



## 2009 Report to the Coalition

2009 was a year of new challenges for First Call. We settled in to our office with our new host organization and coalition partner Family Services of Greater Vancouver. 2009 saw our multi-year Leveling the Playing Field for Families project end, and the Living Wage for Families Campaign ramp up with the hiring of our campaign organizer, Michael McCarthy Flynn. A number of our long-standing Coordinating Committee members retired from this role in 2009, and we thanked them for their outstanding commitment and welcomed some new faces to the table. We began a strategic planning process and developed a fundraising plan to make First Call more sustainable. We launched a monthly giving campaign and have committed to dedicated donor stewardship. The inaugural forum on youth issues in BC was highly successful, expanding the knowledge and reach of existing youth advocacy and growing networks among community, government and coalition members.

2009 emphasized a new financial reality of budget cuts and funding limitations. First Call is working hard to maintain a strong voice for children and youth as services are cut and many of our coalition partners face financial instability.

### First Call Coalition Partner Organizations

Partners are the foundation of this coalition. Partners provide **strategic direction** through First Call's Coordinating Committee and opportunities for engagement such as coalition meetings, strategic planning sessions, and partner surveys. Partners bring projects to first call, support the coalition with financial contributions, and are a key component of our communications network.

Now with 94 provincial and regional organizations, First Call was honoured to welcome **11 new partner organizations** to the coalition in 2009 who are committed to the **Four Keys to Success for Children and Youth**:

- A strong commitment to early childhood development
- Support in transitions from childhood to youth to adulthood
- Increased economic equality
- Safe and caring communities

In our 2009 survey, the majority of our partners said that they became and remained members of the coalition because they wanted to:

- **Contribute to a strong child and youth movement in BC;**
- **Build a stronger voice for their issues by joining with others;**
- **Learn more about issues in other sectors; and**
- **Access research and expertise.**

Poverty, early childhood education and care, and youth and adolescent development were the top three areas identified by partners for First Call to focus on, using our three strategies of public policy advocacy, public education, and community mobilization.

### Strategic Planning

First Call launched 2010 with a new mission statement:

**To mobilize British Columbians to work together to ensure our children and youth have the rights, opportunities and resources required to achieve their full potential. We believe all children and youth in BC should have first call on society's resources.**

At a September Strategic Planning session, participating partners identified a broad range of successes achieved by the coalition, specifically our longevity and persistence, our networking and engagement opportunities, the growth of the coalition, the provision of current and accessible information to our wide-ranging network, creation of a safe space for advocacy, and the effectiveness of our communications messaging, particularly in regard to child poverty.

A number of priorities emerged from our Strategic Planning session, including development of a communications plan, opportunities for youth engagement, and the creation of a dedicated fundraising committee. Work on these initiatives will continue in 2010.

## Public Education and Communications

Media demands increased in 2009 as staff, coordinating committee members and volunteers responded to **50 interview requests** on child poverty and numerous other issues. First Call gave **40 presentations and workshops** to groups of activists and students; service providers; government committees; and boards, membership and staff of coalition partner organizations.

**First Call's Weekly Announcements** reach over 1900 people and are fanned out to hundreds of other people through local and provincial networks.

Our website [firstcallbc.org](http://firstcallbc.org) is updated at least once a week, and it had over 15,000 unique visitors in 2009, including 500 unique visitors the day that the child poverty report card was released!

## Events and Forums

**Monthly coalition meetings** in 2009 featured topics including the Child Poverty Report Card in Action, young worker injury rates, provincial budget cuts and strategic advocacy, Leveling the Playing Field for Children project participants Mount Pleasant Neighbourhood House and Gitksan Wet'suwet'en Education Society, the provincial child and youth mental health plan, and tools for mobilizing around the provincial election and presentations by provincial parties.

First Call's **Early Childhood Development Roundtable Meetings** in 2009 brought together education and child care partners to discuss the multiple facets of kindergarten expansion in BC. The Roundtable met with the new Minister of Children and Family Development to express concern over budget cuts to early learning and care.

In June 2009, First Call held **Taking Stock of Youth Wellbeing in BC Today: A Forum**, with over 140 youth and youth-service providers in attendance. This event resulted in an analysis of youth issues across sectors and ideas for public policy solutions, as well as a commitment from First Call to work with our partners to continue to facilitate dialogue and develop projects focused on supporting youth wellbeing.

Each October First Call hosts a dinner to raise funds, network, and celebrate leadership in advocacy in support of children, youth and families. This year's event, **Honouring Our Advocacy**, was another great success. Our supporters came out in droves, and we were thrilled to have Kathryn Gretsinger emcee the event. We presented an award to Kelly Ng of S.U.C.C.E.S.S. for his many years of committed advocacy, and Dr. Adele Diamond gave an inspiring keynote address. We look forward to seeing you at next year's dinner.

## Advocacy Projects

Since our inception, First Call has been a provincial partner in **Campaign 2000**, the national movement to end child poverty in Canada. First Call produces the annual **report card on child poverty in BC** with the support of coalition partner SPARC BC, and has made great progress in educating the public about BC's abysmal child poverty rate in recent years. Following the November 25 launch, the child poverty rate was highlighted in over 50 BC newspapers, and these statistics are cited more and more frequently in the media and in educational and political materials, including by the Representative for Children and Youth and BC's Official Opposition.

2009 marked a new phase in the **Living Wage for Families Campaign** with the hiring of an organizer and launch of the website [www.livingwageforfamilies.ca](http://www.livingwageforfamilies.ca). Meeting with municipal councils, unions, community organizations and faith groups, the campaign undertook a great deal of outreach in the past year. A formal process has been established to recognize Living Wage Employers. One aspect of the campaign is to document the lived experiences of low-wage workers in Metro Vancouver. The campaign is also supporting a number of local living wage campaigns around BC.

In October, **First Call released a report highlighting the growing workplace injury rates for children in BC** since the 2004 loosening of regulations that protect 12-14 year olds shifted responsibility for workplace safety onto parents. **First Call met with the Minister of Labour** to discuss improving child safety; advocacy efforts on this issue will continue in 2010.

First Call has been working with the **Canadian Council for Refugees** on a campaign to **End Refugee Transportation Loans** and relieve the financial burden placed on government-assisted refugees by the requirement to repay their family's travel costs. In 2009 First Call advocated to BC Member's of Parliament for an end to this policy and conducted a survey to determine whether MP's would support this change.

## More about First Call

In 2009 First Call had 3.2 FTE staff, including a full-time Provincial Coordinator, Administration Coordinator, and Living Wage for Families Campaign Organizer, and a part-time Project Coordinator. A voluntary Coordinating Committee of 8 skilled individuals provided leadership to the coalition's projects and partnerships and liaised between the coalition and the staff who facilitate and perform much of the work.

First Call's budget in 2009-10 was \$225,000. Funding was provided by Vancouver Foundation, United Way of the Lower Mainland, contributions from our coalition partners and individual donors.