

First Call's Weekly Announcements – March 18, 2010

Next ECD Roundtable: March 31

Next Coalition Meeting: April 14

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

Note: you may not have received last week's Announcements due to a server error.

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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. Provincial Gaming Grants Cuts

According to a recent government press release, this year's gaming grants from the Ministry of Housing and Social Development will be streamed to youth arts, culture and sports groups, sports organizations serving people with disabilities, and other organizations that work on public safety, people in need, and community services such as preschools. Groups that will not be eligible include school playgrounds, and adult arts, culture and sports organizations. Parent Advisory Councils and District Parent Advisory Council funding will be restored after it was cut in half in 2009.

Bingo affiliation and direct access grants are being combined into a single community gaming grant program this year, which will distribute \$120 million in funds.

According to a recent article in the [Victoria Times Colonist](#), gaming grant funding for preschools, child care centres and resource centres will be reduced by 50% this year. The amount available to all charities and non-profits has been reduced by \$36 million.

Non-profits that used to access gaming funds have started receiving rejection letters for this year. Even groups that meet the new funding requirements for gaming are facing cuts. They include the Fraser Valley Youth Society, which lost its funding of \$5000 a year. It runs the only drop-in centre for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and transsexual youth in the Fraser Valley. Victoria's Together Against Poverty Society (TAPS) has also lost \$65,000 in funding for its Tenant Advocacy Project.

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2. Extended Family Program to Replace Child in the Home of a Relative

From the [BC Association of Social Workers](#):

Effective April 1st, the provincial government will institute changes to support services for family members/family friends who have stepped in to care for a child whose parents cannot look after them. The Child in a Home of a Relative (CIHR) program under the Ministry of Housing and Social Development will be phased out, with no new applications accepted after March 31st, 2010. The new Extended Family Program (EFP) under the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), heralded by the provincial government as a way to "support strong, stable home environments and ensure the safety and well-being of children and youth who are temporarily unable to live with their parents," states its most important goal is to "improve outcomes for children and youth."

The majority of these children will be living with their grandparents. In fact, there are more children being raised by their grandparents in BC than there are in the foster care system. A recent survey by Parent Support Services Society of BC and the University of Victoria School of Social Work indicated that half the grandparents raising their grandchildren had the children placed with them by MCFD. Grandparents have been referred to as 'the underground foster care system' for good reason.

The BC Association of Social Workers has reviewed the new Extended Family Program, and has identified some major concerns:

Although anyone currently in receipt of CIHR benefits will continue to be covered under that program until the child reaches the age of majority, after March 31st, the only apparent option for a relative who undertakes the care of a child is through the Extended Family Program. If they do not qualify, they will be left with very few supports – and indeed many will not qualify. Two major flaws are apparent in the planning for the EFP:

- The only gateway to the new program is through the child's parent, who must request and agree to the arrangement. Too often that parent cannot be found, suffers from a mental illness or addiction, may be incarcerated or street engaged, may have an estranged relationship with the grandparents or simply may be unwilling or unable to cooperate for a variety of reasons.*
- The new policy disqualifies any relative with legal guardianship of the child to receive services, even if they have great need. This is despite the fact that MCFD staff and often lawyers advise grandparents (or other relatives) to obtain legal guardianship because of the protection it affords the child and the grandparents in decision making and acquiring services for the child.*

Unlike the CIHR plan, which covers children until they age out, the service plan under the Extended Family Program will be reviewed every six months, and supports will continue "as long as there is an assessed need and the parent agrees that the out-of-home placement remains the best option for the child." This leaves relatives unable to plan far into the future as all or some supports could disappear in a very short time. The agreements are "not expected to continue beyond 24 months maximum... unless an assessment of the child's needs supports a longer timeline." Two years in the life of a child who has likely experienced substantial turmoil, and whose parents may have chronic problems that interfere with their ability to parent, is extraordinarily brief. Many grandparents hope that their child will be able to parent again when well. Sometimes that is possible. Often the children stay with their grandparents until they are grown or the grandparents are too old or ill to care for them. But this program can only assure them they will receive help for between 6 and 24 months.

As for the screenings and assessments, we are concerned that these procedures now become the responsibility of MCFD. No new funding or staffing has been allocated to handle the additional workloads in an already under-resourced ministry. While we support the need for in-depth assessments, adding this task to social work caseloads which are already too high in most regions will only result in critical delays across the board to families needing help, and create untenable situations for professional staff.

