

Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Quarterly Report (April 1 to June 30, 2009)
(Alberta Children and Youth Services Response)

Response to Provincial Overview

As part of the quarterly reporting process, the Advocate may make generalized observations that are not specific to a particular child or youth or Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) or Delegated First Nations Agency (DFNA).

The table below provides ministry responses to these generalized observations.

Concern Reported	Ministry Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty accessing resources and supports from caseworkers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decisions regarding services provided to children and youth in care are based on the best interests of the child or youth. When determining the nature of services to be provided to a child or youth in care, staff consider a variety of factors, particularly the needs of the child or youth and whether a support or service is essential to the safety and well-being of the child or youth. Children and youth in care have specific entitlements, such as clothing and room and board. There are also discretionary services that can be provided based on the service plan for the child or youth. A needs assessment is completed on any requested service. Criteria and rates for accessing all financial benefits for children and youth in care, including recreation funds and clothing allowance, are set in provincial policy and are expected to be adhered to by caseworkers. The criteria for entering into a support and financial assistance agreement with a youth and the supports that may be provided under such an agreement are identified in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Regulation. The ministry is responsible for ensuring that a young person transitioning to adulthood receives the best possible supports to achieve independence and in some cases, adult services may be the most appropriate option. Provincial policy outlines the procedures to follow when terminating a support and financial assistance agreement. Situations where the belongings of a child or youth in care are misplaced or damaged are addressed on a case-by-case basis. Provincial policies are in place requiring that caseworkers have contact with a child or youth in care on a monthly basis and face-to-face contact at least every three months, including time spent with the child with no caregiver present. Provincial policy is for caseworkers to attempt to return calls from children and youth by the end of the next business day. If caseworkers are not able to resolve differences with a child or youth they serve, they are expected to provide children and youth with the ability to speak to the caseworker's supervisor and/or manager to resolve the issue, and inform them of their right to access the services of the Child and Youth Advocate.

- Concerns about the ability to have contact with family.

- Concerns about the availability and quality of care in placements.

- Case specific concerns.

- Every effort is made to ensure that children and youth have frequent contact with individuals who are significant to them, when such contact is appropriate and safe. In some situations, it may not be safe for a child or youth to visit with a family member and in other cases, the family member may not wish to visit with the child or youth.
- This has been a recurring concern in quarterly reports; upon ministry investigation, it usually stems from:
 - Children and youth wanting to see individuals whom it is not safe for them to be in contact with.
 - Children and youth having access, but not the quantity of access that they desire, including wanting more access than what has been approved by the Courts.
- Placement decisions for children and youth in care are made based on several factors, including meeting the specific needs of the child and the needs of other children in the placement, the skill set of the caregiver, the availability of an appropriate placement, and the number of spaces available in a placement under licensing requirements. In some cases, a child or youth may not be pleased with the placement option that his or her worker feels is in the best interest of the child or youth.
- Provincial policy is that caseworkers must ensure that any decisions concerning the placement of a child or youth take into account the benefits of placement with extended family and in their home community; and be respectful of the child or youth's familial, cultural, social, and religious backgrounds, and significant relationships.
- For some remote and rural communities, securing placements can be challenging:
 - A province-wide foster parent and Aboriginal caregiver recruitment campaign is underway to address this challenge.
 - A placement committee focused on securing appropriate placements for high-needs children and youth has been established by some DFNAs.
- A ministry working committee, which includes representatives from CFSA's and DFNA's, is developing a process to address quality of care and intervention-type investigations. Where intervention-type investigations have occurred, the information is entered into the child or youth's file.
- A review of mandatory notifications by the ministry has found that in instances where there were allegations of abuse in care, the safety needs of the child or youth are placed first and addressed immediately.
- All case-specific issues identified in the quarterly report have either:
 - been resolved to the satisfaction of the Advocate, or
 - work on the matter was continuing, at the time this quarterly report was submitted.

