

**Alberta Children and Youth Services  
Response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate  
Annual Report 2005-2006**

Concern	Response
<p><b>Policy Definition of Permanency and Its Interpretation in Practice</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "...despite best efforts, some young people will remain in the care of the Director until they transition to the adult world. The current definition of permanency as 'a placement outside the care of the Director' does not include these children. The Child and Family Services Branch agreed to draft policy to reflect the direction provided by the Table in this area. As of March 2006, there was no further development in this area." (p.6)</li> <li>• "The original concept of the Long-term Foster Care Agreement (LTFCA) – which, for all intents and purposes, is permanency in the care of the Director...The Department has advised the OCYA that if a best interest conclusion finds that a child/youth is best served by staying in the Director's care, the existing placement will be maintained despite the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Based on the data resulting from implementation of the <i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i>, the Ministry initiated a review of permanency options for children in care to guide revisions to policy and practice.</li> <li>• The development of an Aboriginal Permanency Strategy was initiated in January 2006 with the goal of ensuring a variety of culturally appropriate permanency options for Aboriginal children.</li> <li>• The policy regarding Long-term Foster Care Agreements states that if no other permanency option is viable, then the LTFCA will be honoured.</li> </ul>

<p>formal definition of permanency ... this intent should be reflected in policy and in the practice direction give to the service delivery system.” (p. 7)</p>	
<p><b>Restrictive Procedures and Intrusive Measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “It is the OCYA’s position that restrictive procedures and intrusive measures are distinct and separate matters, although the terms are often used interchangeably. Nowhere in Ministry policy or regulation are these terms defined.” (p. 8)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S. 23 of the Residential Facilities Licensing Regulation regarding Prohibitions speaks specifically to face-down restraints and other physical restraints.</li> <li>• S. 24 of the Residential Facilities Licensing Regulation specifically addresses the need for Ministerial permission to establish an isolation room and the circumstances under which it may be used.</li> <li>• Policy supports the regulation by providing clarity around the use of any restrictive procedures, by setting parameters for the use of appropriate disciplinary measures that promote self-esteem and independence, and by identifying acceptable and unacceptable child management strategies in both licensed foster homes and in licensed child and youth facilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Allegations of Maltreatment of Children and Youth in Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We urge the Department to develop policy, procedures and practices that accurately reflect the differences between allegations concerning children and youth who are in care and those who are not known to the service system and that clarify the associated practice and recording expectations.” (p.10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Child Youth Information Module (CYIM) contains a section dedicated to identifying and documenting “quality of care” issues or other concerns with the care provided to children and youth in all residential facilities.</li> <li>• A review of the Ministry responses to allegations of maltreatment of children in care has been initiated.</li> </ul>

## Effective Service to Adolescents

- "...the developmental challenge of adolescence is identity formation ... this in turn leads to a challenging of authority. Having said this, it is critical for the child intervention system to put an understanding and context around this reality; there is a need to match expectation and capacity in service plans."(p.10)
- The *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* provides for the extension of services to youth up to 22 years of age.
- The Ministry conducted exit surveys with youth leaving care to assess the effectiveness of services received.
- The Ministry initiated a review of the assessment model to address emerging issues in case practice, including enhanced services for adolescents and permanency options.
- Approximately 2,000 youth participated in 25 youth forums to address issues and needs identified while transitioning to adulthood, including education, employment and mentoring.
- The Ministry worked with youth to establish 10 Youth Networks across the province to engage youth in their own communities.
- Under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*, additional procedural rights have been given to children and youth. A handbook, *Procedural Rights of Children and Youth* has been published and is distributed to caregivers and youth by caseworkers.
- Policy was revised to reflect the need for caseworkers to confirm they have discussed the child or youth's procedural rights.
- The Advancing Futures Bursary Program has been expanded to reach a broader youth population.

## Alberta Children and Youth Services Response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Annual Report 2006-2007

### Preamble

The 2006-2007 Annual Report represents a marked departure from previous and subsequent reports as the nature and content of the report is inconsistent with others received. The 2006-2007 report focuses solely on a generalized North American perspective on high school completion of youth in care. The report does not identify local provincial systemic issues.

Further, the OCYA makes eight (8) recommendations, which are primarily focused on the education system rather than child intervention services provided by Alberta Children and Youth Services. It is not possible to comment on recommendations aimed specifically at Alberta Education. Notwithstanding this, however, where possible, information specific to the recommendations has been provided below.

