

First Call's Weekly Announcements – June 11, 2010

Next ECD Roundtable: July 6

Next Coalition Meeting: September 8

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

Due to problems with our contact list, the information First Call has on record for you may have changed. Please let us know if you are receiving duplicate e-mails or if you were previously removed from the list and are now receiving e-mails again. We apologize for any inconvenience.

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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 for further details on upcoming First Call meetings, events, new publications and more.

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Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. Contact Your MP about Refugee Transportation Loans

Canada requires all government assisted refugees to repay the costs of their transportation to this country. Canada is one of only a few countries that requires these costs to be repaid, and is the only one to charge interest on the loans. In most circumstances, refugee families must begin repaying the loans within six months of their arrival in Canada.

Over the past year, First Call has been contacting the offices of all BC Members of Parliament to find out whether or not they would support the elimination of the requirement that refugees pay back the costs of their transportation to the Government of Canada. While a few MPs responded quickly in support of policy changes, many haven't responded to us.

So far, we've had support from Libby Davies, Joyce Murray, Bill Siksay and Don Davies for ending the repayment policy. A few other MPs wrote to us with comments about specific changes to the policy. Read our list of all MPs and their comments [here](#).

Now we need your help! Has your MP responded to First Call's question? Contact them and tell them why the elimination of refugee transportation loans is so important to help settle refugee families and give them a fair economic start in this country. Ask them to let First Call know where they stand on this issue. You can use our [sample letter](#) to follow up with MPs who have not yet responded to First Call, and view our original letter to MPs [here](#).

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2. U-Pass Expanded to all Post-Secondary Students

From the Canadian Federation of Students – BC:

Students are ecstatic that BC will be the first province in Canada to implement a U-Pass Program for its post-secondary students. The new program will give Metro Vancouver students access to a \$30 U-Pass, saving them over \$50 per month and thousands of dollars over the course of their studies.

"Today the government made good on an election promise to students," said Nimmi Takkar, Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students-BC, "The U-Pass is an investment in the next generation, in the economy and the environment. This program is going to make a major difference in students' lives and go a long way towards building a transit culture in British Columbia."

On October 21, 2009, the OnePassNow campaign hosted the largest transit rally in BC history. The rally called for the BC government to implement a standardised and

fair priced Metro Vancouver U-Pass and included a Proclamation from Mayor Gregor Robertson that October 21 will hereafter be "U-Pass Day" in Vancouver.

U-Pass programs are expected to begin throughout Metro Vancouver in January 2011.

All publicly funded universities and colleges in BC will now have the option of joining the U-Pass BC program. The province has committed to providing the required funding to keep the cost of the U-Pass below \$30 a month for students at participating schools.

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3. Response to Special Advisor's Report on VSB Finances

Last week, the report by BC's Comptroller General on the financial situation of the Vancouver School Board was released. In a news release, the Ministry of Education emphasized that the VSB is in a "strong cash position"; that additional savings are possible through shared services, closing and consolidating schools, and other measures; that the board should limit advocacy activities; that there are concerns about the ethical and organizational culture at VSB; and that the board is lacking in a long-term vision.

The [BC Education Coalition](#) has issued a response to this report. Here are some excerpts:

From the outset, there was concern about the usefulness of a special enquiry that singled out Vancouver, when all BC districts are struggling with budget challenges. The terms of reference also excluded any consideration of the adequacy of provincial funding vs. provincially-imposed costs, which districts say is the primary cause of the budget challenges. But no one believes the VSB is perfect and most felt an objective report could only help students by identify some VSB errors while urging the province to address the remaining gap to avert deep cuts to core services.

So it's deeply disturbing that after spending thousands of scarce Education dollars, nowhere does the Special Adviser's 94-page report examine the impacts on students and their educational achievement of Vancouver's planned \$16 million in cuts for next year. Instead of advice on averting those cuts, it assumes most should proceed and suggests further "savings" via new fees and more cuts.[...]

The Special Adviser received many independent submissions explaining student impacts in detail. She, like the Minister, entirely ignored them. This reflects the heart of the dispute between local boards and the Province. Most boards feel the duty to support student achievement is as important as fiscally responsibility. The Minister and her Adviser in effect say the job of boards is simply to work within their budgets, and to ignore impacts of under-funding on their ability to support student achievement. [...]

The report judges the elected trustees against the standards for professional bureaucrats and appointees who run government agencies and crowns. Under the elected school board governance system in Canada and elsewhere, professional

competency rests with staff. The report finds Vancouver staff competently managed financial affairs and administration, offering only some technical tips on standardizing of reporting and perhaps less conservative forecasting...

