

## Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Quarterly Report (April 1 to June 30, 2008)

### Alberta Children and Youth Services Response

#### Report on Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSA) and Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs)

The tables below include information about how cases where mandatory notifications were made to the advocate were addressed by CFSA and DFNA. CFSA and DFNA are required by ministry policy to inform the advocate whenever:

- A child or youth is alleged to have suffered physical, emotional, or sexual abuse while in provincial government care.
- A child or youth receiving services, or a significant person in their life, disagrees with the services planned for a child or youth in care.
- It is felt that the viewpoint or interests of a child or youth in care are not being considered or the rights of a child or youth in care are not being respected.

The ministry response section of the table shows the number of such incidents reported to the advocate and whether they were founded or unfounded, based on the facts discovered when the incident was investigated.

When an allegation is verified, the first priority of the ministry is to take immediate steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child or youth in care. The nature of these steps vary, depending on the unique circumstances of each case and can include:

- The permanent closure of a foster home or kinship care home, or the discipline of group home staff, up to and including dismissal. Incidents that are criminal in nature are referred to the appropriate police authorities.
- A requirement that foster parents or kinship caregivers receive additional training before being able to care for children or youth in their home again. In some cases a child or youth in care may remain with the foster parent or kinship caregiver, provided their safety and wellbeing can be assured.
- The need for foster parents or kinship caregivers to take additional steps to ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of children and youth in their care, such as making sure third parties who have placed the safety and wellbeing of the young person at risk are barred access to the child or youth.
- The ministry providing additional supports and services to the foster parent or kinship caregiver and increasing its monitoring activities.
- Forwarding verified cases of abuse to the ministry legal services branch for referral to the Office of the Public Trustee.