Concern	Response
<p><b>School Completion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Our concern is that not enough children and youth in care are completing high school and, as a result, are missing one of the significant factors related to successful transition to adulthood. This 2006/07 report focuses on the topic of high school completion for youth in care and makes recommendations about what can be done to increase high school completion rates for children and youth in care.” (p. 6)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alberta is involved in the development of national outcome measurement particular to child intervention services.</li> <li>School performance continues to be one of the ten outcome indicators examined as a part of the National Outcome Measures (NOMS).</li> <li>In the early spring of 2007, Alberta Children’s Services and Alberta Education entered into a joint-Ministry project to implement pilot strategies on improving educational outcomes for children and youth in care. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The initiative will allow children in care to be tracked for Provincial Achievement Testing, age appropriate grade level placement, high school completion and drop out/return rates.</li> <li>A review of best practices for school achievement has been initiated.</li> </ul> </li> <li>The Ministry has initiated the Registered Education Savings Program for Children in Permanent Care, which will provide educational incentive funds for youth who go on to pursue post-secondary education.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Recommendations (p. 15):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1, 3 and 7</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each of these recommendations speaks to the inclusion of school success in case planning and the assignment of responsibility and educational champion for children and youth in care.</li> <li>• Policy clearly assigns the caregiver the primary responsibility to deal with educational matters, but that the caseworker should be involved as much as possible.</li> <li>• Educational placement is a part of standard case planning for children and youth in care.</li> <li>• Each child or youth's school placement and progress is tracked in the Child Youth Information Module (CYIM).</li> <li>• Copies of progress reports and educational assessments are kept in intervention files, as is information regarding any caseworker contact with the school placement.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This recommendation refers to changing the manner in which youth who are 18 and older receive services in relation to educational attainment, in terms of providing more than just financial supports.</li> <li>• The recommendations do not acknowledge the voluntary nature of agreements when a youth has turned 18 and enters into a negotiated contract with the Ministry as an adult.</li> <li>• Recommendation 5 suggests that the Ministry should re-evaluate the position of providing supports past the age of 22 years. It should be noted that with the introduction of the <i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i> in November 2004, supports were extended from age 20 to age 22.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The OCYA is recommending that a particular resource be used for children and youth in permanent care or transitioning to adulthood. The Assessment tool that was introduced in 2006-07 was modelled after this tool. The subsequent development of the casework practice model and the tools to support the model have incorporated key elements of the recommended tool.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 8</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• This recommendation suggests coordination between the child welfare and educational systems.</li><li>• This information is addressed above in discussing the joint project between the Ministry and Alberta Education.</li></ul>
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**Alberta Children and Youth Services  
Response to the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate  
Annual Report 2007-2008**

Concern	Response
<p><b>Permanency</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“As referenced in the 2005-06 Annual Report, the current definition of permanence used by the Ministry excludes children and youth in the permanent care of the Director... Despite an apparent commitment to revise the definition of permanence, Ministry policy in this regard remains unchanged.” (p.5-6)</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Aboriginal children and youth, children and youth with special needs and older children and youth continue to be the least likely to experience permanency ... we see</li> </ul>	<p><u>General:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Learnings from implementation of the <i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i> have guided development of a revised permanency planning policy, which will be implemented in 2008-09. The revisions have resulted in broadening the definition of permanency to be child specific and focus on building stability, attachment and belonging for a child, emphasizing both the maintenance of enduring relationships and stable placements. The process included widespread consultation provincially and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) provided significant input into the new policy.</li> <li>The Ministry streamlined home assessment, approval and training processes to expedite the placement of children in adoptive and private guardianship homes.</li> <li>From 2006/07 to 2007/08, increases of 11% in adoptive placements and 57% in private guardianship placements were realized.</li> </ul> <p><u>Youth/Adolescents:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Significant revisions were made to youth policies in 2007, including the policies regarding transition planning for youth and youth with disabilities. The OCYA provided input into these policies through participation at the Provincial Enhancement Table.</li> </ul> <p><u>Aboriginal children and youth:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The Ministry developed (in 2006-07) and began implementing (in 2007-08) the “Permanency Planning for Aboriginal Children” strategy, aimed at increasing culturally appropriate and permanent placements for Aboriginal children in care.</li> <li>File reviews for each of the three Treaty areas have been completed for children aged 0-12, for a total of 652 files reviewed.</li> </ul>

