



B.C. Government to hire 200 child, youth and family workers after report release

B.C.'s child and family welfare system is at breaking point, with excessive caseloads putting vulnerable children, youth and families at risk, a BCGEU report released November 6 shows. The Choose Children report received considerable media attention.

The same day, the B.C. government announced it would hire 130 social workers by 2016. An additional 70 temporary staff working on ICM will be made permanent next year.

The Choose Children report gives voice to the concerns of B.C.'s children, youth, and family services workers, including at the Ministry for Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Ministry for Social Development and Social Innovation (MSDSI) and in community-based social services.

"The Choose Children report shows that the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children and families is being compromised because frontline workers are buried under massive caseloads, severe staffing shortages and a complete lack of resources," explains BCGEU President Stephanie Smith.

"We welcome the addition of 130 new staff by 2016 as a positive step. But more needs to be done, including the adoption of caseload standards, and the restoration of \$44

million in MCFD funding cuts since 2008," adds Smith

One of the key report findings is that 80 per cent of frontline child, youth and family workers in B.C. have caseloads beyond the recommended best practice of 20 child protection cases per month. Nearly half reported working on over 30 cases, and ten percent of workers reported caseloads exceeding 70 per month.

One-third of surveyed workers were also carrying someone else's caseload over and above their own, the Choose Children report reveals.

"Frontline workers can't always get those who most urgently need help. Quite simply, there are neither enough resources, nor enough staff; and the volume of work is intolerable. That's wrong," says Smith.

Between 2007 and 2013, 598 deaths and 1,453 critical injuries were reported to the B.C. Representative for Children and Youth.

Exactly 3,418 BCGEU members in Components 6, 12 and 3 responded to detailed online surveys – with exceptionally high response rates from MCFD and MSDSI workers.

The BCGEU President and staff also conducted a series of regional meetings with 412 workers in 14 communities

"We don't know what we don't know, and someone's going to get hurt or die."

Team lead, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Interior

"If we're this stressed, how are the families coping?"

Child protection worker, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Vancouver Island

between February and July 2014. The Choose Children report summarizes and analyzes those findings.

The report addresses six key issues identified in the surveys and consultations, including: funding, staffing, caseloads, occupational health and safety, ICM and training and professional development. BCGEU also issues recommendations directed to government in each case. The full report is available at www.choosechildren.ca

The B.C. Representative for Children and Youth, Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, welcomed the report, qualifying it as “ground-breaking,” and indicated that she would be recommending that the BCGEU be invited to formally present the report to the Standing Committee on Children and Youth of the B.C. Legislature in 2015.

“This is about priorities. British Columbia’s political leadership must take responsibility for the proper functioning and resourcing of the child and family welfare system, or carry the shame of failing to help the most vulnerable,” says Smith.

BCGEU will continue advocating for BC’s child, youth and family workers in 2015. Starting in January, members may notice billboard and transit shelter advertising in their communities.

The union is also developing a member engagement strategy based on the feedback received during the community consultations, to promote dialogue and support amongst child, youth and family workers across B.C., and to inform

union members and the public about the critical issues within the province’s child welfare system.

The union will also be developing a strategy focused on supports and services for vulnerable Aboriginal children, who are over-represented in the social welfare system. Already, BCGEU organized a forum with Dr. Cindy Blackstock and Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond in Victoria on November 17.

“It’s not about the job; it’s about not being able to do the job.”

Child protection worker, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Vancouver Island

“I have always loved being an employment assistance worker and helping people. Now I’m a data entry clerk. Someone will die from the lack of service and I sincerely hope it is not one of the clients through our office.”

Employment assistance worker, MSDSI, Interior

Over 70 people attended.

“It’s time government gives back what it’s taken from children at risk,” says Smith. Please visit www.choosechildren.ca to show your support.

Choose Children Report Recommendations

The B.C. government should:

- Restore \$44 million in MCFD funding cut between 2008/09 and 2013/14, adjusting this amount for inflation, and commit an additional \$231 million in new funding to support core areas, including special needs and mental health;
- Create a comprehensive, transparent and accountable staffing strategy, including filling existing staff vacancies and hire an additional 100 FTEs per year over three years;
- Adopt frontline worker caseload standards based on best practices;
- Address the incidence of workplace violence as well as staff working alone.
- Commit to either replace the troubled ICM or reveal when its flaws will be fixed.

SHOW YOUR SUPPORT!

Visit www.choosechildren.ca

Take 20 seconds to tell government: vulnerable children deserve better!