We do not note any appeal system for people refused under the new program, nor is there any increased advocacy funding or service to assist with navigation,

clarification, problem solving etc. In fact, it has been reduced, with the elimination of LawLINE, which was often the first step in receiving legal rights information.

We applaud the services the new Extended Family Program will provide – financial help, respite care, medical, optical and dental benefits, increased access to counselling services – it's all good. But why, we ask, has this program been designed to deliberately exclude many of the families who need it most – the family members who cannot locate or have an estranged relationship with the child's parent, the grandparents or other relatives who fought for legal guardianship to protect the child's best interests – many of whom live near or beneath the poverty line or struggle on fixed incomes, and who have undertaken responsibility for a child or children who may have many special needs.

Currently, 4500 families receive benefits under CIHR and less than 200 under Kith and Kin agreements. With the tight screening criteria of the Extended Family Program, it is likely that few families will qualify. For those who do, it will be a wonderful benefit. For the vast majority who do not, it will be devastating.

BCASW asks the government to review this program in the light of our concerns, and institute the changes that will ensure no children are excluded from the help they need to live in a safe and secure family environment. Specifically, we ask that:

- Legal guardians be considered eligible for the EFP*
- Caregivers be allowed to apply for the EFP in circumstances that preclude a parent from giving consent*
- The program be reframed from a 'temporary' stopgap to one that offers help until a child reaches the age of majority, where it is in the child's best interests*
- Funding be increased to MCFD to handle the additional workload*
- MCFD establish an external advisory body that includes social workers, legal advocates and other stakeholders*
- MCFD recognize the unique hardships and contributions of grandparents and other relatives/close family friends and demonstrate its commitment to supporting children to remain with extended family on a long term basis if needed.*

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3. Canada Ratifies UN Convention on Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Canada is the most recent country to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The Canadian Association for Community Living is applauding the government's action.

Michael Bach, CACL Executive Vice-President, reflected on the development of the Convention: "The Convention was influenced by a Canadian perspective and is a document that all Canadians should be proud of. Canadian concepts about inclusive education, living in the community and supported decision-making infuse the Convention. The Convention also recognizes the valuable role that families play in

making rights a reality for their family members with disabilities. The Convention is also unique for the way it was developed. It is the first time in UN history that people affected by a treaty were actively engaged in the development of its text. It is a Convention that is informed by the lived experience of people with disabilities and their families."

Moving forward, the Convention provides people with disabilities and their families a new tool to promote and advance the rights of people with disabilities and to building an inclusive and accessible Canada. [CACL President Heather] Miller commented that: "The Convention is much more than a listing of entitlements. It is a road map that explains where, why and how the rights of people with disabilities have been neglected and what steps are required to realize human rights for people with disabilities in meaningful ways."

Read more from the [CACL's press release](#).

With regards to children with disabilities, the Convention protects their human rights on an equal basis with other children (article 7). Children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.

The rights of children with disabilities are protected in a number of areas, including education (article 24), health (article 25), adequate standard of living (article 28), and participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (article 30). Read the Convention [here](#).

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4. Trustees Call for Royal Commission on Education

Nanaimo school trustees are taking a motion to the BC School Trustees Association's AGM in April calling for a review of the public education system:

A royal commission is an independent body that consults with all of the different education stakeholders, including government, parents, teachers and communities, and makes recommendations to improve the system.

Dot Neary, one of two Nanaimo representatives on the BCSTA provincial council, said she's heard similar calls for more open conversation about public education from other districts.

"I think there's a movement right now for public education to receive more scrutiny from a wider audience," said Neary.

Read more in the [Nanaimo News Bulletin](#).

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5. Provincial Society Act Review

The Ministry of Finance is reviewing British Columbia's Society Act, the statute that provides rules for the registration and corporate governance of not-for-profit entities. Stakeholders and the general public are encouraged to participate in a [government consultation](#) that ends on April 1.

A number of prominent non-profit organizations in BC have come together to issue a collaborative response to this review. Visit www.yourtake.ca to read their submission and add your voice by endorsing it and/or commenting on issues impacting specific non-profit sectors.

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6. Teen Begins Cross-Country Run for Poverty and Health

On her website, Candace Sutherland shares an inspiring story of resiliency. This Aboriginal teenager from Winnipeg is beginning a cross-country run from St. John's to Victoria to raise funds for four charities to help with poverty and health concerns that have impacted her family. Candace has organized a number of runs since she was 12 years old to raise funds and food for poor families. Read more about Candace at www.candacesutherland.com.

