

CHILDREN'S SERVICES REDESIGN IN ALBERTA

BACKGROUND

espc

Edmonton Social Planning Council
1998



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INTRODUCTION

In 1990, the Government of Alberta undertook a three-year process to completely redesign Alberta's child welfare system. The resulting report, *Reshaping Child Welfare*, directed the Commissioner of Services for Children to "create a system that is designed and managed within local communities", and to delegate authority "to communities for the delivery of services." The Government passed the enabling legislation for the redesign in 1996. But by spring 1997, the government had yet to propose how and precisely which "local communities" will deliver services such as Child Welfare, Handicapped Children's Services and Family Violence programs. Still, it has been made clear that "communities" means private or community agencies, which are not directly accountable to the citizens of Alberta in the way elected officials are.

The transfer of this social trust from the publicly accountable Department of Families and Social Services to independent local or regional bodies raises many important questions, among them:

- What protections should be put in place to protect children at risk?
- Which agencies are going to be providing these services, and what will be their motivation and ability to provide quality services?
- How—and how well—will services be provided to rural communities where there currently exist no local or private agencies to provide the services government agencies now provide?

Clearly, the well-being of children and families in care depends upon high quality standards, program evaluation and monitoring. The government has said it will continue to accept responsibility for "legislation, funding, standards and monitoring"—but without particulars, its commitments could be very broadly interpreted.

It is the opinion of the Edmonton Social Planning Council that in order to provide real protection in a privatized environment, a series of independent third party mechanisms, including random inspection and anonymous complaint investigation, must be in place. Children who live in situations which are likely to intervention, or whose families are living in poverty, are extremely vulnerable. Effective protective measures for them must be especially supportive.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council's Role

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent organization with a 56-year record of providing quality research and analysis of social policies which affect the well-being of people living in Edmonton and area. It has been the view of the Council that good public policy development requires some independent analysis, especially when the lives of our most powerless and vulnerable citizens are at risk.

The Council identified services to children in care to be a priority issue for 1996, the year the province was expected to reveal the Children's Services Redesign plan. With no intention of seeking child welfare funds or contracts, the Council was in a position to approach the reforms from the clear perspective of the interests of the child.

To this end, the Council struck a committee devoted to looking at how we as citizens can protect the public interest after the government redesign of services to families and children. The committee drafted a set of guiding principles (see Appendix A) before it set about its work. From there, the committee examined the following questions:

- What is the background leading up to the decision to redesign the system of delivering services to families and children in Alberta?
- What is the state of monitoring and regulation in the current scheme?
- Where are the potential gaps in a regionalized system?
- What specific recommendations will arise?

By early 1997, the committee accomplished the first two points of their agenda. The results of their work to date are represented by the present document "Children's Services Redesign in Alberta: Background" and the attached "Children's Redesign in Alberta: Legislative and Regulatory Framework".

The committee will not be able to proceed with the final two stages of their work until the province announces a more detailed layout of the newly redesigned system. The government had indicated that a set of standards would be developed by April 1997, but delays in that process have pushed the anticipated announcement date back to January 1998. The work of the Edmonton Social Planning Council's committee to review the Children's Services redesign will be on hold until the government announces the new standards.

Goal, Scope And Objectives Of This Project

The goal of this project is to influence positively the mechanisms for monitoring and standards enforcement which will result from the Children's Services reform process.

The scope of the project includes all services which are mandated under the Office of the Commissioner of Services for Children and Families. The objectives of the project are to:

- thoroughly research existing regulatory, monitoring and standards enforcement mechanisms;
- identify gaps in regulatory, monitoring and standards enforcement that will exist after privatization; and
- recommend comprehensive regulatory, monitoring and standards enforcement mechanisms needed after privatization.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PLAN

The Children's Services redesign initiative began in 1990 and was completed in 1993. The process included extensive consultation with the community regarding the future system and the production of a number of planning documents, including:

- *Focus on Children: Finding a Better Way, An Overview of Part One of the Service Planning Process: Laying the Foundation, Handbook I;*
- *Putting the Plan Together, Handbook II;*
- *The Early Intervention Program: Guidebook for Applicants;* and
- *Early Intervention Program Funding Guidelines Part 1 and 2.*

These documents are summarized in *Redesign of Services for Children and Families Precis*, a background document also produced by the Commissioner's Office. The information which follows is extracted from this Precis.

The consultation process (3,300 Albertans from 65 communities) undertaken by the Commissioner showed a consensus on the following:

- People need to be able to find help.
- Parents and youth don't want to be labeled.
- We need to take a "child in the family" approach.
- We need more prevention and early intervention services.
- We need to integrate services.
- Leadership and responsibility should be returned to the community.
- Existing Aboriginal agreements and treaty rights must be recognized.
- Programs should be funded only if they are successful.
- Communities need stable and flexible funding for services.

The Commissioner's report on the consultation process states that parents and communities want an active role in the redesign of services and in the responsibility for the well-being of their children. Further, "(g)overnment programs were not designed for ... flexibility and had overlooked the positive role communities could play in protecting and helping children". (Source: *Finding a Better Way: The Consultations and Research Leading to the Redesign of Children's Services in Alberta*, November 1994.)

The report also points to the lack of success in improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal people who make up almost 50 per cent of children in the care of Child Welfare: "Services for Aboriginal children have to value their culture and be sensitive to local situations and conditions." (Source: *Finding a Better Way: The Consultations and Research Leading to the Redesign of Children's Services in Alberta*, November, 1994.)

In November 1994, the Minister of Family and Social Services announced a plan for a new approach to delivery of Children's Services. Child and Family Service Authorities were established with the same boundaries as the Regional Health Authorities. Within each Region a Regional Steering Committee was appointed to coordinate a community planning process and to develop a service plan for the region.

The redesign of services is based upon four pillars identified in the government's action plan entitled *Focus on Children*. The four pillars and the guiding principles set out in *Handbook I: Laying the Foundation* are the basis of the Provincial Requirements for Regional Services for Children and Families.

The Four Pillars are as follows:

Integrated Services: Planning and service delivery will be integrated at the community, regional and provincial levels to facilitate barrier-free access to services for children and families.

Community Based Services: Communities support the principle of participation and access for all. The role of natural helpers, support networks and cultural groups will be integrated and expanded within the professional delivery of service.

Improved Aboriginal Services: Planning and service delivery will reflect the values, beliefs and customs of First Nations, Metis and other Aboriginal people in a respectful, collaborative way.

Focus on Early Intervention: Planning will provide an array of services to help children and families develop skills to increase their well-being and reduce the need for crisis intervention during their development.

A Vision for Children and Families has been established as follows:

- all children are safe, well-nourished and live in a stable environment which stimulates their learning and promotes personal development;
- services for children and families are effective, efficient, community-based and community managed;
- services recognize, respect and honour people's culture and values; and
- communities, friends and neighbours help and support each other, and work together to find solutions to their problems.

Upon the approval in principle of the preliminary service plan, each Regional Steering Committee in Alberta is to develop a service plan which, among other criteria:

- describes the provision of children and family services;
- ensures compliance with provincial policy and standards (there is no mechanism or system in place as yet);
- coordinates children and family services between regions; and
- coordinates children and family services with other authorities providing human services (e.g., Regional Health Authorities).

The Assistant Deputy Ministers' committee and the Deputy Ministers' committee, working with the redesign process, have been charged with ensuring that integration happens. Each of these committees are to forward detailed service plans to the Commissioner for approval. As of June 1997, the committees have yet to complete this process.