#### Report on Child and Family Services Authorities

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
Southwest CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine of the files opened were mandatory notifications and four of these involved children under the "allegation of abuse in care" category.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• These mandatory notifications involved nine children. Four of the notifications had to do with four children in the same placement.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ None of the four allegations of abuse were substantiated.</li> <li>○ The concerns of the remaining five children were incorrectly categorized in the Quarterly Report (they were not allegations of abuse but rather "youth disagrees with a significant decision" and "competing points of view").</li> </ul> </li> <li>• A review of this concern found that further permanency planning was necessary.                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A comprehensive cultural plan was developed and consultation and negotiations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inability to implement the permanency plan.</li> <li>• In this reporting period, placement for difficult youth was a major theme.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ regarding a potential adoption are occurring with the child's Aboriginal Band.</li> <li>○ Steps are also being taken to ensure the child maintains a connection to their family during this process.</li> <li>• In response to this general observation by the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The regional foster care unit is working on a plan to recruit and provide foster families with the skills to work with adolescents who are difficult to manage.</li> <li>○ A proposal from the regional residential treatment facility that assists youth transitioning from that program into foster care is currently being considered. This proposal would prepare difficult youth for the transition to a foster care placement.</li> <li>○ The region has a high-risk youth committee that meets monthly to address issues facing high-risk youth in the community.</li> <li>○ The region has a harm reduction committee that identifies potential gaps in services for youth.</li> <li>○ The region continues to support the local youth shelter through yearly funding, since this is a resource that youth with complex needs use.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Southeast CFSA</b>		
<b>Calgary &amp; Area CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 78 individual children were connected to the mandatory notifications with the majority of these referrals (76) being in relation to allegations of abuse in care.</li> <li>• Two referrals were for youth (out of scope) who were requesting services from the director and were denied.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upon investigation, four of the allegations involving seven children, were substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In one case, involving two children, the children were removed from the foster home to ensure their safety and the foster home was closed.</li> <li>○ In one case, involving three children, it was found that the safety of the children was not in danger. The foster home was provided with additional support and was placed on probation.</li> <li>○ In one case, the youth was from another province and was in a kinship care placement in Alberta. Following the concern, the decision was made for the child to return to their home province.</li> <li>○ In one case, the youth was removed from the foster home and placed in a kinship care placement. The foster home is now under review.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• When youth are identified as being “out of scope” this generally means that they do not fit the criteria under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act as being in need of intervention services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ These children are not in need of intervention services and because they are not receiving Ministry services, they do not meet the criteria to access the services of the Advocate.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
<b>Central CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 13 under the “allegation of abuse” category.</li> <li>• The Advocate opened a file involving five children in a foster home in which allegations of abuse were made. The investigation could not be completed due to the foster mother being out-of-country.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 19 children were connected to these mandatory notifications. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ None of the allegations of abuse in care were substantiated upon investigation.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• An investigation into the concerns found that five children were neglected and emotionally abused in the foster home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The children were immediately removed from the foster home and placed with other caregivers, to ensure their safety.</li> <li>○ These children are being provided with the appropriate supports as a result of their experience.</li> <li>○ The foster home was closed following investigation.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>East Central CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Absence of a permanency plan and the two youth are requesting to be involved in developing a plan.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of this concern found that a youth believed that he was going to be sent to summer camp against his will. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The matter was resolved once the caseworker explained to the youth that he did not need to attend camp, but that he should consider various options for an activity over the summer months.</li> <li>○ A plan was developed that was agreed to by all parties, including the youth.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Insufficient information was provided by the Advocate in order for the Ministry to identify the second youth.</li> </ul>
<b>Edmonton &amp; Area CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth have expressed dissatisfaction with the casework services that they were receiving, including lack of follow-through in providing support and services already agreed upon.</li> <li>• Ongoing issues continue in regard to delays in placement resource investigations. A number of files were opened due to investigation timelines that have been exceeded.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In March 2008, a regional policy was developed that clarifies procedures for working with youth who have complex needs and can be difficult to serve.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Policy states that a placement resource intervention-type investigation is to be completed within 58 working days.</li> <li>○ A review found that during the period of this quarterly, 17 investigations were completed within timelines and six were not completed within timelines, due to reasons outside of the investigator’s control (for example, the foster parent was ill and not able to be interviewed by the Region).</li> <li>○ Each quarter, all stakeholders involved in investigations about placement resources meet to discuss issues (Placement Resource Investigation Unit (PRIU) Advisory Committee).</li> <li>○ A representative from the Advocate’s Office is on this committee.</li> <li>○ The issue of delays in completing investigations within appropriate timelines is</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth continue to be dissatisfied with the shortage of appropriate foster homes, suitable group care spaces, or supported independent living spaces.</li> <li>• A few youth identified not feeling safe in their placements due to other peers and/or staff.</li> <li>• Youth feeling uninvolved in the decisions that are being made about them.</li> <li>• Caseworkers not returning calls in a timely manner.</li> </ul>	<p>discussed, as are strategies to achieve better compliance with approved timelines.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PRIU staff meet monthly to review their processes in an effort to improve and expedite the process of investigating placement resources in the Region.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate, the following strategies are currently underway: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Provincial foster care and Aboriginal foster home recruitment campaigns to find additional homes.</li> <li>○ Work with the Multi-cultural Health Brokers to recruit homes in various ethnic committees.</li> <li>○ Regular reviews of the Region's placement recruitment strategy.</li> <li>○ The Region has increased the occupancy rates in Supported Independent Living contracts from 40 to 80% in the first and second quarter of the current fiscal year.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In each case where there is concern for a child's well-being in a placement resource, the matter is to be reported and is responded to. The response may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Placement changes</li> <li>▪ Increased worker contact</li> <li>▪ Increased staffing ratios</li> <li>▪ Contract adjustments</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ Increased monitoring</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Advocate's first Quarterly Report was reviewed at the Regional Intervention Services Management Meeting.</li> <li>○ As a result, the Region has reinforced to staff the importance of ensuring that youth are involved in the development of their service plan goals and that they have reviewed their plans critically.</li> <li>○ Where there is disagreement, children and youth are reminded of their right to contact the Advocate. They are also offered a dispute resolution process that includes the caseworker and/or casework supervisor, potentially the office manager and, if necessary, a referral for an Administrative Review.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• The first Quarterly Report was reviewed at the Regional Intervention Services Management Meeting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Region has reinforced the ongoing message to staff that it is important to ensure that youth are involved in the development of their service plan goals and that they have reviewed their plans critically.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some decisions made by the Director are not supported by the information on file and do not appear to be in the best interests of the child/youth.</li> <li>• Delays occur due to a lengthy ongoing search for extended family placements. Often, no alternate plan is identified.</li> <li>• All of the mandatory referrals received resulting in files being opened for information gathering, were due to allegations of abuse in care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Region has also impressed upon staff the importance of returning calls in a timely manner.</li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In some cases the information that the Advocate is provided by the child or youth about the decision of the Director is not accurate and as such does not match information on the child's file.</li> <li>○ Children and youth and their caseworkers sometimes have differing opinions on what is the best interest of the child.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Lengthy delays in extended family searches can be necessary to ensure we have met both our regional permanency planning expectations and the expectations of the family.</li> <li>○ Further, when Aboriginal children/youth are involved, the Region must also meet the expectations of and have mean</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Five of the allegations, involving 13 children were substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Each of the children involved in this matter were removed from their placement during the course of the investigation to ensure their safety.</li> <li>○ In two cases, the foster home was closed upon investigation. In one case, the foster home remained open because the foster home is appealing the outcome of the investigation. However, no children are placed in the home.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>North Central CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concern regarding increasing number of allegations of abuse in care and how these concerns are managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eight allegations of abuse in care were made, of which one was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ In the case of the substantiated allegation, the youth was placed in another foster home.</li> <li>○ The foster home involved in the investigation was closed.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Whenever there is an allegation of abuse, the regional process involves bringing caseworkers, supervisors, foster care supervisors, and senior team leads together to review the concerns, develop action plans, investigate and discuss results.</li> <li>○ Investigations are handled by senior caseworkers who do not have children in the home on their caseloads. Out-of-region assistance is also requested at times.</li> <li>○ After a meeting between the Regional Senior Leadership Team and the Advocate's Office in March 2008, the concerns of the Advocate were discussed with casework staff.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
<b>Northwest CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Placement for high needs children and youth close to their families was a major theme.</li> <li>• Three mandatory notifications in relation to allegations to abuse in care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Advocate and the CFSA met to address concerns identified in this report.</li> <li>• Upon investigation, one allegation involving four children was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Upon investigation, it was found that one youth abused a child in the foster home.</li> <li>○ The youth was placed in another foster home.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Northeast CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Métis Settlements CFSA</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> </ul>

