

## First Call's Weekly Announcements – August 7, 2009

Next Coalition Meeting: September 9

Next ECD Roundtable Meeting: September 17

First Call Fundraising Dinner: October 20

Visit our [web site](#) for more information.

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We welcome your comments, suggestions and any research or event information you wish to have shared with the First Call network. Please let us know what's going on in your community so we can help spread the word!

Please visit our web site at [www.firstcallbc.org](http://www.firstcallbc.org) for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, conferences, media backgrounders, events and more.

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**Advocacy/Calls to Action**

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## 1. First Call Report from Taking Stock of Youth Wellbeing in BC Today: A Forum

First Call has released a report based on the presentations and discussions from our June 11 forum, *Taking Stock of Youth Wellbeing in BC Today*. Thanks to those of you who attended and presented, and to our co-sponsors Vancouver Foundation and PeerNetBC for making this event a very successful day. The report is available [here](#).

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## 2. First Call Brief on the Federal Budget

First Call has made our annual submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance with recommendations for next year's budget. *Children: The Best Investment for a Sustainable Future* makes two major recommendations:

- 1. Give priority to federal tax and program spending that will increase Canada's investment in early childhood development.** *Esteemed economists agree and research evidence shows that the high rate of return on investments in young children's health and development is of key importance to keeping social costs down and maximizing "human capital."*
- 2. Focus stimulus spending and re-design federal tax policy with the aim of reversing the growth of income inequality in Canada.** *Despite the economic ups and downs throughout the past 20 years, little reduction of child poverty has been achieved since Canada committed to eliminate it in 1989. This is evidence of the fact that economic benefits in good times have not been shared equitably, producing an increasingly divided society. In the current economic crisis, achieving greater social inclusion and income support for the families the market is leaving behind must be essential public policy goals.*

Read the rest of the brief [here](#). Briefs can be submitted until August 14 – contact [fina@parl.gc.ca](mailto:fina@parl.gc.ca).

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## 3. Termination of Refugee Transportation Loans Program Going to UBCM

As part of the ongoing campaign to terminate the refugee transportation loan program, First Call's Adrienne Montani made a presentation to Surrey City Council, and a resolution was passed that will go to the Union of BC Municipalities in September. The resolution states:

*TERMINATION OF THE TRANSPORTATION LOAN PROGRAM FOR REFUGEES*

*WHEREAS Canada, as part of its national humanitarian program for Government Assisted Refugee (GAR) immigrants is the only country worldwide that issues interest*

*bearing loans to refugee immigrants to cover their pre-entry medical examination and transportation costs to resettle to Canada.*

*WHEREAS the burden of the transportation loans is having a detrimental impact on thousands of refugees and on Canadian society, undermining refugees' ability to integrate and to contribute to their full potential in their new homes.*

*THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Union of BC Municipalities urges the Government of Canada to immediately cancel all outstanding refugee transportation and pre-entry medical loan debt and to cease seeking repayment of the transportation and pre-entry medical costs for new Government Assisted Refugees coming to Canada."*

*That the City Clerk forward the "Termination of the Transportation Loan Program for Refugees" resolution to the Surrey's MPs and MLAs and the FCM.*

**First Call has just written to all BC Members of Parliament to find out where they stand on this issue:**

*We are asking you to let us know your position on this policy. We are also asking for your help in convincing the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and the Minister of Finance to make the necessary policy changes to allow the Government of Canada to absorb the cost of transportation for resettled refugees...*

***Do you support the elimination of the requirement that refugees resettled in Canada pay back to the Government of Canada the costs of their transportation to Canada?***

**Take action:** write to your MP (we have a sample letter listed below), and find out who is attending the Union of BC Municipalities convention from your municipality. Let them know that this issue is important to you and that they should vote in favour of Surrey's resolution.

Resources:

- [First Call Letter to BC MP's](#)
- [Backgrounder and Sample Letter to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration](#)
- [Surrey Council Resolution \(see page 3\)](#)
- [Canadian Council for Refugees Resolution](#)
- [Impact of Loans on Refugees \(Canadian Council for Refugees\)](#)
- [Letter to Minister Kenney from the Resettlement Assistance Program National Network](#)

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#### 4. Representative for Children and Youth Report Highlights Poverty as Issue in Child Welfare Case

BC's Representative for Children and Youth has released a new report titled *Housing, Help, and Hope: A Better Path for Struggling Families*. The report examines the case of a young family who's child was taken into care because they could not find

affordable housing that was considered safe for the child. The media release from the Representative's office states:

*A lack of flexibility and of real communication between government support workers resulted in this child being taken into care when other less intrusive options were open, said Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond.*

*"Immediate income assistance support, a short-term housing grant and positive supports would have been a sensible and appropriate approach," she said. "Poverty and lack of affordable housing played a major role in this tragic situation. The system was not responsive in addressing the practical issue of short-term money for housing that would have allowed his parents to create a safe home for him. As a result, this baby was separated from his parents, his community and his culture, and his future drastically changed."*

