

First Call's Weekly Announcements – February 23, 2010

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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.

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Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. MCFD Confirms \$10 Million in Cuts

Mary Polak, Minister of Children and Family Development, confirmed in an interview with the [Vancouver Sun](#) that her ministry will cut \$10 million in funding for frontline services. These cuts will be in place by April 1, and result from the stagnation of funding to the ministry. The cuts will impact contracted agencies that provide that majority of ministry services to children and families. An additional \$5 million in funding will be redirected to Aboriginal agencies. As noted in the Feb. 3 [Weekly Announcements](#), MCFD has identified services to Aboriginal children and families as their top priority.

In a recent opinion piece in the [Victoria Times Colonist](#), Federation of Community Social Services Executive Director Jennifer Charlesworth argues that cuts to social services will drive up the costs of health care:

At least half of the factors that ultimately determine a person's health outcomes have nothing to do with the health-care system. They are things like early childhood development, education, social status, community connection, income, work history - - a mixed bag of socio-economic indicators collectively known as the social determinants of health...

Long-standing community services that directly address the social determinants of health are being considered for significant cuts in the next two provincial budgets. Health authority cuts last fall to community-based mental health and addiction services left thousands of British Columbians without the stop-gap supports they need to avoid far more costly hospital services.

That early intervention and prevention saves money is an uncontested, evidence-based fact. A couple on the edge gets counselling and support, and no violence occurs. A family falling apart gets help, and a child avoids having to be taken into government care. A hungry mom and her toddler get food and a welcoming place to go, and their lives are permanently changed for the better.

In the absence of such services, the burden of care reverts to our most expensive government systems: The acute-care health system, the courts and police. It falls on the shoulders of our families, communities and municipal governments -- the ones who bear the true costs of inadequate social supports.

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2. Media Release: Could You Raise Your Family on a Welfare Income?

Last week, First Call released our second in a series of reports to the media examining aspects of the child poverty report card and calling on government to take concrete action to reduce child poverty.

Think about the income of \$23,766 a year that was provided for a BC family of two parents and two children on welfare.

That's very little to pay for the necessities of life in one of Canada's most expensive places to live. There's the cost of apartments, with the rental market in greater Vancouver very tight. There's food and clothing, of course.

And then there are all those other items that usually get left off the list of necessities, but really belong on the list. The items include transportation or monthly transit passes, the occasional piece of furniture, out-of-pocket child care expenses, and a bit of family recreation. Also on the list are basic telephone service, school supplies, light bulbs, dish and laundry detergent, all-purpose cleaner, haircuts, shaving supplies, over-the-counter medication, toothpaste and tooth brushes, bar soap, toilet paper, and many other items too numerous to mention.

Could you buy all these things for your family for \$23,766? Well, that was the purchasing power of a BC welfare income way back in 1994, according to the National Council of Welfare.

Now cut the amount by 12 percent to \$21,016. That was the amount paid in 2008 for a family of two adults and two children.

The reductions in welfare incomes took place year after year in BC under both the previous New Democratic Party government and the current BC Liberal government. The Liberals finally raised rates in 2007, but families were still worse off than they were in 1994. BC welfare rates for families didn't go up in 2008 or 2009.

Read the rest of the media release, including First Call's recommendations [here](#).

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3. Stop BC Education Cuts

The BC Education Coalition has a new website devoted to preventing cuts to the provincial education system. BC school districts are anticipating a \$300 million funding shortfall this year, as the provincial government is not expected to fund new costs faced by schools including salary increases, carbon tax requirements, and increases in Medical Services Plan premiums. It is also unclear what additional costs will arise from the implementation of all-day kindergarten.

The advocacy section of the website includes a sample letter to government, and facts and research to use in education advocacy. Find out more at <http://stopeducationcuts.org>.

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4. Open Letter Calling for a National Child Care Program

Campaign 2000 and the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada have written to all federal party leaders on the 4th anniversary of the Universal Child Care Benefit, the \$100 a month benefit for families with young children intended to support "their child care choices." The letter states that:

Four years later, Canadian families are no better able to balance work and family than they were in 2006. Finding good quality affordable child care is as elusive as ever for parents. Expansion of child care has slowed, with spaces for only 20% of three to five year olds if parents can afford the fees which range from \$600-\$1,200 a month. Modest and low income families, Aboriginal and rural families, parents of infants and children with disabilities are especially excluded.

Four years later, despite the sizeable public expenditure on the UCCB, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) continues to rank Canada's child care situation as one of the worst of its 30 member countries. Yet, there has been no public, performance-based evaluation of how the UCCB funds are used or whether they in fact "help Canadians balance work and family"...

What's the solution? Across Canada, a broad consensus that transcends partisan politics, regions, age, income, ethnic and racial groups confirms the need for federal funding to build a child care system. Indeed, the December 2009 report of the all-party federal Standing Committee on Finance recommends that the federal government ... implement a national child care plan providing high-quality, affordable and inclusive child care services. This goal should be achieved through federal transfer payments to participating provinces and territories, and the plan should include measurable targets and timelines.