LEGISLATION

The enabling legislation for the redesign of services to families and children is embedded in the Children's Services Authority Act. There are a number of pieces of legislation which are key to the redesign of Children's Services, including: the Child Welfare Act, the Family and Children's Services Act, the Social Care Facilities Review Act and Day Care Regulation.

The preamble to the Child and Family Services Authorities Act includes the statement that "...the Government of Alberta has an ongoing responsibility to ensure and oversee the provision of statutory programs and services to children, families and other members of the community."

Section 1 of the Act provides a definition of child and family services as follows:

- c) "child and family services" means the programs and services for which an Authority has assumed responsibility pursuant to an agreement, and may include the following:
 - i) programs and services under the Child Welfare Act;
 - ii) programs and services under the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act;
 - iii) the provision of social allowance for the care of children under section 9 of the Social Development Act;
 - iv) the funding of women's shelters and other safe living arrangements for victims of family violence;
 - v) education and prevention with respect to child abuse and domestic violence;
 - vi) early intervention designed to promote and maintain the safety and healthy development of children and families;
 - vii) financial assistance to eligible families needing out of home child care;
 - viii) assistance to families involved in child custody and access disputes;
 - ix) any other program or service prescribed in the Regulation.

The responsibilities of Government are outlined in Section 8, which reads as follows:

- 8. Subject to the terms and conditions of any agreement, the Minister and any other member of Executive Council who is a party to an agreement are responsible for the following:
 - a) setting objectives and strategic direction for the provision of child and family services;
 - b) establishing policies and standards for the provision of child and family services;
 - c) monitoring and assessing Authorities in the carrying out of their responsibilities under section 9;
 - d) allocating funding and other resources to Authorities;
 - e) providing administrative and other support services to Authorities.

The responsibilities of Authorities are outlined in section 9 (1) as follows:

9 (1) Subject to the terms and conditions of an agreement in this Act and the regulations, an Authority is responsible for the following:

- a) promoting the safety, security, well-being and integrity of children, families and other members of the community;
- b) planning and managing the provision of child and family services;
- c) determining priorities in the provision of child and family services and allocating resources accordingly;
- d) assessing on an on-going basis the social and other related needs of the region;
- e) ensuring reasonable access to quality child and family services;
- f) ensuring that policies and standards established pursuant to section 8 are followed;
- g) monitoring and assessing the provision of child and family services;
- h) working with other Authorities, the government and other public and private bodies to coordinate the provision of child and family services.

Sections 16 (1), 16(2), 17 and 20 of the Act are also of particular interest, and read as follows:

16(1) For the purposes of this section, "inspector" means:

1. the Minister or a person authorized by the Minister, or
2. in the case of an inspection with respect to a services provider,
 1. the Minister or a person authorized by the Minister, or
 2. a person authorized by an Authority.

16(2) Subject to subsections (1) and (3), for the purpose of ensuring compliance with this Act and the Regulations, an inspector may:

- a) enter and inspect any place owned or operated by an Authority or a service provider;
- b) require the production for examination of any documents or records in the possession of the Authority or service provider and make copies of them or temporarily remove them for the purpose of making copies; and
- c) inspect and take samples of any material, food, medication or equipment being used in the provision of child and family services.

Section 17 of the Act is also of interest, as follows:

17(1) The Minister may appoint a person to conduct an inquiry with respect to any matter concerning:

- a) the provision of child and family services by an Authority or a service provider; or
 - b) the carrying out of an Authority's responsibilities under section 9.
-

Section 20 (2) a) of the Act states that:

2) The Minister may make regulations

- a) respecting the standards to be followed by an Authority in the planning, management and provision of child and family services.

CURRENT ACTIVITIES AND POLICY OF PARTICULAR RELEVANCE

The establishment of standards, monitoring mechanisms and evaluation process for the system as a whole are still under development. Details will be provided when available by the department.

The Commissioner's Office has a committee in place relating to the development of standards, the Standards Advisory Committee. It acts in an advisory capacity in the development of standards and the necessary processes for consultation with regard to standards for services to children across the province. The committee is chaired by Matt Hanrahan, Assistant Deputy Minister of Children's Services. Other committee members include representatives from the regional committees, other community groups in the various program and service areas and the Children's Advocate. In addition, two consultants have been hired by the Department to steer and manage the process of standards development. A province-wide consultation process on standards began in the fall of 1996. Each region will make decisions about the number of consultations to be held in their region and about who will be invited to participate.

The purpose of this phase of standards development is to:

- ensure communities have a voice in the development of standards;
- have the government recognize what communities are telling them about standards and how they will be most helpful; and
- identify potential differences in standards for the community at large and Aboriginal communities. (Memo from Matt Hanrahan and John Lackey to Steering Committee Co-Chairs and Regional Directors, dated August 23, 1996.)

The original timeline for the process is as follows:

Consultation	September - November 30, 1996
Data Entry and Analysis	by January 14, 1997
Analysis Document for distribution to programs	by January 31, 1997
Draft Standards Development	by March 31, 1997
Validation Process	by June 1, 1997

The Standards Committee produced the document "Provincial Requirements for Regional Services for Children and Families" (May 1996). It outlines the preliminary requirements, roles and responsibilities for government and Child and Family Services Authorities relating to services for children, families and other members of the government community. It identifies the legislative responsibilities of the government and the future relationship between government and the Child and Family Services Authorities.

Among other roles and responsibilities, it is stated that the provincial government has the role and responsibility to:

- establish policies and standards for the provision of child and family services;
- develop and implement provincial policy;
- establish provincial standards;
- establish staff qualifications and equivalence;
- monitor and evaluate;
- establish outcome measures;
- monitor and assess Authorities in the carrying out of their responsibilities;
- monitor compliance with government-to-government agreements and protocols; and
- evaluate regional and provincial progress towards provincial objectives.

Among other roles and responsibilities, Child and Family Service Authorities are responsible for:

- planning and managing programs in compliance with provincial legislation, regulation and standards, and in contracting local services and delivery and ensuring the "services are based on standards of practice that protect the public and ensure quality of service", and also to monitor and evaluate;
- assessing needs on an ongoing basis;
- continuously evaluating user satisfaction with services they receive;
- evaluating service provision through other mechanisms, as agreed upon with government; and
- monitoring and assessing to ensure contracted services are provided according to established standards, legislation and regulation.

The Regional Steering Committees are developing their regional service plans on the basis of the Child and Family Services Authorities Act and Regulations, the above noted Requirements and the Summary Format contained in Handbook II. All final service plans are to be in place by April 1998.



CHILDREN'S SERVICES REDESIGN IN ALBERTA
LEGISLATIVE AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

espc

Edmonton Social Planning Council
1998



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to provide a brief description of the various services or program areas under the Children's Services umbrella in the Province of Alberta. This summary includes a description of the role of the services, their legislative and/or regulatory base, standards which currently exist, monitoring mechanisms if applicable, and some additional information pertaining to individual areas.

Most of the descriptive information is from government documents, with heavy reliance on the information contained in *Information Pack: Government Programs and Services*, published by the Commissioner of Services for Children and Families. The Commissioner's office offers a great deal of additional information on individual program areas.

CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

Role of the Children's Advocate

The Office of the Children's Advocate was established in 1989 to provide advocacy to children who receive services under the Child Welfare Act and require assistance in having their concerns heard and considered.

The Children's Advocate:

- represents and protects the rights, interests and viewpoints of individual children and provides them with general information about the Child Welfare system;
- provides information and advice about the nature, adequacy, availability, accessibility, effectiveness and appropriateness of the services which are offered to children in care; and
- reports to the Minister of Family and Social Services and provides an annual report to the Legislative Assembly of Alberta.

