

Wednesday, March 25, 2020
9:30 – 12:00 pm

IN ATTENDANCE

Emily Gawlick, ECEBC (chair)
Alison Merton, Collingwood
Neighbourhood House
Michelle Aderem, The PACE
Program
Marya McVicar, PACE and Family
Services of Greater Vancouver
Mab Oloman, Coalition of Child Care
Advocates of BC (recorder) Jason
Gordon, BC Assoc. for Child
Development and Intervention
Alison Bledsoe, Consultant
Lisa Meneian, Deaf Children's
Society
Natalie Townsend
Susan Foster, MCFD North Fraser
Sharon Gregson, Coalition of Child
Care Advocates of BC
Jaime Matten, Health Sciences
Association
Kate Buium, Human Early Learning
Partnership, UBC

Christine Mann, Parkgate
Community Services Society
Sue Irwin, Child Care Resource &
Referral, Vancouver Coastal
Darcy Morgan, Roots and Seeds of
Empathy
Katherine Moore, Consultant
Katherine Bunce
Brenda Lohrenz, Eastside Family
Place Society
Kirsten Bevelander, BC Aboriginal
Child Care Society
Brianna Braun, Deaf Children's
Society
Regan Stewart
Alexa, YMCA
Michelle Carty, Pacific Care, CCRR
Vancouver Island
Tanya Valois, Westcoast Family
Centres
Lea (and 3 others), Prince George
Family YMCA
Sue Johns, Richmond Society for
Community Living

Winnie, Haida Gwaii CCRR
Kalee
Andrea Haber, City of Vancouver
Asuka Yoshioka, City of Vancouver
Diana Elliott, Aboriginal Infant
Development Program
Giselle Haines, Surrey Delta CCRR
Tazeen
Kirin, Westcoast Child Care
Resource Centre
Patricia Asbur
Debra Perrars, Pacific Care CCRR
Helesia Luke, First Call
Adrienne Montani, First Call

REGRETS

Janet Krenz, [Public Health, Duncan & Cowichan Valley](#)
Lynell Anderson, Coalition of Child
Care Advocates of BC
Jan White and other MCFD
leadership contacts

43 participants in attendance via Zoom.

Apologies that we did not capture the full names and organizations of all those attending. If you have corrections, please sent them to adrienne@firstcallbc.

1. Welcome, recognition of Indigenous lands and agenda

Emily Gawlick chairing.

- Recognition of Indigenous lands
- Introductions, regrets - Jan White, MCFD Victoria, sent regrets explaining that for now Ministry officials will be unable to participate in meetings due to the current situation.
- Adoption of the agenda - adopted

2. Review of Previous Meeting Minutes – [January 29, 2020](#) approved

- Actions arising or pending: none
 - Letter related to wage enhancements for early childhood education assistants and

putting children and youth first

other sector workers - tabled

3. ECD Sector Updates/Presentations/Discussions

- COVID-19 updates and impacts on early childhood services

The following people provided updates:

- **Parkgate Community Services Society (PCSS)**. They hold a child care license for 115 children but many staff were afraid to come to work so they closed doors on March 16th. They are concerned that they will lose MCFD child care funding as of that date. They don't know if they will re-open for special services and are concerned about the impact of the emergency funding on EI for their laid-off staff.
- **The Deaf Children's Society of BC (DCS)** - closed March 16th for spring break, re-opening is delayed. Staff afraid to come to work. 2 families have said they need child care. Government says that they must return parent fees, but they still must pay staff because they have long term workers who, according to their contracts, must be given 5 months notice. If their Preschool remains closed, the Temporary Emergency Funding to cover up to approximately 20% of their operating costs is not enough. They are in a very difficult financial position. It was noted that on the MCFD call (24-03-2020), while the government gets credit for trying to address many issues (this being all new), there were different answers to the same questions. And, quite a lot of concerns came up for which there were no answers. For example, no directions about how to staff child care service for essential workers or how to go about opening services to families you don't know.

In the meantime, they have established an online preschool. Starting immediately, their Preschool at Home will happen daily for an hour with lessons provided for the parents. They are using [GoToMeeting](#), normally an expensive license, but currently due to COVID they are offering free licences for non-profits and all of the DCS staff have taken advantage of that so that they can be connected together and with families. They don't know if this online approach will qualify them as an 'open' program in which case they might get the Temporary Emergency Funding to cover up to 75% of their operating costs.

