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

### **In attendance:**

Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Brenda Lohrenz – ELSA Net  
Freeza Anand – Westcoast Family Resources Society  
Mary Anne McWaters – University Women's Club  
Sophia Dinn – West Coast LEAF  
Mable Elmore – MLA Vancouver Kensington  
Mike Delaney – Legal Services Society  
Kathy Guild – Delta School District  
Tracey Young – BC Association of Social Workers  
Jeremy Vis – BC Association for Community Living  
Agata Feetham – Gordon Neighbourhood House  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Tarah Samuels – Aboriginal Internship Program, MCFD  
Dawn Johnson – MCFD Youth Engagement  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Megan Scott – BCGEU  
Nicholas Simons – MLA Powell River-Sunshine Coast  
Mike Clarke – BCGEU  
Michael McCarthy Flynn – Living Wage Campaign  
Lianne Carley – Vancouver Coastal Health–Population Health  
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association  
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA  
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation

James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Linda Young – Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association  
Deanna Ogle – West Coast LEAF  
Ian Boyko – Canadian Federation of Students BC  
David Halme – BC Teachers' Federation  
Joan McIntyre – MLA West Vancouver-Sea to Sky  
Gemma Holland – First Call  
Stacey Kemp – BC Teachers' Federation  
Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Janice Falk – Delta Teachers' Association

### **On phone:**

Caitlin Etherington - Interior Health

### **Regrets:**

Michelle Van Keith – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Kay Sarai – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Cindy Jamieson – Aboriginal Supported Child Development  
Lanny Libby – City of Vancouver Social Policy  
Jonathan Chapnick – BCGEU  
Leonard Krog – MLA Nanaimo

## **1. First Call Reports and Updates**

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable**

At the most recent meeting of the Roundtable, new reports from the Human Early Learning Partnership on the Early Development Instrument Kindergarten survey data were discussed. It was noted that the Growing Up in BC report from the Representative for Children and Youth and the Provincial Health Officer is a good advocacy tool, but could use a stronger focus on ECD in future editions.

The meeting included a discussion of the ECEBC/CCCABC Integrated Plan for Early Learning and Care. We hope to have someone from the ministries of education and children and family development to discuss their work on the early years at the next Roundtable meeting on December 2.

### **October Focus Group on UNCRC Compliance Reporting**

First Call held a focus group in October to contribute to the alternate/civil society report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child on Canada's compliance. The provincial portion of government's report is inadequate. We should suggest how government can include community in the process prior to the next reporting period.

## **Living Wage for Families Campaign**

New Westminster has now adopted their living wage bylaw, and other municipal campaigns are underway. A number of communities have undertaken calculating their own living wage (as the campaign's calculation only applies to Metro Vancouver).

## **Report on Permanency for Youth in and from Care**

First Call worked with the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks on a report called *Belonging 4 Ever: Creating Permanency for Youth in and from Care*. It's now available to download from our website. [[www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/Transitions/2-permanency%20report.pdf](http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/Transitions/2-permanency%20report.pdf)]

The report contains definitions of permanency, including expanding the focus beyond adoption to securing other lifelong relationships for children and youth in care. It highlights some of the opportunities, tools and best practices in permanency planning in use in BC and elsewhere. It also asks questions about how we can improve permanency planning in BC.

## **Provincial Budget Brief**

First Call's provincial budget brief focuses on the overarching recommendations to address poverty and invest more in the early years. Thanks to those of you in the room who took the time to make submissions and present to the committee on finance and government services. [[www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/CurrentIssues/2011%20prov%20budget.pdf](http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/CurrentIssues/2011%20prov%20budget.pdf)]

First Call just sent an open letter to Premier Campbell that expresses our dismay that the budget consultation process that First Call and so many others participated in was seemingly ignored by the Premier given his announcement two weeks ago of an income tax cut. We were led to believe that the budget consultation process would inform the government's decision on how to use the \$650 million dollars in available revenue. The fact that a tax cut was announced before the committee made their budget recommendations effectively makes a mockery of this democratic process.

