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## **First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of December 8, 2010 BC Teachers' Federation Building**

### **In attendance:**

Maria Nguyen – MOSAIC  
Hilary Feldman – Council of Parent Participation  
Preschools  
Mab Oloman – CCCABC  
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth  
Sue Irwin – Vancouver Coastal Region CCRR  
Programs  
John Carsley – Health Officers' Council of BC  
Darryl Korell – Ethos Strategy Group  
Marc Lalonde – Tseil-Waututh Child and Family  
Development Centre  
Jessie Deacon – Roots of Empathy  
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association  
Jason Chan – SUCCESS  
Brenda Lohrenz – ELSA Net  
David Halme – BC Teachers' Federation  
Karen Thompson – SPARC BC  
Jean Moore – Canadian Mental Health Association  
Andrina Perry – First Call  
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families

Helesia Luke – BC Society for Public Education  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA  
Steve Kerstetter – First Call  
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation

### **On phone:**

Shan Lavell  
Cindy Jamieson - Aboriginal Supported Child  
Development

### **Regrets:**

Freeza Anand – Westcoast Family Resources Society  
Megan Yarema – Canada Without Poverty  
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Michelle Van Keith – Pacific Community Resources  
Shirley Yamashita-Paterson – Family Support  
Institute  
Margaret Antolovich – Public Health Association of BC

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

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable**

The December meeting of the Roundtable was cancelled, as the main part of the agenda was to be a presentation from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Unfortunately, both presenters cancelled at the last minute due to uncertainty with the Liberal leadership race. This was disappointing as Roundtable participants were keen to engage with these two ministries on the formation of preK program and policy development.

The ECD Roundtable is distributing Child Care Advocacy Forum postcards.

### **Communications Update**

Communications are a huge part of our work at First Call, and we felt it was important to share an overview of recent communications activities with the coalition to keep you up to date on our efforts and successes.

First Call's e-mail newsletter, the Weekly Announcements, is sent directly to close to 2000 recipients, and fanned out to many more. It's also available for download from our web site.

Our web site, [www.firstcallbc.org](http://www.firstcallbc.org), has had 15,000 unique visitors this year and over 500 unique visitors the week that the Child Poverty Report Card was released.

First Call launched a Twitter account ([www.twitter.com/firstcallbc](http://www.twitter.com/firstcallbc)) in April of this year, and we already have over 100 followers!

The 2010 Child Poverty Report Card was featured in at least 20 newspaper stories and a number of radio and television clips. First Call staff and volunteers have participated in 50 media interviews this year.

First Call staff and volunteers have given close to 50 presentations this year, to audiences ranging from students to union members to community organization board members. These public education opportunities focused primarily on child poverty, the living wage, women's poverty, and child care, and thousands of individuals were reached.

## **2. Foundation Skills Assessment Tests**

Susan Lambert, President of the BC Teachers' Federation, highlighted some of the problems of these standardized tests. BCTF is fighting to maintain the quality of a good education system. They see it as an issue of professional autonomy versus standardized testing; standardized tests do not help students learn or teachers teach.

Teaching practice is open to inspection through a number of mechanisms, but teachers still need autonomy to choose the most appropriate teaching methods. The use of standardized test results to rate and rank schools results in standardized and impoverished instruction. Grade 10 Science exams have resulted in test preparation and drilling replacing lab experience, lessening students' interest and learning in science.

The two critical elements for learning are a positive student-teacher relationship and joy in learning. Teachers need to know the learning styles of and best practices for each child. An over-emphasis on high stakes tests takes the joy out of learning for students.

It is meaningless to say that all children will reach the same "standard." Better test scores at a particular school are not necessarily an indication of increased quality of education, as there are many ways to make this happen statistically.

Randomized administration of the FSA would be a quick policy change to improve the situation and still assess how the province is doing overall on literacy and numeracy.

## **3. Child Poverty Report Card in Action**

Steve Kerstetter presented the data in the annual BC Campaign 2000 Child Poverty Report Card First Call released on November 24. Statistics Canada provides data for pre-tax and after-tax low income cut offs, and BC still had the worst child poverty rate in Canada according to the after-tax measure. The province lands in the middle using the before tax measure. Statistics Canada provides no explanation for this difference in ranking.

The rate of poverty for children in female lone parent families has come down significantly, likely due to an increase in work force participation, but it is still high at 31%.

Every province except BC has raised their minimum wage in the last two years. BC has the lowest minimum wage in the country.

Welfare incomes keep families at about half of the poverty line. Over 20 years, the poorest 10% of British Columbians have seen no increase in income, while the income of the richest 20% has increased. The poorest 30% have actually lost income since 1989.

Of all the recommendations made in the report card, higher wages would really make a difference for poor kids and families in BC. Wages need to keep pace with the cost of living.

The report card and related materials are available on the First Call website.

First Call partner organizations shared how they use the data from the report card, including in their own research reports, newsletters, and media releases.

First Call challenged the provincial NDP in the media release for the report card, calling on them to put forward details of their poverty reduction plan. The party responded with a commitment to introducing legislation for a plan in the spring.

### **3. Living Wage for Families Campaign**

Michael McCarthy Flynn gave an overview of the progress of this campaign. The living wage is based on a family's expenses where they live. Over one third of BC families with poor children have one parent working full-time full-year.

The living wage for Metro Vancouver brought together a group of stakeholders to set a living wage, using feedback gathered from low income workers and employers.

The living wage enables families to have an adequate but not affluent income, promotes social inclusion, and is a conservative, reasonable estimate.

The living wage for Metro Vancouver is based on a family with two children and both parents working 35 hours a week. The expenses included in the calculation are: food, clothing and footwear, shelter, child care, transportation, other, medical expenses, parent education, and a contingency amount.

The living wage for Metro Vancouver in 2010 is \$18.17 an hour. Victoria's is \$17.31 an hour. A number of municipalities outside of the Lower Mainland have recently calculated the living wage for their areas. Most employers have no quarrel with the methodology of calculating a living wage.

The campaign now has a full-time organizer, and in April 2010 New Westminster became the first city in Canada to pass a living wage policy. In September the campaign released a list of the first 14 certified living wage employers.

The key strategies of the campaign are to advocate for municipalities to pass living wage policies or bylaws, develop a living wage employer recognition process, engage with low wage workers, and conduct outreach to local communities and unions. The campaign plans to bring this issue to candidates in the upcoming municipal elections.

Find out more about the campaign and how to become a living wage employer at <http://livingwageforfamilies.ca>.

#### **4. Partner Updates**

The Society for Children and Youth launched a child rights public awareness campaign on November 8. Transit ads are up now, as is the website [www.everychild.ca](http://www.everychild.ca). The website includes suggestions for taking action on child rights in everyday life. The campaign is using social media, and a public service announcement will be launched in movie theatres in the Fraser Valley in December. A poster campaign will begin next year, and the public service announcement will be run on CTV!

The Ministry of Labour announced that they are gathering input from stakeholders on changes to employment standards, including the minimum wage. No public consultation has been announced.

BC School Trustees Association passed a motion to bring students and youth to the Education Partners table.

The province's ten year mental health plan has been released, so we will see reaction to this document soon. Accountability is a concern with the plan.

**5. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** January 12, 2011. 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.