[Read more.](#)

The NDP responded to the letter with a news release highlighting their call for the next session of Parliament to be the "Women and Children First" session, and their support of a quality, universal, accessible, national not-for-profit early learning and child care program.

Liberal leader Michael Ignatieff responded with a letter reiterating his public commitment to building a national child care program.

Also, the **Canadian Chamber of Commerce** recently passed a resolution calling for a national ECD program:

That the federal government, in cooperation with the provinces and territories and other stakeholders, fund and assist in the development of a provincially-delivered effective early childhood development program to improve the long term productivity of Canada through a better educated, more highly skilled workforce, resulting in superior economic performance.

Read the background information accompanying this resolution [here](#).

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5. Contribute to Alternative Report on UN Convention on the Rights of Children

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children (CCRC) is preparing an alternative report to [Canada's Third Report](#) on the implementation of the Convention on the

Rights of the Child, which was submitted by government in December. CCRC says that this report is missing essential facts on the real-life conditions for children in Canada, and government programs are listed without including outcomes.

CCRC will proceed by responding first to the government of Canada to encourage public discussion, and then prepare an alternative report to submit and be considered alongside Canada's report at the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. If you would like to contribute to this work of the CCRC, visit their [website](#) for their plan of action, including contact information and names of lead agencies on each topic.

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6. Union of BC Indian Chiefs and BC CEDAW Group Open Letter on Poverty and Violence

The Union of BC Indian Chiefs and BC CEDAW Group (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) have issued an open letter to Premier Campbell and Prime Minister Harper:

Tragically, the splendour and expense of the Olympic Games stand in stark contrast to the poverty and violence experienced by the most marginalized women in this rich country.

Therefore, we cannot show our International visitors that you, as leaders of the Government of Canada and the Government of British Columbia, take seriously the human rights of the poorest and most vulnerable women.

In fact, the poverty of women and the devastating violence experienced by Aboriginal women and girls were identified as human rights failures in need of urgent correction, when Canada's human rights performance was scrutinized by countries around the world in 2009 at the United Nations Human Rights Council. In 2008 the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) urged Canada to deal with these issues immediately.

But neither of your governments has taken effective action.

The letter calls for a strategy to eliminate poverty, a federal and provincial plan to address violence against Aboriginal women and girls, and other measures. Read more [here](#).

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Research & Resources

1. AMSSA Newcomer Children Information Exchange Website

The AMSSA Newcomer Children Information Exchange (ANCIE) is a website created to provide information and resources for British Columbian service providers, educators, policy makers and the general public on newcomer children - kids aged 0-12 from immigrant, refugee, and/or temporary resident families.

The site features:

- A searchable database of useful research reports, educational materials, and web links;
- Theme pages that provide a general overview of key issues affecting newcomer children; and
- An archive of the ANCIE Bulletin, our monthly e-newsletter

ANCIE has been created to support the work of AMSSA's Newcomer Children's Advocate Program, an initiative to promote and advance the interests and well-being of BC's newcomer children. The program is supported and funded by the United Way of the Lower Mainland. Visit the website [here](#).

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2. Family Support Institute Launches Support Worker Central Website

Support Worker Central is a new website from the Family Support Institute which provide an online database to match individuals, families and agencies with support workers in their communities. The website is a one-year pilot project funded by Community Living BC. Visit the site at www.supportworkercentral.com.

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3. Youth Housing Study from Victoria

This 2008 document prepared for Victoria's Community Council reports out on a youth housing survey which examines the number of youth and emerging adults lacking stable housing, outlines gaps in services, resources and assets, and provides a basis for developing a 10 year youth housing plan.

It was estimated that 616 individuals between the ages of 13 and 30 were without safe, stable housing in BC's Capital Region. The report identifies issues for diverse groups of youth in accessing housing, and looks at what gaps are currently being addressed and what must be addressed in the future. Read the report [here](#).

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4. National Council of Welfare Bibliography on Costs of Poverty

The National Council of Welfare has compiled a bibliography of reports and articles that address the costs associated with poverty. The bibliography is divided into Canadian, American, and International sections; the Canadian section is subdivided into categories including policies and program, housing, early education, and health. Access the bibliography [here](#).

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5. "...after homelessness..." Report from Interactive Theatre Production

Headlines Theatre Company performed *...after homelessness...* in November and December 2009, and held three community dialogues to gather feedback from audiences and panelists on creating a more effective response to homelessness.

A community action report which summarizes these suggestions is now available and is being shared with public policy makers. The report includes recommendations for various levels of government and includes quotes from audience members directly affected by homelessness. [Read it here](#).

