



**Ministry of Human Services' Response to the
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
*Six-Week-Old Nicole: An Investigative Review***

September 2015

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Background

In 2013, a six-week-old infant fell asleep on her father's chest; when he awoke, he found her unresponsive. The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner determined that the manner and cause of death was undetermined. Our thoughts are with this young child's immediate and extended family.

Although this infant was not in the care of the ministry, her family was receiving extensive intervention supports at the time of her death. This young father was fortunate to have extended family members who could support him so he could focus on his infant twin daughters. As a young single father, he demonstrated some struggles in meeting the day-to-day needs of his premature infants, one of whom had feeding issues. Daily in-home supports were utilized over the month of intervention services to enhance ongoing supports and information and to teach parenting and life skills. Extended family members and involved medical professionals were actively engaged and supportive of the detailed safety plan to support this vulnerable family unit. The father's bond with his young daughters was evident to all who were engaged in case planning for this family.

The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* provides the Advocate with the authority to investigate systemic issues arising from a serious injury or death of a child who was receiving child intervention services at the time of injury or death. The Advocate released an investigative review, entitled *Six-Week-Old Nicole: An Investigative Review*, ("the report") on August 19, 2015. The report makes recommendations for Human Services and other service delivery partners about two key areas related to practice and processes concerning services to vulnerable children in Alberta.

The ministry's response includes information gathered from:

- A review of existing practice, policies and protocols in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- A review of current ministry initiatives in comparison to issues identified in the report.
- Engagement with our regional service delivery partners about opportunities to enhance practice and service delivery approaches; and
- Discussion with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate about the recommendations and the intended outcome or impact of each.

Based on the information gathered and analyzed, we are confident that the existing service delivery mechanisms in Human Services provide an effective foundation for achieving positive outcomes for children and families who are in need of intervention services. In order to continually improve services, we talk to our service delivery partners to refine or improve practices that might help to further ensure the health and well-being of each child in this province.

Response to Recommendations

Recommendation #1:

The Ministry of Human Services should strengthen its capacity to provide relevant assessment, planning and intervention methods to effectively support parents with cognitive challenges.

Ministry response: The ministry accepts the recommendation. The basis of good practice is being able to determine the intervention needs and negotiate services and supports through ongoing assessment with the family to alleviate the needs for intervention. The Child Intervention Practice Framework, associated practice strategies and Signs of Safety implementation over the next three to five years support front-line service delivery staff in service provision. The innovative practice being implemented and integrated across the province supports collaboration, family and community engagement, innovative solutions and critical thinking to meet the identified needs.

In addition to the ongoing implementation of the practice framework, child intervention will engage internal ministry partners to develop a tool to support staff in the identification and support of children, youth, parents and caregivers with disabilities.

Recommendation #2:

The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that the changing circumstances of children and families are continuously reassessed and reflected in child intervention caseplanning. Caseworkers need the support and training for reflective practice that shows clear assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation as a child and their family's needs and circumstances change.

Ministry response: The ministry accepts this recommendation. As already noted, the Child Intervention Practice Framework, associated practice strategies and Signs of Safety implementation over the next three to five years support frontline service delivery staff in service provision. Staff are supported to take the time to complete robust assessments, engage with family and community in case planning, and implement creative solutions that meet the needs of the child and family. They are also provided with tools that support critical thinking across the span of case management activities.

Current policy and practice expectations reflect the need for ongoing assessment and evaluation of the changing circumstances of a child and their family in caseplanning through: regular case conferences, collaborative practice, dynamic safety plans and ongoing contact with the family and service providers.

Conclusion

Human Services continues to implement evidence-based practice strategies and innovative solutions to meet the needs of vulnerable Albertans. By focusing on the strengths of an individual, their support network and being aware of their stressors and abilities, we engage in ongoing assessment and evaluation of services provided. Through our ongoing evolution, we are striving for the development and sustainability of a system that is responsive to the needs of children, youth and families, while supporting front-line service delivery staff to provide meaningful services that alleviate the need for intervention.

Human Services thanks the Advocate for his review and recommendations. We remain committed to working with the Advocate to further systemic improvements to the Child Intervention system to support children, youth and families.