

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2019 9:15 TO 11:30 AM

**PRESENT:**

Amal Omer, MOSAIC  
Anamaria Richardson, Pediatrician  
Bronwyn Armstrong, Office of the  
Representative for Children and  
Youth BC  
Brynn Joyce, BC Federation of  
Students  
Calum Scott, Pacific Community  
Resources Society  
Caroline Donelle, Dedicated Action  
for School Health (DASH) BC  
Darcy Morgan, Roots/Seeds of  
Empathy  
Doug Kinna, BCGEU  
Galen Hutcheson, Parent Advocacy  
Network  
Gyda Chud, First Call Steering  
Committee (chair)  
Heather Lynch, Options Community  
Resources Society  
Jessica Forster Broomfield,  
DIVERSEcity  
Jim Staton, Family Services of  
Greater Vancouver  
Katherine Moore, First Call Steering  
Committee

Kevin Moorhead, Social Venture  
Partners  
Laura Stannard, Vancouver  
Granville NDP  
Margie Sanderson, Society for  
Children and Youth of BC  
Meagan Sutton, Social Venture  
Partners  
Mike Lally, DIVERSEcity  
Nicky Bowman, BC Society of  
Transition Houses  
Peter Prontzos, Langara College  
Sarah Rush, Society for Children  
and Youth of BC  
Shari Laliberte, BCC Nursing/Health  
Promotion BC  
Sharnelle Jenkins-Thompson, West  
Coast LEAF  
Stephanie Howell, Society for  
Children and Youth of BC  
Stephanie Skourtes, Single Mothers'  
Alliance  
Susan Ruzic, BC Teachers'  
Federation  
Tom McLaughlin, BC Children's  
Hospital  
Adrienne Montani, First Call  
Becky Kelly, First Call

Emily Chan, First Call  
Dylan Cohen, First Call, Fostering  
Change  
Halena Seiferling, Living Wage for  
Families/First Call  
Helesia Luke, First Call  
Leila Trickey, Living Wage for  
Families/First Call

**CALL-IN:**

Debra Abraham, Unique Get  
Together Society  
Gisele Haines, Child Care Options  
Resource & Referral  
Margaret Sutton, BC Retired  
Teachers Association  
Samantha Gambling, BC Chapter,  
Coalition for Healthy School Food

**REGRETS:**

Lisa Meneian, Deaf Children's  
Society of BC  
Maureen Black, BC Aboriginal Child  
Care Society

**1. WELCOME, RECOGNITION OF INDIGENOUS LANDS, INTRODUCTIONS, AGENDA**

Gyda Chud, chairing, acknowledged we are meeting on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Tsleil-Waututh and Squamish Nations, followed by a round of introductions.

**2. FIRST CALL UPDATES/ CALLS TO ACTION**

**Staffing update**

Emily Chan, Office and Engagement Coordinator, will be scaling up her work from part-time to full-time beginning October 15. Susan Russell, one of our Fostering Change Campaign Organizers, will also be increasing her hours starting in October. We have also extended Becky Kelly's Assistant Project Manager and Researcher contract until early 2020.

**New First Call Coalition Member – DIVERSEcity**

putting children and youth **first**

A warm welcome to our newest First Call Coalition Member. Serving the Surrey community since 1978, [DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society](#) is not-for-profit organization that has been supporting and empowering immigrants and refugees to successfully integrate into their community through settlement services, language training and literacy programs, community programs, employment/skills training, counselling services and programs for children and youth.

First Call now has 108 Coalition Members! If your organization wants to join the Coalition, you can [learn more here](#).

### **Early Childhood Development Roundtable**

The minutes from our September 18<sup>th</sup> Early Childhood Development Roundtable meeting are available [on our website](#). The meeting we had updates from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) about the children and youth with special needs framework, child care and early years funding. The Roundtable [wrote a letter](#) to MCFD Minister, Katrine Conroy, and Minister of State for Child Care, Katrina Chen, to reinforce a long-standing message of concern from our members about the province's child care capital funding program, specifically with the granting of public funds to commercial, for-profit child care operators and other private property owners.