The report chides trustees for interfering too much in operations, but admits such involvement is consistent with their role under the School Act. Over-engagement is also blamed for the lack of long-term planning. This ignores that the current "hands-on" board has initiated long-term planning (while Vancouver's former "hands-off" board, which the Special Adviser said had its priorities right, was the one that balked at closing schools and initiating long-term planning). [...]

The Minister chose to announce the Special Adviser's appointment a month ago via the media, without the courtesy of even notifying the VSB. Provincial audits by the Comptroller General always give the Ministry responsible opportunities to comment and/or correct errors before draft reports are finalized. The targets of such reports get advance copies to allow them to digest and prepare a public response. In this case, the Minister chose to deny the VSB any opportunity to comment on an advance draft or even to receive a copy in advance of the final report's release to the media.

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4. Update on Human Rights Tribunal on First Nations Child Welfare

Last week, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal heard arguments from Canada to dismiss a complaint about the under-funding of First Nations child welfare. Canada tried twice to have the hearing dismissed at federal court, and now they are appealing to the chair of the Tribunal. The chair has reserved judgment.

A summary of arguments made by Canada, the Chiefs of Ontario, Amnesty International, Assembly of First Nations, and First Nations Child and Family Caring Society is available [here](#).

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5. Campaign 2000 National Update

Campaign 2000, the national campaign to end child poverty, has released their spring bulletin with an update on anti-poverty work federally and updates from their regional partners, including First Call in BC and partners in eight other provinces and territories. First Call's provincial update is below. Download the bulletin [here](#).

On May 21, a delegation of witnesses presented to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth at an all-day meeting on child poverty. Along with contributions from our partner, First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, BC's Representative for Children and Youth requested that the Committee undertake a plan to eliminate child poverty.

The [BC Poverty Reduction Coalition](#) continues to identify allies and educate the public on their poverty reduction strategy for the province.

The [Living Wage for Families Campaign](#) is making progress in their employer recognition process. BREAKING NEWS: the City of New Westminster adopted on April 27th a living wage bylaw for city staff and contractors of \$16.74/hr – the first time in Canadian history that a municipality has set a wage floor above the provincial minimum wage. See www.acorncanada.org for more info.

A new provincial budget at the beginning of March brought more cuts to services for children and families, including over \$7 million in cuts to contracted services from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the planned elimination of Success By 6 funding, and reduced access to dental care and medical services for very low income families and those on welfare and disability benefits.

The Winter Olympics brought Vancouver and BC's poverty struggles into the spotlight around the world. The [Poverty Olympics](#) held a successful event just prior to the official games with 600 community members and media to highlight the complexities of living in poverty and enjoy the creativity of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside community. A Poverty Olympics Torch Relay made its way around the province, with photos and stories capturing the work of passionate advocates on the Poverty Olympics blog and in the media.

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Research & Resources

1. Vancouver Foundation Youth Homelessness Call for Proposals

Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative provides grants to organizations that are targeting the complex issue of youth homelessness in Metro Vancouver. Vancouver Foundation is seeking initiatives that increase access to, and maintenance of, housing for youth at risk of homelessness who are transitioning to independence.

Early in the development of your proposals, interested applicants are asked to contact Nicole MacLellan (nicolem@vancouverfoundation.ca) to arrange a time to discuss your initiative with Catharine Hume, Director, or Vi Nguyen, Manager. Once a fit has been established with Vancouver Foundation staff, organizations will be invited to submit a full proposal due September 15, 2010.

A meeting for interested applicants is scheduled for Thursday, July 22, 2010 from 4:00 pm – 5:30 pm in the Vancouver Foundation Boardroom – Suite 1200-555 West Hastings Street. The focus of the meeting is to provide an overview of the Youth Homelessness Initiative, an opportunity for questions and answers, and a chance for interested applicants to meet with each other. If you plan to attend the meeting, please RSVP to Nicole MacLellan (nicolem@vancouverfoundation.ca) by Monday, July 19th.

Download the call for proposals [here](#).

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2. BC211 – Community Services Line

Funded by the United Way of the Lower Mainland, BC211 provides services for communities in the Metro Vancouver, Fraser Valley and Squamish-Lillooet Regional Districts. 211 will help anyone seeking information about services such as:

- A senior citizen wanting home care support in order to live independently
- A teenager looking for job-seeking skills
- A young mother wanting advice on how to care for her newborn
- A homeless person seeking a shelter bed and a hot meal
- A recent immigrant needing language and employment training
- A family searching for child-care services in their community or close to work
- A father trying to find services for his son with a newly diagnosed illness
- A laid-off worker wanting to find out about employment insurance
- A person affected by disabilities looking for services available in their community
- A service provider wanting to find complementary programs for her clients

Find out more at www.bc211.ca.

