

## First Call's Weekly Announcements – July 27, 2010

Next Coalition Meeting: September 8

Next ECD Roundtable: September 15

First Call for the Children Annual Dinner: October 28

Visit our [web site](#) for more information.

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We encourage you to forward and share the Weekly Announcements with your networks. If circulating excerpts from the Weekly Announcements, please acknowledge First Call as the source of the information.

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](http://www.firstcallbc.org) for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, events, new publications and more.

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**Advocacy/Calls to Action**

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## 1. Changes to Provincial Family Relations Act

Proposed changes to the Family Relations Act are receiving mixed reactions. A review of the Act began in 2006, and a [public consultation](#) is underway until October 8. A [white paper](#) was released this month detailing the new Family Law Act.

The white paper includes proposed changes eliminating the terms custody and access, and instead using the concepts of guardianship and parental responsibilities. From the [Vancouver Sun](#):

*"It is a profound shift from a rights-based consideration to a parenting obligation from a child's point of view," said J.P. Boyd, a Vancouver family lawyer.*

*Using the terms "custody" and "access" to define post-divorce parenting implies ownership of children, said Boyd.*

*"When you talk about kids with those words it creates a win/lose mentality and it promotes litigation. You have parents that fight tooth and nail to have the "c" word," said Boyd.*

*The parent awarded custody is viewed as the winner; the parent who loses custody and has "access" is viewed as the loser.*

*The real losers in custody battles are the kids.*

*Under the proposed changes, joint "guardianship" will be a presumed starting point for negotiating how shared "parental responsibilities" will be determined.*

*A child's right to have unimpeded contact with both parents will come first.*

*There will be provisions to punish parents who deny contact, as well as those who don't exercise their access or "parental responsibilities."*

*The new guidelines are intended to encourage parents to cooperate when it comes to raising the kids, no matter how acrimonious their personal relationship.*

Battered Women's Support Services has responded to the proposed changes with concerns that a dispute resolution approach to family law could be unsafe for women with abusive former partners. "We've written to the Attorney General telling him we reject a disputes resolution approach to family law, a point we clearly made in earlier consultations on these issues," says Angela Marie MacDougall, BWSS Executive Director. Read their press release [here](#).

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## 2. Don't Blame Inclusion for Failure of Education Planning

Advocates are responding to a Vancouver Sun article by a Winnipeg teacher calling for students to be grouped by ability in the public education system. By Dawn Steele and Matthew Quetton:

*...Zwaagstra may not realize that British Columbia's inclusion policy is not synonymous with full integration. It calls for placement of students with special needs based on their unique individual abilities, though sound educational reasons are needed to justify segregation. This two-decade old policy reflects the modern meaning of "inclusion," though many still confuse it with full integration.*

*If students are placed inappropriately and denied appropriate supports or individualized education planning, this is not a failure of "inclusion," but of sound educational practice. Since the days of the one-room schoolhouse, good teachers have known how to group diverse students appropriately for specific tasks to facilitate learning while still fully respecting a philosophy of inclusion.*

*Following the logic of separate schools or classes based on "ability" or stereotype as the new norm, we quickly encounter the fundamental flaw. After shipping out disabled kids, you still have gifted, aboriginal, ESL, immigrant, hyperactive, disadvantaged, emotionally fragile, problem kids, etc., all of whom will need their own schools. The disabled kids will also need separate schools for autism, dyslexia, speech and hearing disabilities, medical fragility, etc. Then where do we place the autistic kid who's brilliant at history? The math genius who can't spell? The aboriginal child with Down syndrome? Who gets the music program, or do we create 15 separate ones?*

*Children with special needs aren't homogeneous. Once you get past the disability to know them as individual human beings, it's clear they have as much (or more) in common with typical kids as they are different from each other...*

[Read more from this article.](#)

Faith Bodner of the BC Association for Community Living also had a response in the Sun:

*...If some students with special needs are in fact only present in classrooms and not integrated "in their participation in the classroom learning," then it is our duty to act accordingly by developing clear policies and guidelines that support real inclusion. Additionally, we must ensure that educators at all levels, particular classroom teachers, have the resources, training and supports they need to provide a quality, inclusive education for all students.*

*To suggest that an academic education is inherently compromised for students who learn in inclusive classrooms is outdated and, one could argue, irresponsible. In fact, current research completed by Simon Fraser University demonstrates that the presence of students with special needs in classrooms does not detrimentally impact educational outcomes for other students (Friesen, Hickey & Krauth, 2009).*

*In fact we are only just beginning to understand the real value of inclusive education for all students and the long-term positive effects it can have as people leave school and become contributing members of their communities with values that include an appreciation for diversity that is born from lived experience...*

Read the rest of this story [here](#).

