

2009 Provincial Election Kit

The purpose of this election kit is to **provide an overview of issues and resources to support individuals and community groups in their advocacy for BC children, youth and families.**

The kit is intended to support you in promoting legislation, policy and practice that benefit children and youth. It will provide you with some tools to advocate for children and youth leading up to the May 12, 2009 provincial election.

First Call has built a broad provincial consensus around the need to ensure that everyone benefits from the following four **Keys to Success for Children and Youth:**

1. A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development
2. Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood
3. Increased Economic Equality
4. Safe and Caring Communities

First Call is a coalition for children and youth that advocates working together to ensure that the issues of children and youth are on all agendas. First Call is a cross-sectoral and non-partisan coalition, sharing a common set of principles arising from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Supporters of First Call share the view that children and youth are society's most important resource. We need to invest in them now, for our future.

Visit www.firstcallbc.org or e-mail us to sign up for our Weekly Announcements e-mail digest and receive the latest updates on election issues and more background materials on the topics presented in this kit.

You Can Make a Difference!

Elections are the perfect time to speak up because it is the time when politicians pay close attention to public opinion. Here are some ways you can **make a positive change for the youth, children and families in your community during the election campaign:**

- **Register to vote at www.elections.bc.ca.** Get to know your candidates for MLA and the party leaders.
- **Attend meetings or candidate events prior to the election and raise issues you're concerned about.** Check candidate and party web sites for upcoming events and for information on their party platforms.
- **Hold a conversation or public forum.** Gather friends to talk about the issues over coffee. Or, hold a larger event and invite representatives from all parties. Include youth and marginalized groups in the planning and organizing if you can.

- **Encourage any group of which you're a member, such as religious, cultural or professional groups, to promote child and youth issues in the campaign.**
- **Write to your local newspaper** about your concerns and what action you want the next government to take. **Speak with the media** and ask them to run a story about the needs of children, youth and families in your community. Use call-in and email feedback opportunities to participate in radio dialogues.
- **Use on-line networking and communications tools** to maximum advantage and spread the word about what counts for you in this election and to participate in election issue debates.
- **Don't forget to vote and remind your friends and family to vote!**

Background on the May 12, 2009 Provincial Election

The web site **www.elections.bc.ca** is your resource for information on your electoral district, your current MLA, provincial parties, voter registration, and voter identification requirements. The web site also has resources for students and youth to learn about elections and voting.

Student Vote will be holding a parallel provincial election for children and youth in BC public schools in May; find out more at **www.studentvote.ca**.

Analyses of the election and political issues are available online from many different organizations and perspectives. Visit First Call's web site at **www.firstcallbc.org** for up-to-date links in our provincial election section, and check out commentary, including postings by First Call's Provincial Coordinator Adrienne Montani, on:

- The Lead-Up – BC Election Commentary from the CCPA: **bcelection.policyalternatives.ca**

The moving spirit of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is that children should have 'first call' on societies' concerns and capacities in order to protect their vital, vulnerable years of growth from the mistakes, misfortunes and vicissitudes of the adult world.

Their right to grow up with a level of material resources sufficient to protect their physical and mental development, and to allow their participation in the life of the societies into which they are born, is a right to be protected in good times and in bad.

Guaranteeing that right should not depend on whether economies are in growth or recession, or on whether interest rates are rising or falling, or on whether a particular government is in power or a particular policy in fashion.

UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre,
Child Poverty in Rich Countries 2005

A Strong Commitment to Early Childhood Development

The Role of the Province

Provincial governments are responsible for policy development, funding and administration of public education, now including early childhood education. Provincial governments can single-handedly implement quality, universal child care (as in Quebec) or early childhood development programs (such as BC's StrongStart Centres).

Provincial governments are also responsible for funding and administering health care. They have the power to improve pregnancy outcomes by increasing prenatal and postnatal services (such as doulas, midwives, or post-natal at-home visits by registered nurses), lowering maternal poverty rates and increasing health promotion education.

Early identification and intervention services for children at risk for development delay or children with disabilities are part of the provincial government's responsibilities too. Making sure parents of young children find the supports and services they need in their communities is another provincial government job.