[[www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/CurrentIssues/Letter%20to%20Premier%20Nov%202010.pdf](http://www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/CurrentIssues/Letter%20to%20Premier%20Nov%202010.pdf)]

## **Award of Excellence**

First Call staff had the honour of accepting an award of excellence for advocacy from the Representative for Children and Youth in October. The award was given to First Call for our commitment and hard work on behalf of B.C.'s vulnerable children and youth, and is shared with all of our partners and volunteers! Thanks to those of you who contributed to our nomination for the award, and to everyone who took the time to send in congratulations.

## **2010 Child Poverty Report Card**

The BC Child Poverty Report Card will be released on Wednesday, November 24. Once again, BC has the highest child poverty rate in Canada using the after-tax Low Income Cut Off. The news conference will be held at 9:30 am at the BC Teachers' Federation office.

## **First Call for the Children Dinner**

Thanks to all of you who attended the First Call for the Children dinner at the end of October and supporting it in other ways by volunteering, donating auction items, and helping us get

the word out. We had an exceptional event and hope you all enjoyed yourselves too, and we're happy to report that we raised over \$12,000.

## **2. Poverty and Education Research**

This research was presented by Margaret White, Linda Young, and Stacey Kemp. The BC Teachers' Federation undertook this research project in the Okanagan, Port Alberni, Vancouver, and Surrey, with 29 teachers participating. The research explores issues related to poverty and education from a teacher's perspective. According to teachers, the causes of poverty can include structural causes, urban re-development and escalating housing prices, having parents with disabilities, and generational poverty. Some family types have a higher incidence of poverty, including Aboriginal families, recent immigrant families, female lone parent-led families, and couples with children in urban areas.

A number of impacts of child poverty in the classroom were identified, including:

- Children are too tired and hungry to learn
- Children have unmet health needs including vision and hearing problems
- Children are treated differently and are teased about being poor
- Arriving late and missing school
- Transiency and change in the lives of children
- Some poor students are more engaged with school staff and activities
- Wide learning gaps among students are observed
- School can be a safe haven for many students

Teachers shared their observations that we need to quit being afraid to talk to kids about poverty. Tools such as a caring classroom environment and appropriately delivered food programs can help dampen the effects of poverty on kids' education.

Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association recently conducted a project discussing barriers on participating in the education system with low wage women workers to find out how educators can better support parents.

More results from the study can be found in the October and November issues of Teacher Newsmagazine [<http://bctf.ca/publications/TeacherNewsmag.aspx>].

## **3. Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth**

This committee of the legislature is tasked with fostering greater awareness and understanding among legislators and the public of BC's child welfare system. Joan McIntyre, committee chair, attended this meeting to learn more about issues First Call is working on and to talk about what the committee can do.

The committee is a conduit to the government for the Representative for Children and Youth, and it is non-partisan. The Representative brings all of her reports to the committee, and her work is the main focus of the committee. It does not development government policy, and is not attached to the Ministry for Children and Family Development.

The committee held a day of presentations on child poverty in the spring, after the Representative requested they take action on this issue. Joan said that the committee's actions did not go as far as the Representative would have liked.

The committee recently issued their annual report, which includes an extensive summary of the expert presentations (including First Call's) on child poverty and refers legislators to a detailed reading list on this issue.

Nicholas Simons, another member of the committee, said that the committee has to be political, even if it is non-partisan. He would like to see the committee be more pro-active. Even if it is performing its role effectively, government may not respond.

Joan McIntyre acknowledged that the issue of child poverty deserves serious study, and that people who raise serious questions deserve respectful answers from government. Often issues are studied behind the scenes by government. Another MLA, Ralph Sultan, has been looking at early childhood vulnerabilities in middle income areas, and examining whether public investments are going to the right places to do preventative work.

When asked if they would support a recommendation for a poverty reduction strategy from the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth, committee members Nicholas Simons and Mable Elmore both agreed, and noted that the NDP is developing a poverty reduction plan. Joan McIntyre said that Mary Polak is the minister responsible for child poverty, and that the minister is coordinating a cross-ministerial plan. The committee would not make such a recommendation as it is beyond their terms of reference.

It was suggested that structural problems are creating poverty, and that these problems require bold action. All MLAs should have poverty profiles for their constituencies and be educated on these issues.

It was noted that MLAs can use First Call as a resource on child poverty and other child and youth issues, and that we are a non-partisan coalition that will work with any political party to increase awareness and inform public policy development on child and youth issues.

**4. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** December 8, 2010. Refreshments served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.