The Children's Advocate represents children who receive services under the Child Welfare Act including those who:

- are subjects of support, custody and permanent guardianship agreements;
- are under apprehension or interim care and custody orders;
- are under supervision, temporary and permanent guardianship orders; and were subjects of an agreement or court order, within 30 days of termination of the agreement or order.

The Children's Advocate may become involved at the request of any person, including the child, who believes that:

- the child's interests are not being considered;
- the child's rights are being ignored;
- the child's viewpoint is not being heard; and
- all relevant information about the child or his or her needs has not been considered.

Authority of the Children's Advocate

The Children's Advocate is not a decision-maker for children in care and does not have the power to make service-related or placement decisions. This responsibility rests with case managers and guardians, who report to the Social Services department. The Children's Advocate:

- has the authority to access children receiving child protection services, their guardians, and all relevant information relating to the child;
- will speak on behalf of or represents a child when major decisions are made about the child;
- may provide assistance and advice to a court and the child welfare appeal panel, and initiate reviews and appeals on behalf of children;
- may delegate any duty or function conferred to him;
- may recommend changes to the child welfare system;
- is child-focused and will, to the greatest extent possible, act for, with and at the direction of the young person;
- will generally seek to resolve issues informally in collaboration and cooperation with others. However, the Children's Advocate can assist the young person to make use of formal review and appeal procedures where necessary;
- will support, assist and empower others who are involved with the child to act as natural advocates, in lieu of disrupting relationships;
- will not judge the position of the child or impose personal views, but will support the child in expressing his or her own views and preferences for consideration by decision makers; and
- is committed to providing advocacy services which are appropriate and responsive to the child's culture and background.

The Children's Advocate and the Children's Services Initiative

The Children's Advocate is actively exploring its future role and fit with the system as the delivery of Children's Services shifts to the community. In April of 1996, the Advocate produced a position paper entitled "The Children's Advocate: A Discussion Paper on the Future of Advocacy for Children in Alberta". The following information is extracted from this discussion paper.

The Advocate is actively involved in the redesign initiative and is exploring advocacy options which will complement the move to community delivery. The overall strategy, as the new Children's Services system evolves, is to proceed incrementally with the changes that will be required of the Children's Advocate Office. The plan is to raise questions with community groups and stakeholders utilizing papers like "The Children's Advocate: A Discussion Paper on the Future of Advocacy for Children in Alberta". The Children's Advocate will continue to provide advocacy on behalf of children, while learning and preparing for the adjustments that a changed delivery system will eventually require.

The role of the Advocate is defined as a "formal advocacy service". It also identifies, tracks and reports to the Minister on issues within the Child Welfare system that impact the effectiveness of the services being provided.

The Children's Advocate does not seek to replace the role of others advocating on behalf of a child. Whenever possible, persons who wish to undertake this role are assisted in this process. This assistance can take the form of providing information, coaching on effective advocacy strategies and offering emotional support in the sometimes arduous procedures that can be required of a persistent advocate. Additional information regarding circumstances in which the Advocate might get involved are provided in the discussion paper.

Looking Forward: The Future of Advocacy Services

As the delivery of Children's Services moves to the community, children receiving child protection services will continue to require someone to speak on their behalf. The need for an arms-length group to identify and help resolve systemic issues will also continue. In order to address these needs, the Children's Advocate is exploring ways of operating effectively and efficiently in the new system.

The Children's Advocate was established to have some independence from the system. A key question for the future is to determine what sort of advocacy service will enable young people easy access to the program in a regionalized environment, maintain the independence of the office and maximize effectiveness within the new service delivery framework.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Child Welfare ensures that the survival, security and development of Alberta's children is protected according to the Child Welfare Act. The Act defines a child as a person under the age of 18. Child Welfare also provides services to families and parents who are considering placing their children for adoption.

Legislation, Regulation and Standards in Child Welfare

The Child Welfare Act legislates services for children in need of protective services because of abuse or neglect. It also provides for handicapped children's services, unmarried parents services and adoption services.

The purpose of the Child Welfare Act is to ensure that children are protected. The Act is based on the following values:

- Each person has dignity and worth. Services must respect the person's basic rights and freedoms.
- Individuals, families and communities have the primary responsibility to meet the person's needs. Services must support personal responsibility and independence.
- Most children are best cared for within their families. Services must attempt to support the family to be a healthy, functioning unit.
- Social problems are better prevented than treated. Services must promote well-being as well as address problems.

Under the provisions of the Child Welfare Act, the Minister designates a Regional Director to take responsibility for most decisions and actions on behalf of children. These powers and duties, as described in the Act, are sub-delegated to and carried out by child welfare workers. A child needs protective services if the child's survival, security or development is endangered by the action or inaction of the guardian (usually the parent; the guardian could also be a person appointed by the Court).

Information on principles to be followed by service providers is available in detail. Presumably, these principles afford workers a framework within which to provide services and can be considered a very high level of standard.

Part 2 of the Act provides for several voluntary service agreements (including support agreement, custody agreement and permanent guardianship agreement).

Part 3 of the Act provides for protective court orders. (These orders are granted in Provincial Court and include a supervision order, a temporary guardianship order, a permanent guardianship order and an apprehension order.)

Part 4 specifies ways in which the child may be confined and treated.

Part 5 deals with Private Guardianship.

Part 6 deals with adoption.

Section 72 of the Act states that a Director may enter a Handicapped Children's Services agreement with a guardian of a handicapped child to provide services to the child or family. The child does not have to be in need of protective services. More about this area will be provided in a later section of this report.

Section 73 of the Act recognizes the role of an Indian child's band in planning services. (Note that the terminology used in this report follows the terminology used in the various government documents and legislation quoted.) If the child is a band resident, the Director must consult with the band before entering a permanent guardianship order. If the child is not a band resident, the director must seek the guardian's consent to consult with the band. The director must provide the band with a copy of a court order.

Under Section 73(5), a person who adopts an Indian child must ensure that the child can exercise their rights under the Indian Act and must inform the child about his or her status.

Sections 84 and 85 are of particular interest for the purposes of this project. Under these sections, the Minister may establish external Appeal Panels that have the power to vary or reverse certain decisions of a director. An eligible person may appeal a decision:

- to move, or not move, a child who is under a director's guardianship;
- to permit or refuse visits to a child who is under permanent guardianship agreement;
- to disclose, or refuse to disclose, personal information;
- to provide, or refuse to provide, support services to a child over 16;
- not to enter an agreement or apply for an order for a child who needs protection;
- not to enter a Handicapped Children's Services agreement;
- not to enter a care and maintenance agreement with an 18 or 19 year old;
- not to enter a post-adoption support agreement;
- not to accept an application to become a foster or adoptive parent; or
- to withdraw approval from a foster parent.

Beyond the Act is a host of operating procedures or principles that is followed by workers in carrying out the authority that has been delegated to them by the Minister and the Director.

Many procedures are set out in the Child Welfare manual that have been years in development and compilation. Its state of development is certainly an indication of the importance and complexity of the matters dealt with under the Act.

Partnership Agreement Between the Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families and Alberta Family and Social Services

There currently exists a large body of standards that apply to all child welfare agencies which are subject to the core departmental standards of Alberta Family and Social Services (AFSS). The departmental core standards apply to all child protection services contracted and funded by the department. Agency-operated foster care is also included. Agencies which meet the core standards may apply for certification.

Contracted agencies also have the option of seeking accreditation, which is a process designed to take service quality to the next level.

