

First Call's Weekly Announcements – March 4, 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. Provincial Budget Woes

Here's a sample of responses from First Call partners to the provincial budget that was announced on Tuesday.

[BC Government and Service Employees Union:](#)

BC Liberals' proposed 2010 budget does nothing to support vital community services and lacks the kind of long-term planning that would ensure a broad-based economic rebound says B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union.

"Public and community services are key to making sure that the economy recovers quickly and that everyone in British Columbia shares in the economic recovery," says BCGEU president Darryl Walker.

This year's budget makes no plans to restore the almost 100 vital community-based programs that have been cut since September's budget update. Additionally, a planned \$10 million cut to programs funded by the Ministry of Child and Family Development was confirmed in mid-February.

"The services that have been cut and the ones on the chopping block are the ones that turn people's lives around and build strong foundations for the future of our province," Walker says...

[BC Teachers' Federation:](#)

BC Liberals' latest budget will lead to more instability and uncertainty for BC schools as downloaded costs continue to outpace government funding, BCTF President Irene Lanzinger said today.

"The government wants British Columbians to believe they are protecting education, but students, parents, and teachers should brace for more cuts," said Lanzinger. "More schools will close, there will be more overcrowded classes, and teachers will be laid off. The government continues to be in complete denial about its role in education cuts."

The government claims that there's enough funding to meet the needs of BC's public education system, but the small amount of new funding is far exceeded by rising costs. The government is asking school districts to use the small funding lift to fund salary increases and full-day Kindergarten. However, there is no new funding to deal with rising transportation and heating costs. The government also refused to fund MSP and pension increases...

[BC Association of Social Workers:](#)

In BC over the last decade, as we've gotten closer to the historic 2010 Olympics, the BC government has talked a lot about its "legacy" for our province. The most lasting and unexamined impacts of the 2010 Olympics are the social legacy that result from this epic event, whose real benefits and costs remain to be calculated. These are only a few of the impacts already being felt by the citizens of BC:

- *In spite of increased demands for child welfare services the Ministry of Children and Family Development will receive an increase of only 1.2% in 2010, with no increases in 2011 and 2012*
- *Child protection re-organization, cuts to frontline and other positions are leaving far too many children and families at-risk and vulnerable and many do not receive the timely support and interventions they require*
- *15 social workers were laid off and 12 spiritual care directors were terminated by the Fraser Health Authority*
- *Cuts to community Addiction and Mental Health Services, sexual abuse counselling and autism services for children leave many at-risk and hurting*
- *The highest rate of child poverty for six years in a row, depriving a generation of young people the basic necessities, including food, housing and dignity...*

[BC School Trustees Association:](#)

The 2010/11 provincial budget announced today contained an overall funding increase of \$112 million to operating grants for school districts in 2010/2011.

BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) President Connie Denesiuk says, "Today's budget included some encouraging moves in the right direction. We are particularly pleased that the Annual Facilities Grant (AFG) funding is being replaced, and that increases in teacher wages and benefits will be fully funded."

While boards of education continue to struggle with very tight budgets, and many boards are facing school closures and program cuts, the outlook is more positive than last year...

Budget documents are available online at www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2010. At the March 10 coalition meeting we'll be discussing impacts of the budget on the child and youth serving sectors.

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2. Dignity for All Campaign Update

The Dignity for All Campaign has three goals: (1) a federal plan for poverty elimination that complements provincial and territorial plans; (2) a federal anti-poverty Act that ensures enduring federal commitment and accountability for results; and (3) sufficient federal investment in social security for all Canadians. The campaign is working on several fronts towards realizing each of these goals.

As of February 26th, 300 groups have endorsed the campaign, as well as 43 MPs (from across all parties) and 6 Senators. In February, the campaign sent an open letter to federal party leaders:

Prior to the prorogation of the 2nd Session of the 40th Parliament of Canada, momentum was building on both sides of the House of Commons to place the elimination of poverty in Canada as a top priority for both the Parliament and Government of Canada.

This priority commitment was firmly established with the unanimous passing of the November 24th, 2009 motion entrusting the Government of Canada to develop an immediate plan to eliminate poverty in Canada for all. Further, the priority status of addressing poverty in Canada was reflected in the agenda of the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities (HUMA), and in particular their study of the federal contribution to reducing poverty in Canada. The importance of investments to support vulnerable Canadians and improve quality of life was also outlined in the Government Response to the Fourth Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry entitled "Beyond Freefall: Halting Rural Poverty," also issued in November 2009.

The Dignity for All campaign, a pan-Canadian initiative to combat the structural causes of poverty in Canada, congratulates the Parliament and Government of Canada in making poverty elimination in Canada a national priority. We are, however, concerned that momentum on this critical issue may be lost.

Dignity for All is therefore calling on the Parliament and Government of Canada to commit to the uninterrupted resumption of the agenda of the HUMA committee as set out in the 2nd Session of the 40th Parliament of Canada.

Read more [here](#).