#### Report on Delegated First Nation Agencies

Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA)	Concern Reported	Response
<b>Bigstone Child &amp; Family Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions about the definition of permanence and the differing values of all parties when discussing the interest of a young person who is receiving services under the <i>Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act</i>.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A review of the concern found that there was a disagreement about where a child should reside (on- or off-reserve). The DFNA took the following actions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The child was moved from an off-reserve foster home to a placement in an on-reserve kinship care home with a sibling.</li> <li>○ The investigation into this concern found that the agency had developed appropriate treatment, education and concurrent plans for the child.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Little Red River Cree Nation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A longstanding resource issue continues to be the shortage of specialized placements for children and youth with high needs in this area of the north.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be difficult to find placements to meet the needs of some high needs children and youth in more northerly and remote locations.</li> <li>○ In some cases, offering highly specialized placements in more northerly and remote locations can be logistically unfeasible.</li> <li>○ The agency continues to provide services and make efforts to address the issue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>North Peace Tribal Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There continues to be a shortage of specialized placements for children and youth with high needs in this area of the north.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be difficult to find placements to meet the needs of some high needs children and youth in more northerly and remote locations.</li> <li>○ In some cases, offering highly specialized placements in more northerly and remote</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ locations can be logistically unfeasible.</li> <li>○ The agency continues to provide services and make efforts to address the issue.</li> </ul>
<b>Piikani Child and Family Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Phone calls to discuss youth's placement issues were not returned.</li> <li>● The issue of placement resource availability is a systemic issue for Piikani Child &amp; Family Services. Youth placed in Region 6 therefore felt isolated and not supported by caseworker.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● These two bullets refer to the same child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A review of the concern confirmed that the youth was moved from a facility and placed with extended family.</li> <li>○ Further review also determined that the youth was often calling the caseworker more than once a day.</li> <li>○ In addition to the support from the caseworker, the youth also had access to both the key worker at the placement and the advocate for support.</li> <li>○ The caseworker provided the youth with a pre-scheduled regular time during which the worker would meet and speak with the youth, to assure the youth that they would be heard.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Stoney Child &amp; Family Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● The issue of distance is problematic when youth are placed so far away from their home community. This issue is made more difficult when staff from this placement fail to follow through on scheduled meetings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In response to this generalized observation of the Advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ It can be difficult to find placements for youth with complex needs in the local area.</li> <li>○ The agency continues to provide services and make efforts to address the issue.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

\* The Child and Youth Advocate did not receive any mandatory notifications or have additional observations regarding the Delegated First Nation Agencies not listed in the table above.