

RESPONSE TO MARTIN FATALITY INQUIRY REPORT

The Ministry of Human Services has carefully reviewed and considered the recommendations of the fatality inquiry report released on November 2, 2012, into the December 2006 death of Samantha Martin.

The inquiry found this was a medical death due to natural causes, following the child's return to parental care. Whenever possible, the ministry takes into account reviews of incidents involving children who were recently in care when identifying learnings that could lead to better services for children currently in the system.

As we continue to evolve and learn from experience and research, improvements to the child intervention system are always taking place. We have not stood still and waited for this or any other external report to make changes to better serve children and families. Our systems have continuously improved since Samantha came into care in 1993.

Today, we support families of children with disabilities differently than we did almost 20 years ago, thanks to staff and our community partners who have led the way in promoting changes over the years. Children with disabilities are no longer served under the child intervention system unless there are concerns for their safety and well-being.

The majority of children with disabilities in Alberta and their families are served through the Family Support for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program, a unique model of support based on pioneering legislation that is recognized as one of the best in Canada. Currently, 98 per cent of children with disabilities involved with FSCD live with their parents and supports are provided to assist the family in meeting their child's and family's disability-related needs.

Over the past several years, numerous improvements to the child intervention system have been made in response to input from the field, research and reviews. The learnings from systemic reviews and case reviews are incorporated into policy, training and practice, and are shared with staff, caregivers and service delivery partners.

Collaborative case planning:

Many of the children we serve, including medically-fragile children, require extraordinary services from more than one ministry and in many cases, from various service sectors. The ministry continues to move forward on service delivery approaches that include a focus on collaborative planning and using a cross-disciplinary approach based on the individual needs of the child and family. For example, FSCD and Education's Program Unit Funding (PUF) program work with families to develop one service and program plan for jointly supporting children with severe disabilities at home and in early childhood education settings.

Caseworkers also work closely with agency service providers to provide community-based supports that assist families in addressing concerns to help keep their families together. This approach helps ensure that everyone involved has the same information and understands the plan for services and supports.

Caseloads/resources for staff:

We continue to monitor staff workloads closely to ensure the needs of families are being met. In addition, we strive to ensure critical front-line positions are filled as soon as possible. There is no set average number for caseloads because each case represents services that are unique to each child. Some cases are more complex because of the needs of the child or the situation of the family.

Caseworkers receive initial and ongoing training and support to guide their work with children, youth and families. For example, delegation training for child intervention workers provides an emphasis on assessment to build a better understanding of the greater level of risk and vulnerability of children with special needs. Case management tools such as the new Intervention Services Information System (ISIS) support the ability to enter comprehensive medical information and flag upcoming actions and decision points.

Supporting vulnerable Albertans is a top priority for our government. We are committed to continually improving the services we provide for children and families in our province.