

First Call's Weekly Announcements – March 25, 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. Canada Proposes Changes to Youth Justice Act

Last week, the Conservative government proposed changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act to give judges the power to consider behaviours such as a "casual

attitude to the law," a "complete lack of empathy for the victim," and previous brushes with the law when sentencing youth under 18, according to Minister of Justice Rob Nicholson.

According to the CBC, youth crime is decreasing in Canada; there was a 26% drop in youth court cases between 2002-2003 and 2006-2007. Read the full story on the [CBC](#).

The [government press release](#) states that these changes will "require the Crown to consider seeking adult sentences for youth convicted of the most serious crimes" and "require the courts to consider publishing the name of a violent young offender when necessary for the protection of society."

Read a commentary from the [Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives](#) on the costs of "tough-on-crime" bills.

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2. Success By 6 Funding Cut

The BC government has announced its intention to stop contributing to the funding of the Success By 6 Early Childhood Development Provincial Partnership, which is a collaboration between the BC Government through the Ministry of Children and Family Development, United Ways, and Savings and Credit Unions of BC. The province will contribute half of its previous annual commitment of \$5 million in 2010-11, and will stop funding the initiative in 2011. Success By 6 BC will not continue given the end of government support, and the funds available will be directed toward maintaining capacity funding for completion of existing projects through March 31, 2011. More information will be shared when it becomes available. You can find out more about Success by 6 at www.successby6bc.ca.

On Wednesday, this cut was debated in the Legislature:

M. Karagianis: Success By 6 was a creation of this government in 2003. Now not only is their funding being cut in half this year; the entire program is being cancelled in March 2011. The coordinators of this program have worked tirelessly for six years to build relationships across government with business, with First Nations and the non-profit sector. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

The cancellation of this program will have a devastating effect on organizations already stripped to the bone by this government's cuts. How can the Minister of Children and Families justify eliminating funding to an organization that supports so many front-line services to families? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. Polak: Success By 6 has been a tremendous partnership with the government of British Columbia, with credit unions, and we're proud that since 2003 we have invested \$27 million in Success By 6. In addition to the \$2½ million that Success By 6 will receive in a grant this year, we'll also be, across government, spending almost a billion dollars in early childhood development, child care services, children and youth with special needs. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

We will continue to work with Success By 6 as we look for opportunities to help them transition some of their programs in these difficult times. But there's no question that this is an area that we deem a priority, and we certainly invest more than the opposition ever did. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Mr. Speaker: The member has a supplemental. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

M. Karagianis: So this minister admits that they're proud to have cut this program by 50 percent and that they are doing away with it by 2011? That's the kind of support that this minister offers to communities? The early childhood development provincial partnership has said that without the three partners in place — the United Way, the credit unions and, most importantly, the province of British Columbia — they will not be able to carry on, and Success By 6 will be dissolved along with 400 programs across this province that it serves. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

After six years the program is strong. It is delivering innovative programs to communities, and now the B.C. Liberals will cancel it outright. It does not make any sense. This is another bad decision by a government that proves over and over again that it does not care about supporting families and communities. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

I would ask the minister: will she stand today and reverse the decision and reinstate the funding for Success By 6? [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Hon. M. Polak: Year upon year since 2003 this government has responded by supporting Success By 6 with grants — year upon year upon year; grants that the opposition voted against every single time. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

We will continue to be working with Success By 6 as they work with the \$2.5 million grant we will provide this year in order to ensure that we help them to transition their programs and to look for opportunities to enhance community capacity-building across the province. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

[...]

G. Coons: The cancellation of Success By 6 is a lot more than just one program. More than 400 programs are supported. This means no more literacy programs, no more books, no more support for first languages projects. The list goes on and on. [DRAFT TRANSCRIPT ONLY]

Read more of the transcript [here](#) (scroll down to Success By 6 Program heading).

Funding for early years programs and services in BC is a fragile patchwork of stitched together grants from a variety of sources. The ramifications of this cut, like the earlier one to eliminate the Provincial Advisors for Infant Development and Supported Child Development, are predictably far reaching and devastating to efforts to support young children and their families in communities around the province. Contact your MLA and the Minister of Children and Family Development now to let them know that you oppose these cuts.

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3. Reduced Spending in the Public Sector

At the recent Build a Better BC teach-in, political consultant and writer for theyyee.ca Will McMartin discussed the reduction in public sector spending over the last two decades. From an article by Soren Bech:

McMartin said the public sector in Canada today is 80 percent of what it was 20 years ago, and the cuts are continuing. "A conclusion you might reach today is that government cutting has gone on too long," he said.