*The infant, who is not being identified, was assessed as a healthy baby when taken into government care in 2006. Three months later, he was critically injured. Today, at the age of three, he has cerebral palsy, is blind in one eye, doesn't walk yet and will need life-long supports.*

The **BC Association of Social Workers** also issued a press release about the report, stating:

*The BCASW supports the Representative's key findings and recommendations and urges MCFD to move quickly towards action and implementation.*

*A reactive, crisis-driven child welfare and social service system that defaults to removing children from vulnerable families rather than working together to find creative solutions to poverty, social exclusion and marginalization creates more problems, tragedy and poorer outcomes.*

*Investment in human and social infrastructure and capital is the most enlightened way forward at this precarious time in BC's child welfare and social service systems. Children in the care of MCFD have a right to be treated with the highest duty of care that a society can offer its most vulnerable and fragile citizens. The government of British Columbia must improve its commitment to the safety, protection and enhancement of the lives of all of BC's children. Their lives and well-being depend on it.*

[Representative's Press Release](#)

[BCASW Press Release](#)

[Housing, Help and Hope](#)

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## 5. Public Libraries At Risk of Losing Provincial Funding

BC public libraries are at risk of losing significant funding this year. Here is some information from [www.stopbclibrarycuts.ca](http://www.stopbclibrarycuts.ca):

*BC provincial public libraries have not yet received their 2009 annual operating grants from the provincial government, nor have they been told how much money they will be receiving – both of which usually happen earlier in the fiscal year. There have been strong indications that the Province has decided to stop funding libraries and that this funding may be cut from the current and subsequent budgets.*

*During this economic downturn, there has been a significant increase in the usage of BC public libraries. Residents know that their libraries offer more than free books to read – they are using the Internet and computer systems to do research, hunt for jobs and more. Without provincial grants, significant cuts will result in these areas:*

*Open Access – In 2008, open access to library collections resulted in more than 5.4 million items being borrowed between communities, creating substantial provincial cost savings by borrowing rather than buying duplicate books.*

*Online Resources – BC residents have 24/7 online access to hundreds of online full text magazines and databases purchased cooperatively by BC libraries. This saves significant tax payer dollars and ensures that BC's rural and remote citizens have the same access to information available in BC's larger centres.*

*AskAway – A collaborative reference service provided by BC libraries. Residents can get free quality help with research on any topic or question from experienced librarians and library technicians.*

*BC OneCard – The BC OneCard program ensures that no matter where you are in BC you have access to local libraries and library services for free by showing your home library card and photo identification.*

*Literacy Programming – Babies and kids around BC can maintain and enhance their literacy skills at all BC public libraries with the BC Summer Reading Club and Books for BC Babies. Both programs are offered free of charge and ensure that all children in BC have the opportunity to develop their reading skills.*

Library cuts will disproportionately impact low income individuals and families who have limited options for accessing the internet, resources, and entertainment. Please visit [www.stopbclibrarycuts.ca](http://www.stopbclibrarycuts.ca) to sign their petition, and contact your MLA to let them know where you stand on this issue.

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## Research & Resources

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### 1. PEI Moves to Full Day Kindergarten

Prince Edward Island will be moving to mandatory, full day kindergarten for five year olds beginning in September 2010. Kindergarten programs in PEI were previously run as community-based, publicly funded early childhood programs outside of

schools. The province's Public Kindergarten Commissioner released a report in June of this year which stated:

*Existing kindergarten teachers will be considered first for the new teaching positions in the school system.*

*Each kindergarten teacher will teach a maximum of 15 students.*

*The play-based curriculum that was recently developed by Island kindergarten educators will continue to be used. The curriculum is based on the philosophy that five-year-olds learn through play, and that they can best learn skills and concepts through active exploration, discovery and hands-on involvement.*

*Premier Ghiz said that while people are excited about moving kindergarten to schools, many are also concerned about the impact this will have on the early childhood sector. "Government understands the vital importance of early childhood education. We are committed to working closely with the sector to identify and address training needs. We are also prepared to fund a comprehensive review that will determine the short and long-term needs of the sector and policy direction to support a vibrant and sustainable early learning and child care system."*

#### [Public Kindergarten Commissioner Report](#)

In the 2008 throne speech, the BC government committed to examining the feasibility of all day kindergarten for three, four and five year olds. An April 2009 report stated that it is not economically feasible to introduce all day kindergarten, even for five year olds, at this time.

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## 2. Quick Fact: Youth Crime Rate Continues to Fall

According to highlights from the police-reported crime statistics in 2008 released by Statistics Canada, there were about 167,000 Canadian youth accused of a Criminal Code offence in 2008, down almost 11,000 from 2007. As a result, the youth crime rate decreased 5%, the fourth decline in the past five years. The youth violent crime rate also dropped, down 3%.

