

First Call's Weekly Announcements – November 16, 2009

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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 for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, events, new publications and more.

First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
202 – 1193 Kingsway, Vancouver, V5V 3C9
Ph: 604-873-8437 Fx: 604-874-9898
Email: info@firstcallbc.org

Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. 20th Anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

November 20 is National Child Day, which marks the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The [UNICEF website](#) has detailed information on how Canada is doing with regards to the UNCRC, and is taking this opportunity to mobilize in favour of a national Children's Commissioner.

In their opinion column in the Vancouver Sun, child advocates Marc and Craig Kielberger write:

Twenty years ago this week, the United Nations adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Since then, it has been ratified by 193 countries, including every UN member state but the United States and Somalia. This was the first document to enshrine children's rights not as someone's daughter or son, but as distinct members of our society requiring special protection and rights.

The document itself was revolutionary. The support was unprecedented -- the most widely ratified convention in history. The UNCRC laid out the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights for children. Around the world, it was hailed for the solemn promise it made for protecting children and the hope it represented for our future...

Canada also has significant shortcomings. After criticism from the UN on inaction related to domestic child poverty, the government ceased filing reports for review. It has failed to submit a five-year annual document since 2001.

The 20th anniversary of the UNCRC is the perfect time for Canada and the world to renew our commitment to children. Canada can start by submitting to a review, learning from the criticism and actually implementing the policies.

The Public Health Agency of Canada has a number of resources available about the UNCRC, including rights education activities for children. Find out more [here](#).

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children has prepared a statement for the 20th anniversary of the UNCRC and a progress report on children's rights in Canada – both are available on their [website](#).

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2. Finance Committee Report on 2010 Budget Consultations

The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has issued its report on the recent budget consultations. The vast majority of recommendations dealing with child and youth issues were under education; the recommendations do not address poverty, low wages, or child care. Budget priorities include:

- Eliminate inefficiency across ministries and improve resourcing to address delays for services and programs for children with special needs.
- Examine reducing the interest rate charged by StudentAid BC on student loans.
- Consider extending the no-payment, interest-free period on BC student loans.
- Work with boards of education to conduct a comprehensive review of the education funding formula.

- Treat the annual facilities grant [to boards of education] as a high priority for funding in the 2010-11 budget.
- Ensure the implementation of all-day kindergarten is fully funded.

The report is available for download [here](#).

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3. Motion Before House of Commons on Refugee Transportation Loans

Burnaby-Douglas MP Bill Siksay has introduced a motion to repeal the refugee transportation loans program. You can read more about this campaign [here](#). The text of the motion is:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) immediately end the requirement for government and privately sponsored refugees to pay the costs of their travel to Canada for resettlement; (b) institute a program to pay these costs for government and privately sponsored refugees; and (c) immediately forgive all outstanding refugee travel loans.

Your help is needed – call or write your MP and ask them to support this motion (#441). Find out how to contact your MP [here](#).

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4. BCSTA Calls for Delay of Full-Day Kindergarten

The BC School Trustees Association has expressed concern that full-day kindergarten will not be properly funded for its September 2010 implementation, and has requested that government delay the start of the program. In a CBC News article, BCSTA President Connie Denesiuk stated that it's not clear that the \$150 million promised for full-day K over the next two years is new funding. Trustees want to ensure that the program is delivered properly without drawing on money from other areas of the education budget.

Read more [here](#).

The Ministry of Education now has a website available on full-day kindergarten which you can access [here](#). It features a summary of discussions and ideas from a forum for education stakeholders held in October.

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5. BC Poverty Reduction Coalition Gets the Message Out in Abbotsford

Vibrant Abbotsford has been highlighting the message of the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition in their community and before city council. The group presented the provincial poverty reduction strategy to Abbotsford City Council, emphasizing the high rate of poverty and high cost of living in that community. Vibrant Abbotsford asked council to cut poverty to 9% in four years and 3% in 10 years, and to end street homelessness in two years.

