

Victoria Regional Women's Committee
Minutes
November 14, 2011

Virginia Vaillancourt, Brenda Esplen, Jeannette Lum, Kay Ahmadi , Rosemary MacKenzie
Guest Speaker -Rita Chudnovsky of "Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC

Meeting called to order at 5.34pm.

Virginia advised the members before we do the introductions and hear from our guest, we need to quickly run through 1-2 things regarding our up coming event.

1. Introductions

Roundtable introductions of members in attendance and guest Rita Chudnovsky

2. December 6 Event Update

Virginia advised that she still needs seven name readers, so if we know of anyone, please give them her email address. For the event she has sent out an invitation to the BCGU and they have posted our event on their calender of events and will go out in their e-news letter that is also sent to their affiliates and she will finish the BC Fed's invitation tonight. Virginia is still working on her speech and Brenda had given her some information which she will incorporate into name reading this year, it will be a short blurb about each of the women, i.e., their age, their talent, etc., to give more information on the women. Virginia may have someone read the background information after we read the names, to give us a chance to place the rose and the candle by their name.

Regarding the advertising, Jeanette has been working on it and Virginia has received some calls. It. Virginia is working with Vic News, which is part of Blackpress and they have a blow out special - 1/4 page advertisement in colour on the front page for \$50. The offer is on for two weeks. We need to decide if we are going to do that first even though there are a couple of weeks left till the event, to get the word out. This will be for the daily news which goes out on Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. We need to decide if we want it to appear in the paper on those days or just one day and if we want it in this weeks' or next weeks' paper. The downtown paper has a good readership. The other source is the community paper, in the gift guide section which is reserved for retail stores - a full colour 1/4 page advertisement would cost us \$559.00 and it reaches five communities or they can run our advert in four papers, it will cost us \$31.80 per column inch for a black and white space = \$381.78 for an advert measuring three columns wide by 4" tall. A question was raised regarding last years advertising cost - Virginia explained we did not do a lot, we had some free advertising via radio and Times Columnist. Last year we did the buttons and a small advert in the Victoria News that was paid for by CAW. So far we have \$100 from Area Council, \$100-200 from Human Rights and some from her regional council to help cover the advertising expense. A question was raised how much can we spend on advertising - our budget for advertising was \$700 this year and so far we had \$300 in donation to help with the cost. It was decided we would place the advertisement in the Wednesday and Friday paper at the cost of \$100 and \$381.78 for the other advertising.

Virginia will ask if we can get a discount as we are a non profit organization and will send the paper a copy of our graphic. Virginia will also look into seeing if she can get some free advertising from the radio stations and the Times Columnist to promote our event. Jeanette advised us that the Times Columnist was interested in our event and she was hoping they would come out and cover the event. The Time Columnist asked about sponsorship. Virginia advised us she will look at it for next year's event as the contract she has with the legislature does not allow any banners advertising any organization on their grounds. Rosemary mentioned there is also the "Lookout" which is a paper put out by DND for their members and their family which we can contact to advertise our event. Rosemary will give Jeanette information as how she can contact them.

For the event we have buttons and Virginia will look at some handouts which Kay brought in. November 15th is the last day that the speakers can get back to Virginia and due to the provincial election we may or may not have Dean Fortin as a speaker. Virginia will follow up the speakers on November 16, 2011.

3. Previous Minutes

Reviewed and approved October 26, 201 meeting minutes (m/s/c Kay/Jeanette/Carried)

4. Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC

Rita thanked us for our invitation and interest in their organization.

The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC has a long history of working with PSAC and have been asked to attend conferences and workshops on childcare. At national level they worked with PSAC to put forward a solid childcare program. Rita stated their organisation is a non profit organization, they have been operating for 25 years, consists of mainly a group of women meeting round the kitchen table working and fighting for high quality, not for profit, publicly funded childcare system. Their work is focussed in BC but is connected with the Pan-Canadian childcare advocacy of Canada. They are small, membership base, do not have an office or paid staff, do not get any funding from the government. Their funding comes from membership and donation for some of the projects they are working on. They have a large number of unions that are members of the coalition. It would be a good idea for us to join. She noticed we had a poster in the office that was prepared for them by the BCGEU. Their organization is located in the main land but they do have members that are working on local childcare issues. Rita asked how much we knew about their organization. Kay advised when attending the recent BC labour council summer school, she has an opportunity to attend a very interesting class that was put on by childcare advocates of BC and brought back some of their brochures for the RWC. Virginia advised Rita that three members of the RWC have been meeting with MP and MLAs regarding childcare and it would be a good idea to work with the local advocates to advance our campaign.

