

First Call's Weekly Announcements – May 3, 2010

Next ECD Roundtable: May 26

Next Coalition Meeting: May 12

Living Wage Roundtable: May 11

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

A. [Advocacy/Calls to Action](#)

1. [City of New Westminster Adopts First-Ever Living Wage Bylaw in Canada](#)
2. [Role of Representative for Children and Youth Threatened](#)
3. [Poll Shows Support for Early Childhood Spending](#)
4. [May is Child Care Month, Cuts and All](#)
5. [Support Funding Restored for Two Port Alberni Teenagers](#)
6. [A Proactive Community - Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Katzie Community Network](#)

B. [Research & Resources](#)

1. [FBCYICN YouthSpeak 2009 Report](#)
2. [Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth](#)
3. [Three Questions on Youth Justice](#)
4. [Research on Antidepressants and Pregnancy](#)

C. [Announcements](#)

1. [ECEBC Annual Conference May 27-29 in Richmond](#)
2. [FUN Camps Scholarships Available](#)
3. [A Chemical Reaction Showing in Surrey](#)

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. City of New Westminster Adopts First-Ever Living Wage Bylaw in Canada

Great news! On April 26, New Westminster City Council voted unanimously in favour of a living wage bylaw, the first of its kind in Canada. The living wage for New Westminster will be based on the Living Wage for Families' calculation of the wage required to keep a family with two children and two working parents above the poverty line (currently \$16.74). Here's the text of the motion:

"That the City establish a Living Wage Policy that is tied to an hourly rate established each year by the Living Wage for Families Campaign; and,
That the Living Wage policy will apply to both full time and part time employees;
and,
That there be no threshold in terms of dollar value of a contract or number of employees; and,
That the policy apply to persons that perform physical work on City premises and properties; and,
That staff bring back information to Council regarding implications of the Living Wage on contracted services."

This is a great victory for the Living Wage for Families Campaign and our partners, who include First Call, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, Vancity, Hospital Employees' Union, and BC ACORN, whose members worked so hard to achieve this victory in New Westminster. Read the media release from the Living Wage for Families Campaign [here](#), and read the front page story from the Vancouver Sun [here](#).

Don't forget that there is a Living Wage Roundtable coming up on May 11 - the poster is available [here](#). Hope to see you there!

[../top](#)

2. Role of Representative for Children and Youth Threatened

Last week, the provincial government quietly introduced legislation that would limit the access of the Representative for Children and Youth to cabinet documents, which would prevent her office from releasing future reports that rely on the information from that level of the Executive Council, such as her recent *Honouring Christian Lee* report on domestic violence. Read more in the [Vancouver Sun](#).

Below is a media release from the [BC Association of Social Workers](#):

Through the introduction of Bill 24-2006 the BC government has introduced amendments to the Representative for Children and Youth Act that will restrict the Representative in accessing cabinet documents which are necessary to monitor and assess how the BC government is meeting its mandate toward the children and youth of BC.

The fact that these legislative changes are retroactive to the creation of the Representative's office, and were hidden within the bill which contained 200 amendments to miscellaneous laws, speaks to the profound lack of transparency, openness and accountability with which the BC government is operating. The introduction of these amendments can only be seen as attempts to undermine and diminish the legislative authority and power of the Representative in holding the BC government accountable for its action and inaction that contribute to the continuing and rapid deterioration of the child welfare and social service systems of care in BC.

There is enough evidence to demonstrate that MCFD is often failing to meet even its most basic legislative mandate – to protect children and youth. The attrition of frontline social workers continues unabated. The government has failed to act on previous recommendations of the Representative.

How are the interests of children, youth and families being served by creating a veil of secrecy around accessing information about how the leadership of MCFD is operating and what changes they are planning?

Whose interests are being served by cutting the Representative off at the knees in fulfilling the mandate of her office – assessing and reporting on how MCFD and other Ministries are fulfilling their legislated mandates toward the children and youth of BC?

It's time for the leadership of MCFD to be reminded that their first and most important commitment is to serving the interests and needs of BC's children and youth in the most accountable, transparent and ethical way. There is still time for the BC government to meet its own goal of building the best system of support in Canada for children with special needs and those who are at risk. BC's children and youth deserve the absolute best that we have to offer.

