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First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition Minutes of January 12, 2011 BC Teachers' Federation Building

In attendance:

Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association
Julie Norton- BC Borstal Association
Mae Burrows - First Call
Pany Aghili - Dixon Transition Society
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation
Rhiannon Wong - BC Society of Transition Houses
Desiree Sattler - Canadian Red Cross
Cheryl Mixon - Family Services
Michele Murphy- WAVAW/Rape Crisis Centre
Dayla Israel - WAVAW/ Rape Crisis Centre
Fred Milowsky - Rep. for Children and Youth
Kim Thompson - UBC
Jeremy Vis - BC Assoc. for Community Living
Colleen Evans - BC Assoc. for Community Living
Agata Feetham - Gordon Neighbourhood House
Jason Chan - SUCCESS
Michael McCarthy Flynn – First Call
Joan Merrifield - BC Teachers' Federation
Jody Tetreau - BC Teachers' Federation- SW
Louise Gonsalvez - BC Teachers' Federation – SW
Melissa McDowell- AMSSA

Chris McIntosh- Fighting Autism Intervention
Reductions (FAIR)
Gemma Holland – First Call
Adrienne Montani – First Call

On phone:

Caitlin Etherington- Community Integrated Health
Services

Regrets:

Pardeep Purewal- Ministry of Public Safety and
Solicitor General
Jennifer Charlesworth- Federation of Community
Social Services of BC
Lanny Libby- Social Policy, City of Vancouver
Maria S. Nguyen- M.O.S.A.I.C. Family Programs
Megan Yarema- Canada Without Poverty
Margaret Antolovich- Powell River/Sunshine
Coast/Coastal HSDA

1. Introductions

Chair Julie Norton opened the meeting, and there was a round of introductions.

2. First Call Reports and Updates

Adrienne Montani noted that First Call is open to ideas from all coalition members in relation to funding and strategic planning.

There are some new partners in the coalition: The Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Helping Spirit Lodge Society. Currently the coalition has just over 90 partner organizations.

Financial Report

First Call has been struggling financially this past year and still has an approximate shortfall of \$19,000. A partner appeal went out last summer and an individual donor appeal in November. We are looking at whether we should have a partner membership fee. First Call is receiving \$450 from monthly donors and the individual appeal has brought in about \$7000. First Call continues to seek grant funding for projects, e.g. to support low income parents and youth to represent their own experiences and proposals for policy change. The First Call Coordinating Committee is looking at how to make the Coalition's core operations sustainable. Julie Norton suggested partner organizations might keep First Call in mind when choosing partners for projects that have an advocacy focus.

Strategic planning

First Call's strategic planning work has been examining three goals:

1. Coalition building- maintaining and building coalition strength and united voice for children and youth
2. Strengthening our communication capacity (internally and externally)
3. Building the sustainability of the Coalition

First Call welcomes participation and input on any of these themes from its partner organizations and will be sharing the draft strategic plan document for comment.

3. Anti-violence Programs for Children and Youth in Schools

There were presentations given by three organizations: WAVAW, the Red Cross Respect Ed Program and the BC Society of Transition Houses.

WAVAW: "Raise It Up"

Dalya Israel and Michele Murphy from Women Against Violence Against Women Rape Crisis Centre (WAVAW) presented publicly for the first time their new "Raise It Up" social justice curriculum. WAVAW along with its Youth Advisory Committee produced the curriculum on issues related to violence, oppression and leadership for high schools in the Lower Mainland. It is aimed at helping youth examine the root causes of violence and how they can be actors for social justice.

The "Raise It Up" Instructional Framework has 3 primary objectives

1. To educate students about the oppressive social structures that produce social injustice
2. To demonstrate how these systems create and perpetuate violence
3. To motivate students to take action to create a socially just society and to give them tools and strategies that will enable them to do so

Words like "bullying" can often mask specific forms of violence experienced, e.g. homophobia, sexism, or racism. The curriculum helps youth acquire the language to describe and frame the oppressions they experience.