The Facts

- Statistics Canada estimates that there are over 215,000 children under the age of 5 and a total of 686,000 children under the age of 15 in BC. (BC Stats, 2009). There are approximately 90,000 licensed child care spaces in BC and government provides subsidies for 50,000 children. (MCFD 2009)
- The province only has enough regulated child care spaces for about 1 in 5 children under the age of six. (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2008)
- Child care is the second highest living expense for families with young children in Metro Vancouver and Victoria. (CCPA, First Call, and Victoria Community Council, 2008)
- A record 72% of married or common-law mothers in Canada who have a child under three years of age and an employed husband are now part of the workforce. (Vanier Institute of the Family, 2009)
- Wait lists for child care spaces average one to two years and are growing, according to a survey of 50 licensed child care centres. (BCGEU, 2007) The wait list problem is most acute for infant and toddler care.

Cross government commitment, supportive provincial policies and sustained integrated funding provide the essential base for the ECD basket, without which practitioners and communities cannot effectively deliver the supports and services that young children and families need.

First Call, Early Childhood Development in BC

- Since 2007, the Ministry of Education has had jurisdiction over early learning in BC. The separation of early learning from child care, which is within the mandate of the Ministry of Children and Family Development, ignores the fact that child care is an important part of early learning. (Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC, 2007)
- Canada tied for last place among developed countries evaluated in a UNICEF report on ten benchmarks for child care. Canada also came in last for public expenditures on early childhood services and the rate of access to early learning and child care programs for 3-6 year olds. (UNICEF, 2008)
- 950 BC children under 3 years were waiting for infant development services as of March 2008 (Infant Development Program of BC), and over 6,000 children are on waitlists for early intervention services. (BC Association of Child Development and Intervention, 2008)

Sample Questions for Candidates

Will you increase funding for child care and other early childhood programs so that parent fees can be lower and wages for early childhood development professionals can be raised to reflect their skill and the importance of their work?

What will you do to ensure that early learning in schools is comprehensively funded and coordinated?

In BC, early learning opportunities are provided free for children whose parents or other caregivers can participate with them. The early learning and care needs of all other children are left up to the marketplace. How would your party address this inequity?

Do you think it is appropriate for the well trained early childhood development staff who care for our youngest citizens to be paid \$14 an hour?

What will you do to reduce waitlists for young children needing early intervention services?

Great resources for more information on this issue:

Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC: www.cccabc.bc.ca

Child Care Advocacy Forum: www.advocacyforum.bc.ca

Early Childhood Development in BC – First Call’s Framework for Action:
www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/EarlyChildhood/1-framework%202008.pdf

Human Early Learning Partnership: www.earlylearning.ubc.ca

Children First sites: www.bcchildrenfirst.ca/links.htm

Success by Six: www.successby6bc.ca

Support in Transitions from Childhood to Youth and Adulthood

The Role of the Province

The provincial government has responsibility for all levels of education; they have the ability to support successful transitions between the different levels of schooling by reducing class sizes, ensuring sufficient funding exists for teaching and support services in schools, improving student loan and grant programs, and increasing access to post-secondary education.

The government also has direct responsibility for children and youth living in foster care. Youth transitioning out of care often need extra support in establishing a home of their own, finding employment and pursuing further education. Supporting these vulnerable youth is an important part of the role of the province.

Children and youth who feel connected to their schools benefit in many ways. Schools can take steps to improve the social environment of their institutions by increasing student voice and power; improving social events to be more safe and inclusive for a variety of students; increasing the number and variety of clubs or sport teams and removing financial barriers to participation; or initiating anti-bullying, anti-homophobia, or anti-racism campaigns led by students. These types of initiatives need extra funding from the province.

