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**First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition
Minutes of January 13, 2010
BC Teachers' Federation Building**

In attendance:

Julie Norton – First Call
Nicole Mate – BC Children's and Women's Aboriginal Health
Jeremy Berland – Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond – Representative for Children and Youth
Elsie Kipp – Kinex of PeerNetBC
Romi Chandra – Kinex of PeerNetBC
Adrienne Montani – First Call
Bill Preston – BC School Trustees Association
Lynn McBride – BC Aboriginal Child Care Society
Shirley Paterson – Family Support Institute
Leah Karpan – VCH Aboriginal Health Initiative
James Chamberlain – BC Teachers' Federation
Margaret White – BC Teachers' Federation
Steve Kerstetter – First Call
Peter Vlahos – Vancouver Coastal Health
Linda Day – Vancouver Coastal Health
Mary Anne McWaters – University Women's Club
Andrina Perry – First Call
Diana Day – VCH Aboriginal Health Initiative
Sherry Small – Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre
Tammy Findlay – Human Early Learning Partnership
Mark Gifford – Vancouver Foundation
Lesley Richardson – First Call
Karen DeLong – BC Association for Community Living
Susan Forest – Justice Institute of BC
Rishima Bahadoorsingh – AMSSA
Jennifer Sarkar – Living Wage Volunteer
James McNish – Living Wage Volunteer
Noelle Virtue – BC Healthy Living Alliance
Helen VanWart – Child and Youth Special Needs MCFD
Jordana Zbarsky – Big Sisters of BC Lower Mainland
Lesley Cleathero – SFU Masters of Public Health Student
Katie Graham – SFU Masters of Public Health Student
Jennifer Charlesworth – Federation of Community Social Services of BC
Karen Lai – SPARC BC
Kristina Dixon – Canadian Mental Health Association
Glenn Hope – BC Council for Families

Patty Keith – VCH Maternal Child Health
Janine Wittal – Advocate
Lynell Anderson – Human Early Learning Partnership
Carol Ann Young – City of Vancouver
Rita Chudnovsky – BC Child Care Advocacy Forum
Sheila Davidson – Early Childhood Educators of BC
Fred Milowsky – Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
Gary Mavis – Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents
Linda Kuan – Canadian Red Cross
Kathy Berggren-Clive – MCFD
Iglia Ivanova – Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
Danielle Kelliher – BC Association for Community Living
Steven Klein – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Kelly Read – Office of Mable Elmore, MLA
Helesia Luke – BC Society for Public Education
Marjorie Dumont – BC Teachers' Federation
Madeleine Novak – Richmond Addiction Services
Lisa Chapeskie – Burnaby Association for Community Inclusion
Vi Nguyen – Vancouver Foundation
Michael McCarthy Flynn – Living Wage for Families Campaign
Shari Laliberte – UBC School of Nursing
Joel Bronstein – Little Mountain Neighbourhood House
Sharon Hoyland – Roots of Empathy
Sonja Sladojevic – Windows of Opportunity
Jason Chan – SUCCESS
David Phillips – MCFD
Magnolia Villalobos – Richmond Women's Resource Society

On phone:

Theresa Hermary – Interior Health
Shan Lavell – Community Action Toward Children's Health
Michael Goldberg
Lisa Werring – Breakfast for Learning
Rhiana Alfadili – Office of the Representative for Children and Youth
Kathy Basaraba – Children First

1. Introductions

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

2. BC's Representative for Children and Youth

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond and her deputy Jeremy Berland gave a report on some of their current work.

A report in collaboration with the provincial Ombudsman will be released soon which examines the complaint process for children and youth involved with MCFD. It will address whether the process needs to be improved. The report will also have repercussions for the ministries of health and education. A children's legal clinic is one possible solution. MCFD should do more reporting on complaints that it receives. An automatic notification process is needed so that MCFD complaints are sent to the Representative's office.

Another recent report (*Housing, Help and Hope*) demonstrated difficulties faced by young Aboriginal parents and the impact of poverty on child welfare. Families can't meet their basic needs on social assistance. Solutions to poverty can be found by bringing people together – we have to move beyond partisanship.

Other jurisdictions are much further ahead than BC. Strong supports are needed in education and early childhood, and we need to look at welfare rates.

Poverty and violence are two of the major issues being presented to the Representative. Mary Ellen has raised the issue of the need to repeal Section 43 of the criminal code, which allows a defense against hitting children, with the BC Attorney General.