The departmental core standards and the AASCF accreditation standards are merged into one document entitled "Standards for Services for Children and Families". This document constitutes a two-tier system of standards. The process whereby an agency demonstrates its compliance to the Tier 1 core standards is known as certification. The process whereby an agency demonstrates its compliance to Tier 2 standards is known as accreditation.

Tier 1, the compulsory certification standards, is comprised of the current departmental core standards as well as some of the AASCF standards which may be deemed to be a minimal requirement for good practice by a joint department and association committee.

Tier 2, the voluntary accreditation standards, includes service standards, program standards, as well as some generic standards and constitutes the accreditation standards.

Certification (to core standards) is a requirement for licensing and is mandatory for all contracted child welfare agencies with four or more beds and for agency-run treatment foster care.

Certification and accreditation represent only one method by which agencies should address quality improvement concerns.

If an agency should choose not to take part in the process outlined and developed in this model, the onus is on that agency to propose and develop another mechanism whereby it can demonstrate to the department that it complies with the core standards.

Many contracted agencies operate both residential and non-residential community programs and are subject to the departmental core standards. However, there are other community programs which do not have a residential component and thus are not subject to the department's core standards.

Fee for Service agencies do not have to meet core departmental standards. This is a major gap in the current system. (Core standards applies to all Services to Persons with Disabilities programs, women's shelters, etc.)

Certification and Accreditation Process

Certification refers to the process whereby an agency achieves the recognition of having demonstrated compliance with the certification standards. Certification is mandatory for all child welfare agencies either operated by the Department of Family and Social Services in Alberta, or privately run. This includes agencies which operate residential programs, supported independent living programs, treatment foster care, family support and other community based programs. Certification is also required for obtaining a license to operate a child welfare residential facility in the province of Alberta.

Accreditation is the process whereby an agency achieves the recognition of having demonstrated compliance with the accreditation standards. Accreditation is a voluntary process aimed at quality improvement.

The process involves two components, self-study and on-site peer review. An agency choosing to be accredited as well as certified is normally required to undertake both components simultaneously.

Self-Study

Agencies are required to conduct a self-study as part of the process for preparing for certification or accreditation. The self-study is a process whereby the agency involves key members of its staff in reviewing its policies and practices to ensure each agency meets all the requirements laid out in the standards.

On-Site Peer Review

An on-site review of the agency is conducted by a peer review team as part of the process of both certification and accreditation. The peer review team is composed of at least one agency and/or AASCF representative as well as a departmental representative. The number of peer reviewers depends on the size and complexity of the agency being reviewed. Peer reviewers are assigned by the AASCF and department respectively. Agencies have the option of asking for a replacement if there is perceived conflict of interest.

Child Welfare Certification and Accreditation Board

The Child Welfare Certification and Accreditation Board (CWCAB) is an arms-length board responsible for making the decision about whether an agency has adequately met the requirements to be granted certification and/or accreditation. The board is composed of representatives of the Association, department, public and consumer representatives.

The peer review team submits its report to both the agency in question and to CWCAB. The agency also has an opportunity to reply to the peer review team's report. The agency submits its response in writing to CWCAB for consideration in arriving at a decision.

Term of Certification and Accreditation

Both the certification and accreditation of an agency lapse after a period of three years. Prior to the three year lapse, the agency is required to undertake another self-study and to be reviewed by a peer review team. CWCAB once again makes the final determination on certification and accreditation.

Agencies are required to review their compliance to standards on a yearly basis. They must submit a yearly signed declaration to the AASCF office and to the department attesting that they continue to meet the requirements of the certification standards and the accreditation standards (in the case of accredited agencies).

Confidentiality and Access of Information

Peer review reports on certification reviews and information about an agency's compliance to certification standards are shared with the department's Contract Managers and the government licensing branch. Information on accreditation reviews remain confidential—i.e., only notification of an agency having completed accreditation is shared.

Coordination and Problem Resolution

The Certification and Accreditation Council (CAC) is responsible for overseeing and coordinating all aspects of the certification and accreditation process. It is responsible for resolving problems with the process of certification and accreditation as well as any disagreements on the interpretation of standards. CAC also oversees the peer review process and the training of peer reviewers.

CAC is made up of representatives from the AASCF, the department and consumers.

Certification is a contract requirement for agency-funding through Alberta Family and Social Services. An agency's certification may be deferred. If this happens, the agency and the AASCF work together to resolve any outstanding requirements. Agency certification has never been denied completely.

Standards Development and Revisions

The Certification and Accreditation Council is responsible for overseeing the development and ongoing revisions of standards. The standards are developed and revised by Program Councils which represent the various service areas which are represented on CAC. The Program Councils have both department and agency/association representation.

A revision of the standards is expected as part of the redesign of Children's Services. The underlying rationale for this revision is to make the standards more outcome-focused.

PROTECTIVE SERVICES

Protective Services staff respond to referrals from people in the community about children who might need protection. If the child's guardian cannot or will not protect the child, the staff provide services that ensure the child is protected. Staff may provide protective services to a child and family only if the family enters a voluntary agreement or a Court orders the services. In 1994/95, staff completed investigations on 28,145 matters. In October 1995, the caseload was 8,660 children receiving protective services.

Services which might be provided are counseling or parenting training to a parent whose child remains at home. A child might be temporarily removed while the child and parent receive intense therapy. A child might be permanently removed and put up for adoption if the parents will not be able to appropriately protect the child within a reasonable time. Children may receive protective services while they remain at home with immediate family or other relatives.

In 1994/95, 4,409 children were living with other people, on their own or in Child Welfare out-of-home care. Out-of-home care provides places for children to live if they need to be out of the family home while they receive protective services. Protective services staff work to find a place which will best suit the child's needs.

Foster Care

Foster Care provides a child with a placement in the private home of the foster family. A foster family is approved, trained, supported, paid and matched with children either directly by department staff or through agencies under contract. In December 1995, 2,447 children were in homes supported by the department and 437 in homes supported by agencies.

Group Care

Group Care provides a child with a placement in a small group home operated by professional child care staff. In December 1995, 214 children were in group care.

Residential Treatment

Residential Treatment provides a child with a placement in a structured setting, closely supervised by staff from various professions. This staff gives the child intense treatment. In December 1995, 413 children were in residential care.

Secure Treatment

Secure Treatment provides a child, who has been admitted through a legal process, with intense assessment and treatment in a specialized secure setting. The department has 40 secure beds.

Supported Independent Living

Supported Independent Living provides a youth with an opportunity to make the transition to independence. In December 1995, 388 youths were in the program.

Unmarried Parents Services

Unmarried Parents Services staff provides information and counseling to unmarried parents who ask for help to make plans for their children. If parents decide to have their child adopted, the staff helps them with the adoption process.

Adoption Services

Adoption Services staff helps arrange adoption for children in the department's permanent care and children whose parents decide to have them adopted. The Court of Queen's Bench makes the final decision whether to grant an adoption order. Adoption Services include:

Home Assessment

The Home Assessment program completes home studies for people who apply to adopt a child in the department's care.

Ward Adoptions

The Ward Adoptions program matches children in the department's care to approved families. From April 1, 1995 to December 31, 1995, the department placed 123 children with prospective adoptive families.

Post Adoption Supports

The Post Adoption Supports program provides financial help to families so they can adopt special needs children in the department's care. As of March 1996, the department had agreements to help adoptive families care for 247 children.

Private Adoptions

The Private Adoptions program helps with adoptions of children who are not in the department's care. Parents place these children with a family or have a licensed agency place them. The adopting family pays a licensed agency to complete a home study and the needed documentation.