Find out more about [Vibrant Abbotsford](#) and read the [local media coverage](#). Visit the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition [here](#).

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6. Stop BC Gaming Fund Cuts Rally in Vancouver

A rally is scheduled for Saturday, November 28 at 1:30 PM at the Vancouver Art Gallery to protest cuts to the province's gaming fund. Cuts to this fund have impacted parent advisory councils, social programs, organized sports, youth programs, arts programs and many others.

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Research & Resources

1. Adoption Awareness Month Message from the Province

During Adoption Awareness Month, government is emphasizing its work to support the adoption of teens in care:

Last year the ministry began placing a greater focus on finding homes for older youth. In 2008-09, 17 children over 12 years of age found forever families. With 376 children in ministry care who are over the age of 12 and have adoption as their plan of care, the ministry is working in partnership with licensed adoption agencies and the AFABC to help increase these numbers.

"We know that when people think of adoption they often think about bringing home a baby or toddler. So many older children and youth have, historically, aged out of care never finding a permanent family," said Polak. "It can take more time to find the right match between a prospective family and an older child, but it is worth the extra effort."

During the next few years the emphasis on placing older youth will continue, as will a continued focus on working closely with Aboriginal communities to find more adoptive families. It is important to ensure children retain their cultural identity and connection to their community.

Quick facts on adoption in BC:

- *There are approximately 1,300 children in British Columbia waiting for a permanent family – with more than 600 of these children ready to be adopted today.*
- *Between April 2004 and March 2009, 1,471 children in care of the ministry found permanent families through adoption – that is an average of around 300 children per year.*
- *Over the last five years, 499 Aboriginal children found permanent families through adoption. Of those, 275, or 54 per cent, were placed with Aboriginal families.*
- *There are about 600 Aboriginal children registered for adoption, and that number remains consistent year over year.*
- *There are 376 children over the age of 12 waiting to be adopted. While that represents approximately 30 per cent of the children in care with adoption as their plan, adoptions for older children account for less than 1% of all adoptions each year.*
- *If you want to find out more information about adoption you can call 1-877 ADOPT-07 or visit the Ministry of Children and Family Development website at: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption.*

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2. Vanier Institute Studies on Children and Cities

Two studies from The Vanier Institute of the Family say Canadian cities, in many ways, are failing to meet the needs of their youngest citizens. The reports raise critical questions about the impact of urban design and development on the health and safety of children and youth.

Juan Torres from the Université de Montréal's Institut d'urbanisme looks at the ways in which urban planning has evolved to accommodate the needs of the automobile and the negative impact that has on healthy child development and the evolution of vibrant, user-friendly communities. Read *Children and Cities: Planning to Grow Together* [here](#).

Belinda Boekhoven of Carleton University adds to the dialogue by asking important questions about children's access to free playtime and outdoor space in cities. Her study finds that young people today are much more likely to be involved in organized activities than in the past. And while structured participation in activities has been shown to be beneficial for child development, there are also risks if children and adolescents don't have enough free time and safe spaces to exercise their imaginations and develop traits such as self-motivation and self-reliance. Read *Caution! Kids at Play?* [here](#).

These papers make the case that we would all benefit if children and youth figured more prominently in the urban planning process.

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3. ECEBC Call for Proposals: Communities of Leadership Innovation

Early Childhood Educators of British Columbia, with funding from Vancity Community Foundation, is seeking proposals from Early Childhood Educators across BC who are interested in playing a leading role in helping their communities become one of ECEBC's 2010/11 "Communities of Leadership Innovation." This is an opportunity for you and other ECEs in your community to develop your capacity to:

- Raise the profile and understanding of the work you do in the broader community;
- Building the leadership capacity of ECEs in your community;
- Take ECE values and ways of knowing out the door to the larger community.