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Research & Resources

1. First Call's 2009 Report to the Coalition

At last week's coalition meeting, First Call presented a report on our work in 2009. As First Call is not a registered society, we don't produce a formal annual report. This two-page brief provides an overview of First Call's projects, planning, outreach, and other activities over the past year and is a useful snapshot of the coalition's work. A big thank you to all of our partner organizations who helped us accomplish so much! Read the report [here](#).

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2. SPARC Guide to Conducting Affordability Studies in Your Community

This guidebook discusses different ways of measuring poverty in Canada and describes how to conduct an affordability study for your community. By using this guide book, you will:

- Acquire knowledge about different approaches to measuring poverty in Canada
- Understand the market basket measure methodology for conducting affordability studies
- Develop skills to design and implement an affordability study for your community
- Engage options for how to use the results of an affordability study to address issues of poverty and low income in your community

Download it [here](#).

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3. How to Support Children and Young People's Campaigning

A guide by UK organization Participation Works describes the process of supporting campaigns led by children and discusses how to work them in an ethical way. It also contains British case studies of campaigns led by children and youth and provides a list of further resources. Read it [here](#).

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4. New Resource on Human Rights and Education

The International Human Rights Internship Program and the International Budget Partnership have produced "Read the Books: Government Budgets and the Right to Education," a tool for examining education budgets from a human rights perspective. It includes:

- Elements of the right to education and where these might be found in a government's budget;
- A government's human rights obligations and questions that these raise about a government's budget;
- A process for using a rights framework to analyze a government's education budget; and
- A short discussion of costing related to the right to education.

Download it [here](#).

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5. Funding for Research on Immigration, Housing and Homelessness

The Metropolis Project of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and the Homelessness Partnering Secretariat of Human Resources and Social Development Canada are funding a comparative study of refugees and asylum-seekers' housing experiences in Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver. In addition, they will fund projects exploring factors of newcomer homelessness in smaller Canadian cities. Up to \$275,000 is available for projects to be completed by March 31, 2011. The deadline for proposals is May 5. Find out more [here](#).

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Announcements

1. Full Day Kindergarten Summer Institute – Port Moody

Coquitlam and Mission school districts present *Playful Possibilities*, a summer institute on kindergarten for teachers, early childhood educators, community partners and others. The institute takes place on July 5 and 6 with speakers including Stuart Shanker, Janet Mort, and Jane Beach. It will take place at Heritage Woods Secondary School in Port Moody, and the registration fee is \$25. Contact mdockendorf@sd43.bc.ca or Brenda.lightburn@mpsd.ca for more information.

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2. Discussion with Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams – Vancouver

Nobel Peace Laureate Jody Williams will join the Canadian Red Cross for *Even Wars have Limits*, a discussion with youth on the historic landmine ban, the ongoing humanitarian impact of these weapons in such places as Afghanistan and how youth can be effective global citizens. General public welcome - entrance by donation. The event takes place on Sat. March 20th, at 3:00 pm at SFU Harbour Centre, Room 1700, 515 W. Hastings St, Vancouver. Email for more info: mmennie@redcross.ca.

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3. Child and Youth Care Association Prepares for New Generation of Leaders

The Child and Youth Care Association of BC will address the following questions at their upcoming AGM:

- How can we prepare ourselves as emerging child and youth care leaders?

- What are the opportunities for learning and mentorship from the current generation of child and youth care leaders?
- What do we need in order to build a robust, positive, and practical association for child and youth care workers and students in BC?

The theme of this AGM is to focus on visionary leadership: *Bridging Into the Next Generation of Child and Youth Care Leadership in BC*. Child and youth care workers, students, social service sector employees, and sector leaders are encouraged to attend! Please see the [website](#) for meeting and registration details. The AGM will take place on April 24 at Douglas College in New Westminster.

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4. Buddy Up for Breastfeeding Seeks Volunteers

This breastfeeding support program is looking for volunteers who will receive training from Public Health Nurses to provide confidential telephone and e-mail support to new breastfeeding moms. Contact the program coordinator at Maple Ridge Public Health for more information – 604-466-7911.

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5. Rally to Build a Better BC - Vancouver

Just a reminder that the multi-sectoral rally against provincial budget cuts is coming up on Saturday, April 10 at noon on the north side of the Vancouver Art Gallery. Find out more at www.betterbc.ca.

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