

First Call's Weekly Announcements – October 9, 2009

Next Coalition Meeting: October 14

Honouring Our Advocacy Fundraising Dinner: October 20

Next ECD Roundtable: October 28

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

Tuesday is your last chance to buy tickets for Honouring Our Advocacy!

Details are at www.firstcallbc.org/dinner.html

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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, conferences, media backgrounders, events and more.

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Advocacy/Calls to Action

1. UBCM Passes Resolution to End Refugee Transportation Loans

The Union of BC Municipalities has passed a resolution from the City of Surrey in support of terminating the transportation loans program for refugees. We hope that this resolution will place additional pressure on the federal government to take action on this issue.

The Health Officers Council of BC has also passed a motion supporting the elimination of the loans program, on the basis of Canada being the only country that issues interest bearing loans to refugees, and that this undermines their ability to integrate and to contribute to their full potential in their new homes.

First Call has been actively seeking an end to this program which requires government-assisted refugees to repay the costs of their travel to come to Canada for resettlement. In August, we wrote to all BC Members of Parliament to ask if they supported the elimination of this repayment requirement, and to date we have only had responses from 3 MPs.

Burdening newly arrived individuals and families who have experienced displacement and trauma with thousands of dollars in debt is bad public policy for two reasons:

1) It diminishes our compassionate intentions to assist people in need of sanctuary and a new home. A wealthy country like Canada can well afford to welcome refugees without asking them to pay us back for the cost of bringing them here.

2) It represents a false savings for government and society. Resettled refugees are mostly living on below-poverty-level federal assistance payments for their first year in Canada. (The rate of this assistance is tied to provincial income assistance rates and has not increased in a decade or more.) The requirement for them to allocate money from this meager income for debt repayment means less money available for food, rent, clothing and other basic needs. This debt burden further marginalizes and impoverishes these families, diminishing their capacity to integrate. For example, youth in refugee families are missing out on a crucial time to concentrate on their education when they feel an obligation to go to work to help their parents make loan payments. The long-term costs in health care, education, income assistance and other areas as a consequence of increasing these families' poverty are predictably greater than the cost of government absorbing the original transportation expenses. In this respect, the transportation loan repayment policy is counterproductive and inefficient.

Materials are available on the First Call website [here](#), and the [Canadian Council for Refugees](#) website features stories demonstrating the impacts of the loans program.

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2. Bill for National Housing Strategy Passes Second Reading

Bill C-304, an Act to ensure secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing, passed second reading this week after years of work by MP Libby Davies. The bill will go to committee before its final reading in the House.

The bill calls for “a national housing strategy designed to ensure that the cost of housing in Canada does not compromise an individual’s ability to meet other basic needs, including food, clothing and access to education.” The bill goes on to outline the following:

(2) The national housing strategy shall provide financial assistance, including financing and credit without discrimination, for those who are otherwise unable to afford rental housing.

(3) The national housing strategy shall also ensure the availability of housing that

(a) is secure, adequate, affordable, accessible, and not-for-profit in the case of those who cannot otherwise afford it;

(b) reflects the needs of local communities, including Aboriginal communities;

(c) provides access for those with different needs, including, in an appropriate proportion, access for the elderly and the disabled, and reasonable design options;

(d) uses design and equipment standardization where appropriate to accelerate construction and minimize cost;

(e) uses sustainable and energy-efficient design;

(f) includes not-for-profit rental housing projects, mixed income not-for-profit housing cooperatives, special-needs housing and housing that allows senior citizens to remain in their homes as long as possible;

(g) includes housing for the homeless;

(h) includes provision for temporary emergency housing and shelter in the event of disasters and crises; and

(i) complies with standards for the maintenance of existing housing stock or for the construction and maintenance of new housing and appropriate health, security and safety standards.

(4) The national housing strategy shall ensure that priority in the provision of secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing shall be given to

(a) those who have not had secure, adequate, accessible and affordable housing over an extended period;

(b) those with special housing requirements because of family status or size or because of a mental or physical disability; and

(c) those who have been denied housing as a result of discrimination.

The complete text is available [here](#).

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3. ACORN Launches Living Wage Campaign in New Westminister

ACORN Canada is one of Canada's largest and most successful networks of community unions, with more than 25,000 low and moderate income members organized into 20 neighborhood chapters in 4 cities across Canada.

ACORN is launching a living wage campaign in New Westminister on Saturday, October 17 at 12 noon in front of City Hall. Their goal is to pass Canada's first Living Wage Bylaw in New Westminister.

Living Wages are good for the economy. They stimulate depressed local economies in lower income communities, and enable families raising children to avoid severe financial stress.

Contact 604-522-8706 and visit www.acorncanada.org.

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4. Education Partners Protest Cuts Together

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, BC School Trustees Association, BC Teachers' Federation and CUPE have issued a joint letter to the Minister of Education concerning funding issues. The letter states:

On September 23, 2009, the elected representatives of British Columbia's largest education stakeholder groups agreed to write you to express our growing concern regarding the recent cuts made to BC's public education system. We agreed to send this unprecedented letter outlining our shared concern about the cutbacks to programs and grants that are now being felt by students in classrooms across the province. Through this letter parents, school workers, teachers, and trustees have come together to ask you to reverse these damaging cuts.