We urge organizations and individuals to sign on to the campaign if you haven't already. Also, you can contact your MLA and ask them to endorse the campaign. Below is a list of BC MPs who have already voiced their support for Dignity for All:

1. Alex Atamanenko (BC Southern Interior, BC – NDP)
2. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, BC – NDP)
3. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, BC – NDP)
4. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton-North Delta, BC – Liberal)
5. Peter Julian (Burnaby-New Westminster, BC – NDP)
6. Denise Savoie (Victoria, BC – NDP)
7. Bill Siksay (Burnaby-Douglas, BC – NDP)

Sign on to the campaign and find out more at www.dignityforall.ca.

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3. NDP Leader Challenges Prime Minister to Address Women's and Children's Poverty in Canada

The following article by Jack Layton ran in the National Post:

Stephen Harper's recent announcement that Canada will be making maternal and child health a top priority at June's G8 meeting makes him a welcome latecomer to the issue. While other countries have been delivering full-fledged support for maternal and child health since 2007, pledging \$5.3-billion dollars to the cause last year alone, Canada has been virtually invisible on the issue. Rather than marking a new approach of principled humanitarianism, this announcement highlights years of Canadian inaction on the health of women and children under Mr. Harper's watch.

Nevertheless, my colleagues in the NDP and I gladly accept this overdue commitment. But we also question why it is only women and children in the developing world that will benefit from Mr. Harper's new-found interest in gender, poverty and health.

Notwithstanding this new international commitment, the Conservative government has worked tirelessly since its election to remove gender equality from domestic programs. It has done everything in its power to stop women's organizations from conducting research and advocacy on inequality, despite the fact that poverty most often wears a woman's face in our country. It has steadfastly refused to launch an inquiry into the disappearances and deaths of more than 520 aboriginal women and girls, though that is most certainly a health issue as well.

Read more [here](#).

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4. What Happens When EI Runs Out?

According to a Toronto Star article by Carol Goar, 500,000 Canadians will see their Employment Insurance benefits run out this year:

...they'll discover – as many autoworkers already have – that welfare isn't as easy to get as they thought. To qualify for a monthly allowance of \$585 [Ontario rate], applicants must deplete their savings and sell off their assets.

Ninety per cent will reject that option.

Beyond that, little is known about EI exhaustees. The federal government tracks the number, but won't release it, claiming it is unreliable. The provinces and municipalities track welfare caseloads, but their statistics provide little information about the long-term unemployed. (The labour movement came up with its figures by piecing together information from various sources.)

These recession victims were largely ignored in Ottawa's stimulus package. The 2009 federal budget extended EI benefits for a mere five weeks. Last September, to alleviate public pressure, the government added a 5-to-20-week top-up for older workers.

To put this in perspective, Washington increased its maximum entitlement to two years (double Canada's) in hard-hit states. In most European countries, workers who exhaust their jobless benefits move into follow-up programs that offer training, counselling and modest, but not penurious, income support.

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

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5. News from Repeal 43 to End Legalized Violence Against Children

The Repeal 43 Committee works to end legalized violence against children in Canada. Section 43 of the criminal code currently allows for the physical correction of children.

Senator Hervieux-Payette has confirmed that she will reintroduce Bill S-209 to repeal section 43, which was before the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee for study when Parliament was prorogued in December.

Read more news about banning the corporal punishment of children [here](#).

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Research & Resources

1. A Closer Look at Low Wages in BC

A new report by First Call volunteer Steve Kerstetter has been released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives:

Workers in British Columbia earned an average of \$21.46 an hour in 2008, according to the latest annual wage data published by Statistics Canada. This was good news for workers at the average wage or better, and well above the minimum wage of \$8. The average wage has gone up 25 per cent over the past decade (pre-inflation adjustment).

However, a closer look at the situation of workers in BC reveals some troubling facts about wages and hours of work, and the workers who are most likely to have low wages and/or insufficient hours. Hundreds of thousands of workers are still at wage levels that either trap them in poverty or put them at high risk of falling into poverty.

Statistics Canada reports that 346,100 BC workers earned less than \$12 an hour in 2008: almost one in five of all employed workers...

Low-wage workers include people in high-risk groups such as Aboriginal people and recent immigrants, but they include large numbers of other British Columbians as well. About 15 per cent of all BC families with children live in poverty because of low earnings.

Download the report [here](#).

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2. Child- and Youth-Friendly Land Use and Transport Planning Guidelines

A near-final draft of the Child- and Youth-Friendly Guidelines for Land-use and Transport Planning is available for comment. The Guidelines are primarily for the use of municipalities - specifically councilors, their planning staff and consultants. This work is funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, whose interest is in fostering environments in which children and youth are more active. Comments are welcome before March 12 to mail@richardgilbert.ca.

Read the Guidelines [here](#).

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3. Project to Reduce Childhood Obesity

The Childhood Obesity Foundation has a new website dedicated to educating Canadian children, their families and caregivers, educators, business and government about the problem of childhood obesity. It highlights four simple steps to prevent obesity: 5 fruits and vegetables per day; 2 hours of screen time or less, 1 hour of physical activity, and 0 sugar-sweetened beverages.

The website includes resources on how to take action for families, schools, communities, business, and government. Find out more at www.childhoodobesityfoundation.ca.