<p>a need for communication -- conversation between the Department, frontline service providers and the public – about how to find the means to grant the very reasonable request of children and youth in care to be a part of a family.” (p.6)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An increase of 28% in Adoption and Private Guardianship Orders for Aboriginal children was realized in the 2007-08 fiscal year versus the previous fiscal year.</li> <li>• Videoconferencing technology has been set up in five DFNA communities to support the promotion of permanency planning for Aboriginal children by allowing greater participation in the case planning process.</li> <li>• As a follow-up to the development of a provincial action plan to increase Métis people’s participation and involvement in programs, policies and standards, a Métis Steering Committee has recently been established.</li> <li>• In April 2007, a historic agreement was reached between Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) and Alberta First Nations that provides an additional \$98 million over five years for the delivery of early intervention and prevention services to children living on-reserve.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Restrictive Procedures and Intrusive Measures</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The OCYA believes there is a lack of clarity around terminology, an absence of comprehensive procedures and a want of accountability expectations for restrictive procedures and intrusive measures used to control the behaviour of children and youth in care.” (p. 7)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• S.23 of the Residential Facilities Licensing Regulation regarding Prohibitions speaks specifically to face-down restraints and other physical restraints.</li> <li>• S. 24 of the Residential Facilities Licensing Regulation specifically addresses the need for Ministerial permission to establish an isolation room and the circumstances under which it may be used.</li> <li>• Accreditation is required for all residential facilities (foster care, supported independent living, and group care, including secure services) and family and community-based services (in-home/intensive family support and youth workers) from one of four approved accrediting bodies. The standards of each accrediting body speaks specifically to restrictive procedures.</li> <li>• The Ministry has initiated a comprehensive review of accreditation processes to ensure accredited agencies have appropriate standards in place, including suicide intervention, restrictive procedures, use of seclusion, and reporting of critical incidents. Results from this review will be implemented in 2008-09.</li> <li>• Policy supports the regulation by providing clarity</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Physical restraints, psychotropic medications, confining children/youth in locked rooms, denial of phone or personal contact with family members, listening to phone conversations or to conversations during visits – these are but some of the restrictive procedures and intrusive measures used by caregivers.” (p.7)</li> </ul>	<p>around the use of any restrictive procedures, by setting parameters for the use of appropriate disciplinary measures that promote self-esteem and independence, and by identifying acceptable and unacceptable child management strategies in both licensed foster homes and in licensed child and youth facilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychotropic medications are only administered upon consultation and prescription by qualified medical professionals; policy states that where any emotion, thought, behaviour-altering drugs or aversion therapy is required, the case plan must receive consent from the manager.</li> <li>• Certain monitoring activities, including listening to conversations, are considered safety measures for children and youth in care, not disciplinary measures.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Children and Youth with Complex Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Policy documents released by the Alberta Children and Youth Initiative ...speak to enhancing government’s service support for and to children and youth with complex needs. The documents address the need to develop an easily identifiable, integrated response to children and youth with complex needs in every CFSA. Unfortunately,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding is in place for multi-disciplinary teams (MDTs). MDT coordinators have been seconded from the education and health sectors, which has enhanced the coordination of cross-sector supports to children with complex needs. Videoconferencing is in place in all regions to increase access to MDTs by rural families. MDT coordinators share best practice information and develop policies to enhance or streamline the process for families.</li> <li>• In partnership with the Ministry of Seniors and Community Supports, training sessions have been delivered to all regions on the “Youth in Transition Protocol” document.</li> <li>• Numerous activities have been completed pertaining to the Child and Youth with Complex Needs Initiative: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A funding review has been completed and the</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>this approach to support for children and youth in the care of the Ministry has not been realized.” (p.8-9)</p>	<p>report/recommendations approved;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A review of “The Management of Integrated Services for Children and Youth with Complex Needs and Their Families: Guidelines for Alberta Regional Integrated Case Management Teams” has been completed, and the guidelines have been clarified and the report approved; and</li> <li>▪ A summative evaluation of the initiative has been completed and the report and recommendations approved; a work plan has been developed in response to the recommendations and is being implemented.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Investigation of Protection Reports about Children and Youth in Care</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “...there has been no policy and procedure direction from the department and the changes from authority to authority are inconsistent...We believe this can only be remedied by the Department developing clear direction – policy, procedures and practices – that differentiate the service response to allegations concerning children and youth who are in care and those who are not known to the service system. “ (p. 9-10)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry has undertaken to develop policy that will clarify terminology and procedures to improve identification and tracking of concerns regarding children in care. Significant consultation has occurred with key stakeholders including regional experts, legal advisors and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. This policy will be implemented in 2008-09.</li> <li>• The Ministry identified as a priority and developed subsequent policy and training specific to the impact of exposure to family violence as an example of child maltreatment.</li> <li>• Alberta is an active participant in the Canadian Incidence Study on Child Maltreatment and over-sampled in order to ensure all necessary baseline data will be available as a basis for policy development.</li> </ul>
<p><b>School Completion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The OCYA believes that greater attention must be given to setting education attainment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry continues to work in conjunction with Alberta Education to implement pilot strategies on improving outcomes, including school performance and high school completion for children in care;</li> </ul>