### **Fostering Change Campaign**

The Fostering Change Campaign [wrote a letter](#) to MCFD Minister, Katrine Conroy. The letter explains that the current Agreement with Youth Adults (AYA) program policy is not very flexible and is failing to provide equitable access to supports for young people from care. MCFD wants to increase the number of people accessing the AYA program, however the rigid program criteria make that goal difficult to meet. The minister's [response letter](#) acknowledged the validity of our concerns, but didn't offer any immediate solutions. We are hopeful that government is working on policy changes that will address our concerns that could be announced in future.

[Policy Solutions Day](#) organizing is well underway for the event on Wednesday October 23. The bus is almost full and we already have 10 ministers and 20 MLA meetings confirmed. [Please contact](#) Dylan Cohen, Fostering Change Campaign Organizer, if you're interested in volunteering.

We held our Rallying for Change event in September at Victory Square. Even with a limited number of attendees, two major news outlets covered the story.

### **Campaign 2000 / Child Poverty Report Cards**

We will launch our [BC Child Poverty Report Card](#) in late November, though the exact date is not yet confirmed. November 24 is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary date of when the House of Commons committed to eliminating child poverty by 2000.

### **Living Wage for Families Campaign**

We are creating factsheets about the Living Wage for different sectors, including the [non-profit sector](#). We are on our way to certifying 7 more Living Wage employers and anticipate movement by the City of Burnaby to start paying their staff a living wage as of October 1 and including their contractors by January 1.

The campaign made a [submission](#) to the BC government's recent consultation on paid leave for employees experiencing domestic or sexual violence and will be doing some strategic planning at a session in November.

### **First Call Fundraising Gala**

The [First Call Fundraising Gala](#) will be held on Thursday February 27 and registration is now open! The topic of how the climate crisis affects BC children and youth is a pressing issue and we are looking forward to hearing from our featured speaker, Dr. Melissa Lem, on that topic. We are currently recruiting event sponsors and items for our silent auction. [Please contact](#) Emily Chan, Office and Engagement Coordinator, with any suggestions.

## **Children's Right to Housing Project**

We are beginning work on our Children's Right to Housing project funded by the Law Foundation. Please contact Adrienne Montani, Provincial Coordinator at [adrienne@firstcallbc.org](mailto:adrienne@firstcallbc.org) if you are interested in joining the project advisory committee.

## **Child Labour Standards Project – Government consultation**

The Provincial Government has just launched an online survey about the regulations for the amended employment standards for minors. It contains some poorly worded questions that make it hard to respond accurately. They are also accepting full written submissions, with a deadline of November 15. First Call will prepare a submission and share it with coalition members who would like to engage in this consultation.

## **BC Human Rights Tribunal – feedback session held Sept 13th**

Currently, children cannot self-represent in BC human rights complaints. First Call was approached by a BC Human Rights Tribunal working group to respond to a working paper on this topic, and we hosted a feedback session for members on September 13. First Call will submit a response reflecting the considerations and questions that were raised during the session.

## **Kids Can't Wait Summit: October 29th**

Inclusion BC, alongside many organizations including First Call, is hosting a second Kids Can't Wait Summit on Tuesday October 29. Join us for a full-day gathering of families, advocates, agencies, and organizations coming together to improve outcomes for children and families who receive early years supports and services in B.C. [More info and register here.](#)

## **Recent BC legislative changes**

On October 7 the BC Government introduced [Bill-35-2019: Miscellaneous Statutes Amendment Act \(No. 2\)](#), which included three changes of note to the Employment and Assistance Act and the Employment and Assistance for Persons with Disabilities Act. The proposed changes will:

- end the need for people to pursue early Canada Pension Plan retirement benefits before age 65;
- eliminate the two-year independence rule for youth as a barrier to receiving income assistance;
- increase the amount of time people can live together to 12 months before being considered common law, and providing the singles assistance rate to two married but separated people living in the same residence.