While groups like the Fraser Institute and the Canadian Taxpayers' Federation push for more cuts, and say spending is too high, they fail to recognize that governments' share of the economy has steadily fallen.

"By international standards, Canada's public sector is one of the smallest," he said.

McMartin pointed out that when you look at trends in government spending, you can't look at dollars alone. You must also take into account inflation, population growth, the size of the economy and changes in accounting policies.

B.C.'s population grew by 700,000 people in the 1990s, and by another 448,000 during the B.C. Liberals' time in office. This means the province has more taxpayers, and more people who require services. Accommodating those changes does not mean the proportion of public spending has increased.

Even though the number of dollars spent on public services has gone up, the amount per person has gone down and continues to go down.

McMartin cited a BMO Capital Markets analysis of the March 2 provincial budget. It found that after inflation, public spending per capita in B.C. will "contract" 1.2 percent annually in the next few years.

When the B.C. Liberals took office in 2002, public expenditures in B.C. were 22.7 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Under Gordon Campbell, it will soon be under 15 percent.

The tendency, McMartin indicated, is for people to assume that "over-spending" is the cause of government deficits. He cited a recent Ekos opinion poll in which 46 percent of respondents favoured cuts in public services and spending.

"The empirical evidence" he said, "is that spending is not out of control."

The full synopsis of the teach-in on building a better BC will be available at www.betterbc.ca.

A recent "Behind the Numbers" piece by the CCPA's Iglia Ivanova examines the misconception that recent government layoffs are necessary to trim the waste from provincial programs and administration:

It is a little known fact that BC's public sector has been shrinking both in terms of employees per capita and expenditures relative to GDP (or the size of the economy) since the early 1990s. This is because our public service already went through

several comprehensive reviews in recent years that looked for ways to cut costs. Simply put, BC entered the recession with one of the leanest public sectors in the country and there was little room for cuts without compromising much-needed public services. The recent round of cuts has made it even more difficult for the province to deliver important programs and services.

BC's public sector provided 17% of all jobs in the province in 2008; there were 89.7 public sector employees per 1,000 people in BC, compared to 90.4 per 1,000 in Alberta, 99.6 per 1,000 in Ontario, and close to 140 per 1,000 in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. Read more [here](#).

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4. Recommendations from Women's Voices at the Table

On March 6, a "Women's Voice at the Table" conference was held in Vancouver to mark International Women's Day. The "at the table" concept is part of a broadly-based Canadian and global civil society campaign to mobilize women to be heard and to declare our right to be "at the table" with leaders at the G8 and G20 meetings taking place in Canada this June. Participants gathered at roundtables to discuss and make recommendations on issues including education, access to justice, and poverty and income.

The final product from this event includes recommendations that will be shared with government leaders from around the world, and a commitment to immediate, local action by participants on each issue. The actions and recommendations are available to download [here](#).

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Research & Resources

1. Presentations on Neighbourhood Learning Centres

The Ministry of Education has launched a website, www.neighbourhoodlearningcentres.gov.bc.ca, to promote its Neighbourhood Learning Centres concept highlighted in the recent throne speech. These Centres are based in schools, and can include other services such as child care, health clinics, sports program, and family resource centres.

The province currently has 9 model Neighbourhood Learning Centres in six districts. At a January 2010 stakeholders forum, research was shared on the potential impact of Neighbourhood Learning Centres, and school districts shared their visions for

Learning Centres in their communities. All of these presentations are available on the website.

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2. National Survey on Child Care Fees

Today's Parent magazine recently conducted a survey of monthly non-subsidized fees for full-time preschool care. The average fees ranged from \$399 in Manitoba to \$814 in Ontario, with BC coming in second highest at \$775 a month.

What accounts for the vast discrepancies in fees? The short answer is that child care in Canada is a user-pay, market-driven service. Prices rise and fall based on a number of factors: what parents in a given area are believed to be able to pay, what child care wages are in that market, whether staff are unionized (a Canadian study showed that unionized staff earned \$3.32 more an hour than their non-union counterparts), and whether the centre is non-profit or for-profit.

The biggest single cost for child care centres is wages. Martha Friendly, director of the Childcare Resource and Research Unit, a Toronto-based policy and research institute focused on early childhood education, estimates that 75% to 90% of a centre's expenses are wages and benefits. "Some centres charge very high fees because they can. Others, which can't charge high fees, have to find ways to cut costs, usually by paying lower wages, which is likely to affect the quality of the care they can provide," says Friendly.

