



COALITION MEETING AGENDA

BC TEACHERS' FEDERATION
550 WEST 6TH AVENUE, VANCOUVER

Wednesday, October 12

PRESENT:

Addison Mott, Community member
April Martin-Ko, BC Council for Families
Barb Ryeburn, BC Teachers' Federation
Caroline Kent, Comp 3, BC Government and Service Employees' Union
Cheryl Mixon, First Call (chair)
Doug Kinna, BC Government and Service Employees' Union
Fred Milowsky, Representative for Children and Youth Office
Gyda Chud, First Call/Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Kerry Watts, BC CAPC Society/North Shore Community Resources
Ildiko Kovacs, Society for Children and Youth BC
Jane Bouey, Parent Support Services Society

Jason Chan, SUCCESS
Jean Moore, BC Alliance on Mental Health/Illness and Addiction
Joan Beaty, University Women's Club Vancouver
Joshua Wasilenkoff, RAYCAM/Community member
Kendra Milne, West Coast LEAF
Lynell Anderson, Consultant
Mab Oloman, Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC
Mary Johnston, Five Family Place Partnership/Eastside Family Place
Mike Clarke, BC Government and Services Employees' Union
Patricia Grohne, University Women's Club Vancouver
Sheena Ashdown, Help BC Foster Kids Now
Tanika Dodds, Adoptive Families Association of BC

Wayne Wong, Westcoast Family Centres
Adrienne Montani, First Call
John Kennedy, First Call
Julie Cheng, First Call
Deanna Ogle, Living Wage for Families Campaign

REGRETS:

Fionn Yaxley, BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
Heather McCain, Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods
Katherine Moore, University of BC/First Call
Pamela Alcorn, Federation of Community Social Services of BC

CALL-IN:

Michelle Dickie, Kelowna Child Care Society, ECD Coalition
Central Okanagan

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Cheryl Mixon welcomed everyone and acknowledged we are grateful to be meeting on unceded Coast Salish territory, home of Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations. A round of introductions was made.

2. FIRST CALL UPDATES

BC Public School Funding: Equal Opportunity or Lost Potential?

Monday, November 7, First Call is holding an event around public education funding. It's from 3-5 pm at SFU Downtown and co-hosted with Simon Fraser University and Your Education Matters. This is a discussion about the impacts of underfunding education particularly on vulnerable students. Speakers include Alex Hemingway, Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; Ken Clement, Canadian Aboriginal AIDS Network, Carol White, Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House; as well as coalition members

putting children and youth first

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Jason Chan, SUCCESS; Dylan Falconer, PLEA Community Services and Alanna Hendren, Developmental Disabilities Association. Everyone is welcome.

Youth podcasts

John Kennedy, First Call's communications and development coordinator, has been busy producing podcasts by youth. [Have a listen](#) to the episodes, it's powerful stuff. The youth set the agenda and talk about policy issues they need to succeed.

Provincial budget submission

We are working on a [provincial budget submission](#) due October 14, 2016.

Workers' forums

The BC Employment Standards Coalition is holding [workers' forums](#) around Metro Vancouver to collect stories about workers' bad jobs. Part of this is in response to the labour ministry doing a review of the Employment Standards Act. The Employment Standards Coalition's response is you need to hear stories from the workers. First Call has produced a Chinese translation of the poster.

Syrian refugee youth

Adrienne attended a session with Syrian refugee youth as part of Fresh Voices hosted at the Immigrant Services Society's new welcome centre. Young people new to the country are putting their voices together and starting to get active. It's very inspiring.

2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card

First Call is currently working on the child poverty report card, which will be launched Thursday, November 24 at the BC Teachers' Federation at 550 West 6th Avenue. We are making a special effort to get the stories of youth aging out of care into the report card. Please [contact Adrienne](#) if you have ideas for speakers at the media conference / launch.

Living Wage for Families Campaign update (celebration!)

Congratulations to **Parent Support Services Society** for becoming a Living Wage Employer. We encourage any groups sitting around the table to consider becoming certified as a Living Wage Employer. [Contact Deanna Ogle](#) for more information.

The **City of Vancouver** will implement the living wage for all staff and contractors, including security and graffiti removal. This will affect hundreds of contract workers. The Vancouver Public Library will also see an increase for shelvers and their security staff. The Vancouver police department will also be certifying as a Living Wage Employer. They have casual staff who will now be making a living wage.

The City of Vancouver will also work with their networks to encourage companies to become Living Wage Employers. That is great leadership.

There is work to do to urge the park board to become a Living Wage Employer. They have significant contractors, such as concession stand workers. The PNE site has many employees that are not making a living wage, as well as EasyPark.

