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NEWS EDITORS - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 15, 2008

Crisis in Early Childhood Workforce

Childcare in BC is facing a critical exodus of well-trained early childhood educators (ECEs) leaving the work they love because they cannot earn a living wage. This is one of the worrying findings contained in a recent survey conducted by First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. The results of the survey of early childhood educators clearly show that the shortage of trained early childhood educators is at crisis level. Ninety percent (90%) of respondents have had difficulty recruiting and retaining ECEs.

One respondent states, *"Government wants to open new spaces for child care, but how will they be staffed when we are already facing a crisis? We are not creating new spaces; we are closing centres (especially infant/toddler centres) because of lack of qualified staff."*

The survey also highlights concerns about fewer people entering the profession, causing burnout and stress among existing staff. *"The pay is not equivalent to the amount of time, effort and love ECE staff put into their jobs. The burn-out rate is high – approximately half leave the childcare field within five years of receiving their schooling,"* says Sheila Davidson of Early Childhood Educators of BC.

On December 21, 2007, BC's Minister of State for Child Care Linda Reid announced a new incentive program to address the shortage of early childhood educators. Unfortunately, this limited program does not solve the overall problem of low wages and benefits for staff working in childcare programs.

Similarly, seventy-four percent (74%) of respondents to First Call's survey noted that government allocations for professional development for ECEs would not address recruitment and retention issues. As one respondent notes, *"Staff do not feel there is any incentive to do more training as it does not affect wages. People without training can make more money than ECE staff in stores and restaurants."*

The survey also reflected respondents' concerns that the lack of affordable childcare spaces in BC is preventing parents from working, and contributing to absenteeism, noting, *"Without consistent, quality childcare, we are placing our children at high risk. Economically it has affected business due to few available childcare spaces, which prevents parents from returning to the work force, and in turn they are now living in poverty"*.

Survey respondents overwhelmingly agree that services to young children and families will continue to be in crisis until both levels of government recognize the need, and commit to building an integrated, planned and adequately funded system for early learning and childcare in BC.

The outpouring of responses to First Call's ECE staffing survey confirms the urgency of addressing these critical issues for the benefit of young children, for their families and for the provincial economy. First Call urges the Government of BC to produce their long-promised, comprehensive early years plan, with adequate funding to bring stability and security to this crucial workforce.

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