## **Federal Election Toolkit – Social Media work**

The Federal Election Toolkit is now [available on our website](#). We also created factsheets with child poverty statistics by federal riding, which were tweeted to every MP running in the election and many local newspapers. We are now tweeting our election toolkit questions throughout this week.

### **3. DECISION ON JOINING THE [COALITION FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD](#)**

In addition to the positive consensus from those in attendance at the September coalition meeting, we have heard from other member organizations via email in support of First Call joining the Coalition for Healthy School Food, an advocacy initiative to secure a Federal Government investment in a national healthy school food program. **Motion for First Call to join the Coalition for Healthy School Food as a member. Passed without dissent.**

### **4. FEDERAL ELECTION CANDIDATES' PANEL**

**Candidates present: Yvonne Hanson, New Democratic Party; Hedy Fry, Liberal Party**

In anticipation of the October 21<sup>st</sup> federal election, First Call invited the Conservative, Green, Liberal, and New Democratic Parties to participate in today's meeting. Yvonne Hanson from the New Democratic Party and Hedy Fry from the Liberal Party accepted our invitation. The Green Party did not respond to our request and the Conservative Party, initially confirmed a candidate to attend, but then cancelled.

Candidates were asked four questions based on First Call's 4 Keys to Success for Children and Youth, which they had received in advance.

### **Key to Success 1: A strong commitment to early childhood development**

There are licensed child care spaces for only 20% of young children in BC. Child care across Canada is often characterized by high fees, low staff wages, mediocre quality, and unacceptable wait lists. Canada's public support for young children and their families is the weakest among the world's rich countries at 0.25% of GDP - well below the 1% international benchmark.

Will your party support the Affordable Child Care for All Plan, including the following commitments?

- Significantly increase Canada's ELCC budget by \$1 billion each year over 10 years to meet international benchmarks?
- Pass federal legislation to ensure quality child care becomes and remains accessible to all families in Canada?
- Continue to work with Indigenous leaders and communities to operationalize, implement and expand on the Indigenous Early Learning and Child Care Framework to realize the goals and aspirations of the Indigenous Peoples?

**Hedy Fry, Liberal Party:** Yes, this is essential if we want to get women into the workplace. We are investing \$7.5 billion over five years into Early Learning and ELCC plan. This has to be an all-government approach to look at how to improve gender equality across Ministries. We created 250,000 spaces for pre and post-school care for children under 10 years old. On the topic of Indigenous ELCC, we worked regularly with First Nations and Metis on a nation-to-nation basis.

**Yvonne Hansen, New Democratic Party:** The NDP wants to work towards a \$10aDay child care plan. We've learned lessons from the Quebec child care model and will invest \$10 billion over 4 years to expand spaces and embed it in legislation. We also want to properly invest in Indigenous child welfare systems so that Indigenous children don't need to be raised by settlers.

### **Key to Success 2: Support in transitions from childhood to youth and adulthood**

The average Canadian university graduate finished school with more than \$26,000 in student debt. Among those who have never participated in post-secondary education, "financial issues" have been found to be the most commonly recognized barrier.

Canadians with student loans pay, on average, \$5,000 in student loan interest. The system unfairly punishes those who can't afford to pay education costs up-front. This unfair debt burden impacts those raising families.

Data from the 2016 census show 11% of Indigenous people had a university degree, compared to 29% for non-Indigenous people. High poverty levels for Indigenous people are a significant barrier to their ability to get a post-secondary education.

Will your party increase federal support for access to post-secondary education, both to remove financial barriers for low-income students and to lower student debt?

**Hedy Fry, Liberal Party:** We increased the Student with Disabilities Grant from \$8,000 to \$20,000, and will increase student grants by 15%, plus increase the interest-free grace period after graduation to 2 years and loan debt payments would only be required when graduates earn at least \$35,000 per year. New parents won't need to pay back their student loans until their children are at least 5 years old. We are working with Indigenous

groups on how to better support K-12 school connections and post-secondary enrollment and retention. We are also investing in the Aboriginal Skills Training Program.