The Facts

- Youth from care do not have the experience of depending on their parents well into their twenties for emotional, practical, and financial support, as is the norm for many other youth. (University of Victoria School of Social Work, 2007) As of July 2008, new provincial financial supports for former youth in care have started to be made available to help with the transition to independence. Former youth in care over 24 years old are not eligible for this assistance.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth in Canada. Aboriginal youth are 5-6 times more likely to commit suicide than other youth (BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions, 2006). Gay and lesbian youth are 6 times more likely to commit suicide than straight youth. (McCreary Centre Society, 2003)
- Parents participating in a focus group identified transportation, time availability and cost as the most significant barriers to having their child in after school care. Over 10% of children ages 9–12 were left unsupervised after school. (United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2007)
- 29% of BC youth report experiencing some sort of discrimination; the majority of discrimination was based on physical appearance, following by race or skin colour and sexual orientation. (McCreary Centre Society, 2003)

- Middle childhood (9-12) represents a unique and critical developmental period for important competencies. During middle childhood, problems can arise that, left unchecked, will become exacerbated as children move into adolescence. (United Way of the Lower Mainland, 2007)
- Students who do not complete high school are more likely, on average, to be male, Aboriginal, lack English-language skills, or have special needs. (Ministry of Education, 2008)
- Very few children in care in BC graduate from high school – an estimated 21%, as compared to 78% for the general population; one third of these children struggle with mental illness and behavioural issues. (Representative for Children and Youth, 2007)

Sample Questions for Candidates

How is your government going to improve the graduation rates for vulnerable youth?

How will your government improve supports for youth in and transitioning out of care?

Are you in favour of reducing or eliminating fees charged by public schools through increased education funding?

Children and youth need to be engaged in safe, quality, accessible out of school activities and care. If elected, what will you do to support such programs?

Great resources for more information on this issue:

McCreary Centre Society: www.mcs.bc.ca

Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: www.fbcyicn.ca

Youth Suicide: It's Time to Get Involved: www.cihir-irsc.gc.ca/e/32154.html

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada: www.fncfcs.com

BC Teachers' Federation: www.bctf.ca

Representative for Children and Youth BC:

www.rcybc.ca/Content/Publications/Reports.asp

United Way of the Lower Mainland:

www.uwlm.ca/How+We+Work/Children+6-12

Increased Economic Equality

The Role of the Province

The provincial government is responsible for reducing the high rate of child and family poverty in BC. As many other provinces are now doing, BC can commit to setting targets and timelines for poverty reduction and reducing income inequality. Many groups have proposed poverty reduction measures, including First Call (in the Child Poverty Report Card: www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/economicequality/3-reportcard-b&w.pdf) and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (The Time is Now: www.policyalternatives.ca/reports/2008/12/poverty_reduction/?pa=BB736455).

The provincial government has direct control over welfare rates. Increasing them could lift many children and youth out of poverty. Low income children and families could also benefit from increased government support for dental and extended health care and prescription drugs.

Expanded access to quality child care is known to be a key part of eliminating child poverty. Quebec has implemented universal child care that has successfully lowered the number of families on social assistance. BC could do the same.

A variety of fees are charged for in-school activities and events that prevent some children and youth from fully participating. Reliance on parent-paid fees and fundraising has created have and have-not schools, and has increased inequality within the public education system. The province could eliminate these inequalities by increasing funding to public schools.

Finally, the province could increase the minimum wage to \$10.76/hour, eliminate the \$6 training wage, and ensure provincial contractors are paying living wages.

The Facts

- British Columbia had the highest child poverty rate in Canada for the fifth year in a row at 21.9%, or 181,000 children, significantly higher than the Canadian average of 15.8%. (First Call, 2008, before tax LICO measure)
- Over one third of BC's poor children live in families where at least one parent is working full-time full year. (First Call, 2008)
- In BC, 40% of Aboriginal children under the age of 6 who are living off-reserve live in a low income family, compared to 18% of other BC children under 6. (Statistics Canada, 2008)
- BC has the second lowest minimum wage in the country after New Brunswick. BC and Prince Edward Island share a minimum wage of \$8, while BC has a lower training wage of \$6 for "inexperienced" workers. Apart from BC and the Northwest Territories, every province and territory in Canada has raised their minimum wage since March 2008; BC's wage has remained stagnant since 2001. (Human Resources and Social Development Canada, 2008)

- 49% of recently immigrated children live in poverty. (Campaign 2000, 2008)
- The gap between low and high income earners in BC is growing. The ratio of the average total income between the richest 10% and poorest 10% of families with children has increased from 9 to 1 in 1989 to 13 to 1 in 2006. (First Call, 2008)

Sample Questions for Candidates

If elected, will you adopt a poverty reduction plan for BC with explicit targets and timelines?