Rita advised us that the Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC are currently working on two initiatives that they are excited about. They are putting a lot of energy into a community plan for early childcare and learning, and childcare rights. Rita asked if any of the members had any problems with childcare.

Virginia described the hurdles and barriers she had to go through 12 years ago when she was trying to find a place for her five year daughter and two years ago when she urgently needed to find a place for her niece. “If you are lucky to find a space, it is not cheap.” We heard that some mothers have been trying to find a space for their child even before getting pregnant and if they find a place, they have to pay to reserve their place. Rita explained that she is not an early childhood educator but she got involved 33 years ago with the advocacy when she was looking for infant childcare and now trying to find a place for her second grandchild, it has not got any easier. Brenda mentioned she was lucky to have the help from her parents for childcare. She is hoping when her son has kids, childcare will be affordable. She heard right now people are paying \$1000 per month so their child can attend the daycare four days per week. If the child is sick and cannot attend the daycare, the parents still have to pay. Kay mentioned that daycare is the biggest concern of her co-workers. It took one of her co-workers three years to find a space and it was for half a day once a week. The co-worker has to rely on her mother to look after her child the rest of the week. It seems majority of the wages the parent earns goes to pay for the childcare. Jeannette stated, her sister required short term childcare for her son, due to her husband being away. Jeanette took a month off work to look after her nephews as her sister could not afford the high cost of daycare.

The members also discussed the fact that the caregiver needs to earn a good income too as they have a lot of responsibility and are also trying to support their family. We need to find a way that is fair for both sides. Rita explained the difficulties we have mentioned are typical for all families in BC and across Canada except in Quebec, because we do not have a childcare system. What we have at the present is an individual or group thinking there may be a need in the community or they can do it to earn some money. Individuals or businesses open up a program or service after getting the licence allowing them to do so and the parents have to pay 85% of their cost, which makes it unaffordable for the parents. The women providing the childcare are not earning a living wage. The average wage for an early childhood educator in BC that has a year or two of collage education is \$15 - \$16 per hour. The present system is not working for the families nor the educator because we are asking families at the time in their life when they are financially stretched to pay for quality childcare more than it would cost to send their child to a college or university.

Rita stated their organization has spent the last 25 plus years trying to solve this problem. The Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC and their partners “The Early Childhood Educators of BC” agreed this has gone on for too long. As the government was bringing about a change to full day daycare for young children, which is governed by the school act, the Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC decided instead of waiting to see what the government was going to, would put forward a plan of how we can move from the patchwork of the different services that are not enough or are too expensive and do not pay people a decent wage to a system that will meet the needs of the children, their family and the community.

Childcare = Public system.

We need to move way from childcare and small business model where they charge the user a fee for the service to a public system like all other public systems. The plan is based on a decade of established evidence and research which indicates:

- Public spending on early years education is a good social and economic investment. The children should have good experiences in their early years, which would result in good health, a good outcome and be contributing members of society and if the child has a bad experience, it can cause harm.
- Quality childcare is early learning. At the present the provincial government had divided early learning into two different departments - early learning falls under the ministry of education and childcare under the ministry of childcare and family development. The government thinks learning starts when the child enters the school. We know the learning that the child gets in the first five years of their life is phenomenal. We all know children learn through playing and the quality childcare they are getting in those years.
- Children and families have a right to a quality childcare. Canada signed an international UN treaty stating this is a right for families and their children but Canada has not honoured it. The current provincial and federal system is not meeting the requirements of families with young children. More women have entered the work force and the cost of childcare is the second highest for a family after housing. The spaces available only cover 1/5 of the demand. Based on a study done on 14 developing countries, Canada spends the least amount on children aged 0-6 (BC spends .28% of their budget on childcare).

The plan is called “Made in BC” - At the present the BC government spends an average \$382 for each child aged 0-12.

1. Bringing care and learning together and make childcare equal to education.
2. Build on quality childcare and public education system. The child has a right to go to school and the parents are not charged for that service.
3. Getting public support for early childhood educators and childcare the same way, they support the school system.
4. The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC do not want little children in schools behind desks and doing test. The focus should be on good childcare programs that are based on play base and building a strong personal relationship with children and their families, putting care at the core and making it a community based.
5. Parental leave needs to be 18 months and should be available to all families. It should be a benefit that all people can use, whether they are working or self employed.
6. The federal and provincial government needs to support the plan. It should be a new investment, not taking the funds from other departments to pay for this project.