British Columbia has one of the best public education systems in the world. Collectively, all of our members work hard every day to ensure BC's students are well supported and receive the best education possible. We are worried, however, that our system's excellent standing is at risk as our ability to meet the needs of every student erodes due to these cutbacks.

As minister of education, you have stated that your intent in these difficult economic times is to protect services for students, especially vulnerable students. However, unfunded cost pressures such as salary and Medical Service Plan increases, as well as costs associated with rising BC Hydro rates, H1N1 prevention, gas prices, the

Harmonized Sales Tax, and carbon neutrality mean less district funding is available to directly support students.

The letter goes on to discuss the impacts of the cancellation of the annual facilities grant and changes to CommunityLINK funding. Read more about it [here](#).

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5. October 11 – 17 is Homelessness Action Week

Homelessness Action Week starts on Sunday! Visit <http://stophomelessness.ca/communities> to find out about the numerous events that are happening around the province:

- a panel presentation on Neighbourhood Responses to Homelessness on Tuesday in Vancouver
- a public consultation on creating more rental units on Tuesday in Nelson
- Connect Days, offering health services and pampering on Thursday in Surrey
- a Homeless Count on Friday in Kamloops.

Visit the website for details of these and other events.

Six Metro Vancouver mayors have now signed on to the Speak Up for Affordable Housing campaign, and you can too! Find out more [here](#).

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Research & Resources

1. First Call Report on Child Work Place Injuries

This week First Call released a report by Helesia Luke titled *What's Happening to Our Children? A Look at Child Work-Related Injury Claims in BC Over the Past 10 Years*. The report shows a startling increase in the number of child work-place injury claims accepted by WorkSafeBC since the work-start age was lowered to 12 in late 2003.

First Call is pleased that the Minister of Labour has responded promptly to our request for a meeting to discuss the report's recommendations. Coalition reps will meet with Minister Coell next week.

The report found that beginning in 2004, a year after the Employment Standards Act was changed, accepted injury claims began to increase in all age groups examined (14 and under, 15 and 16 year-olds). The only exception was 2008 when accepted claims for 15 and 16-year-olds dropped slightly. Injury claims for children under 15

continued to increase through 2008. For all age groups, injury claims were significantly higher after 2005 than they were in any previous year.

In 2008, WorkSafeBC accepted 42 claims for job-related injuries to children age 14 and under. This represents a ten-fold increase in claims over a four-year period.

Yesterday, the findings of this report were debated during question period in the legislature. Read the transcript [here](#) (scroll down to Oral Questions).

The [report](#) and [press release](#) are available on the First Call website.

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2. Representative for Children and Youth Issues Annual Report

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond has issued her annual report for 2008-09. Last year, her office worked on more than 1,500 advocacy cases, and continues to make recommendations to strengthen families and communities, particularly around the themes of better understanding of issues and needed services for Aboriginal children, consistent practice throughout the province on planning for and with children living out of the parental home, and ensuring all the opportunities for prevention of poor outcomes are fully realized across systems of support.

The report includes advocacy case studies, and summaries of the Representative's work reviewing critical injuries and deaths and the monitoring, research, evaluation and audit function of her office. The report is available for download [here](#).

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3. Accessible Community Bylaws Guide

SPARC BC launched the Accessible Community Bylaws Guide at the Union of BC Municipalities Convention. A vast document covering nine model accessibility bylaws with hundreds of recommendations and one employment policy, it is designed to give BC municipalities a practical tool for planning, and serve as a knowledge resource for anyone wanting a comprehensive understanding of community accessibility.

The Accessible Community Bylaws Guide aims to:

-Give British Columbia municipalities a set of tools which they can use to construct more accessible communities for people with disabilities, as well as include people with disabilities in decisions that affect their lives.

-Utilize the strength of local government to enhance the accessibility of a community, which has many positive outcomes.

-Contribute to higher quality of life for community members, ensure the long-term viability of a community through sustainable infrastructure, and set an example for community partners and other communities.

Click on the links below to:

[-Download summaries, a community map, and the full Bylaws Guide](#)

[-Access links to other accessibility resources](#)

[-Join the email Network: BC CAN \(BC Community Accessibility Network\)](#)

[-Read the 2009 Policy Spotlight on the Ontario Accessibility Legislation](#)

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4. Affordability Index for BC's Capital Region

Victoria Community Council has launched their 2009 Affordability Index, an updated calculation of what was previously their living wage campaign. The wage required to maintain a modest quality of life in BC's Capital Region is \$17.02 an hour in 2009, up from \$16.39 last year. Their backgrounder states:

The Affordability Index, calculated and released each year by the Community Council's Quality of Life CHALLENGE, reflects the real costs of living through the hourly wage required to enjoy a modest quality of life in our region. When we look behind the number to see the costs that drive that required wage up or down, we have an opportunity to engage our community in dialogue around strategies to prevent and reduce poverty. Our region's affordability, especially the high costs of housing, childcare, and transportation, affects our ability to attract and retain staff and sustain a healthy and vibrant economy and community.