Read more [here](#).

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## 3. Anti-Racism and Postcolonialism in Early Childhood Education

This article from the *Early Childhood Educator* examines how children and early childhood educators can talk about social justice, based on a conversation between pre-schoolers. In the words of one early childhood educator:

*"Children know a lot about racism because many of them live it. I am often told 'This is Canada, we're all the same in Canada.' This frustrates me to no end. People don't want to hear about racism and they want to pretend that it doesn't exist. It's so important that we give them the language to discuss these issues. This is so much deeper than the multicultural approach. I'm kind of tired of people just bringing in a costume and saying this is a multicultural place. Or here is a puzzle with people of different colours. Or saying let's celebrate Chinese New Year. This is playing tourist in some way."*

Read more [here](#).

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## 4. Safe Harbour: Respect for All Program

Coordinated by the Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies in BC, the Safe Harbour: Respect for All program creates opportunities for storefront businesses, institutions, agencies, and entire municipalities to be proactive in creating welcoming and inclusive workplaces and communities. Trained Safe Harbour locations are equipped with the knowledge to better understand their diverse workforce and improve their service to diverse customers and clients.

Safe Harbours also serve as temporary refuges for anyone facing discrimination. Over 500 businesses, agencies, and institutions have now signed on as proud Safe Harbour locations. RONA, TD Canada Trust, Royal Bank, Vancity, London Drugs, The Sandman Suites and the David Suzuki Foundation are a sample of our 500 locations committed to Safe Harbour across 34 BC communities. They are leaders in their stand against racism and hate and in their commitment to providing a respectful workplace environment for people from all backgrounds.

Find out more at [www.safeharbour.ca](http://www.safeharbour.ca).

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## 5. Commentary on Chief Public Health Officer's Report

Sharon Kirkpatrick and Lynn McIntyre have coauthored a commentary on Dr. David Butler-Jones' first annual report on the *State of Public Health in Canada*, which was released last June. The three-page commentary notes how the report "shines a light on major health inequalities in Canada, providing a foundation for further action," despite failing "to [offer] a critical approach to addressing and reducing health inequalities."

The CPHO was expected to make a report about the possibilities of a pandemic infectious disease, such as SARS, but instead "Dr. Butler-Jones chose to use his first report to draw attention to health inequalities and inequities in Canada," such as "persistent and sizeable gaps in life expectancy, infant mortality, self-reported health, prevalence of chronic diseases, and other health indicators between higher- and lower-income groups, as well as the extraordinary disadvantage experienced by

Canada's Aboriginal peoples". Kirkpatrick and McIntyre "highlight some of the strengths and limitations of the report, and reflect on the opportunity that it presents for public health practitioners and researchers working towards the recognition and reduction of health inequalities in Canada."

To read the abstract, visit [The Canadian Journal of Public Health](#) (the full report must be purchased). The *State of Public Health in Canada* is available [here](#).

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## Announcements

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### 1. Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth: Vancouver Symposium

Join the BC Yukon Society of Transition Houses and the CAMH Centre for Prevention Science for a regional symposium on Engaging and Empowering Aboriginal Youth. The event takes place on Wednesday, September 30, 2009 from 8AM – 3PM at the Radisson Hotel Vancouver Airport.

Participants will receive a free toolkit for Service Providers at this event. Registration is FREE and open to all service providers working with or wanting to learn more about engaging and empowering Aboriginal youth in their programs.

Space is limited. Please register early to ensure seating. Continental breakfast and lunch included. To register, please click [here](#) or contact Rhiannon Wong at [rhiannonwong@bcysth.ca](mailto:rhiannonwong@bcysth.ca).

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### 2. BCAPOP Conference Program Now Available

The BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs is holding a conference October 14 – 16 at the Hilton Vancouver Airport. Featured Speakers will include Penny Simkin, *When Survivors Give Birth*; Jan Spillman, *Compassion Fatigue*; and Heather Cameron, *Mothers for Recovery Support Groups*.

The full conference program is now available for download [here](#). Register online [here](#).

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### 3. Parent Support Services Seeking Nominations for Bill McFarland Award

The Bill McFarland Award was established by BC Parents in Crisis Society (now Parent Support Services Society of BC) in 1997. Over his 50 year career, Bill McFarland was instrumental in the development of progressive programs, policies and services for children and their families.

Bill McFarland was an advocate for children throughout his life and social work career. Among his achievements, Bill was a founder of the Alberta Foster Parents Association, the National Federation of Youth in Care Networks, and Parent Support Services Society of BC. This award honours his memory and his tireless efforts for the care and welfare of all children.

The award is presented to a group or individual for:

- Outstanding devotion to the prevention of child abuse over a long period of time, and/or;
- Efforts related to a project which is making a lasting mark in the area of child welfare.

The deadline for nominations is August 21, 2009. Nomination information is available [here](#).

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