

Media Release

For immediate release

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New Report Reveals Risks Working Children and Youth Face in British Columbia

(Vancouver B.C.) Today, during BC Youth Week, First Call BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition released “Child Labour is No Accident: The Experience of BC’s Working Children” an eighteen-month research project funded by the Law Foundation of B.C.

This report brings together original research through interviews and focus groups, with existing studies to examine the consequences of child labour laws in BC. The study focused on three areas of potential impact: health and safety, wages and working conditions, and education. It also contrasts BC’s law with employment standards in other jurisdictions.

“Most importantly, we were interested in hearing from young people about their work experiences,” explained Adrienne Montani, First Call’s Provincial Coordinator and an author of the report. “Their stories of their injuries and safety hazards at work provide some of the most compelling evidence in support of strengthening employment standards for children and youth.”

Some key findings from this study include:

- Forty-three per cent of youth study participants reported sustaining workplace injuries. The most common injuries were burns, cuts and falls. Several study participants reported serious injuries, including a 12-year-old with burns down the front of his body from battery acid, a 13- year-old with a broken wrist and back injury from a fall, and another with blistered fingers from a burn on a grill.
- Lack of pay for training is a common experience among working children and youth. Employers will ask workers to come in for a “try out” shift, or they will be asked to start working as part of the interview for the position.
- Sixty per cent of young people who participated in this study started work at age 14 or under, but only 24 per cent reported a parent had given written permission for them to start work, as required by the current legislation.
- Sixteen per cent of participants reported having dropped out of school due to their work schedule and/or financial need and forty-six per cent reported being too tired and/or not having enough time to complete their homework or participate appropriately at school as a result of working too much.
- About half of study participants reported they did not receive adequate (or in some cases any) training at their jobs.

On the eve of publishing this report, WorksafeBC provided current data. This new data provides a startling indication of the risks working children face.

- There has been a dramatic increase in annual payments for accepted disability claims related to children ages 12 to 14 injured on the job.
- WorkSafeBC has paid over 1.1 million dollars in disability claims for 179 children injured on the job since 2003.
- Within these claims, are two males under the age of fifteen who received payments for “high cost” injury claims in 2011 and/or 2012. They are both now permanently disabled because they went to work, legally, at a workplace prohibited to children in other provinces.
- While details of these claims cannot be released in order to protect the boys’ privacy we do know the injuries were severe and permanent and occurred while the boys were doing work known to be high risk and inappropriate for children.
- Since 2004, nine young people were designated “long-term disabled” (LTD) as a result of a work-related injury sustained when they were under the age of 15 years.
- Accepted annual disability claims for males fluctuated from about ten thousand dollars in 2009 to over \$211,000 in 2011 and almost \$600,000 in 2012. The steady trend upward is driven by an increase in dollar amounts paid to male children injured on the job since 2003.
- Disability claims do not include health-care or rehabilitation costs.

First Call is calling on the next provincial government to take immediate action to protect children from exploitation and injury in the workplace. Please see backgrounder for more findings and recommendations.

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Report, backgrounder and addendum available at www.firstcallbc.org

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