The plan has six highlights:

- New law in BC called “Early Care and Learning Act”- to legislate that all young children have access to voluntary affordable and quality care. It should not be based on getting them ready for school. This act would be separate from the school act. It would distinguish between the programs they attend before school and at school. The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC do not want the school act to be amended to include the needs of young children.

- The government recently invested money in a program called “Strong Start” for children aged 3- 4, but what is happening is, parents on maternity leave attending with their young children. This program was a drop in at the schools and they required the child to be accompanied by a parent. The schools hired early childhood educators and paid them a decent wage.

This service is free for the parents. This is great but discriminates if the parent is working as they are paying for every hour of program that their children are getting. Participation in a good preschool or daycare should prepare you for the world as much as a drop in programs.

- The act should meet the needs of families with young children. The childcare program should move into the ministry of education. This would make school boards and ministry of education responsible that there is community and school base early childhood learning programs.
- The locally elected education board representative should be given the job and funding and be responsible for planning and governing the services in their area. They will be responsible for working with their community to develop a plan for the growth.
- At the present you can find whole bunch of names - family childcare, group childcare, preschool, daycare, child development centres. What we need to do is bring those programs together under one name ‘The Early Year Centre’ and it would be a network of the services available. This way, the families can choice the program that meets their needs. The programs would be staffed with qualified early childhood care educators who know about young children needs.
- We need to keep the existing facilities, every good space that exists by welcoming them into the new system and support them in making the changes required without them having to close down. The school boards would then be responsible for developing more programs to meet all the unmet needs.
- Instead of the early year centres getting most of their revenue from the parents, they would get most of their direct operating funding from the provincial government.

Rita stated their organization has been working with the early learning partnership at UBA and they have calculated what this system would cost. The funding the early year centres received must be used to do five things:

- Cap parent fees -based on the funding they are asking from the government, it would cost parents \$10 per day for full time care, \$7 for part time care and if your income is below \$40,000 it is free.
- Improve the wages of the early childhood educators and their education level. The suggestion was an average \$25 per hour plus a good benefit package.

- They have to agree to welcome and include all children, including those needing extra support.
- They would have to meet and demonstrate the community need -, i.e., someone cannot open a daycare next to someone else, when somewhere else in the community has a greater need.
- They have to provide the “BC Early Learning Framework” - a document that lays out a play base, whole listed child lead approach to early childhood

The next step is enhancing kindergartens and grade one. School would still start at the age of five, what they are suggesting is that early childhood educators join teachers in the kindergarten and grade one program.

- The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC are proposing to do three things:
 - a. Lower the ratio of children to an educator. Right now for a 5-year-old in a licenced group daycare setting would be one educator for every eight children. In BC an educator is looking after up to 22 children in a full day kindergarten, which makes it impossible for them when they are supposed to be doing a play base program. If early childhood educators were brought in for the children in kindergarten and grade one, they could work alongside the teachers and there would be more adults and educators with a group of children.
 - b. They could also offer families that need it a full daycare in one location and the children would not need to be bused from one location to another.
 - c. If early childhood educators worked alongside the teachers in the staff rooms, in the schools, would actually be a way to move early childhood education and how they learn up the school system. School age care before and after school would then start from grade two and up. Boards of education would be responsible for insuring there is an on site program at a school wherever it is needed and work with the existing school age providers and develop new ones.

Then invest in the work force. This system would only work if we had well respected, well educated and fairly paid workforces of early childhood educators. This is the best way to insure the programs are of high quality. At the present there is a huge gap between what early childhood educators and teachers earn. We need to bring the early childhood educators salaries in parity with the teachers. It was suggested that a bachelor of early childhood education become the new standard for this sector. Anyone that is presently qualified to work would stay in the current job and support them to improve their qualifications.

The organization is making the case to the government that they should embrace the plan, adopt the plan and work with communities to start implementing the plan. The first thing the government need to do is to pass the act and make a commitment to a five-year stable budget and then work with the communities to develop the target and time lines. The priority should be to meet the needs of working families with young children and solving the problems they are facing right now for child care so they can go to work.

