



## Department of Justice

### **GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW CHILD ADVOCACY CENTRE**

**VANCOUVER, October 11, 2011** – Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay, Q.C., Member of Parliament for Delta–Richmond East, Parliamentary Secretary to the Honourable Rob Nicholson, P.C., Q.C., M.P. for Niagara Falls, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, today announced government support for a project to engage the community in the development of Vancouver’s first Child Advocacy Centre. This project will bring together key stakeholders to determine how Vancouver’s children and youth victims or witnesses of crime can be better served.

“Our Government is committed to protecting Canadians who are victims of crime,” said Minister Nicholson. “Today we are taking the first steps toward the establishment of a child-focused facility that will stand up for young victims of crime.”

The aim of a Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) is to minimize the trauma of being a child victim of crime. A CAC is a place where a collaborative team of professionals work in a child-friendly setting to help a child or youth victim or witness navigate the criminal justice system. The work of CAC staff can greatly reduce the emotional and mental harm to a child and their approach can improve the quality of evidence brought forward in trials. Better evidence can lead to more charges laid, a higher rate of guilty pleas and convictions, and more appropriate sentences.

“Vancouver’s first Child Advocacy Centre will reflect the joint efforts of many Lower Mainland community agencies that are helping children and youth who are victims of crime,” said MP Findlay. “Our government remains unwavering in our commitment to protecting Canadians so that our communities are safe places to live, work and raise families.”

“We welcome the opportunity provided by this funding to build on the strong work and collaboration already in place in Vancouver’s social service, health and criminal justice agencies,” said Lisa Whittaker, Vice President, Counselling, Community Education, Trauma & Victim Services at Family Services of Greater Vancouver. “An enhanced co-ordinated response, like a

Child Advocacy Centre, is a crucial piece in offering healing, support, and justice for children and youth who have experienced or witnessed abuse and other crimes.”

The \$241,000 in federal funding over two years comes from \$5.25 million in funding over five years that was announced October 7, 2010 and is made available through the Victims Fund at the Department of Justice. In 2007, the Government announced the Federal Victims Strategy and committed \$52 million over four years to respond to the needs of victims of crime. In Budget 2011, the Government announced \$26 million in renewed funding over the next two years to continue the Federal Victims Strategy.

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## **Backgrounder: Child Advocacy Centres**

A Child Advocacy Centre (CAC) adopts a seamless, co-ordinated and collaborative approach to addressing the needs of child and youth victims of crime. A CAC seeks to minimize system-induced trauma by providing a child-friendly setting for a young victim or witness and his or her family.

The funding from the Government of Canada will assist Family Services of Greater Vancouver to develop a feasibility study, a business plan, and a governance structure that will stand as a strong foundation for a Child Advocacy Centre to serve the Vancouver region in the future.

Professional services offered by CACs include co-ordinated interviews by law enforcement and Crown Attorneys, examination of the child by a paediatric child psychologist, and trauma counselling. One goal of a CAC is to minimize the number of interviews and questions directed at a child, thereby minimizing any additional system-induced trauma. This approach enables children to provide more reliable and credible evidence, which may lead to an increase in charges laid, guilty pleas, convictions and appropriate sentences.

CACs help children and their families navigate the justice system in a number of ways. These include providing a child with a safe and comfortable environment in which to be interviewed by criminal justice professionals, minimizing the number of interviews and ultimately leading to better communication between agencies supporting young victims. Interviews recorded by video, as done by CACs, have proven to be an effective method for gathering valuable information to help both children and the justice system. CACs may also provide education and training to justice professionals on best practices for interviewing child victims and witnesses.

Through extensive research, it has been shown that CACs improve experiences for children who have been abused. Their experience at a CAC is designed to support their healing and assist them in recovering from the severe stress and trauma of abuse. CACs have also been shown to increase collaboration in child abuse cases, reduce costs and speed up prosecutions. This collaboration assists both the agencies charged with protecting children and youth and law enforcement agencies responsible for investigating criminal activity.