BC has one of the lowest minimum wages in the country and discriminates against new workers. Will your party commit to raising and indexing the minimum wage and eliminating the \$6/hour training wage?

Families on welfare are living well below the poverty line and rule changes don't allow employable parents to keep child support payments or any earned income. How will your government improve social assistance for families with children?

Two parents working full-time would need to earn \$16.74 to meet the basic costs of living for a family of four in Metro Vancouver (\$16.39 for Greater Victoria). Will you commit to making sure all provincial government contracts require contractors to pay a living wage to their employees?

Great resources for more information on this issue:

First Call: www.firstcallbc.org/pdfs/economicquality/3-reportcard-b&w.pdf
 SPARC BC: www.sparc.bc.ca/resources-and-publications/category/43/poverty
 UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre: www.unicef-irc.org
 Campaign 2000: www.campaign2000.ca
 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA): www.policyalternatives.ca
 National Council of Welfare (NCW): www.ncwcnbes.net
 For **poverty statistics in your community** go to:
www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca/data/dd/facsheet/facsheet.asp

Safe and Caring Communities

The Role of the Province

The province can provide funding for transportation upgrades or adjustments to existing services to better benefit children and families (e.g. more stroller accessible buses).

The province has committed to seismic upgrading for 300 high risk schools in BC, yet this upgrading has only been completed in 14 schools and is underway in another 18. When schools are renovated, the province can commit to keeping community and early learning spaces open and including these spaces in new and renovated buildings.

Community schools are a great way to involve children and youth in their school and community. Support from the provincial government could help convert more schools to become community schools which help children and youth to become more involved and serve as hubs for early childhood development, recreation and other community services. Government can also make recreation more accessible to low income families.

The province regulates employment standards. Under 2003 legislation, children 12 to 14 years of age now need the permission of only one parent in order to work, when approval by the Employment Standards Branch used to be required. These new regulations do not exclude potentially hazardous work. (CCPA, 2005)

The Facts

- Young people who feel connected, valued and engaged are less likely to become involved in risky behaviours, be more resilient and become involved in their communities. (McCreary Centre Society, 2007)
- Positive recreation experiences have been linked to improved self-esteem, positive lifestyle choices, reduced alienation and antisocial behaviour, improved quality of life for those with disabilities or who are disadvantaged, positive stress management, and improved ethnic and cultural harmony. (National Children's Alliance, 2006)
- 41% of parents in a recent study said that cost was a significant barrier to their child's involvement in out-of-school activities. (United Way, 2007)

Research tells us that young children and families are healthiest and most resilient when they are actively connected to and positively engaged in their local community and, in turn, communities which mobilize around the needs of young children and families, see an improved quality of life for all citizens.

First Call, Early Childhood Development in BC

- On average, 200 BC children and youth die from unintentional injuries each year, and injury remains the number one cause of death among children and youth in BC. Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of death for 0-24 year olds. Falls are the leading cause of childhood hospitalization. (BC Injury Research Prevention Unit)

Sample Questions for Candidates

If elected, will your government restore Employment Standards Branch oversight of workers aged 12 to 14?

Youth in our province need safe places to socialize and find support. Will your government commit to increasing funding for youth services?

How will you make our communities throughout the province more family friendly (e.g. improving transportation, funding community schools and parent support services, supporting quality child care options)?

Great resources for more information on this issue:

BC Centre for Safe Schools and Communities: www.bccssc.ca

Canadian Association for the Child's Right to Play: www.ipacanada.org

BC Injury Research and Prevention Unit: www.injuryresearch.bc.ca

BC Crime Prevention Association: www.bccpa.org

BC Association for Community Living: www.bcacl.org

Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement: www.engagementcentre.ca