The coalition for childcare advocates is in the process of taking the plan to as many audiences they can to get endorsements and support, and the momentum is growing. A sample of the organizations that have endorsed the plan in principal or fully to date are: The city of Vancouver, city of Burnaby and North Vancouver. The union of BC municipalities has passed a resolution to accept the five key elements of the plan but they did not name the plan in their resolution as it would be recorded in their resolution book. The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC have people around the province taking the plan forward to their municipalities and attended any event they could. The Vancouver school district, Kootenay Columbia, Campbell River have endorsed it.

The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC are making their way through schools districts and municipalities, and large number of unions have endorsed it (BC Teachers federation, CUPE, BCGU). They have a growing body of organization, community groups and municipalities that have endorsed the plan. So far the Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC have met with the minister of education and minister of children and family development, leaders of the opposition and some members have talked to their MLA's. At the present they do not have a commitment from the governing party or the opposition that if elected they would implement this program.

Virginia advised Rita that she is the BC PSAC representative for the women's group and she will talk to the higher ups regarding this program as we will be holding our regional conference in 2012 and we can also talk about it to PSAC in our next round of lobbying MP's/MLA's we will take this information with us. Virginia will also talk to the head of the Vancouver PSAC women's group about this organization and our group had talked about becoming members of the coalition but wanted to wait till we had seen and heard the presentation. We will discuss it at our next meeting. Rosemary suggested that we could also talk with our area council to see if they can help with some funding.

Rita advised us on the back of their brochure are the names of some of the organizations that have given them funds to cover some of their costs. Other provinces like Ontario, the primer of Ontario commissioned Dr. Pascal and gave him \$2m to come up with a plan for Ontario. The Coalition for Childcare advocates of BC was not commissioned to come up with a plan and they did not receive any funding from the government either. Rita advised us that they have on their website three videos of this presentation and a question and answer sessions that we can watch. There is a Victoria base organization called "PLAY" which held a public meeting last month and along with the Greater Victoria Childcare council have in the last five years done a childcare needs assessment in Victoria. Rita mentioned that if we are interested connecting with "PLAY," she will forward Rosemary some contact information as they are strong advocates and do good work.

Brenda indicated that she liked part that kids aged five start school. She mentioned that she spoke with her mum and other people and noted we are pushing the kids because they do not have an affordable environment to be a kid and not letting them be kids, which results them hating school by the time they reached grade three.

Rita stated the childcare community thinks that children need smaller environment, play base, less pushing, less stress to perform well at a younger and younger age. The problem is that there are some great childcare out there, high quality is the exemption and so few families have access to it. That is the reason they are trying to bring in the universal nature of the public school while holding onto the community play base relationship. Soon Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC will produce fact sheets on their website - For families - what will this plan mean to you. The costing -is it worth investing. Facts on number of children, mothers, etc. and the last one will be how this plan will play a role in reducing poverty.

The next initiative the Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC are working on jointly with the Childcare Advocates of Canada is "Childcare is a Right" and it related to their plan. How can they make that right real for the children of BC? This project is to explore the commitments that Canada made internationally to women, children and their family and the rights that relate to childcare.

Canada has signed three international UN treaties that are relevant to this project: -

- Convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women
- Convention on the right of the child. General comment # 7 - inform countries like Canada who are signed on the CRC how those rights should be applied to very young children. This comment is very relevant to the fact that Canada has failed to deliver on its promise to deliver childcare as a right.
- International convenient to economic, social and cultural rights, which speaks to the right of women to participate in the economic, social and cultural rights of their country.

All three treaties are relevant to Canada's failure to live up to the commitments it made. When Canada or another country signs onto an UN treaty, it is not like our charter of rights because the UN treaty describes the rights in more detail than our charter of rights. They are agreements between countries and they are supposed to help us if things go wrong. The treaties outline what countries are suppose to do, and we as citizens can hold the government accountable for living up to the promises they made in these treaties and the treaties state the government must respect the rights, protect the right and fulfill the right. It is not just the matter of signing it to say we believe that should be the case, the country is obliged to put it into practice.

The convention on the right of the child enshrines a number of rights for children that are very relevant. Each child should be respected as an individual. Children are citizens and have a right to: play, healthy food, health care, free public education, safe housing and early childhood education. General comment # 7 in addition to that also obliges the counties to provide assistance to the families including providing quality childcare, to ensure the person offering and providing the childcare is a professional caregivers who understand early childhood and ensure that the programs are affordable to all parents. There also needs to be a comprehensive frame work for the services, there needs to be standards for professional training, the work needs to be socially valued, properly paid and access is guaranteed specially to those who cannot afford it.