Post Adoption Registry

The Post Adoption Registry exists to:

- maintain information on adoptions;
- provide information about adoptions to adoptive and birth families; and
- help reunite people who were separated by adoption.

During 1995, the Registry handled 4,272 inquires and helped with 317 reunions.

ABORIGINAL CHILDREN

A large portion of Child Welfare services are provided to Aboriginal children. Although they make up a small portion of Alberta's children, Aboriginal children make up 42 per cent of the child protection cases. Therefore, both the Child Welfare Act and department policy demand that staff follow special procedures when providing services to these children.

Staff must:

- make every attempt to provide services and placements within the child's community and culture; and
- consult with the band when making plans and providing services for an Indian child and ensure that an adopted Indian child is aware of his or her heritage and retains the rights of Indian status.

Most First Nations in Alberta have agreements or other arrangements with the department to provide their own services or help plan how services are provided in their communities. Others are holding discussions. The department is also negotiating with Metis groups to develop Metis-specific services.

FAMILY TIES PROJECT

Child Welfare has a Family Ties Project that:

- promotes planning and services that prevent children from losing ties with their families, communities and cultures; and
- helps reconnect children who have lost their ties.

DAY CARE PROGRAMS

Day Care Programs is responsible for the following:

- overseeing the licensing of social care facilities (as defined in the Social Care Facilities in the Social Care Facilities Licensing Act) for adults and children;
- setting standards for day care centres, family day homes, nursery schools and drop-in centres that include the health, safety and well-being of children in care and the operation of the service;
- ensuring that standards are met and maintained;
- administering funding programs in support of families and child care services in Alberta;
- providing opportunities for children with special needs to be integrated into daily activities of child care services; and
- certifying day care centre staff to work in day care centres.

Licensing and Enforcement Program

The Licensing and Enforcement Program is of particular interest for the purposes of this project. This program is responsible for licensing, monitoring, enforcement and investigation of complaints in day care facilities. Day care facilities include day care centres, nursery schools, drop-in centres, out-of-school care facilities and residential facilities for children and adults.

All complaints and critical incidents related to day care facilities and other social care facilities are investigated by regional Day Care Programs and are referred to the appropriate authorities, such as Child Welfare, Police, Health, Fire.

The standards for day care centres address:

- the number of staff required according to the age and number of children in care;
- the qualifications of staff;
- the program of daily activities required for children's development;
- the physical environment, including indoor and outdoor space and equipment safety; and
- administration.

Family Day Home Program

The department has contracts with 93 agencies in Alberta which operate family day homes. These agencies, in turn, have contracts with about 1,800 self-employed caregivers who care for approximately 5,300 preschool children enrolled with the agencies (February 1996).

Regional Day Care Services

Regional Day Care Services regularly inspect each agency and a percentage of its family day homes to ensure that provincial standards are met.

All complaints and critical incidents are investigated.

Integrated Day Care Program

The Integrated Day Care Program is administered by each of the six regional Day Care Services offices. The program provides opportunities and funding for children with special needs to take part in the regular activities of a day care centre, family day home or nursery school.

Staff Qualifications and Certifications

Under the Day Care Regulation, all day care centre staff must be trained in Early Childhood Education and certified at one of three levels. The Provincial Staff Qualification office receives applications for certification, assesses training credentials and assigns a staff qualification level to the applicant.

The Staff Qualification office also enters into contracts with five public colleges across Alberta to deliver a 50-hour orientation course.

Funding Programs

In addition to the funding provided on behalf of children with special needs, Day Care Programs provide financial support to daycare centres, family day home agencies and parents.

Operating Allowance

The Operating Allowance is paid to all licensed day care centres to offset the costs of meeting provincial day care standards. The allowance lowers the cost of day care for parents who use day care centres.

Administration Fee

The Administration Fee is paid to contracted family day home agencies to offset their operating costs.

Child Care Subsidy

The Child Care Subsidy helps lower income parents with payment of their child care fees when their child attends a day care or a family day home.

FAMILY VIOLENCE

Office for the Prevention of Family Violence

The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence (OPFV) was established in 1984 by Family and Social Services to assist government in responding to family violence in Alberta. Some of the functions of the Office are:

- to maintain statistics on shelter use;
- to develop policies and standards for shelters;
- to provide consulting and training within the community on violence prevention;
- to develop materials for education and awareness; and
- to coordinate Family Violence Prevention Month.

Alberta Family and Social Services funds 17 women's shelters and six rural family violence prevention shelters throughout the province. There are three on-reserve shelters in Alberta: Sucker Creek, Wabasca/Demarais and Morley. On-reserve shelters are funded by the federal government.

The budget for OPFV is \$7.8 million. Shelters receive \$7.1 million of this budget to cover basic emergency services. Communities may also raise funds for public education, volunteer coordination, research, outreach, support groups and other programs.

Women's Shelters

Women's Shelters provide short term, safe and supportive environments for abused women and their children, or women needing emergency accommodation. These women are provided with counseling and information to help them to make informed decisions about their future. The shelters offer emergency services to women and their children 24 hours a day, any day of the year. Women and children can stay a maximum of 21 days each time a shelter is needed.

Rural Family Violence Prevention Centres

Rural Family Violence Prevention Centres were developed provide a safe and secure residence to rural women and children for a maximum of seven days. (They are located in High Level, Fairview, Whitecourt, Lac La Biche, Hinton and Grande Cache.)

Second Stage Housing

Second Stage Housing is a service for women and their children after they have left the shelter. Accommodation is provided in an apartment complex with extra security measures in place. In-house staff assist women in preparing for independent living in the community.

There are two second stage housing facilities: Women In Need Growing Stronger (WINGS) in Edmonton and Discovery House in Calgary.

The Office for the Prevention of Family Violence (OPFV) provides the following additional services:

- Women's Shelter Information Service;
- OPFV Resource Centre;
- Community Awareness; and the
- Interdepartmental Committee on Family Violence

HANDICAPPED CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Handicapped Children's Services (HCS) helps a family meet some of the extraordinary needs that arise because of their child's disability. This program includes financial benefits, information and referral services and coordinating services.

- to help families care for their children with disabilities at home;
- to facilitate the child's developmental growth and participation in community life; and
- to retain family involvement if a child requires out-of-home support.

All eligible children and families have access to the program across the province. HCS assistance to a family respects the family's integrity, self-reliance and responsibility. Children and families are treated with fairness, understanding, courtesy and respect. An overriding principle is that children are best cared for within the family. When this is not possible, the family is encouraged to have regular involvement with the child.

A Handicapped Child is defined as: a child who has been assessed by a medical/health professional as having a chronic physical or mental disability or disorder of organic cause. A child who is chronically disabled as a result of a traumatic injury is also eligible.

To qualify for the program, a child must be under 18 years of age. The guardian must maintain full guardianship responsibilities for the child.

Funding may be provided for:

- family support; and
- travel, meals and accommodation to assist parents with some costs of transporting their child to specialized services or treatment for emergency medical care, treatment or therapy, day care, etc.

COURT SERVICES

Family Court is the part of the Provincial Court that handles Young Offender, Child Welfare and Family matters. Family members may apply to Family Court regarding:

- custody and access to children;
- private guardianship of children; and
- mental health warrants.

Court Services

Court Services helps families make decisions and work out agreements when parents are separating. In most communities, the program offers Family Court Services. In Edmonton and Calgary, it also offers Mediation Services.

Court Services handles about 2,100 calls a month, 80 per cent of which are in Calgary and Edmonton.

Family Court Counselors

Family Court counselors help people make Court applications. They can also help negotiate agreements, provide short-term counseling, and make referrals to other community agencies.