The "Raise It Up" program offers support to educators and is designed to easily integrate social justice into all aspects of their teaching. The content and activities connect to many of the Ministry of Education's Prescribed Learning Outcomes in a number of different courses at the secondary level.

More details about the curriculum can be found on WAVAW's website: www.wavaw.ca

The Red Cross: Respected

Desiree Sattler discussed the experience of the Respected: Violence & Abuse Prevention programs which focus on preventing bullying and harassment, risk management and promoting healthy relationships. The programmes are delivered at the invitation of schools and community organizations (about 600 sessions per year in BC) with the subject matter tailored for different audiences.

She outlined five things which they have learned:

1. Education needs to be experiential and involve the whole person (hearts, minds and spirits): the program offers simple activities where youth look at their relationships
2. Start with the positive, e.g. identifying what positive and healthy relationships look like, as well as giving information on identifying violence and unhealthy relationships.
3. Engage youth in the design and delivery of activities, e.g. train students how to facilitate and deliver workshops in their schools.
4. The importance of educating adults in providing safe spaces for kids.
5. The importance of working in partnership- making connections and finding out what others are doing.

There are numerous resources available on-line – books, kits, teacher training materials. For more information on the program go to www.redcross.ca/respected

BC Society of Transition Houses: Violence is Preventable Program

Rhiannon Wong spoke about the Violence is Preventable program of the BC Society of Transition Houses. BCSTH provides support to 90 Children Who Witness Abuse (CWWA) Programs and those providing prevention and intervention services in BC schools through the Violence Is Preventable Project. The project aims at helping children who have witnessed domestic violence. They give presentations in schools, do group work with children and also provide one-on-one counsellors in the schools. They have found that younger children like to be able to talk about domestic violence while older children like to know that it's not their fault and they are not alone. In one school a presentation was made to 100 children and afterwards 20 children self identified as having witnessed abuse.

Resources and DVDs for different groups, program evaluation reports and a manual for teachers and counsellors are available on the website:

<http://www.bcsth.ca/content/childrens-services-2>.

The program currently has no funding. The counsellors involved volunteer their own time. Rhiannon mentioned that they need votes for the Pepsi Refresh Project which gives them the chance of receiving \$100,000. You will find the link on their website:

<http://www.bcsth.ca/content/childrens-services-1>. Every vote counts and you can vote once a day, every day until the closing date!

4. Political Parties' Leadership Candidates Survey

The attendees were asked to help First Call in honing the key policy questions affecting children and youth that we want to bring to the attention of leadership candidates for the BC Liberal and New Democratic parties in our candidate survey. It is the coalition's job to put forward a breadth of issues and all four of First Call Keys to Success for children and youth should be covered.

Attendees divided into groups to discuss which questions they would like to put forward under the each heading.

A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development

Two overarching frames were identified for these questions: access to quality early childhood care and education and reducing vulnerability. Specific suggestions included:

- How will you improve access to child care / early childhood education programming for the children of working parents? How will you support working parents to take advantage of existing programs?

- Are you in favour of the creation of a universal, publicly-funded, quality, affordable and accessible child care system for BC? If so, what will be your first step to achieve this?
- Are you in favour of fully-funded early intensive therapy programs for children with autism?
- How will you improve supports for the social-emotional development of young children?
- Will you restore the funding cut from the Success By 6 program?
- Will you commit to an increase in public investments in preventative services and programs for young children?
- Referencing the evidence and recommendations in the *15x15 Report*, what steps will you take to act on this report's evidence and recommendations?
- Knowing that thousands of children and youth with special needs and their families are on waitlists for urgent therapy services, infant development programs, supported child development programs, and respite care, how will you commit to making articles 7 and 23 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities a reality in BC?

Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth to Adulthood

Some proposed questions:

- Do you have a vision and action plan for youth with special needs? If so, what are the three or four key issues that you will address and what are the outcomes for your plan by 2013?
- Would you engage/include youth in policy tables, including taking advice from a broad range of youth as to what form and kind of engagement and advisory role they would participate in?
- Would you give youth the power and tools to engage other youth in these discussions, including participant funding and other necessary resources? Note that there are barriers there for youth with FASD and autism in relation to community engagement.
- With reference to students with special needs, what will your government do to ensure that adequate supports are provided for every student in order for them to be included in the regular classroom? How will you ensure that all educators are well-prepared to educate all students in the regular classroom?
- Do you have a vision more broadly for youth and young adults that focuses on education and/or employment or apprenticeship for the full range of youth?
- Are you prepared to commit all of the Federal employment services dollars that were transferred to the Province to funding employment services, most particularly those dollars that support youth as they transition to adulthood and the labour force?
- Would you support expanded funding for pre-employment and apprenticeship training?
- Would you support enhanced dual track credit career programs for all youth in schools, as well as for youth who missed a schooling opportunity?

- Would you support employment training for not only 'at risk' youth but also for youth still living at home?

Increased Economic Equality

This group made the suggestion that we should ask "yes/no" questions in order to make it easier to report with clarity on where candidates stand on an issue. For example: do you support a targeted and time-lined plan for reducing poverty by December 2011? Then list the elements of the plan that First Call suggests should be included, e.g. raising welfare rates, minimum wage increase, removing post-secondary financial barriers, paying living wages, etc.

Safe and caring communities

Proposed questions spanned commitments to invest in violence prevention programming, increasing the stock of affordable housing, funding for neighbourhood learning centres and community use of schools.

There was agreement that we should add something under this heading about the Employment Standards Act changes to child labour protections.

It was agreed that First Call will take all of the suggested questions and input from partner organizations and boil them down into a survey with no more than 3 questions for each Key to Success, structured as yes/no questions. All partner organizations are encouraged to use the survey and supplement the questions as they see fit.

The issue of lowering the voting age to 16 has been raised by leadership candidates and First Call will be circulating information on this in an upcoming weekly announcement.

It was noted that it would be good to send our survey directly to the two parties' women's caucuses. It was also suggested that it would be a good idea to work with the early childhood development coalitions and tables in communities.

People may want to become party members so that they can vote on party leaders. And using social media such as Facebook and Twitter could be useful in raising issues and engaging with candidates.

Our goal is to have a "tsunami" of child and youth issues brought to candidates' attention.

It was suggested that First Call could host a leadership candidate forum, one for each party, which would look at youth issues and help to educate and better inform them so that they would be more prepared to take positions within their own party. SPARC BC held a very successful all candidates meeting for the last federal election that engaged politicians in listening about specific issues in groups and asking them to report to the room on what they had learned. We will explore this idea with partners and discuss at the next Coordinating Committee meeting. A number of people offered to help with the potential meeting/forum.

5. Election Readiness

There was not enough time to discuss the preparation of election kits for upcoming known and possible elections, so this will be moved to a future coalition meeting agenda.

6. Partner Updates and Announcements

James Chamberlain from the BCTF noted that a couple of motions addressing child and family poverty solutions will go to the teachers' AGM in March.

Melissa McDowell with AMSSA (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC) mentioned that they have a resource board available to any organization which has resources, events or programs to share. Contact her at: projects@amssa.org

Bill Preston said that the BCSTA passed a resolution taking a leadership role to add youth to the list of Education Partners. It has been forwarded to the Ministry of Education. The creation of a student/youth provincial organization is needed. Bill would like to hear from any groups interested in exploring this idea.

Desiree Sattler announced that the Society for Youth and Children of BC is looking for a new executive director and would like people to spread the word about this opportunity.

6. Time and Date of Next Meeting: Wednesday, February 9, 2011.

Refreshments served at 9:00, meeting from 9:15 – 11:30 am. BC Teachers' Federation, 550 W. 6th Ave. in Vancouver. Telephone participation welcome.