- **The PACE Program** are doing something similar using the same online service. They received a letter from the Ministry advising not to use free Zoom for security reasons.
- **BC Association for Child Development and Intervention (BCACDI)** Lots of information sharing among the foundational programs. Supported child development is struggling because a vast majority of the child care centres have closed or are closing. There are concerns about the health of people like respite workers. A lot of online sharing going on about innovative strategies. Jason will send information about Telehealth and other online technologies being used. [see: <https://bcphysio.org/media/766/download>]
- **Coalition of Child Care Advocates of BC (CCCABC) and \$10aDay** They are starting to hear concerns about the financial incentive package that the BC government has announced: particularly about providers getting 7 times their CCOF payments if they stay open but only 2 times CCOF if they close. Some centres are closing because their staff aren't coming to work.

Others are staying open so that they can get the 7x CCOF plus the parent fees even though they may only have one or two children enrolled and their staffing and other operating costs had decreased. CCCABC is very concerned about the apparent lack of accountability for the incentive funding. So far government has been vague about how the funding is to be used by the centres... for wages? BC's approach is incentivizing the market.

It was noted that the dollars are not tied to safe practices or to meeting the needs of essential workers. CCCABC is calling for essential workers not to have to pay fees. CCCABC is about to release a letter to decision makers about these concerns and it will be posted to https://www.10aday.ca/campaign_updates.

In response to COVID-19, BC is approaching child care differently from the rest of Canada. (Note: as this is changing daily please check the regularly updated Provincial/ territorial working chart provided by the Childcare Resource and Research Unit https://www.childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/COVID-19-Working%20chart_SM_LF_03-25-2020.pdf)

- **Early Childhood Educators of BC** – ECEBC has the same concerns and is advocating for more support for Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). They have connected with ECEs across the province, heard many stories and concerns, and have developed a series of position statements. <http://www.ecebc.ca> Emily also noted that there are additional areas of concern in First Nations communities.

ECEBC is recommending child care, as we know it, be closed and then started up, with a comprehensive emergency plan for the child care sector. ECEs can ensure best practices in keeping with their professional code of ethics. http://www.ecebc.ca/resources/pdf/ecebc_codeofethics_web.pdf

- **BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS)** -A lot of fear and uncertainty among community and program members. Information is not being received. Programs are shutting down on a week to week basis. Some educators are providing online contact with families through online circle times twice daily in some case. Activity packages are also being made available to families and there are some food programs. Dollars should continue for the federally funded programs. Employment issues are arising. In some communities Save-on-Foods is hiring for \$2 more per hour than the current child care wage, so there are concerns about losing staff. Huge concerns around health services in small remote communities. <https://www.acc-society.bc.ca/bcaccs-is-advocating-for-childcare-programs-during-the-covid-19-crisis/>
- **Collingwood Neighbourhood House** - Closed Friday March 20 and will be laying off all their ECEs and will top up their EI. Staff have been talking about choosing a different career path. While they recognize that there have been improvements over the past two years--the wage enhancement etc.-- they are not deemed an essential service, but are being asked by Vancouver Coastal Health to act outside of their expertise, e.g. monitor health of families.
- **PACE** - The health and safety of staff, clients and community is their priority, so this means that staff are working remotely, where possible by offering phone calls, digital meetings, consultations and play therapy sessions. Their big concern is the isolation of their families

with children in foster care... the effect of court closures on families awaiting decisions on next steps for the children. They normally support some children with challenging behaviours in the child care centre they attend. That service is suspended and they are offering email and online support, but they know that families and children that are self isolating are very stressed, which raises protection concerns.