Support the Representative by contacting your MLA to let them know that this legislation limiting the access of the Representative to cabinet documents is unacceptable.

[../top](#)

3. Poll Shows Support for Early Childhood Spending

A poll by Angus Reid was released last week as part of the "Inspiring Innovation – Investing in Human Capital, Early Care and Learning Hubs" symposium in Vancouver. It shows wide public support for an increase in spending on early learning and care. The Human Early Learning Partnership has found that 29% of kids in BC are considered developmentally vulnerable when they enter kindergarten. 88% of poll respondents supported the goal suggested in HELP's report to reduce this vulnerability to 15% by 2015, and over 60% said they would support spending up to a billion more dollars each year to meet that goal provincially.

The poll was funded by the YWCA. Read more about it on [the Hook](#), and download HELP's 15 by 15 report [here](#).

HELP's Paul Kershaw wrote an article in the Vancouver Sun recently about public investments in the baby boomer generation versus the lack of investments in young children:

I believe boomers genuinely want to leave more to their children and grandchildren than they have enjoyed. The story they tell themselves is not intended to be fiction. Although the generation's record of accomplishment on this front is weak so far, and the debt and global climate change are massive problems they leave for the future, there remains time for boomers to fix one major intergenerational problem: They can undo decisions which tolerate nearly 30 per cent of the next generation reaching school in a vulnerable condition. For this, we must move beyond the boomercentrism that guides our priority-setting to invest in the smart family policy parents require now, and that children deserve.

Read more of the article [here](#).

[../top](#)

4. May is Child Care Month, Cuts and All

The Province of British Columbia has proclaimed the month of May to be Child Care Month, and May 20 is Child Care Provider Appreciation Day.

Please send First Call information about any events taking place in your community to celebrate Child Care Month.

The proclamation of Child Care Month has gone ahead despite ongoing cuts to child care and ECD, including a reduction in funds available for child care from gaming grants, a reduction in minor capital grants and loss of major capital grants for child care centres, amongst other cuts.

One of the most recent cuts includes \$88,000 from OPTIONS Community Services' Mobile Child Care program, which provides child minding services to Surrey based programs. Mobile Child Care served over 4000 children last year. The program will end on May 31.

[../top](#)

5. Support Funding Restored for Two Port Alberni Teenagers

Until recently, Supported Child Development funding for medical and care costs for high needs children over the age of 12 was available from some agencies and regions on a case by case basis. But now MCFD is no longer allowing these exceptions, and will only provide support for high needs children ages 12 and under.

Two parents of high needs teenagers in need of constant supervision were profiled in an article in the [Alberni Valley Times](#), with one parent making the point that the amount of support she had been receiving for her 16 year old son was far less than it would cost the ministry if she was unable to pay for his care and he went into the

foster care system. Local MLA Scott Fraser took both of these families' stories to the legislature, and funding for their children has now been restored, although it will come from MCFD directly rather than the Supported Child Development Program.

Please e-mail parent Cheryl Magnussen at Magnussen@shaw.ca if you are in need of child care and support funding for your high needs teenager while you maintain employment. She is willing to provide support for your advocacy efforts.

[../top](#)

6. A Proactive Community - Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Katzie Community Network

The Maple Ridge Pitt Meadows Katzie Community Network is proactively mobilizing in response to cuts and changes to service delivery affecting their communities at their monthly meeting.

They are compiling:

- An inventory of funding cuts, grant reductions, and reorganization of services that have impacted their agencies' services
- An assessment of impacts to clients, staff, and agency

They aim to use this information to:

- Begin to understand these changes from a community level, and to establish priorities
- To ensure that the Community Network Facilitators have the information that they need to both advocate and inform others that can advocate for services in the community
- Provide information to Community Leaders and enable them to advocate for services for the community

This type of local information gathering and sharing is crucial to helping local decision-makers and leaders who want to protect and improve services and supports for children, youth and families.

First Call welcomes reports from local communities to inform an assessment from a provincial perspective of the impacts of funding cuts and other changes affecting children, youth and families.

[../top](#)

Research & Resources

1. FBCYICN YouthSpeak 2009 Report

The Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks uses the YouthSpeak model to find out about the needs, issues, and ideas of youth in/from government care and make recommendations to address these needs. This report gives an overview of the YouthSpeak model and previous YouthSpeak events, and summarizes the top 5 priorities identified at the 2009 event. Download the report [here](#).