Report on Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) 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 CFSAs and DFNAs. CFSAs and DFNAs 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 well-being of the child or youth in care. The nature of these steps varies, 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 well-being can be assured.
- The need for foster parents or kinship caregivers to take additional steps to ensure the continued safety and well-being of children and youth in their care, such as making sure third parties who have placed the safety and well-being 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.

Child and Family Services Authorities

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
<p>Southwest Alberta CFSA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. • Permanency planning challenges. • Youth coming back into care after unsuccessful adoptions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the information regarding the mandatory notification determined that it was not an allegation of abuse in care. • The region has a permanency planning committee in place, whose members include region staff, foster and adoptive parents, former youth in care, private adoption consultants, and Aboriginal Elders. The committee reviews permanency plans and makes recommendations to senior managers about permanency planning and long-term placements. The region is currently reviewing all permanency files to identify any barriers and those files will be forwarded to the permanency planning committee for review. • It has been found that unsuccessful adoptions usually relate to youth aged 12-18, who have significant challenges (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, mental health problems). The region anticipates better supports and matching for adoptive families with the implementation of a new home assessment tool and legislative amendments clarifying eligibility for supports under the Supports for Permanency Program.

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
Southeast Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four mandatory notifications involving five children. • Youth with specialized needs wish to be closer to family and their home community. • Youth expressing frustration with their caseworker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three allegations of abuse involving three children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inappropriate discipline techniques used by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family support worker reviewed appropriate techniques with the foster parent. ○ Sexual touching between a perpetrating foster child and two other foster children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No other children are being placed in the same home as the perpetrating child, and constant supervision for the perpetrating child is in place. • In some cases, children and youth who have significant challenges require specialized supports and services that are only available in larger urban centres. Case planning for these young people includes ensuring that the placement is reviewed on an ongoing basis, so youth are not placed out of the region any longer than necessary. Caseworkers also facilitate visits between the family and a child or youth who is placed out of region, to promote the maintenance of familial connections. • Youth are advised that if they have concerns about their relationship with their worker, they need to contact the supervisor or manager to discuss these concerns.
Calgary and Area CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29 mandatory notifications involving 71 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine allegations of abuse involving 13 children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster father made inappropriate sexual advances toward a youth in a foster home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth in the foster home has been removed and police are investigating. ○ Foster parent left a red mark on the arm of a foster child after grabbing him/her. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved from foster home and foster home placed on hold. No other children were in the home. ○ Altercation between the foster parent and the foster child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved from foster home and foster home closed. ○ Former foster child who is now an adult, but is still living in the foster home, slapped a foster child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adult female no longer permitted to care for any children in the home and foster home placed on hold. ○ Inappropriate sexual play between two foster children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster parent found to have taken appropriate steps to ensure safety of children. ○ Foster parent gave foster children a medicine, thinking that it was a herb. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster parent told to advise caseworker before giving medication to children. ○ Two cases of inappropriate discipline techniques used by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In one case, the foster parent admitted overreacting and the foster children indicated a desire to remain in the home. Conditional licence issued, additional training provided. ▪ In the other case, supervision in the home was increased.

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth concerned about being relocated. • Concerns about lack of communication with workers and adequacy of case planning. • Transitional planning and services for youth over 18. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster child saw foster parent drink alcohol on a number of occasions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved from foster home, foster parent must attend addictions assessment. • Region is placing more emphasis on less intrusive family-based placements with wrap-around services to better meet the needs of children and youth. This has resulted in some youth being moved from residential group care to more family-based placements. • Youth who are concerned about the responsiveness of their workers are encouraged to address them with their worker or contact a casework team leader or manager. Those still not satisfied are advised of their right to contact the Advocate. • The criteria for entering into a support and financial assistance agreement with a youth and the supports that may be provided under such an agreement are identified in the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Regulation. The ministry is responsible for ensuring that a young person transitioning to adulthood receives the best possible supports to achieve independence and in some cases, adult services may be the most appropriate option.
Central Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eight mandatory notifications involving 12 children. • Concerns with youth involvement in case planning. • Concerns with relationship with caseworker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four allegations of abuse involving six children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster father allegedly struck a foster child, which left bruising. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster child moved, foster home closed, matter referred to police. ○ Two cases of physical and/or emotional abuse of a foster child by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In one case, conditional licence issued, monitoring increased, and additional training provided. ▪ In the other case, the foster home was closed and the matter referred to police. ○ One foster youth sexually abused another foster youth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster parents were no longer fostering when the allegation was reported. Matter referred to police. • The Region is making every effort to involve children and youth in case planning, per provincial policy. When disagreements occur, the region re-examines the matter and tries to provide options to the youth. • Instances where child could not reach their assigned worker were due to the assigned worker being away and the case not being reassigned or messages not reaching the cover-off worker. Issue has been addressed and steps taken to resolve it have been implemented.

