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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Minutes of May 13, 2009
Family Services of Greater Vancouver**

In attendance:

Julie Norton – First Call
Carol Anderson – Westcoast Family Resource Society
Blanca Salvatierra – Mt Pleasant Neighbourhood Hs.
Colleen Bob – RespectED, Red Cross
Michael McCarthy Flynn – First Call
John Millar – Health Officers Council
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Andrina Perry – First Call
Lesley Richardson – First Call
Magnolia Villalobos – Richmond Women’s Res Ctr
Jocelyne Hamel – Mt Pleasant Neighbourhood Hs.
Monica Urrutia – Philippine Women Centre
Karen Lai – SPARC BC
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Health
Lesley Cleathero – Vancouver Coastal Health
Rachel Douglas – Public Health Agency of Canada
Erin Rennie – Western Society for Children
Kim Lau – YMCA
Jenn Basu – AMSSA

Terry Lejko – Van Aboriginal Child & Fam Services Soc
Breann Specht – Vancouver Coastal Health
Nicole Mate – BC Children’s Hospital Aboriginal Health
Jason Chan – SUCCESS
Annette Vogt – BC Centre for Safe Schools
Dana Brynelsen – Infant Development Program
Steve Kerstetter – First Call

On phone:

Michael Goldberg – First Call

Regrets:

Lynell Anderson – Human Early Learning Partnership
Susan Forest – Justice Institute of BC
Philippa Slater – Learning Disabilities Association of BC
Catherine Guzik – Immigrant Integration Branch
Mitzi Dean – Pacific Centre Family Services
Al Vigoda – Vibrant Surrey
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers’ Federation
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

1. Introductions

Chair Julie Norton opened the meeting.

2. Provincial Election Discussion

The election results will impact First Call’s strategies for the future. A strategic plan for First Call will be developed in the next few months, and will take into account the need to build working relationships with new ministers and other decision-makers. Public policy is one strategy that First Call takes in our advocacy work – the others are public education and community mobilization. Our strength has been synthesizing information from the field. Mobilizing within the coalition is also an important strategy.

First Call does a good job of keeping the coalition informed, but we need to examine how we can be more effective in informing policy development. We have not been able to move forward on the poverty reduction issue with this government, and we need new approaches.

Quebec has done well at reducing child and family poverty, and this success came out of a social movement. First Call has been seen less as a social movement, and more as focused on direct advocacy to government. In Quebec the movement was backed by labour, and there were strong advocates within government. We don’t have the same conditions in BC. There are existing movements in BC around a poverty reduction strategy and the living wage campaign which First Call is involved with. First Call has aspired to be the child and youth movement for the province, but this is too broad a goal. We want to be the collective

voice of many sectors on child and youth issues, e.g. health, community living, child and family services, etc.

First Call has a provincial scope, and therefore community organizing is challenging. How much of an emphasis should we place on community development as opposed to provincial policy?

What critical public policy issues need to be brought forward?

How will government measure poverty if they don't accept our numbers? We need to press on this.

Other issues include pushing for government to keep their commitment to early childhood development and housing. We could also emphasize the link between childhood obesity and poverty.

First Call's mandate is to support local communities to take up child and youth issues and calls to action.

3. First Call Project – Leveling the Playing Field for Children

This HRSDC-funded project has just wrapped up. It included the development of a number of research tools such as a report on provincial child poverty rates and a literature review, and involved 3 communities from around the province:

- Kla-how-eya Aboriginal Centre in Surrey developed a coalition on Aboriginal children and youth;
- Gitksan-Wet'suwet'en Education Society (GWES) in Hazelton developed a DVD to use as an advocacy tool;
- and Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House (MPNH) conducted a participatory action research project.

We viewed GWES's educational DVD highlighting the social issues relating to poverty in their community.

Blanca Salvatierra from MPNH gave an overview of their project with Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking families. First Call's community action toolkit was used as a resource. Parents were trained as facilitators and developed a survey for families to ask them about their challenges and barriers, surfacing issues such as housing, education and child care. Six parent facilitators were then able to train additional facilitators. Quotes were shared from the parents demonstrating the importance and impact of the project. Parents became self-advocates wrote letters to government. This project has been a seed for additional community organizing at MPNH. We viewed a short DVD produced by MPNH on this project.

4. First Call Project – Community Consultations

With support from Vancouver Foundation project funding, in conjunction with the BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities, First Call conducted forums in five communities around the province: Nanaimo, Abbotsford, Prince George, Kamloops and Castlegar. Representatives attended from the non-profit, education, government, Aboriginal, and criminal justice sectors. The forums engaged participants in articulating their vision for children and youth in their communities based on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Each session included an advocacy skills workshop, and helped participants see how much advocacy was already being done in each community. The attendees then worked in groups to develop advocacy plans on specific issues.

A range of issues were found to be common across communities, identified by the needs of different age groups, including the lack of affordable leisure activities for youth; the fact that poverty is a problem all around the province; the need for affordable quality child care, the importance of keeping youth connected to schools and positive community influences, and many others. The report on these sessions will be posted to the First Call website shortly.

The forums helped to break work down into systematic steps and created a networking opportunity within each community.

5. First Call Project – Living Wage for Families Campaign

The living wage is a level of income that allows a family to live with dignity. The current minimum wage in BC doesn't raise anyone, even an individual, above the poverty line.

The campaign kicked off with a report last year calculating the living wage for a family of 4 in Metro Vancouver (\$16.74 an hour), based on the actual cost of basic living expenses. The wage can also be lowered if employers provide benefits (e.g. medical and dental) or if costs, such as housing or child care, are reduced through social programs.

A campaign advisory committee has formed and fundraising is underway. We're now moving into the next stages, which will include mobilization, a listening campaign, business accreditation for living wage employers, and the approach to government and framing of the campaign during the recession. Two upcoming workshops for community and labour partners will take place in June to focus on these issues.

6. Partner Updates and News

We viewed a few clips from a new DVD on the importance of play produced by Westcoast Family Resources Society, which is available in several languages.

First Call has a new fundraising plan, and more information about this will be circulated at a later date.

First Call is still working on a campaign to end the debt burden of repayable transportation loans to government-assisted refugees, which will include educating and seeking the support of BC's Members of Parliament.

7. Time and Date of Next Meeting: September 9, 2009, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers' Federation building, 550 W. 6th Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.