Each year, ECEBC identifies ten diverse geographic and cultural Communities of Leadership Innovation where two or three licensed- to-practice ECEs take a leadership role in developing and implementing a community project that raises the profile and understanding of the value of ECEs. Through the project, participants are supported to develop their own leadership capacity, culture and confidence. Each identified community receives up to \$10,000 to support their project.

Find out more about this opportunity [here](#).

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4. Touchstones of Hope Pilot Program for Indigenous Children

The Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare program goal is to engage communities in the redesign of child welfare so that it better serves Aboriginal children, youth and families. The program guides communities based on interpretations of the five Touchstone of Hope principles: self-determination, holistic response, structural interventions, non-discrimination, and culture and language.

Between now and March 2010, the Touchstones program will be piloted in 5 communities in Northern British Columbia. The next community workshop is scheduled for November 25-26 in Fort St. James. For information contact Dianna Mould, Touchstones Project Coordinator, by telephone 250-565-6314 or by e-mail Dianne.Mould@gov.bc.ca.

For more information on the Touchstones of Hope: Reconciliation in Indigenous Child Welfare document, please see www.reconciliationmovement.org.

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Announcements

1. New Cross-Ministry Protocol on Transitions for Youth with Special Needs

A new protocol has been developed for improving access to existing resources and supports and ensuring that a coordinated transition planning process occurs for youth with special needs and their families. Transition planning for youth with special needs will identify opportunities and experiences during their school years that will help them better prepare for life as adults. The government organizations that are signatories to the protocol are: Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, Children and Family Development, Education, Health Services, Housing and Social Development, Public Safety and Solicitor General, BC Housing, Community Living BC, and the Public Guardian and Trustee.

The transition planning protocol document is available [here](#).

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2. Headlines Theatre Presents “After Homelessness”

After Homelessness is a Forum Theatre play which uses theatre as a conduit to explore solutions. *After Homelessness* will ask questions about what it takes to create housing that is safe, appropriately supported and affordable. Performances run from November 21 to December 6 in Vancouver, and Community Dialogue Sessions will take place on November 24, 25 and 26. These sessions will result in a Community Action Report with policy suggestions that will be received and considered by government and other agencies.

Find out more [here](#).

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3. Public Child Care Forum November 24

This public forum will feature First Call’s Adrienne Montani, Susan Prentice from the University of Manitoba, and Susan Harney from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC. The forum will examine what a public child care system would look like and what we can do to push government to act.

The forum takes place on Tuesday, November 24 from 7 – 9 PM at the Vancouver Public Library, Alice Mackay Room, 350 W. Georgia St. On-site child care will be provided. Contact Randi Gurholt-Seary at 778-554-0252 for more information.

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4. The Rights of the Child Early Years Conference

UBC Interprofessional Continuing Education presents the Early Years Conference 2010: the Rights of the Child, from February 4 – 6 in Victoria. **The early bird registration deadline for this conference is November 26.**

The conference objectives include:

- To learn about the U.N. Convention on the Rights of the Child and how to incorporate the principles of the convention into daily practice.
- To promote focused dialogue among individuals and groups who support early child development and learning.
- To explore ways to communicate and support one another's work with children and families.
- To develop collaborative strategies that highlight and advocate for the Rights of the Child.
- To showcase exemplary practices incorporating the U.N. Convention.

The conference brochure is available [here](#); and click [here](#) to register.

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5. Impacts of Current Funding Uncertainty on Family Serving Agencies

The Association of Family Serving Agencies presents a community forum on How to Care in Tough Times: Impacts of Current Funding Uncertainty on Family Serving Agencies, featuring Dr. Michael Prince, Professor of Social Policy at the University of Victoria. This meeting will offer a chance to collectively discuss the changing social service landscape, impacts of funding cuts and opportunities to support one another and to make our voices heard.

The forum takes place Thursday, November 26 from 7 – 8:30 PM at /A\ Channel (orientation room), 1420 Broad St. in Victoria. RSVP is required to info@communitycouncil.ca or 250-383-6166.

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