If a family is not able to settle custody or access, the Court sets a trial date. If the judge wants reports about the parents, a counselor investigates and writes a report about custody and access.

Mediation Services

Mediation Services helps separating or divorcing couples work out acceptable resolutions to their child custody, access and maintenance disputes.

OTHER DEPARTMENTS

Details on the Education system, Youth Justice Committees, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission and Health related activities are available from the respective agencies. The original premise of integration of all service areas, including those outside the traditional Family and Social Services Programs, appears to have faltered somewhat.

Recent direction has been given to and from the most senior level committees on the Children's Services initiative, to see Departments all working together. It is maintained that this integration is crucial to the success of the model. Time is required before the true success of this can be determined.

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CHILDREN'S SERVICES REDESIGN IN ALBERTA

MONITORING AND EVALUATION FRAMEWORK: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

espc

**Edmonton Social Planning Council
1998**

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INTRODUCTION

On April 20, 1998, Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Family and Social Services, announced the release of what he termed an "Accountability Framework" for community-based services to children and families. The framework outlines the governance, funding, monitoring and evaluation structures and the standards established for the operation of the existing and soon to be named regional authorities for children's services. By early June, the Minister had announced appointments to all regional authority boards. For those involved in the redesign initiative and for the thousands of people working in the delivery of services to children and their families, these announcements marked an end to a long and, at times, arduous journey. It also heralded the beginning of a different way of managing child welfare services in Alberta.

Reactions in the community to these most recent announcements have been mixed. The province claimed broad-based community support for the entire initiative. In the Calgary-Rockyview region (Region 4) the board had been appointed in December and was already busy working on a business plan. In other regions, particularly Region 10 (greater Edmonton), there existed a significant level of skepticism regarding all elements of the accountability framework as well as claims that the board selection process had been subject to political interference. In early April, an ESPC survey of the Edmonton region's front-line workers and advocates in areas such as child protection, foster care, day care and women's shelters uncovered deep concerns regarding all aspects of the redesign initiative.

Around the same time, in response to increasing public pressure, the province released the results of the Coopers and Lybrand review of the child welfare program. One of their main conclusions with respect to the redesign initiative read: "Until a credible implementation strategy is developed for the devolution it is not clear if the Ministry has the capacity to provide and sustain the support required to devolve the [child welfare] Program." (Coopers & Lybrand, 1998, p. 3-40) It further identified three possible approaches to devolution: accelerated, incremental or limited transition. Despite being warned of the high level of risk associated with accelerated transition, the Minister announced that this was Alberta Family and Social Services' (AFSS) strategy of choice for redesign.

In the accountability framework news release, Dr. Oberg claimed: "Government will continue to set province-wide policies and legislation, provide funding and monitor and evaluate services to ensure that services are leading to positive results for children and families." The essential link between each regional authority and the province with respect to accountability are the proposed monitoring and evaluation structures and processes. They will be the key conduit for the gathering of information that will indicate whether or not authorities are living up to their legislative mandates. This information will form the basis for assuring the public that children are protected and families are supported.

With this important piece of information available, the opportunity to critically examine the proposal finally presented itself and phase III of the ESPC's children's service advocacy project could be completed. The following description critically examines the overall monitoring and evaluation proposal. It begins with an outline of the method by which information was gathered and is followed by three sections addressing the processes and structures to be used and the outcomes to be measured in this new system. Each section includes a brief description of what is being proposed and is followed by a presentation of the plan's strengths as well as potential obstacles to its effective development and implementation. Each section concludes with recommendations capable of addressing these gaps.

METHODOLOGY

In the spring of 1998, the ESPC conducted a survey of those in Region 10 who were working with or concerned with the well-being of children (and families) in order to investigate their views on the redesign initiative. The survey gathered information on general issues related to public social policy and more specifically on the proposed standards, funding and monitoring and evaluation frameworks for regional authorities. Of the nearly 1,000 surveys mailed out, over 240 were returned.

In June 1998, the ESPC brought together a group of approximately 25 people to examine the strengths and identify gaps in the proposed monitoring and evaluation framework. They represented parents, service providers at various levels, board members, and advocates interested in the redesign of children's services. The group was drawn from respondents who had indicated an interest in ongoing discussions regarding the redesign initiative. Upon invitation they came together to critically examine just the proposed monitoring and evaluation framework.

The following discussion reflects the thoughts of these survey respondents and focus group participants. It also includes the input of ESPC staff and other volunteers involved in the research.

PROPOSED MONITORING AND EVALUATION PROCESS

Description

The province proposes to create monitoring and evaluation frameworks through their "Community Based Model for Monitoring and Evaluation" (AFSS, p. 9). Above and beyond their responsibilities to appoint regional boards and to establish legislation, standards, funding schemes and other relevant frameworks, the government also promises to work closely with each regional authority in the establishment of goals, outcomes, questions, priorities and indicators of success as they relate specifically to monitoring and evaluation. They focus on the need to build "collaborative and inclusive processes" (p. 17) so as to promote an ethic of trust between partners in the new regionalized delivery system.

Strengths

- The government's commitment to a collaborative process involving children, families, regional authorities and service providers is encouraging. Many of these stakeholders have never been involved in examining the processes and outcomes associated with child welfare delivery.
- The involvement of service providers is considered a key strength in that the people who work in the sector have direct contact with families and an awareness of their struggles. This will be particularly important in the early going as trust in the newly appointed authorities among parents of children and youth will be slow to develop. Service providers will be able to act as important advocates during these times.
- The government has responsibility and authority for being accountable - monitoring and evaluation has the potential to ensure this happens.

Obstacles

- There is a distinct reliance on voluntary input to monitoring and evaluation. There is concern regarding the qualifications and supervision of volunteers in general as well as the capacities of local communities to muster the volunteer input needed to make the redesign initiative a success.
- There is no definition of "community" and the government's definition is often discriminative and divisive (e.g., urban vs. rural, native vs. non-native, competitive market orientation to service delivery, etc.). This divisiveness may impede the ability to collaborate between and within jurisdictions.
- Families who are impacted by the child welfare system have not been meaningfully involved in the redesign and thus there is little confidence that they will be involved in the monitoring and evaluation of services. Barriers to their involvement include vulnerability of clients, lack of access to transportation, language and literacy (and using plain language) and families' general economic conditions (e.g., poverty, working several low income part-time jobs, etc.). As well, many of the families who receive support are very isolated. The proposed involvement of families and children appears token.
- The reliance of the proposed monitoring system on reports from outside the government is of concern. There is a general lack of trust in the government in that they have not listened to reports in the past (e.g., "In Need of Protection" - Children's Advocate Report; Coopers Lybrand Report - AFSS Contracted Report; Rainbow Report on Regional Health Authorities - Alberta Health; Efficiency and Effectiveness of Public School System - Calgary Public School Board).
- There is a general lack of public understanding of concepts such as "outcomes" and "performance measures". There is no recognition of the need for education in the community with regard to building an understanding of these concepts.
- Self-assessments, taken alone, tend to be self-gratuitous and the government is looking for numbers and trends that "look good". This could influence the possibility of authorities creating overly positive reviews of their activities.
- There is no proposed mechanism to track the number of people unable to find or access services.
- The proposed process may make it harder to make the Minister and the provincial government accountable - there is no reference to the Government Accountability Act.
- The entire initiative is primarily motivated by the provincial government's desire to cut expenditures. Changes in oil or lottery revenues could have a negative impact on the activities of the regional authorities, including their work in the area of monitoring and evaluation.