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3. Gender Differences in OECD Countries

Here are some facts from the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's March 2010 Gender Brief:

- Since the 1970's, fertility rates have decreased markedly, reaching below replacement levels in 2008 in most OECD countries.
- One in every six children is living in sole-parent households across OECD countries, with most sole-parent households headed by women. In Canada, 22% of children are living in a sole-parent household, compared to Portugal, Italy and Greece which all average fewer than 10% of children.
- Employment rates tend to be lower for mothers of young children than women as a whole. In Canada, the maternal employment rate for mothers of children age 3-5 years has an average of 68%, compared to Iceland, Finland, and Sweden all with averages above 80%. The proportion of sole mothers in paid employment is higher than partnered mothers in most countries. Sole mothers often have to engage in paid work, as public benefits for sole parents are low, often relying on informal networks for child care support.
- Although the gender and age gaps have decreased over time, the median earnings of men are still higher than those of women in all OECD countries.

While in Canada men's earnings are more than 20% higher than those of women, in Belgium and New Zealand gender differences are below 10%. Unequal pay prevails in part because most women are more likely to work in lower-paid occupations than men and work part-time.

- Women spend more time on care work (time spent caring for a child or another adult) as a primary activity than men. In Canada the proportion of total time spent on care work by women with 1 child is 8% and with 2 children or more is 9%. This is almost double that of men, as is the average in almost all countries.
- Public spending on family benefits varies across countries, with Canada well below the OECD average 2.3% of GDP. The public expenditure of family benefits in Canada sits at 1.1% with the majority being spent in cash benefits rather than in services or tax benefits. On the other hand, France, Luxembourg and the United Kingdom all spend above 3.5% on family benefits. In Finland, Iceland and Norway public spending on family benefits is at 3%. Public support accounted here only concerns that which is exclusively for families (e.g. child payments and allowances, parental leave benefits and childcare support). This does not include spending recorded in other social policy areas such as health and housing.
- Public spending on child care and preschool services across the OECD countries is an average of 0.6% of GDP; Canada's public expenditure is 0.1%. The US public expenditure is also well below the OECD average at .35%. Iceland and France are above average, spending over 1%.

[Download the Gender Brief.](#)

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Announcements

1. Vancouver People's Summit

The Vancouver People's Summit will host At The Table, the international campaign to ensure issues that matter are on the table at the G8/G20 talks in Toronto. The At The Table event will take place on Sunday, June 20, as part of the Main Street Car Free Day Festival. Main Street between 29th and 33rd Ave will be filled with music, children's performances, street theater, dialogue, debate and more. It's a party with a purpose, and we want you to be part of it!

The Vancouver Peoples' Summit will bring together activists and advocates to celebrate our common cause and send a message to leaders: we want bold action to end poverty, stop climate change, and make sure the global economy works for everyone. Find out more at www.vancouverpeoplessummit.ca.

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2. Assessing the Physical Development and Well-Being of Children

Head and Shoulders, Knees and Toes: Laps to Landscapes: Assessing the Physical Development and Well-Being of Children will take place July 9 at UBC with keynote speakers Dr. Carl Dunst and Dr. Wendy Hall. The full brochure and registration information is available [here](#).

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3. Family Conference on Developmental Disabilities

The Family Focus Society, BC Association for Community Living and Canadian Association for Community Living present "Families, a Journey of Generations Moving Mountains," a conference for people with a disabilities, family members, caregivers, service providers, advocates, friends and professionals.

Family Focus enjoys a 23-year tradition of organizing conferences "for families by families". Come to Whistler this coming Oct 22-24 and experience the atmosphere of a national conference for sharing information, learning together, supporting one another and celebrating loved ones and each other.

Find out more at www.familyfocusconference.com.

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4. BC Association of Pregnancy Outreach Programs' 2010 Conference

The BCAPOP annual conference and general meeting will take place October 13-15 at the Hilton Vancouver Airport in Richmond. Feature presentations include "When Survivors Give Birth" by Penny Simkin, doula and author, and "Problematic Substance Use in Pregnancy" by Pregnancy-Related Issues in the Management of Addictions. Contact Chi Cejalvo at ed@bcapop.ca for more information.

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