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6. Bursaries Available for Youth in and from Care

The **Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks** (FBCYICN) is a youth-driven, provincial, non-profit organization dedicated to improving the lives of young people in and from care in BC, between the ages of 14 and 24. Three times a year the FBCYICN distributes two bursaries from their Dream Fund to young people in and from care or young people currently on or who have received Youth Agreements.

The Education Achievement Bursary assists youth in and from government care who plan to attend, or are attending, a designated post-secondary academic institution with the costs of tuition and books. This bursary is worth up to \$2,500 per academic year (two semesters).

The Reach for Success Bursary assists young people in and from care with the financial costs associated with workshops, tutoring, attendance at conferences, or participation in other skill building activities that require a registration or tuition fee. Applicants can apply for up to \$500 once per year.

THE DEADLINE FOR THESE BURSARIES IS ON THE SECOND FRIDAY OF MARCH, JULY AND NOVEMBER. The Next Deadline is March 12th.

If you are interested in applying please visit www.fbcyicn.ca/dreamfund or email sam_pothier@fbcyicn.ca.

The **Federation of Community Social Services** provides bursaries to assist young people in and from care who wish to pursue a career in social, health or education services with the financial costs of tuition, books, and supplies for post-secondary academic, technical or vocational training or academic upgrading. This post-secondary bursary is available to a maximum of \$1,000 per academic year (two semesters). Find out more [here](#).

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Announcements

1. Breaking Barriers Building Bridges Youth Conference in Vancouver

Are you, or do you know, a youth aged 15-24? This March 19-21 2010, join the McCreary Centre Society's Youth Advisory Council for the 13th Annual Breaking Barriers & Building Bridges Youth Health Conference (the B4)!

The theme of this year's conference is Healthy Relationships and will include workshops that explore important issues facing youth today such as emotional health and self-care, sex and sexuality, violence and overcoming barriers to healthy relationships.

The Breaking Barriers and Building Bridges (or B4) is a by-youth-for-youth conference, organized by McCreary's Youth Advisory Council. The B4 brings youth from across the province together to explore social and health issues affecting youth. It is a weekend full of opportunities for young people to gain knowledge, develop skills and share ideas. The weekend will also enable youth and adult support persons to network with others, see what's happening throughout the province, and support each other. And of course: have FUN!!!

If you are a youth aged 15 to 24, registration is on a first-come, first-serve basis (limit five youth per organization). We encourage adults who work with youth groups to attend along with youth. This year's B4 will take place at the beautiful Sasamat Outdoor Centre, just outside of Vancouver, BC (www.sasamat.org). Travel and registration grants available for youth facing barriers.

For more information or for a registration package, please email stephanie@mcs.bc.ca or call 604-291-1996.

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2. Early Childhood Education in the Inner City – Vancouver Forum

The Network of East Vancouver Community Organizations is holding a dialogue with practitioners, parents, researchers and funders on March 12 from 9:00 AM to noon at the Waldorf, 1489 East Hastings St. in Vancouver.

Vancouver's inner-city is home to children who are the most vulnerable and least "school ready" in the whole province. Research tells us the children who start behind stay behind. This forum will examine strategies to change this harsh reality, including:

- Targeted Funding versus Universal Funding
- Individual, Family, Community Capacity Development
- Quality Early Learning Opportunities
- Parent Training and Access to Health Care

Presenters will include Clyde Hertzman and Lynell Anderson from the Human Early Learning Partnership and Janet Austin from the YWCA. RSVP to fernjeffries@novuscom.net and contact Rose at 604-719-4939 for child care arrangements.

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3. Tri-Cities Healthy Kids Fair

Local community partners are proud to present the Tri-Cities Healthy Kids Fair. Community organizations will be available to provide parents of tots and preschoolers with information on safety, health, literacy awareness, recreation and other community programs. Admission is free. Non-perishable items are being accepted for the local food bank.

The fair takes place on Thursday, April 22nd, at the Port Coquitlam Recreation Complex, 2150 Wilson Avenue. Call 604-927-7946 for more information.

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4. Documentary Film-Making Program for Young Women

DOXA Documentary Film Festival is presenting the Connexions Youth Forum, a unique professional development program directed at emerging documentary filmmakers who may face barriers in the film industry.

For the 2nd year, DOXA, in partnership with the National Film Board will be offering Connexions to young women, a group that is vastly under-represented as directors in the BC film industry.

Young women age 19-26 who are planning a career in documentary film directing are invited to apply. Download the application [here](#). Act fast, the deadline is February 26!

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5. Drug Info Night for Parents in Maple Ridge

Alouette Addictions Services, Ridge Meadows RCMP, School District 42 and local teens present **Parents Night: Your Kids and Drugs... A Forum**. The event will focus on teens' perspectives on drug and alcohol use. It takes place on March 23 from 6:00 – 8:30 PM at Westview Secondary School in Maple Ridge. Call 604-467-5179 to RSVP.

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