Recommendations

- Advocates in each region need to be able to feel free to speak out without fear of reprisal from government. And they must be heard - action needs to be taken when concerns are identified.
- The children and families whose lives are impacted by the child welfare system are very vulnerable and there must be no threats to their involvement in monitoring and evaluation activities such as surveys, questionnaire and focus groups.

- Those responsible for measuring performance, be it government or the regional authorities, should consider the following:
 - ⇒ Consult service providers first and work with them to develop trust.
 - ⇒ Allow service providers to facilitate relationship development with "clients".
 - ⇒ Set up meetings in local communities to discuss monitoring and evaluation.
 - ⇒ Home visits might even be considered to reach "clients".
 - ⇒ Involvement in monitoring and evaluating cannot be dependent on computer access as many "clients" do not have access to these tools.
 - ⇒ Any communication must be culturally appropriate in language understandable to them. The development of strategies and criteria for monitoring and evaluation must involve the active participation of people from a diversity of backgrounds.
 - ⇒ Surveying parents and/or children 0-6 years at public health centres should be considered.
- The government and each regional authority must openly communicate monitoring and evaluation plans to service providers, advocates and clients. They should consider sending out condensed versions of service plans and monitoring and evaluation proposals to interested persons within each region.

PROPOSED MONITORING AND EVALUATION STRUCTURE

Description

Two provincial departments, Family and Social Services and Treasury, are working together in the development of government performance measures. AFSS will have staff assigned to monitoring the operations of regional authorities. The exact number of staff is not known at this time. Their responsibilities will be to work with the authorities in establishing evaluation and monitoring processes. The province promises the involvement of various stakeholders through "Review Teams". (AFSS, p. 22) The teams will work together to create Regional Progress Reviews or the monthly, quarterly and annual reports from the regional authorities. AFSS staff will, in turn, prepare the final reports, which will include recommendations to the regional authorities. The proposal implies that authorities will establish their own monitoring and evaluation structures.

Strengths

- The idea of Review Teams seems positive as it involves people both inside and outside of Children's Services.
- The Review Team has the potential to be a more collaborative process than the use of investigative agents.

Obstacles

- Accountability could be compromised by the fact that the Review Team will be responsible for data collection while AFSS will be responsible for preparing the final report and making recommendations. Giving AFSS final say on recommendations seems to contravene the government's assurance that regional authorities will be self-determined. However, if this structure leaves too much control in the hands of the authority, it could lead to gratuitous, self-interested reporting.
- There are indications that this type of structure is questionable with regard to determining accountability and achieving results in other jurisdictions, such as health. For example, in July, 1996 Dr. Lyle Oberg, then MLA and chair of the Capital Health Authority Review Committee, issued a report recommending significant reductions in acute care services in the Capital Health Authority (CHA) region. Not only did the CHA and health advocates seriously criticize these recommendations, they were never acted upon. If this kind of blurring of responsibility occurs with the operation of Children's Services Regional Authorities, it could compromise the well-being of children and families receiving services.
- The responsibilities of, and selections processes for members of the Review Teams are not clear or transparent. Depending on the selection process, Review Teams may lack the expertise necessary to either understand the complexities of delivering child welfare services or adequately appraise a regional authority's ability to address local needs. There are already concerns expressed in some jurisdictions that community-based board selection processes have suffered political interference. This reinforces the belief that a particular agenda permeates the entire redesign initiative.
- There is no mention of how regions can work together to monitor their own work and how to learn from each other. There is no mention of the future of the Child Welfare Information System (CWIS) and its capacity to continue to provide monitoring information between regions. Without it, the regional authorities will be unable to monitor families who move between regions to avoid protective intervention. The Review Team process is not responsive enough to address this issue.
- AFSS currently lacks the expertise and personnel necessary to provide all 18 authorities with the support necessary to develop comprehensive and effective monitoring and evaluation processes. There seem to be no provisions in the funding formula to address the costs associated with monitoring and evaluation.
- There is no mention of the role of the Alberta Association of Services to Children and Families (AASCF) in evaluating child welfare services. Currently the AASCF plays a fundamental role in developing standards for and certifying and accrediting child welfare services in Alberta.
- There is no mention of the role of the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers (AARSW) in monitoring and evaluating the delivery of services. The AARSW is responsible for registering social workers, regulating their practice, and taking disciplinary action against workers when necessary. The province is on the verge of announcing legislated mandatory registration for social workers. Whether or not this will include those employed by regional authorities is not clear.
- There is no mention of a role for the College of Alberta Psychologists (CAP), the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA), the Alberta Foster Parents Association (AFPA), the Alberta Community Living Association (ACLA) and the Alberta Association for Young Children (AAYC) in monitoring and evaluating the delivery of services. Each of these organizations has played a significant role in the development of standards governing the practice of psychologists, child and youth care

workers, day care workers and rehabilitation practitioners. Some play a fundamental role in the regulation of the practice of professionals working directly with children and families who will become clients of the new regional authorities.

- There is no mention of the role of the Children's Advocate in the new regionalized structure. Currently, the Advocate plays a vital role in monitoring services to children with child welfare status and advocating on their behalf when there is reason to believe their needs are not being met.
- The process of reporting appears to be limited to just the Review Teams and AFSS. This does not meet the needs for public accountability in the management of government funded services.
- There is no discussion of appeal processes for clients, service providers or authorities with regard to their place in the monitoring and evaluation structure.
- How and by when regional authorities will be expected to set-up and implement the Review Teams is not clear at this time. While these teams are being established the delivery of services will continue, which means children and their families will be receiving support and treatment through unregulated, poorly monitored services.

Recommendations

- There must be a capacity for independent third party monitoring directly accountable to the Minister. This must include: random inspection, anonymous complaint investigation and the capacity to recommend directly to the Minister immediate termination of unsafe practices. This "fail-safe" mechanism does not duplicate, but in fact supplements, the work of the Review Teams. Such a mechanism would also reinforce the role of the Minister with respect to child protection as defined in the Child Welfare Act.
- The roles and responsibilities of the authorities and the government need to be re-examined and clarified. Particular attention needs to be paid to the responsibility of each in the area of recommendations for change. How and in what time frame a regional authority will be expected to respond, and the actions the province may take in enforcing recommendations, must be clearly defined.
- The Review Teams must have access to a broad range of information. Clients, in particular, must be given the opportunity to provide information on services, and to provide feedback with respect to final reports and recommendations.
- Review Teams must be subject to a transparent and rigorous selection process. The province should be responsible for ensuring Review Teams have sufficient expertise to adequately assess the performance of a given regional authority. The province should also take measures to ensure the Review Teams include representatives of all stakeholders in the area of children's services, particularly clients.
- There needs to be a system to capture information on gaps within and between regions. Many believe that CWIS is an effective system for collecting data and sharing within and between regions and that it needs to be retained and improved so as to enhance the authorities' ability meet provincial standards. The provincial government has invested a great deal of money into this system, and the rationale for eliminating such a system should be clearly articulated.
- The province should take the advice of Coopers & Lybrand and critically assess AFSS's capacity to provide the support necessary to create effective monitoring and evaluation processes. Additional staff and resources should be added to AFSS and provided to the regional authorities as needed.

- The standards of practice and monitoring mechanisms provided by organizations such as the AASCF, AARSW, CAP, CYCAA, AFPA, ACLA and AAYC should be adopted as provincial standards for the regional authorities' delivery of services to children and families.
- The role of the Children's Advocate must be affirmed as it relates to monitoring the well-being of children with child welfare status. The confidence that Albertans demonstrate in the Advocate suggests expanding the office's role to include all children in Alberta.
- The Children's Advocate should report to the entire legislative assembly, not just the Minister of Social Services so as to provide transparency to the activities of the Advocate's office.
- There should be a clear, understandable process for making the findings of reviews and final reports available to the public.
- There needs to be appeal mechanisms available at all levels of the new system.

