plan for BC. Sign up as individuals and check to see if your organization has signed on.

Other First Call News

Watch for our annual appeal for partner contributions coming in June.

The June coalition meeting will be a celebration with the Child Care Advocacy Forum as they wrap up a decade of work. Their work is being rolled into First Call's ECD Roundtable.

First Call will be a witness at the May 21st meeting of the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth that will examine child poverty.

Partner Updates

The BC Council for Families annual general meeting is on June 18 with guest speaker Joanne Schroeder from HELP.

The UBC Alma Mater Society, Graduate Student Society and Antigone present a conference on child care on campuses called "It Takes a University," May 21-22.

Canadian Mental Health Association has a new project on transitions from youth to adult mental health services, and they may be in contact with some First Call partners.

During estimates in the provincial legislature, questions were asked about specific cuts and it came out that there will be no child care plan, and the early years plan is being shelved due to lack of funds.

4. Alcohol and Drug Use Among Youth

Duncan Stewart of McCreary Centre Society presented *What a difference a year can make: Early alcohol and marijuana use among 16 to 18 year old BC students*. McCreary is a non-profit organization that conducts research on youth, including the provincial Adolescent Health Survey. All their reports are available on their website: www.mcs.bc.ca.

The Ministry of Health Services funded a study of early alcohol and marijuana use among 16 to 18 year olds, using data from the Adolescent Health Survey. Alcohol and marijuana use among teens has declined since 1998. 75% have tried alcohol, and 46% have tried marijuana. Some cultural and gender differences were identified in the study.

One of the key findings was that youth who started drinking earlier drank more, mixed alcohol, and participated in binge drinking. The older youth were when they started using alcohol or marijuana, the less likely they were to be current users or to engage in risky behaviour. Smoking rates are going down among youth, but perceptions of pot are different – smoking pot is not considered unhealthy the way cigarettes are.

McCreary released a bulletin in addition to the Ministry of Health Services study which examined the use of substances besides alcohol and marijuana. Youth who used alcohol and pot earlier were more likely to try other substances.

There are a number of health risks attributed to early alcohol use, including increased likelihood of getting in fights, carrying weapons, early sexual activity, and driving under the influence. A number of protective factors are associated with delayed substance use, including connectedness to family, school, and culture, and participation in meaningful activities. There does seem to be some link between poverty and early substance use.

Delaying the use of alcohol and marijuana by even a couple of years improved health outcomes for youth, and even among early users, avoiding use of alcohol or marijuana recently had health benefits. McCreary recommends targeting children at greater risk for early use and not giving up on older youth who are already using substances.

5. Children's Mental Health

May 7th was Child and Youth Mental Health Day in BC. Keli Anderson announced that an Institute of Families was launched last week, which is mobilizing families to support child and youth mental health and engage them as partners. The Institute will meet the need for a national, collective movement for mental health, and they are partnering with Today's Parent magazine on a public education and outreach campaign. They will provide a template and support for provincial family councils, and are taking the lead on a national Child and Youth Mental Health Day. The Institute will use a "family smart" designation to identify programs and policies meeting criteria identified by families.

6. Time and Date of Next Meeting: June 9, 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.