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### 3. Join the Coalition for Public Legal Services

The Coalition for Public Legal Services was started late last year by a group of justice stake-holders that includes community advocacy groups, non-profit law firms, unions, and NGOs from around BC. Coalition members are concerned about and directly affected by the deterioration of legal aid services in BC and will work to combat the continued demise of legal aid.

Find out more about the Coalition and how to join [here](#). Current members include the BC Association of Social Workers, BC Coalition of People with Disabilities, First United Church, West Coast LEAF, BCGEU, Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre, and the BC Public Interest Advocacy Centre. Individuals are invited to join as well as organizations.

The Coalition for Public Legal Services will be participating in the Public Commission on Legal Aid, an initiative of the legal profession in BC. Consultations will begin in September.

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### 4. Power of Women Group Rally to Keep Families Together

From the Downtown Eastside Women's Centre Power of Women Group:

The Ministry of Child and Family Development (MCFD) has forcibly removed many children from their families, especially from single mothers, poor families, Indigenous communities, and from parents who were themselves caught in the vicious cycle of foster homes. There are currently more Indigenous children in the child welfare system than there were in the residential school system. Thousands of mothers and families are enduring surveillance and scrutiny instead of receiving support.

The DTES Power of Women Group is organizing to defend and support healthy families. Almost all the women in our group have had their children apprehended, temporarily or permanently, or are currently facing the threat of child apprehension.

Gather at Ministry of Child and Family Development Regional Office Tuesday, August 3 from 3:30-5:30 pm @ 865 Hornby (at Smithe).

All are welcome. For more information contact [project@dewc.ca](mailto:project@dewc.ca) or call 604 681 8480 x 234.

The Power of Women Group is a group at the Downtown Eastside (DTES) Women's Centre, located in the DTES of Vancouver, the poorest off-reserve postal code in Canada.

We are a group of women (we are an inclusive group) from all walks of life who are either on social assistance, working poor, or homeless; but we are all living in extreme poverty. Our aim is to empower ourselves through our experiences and to raise awareness from our own perspectives about the social issues affecting the neighbourhood.

Many of us are single mothers or have had our children apprehended due to poverty; most of us have chronic physical or mental health issues, for example HIV and Hepatitis C; many have drug or alcohol addictions; and a majority have experienced and survived sexual violence and mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional abuse.

For indigenous women, we are affected by a legacy of the effects of residential schools and a history of colonization and racism.

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## Research & Resources

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### 1. Moving to a System of Integrated Early Care and Learning in BC

This project from the Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC and Early Childhood Educators of BC aims to examine the relationship between free, universal and publicly-funded full school-day kindergarten for 5 and 4 year olds and BC's existing child care services. Two recently completed project documents include an [environmental scan by Jane Beach](#), which provides an overview of the role of ministries/departments of education in the provision of early care and learning programs and supports, and a [literature review by Tammy Findlay](#) on the governance of integrated early care and learning systems. Find out more about the project here: [www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html](http://www.cccabc.bc.ca/cccabdocs/integrated.html).

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### 2. Overrepresentation of Poor Children in Child Welfare

The Canadian Child Welfare Research Portal's Research Watch has provided the following summary of an article in the journal *Child and Youth Services Review*, based on studies conducted in Canada and the US:

*Poor children are significantly overrepresented on child welfare caseloads...*

*While this overrepresentation is certainly in part explained by the fact that poverty is a risk factor for maltreatment, some critics raise concern that poor families are also more likely to be reported because they are scrutinized more closely...*

*Comparing poor non-reported children to poor reported children, the study finds that the reported children and their families presented a much higher risk profile; for example the reported children's parents were four times more likely to have a documented mental health problem. These findings indicate that poor families are more likely to be reported for child maltreatment because of the array of stressors and risk factors that they face rather than because of higher levels of scrutiny or*

*class bias. The authors aptly conclude that rather "than see child welfare as an active force engaging families without need, an alternative is to view the reporting system as a means to identify higher risk families, and to channel services to these families and the areas in which they live."*

To view the full summary click [here](#).