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
East Central Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nine mandatory notifications involving 17 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three allegations of abuse involving 12 children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Foster parent emotionally abused foster children (demeaning comments). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Children moved to alternate placements and foster support plan in place. ○ Group home staff member emotionally abused some group home residents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff member dismissed by agency and agency ensured that remaining staff were using appropriate conflict resolution and supervisory practices. ○ Inappropriate discipline techniques and emotional abuse by foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster children moved, foster home closed, matter referred to police.
Edmonton and Area CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 mandatory notifications involving 118 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 allegations of abuse involving 50 children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Three cases of inappropriate discipline techniques used by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In two cases, foster parents were provided with additional training on appropriate techniques. ▪ In one case, the children were moved and additional training was provided. ○ Foster parent left foster children with inappropriate caregiver. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Expectations around supervision were reviewed with the foster parent. ○ Foster parent and foster child involved in altercation over leaving the home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster parent admitted to overreacting but no safety concerns for the youth. ○ Group home staff member used a laptop to view inappropriate photos online. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Staff member suspended and is receiving professional help. ○ Inappropriate care of a youth in a group home setting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ One staff member terminated, second staff member resigned. ○ Physical altercation between three children in a group home setting. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Perpetrator moved to a different placement in order to address aggressive behaviours. ○ Five cases of inappropriate peer-on-peer sexual activity in a group home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In one case, the perpetrating youth was moved, supervision increased, and safety plans were developed and implemented. ▪ In another case, facility staff adjusted sleeping arrangements and increased supervision. ▪ In three other cases, the incident was reviewed with agency and supervision was increased. ○ Inappropriate peer-on-peer sexual interactions between foster children in a home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some children were moved from the home and supervision was increased. ○ Foster youth sending inappropriate pictures on her cell phone to an adult male. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth was referred to counselling and protective measures were put in place.

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concerns from young people feeling they are not receiving the services they require. • Concerns that workers are not following through with what they promised to do. • Length of time waiting for specialized services. • Lack of appropriate placements. • Transitional planning and services for youth over 18. • Concerns about accessing birth families and significant others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upon investigation, it was found these concerns are reflective of normal disagreements (e.g., worker and youth disagree on whether the youth is ready to move out on their own). • Upon review, it has been found that while workers may not be available as often as youth would like, in most cases, workers are meeting or exceeding policy expectations for client contact. • Youth may have to be placed on waiting lists when clinicians in private practice have waiting lists. For example, occupational therapy services are subject to prioritization practices in place at Alberta Health Services. In some cases, it takes time to fulfill a request for a male staff member to work with a youth, since agencies find it more difficult to recruit male workers to the profession. There is currently no waiting list for female youth workers. • The region often finds it more challenging to get foster parents to accept new foster children in the summer months because they are away on vacations. However, the region has had recent successes in increasing its placement options, to the point that hotels are only rarely being used as an emergency placement resource. • Every effort is made to provide transitional support up to age 22. Plans to transition youth have not been advanced quickly enough in some cases; however, this represents a minority of cases of youth served by the region who are over the age of 16. • Every effort is made to ensure that children and youth have frequent contact with individuals who are significant to them, when such contact is appropriate and safe. In some situations, it may not be safe for a child or youth to visit with a family member and in other cases, the family member may not wish to visit with the child or youth. • This has been a recurring concern in quarterly reports and upon ministry investigation, and usually stems from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Children and youth wanting to see individuals whom it is not safe for them to be in contact with. ○ Children and youth having access, but not the quantity of access that they desire, including wanting more access than what has been approved by the Courts.
North Central Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four mandatory notifications involving five children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One allegation of abuse involving one child was substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Youth at a group home was slapped by a group home worker. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Worker dismissed and youth provided with counselling.