EI child-related benefits clawbacks ended (celebration!)

Effective October 1, the clawback of women's maternity and parental leave EI benefits from families on disability assistance will cease. Many organizations advocated for this. Community Legal Assistance Society's human rights case was pending. First Call wrote to Michelle Stilwell asking for a simple change

to classify these benefits as earned income instead of unearned income. The ministry will also stop clawing back EI benefits from parents caring for critically ill children.

First Call wrote a letter to Minister Stilwell thanking her for doing the right thing in changing a policy that was plunging families with newborns into even deeper poverty.

There is still more work to do as CPP survivor spousal benefits are still clawed back from disability benefits.

Sanctuary Health – Infant MSP enrollment letter

Following up on a request by Sanctuary Health, First Call has written a [letter](#) to BC health minister Terry Lake regarding Canadian-born infants not being enrolled in the Medical Services Plan (MSP) if parents have precarious immigration status.

We called on the government to waive proof of identity and residency for parents of Canadian-born infants who have precarious immigration status, as well as to adopt a policy of non-collaboration with the Canadian Border Services Agency, in order to remove the fear in parents with precarious immigration status who want to enroll their babies in MSP.

First Call provincial election toolkit

The sanctuary health child immigration status is part of the questions in the First Call provincial election toolkit that is being circulated. Please [provide feedback](#) by the end of October.

We have a Chinese translation of the voter information part of the toolkit courtesy of our practicum student. We want to focus on the online roll-out of the toolkit this year.

On the back table are sheets you can use to suggest questions to ask parties and candidates in the election toolkit. Please write down your feedback and hand them back at the end of the meeting.

There was agreement First Call will invite party leaders to coalition meetings between January and May, 2017 in advance of the provincial election.

The University Women's Club is holding an all-women candidates election forum and many of the questions are drawn from the First Call election toolkit. Patricia Grohne will let us know when that event would be.

Presentations and other publications (see end of minutes)

3. KENDRA MILNE, WEST COAST LEAF

[Amending Social Assistance Legislation to Better Support Women's Financial Independence](#)

West Coast LEAF have submitted a [briefing note](#) to the provincial government calling for changes to the *Employment Assistance Act* and the *Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act* that would support women's financial independence, self-determination in relationships, and ability to flee abusers. The brief calls for revisions to the current broad definitions of "spouse" and "dependent" in the legislation that create barriers to accessing benefits which disproportionately affect women. Applicants for income assistance and disability benefits should not be asked to depend on others financially to meet their basic survival needs when no actual support is available to meet these needs.

The government is using different definitions than those defined by BC's family law.

The current definition is too broad and is causing people to be declared ineligible for assistance. This assumed financial dependence **doesn't account for** situations involving people calling themselves a couple to get an apartment, separated spouses sharing housing but not finances, domestic abuse and families helping house a homeless friend or family member, for example. The definition of dependent problematically also includes a person in relationship with someone who "indicates a parental role" for a dependent child, often judged very broadly too.

West Coast LEAF is concerned because it disproportionately impacts women and women with kids and increases risk of violence in the relationship. It also means people can't form relationships that can be beneficial to them, because they will be prematurely and/or erroneously deemed financially dependent after a few months and denied assistance.

Recommendations

West Coast LEAF recommends dependent be defined consistent with family law and to eliminate the indication of parental responsibility from the definition. None of the relationships should matter unless there is significant financial dependence.

West Coast LEAF would welcome a supportive letter from First Call.

Discussion

The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth gets calls from grandparents whose grandchildren are placed with them as part of a safety plan. Grandparents cannot have access to assistance for the child because they don't have legal custody, which is contradictory.

You have to apply online for income assistance. Screening is done online and those who have limited English and computer knowledge cannot access assistance. Poverty reduction advocates and BC Government and Services Employees' Union members have met to discuss the many access barriers for applicants for income and disability assistance. BCGEU workers who deal with assistance fear retribution for speaking out. The online application process is dehumanizing to both applicants and government staff. Some 50% of applications are turned away. Librarians and community service workers are becoming experts in helping people do applications.

This definition of financial dependence reveals the disconnect between MCFD and MSDSI in policy impacts and intent, particularly in relation to women encouraged to leave domestic violence situations (e.g. by MCFD and Attorney General), while on the other hand they and their children are being denied assistance by being erroneously defined as financial dependents of partners, roommates, former spouses, etc. There are mental health issues as well as many different kinds of situations that affect children.

Kendra has seen people declared ineligible retroactively and told they now owe tens of thousands of dollars to the ministry.

