

**SPEAKING OUT
FOR
CANADA'S CHILDREN**

***Community Action Guide
Federal Election 2006***

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GETTING INVOLVED

In one of the richest countries of the world, children and youth in Canada are not doing nearly as well as they should be. Governments need to do more to support children, youth and their families. The National Children's Alliance has identified key priorities for change in this community action guide. You can make a difference and keep children front and centre on the public agenda.

- ✓ **Attend your local all candidates meeting**
- ✓ **Ask a question**
- ✓ **Distribute this Community Action Guide**
- ✓ **Write a letter to your local newspaper**
- ✓ **Send an email to the political parties**
- ✓ **Copy and use these facts sheets in your community**

WHO IS THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE?

The National Children's Alliance is a coalition of 67 national organizations working collectively to enhance the well-being of children, youth and families in Canada. It is a model for collaboration across disciplines and sectors. Building on the strengths of hundreds of thousands of people working on the front lines in our communities and their combined research capacity, the National Children's Alliance works to build consensus on its policy development by mobilizing and linking practice and research to policy.

The members of the National Children's Alliance are:

- Active Healthy Kids
- Allergy Asthma Information Association
- Adoption Council of Canada
- Big Brothers and Sisters of Canada
- Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada
- Canadian Adolescents at Risk Research Network
- Canadian Association for Community Living
- Canadian Association of Family Resource Programs
- Canadian Association of Food Banks
- Canadian Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres
- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Child Care Federation
- Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children
- Canadian Council for Refugees
- Canadian Council on Social Development
- Canadian Institute of Child Health
- Canadian Living Foundation - Breakfast for learning
- Canadian Mental Health Association
- Canadian Nurses Association

- Canadian Paediatric Society
- Canadian Parents for French
- Canadian Parks & Recreation Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Canadian Public Health Association
- Canadian School Boards Association
- Canadian Teachers' Federation
- Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada
- Child Welfare League of Canada
- Children's Aid Society
- Family Service Canada
- Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada
- First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada
- Frontier College
- Hospital for Sick Children Foundation
- Invest in Kids
- Kids Help Phone
- La Commission nationale des parents francophone
- Laidlaw Foundation
- Learning Disabilities Association of Canada
- Métis National Council of Women
- Movement for Canadian Literacy
- National Anti-Poverty Organization
- National Association of Friendship Centres
- National Youth In Care Network
- Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association
- Planned Parenthood Federation of Canada
- Pollution Probe
- Power Camp national
- Safe Kids Canada
- Save the Children Canada
- Scouts Canada
- SOS Children's Villages Canada
- SpeciaLink: The National Centre for Child Care Inclusion
- Street Kids International
- The Student's Commission
- Thrive! The Canadian Centre for Positive Youth Development
- UNICEF Canada
- United Way of Canada - Centraide Canada
- Vanier Institute of the Family
- YOUCAN
- YWCA of Canada
- YMCA Canada

BASIC NEEDS

MAKING THE CASE

- 1 in 6 children in Canada are living in poverty
- More than 300,000 children rely on food banks
- A two child family, even with both parents working full-time at minimum wage lives below the poverty line in a Canadian city
- There are two million full-time workers paid poverty level wages
- More than 700,000 households are in severe housing need, this is more households than Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick combined
- Half of Canada's social assistance recipients are families with children

KEY MESSAGES

- Income security programs and living wages are the foundation for reducing poverty
- Food insecurity not only affects physical health, but also mental, social and emotional health
- Poor housing conditions negatively impact on child health and development
- Instability in housing is a major cause of frequent moves for families in low incomes

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Would your party allocate the \$1.6 billion promised for social housing in the 2005 federal budget?

Does your party support enhancing the Child Tax Benefit to \$4,900?

With many families not eligible for parental leave benefits, would your party enhance the program to be more inclusive of adoptive families, part-time workers, self-employed women and families with disability-related needs?

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE

MAKING THE CASE

- Only 12% of young children in Canada have access to regulated child care even though close to 70% of their mothers are in the labour market
- Research is clear that high quality child care has a strong positive effect on cognitive and language development and school achievement.
- In a recent survey 90% of Canadians indicated that they expect governments to deliver accessible, affordable and nationally coordinated child care

KEY MESSAGES

- Quality child care means trained care providers, low adult-child ratio, cultural sensitivity, appropriate physical environments and regulation of services.
- The federal government has signed agreements with ten governments for \$5 billion dollars over the next five years to support quality, universally inclusive, accessible and developmental early learning and child care
- It is critical to invest in child care services so that families can have affordable child care choices
- Tax relief cannot provide the needed range of services or access to services particularly for low and middle income families

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Will your party honour the existing early learning and child care agreements already signed by the federal government and provinces?

Does your party plan to invest additional resources directly in child care services? If so, will these services be in the regulated child care sector to ensure quality?