- **Westcoast Family Centres** - Also serve a vulnerable population. They have suspended face to face services for now, including their supervised access program, and have moved to FaceTime. They are also looking into how to do more with other online platforms but must have MCFD permission to do that. They are also dropping off groceries and play kits. They are working with MCFD on how to safely provide support to stressed families, screen clients with health issues and do so with staff who are also stressed. There is discussion of allowing breastfeeding to nurse their infants in MCFD offices.
- **BC Aboriginal Child Care Society (BCACCS)** - Children's social and emotional wellbeing is not being addressed by government. Disruption of relied upon services is contributing to that. Kirsten echoed the concerns raised about vulnerable families and noted that there are some exceptionally vulnerable children in the Downtown Eastside - really at risk.
- **Aboriginal IDP and SCDP** – inclusive, in-person supports to families have been suspended. Maintaining communications through technology (text, Facebook, Skype, etc.) but that doesn't work for families with no online capacity, so they are using phones, and some families don't have money for phone minutes. They are setting up emergency contacts. Staff have their own complications because of the lack of child care. No layoffs yet as they are working remotely. Some staff are taking advantage of free online courses because they aren't at work. A list of those is being developed. There is concern about contract deliverables in these uncertain times but feel that the well-being of staff and clients is more important than monthly stats. A conference call is scheduled with MCFD to discuss this, so may learn more. In the interest of containment, some First Nations have asked service providers not to come to their communities.
- Emily Gawlick - Lots of concerns and examples of how folks are trying to address services with best practices. Is there a role for First Call?
- First Call is collecting and sharing information from its members and from various committees and agencies and they are creating a dedicated webpage. Please provide First Call with any information about best practices and issues arising. The question was asked - has a cross ministry committee been established to consider and monitor impacts on children? If not, it would allow for a more coordinated response to the issues raised in this meeting and elsewhere. Please let Adrienne know if you need First Call's help.
- Sharon Gregson - Would First Call support the position of CCCABC and Child Care Now? Which is...
 1. **Implement an emergency child care plan** to provide free age-appropriate child care services for all children whose parents are designated as essential workers.

2. **Close community-based programs** that are not required to care for the children of designated essential workers.
3. **Continue to pay all** child care staff.
4. **Suspend all parent fees** while programs are closed.
5. **Maintain all government funding** to service providers during closures and provide additional funding to compensate for the loss of income from parent fees and/or parent subsidies.

There was much positive head nodding. As no objections were raised Adrienne said yes.

Action: Adrienne and Helesia will draft letter to decision makers including Dr. Henry. Usually First Call uses a collective voice in a letter and then asks members to chime in as well. Some of those in attendance said they will take this initiative back to their agencies for support or action.

- Cuts to preschool/child care programs for deaf children.
Lisa Meneian - Deaf Children's Society BC (DCS) <https://www.deafchildren.bc.ca/>

This visual presentation accompanied Lisa's presentation. [Link to PDF](#) presentation.

To summarize, Lisa provided a brief history and description of DCS services and the benefits to deaf children. Some services are available throughout the province. Others, like the preschool, are only available to children in the lower mainland.

The services have been predominantly funded through a \$1.6 M contract with MCFD but while the funding amount has been constant the number of families accessing services has doubled over the last ten years. Therefore, since MCFD funding has not increased to meet the increased demand it represents an ever-decreasing percentage of the DCS budget.

- Prior to 2015 – MCFD funding represented 75% of DCS budget
- 2015 -2019 – MCFD funding represented 35% of DCS budget
- 2020 -2021 MCFD funding will represent 18% of DCS budget

Government has approved a service delivery model that can't be met, putting the agency "in breach of contract". They now must fundraise 82% of their budget...but as Lisa mused "who would want to fund an agency that is so vulnerable". They have been in discussions with MCFD for over a year, but the issues haven't been resolved and there is no funding for the preschool.

Request: They are seeking letters of support to government.
(See the suggestions for how people and organizations can help and template letters of support at: <https://www.deafchildren.bc.ca/supportdcs.html>.)

Discussion: Recognition that for children who can only use sign language Deaf Children Society is the only option. Other organizations are also experiencing changes to their funding allocations, but their advocacy strategies are limited due to the pandemic.

What about letter to government to press pause on contract decisions that affect vulnerable populations and to relax reporting responsibilities? How do we ensure that the infrastructure remains standing at the end of the day- at the end of the COVID crisis?

Action: Letter to government, using this as an example, that pause should be initiated... so that at the end of the day the infrastructure remains standing. The letter should reference both this matter and others that have been voiced during the earlier discussion and COVID-19 impacts on early childhood services.

4. Member Updates and New Resources

Several participants said they appreciated the ability to reconnect especially at this time. Some are struggling with what advocacy work means today, so staying connected is good.

Adrienne: Thank you, and we will continue to share and convene as needed.

5. Future Meeting Venue and Dates

Our regular in-person meetings at the Vancouver offices of the BC Government & Service Employees Union are suspended until further notice due to the danger of spreading COVID-19. We will be hosting virtual meetings using Zoom for the following dates until public health authorities change their guidance about public meetings and social distancing. All meetings are scheduled for Wednesday mornings from 9:30 am to 12:00 pm.

May 27, 2020

September 23, 2020

November 18, 2020

Links to the Zoom calls will be sent out in advance of the meetings and posted to the First Call website on this page. <https://firstcallbc.org/our-coalition/ecdrroundtable/>