The convention to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women enshrines women's rights to be free from abuse, to health care, to equal work opportunity and wages and to a sufficient affordable childcare so they can participate and be fully equal.

Canada is required to submit a report every four years to the UN that outlines the progress it is making and fulfilling the right that it has signed on to. Non government organization can review the report the federal government submitted to see if the truth had been told. We are encouraged to submit our own reports by the UN to tell the community truth and bear witness what is really going on. Based on the information UN receives from Canada and the community organizations, they prepare questions for the state of Canada about their report. Canada has to send a representative to the UN council to answer their questions and defend their record on whether they had lived up to their obligation on these rights.

If the non government organizations can afford to send a representative to the UN, they can sit in and listen to what Canada's representative said and then they could tell the community truth as well. Afterwards the UN prepares a final report.

Canada has submitted their third and fourth periodic reports on the convention on the right of the child and UN will review Canada's report in 2012. Many organizations are disputing the picture/story which Canada presented to the UN about how good things are in Canada. So the Coalitions for Childcare Advocates feel as a non government organization as part of a civil society under these treaties have an obligation to bear witness to the human right violations, to policies, laws and implications outcomes.

The federal government is supposed to support them to do that. This federal government has cut off all of the funding for all of womens' advocacy organizations. The coalition for childcare advocates of BC and Canada used to get federal status of women money because it was their job to support the advocates but they do not get funding anymore, which is another way which Canada is breaking the treaties. The federal government is supposed to support their capacities to be actively engaged citizens. In this content the Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC have done a number of things. They have prepared their own report called "the tale of two Canadas" which they will submit to the UN at the end of November 2011. This report tells the other side of the story from the government's report. Rosemary asked of the government knows about this report and what they are planning to do. Rita said the report has been out a few months, and they should know by now. Kay mentioned that heard Canada last its G8 status because it did not comply with the requirements of the UN treaties. Rita stated that is not correct, Canada thought it was going to get a seat on the security council of the UN. Canada did not get the votes they expected to get, which resulted in Canada not getting the seat on the security council. This was a shock because Canada is generally viewed in the UN as a model country that protects the rights. Many people think this was because Canada failed to live up to the commitments made under the UN treaties, including its failure to meet its commitments to young children.

The Coalitions for Childcare Advocates of BC have also written a declaration to present to the UN council that is reviewing Canada's record on the childcare system.

Rita mentioned that PSAC nationally has signed the declaration and they are looking for national and provincial organization support to get the declaration ready to go. In the mean time, they will spend some time on public education about the rights that Canada has made a commitment to and their failure to live up to those rights. People need to see and act as if childcare is their right.

There are four handouts that are available for people to read (As children, childcare is our right, As workers, childcare is our right, As women, childcare is our right and As a family, childcare is our right.) There are also many workshops around this project “childcare is a right” that really works with women groups and committees. Women still feel guilty about going to work and looking for childcare for their children. The Coalition for Childcare Advocates of BC what to engage with the women to help them begin to speak with confidence about their right to childcare and not feel guilty or defensive about it.

Rita explained that two of their members (Susan Harney and Sharon Gregson are going to Calgary where the UFCW (United Food and Commercial Workers) national women’s committee has asked them to do a trainer day on “Childcare is a Right” workshops in the workplaces. Once the report and declaration are submitted to the UN, their work on this project does not end, they will continue to work on rights point of view around this. In the mean time they are looking for resources to help with the cost of printing their brochure and handouts as they have run out of funding. Rosemary stated that the PSAC Print Shop in HQ is also closing down and asked if the brochures and handouts are on the coalition’s website - Rita said yes, people can download them if they like.

The Coalition for Childcare Advocates will continue to bring international pressure and shame to Canada federally for not living up to its commitments. They will build a broad sense around childcare is a right and how would that right be in the real world and what would it look like, they have a plan for that too - the government just has to say “yes” and they are ready to go. The more we can talk to our MLA’s and municipal representative the better. Rosemary said on our members just has a baby and her mother is a councilor for Langford, there she will surely hear about this. Rita advised us there are some strong federal politicians that support childcare. Virginia mentioned that Keith Martin had a plan that he was trying to introduce to the House of Commons but his number never came up to present it. Virginia mentioned we have been trying to meet with MLA’s but getting response has been very hard.

Virginia thanked Rita for coming and making the presentation.

Adjourned at 7.45 P.M.