This also impacts senior women. People are hiding their relationships. What does this mean as they age and transition into long-term care?

This is similar to the clawback in the sense when spouses relied on partners financially, based in archaic thinking.

It was agreed First Call will write a letter in support of the brief. We can also invite reps from MSDSI and MCF for a dialogue based on this brief. Interest from members in participating in this meeting include West Coast LEAF, BCTF, Westcoast Family Centres, Adoptive Families Association, Parent Support Services, Society for Children and Youth, Family Places, BCGEU. Transition houses may also be interested.

4. LYNELL ANDERSON, RESEARCHER

[Opportunities in Transition: An Economic Analysis of Investing in Youth Aging Out of Foster Care](#)

Lynell Anderson co-authored with Marvin Shaffer the report commissioned by the Vancouver Foundation through the Fostering Change initiative and co-published with SFU.

The focus of Fostering Change is very specific: to improve policy, practice and community connections for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The report demonstrates we can afford to do the right thing as part of the advocacy toolkit.

The goal of this report is to show we can afford to support young people aging out of care.

There are three research reports published together:

1. Outcomes
2. Cost of adverse outcomes
3. Supports that can improve outcomes and reduce costs

Background:

- There are more than 7,800 children and youth in care or on youth agreements (a voluntary agreement starting at age 16); 60% Aboriginal
- 1,000 age out each year at 19 – they only had data on this. This doesn't include youth who leave care at age 18 or go on youth agreement at age 17
- Young people in the general population have a much different experience as they transition to adulthood, they have much more support nowadays from home.
- There is no systematic tracking of youth who've aged out of care, so data is lacking.

Report 1 shows significant negative outcomes for these youth:

- Only about 1/3 graduate from high school
- Post secondary participation and university degree much lower than general population
- Full time employment is lower
- Higher government assistance
- Higher likelihood to live in poverty
- Transient and precarious housing
- Criminal involvement and victimization
- Higher early pregnancy, substance abuse, mental illness and early loss of life

Report 2 shows the adverse outcomes:

- Key drivers are low educational attainment, poverty and poor mental wellness.
- Using standard monetization of costs used by government, the costs total up to \$268 million.
- This figure doesn't include non-monetized costs (because not enough data is available currently) of poor mental wellness, early pregnancy and parenting, homelessness, substance abuse.

Report 3: What can we do about it? The research is very clear. Key requirements are:

- Support for living costs
- Reduce financial barriers to education
- Social/community connectedness support

Recommendations: Build on what exists

- Longer, more flexible agreement for young adults support
- Support for existing service organizations to serve more youth, access to housing, life skills, mentoring
- Extension of fee waiver and other education cost support

Summary:

- Adverse costs of up to \$268 million compared to investment of \$57 million
- Closing the education gap alone would generate benefits equal to costs.
- There is a clear economic case for improved supports.

It was noted that the beneficial impact on Aboriginal youth is significant. Youth aging out of care need a variety of options including agreements and mental health support.

5. MEMBER UPDATES

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC – They now have support for the \$10 a Day plan from the New Democrat Party. There is energy for a week of action in March culminating on March 8, International Women's Day.

Office of the Representative for Children and Youth – A [report](#) on children who have been exposed to sexual violence while in government care was released last week. A [report](#) on a youth suicide will be released shortly.

University Women's Club Vancouver – Together with First Call the University Women's Club has received a grant from Vancouver Foundation to set up study circles through local clubs around the province to explore the challenges facing young people aging out of foster care in B.C. and explore actions to give them more support in this transition. They will bring results to a December 10 action forum and bring it back to Vancouver Foundation.

The post-majority support most parents extend to their children isn't there for youth aging out of care. For example, one youth came home on his 19th birthday and his door to his room was locked. All his possessions were outside in the rain. The caregiver told him to go to a homeless shelter down the road. The policy is social workers are to help youth transition but they are so overworked that in practice it doesn't happen. It is a moral obligation to look after that caring gap. We need to look at the outcome of the child.

BC Government and Services Employees' Union – Caroline Kent represents component 3 community social service workers including early childhood educators, out-of-school care workers and teen program workers. They are reaching out to their members to get them involved in their union in a different way through various general interest workshops, including an ergonomics course for early childhood educators, which goes to the renewal of their license.

Vancouver Metro Alliance – MVA is holding an all-candidates meeting on April 4, by invitation. Housing, transit, social inclusion and living wages were issues for their successful event for the municipal election and helped move the City of Vancouver to commit to the living wage.