Her report *Honouring Christian Lee – No Private Matter: Protecting Children Living with Domestic Violence* looks at the system of supports for children. There needed to be prompt and thorough support in the case of Christian Lee. Disconnects between ministries is a problem in domestic violence cases and the issue of the impacts on children of witnessing violence in their homes needs more attention.

Mary Ellen is appearing before the Standing Committee on Children and Youth later this month. She is advocating to MCFD Minister Mary Polak on child poverty, who has said there will be a plan. Minister Polak is the designated lead minister on this issue. We need to look at ministry performance measures and push for real goals. For example, the rental assistance program is not reaching many families who really need it.

The Rep's office is working with the Provincial Health Officer on a State of the Child in BC report, which will use data from the Adolescent Health Survey and other sources. There will be a conference in the fall of 2010 to discuss the development of the indicators and measures to be used in the report. The important difference between this and other similar reports will be how the measures are used. Youth are being consulted about what they think are the most important issues to monitor.

The aim is to produce a State of the Child report every two years. The report will use 22 indicators. We need common developmental indicators in BC. The responsibilities of government and those of non-profits and families are not well articulated.

Discussion:

The Representative does an excellent job as a non-partisan advocate. Apparently there is an early years plan from MCFD, but it has not been released. There is very little information available about the move to all-day kindergarten. The lack of a plan for the child care component of early morning and after-school coverage is a concern. The Ministry of Education is working on the curriculum for all-day kindergarten. In Ontario, kindergarten is supported by child care which can be subsidized. The move to full-school-day K will create more pressure for assessments and support services.

The State of the Child report should look at child workplace injury rates.

The Central Okanagan publishes their own regional State of the Child report focusing on the early years. They are mobilizing to raise MLAs' awareness of child poverty.

School board cuts are going to be a crisis this year, and non-enrolling services for students with additional needs always get cut. The Representative would like education to become a designated area for her office. School trustees should not consider shutting schools down for a week, as this results in lack of support for vulnerable children. Standards of service for students with special needs are still lacking.

Canada recently submitted a report on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which covers the years 2001-06. Some aspects of the BC section of the report are inaccurate and reflect programs that have been disbanded. The Representative is looking at doing a complementary report to the UN, as is the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children. A big gap is the lack of a national children's commissioner to provide national oversight.

An audit on education funding for children with special needs is underway by the Auditor General.

The government says it's hard to do anything in tough economic times, but those times are even harder for families. It's very hard to get programs and services back once they've been cut. Deficit spending during a recession is necessary.

Cultural competency and safety for Aboriginal people is critical in health care and education. Racism needs to be addressed and Canada should sign the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. Standards are needed for cultural competency. BC Aboriginal Child Care Society has two documents available on cultural safety – [Steps in the Right Direction](#) and [A Guide for Culturally-Focused Early Intervention Therapy Programs](#). We must push for anti-oppression policies within our own organizations.

3. Vote on First Call Mission Statement and Name Change

First Call's Coordinating Committee decided not to go ahead with a proposed name change, taking into account the discussion at the December coalition meeting. The coalition voted to support the recommended new mission statement:

To mobilize British Columbians to work together to ensure our children and youth have the rights, opportunities and resources required to achieve their full potential. We believe all children and youth in BC should have first call on society's resources.

4. First Call Reports and Updates

Due the proximity of BC Teachers' Federation to the Olympic village, the February meeting will be held at the Canadian Red Cross offices in Burnaby.

In the fall, First Call met with the Minister of Labour regarding child workplace injury rates. The follow-up letter from Minister Coell was disappointing as it does not address our concerns. A dedicated website is in the works to mobilize some advocacy efforts on this issue.

First Call has issued the first in a series of monthly reports to the media on child poverty which will respond to the government's debate on the numbers. The first report issued in January looks at long-term poverty statistics and how BC has done compared to other provinces over time.

The Living Wage for Families Campaign is co-hosting a forum on February 9 in New Westminster, where city council is considering a living wage bylaw and have asked for a staff report. New fact sheets are available on the website www.livingwageforfamilies.ca. There is also information on endorsing the campaign and becoming a living wage employer. A new living wage calculation for Metro Vancouver will be released soon.

8. Time and Date of Next Meeting: February 10, 2010. Coffee served 9:00 – 9:15, meeting is from 9:15 – 11:30 am. Canadian Red Cross Training Room (Entrance A), 3400 Lake City Way in Burnaby. Telephone participation welcome.