[.../top](#)

2. Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth

The Active Healthy Kids Canada report card gives Canada an "F" for physical activity levels, stating that only 12% of children and youth meet the guidelines of 90 minutes of physical activity a day. The report includes the following recommendations for increasing physical activity in the early years:

- Policy-makers should invest in active living for children under five; ensure child care policies mandate daily physical activity and adequately resource staff; target caregivers with incentives and messaging to get kids active and be active with them.
- Public health & healthcare professionals should promote physical activity, active play, and reduced screen time as part of early years support programs for families.
- Parents should keep TVs out of bedrooms, institute screen time limits, and create opportunities for active outdoor play for kids and as a family.
- Early childhood educators & schools should train and resource staff; offer a minimum of 90 minutes of daily active play time, indoors and outdoors, structured and unstructured.

Download the report card [here](#).

[.../top](#)

3. Three Questions on Youth Justice

The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children has written to Members of Parliament suggesting three questions for them to ask about the proposed changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA), detailing aspects of the debate that have not been highlighted in Parliament:

1. What are the results of the consultation on the effectiveness of the YCJA?
2. Are these amendments consistent with human rights commitments that Canada has a duty to implement?
3. Is this the top priority for Canada's young people and a safer society?

Read the reasons why these questions need to be asked [here](#).

[.../top](#)

4. Research on Antidepressants and Pregnancy

New research from Denmark shows that the use of antidepressants during pregnancy may delay babies' developmental milestones by up to one month, but not beyond the normal range of development. The delays included learning how to sit up, looking after sounds, and learning how to walk. The researchers say that women should not necessarily avoid antidepressants while pregnant, because, of course, their wellbeing is also at stake. Read more about it on Reuters.com.

[../top](#)

Announcements

1. ECEBC Annual Conference May 27-29 in Richmond

ECEBC is holding its 39th Annual Conference Building on our Roots, Celebrating Our Success and Expanding Our Possibilities May 27 – 29, 2010 at the Sheraton Vancouver Airport Hotel and Vancouver Airport Marriott Hotel in Richmond. Please join us for this comprehensive opportunity for professional development and networking. Hotel accommodations are available at a special rate until May 3. Please see details, including information on keynotes and workshops as well as our always fun gala event, at www.ecebc.ca and follow the links to conference.

[../top](#)

2. FUN Camps Scholarships Available

Child and youth agency workers are invited to recommend young scholarship recipients who are low-income, disadvantaged and/or Indigenous to participate in the FUN camps environmental program. At FUN Camps, young Canadians are encouraged to reduce their ecological footprint through education focused on leadership, teamwork and sustainability. The scholarships allow recipients to participate in our program at no cost, and they are available for 6-12 year olds to attend the Victoria camp and 6-16 year olds to attend the Vancouver camp.

Friends Uniting for Nature (FUN) Society is a charitable, non-profit organization with a mission to deliver hands-on programs that inspire and empower young Canadians to preserve and protect the environment through education, leadership and teamwork. To learn more about FUN Camps please visit: www.funsociety.ca.

The FUN day camps run Monday – Friday from July 5th to August 27th, 2010 in Vancouver and Victoria.

Scholarships will be given out on a first come, first serve basis, so please submit your application as soon as possible. The deadline is May 31. Successful scholarship recipients will be granted one week of FUN Camps free of charge. Bus tickets are also available to those who do not have any other way to get to camp.

To submit a scholarship application, please go to:

http://www.funamps.ca/Scholarship_Form.html and click on "download a fillable scholarship recommendation form here". This link is a private link created specifically for you, only share it with other child/youth agencies.

Once the form is on your screen please click on "save as" and save the fillable pdf onto your computer.

Fill out the form and save it. E-mail the completed form to lsalatian@funamps.ca.

[../top](#)

3. *A Chemical Reaction* Showing in Surrey

A Chemical Reaction is an award winning documentary that tells of the Canadian movement to ban lawn and garden pesticides. It will be shown on Thursday, May 6th at Earl Marriot Secondary School Theatre, 15761-16th Avenue in Surrey. Doors open at 6:30 and the film will start at 7:00. Admission is by donation. The film is presented by the Surrey/White Rock Pesticide Free Coalition.

[../top](#)