Eastside Family Place and Five Family Place Partnership – October 3–7 was National Family Week and the City of Vancouver has proclaimed October 9 Family Place Day. Child poverty is family poverty. Family Places are dealing with many people in crisis.

Eastside Family Place has partnered with Kiwassa Neighbourhood House, which is the new Northeast Early Years Centre, to connect with families to ensure they are getting a continuum of services.

West Coast LEAF – The Coalition of Child Care Advocates, Single Mothers Alliance of BC and West Coast LEAF are going to Geneva next week to make a submission on child care to the United Nations committee reviewing Canada's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Parent Support Services Society – They work with all people in parenting roles in various languages across the province. Last month was Grandparents Day and PSS held events around BC celebrating the role of grandparents, particularly grandparents raising grandchildren. They are still trying to get to the root of the problem they are hearing on the help line. Low-income seniors who are raising their grandchildren and are receiving their guaranteed income supplement are having the Canada Child Benefit clawed back from this supplement. They are examining if this is a systemic problem.

Help BC Foster Kids Now – Sheena Ashdown held a rally in February 2016 before the budget to get the government to provide more funding for youth aging out of foster care. They received good media coverage. Sheena is holding another [rally](#) October 26 at MCFD Minister Stephanie Cadieux's office in Surrey.

SUCCESS – The organization is putting more focus on helping people fill online forms and getting service after three years when settlement funding will no longer support services for them.

BC Teachers' Federation – More infographics based on poverty education research will be coming out soon. BCTF is working on the election providing support to their local representatives to hold public forums, antipoverty measures. John Kennedy to email Barb to receive latest infographics for circulation.

There was a cheer around the room for the parents who have advocated against school closures in Vancouver and Richmond.

Adoptive Families Association of BC – October is Foster Family Appreciation Month in BC and you can find stories about BC foster families at fosteringconnections.ca. During the month we are encouraging families across BC to become foster parents. This is an initiative in conjunction with the Indigenous Perspectives Society, Foster Parents BC and the provincial government.

November is Adoption Awareness Month. AFABC's film about youth aging out of care called *Striving for Permanence* will be shown at the November First Call meeting.

Society for Children and Youth of BC – They have a [child rights public awareness campaign](#). They are wrapping up their PhotoVoice project with youth in Abbotsford. Some of their work will appear in the *2016 BC Child Poverty Report Card*.

RAYCAM – They had their youth matters forum a couple weeks ago with participation from the City of Vancouver. Their youth council talked about their issues from the Downtown Eastside and Strathcona neighbourhoods.

BC Community Action Program for Children Society (BC CAPC) – As the advocacy arm of BC CAPC programs, the BC CAPC Society is getting out the message: “We’re doing more programs with less.” They are finding ways to quantify that, tracking how many families have been turned away from CAPC programs.

BC Council for Families – BCCF is a training and resource society for families and people working in non-profits for families. They’re focusing on cradle to seniors now.

BCCF supports young parent programs and their upcoming conference has a focus on mental health.

They have received a small grant to run Nobody’s Perfect and Mother Goose programs for vulnerable families living in poverty. They have received another grant to develop print materials for Syrian refugees.

6. NEXT MEETING

The next coalition meeting will take place Wednesday, November 9, 2016. Refreshments are served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15–11:30 am. BC Teachers’ Federation, 550 West 6th Avenue in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome; please contact us by the Monday before the meeting at info@firstcallbc.org if you wish to participate by phone.

FIRST CALL OUT AND ABOUT

Community Presentations September 2016

- BCIT Nursing School on child poverty
- Port Moody City Council on the living wage
- Downtown Eastside Neighbourhood House and Simon Fraser University Downtown – Where Ends Don't Meet public forum on poverty and inequality
- Vancouver City Council on the living wage
- Broadbent Institute Progress Summit 2016 on the living wage
- City of Vancouver Healthy Cities Strategies Leadership Table on the living wage

Recent Publications

- October 2016: [Letter Thanking MSDSI Minister Stilwell on End to EI Maternity Benefit Clawback](#)
- October 2016: [Opinion: Vancouver city council shows leadership on living wages](#)
- September 2016: [Response from Minister of Health Jane Philpott Re: Congratulations](#)
- September 2016: [Vancouver to become largest Canadian city to certify as Living Wage Employer](#)
- September 2016: [Quesnel becomes second municipality in Canada to implement a living wage policy](#)
- September 2016: [Letter to MSDSI Minister Stilwell on EI Maternity Benefit Clawback](#)

Media Hits

First Call garnered 32 media hits in September 2016, much of it in relation to the living wage at the City of Vancouver and Quesnel. The media covered these additional topics:

- Minimum wage
- Child poverty