goals for children and youth in care and for improving high school completion rates. Our experience suggests that education is not sufficiently considered in service planning for children and youth in care.” (p.10)

- In addition to the tracking Provincial Achievement Testing, age appropriate grade level placement, high school completion and drop out/return rates, the project will look at special needs programs.
- A review of best practices for school achievement is ongoing.
- Data matching and analysis have been completed for achievement testing, grade appropriate placement, high school completion and drop out/return rates for 2007-08; the analysis is underway.
- The Ministry continues to improve access to the Advancing Futures Bursary (AFB) Program to help increase the educational attainment of youth in care.
  - A Resiliency Survey has been developed and finalized, which will be included in the AFB application process for all recipients during the Fall 2008 intake.
  - A recruitment plan has been developed and implementation is forthcoming. AFB Program Coordinators will be visiting CFSAs and DFNAs to meet with caseworkers, youth in care and youth serving agencies. AFB promotional materials will also be distributed.
- The Ministry has implemented the Registered Education Savings Program for Children in Permanent Care, which will provide educational incentive funds for youth who go on to pursue post-secondary education.
  - Alberta is the first jurisdiction nationally to implement the RESP Program.
  - Approximately 4,600 children and youth have recently been identified as eligible for grants from either federal or provincial programs; mass enrolment is ongoing.
  - To date, approximately 160 individual RESPs have been established, with an overall investment of over \$100,000 and individual investments ranging from \$625 to \$1,625, depending upon the age of the child.

<p><b>Placements</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “For whatever reasons, there has been a net decrease in the number of foster homes in Alberta. At the same time, Alberta’s booming economy has resulted in an exodus of staff from contracted group care resources to other employment opportunities with better pay. All of this results in decreased placement resources for children and youth in care.” (p.12)</li> </ul>	<p>The Ministry has undertaken several initiatives to improve recruitment and retention of caregivers, including foster parents and kinship care providers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A leading practices document has been developed and distributed to guide recruitment and retention strategy development.</li> <li>• Increases to basic foster care rates have been provided in each of the years referenced by this report.</li> <li>• Videoconferencing options have been developed and implemented to increase access to training for foster parents and kinship care providers.</li> <li>• A provincial caregiver awareness and recruitment campaign has been initiated, aimed at increasing the number of foster parents and Aboriginal caregivers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ The foster care recruitment website was launched in October 2007.</li> <li>▪ Regional advertising toolkits will support CFSA’s and DFNA’s in developing and implementing tailored recruitment materials.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The Aboriginal recruitment campaign will be relevant and meaningful to prospective Aboriginal caregivers, with the intent to increase the number of Aboriginal children placed in culturally appropriate homes.</li> </ul>
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**Note:**

It should be noted that throughout this time period, the Ministry has made focused efforts to improve processes in the spirit of continuous improvement and quality assurance. Examples include the following:

- Development, review and revision of standards for the Child Intervention and Family Support for Children with Disabilities Programs
- Enhanced support to CFSA’s and DFNA’s to improve compliance to standards
- Development of a variety of reporting mechanisms and tools to ensure necessary program information is available to the field to ensure ongoing quality assurance and continuous improvement