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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition  
Minutes of March 11, 2009  
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

**In attendance:**

Lynell Anderson – Human Early Learning Partnership  
Heather Armour – Public Health Agency of Canada  
Jennifer Basu – AMSSA  
Colleen Bob – RespectED, Red Cross  
Ally Butler – MCFD, Advocacy Team  
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation  
Karen DeLong – BC Association for Community Living  
Simone Fournel – MCFD Advocacy Team  
Rachel Gold – Little Mountain Neighbourhood House  
Ginny Gonneau – Society for Children and Youth of BC  
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families  
Jasmine Howes – Parent and Student  
Sue Irwin - Vancouver Coastal Child Care Resource & Referral  
Danielle Kelliher – BC Association for Community Living  
Irene Lanzinger – BC Teachers' Federation  
Ian Lewis – Student  
Jenn McGinn – MLA Vancouver-Fairview  
John Millar – Health Officers Council  
Cheryl Mixon – Family Services of Greater Vancouver  
Adrienne Montani – First Call  
Mab Oloman – Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC

Andrina Perry – First Call  
Darryl Quantz – Vancouver Coastal Health  
Lesley Richardson – First Call  
Lola Sienema – Pivot Legal Society  
Philippa Slater – Learning Disabilities Association  
Carrie Smith – Pivot Legal Society  
Jean Swanson – Carnegie Action Project, Raise the Rates  
Tina Tam – Society for Children and Youth of BC  
Jane Thornthwaite – BC School Trustees Association  
Magnolia V. – Richmond Women's Resource Centre  
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation Research  
Cynthia Wong – Trip Ed  
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland

**On phone:**

Tom Gregory – Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport

**Regrets:**

Wanda Gendron – Western Society for Children  
Michael Goldberg – First Call  
Ian Mass – Pacific Community Resources Society  
Lila Murao – Hospital Employees' Union

**1. Introductions**

Chair Julie Norton opened the meeting.

**2. Society for Children and Youth Update**

Tina Tam, the outgoing Executive Director of Society for Children and Youth, attended the Best Interests of the Child Conference hosted by UNICEF and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. The rights of the child have not been implemented in Canada. Best interests is one of the most basic aspects of child rights, but it is not clearly defined and not recognized in much legislation. While the law recognizes child rights as *a* consideration, it does not recognize them as *the* consideration. The conference generated some interesting questions:

- Does society really think people under 18 are incompetent (and therefore not able to make decisions for themselves)?
- How much power should the state have in terms of foster care?
- Are religious beliefs always in the best interests of the child (i.e. in refusing health care)?
- Can parental rights co-exist with child rights?

The outcomes from this conference will lead into a community report to the UN. The conference also highlighted the need for a national children's commissioner, and the disconnect around parenting and the rights of children, for example parents who grew up in residential schools with no access to elders.

Society for Children and Youth is working with the Representative's Office and BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities on a child rights campaign. They will host a youth with disabilities in conflict with the law roundtable in May, as well as a dinner and Annual General Meeting to celebrate their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary and a keynote address by Kathy Vandergrift of the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children.

## **Discussion**

Children of this generation may be the first to live shorter lives than their parents, due to obesity, poverty, and unsafe housing. What in the Convention on the Rights of the Child can be used to protect them?

Children have the right to a voice in their own development. Canada hasn't been living up to our ratification of the UNCRC.

### **3. Provincial Budget and Ministry Service Plans relevant to children and youth**

Tom Gregory, Ministry of Healthy Living and Sport:

There is a reduction in revenues, and with that has come strict budgetary controls and reduced flexibility on spending. Women's and children's issues are a priority in Healthy Living and Sport. Health Services and Education are the only ministries seeing budget increases.

Jean Swanson, Carnegie Community Action Project and Raise the Rates:

The Ministry of Housing and Social Development is expecting increases in the number of welfare recipients over the next two years, so there is a bit of a budget increase to cover this. The rates will not be raised. They plan to cut 71 jobs.

It would cost half a billion dollars to raise welfare rates by 50%. A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC has been launched, and you can sign on at [www.bcpovertyreduction.ca](http://www.bcpovertyreduction.ca).

The new hotel purchases made by MHSD are already occupied and are not suitable for permanent housing. There is no new spending for housing in this budget. It would cost \$200,000 to build a new unit of social housing, when government is spending \$362 million to fix the roof of BC Place Stadium.

78,000 were turned away from shelters in BC last year, 40% of whom were families with children. It makes sense to invest in low-income housing and income assistance funds now, because that money will be spent in the local economy.

There is a grand march for housing taking place April 4 at 12:30 PM – meeting at Main and Hastings, Peace Flame Park, or Main St. Skytrain station in Vancouver.

Irene Lanzinger, BC Teachers' Federation:

There is a 10% increase in Kindergarten enrollment expected in the next 10 years. Government didn't close schools during the enrollment decline in the late 1970's – it is normal for student enrollment to rise and fall. In the meantime, there are other uses for empty school space in communities.

School boards are already short from last year's salary increases, not taking this year's budget into account. BCTF predicts that this year's budget will be short the cost of collective agreement promises and inflationary costs such as transportation, which particularly affects rural boards where there is lots of bussing.

The budget for StrongStart programs has increased by 50%.

The block (per student) funding that school boards receive does not take into account other costs such as moving to generally accepted accounting principles. While block funding has increased, new things have been rolled into this funding such as services for high incidence students with special needs. Boards will have to make cuts.

BC's per capita spending on public schools is below the Canadian average and our student to educator ratio is the highest in Canada.