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### 3. Socially Constructed Image of the Child Shapes Policy Decision-Making

From the UNESCO Policy Brief on Early Childhood:

*The social construction of the child has gained increasing attention in recent years: the idea that our image or understanding of the child is socially constructed within particular contexts and, further, that these constructions shape policies, provisions and practices.*

The image of the 'rich' child is one that has come up, particularly in the Italian city of Reggio Emilia, known for its network of early childhood centres. However, rich in this context is not a term that refers to material wealth:

*Rather 'rich in potential, strong, powerful, competent and, most of all, connected to adults and other children'. It is a contrast to some other common images of the child as lacking, passive, acted upon, or following a predetermined path set out by adults and/or innate 'development'. The 'rich' child is an active learner, 'seeking the meaning of the world from birth, a co-creator of knowledge, identity, culture and values'...*

*Working with the 'rich' child poses some challenges in the development of early childhood policy and provision. First, it requires a well-trained early childhood workforce capable of supporting children's learning to extend their understanding rather than teaching a received understanding. It is essential to provide support to the ongoing development and enrichment of educators. Second, it requires careful attention to organisation, for example at least two educators per group of children... Third, it challenges much of the dominant view of education, which is often reduced to transferring 'important' knowledge (e.g. literacy, math, science) from teacher to children, and which assumes that children are guided (in however 'child-centred' a way) towards a prescribed destination...*

To read the full brief click [here](#).

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### 4. The Grocery Gap: Who Has Access to Healthy Food and Why It Matters

PolicyLink and the Food Trust reviewed more than 132 studies conducted in the United States over the past 20 years. The goal was to summarize existing evidence around the access to healthy food and its impacts and to provide data to inform an ongoing debate:

*It was found that a large and consistent body of evidence supports what has been long observed: many low-income communities, communities of color, and sparsely populated rural areas do not have sufficient opportunities to buy healthy, affordable food. The consequences are also clear: decreased access to healthy food means people in low-income communities suffer more from diet-related diseases like obesity and diabetes than those in higher income neighborhoods with easy access to healthy food, particularly fresh fruits and vegetables.*

The full report can be accessed [here](#).

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## Announcements

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### 1. First Call to Recognize the Honourable Ted Hughes at Annual Dinner

We are thrilled to let you know that at our 2010 annual dinner we will be paying tribute to the work of the Honourable Ted Hughes, retired judge and senior advisor to several governments. Mr. Hughes led the 2005/06 review of British Columbia's child welfare system which recommended the creation of the office of the Representative for Children and Youth. In his report, Mr. Hughes wrote: "Advocacy is a way of reminding everyone involved in a disagreement over child welfare services, that this is about the child."

First Call's annual fundraising dinner is also our opportunity to celebrate our collective work on behalf of BC's children and youth! This year we will gather on Thursday, October 28 at the Fraserview Banquet Hall in Vancouver (8240 Fraser St. at Marine Drive). The evening will include a delicious Indian buffet dinner, a silent auction and raffle with exciting prizes, live music, and door prizes. We hope that you'll be able to attend!

Tickets go on sale September 6. Download the flyer for this event [here](#).

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### 2. Mentors Available for First Nations Youth in Care - Vancouver

Kinnections is a mentorship program run by the Urban Native Youth Association for First Nations youth aged 15-19 who are in long term foster care. The program currently has a number of volunteer female mentors waiting for youth to be matched with. Kinnections helps to support youth as they transition from long term foster care to independent living by connecting them with volunteer community members. Youth and Mentors engage one-to-one in goal setting, life skills training, recreational activities, and group activities.

Please contact Jenny Wade, Program Coordinator at 604-254-7732 or [kinnections@unya.bc.ca](mailto:kinnections@unya.bc.ca) to arrange for a mentor, or visit the [website](#) for more information about this program.

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### 3. Training for Caregivers of Youth with FASD

The Asante Centre for Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is holding a series of trainings in the Lower Mainland for professionals, family members and caregivers on language disabilities and the implications and strategies for youth in the legal system. The training runs from September to December 2010. Download the brochure and registration form [here](#).

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### 4. Child Protection and Domestic Violence Workshop

Join lawyers Adrian McKeown and Lobat Sadrehashemi for this legal education workshop for service providers discussing the relationship between BC's child protection system and domestic violence and sharing practical tips for helping women who have experienced violence navigate the system.

What: Legal education workshop

When: Wednesday, August 11th 10 am-noon

Where: Pivot Legal Society – 678 East Hastings Street, Vancouver

Who: Anyone working with women involved with the child protection system.

Cost: Free

Topics will include:

- 1) Relevant sections of the Child Family and Community Services Act
- 2) The roles and responsibilities of service providers
- 3) Effective communication with social workers
- 4) The court system
- 5) Alternative dispute resolution
- 6) The complaint process

There will be plenty of opportunity for questions and discussion, but feel free to send any questions or topics you would like to see covered in advance to Darcie Bennett at: [dbennett@pivotlegal.org](mailto:dbennett@pivotlegal.org).

For more information or to RSVP contact Darcie Bennett at [dbennett@pivotlegal.org](mailto:dbennett@pivotlegal.org) or (604) 255-9700 ext. 102.

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