PROPOSED OUTCOMES AND PERFORMANCE MEASURES TO BE MONITORED

Description

AFSS has developed a monthly summary report to be completed by each regional authority. The reports will track each authority's achievements, concerns and emerging issues as well as the number of:

- child protection investigations;
- day cares meeting critical standards;
- turnaways at women's shelters;
- child protection staff vacancies; and
- cases in child welfare, day care subsidy, handicapped children's services, early intervention and women's shelters.

The province also states that it will "monitor the Authorit[ies] ... with respect to every standard." (AFSS, p. 10) They temper this statement by saying that some of the provincial standards will be assigned greater priority than others, and that priorities will vary from region to region. In addition to the development of provincial standards for the operation of the regional authorities, the province, over the years, has worked closely with various provincial associations in the development of standards for the delivery of day care, child welfare, women's shelter and handicapped children's services.

There are also performance measures outlined in the AFSS Business Plan that are supposed to be monitored (AFSS, p. 18). The only measure in the current plan relating to the activities of regional authorities is "[t]he percentage of children who stay free from abuse and neglect while receiving child protection services." (Government of Alberta, Budget '98: Agenda for Opportunity, 1998) Most regional authorities have yet to begin the development of business plans and are not actively engaged in the development of

monitoring and evaluation processes. Calgary Rockyview has completed some preliminary work on establishing performance measures. For its desired "children are safe" outcome, some of the performance measures proposed were the "incidence of child abuse", "incidence of youth violence", "incidence of domestic violence".

Strengths

Focus group participants could identify no strengths with regard to this particular aspect of the framework and survey respondents were not asked to comment on this aspect of monitoring and evaluation. As well, there is little consensus in the academic world with regard to the appropriateness of exclusively applying outcome standards to human services. Some argue that there is a need implement both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis to the delivery of social services. If so, this framework does, for the first time in the delivery of child welfare, day care and handicapped children's services, lay out a process whereby specific outcomes will be measured and client evaluation data would be collected.

Obstacles

- The standards set by the province are very broad and philosophical and will be very difficult to associate with specific measures. As well, core standards outside of those listed in the Accountability Framework are considered adequate for some services (e.g., continued licensing for day cares and standards for women's shelters), but are not for others (e.g., no mention of the standards established and implemented by province-wide associations).
- The validity of the measures currently proposed are too narrowly focused on the activities of the delivery system and are not linked to the standards that have been established as a foundation for the operation of the regional authorities (e.g., caseloads are a measure of the activities of the child protection system, not whether or not children and families feel safe) and are biased toward reductions in the delivery of services (e.g., caseloads). These measures can be influenced by the interpretation of standards by each regional authority and service provider - e.g., when to open a child protection file - and relate only to crisis intervention services. In the end, many believe the measures proposed and their interpretation will be driven by the provincial government's goal of cost-cutting.
- The idea of allowing some regional authorities to prioritize one standard over another is of significant concern. Many insist that one standard cannot take precedence over another because each is integral to assuring the development of a healthy child - if a regional authority fails to live up to any one of the standards, the result will be an unhealthy child. As well, there appears to be a lack of trust between families, service providers, regional authorities and government. There is the potential for priority setting to be linked to a particular philosophical viewpoint (e.g., non-intervention into families) and hence negatively affect service availability and delivery in a given region. Finally, there is a fear that prioritizing will be driven by the incentive to cut costs, hence encouraging authorities to pay attention to meeting standards that require lower financial commitments. Some of the potential impacts of prioritizing are:

- ⇒ This will become an administrative nightmare for the province to monitor - 18 different authorities means 18 different sets of priorities, processes and methods. The resources to monitor and evaluate effectively in this type of environment may not be available.
 - ⇒ The province may not have the expertise to adequately meet the needs of each regional authority.
 - ⇒ Differing priorities in the area of standards could contribute to a situation where people will have to move to get the services they need. Any need to access services in regions outside where a family lives will create pressures on a specific authority's resources. Some regions may not be able to meet local demand because of demand pressures from outside (e.g., similar to regional health authorities).
 - ⇒ Inter-regional access to services will create additional administrative costs that are not covered in the funding framework (e.g., billing back).
 - ⇒ This process may encourage the accumulation of specialized services in areas where an authority's priorities match that of the service. This could leave some authorities lacking needed services.
- In some cases, services in a region could be lost because providers are unable to meet the standards set for delivery because of circumstances beyond their control (e.g., a service has to move to a new location and there are no resources to bring the new facility up to standard).
 - All proposed measures fail to collect data indicating the number of families and children needing but unable to access services.
 - Criteria to be used in assessing how well a regional authority is addressing the "four pillars" of the redesign initiative are not identified.
 - There is no mention of how the allotment of funding in a given regional authority will be monitored by the province.

Recommendations

- The standards against which each regional authority will be measured must be consistent on a province-wide basis. The standards that are currently in place for the delivery of day care, women's shelters, child welfare services and supports to disabled children must be upheld. Clients and associations such as the AASCF, AARSW, CAP, CYCAA, AFPA, ACLA and AAYC must be involved in the continued development and refinement of delivery standards.
- The Province and regional authorities must broaden the performance and outcome measures to include indicators that measure more than just the activities of the delivery system. Measures proposed must also be logically linked to provincial standards. Consideration should be given to using quality of life indicators such as child birth weights, infant mortality and morbidity rates, family incomes, child nutrition and malnutrition, food bank usage, school expulsions and literacy rates among others. As well, the province should consider implementing a system to measure the actual incidence of child abuse and neglect. In the U. S., a distinction between the actual incidence of crime and the activities of the criminal justice system is made by using the Universal Crime Reports to augment the statistics provided by police and the court system. A similar system that surveys the general public with respect to the incidence of child abuse and neglect could be developed and implemented by the province.

- How can there be no independent monitoring capacity in a system designed to protect our most vulnerable children? In the model proposed, every player has a clear, vested interest in presenting the system in the best possible light. How will unsafe practices be identified and stopped immediately before children can be harmed?
- The province's overall focus on outcomes and performance measures seems to disregard the issue of process in the delivery of social services. How a vulnerable child or family is treated by a regional authority or its designated service is more important than the outcome achieved. How will the province ensure the processes used to achieve positive outcomes are not harmful or abusive?
- Will there be ample resources made available to establish structures and processes for collecting both quantitative and qualitative data?
- Does the province have the capacity to monitor 18 different systems of monitoring and evaluation?
- What effect will fluctuating provincial revenues have on the regional authority's ability to meet standards and to monitor and evaluate effectively?
- How will consistency and continuity of service be assured between regional authorities?
- Will recommendations of the province in review report be enforced? If so, how?
- How can the process of monitoring, evaluating and reporting inform the general public of the complex problems encountered by vulnerable children and families and how the services provided to support them enhance the overall quality of life in Alberta communities?
- How much will the development of review processes and the implementation of monitoring and evaluation strategies rely on the efforts of volunteers? What is a given regional authority's capacity to provide this kind of volunteer effort?
- What processes will be in place to intervene and suspend operations which are considered unsafe or abusive?

There are critical questions that do not appear here yet relate to other aspects of the redesign initiative. More will emerge as implementation takes place. Only with an open mind and a willingness to meet the challenges related to these changes will the government and regional authorities be able to successfully manage the transition.

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