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
Northwest Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six mandatory notifications involving eight children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three allegations of abuse involving three children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the Advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Two cases of inappropriate discipline techniques used by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In one case, the child was moved, a conditional licence was issued, and additional mandatory training was provided. ▪ In the other case, the foster child was moved but asked to return to the foster home. A support plan has been developed to facilitate this request and ensure the child's safety. ○ Child in a kinship placement sexually abused by son of kinship caregiver. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved from home, kinship home closed, child receiving counselling. ○ Youth at a group home was slapped by a group home worker. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Worker dismissed and youth provided with counselling.
Northeast Alberta CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No mandatory notifications. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A.
Métis Settlements CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allegation of abuse was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Caregiver was using illegal drugs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child removed from the home, the kinship home was closed, and the matter was referred to police.

Report on Delegated First Nation Agencies

Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA)	Concern Reported	Response
Akamkispatinaw Ohpikihawasowin Child & Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The allegation of abuse was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child was physically abused by a babysitter. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The foster parents no longer use this babysitter.
Kasohkowew Child Wellness Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two mandatory notifications involving three children. Concerns with the Director of KCWS. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation. The individual in question is no longer an employee of KCWS.
Piikani Child and Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation.
Siksika Family Services Corporation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mandatory notifications. The need to place youth with difficult behaviours in placements outside their home community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A. It is sometimes necessary to move a youth outside of their home community to access the specialized services they need, which may only be offered in larger centres. If a child or youth must be placed outside their community, the focus continues to be on returning the young person to their home community when it is safe to do so. Efforts have been made to arrange for the young person to visit their home community as much as possible and especially during school breaks. A placement committee for the agency, focused on securing appropriate placements for high-needs or high-risk youth, has been established by the DFNA.
Siksika (Calgary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two mandatory notifications involving two children. Youth expressing concern with not being placed closer to their home community and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation. It is sometimes necessary to move a youth outside of their home community to access the specialized services they need, which may only be offered in larger centres. If a child or youth must be placed outside their community, the focus continues to be on returning the young person to their home community when it is safe to do so. Efforts have been made to arrange for the young person to visit their home community as much as possible and especially during school breaks. A placement committee for the agency, focused on securing appropriate placements for high-needs or high-risk youth has been established by the DFNA.
Stoney Child and Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mandatory notifications. Youth expressing concern with not being placed closer to their home community and family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> N/A It is sometimes necessary to move a youth outside of their home community to access the specialized services they need, which may only be offered in larger centres. If a child or youth must be placed outside their community, the focus continues to be on returning the young person to their home community when it is safe to do so.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing youth with timely services. • Concerns about transitional planning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts have been made to arrange for the young person to visit their home community as much as possible and especially during school breaks. • DFNA practice is to have caseworkers return calls to youth within two days. The youth are encouraged to contact the casework supervisor if calls are not returned within this timeframe. • DFNA's Assistant Director has sent a memo to agency staff reinforcing that transition planning is required to start when a youth turns 16.
Tsuu T'ina Child and Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allegation of abuse was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Inappropriate sexual play between two foster children. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster parent responded appropriately when learning of the incident by teaching about appropriate behaviour and increasing supervision.
Western Cree Tribal Council Child Welfare Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two mandatory notifications involving two children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A review of the information regarding the mandatory notifications determined that neither involved abuse in care.
Yellowhead Tribal Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The allegation of abuse was substantiated. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Corporal punishment was used on a child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appropriate discipline techniques were discussed with the foster parent.

* 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.