Read more [here](#).

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Announcements

1. Amazing Auction Items to Win at Honouring Our Advocacy

Honouring Our Advocacy is coming up on October 20, and this annual fundraiser will feature Dr. Adele Diamond, Kelly Ng, and Kathryn Gretsinger! Find out all the details on our [website](#).

Today we wanted to feature some of the fabulous auction items that will be waiting for your bid on October 20:

- TWO different getaways to the Sunshine Coast –
 - One week at a gorgeous, private beach front home on 1 acre, south of Powell River. A three bedroom rancher, sleeps 6 comfortably, with a fire place, outdoor wood sauna and hiking trails behind the house. Valued at \$1,600.
 - Two-night stay for up to four guests at the Honeysuckle Rose Cottage in Halfmoon Bay, \$300 value.
- Canucks tickets
- A roundtrip for two to Victoria from Helijet
- A three hour kayaking tour for six in beautiful Deep Cove
- Harbour Cruises' Carol Ships Dinner Cruise
- A beauty gift basket including a haircut and manicure
- Arts Club Theatre tickets

See you at the dinner!

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2. October is Foster Family Month!

This month, foster families are being celebrated around BC. The [Foster Family Month Blog](#) is highlighting messages of encouragement and hope to and from foster parents, kids and resources teams.

Here is part of the message from MCFD:

Thousands of foster families and the resource workers and community agencies that support them will spend the next 31 days celebrating the remarkable contribution foster families make in our communities and the difference these "moms and dads" make in the lives of vulnerable children and youth.

October is Foster Family Month in British Columbia – a month where we honour the 3,300 foster families in the province who open their hearts and give children a safe, nurturing and supportive home when they are unable to be with their own families.

"Foster families are a cornerstone in our efforts to help children and families be as strong, healthy and successful as they can be. We simply could not do our work without them," said Minister of Children and Family Development Mary Polak. "Foster families offer love, understanding and a safe, stable environment for vulnerable children and youth, who for a variety of reasons, are not able to be with their own families.

"We are always grateful for the work they do and Foster Family Month gives us 31 days to let them know how much they are appreciated."

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3. LDABC South Vancouver Island Fall Conference

The Learning Disabilities Association of BC South Vancouver Island Chapter hosts their fall conference October 23, featuring Dr. Bruce Perry on the topic understanding the impact of trauma on children: implications for learning.

Bruce D. Perry, M.D., Ph.D. is the Senior Fellow of the ChildTrauma Academy, a not-for-profit organization based in Houston that promotes innovations in service, research and education in child maltreatment and childhood trauma (www.ChildTrauma.org). Dr. Perry is the co-author of *The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog: What Traumatized Children Can Teach Us About Loss, Love and Healing*, a popular book based on his work with children. Over the last fifteen years, Dr. Perry has been an active teacher, clinician and researcher in children's mental health and the neurosciences holding a variety of academic positions.

The conference takes place at the Harbour Towers Hotel and Suites in Victoria. The conference brochure is available [here](#).

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4. BC Alliance for Young Parents Conference

Come celebrate our successes and discover solutions to our challenges working with young parents. Leave rejuvenated, with a renewed sense of shared goals and the seeds of future collaborations for young parent families!

Whether you're a child care provider, youth worker, public health nurse, home visitor, program leader or anyone who works with young parents, there's something to be gleaned from this year's conference.

The BC Alliance for Young Parents Conference is October 23- 24 at the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle Downtown. For program details, accommodations information and to register visit www.bccf.ca. Registration deadline is October 16. Contact Pilar Onatra, Program Coordinator at pilaro@bccf.ca.

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5. The State of Children's Development in the Fraser Region

Join Dr. Clyde Hertzman for an overview of Early Development Instrument results for the Fraser region: What trends are emerging in the Fraser? What are the implications for policy and planning at both the local and the regional level? What actions for change can we take for our children and families?

The afternoon session will be a showcase of "Fraser Region Innovation." HELP, communities and school districts have now been collaborating for BC's children for ten years. This session will profile examples of policy and program innovations in supporting children's development that have emerged from around the region.

The event is on November 3 from 10 am – 3 pm at Lena Shaw Elementary School in Surrey. Register at www.earlylearning.ubc.ca.

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6. Revisioning of Family Therapy Course at the JIBC

The Revisioning of Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice is a JIBC special event featuring Dr. Kenneth V. Hardy.

Families whose lives are trapped along the margins of society often present major challenges for those who work with them. Whether a consequence of class, race, or ethnicity, the everyday circumstances of these families are often compounded by the dynamics of oppression. This course will provide a fresh and critical examination of the anatomy of oppression and its effects on the lives of children and families and the process of treatment. A conceptual framework for working effectively with a range of diverse families, based on the revisioning of family therapy, will be provided. Relevant self-of-the-therapist issues will also be addressed.

This course will take place October 29-30 at the Justice Institute New Westminster campus. For more information contact Caroline White at 604.528.5620, or counsellingpc@jibc.ca, or visit www.jibc.ca/cccs. To register, call 604.528.5590 or 1.877.528.5591.

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