Jane Thornthwaite, BC School Trustees' Association:

The BCSTA Provincial Council passed a motion, to go to the Annual General Meeting in April, asking the provincial government for adequate funding in the 09/10 budget to cover actual costs including transportation and salary increases.

School closures are resulting from the per student funding formula. For example, Balmoral Junior Secondary in North Vancouver is facing a possible closure.

Lynell Anderson, Human Early Learning Partnership:

Results from application of the Early Development Instrument across BC show that, overall, children's vulnerability has increased in recent years despite good economic times. Given the current economic situation, this raises questions about what we will do now to address vulnerability.

In order to help their children thrive, families need 3 things: time together, adequate resources, and community supports.

So when we look at the 2009 budget for action in these areas, it indicates that there is some new funding over the next three years for vulnerable children and youth. This is going to income assistance, special needs services, and children and family development. Of the money going to MCFD, \$8 million a year is for child care re: parent fee subsidies.

Canada ranked last in a UNICEF report on Early Childhood Education and Care that compared 25 countries. UNICEF recommends investing 1% of GDP on child care for young children. In BC that would be about \$1.6 billion. BC is currently spending about \$300 million on child care for children under 12.

Provincial child care operating funding accounts for 20 – 30% of child care centre budgets, and the balance primarily comes from parent fees. The provincial budget does not indicate growth in child care spaces beyond 2009/10.

Karen DeLong, BC Association for Community Living:

BCACL advocates for children with special needs. They launched a campaign to end waitlists, and the budget has allocated \$38 million over three years for this. It would cost \$30 million in the first year to end waitlists.

A framework for action has been mentioned but not yet implemented. \$73 million has been announced for CLBC for adults.

Cheryl Mixon, Family Services of Greater Vancouver:

Family Services serves families that are involved with MCFD. There has been a nominal budget increase in 09/10, with nothing in 10/11 and 11/12. The budget will not cover all collective agreement plans for contractors (most contractors do not have pension plans but are supposed to be getting them).

MCFD has not recovered from the cuts made in 2001. Though there are no cuts this year, there will be a decrease in services.

70% of clients at Family Services need help with food security, and 20% need assistance to move. 40% of preschool children served require supported child care to help keep their families together. A decrease in service providers is inevitable. The move of children's services to MCFD from CLBC is going to be expensive.

## **Discussion**

It is still unclear in this budget how much money is allocated for supporting low income families to access sport and recreation opportunities.

## **4. Participatory Discussion of Ministry Performance Measures**

Attendees reviewed the service plans and performance measures of MCFD and the Ministry of Education, and made the following comments.

Ministry of Children and Family Development:

- How does the number of child care spaces indicate health and well-being and a decrease in preventable vulnerabilities, given that the number of spaces is sufficient for only approximately 15% of children under 12 years?
- (Goal 3) If we are looking at prevention, why are numbers confined to children in care and not the entire child and youth population?
- (Goal 2 and 3, performance measure 6) Why are there no measures to support and maintain children and parents to *ensure* that all children receive adequate support "based on the assessment of individual needs"?
- How is school achievement an indicator of resiliency?
- (Performance measure 2) Why is there not some reference or linkage to how healthy, stable, secure and educated child and families/guardians are?
- (Performance measure 2) Indicator of number in care and cost rather than how well children in care are doing.
- (Performance measure 2) How can we ensure that supports for children and families with special needs can receive necessary services without entering the child protection system?

Ministry of Education:

- The current satisfaction surveys are not an appropriate measure for education quality.
- Qualitative measures need to be developed with focus groups of students which focus on the whole child, not just career preparation.
- Additional supports lacking for Aboriginal students to improve graduation rates.
- Stop using FSA data as a measure of success for Aboriginal students.
- Add a performance measure to track child poverty rates at all grade levels relative to educational outcomes (i.e. EDI data as it relates to child poverty).
- Track "early school leavers" and their reasons for departure (i.e. high incidence special needs, Aboriginal, immigrants and refugees, etc.).
- Use EDI data to provide targeted funding to designated at-risk students in Kindergarten for early intervention services.

### **5. Trip Ed – a campaign for low cost transit passes for children’s field trips**

A group of parents from Vancouver School District have formed this campaign after asking why teachers and day care leaders should have to pay so much for transportation for field trips. They are proposing to Translink that a \$10 yearly transit pass be made available for purchase by schools and other groups.

First Call partners can help in this advocacy effort by writing letters of support and joining the "Trip Ed" Facebook group [Contact Cynthia Wong at [cynthiawong178@hotmail.com](mailto:cynthiawong178@hotmail.com)].

The idea is that every school could purchase two passes. The program does not exist anywhere else to the group’s knowledge, though in some places transit is free for children.

### **6. Partner Updates**

Registration for the BC Association for Community Living’s conference, Bringing the Pieces Together, is now open at [www.bcacl.org](http://www.bcacl.org).

BC Teachers’ Federation just held a regional social justice conference, and more conferences are coming up which are open to teachers, parents and students – find out more at [www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx](http://www.bctf.ca/SocialJustice.aspx). The ban on Social Justice 12 has been lifted in Abbotsford and the course will be offered in September.

The new contract for Child Care Resource and Referral Centres is a three-year contract.

First Call is hiring an organizer for the Living Wage for Families campaign – the job posting is available on our web site now.

**6. Time and Date of Next Meeting:** April 8, 2009, 9:00 – 11:30 am, BC Teachers’ Federation building, 550 W. 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.