Read more [here](#).

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3. Study on Impacts of Same Sex Parenting

A new American study published in the Journal of Marriage and Family found more similarities than differences among children raised by two parent families, regardless of the gender of their parents. The authors found that "very little about the gender of the parent has significance for children's psychological adjustment and social success. [...] The social science research that is routinely cited does not actually speak to the questions of whether or not children need both a mother and a father at home. Instead proponents generally cite research that compares [heterosexual two-parent] families with single parents, thus conflating the number with the gender of parents."

Read more [here](#).

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4. 40 Years After the Royal Commission on the Status Women

In an article on rabble.ca, Judy Rebick notes Canada's drop in ranking in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Index, going from 7th in 2004 to 25th in 2009. She blames this shift on federal government policy changes and "the impact of corporate globalization on social program[s], poor people, workers and on the women's movement itself."

Rebick says that the Royal Commission allowed for progress in the areas of abortion, child care, equal pay, and increased representation by women in government. But since then, funding cuts coupled with the emphasis on research rather than advocacy for women by the Liberal government of the 90's have resulted in some backwards movement on women's issues. She states that the women's movement remains the most diverse social movement, and it is becoming "more global, more diverse, more radical and more integrated into other movements for social and environmental change." Read her piece [here](#).

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5. "Poverty Challenge" Educates Ontario Students

The Poverty Challenge is an intensive one-day summit on poverty for high school students in Kingston, Ontario. They have the opportunity to go through the motions of a person living in poverty, negotiating systems of supports and bureaucracy to access food, housing, and income. Students will then talk to other students about the challenges they faced and insight they have into the particular situation they tried to overcome. They will work with other students to create an action plan to solve the problems they encountered. The goal of the event is for students to gain a better understanding of poverty and become agents of social change. This is the second year that the poverty challenge is taking place – find out more at www.thepovertychallenge.org.

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Announcements

1. Housing Youth 2010 Forum

Vancouver Foundation is holding *Housing Youth 2010* on Friday, May 7th from 9:00 am – 4:00 pm at the Vancouver Public Library, Alma VanDusen and Peter Kaye Room. Please RSVP to [Nicole MacLellan](#) by April 9th. The forum is free, but space is limited.

Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative is focused on addressing youth homelessness in Metro Vancouver through granting, convening and partnering activities. The purpose of this forum is to bring together local service providers,

fundere and young people for a day of learning and discussion based on the early experiences of our grantees. We will explore ways to increase our collective impact as we work to ensure that all youth have homes.

The first part of the forum will provide an opportunity for grantees to share key learnings gained from their work and will include the perspectives of young people and evaluators. The afternoon will include fundere in a dialogue about learnings and mechanisms to strengthen our collective impact.

To learn more about Vancouver Foundation's Youth Homelessness Initiative, please visit our [website](#).

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2. Richmond Presentation on Poverty Reduction Plan

The Richmond Poverty Response Committee and CFUW are presenting an evening with Seth Klein of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives on why BC needs a poverty reduction plan. He will present the key features of a poverty reduction plan and the priority public policies needed to significantly reduce poverty, followed by a question and answer session.

The event takes place on Tuesday, May 4 at 7:00 PM at the Richmond Cultural Centre Lecture Hall, 7700 Minoru Blvd. Admission is by donation. RSVP to SethKleinRichmondMay04@richmondprc.org.

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3. Walk for Community Social Services Month – Victoria

March is Community Social Services Awareness Month. Join community social services workers on Saturday, March 27 for a walk to raise awareness about the vital role these services play in our communities. The walk will begin and end at Centennial Square in Victoria. It will start at 10:30 AM, with a wrap up barbeque at 12 PM. Everyone is welcome, and there is no cost to participate.

Those interested in participating are encouraged to pre-register by emailing bwilson@heu.org or by calling 250-978-5475. Visit the Community Social Services Matter website for more information: www.communitysocialservicesmatter.ca.

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4. Vancouver Rally Against Legal Aid Cuts

Join legal aid workers this Friday as they hold a rally to mark the closure of legal aid centres across BC. This is the second round of cuts to BC's legal aid system in two years. Come out to show your support for an accessible justice system - everyone is welcome.

The rally will take place at 510 Burrard St. beginning at noon.

A rally against government cuts in general will take place on April 10 at noon at the Vancouver Art Gallery. Find out more at www.betterbc.ca.

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