Does your party believe in working with the provinces and territories to develop a national child care strategy?

MIDDLE CHILDHOOD MATTERS

MAKING THE CASE

- More than one quarter of children are not physically active enough to meet their developmental needs
- For every \$1 invested in physical activity there is a long term savings of \$11 in health care costs
- 1 in every 5 children have emotional and/or behavioural problems severe enough to interfere with their development
- User fees for recreation and cultural activities have increased steadily over the past decade and as a result the one million children living in poverty do not have equal access these critical supports
- Research clearly shows that successful schools must equally address both children's emotional and physical developmental needs in order to achieve optimal academic outcomes

KEY MESSAGES

- Government policy needs to recognize that children cannot meet their developmental potential without access to community recreation and cultural opportunities
- Good recreation programs have been shown to improve mental health status of children and their parents
- There are more than 250,000 organizations in the voluntary/NGO sector providing services to children and families
- It is essential that education, preventive health and recreation services are coordinated at the community level
- In 1999 all levels of government in Canada signed the National Children's Agenda – it's now time for action on middle childhood

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

- **Would your party be willing to invest in “Public Spaces Family Places” – an investment in community cultural and recreational infrastructure?**
- **Is your party going to address the policy void by developing a strategy for middle childhood that builds on the successes of the early learning and child care initiatives?**
- **Would your party work with the voluntary/NGO sectors and provide resources to foster integrated community services, recognizing the importance of existing child and youth serving organizations?**

TOWARDS A NATIONAL YOUTH AGENDA

MAKING THE CASE

- The transition to adolescence is difficult – morbidity and mortality increase 300%
- Brain development is critical during the teen years as the frontal lobes do not mature until the early 20's
- Youth have the highest unemployment rate of any age group and are most likely to work in low wage jobs
- High school drop out rates in Canada are close to 30%
- 1 in 4 young people report that bullying is a problem in their lives

KEY MESSAGES

- Youth programs are much more effective when they include a strong youth engagement component and use a comprehensive approach to address multiple risk behaviors
- Canada is one of the few countries in the industrialized world that does not have a national youth policy
- Youth engagement in school and community is associated with positive health status; however, the rate of engagement for youth with disabilities is much lower
- Average student debt is \$25,000 for undergraduates and the total student debt load is equivalent to the federal cuts in the post-secondary transfers

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Will your party take a leadership role in the development of a National Youth Agenda that is cross-departmental and includes youth engagement?

Does your party support a federal Child and Youth Commissioner to play a role similar to provincial child advocates?

Would your party reduce the burden of debt on post-secondary students?

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN AND YOUTH

MAKING THE CASE

- There are more than 320,000 Aboriginal children in Canada and over half of them live in poverty
- Children on reserve have a quality of life that measures 78th on the United Nations Human Development Index, similar to Peru
- Today there are more First Nations children in the care of the state than there were in residential schools at their height
- First Nations child and family service agencies recently reported close to 400 jurisdictional disputes with governments
- Over the past decade governments have slashed budgets for recreation and support services off-reserve, particularly for children in the middle years

KEY MESSAGES

- For a country reporting annual budget surpluses and as a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the plight of our Aboriginal children is a disgrace
- Community programs are critical to improving child outcomes, research is clear that effective programs are culturally and community based
- Aboriginal children end up in the child welfare system primarily due to neglect, a function of poverty and inadequate housing outside of the control of parents
- Children and their families are routinely denied basic services because of jurisdictional disputes among governments

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Does your party support implementing a policy to prevent jurisdictional disputes, such that families receive service immediately by the agency of first contact, and governments resolve payment disputes among themselves in a separate process?

Would your party increase investment in recreation and cultural community programs for children on and off reserve?

Will your party honour the commitments of the recent Kelowna meetings and make children a priority in their implementation?

INCLUSION FOR ALL

MAKING THE CASE

- There are 315,000 children between 10 and 19 living with disabilities
- Almost 1 in 3 children with disabilities live in poverty
- Children with disabilities are more likely to experience bullying
- More than half of recent immigrant children live in poverty
- Many recent immigrant workers are in low-wage jobs without benefits, even though today's immigrants have the highest ever educational credentials

KEY MESSAGES

- The results-driven education system is not designed to include children with disabilities and language barriers
- Many families with children with disabilities face economic consequences due to limitations in participating in the labour market and the added expenses associated with caring for a child with a disability
- Canada has signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and has committed to A Canada Fit for Children – governments have a responsibility to ensure inclusion for all children
- Inclusion means creating environments where children thrive not just survive

QUESTIONS FOR CANDIDATES

Does your party support enhancing the tax system to acknowledge the costs associated with disability?

Would your party enhance transfers to directly fund ESL/FSL for newcomer adults and children?

Would your party ease the barriers to allow immigrants to receive their Canadian work qualifications in a timely and affordable manner?