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4. Infant Mortality Going Up in Canada

Statistics Canada has released infant mortality data for 2007. The rate went up from 5 to 5.1 deaths of children less than one year of age per 1,000 live births. The BC rate, however, decreased from 4.1 to 4 per 1,000 from 2006 to 2007. Nunavut has the highest rate of infant mortality in the country.

[Statistics Canada](#)

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5. Breastfeeding Improves Intellectual Development

A recent bulletin from the Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development highlights research on a program that encouraged mothers to breastfeed exclusively for at least four months and to continue breastfeeding for a year, resulting in children with higher IQs.

The study [which took place in the Republic of Belarus] compared the babies of mothers who took part in a program designed to promote longer exclusive breastfeeding (the experimental group) with the babies of mothers who were not influenced in any way (the control group). All the mothers were of similar age, education and family history and had chosen to breastfeed before the study began.

Almost half (43%) of the women in hospitals that offered the program chose to exclusively breastfeed their babies until they reached three months old. Only 6% of those in hospitals without the program chose similar actions. After a year, almost 20% of the mothers in the experimental group were still breastfeeding, while only 11% of their peers were still doing so.

A total of 13,889 of the children were followed up to age six and a half. The children received pediatric exams plus verbal and performance IQ tests when they were old enough. Once the children started school, their teachers were asked to rate their performance in reading, writing and mathematics. On average, the children in the experimental group had higher verbal IQ scores and higher teacher ratings in reading and writing tests than those in the control group. This follow-up was funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Read more [here](#) (page 3).

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Announcements

1. March is Community Social Services Awareness Month

In cities and towns across the province we staff group homes for people with developmental disabilities, we counsel and support immigrant families, we work in childcare centres and in transition houses for victims of violence; we provide women's services, and assistance for First Nations families. All these services are paid for by the provincial government.

We make a difference in your community every day. We know what services should be expanded at the local level and we have ideas about how programs should be improved so they better meet the needs of people in our province.

Community Social Services Awareness Month includes a call to action to draw attention to cutbacks and inadequate funding to this sector. Find out more at www.communitysocialservicesmatter.ca.

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2. International Women's Day Breakfast with Adrienne Montani

First Call's Adrienne Montani will be the guest speaker at the BC Federation of Labour's International Women's Day Breakfast on Monday, March 8 at 7:30 am. The breakfast takes place at the Metrotown Hilton Hotel in Burnaby, and it will celebrate women's accomplishments and bring women's issues to the forefront. Tickets are \$30. Find out more and download the poster [here](#). Happy International Women's Day!

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3. BC Inclusive Education Awards Recipients Announced

From the BC Association for Community Living:

In celebration of [Inclusive Education Week](#) (February 15 - 22), two awards have been announced in the areas of K-12 and post secondary education.

2010 Inclusive Education Award Winners:

Brian Silzer - for his instrumental role in making post secondary education inclusive of people with developmental disabilities as Registrar at the University of British Columbia. [Read the press release here](#).

Brian Silzer will be given the award at the Conference of University Registrars in June.

Dr. Beth Sparks - for pioneering the use of technology to support inclusive learning environments at Cougar Canyon Elementary School in Delta, B.C. [Read the press release here](#).

[Read the article in today's Surrey Delta Leader](#).

Dr. Beth Sparks will be given her award at her retirement celebration at Cougar Canyon Elementary School in May.

[Click here](#) for more information about the awards, including nomination criteria and indicators of successful inclusion.

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4. Youth Leadership Workshops on Popular Culture and Diversity – Maple Ridge

Learn about career ideas, social change, and making a difference at this free workshop for youth ages 12-22. How to Be a Change Maker! takes place March 17

from 4:00 – 5:30 PM at Thomas Haney Secondary School, room 2130. Call 604-467-6055 to register or find out more at www.familyed.bc.ca.

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5. Exploring the Power of Real Play Event – North Vancouver

Parent Participation Preschool Teacher's Association and Council of Parent Participation Preschools in BC present Exploring the Power of Real Play with Bev Bos and Michael Leeman. This workshop takes place from 9:30 am - 12:30 pm on Saturday, May 1st at Highlands Elementary School Gym, 3150 Colwood Drive, North Vancouver. The cost is \$30. Contact Deanna at hilderzoo@shaw.ca for tickets or visit www.cpppreschools.bc.ca.

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6. Atypical Caregiver Behaviour and Modified Interaction Guidance Training - Vancouver

Westcoast Family Resources presents three days of professional development with Diane Benoit, Associate Professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto, Research Scientist in the Research Institute at the Hospital for Sick Children and Staff Psychiatrist in the Infant Psychiatry Program at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto, Ontario. Her research, educational and clinical activities focus on parenting, child-parent attachment relationships, parents' perceptions of their children and relationship with them, attachment-based and trauma-focused interventions, and problems of early childhood such as trauma, neglect, and abuse.

This training session for mental health clinicians, counselors, psychologist, family support workers, family doctors and others working with children and families will take place April 21-23 at VanDusen Botanical Gardens. Contact Westcoast at 604-254-5457 or admin@westcoastfamily.org for more information.

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