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**Equal parenting organization going cross-country**

**Newcastle resident heads up national campaign by Fathers for Justice Canada**

**By Moya Dillon**

NEWCASTLE – Equal parenting is a concept Kris Titus, national co-ordinator for Fathers 4 Justice (F4J) Canada, feels strongly about on a personal level. After going through a divorce 10 years ago, Ms. Titus became a proponent of equal parenting after realizing the effects her custody arrangement was having on her children. “I just thought ‘My God,’ they’re really hurting,” she said of seeing her children crying after leaving a visit with their father. “It just wasn’t fair to them.” Ms. Titus went back to court with her ex-husband to request equal custody, rather than the children seeing their father every other weekend. Their first request was denied. “They took issue with us wanting to be financially independent,” Ms. Titus explained. “We were told we didn’t have a good enough reason for him ending child support payments, even though we were going to split custody equally.” It took one more try, but the courts eventually agreed with the couple and the difference to the kids, Ms. Titus said, was instantaneous. “They weren’t crying or screaming anymore when they had to go from one to the other,” she said. “The change, in such a short time, was just amazing.”

F4J will be taking its message of equal parenting on the road with a Cross Country Crusade this summer. Organizers will make 30 stops between Vancouver and St. John’s as they drive across Canada in the “Barney Mobile,” a large purple van. The van will be staffed by the organization’s signature superhero-costumed supporters, which are meant as symbols of how children see their parents. “We’re the first and most important role models children see, to them we’re heroes,” Ms. Titus said. “The goal of the courts should always be to help both parents stay as involved as possible in their children’s lives.”

F4J supporters will be handing out postcards addressed to Prime Minister Stephen Harper at the crusade’s promotional pit-stops. The postcards champion a Motion to Parliament in support of equal parenting by MP Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon-Wanuskewin.) The crusade’s final stop in Ottawa in October is timed to coincide with the earliest date the motion may be read in the House of Commons.

“We just want equal parenting to be the assumption by law,” Ms. Titus said of Fathers 4 Justice. “People get so caught up with animosity during divorce. We need to keep our eyes on the prize, which is raising healthy, happy children.”

The Cross Country Crusade will roll through the GTA the week of Sept. 8 to 12 and will be making at least one stop in Durham Region.