**Yvonne Hansen, New Democratic Party:** The NDP wants to eliminate interest on student debt, as other provinces have done. Post-secondary education should be part of our public education so we want to cap tuition fees and then reduce them. Textbook prices and other post-secondary costs have increased, but wages have not increased. We will increase access to student grants and expand financial assistance. We will also create job retraining programs for older students and expand employment insurance.

### **Key to Success 3: Increased economic equality**

2019 marks 30 years since the 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty by the year 2000. Sadly, too many children are still growing up in poverty. In BC 1 in 5 children live in poor households.

Will your party commit to maintaining and enhancing the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy including fully funding strategies like Canada's National Housing Strategy? Will your party ensure strategies to reduce child poverty will be a priority in ministries across government and properly funded through budget measures?

**Hedy Fry, Liberal Party:** We are proud that within 3 years, we have taken 300,000 kids out of poverty. However, it's not enough. We have the first-ever poverty reduction strategy and we set measurable goals, which is important for us to track our success. We aim to reduce poverty by 20% by 2020 and by 50% by 2030. We will decrease chronic homelessness, and especially reduce poverty rates amongst Indigenous peoples. We will look at data gaps to see who is falling through the cracks. Housing is under provincial jurisdiction, so we need to work with provinces and non-profit sectors to collaborate. We have been opening new housing buildings across BC, not just in Vancouver.

**Yvonne Hansen, New Democratic Party:** The National Housing Strategy funds won't come until after the next federal election. People are working two jobs to be able to pay rent, so this is urgent. We will start a national school nutrition program for nutritious and culturally-appropriate foods because Canada currently ranks 37<sup>th</sup> out of 41 countries based on access to nutritious foods. We will raise a federal minimum wage to \$15/hour and extend parental leave. We also will add Pharmacare to the national health care plan and improve dental and mental health coverage. We are also interested in running a basic income pilot program, creating a universal child care program at \$10/day, and installing a Youth Commissioner to ensure those programs are created.

### **Key to Success 4: Safe and caring communities**

The federal government has a responsibility to promote and monitor the implementation of the rights and protections of children in all Canadian jurisdictions. However, there is no focal point for children at the federal level to ensure children's needs and rights are considered in legislation, policy and services.

Will your party appoint a National Children's Commissioner and increase public accountability for respecting the rights of children in Canada?

**Yvonne Hansen, New Democratic Party:** Bill C441 is for a Youth Commissioner, not a Children's Commissioner. They would oversee policies on child rights issues and make sure those policies are approved. The Commissioner would educate Canadians on child rights issues and handle individual concerns brought to Government. They would also be responsible for Indigenous children's rights. We are disappointed the Liberal government is appealing the decision to award compensation to Indigenous children.

**Hedy Fry, Liberal Party:** The Prime Minister is the Minister of Youth and has a Youth Advisory Council. We have a Minister for Youth and Families who has full charge to ensure that young people are represented and that every department is helping better the lives of children and youth. Canada attended a conference and brought to the table that Indigenous peoples are people, not population demographics, and worked for years on [Bill 262](#) (UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act), but it was blocked by Conservative senators.

Additional questions asked by coalition members touched on a number of topics: mental health and addictions, a national school food program, child sexual exploitation and sex industry legislation, addressing the root causes of family poverty and youth justice programs that focus on prevention, and the two candidates responded based on their parties' platforms.

**5. Member updates and issues for future coalition meeting agendas**

*Due to limited time, the member updates were skipped at this meeting.*

**6. MEETING ADJOURNED**

**Time and date of next meeting**

The next coalition meeting will take place Wednesday, November 13, 2019, 9:15–11:30 am. Refreshments are served at 9:00 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](mailto:info@firstcallbc.org) if you wish to participate by phone.