

Working Together as Child Intervention Practice Is Changing to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families

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The Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF: www.aascf.com) along with the Alberta Foster Parent Association (AFPA: www.afpaonline.com) and Regional staff are working together to engage caregivers (foster parents, kinship carers and agency front line staff) in the process of learning about and implementing the changes underway in the child protection sector. While there is no question that much excellent work has been happening all along, there has been a huge groundswell of enthusiasm, along with some trepidation, around what appears to be lots of new initiatives and changes in practice.

The different regions of the province are in quite different places with the implementation of initiatives that support a more effective and collaborative way of supporting children and families to achieve better outcomes. Many people have already seen and felt some of the differences coming out of the sites working to implement these changes in practice: OBSD, the Practice Framework, Front-end Strategies, Signs of Safety and many others. While all of these initiatives are being piloted in selected sites around the province, they are all moving in the same direction, operating from the same principles, aiming towards the same outcomes and reporting similar trends. Some regions are implementing multiple initiatives at the same time; others are focusing upon one (or more) at a time. All of the initiatives are focusing on changing not only behaviour of workers (both regional and agency) but also changes in thinking about how to work with clients. The Practice Framework lays out the principles; Signs of Safety focuses upon identifying harm and danger, strengths, supports and developing a realistic plan to ensure safety over time; the Front-end Strategies is slowing down the process of apprehension and supports for families are being strengthened (i.e. increased funding for mental health, recognition of the positive work being done by prevention and early intervention programs, the increased focus on violence prevention in the home along with the development of programming that is changing how to better work with Aboriginal and multicultural/refugee families.)

As the practice of how the work of child intervention changes, so will the role of foster parents, front-line workers and other stakeholders. A series of workshops for caregivers are currently in the planning stages for all Regions (over the fall and winter) that will address the role of caregivers within the different initiatives being implemented. The first workshop for caregivers was in Calgary June 16th with over 400 people in attendance (including the 60 children who were cared for during the session). The attendance was certainly more than I had anticipated and many thanks are given to the regional staff and the staff at Rock Pointe Church (the venue) for all of their assistance in supporting this workshop!!!

The presentations included:

- An overview of the evolution of child intervention practice, practice shifts within the region and emerging trends by Jon Reeves Regional Manager, Calgary and Area
- Signs of Safety by Toni Morkin, Senior Manager
- Aboriginal Engagement – Carmen Esch and Sherri Vernon White
- Case example of Youth Reunification - Marla Gill-Gentile and Cheryl Wilson
- What we have learned: OBSD agency presentations:
 - Woods Homes by Jason Webster, Program Supervisor, Foster Care Network and Audra Richards, Program Manager, Family Support Network
 - Mahmawi-Atoskiwin by Hazel Bergen and
- Regional changes to care giver support and the changing role of caregivers - Chris Tortorelli, Jody Passmore and Sarah Andrews-Luft

Comments from the 41 table discussions (involving over 340 caregivers) were collected and compiled. A quick summary of the comments include:

What is working well?

- Support workers (region and agency) do a good job of supporting
- Social workers are now making decisions collaboratively, more open communication with all involved; Single plan

- Engaging/empowering families
- Strength based approaches
- Less children in care; Better matching ; Shorter placements ; Kinship placement are up
- Kids are being heard in the process
- Cultural practices are being honored
- Support services developed
- Regional management is fully on board with the changes

What are you worried about?

- The Region's "plan" will fall through and not be fully implemented
- Foster families working with bio families; Compensation; Expectations of foster parents; Not getting referrals for placement
- Kinship care
- Communication; That we are not really part of the team
- The social worker is "key" - Stability of workers
- Lack of support
- Screenings/assessments
- Concerns about children
- Training and support:
- Co-ordination with other systems

Next Steps

- A very realistic "plan"
- Communication –between caregivers/professionals/family; Support and respect each other –flexibility on all sides
- Planning for child/family; Support the bridge between foster and bio family; Supports
- More in depth information/training
- Tell the positive stories
- On-line communication
- Better coordination across systems (education, health, justice, DFNA's, community)

The power point presentations, the taped presentations and more detailed Notes from the Table Discussions are posted on the AASCF website (www.aascf.com). We anticipate that the future workshops will be as successful as the one in Calgary and we look forward to having the discussion with caregivers about their role within the changing world of child protection.

In addition to the above workshops, over the fall/winter of 2014-15 the AASCF will be co-ordinating a number of workshops to support staff:

- ***Allying with Indigenous People: The Practice of omanitew***, will be offered in Calgary early in September (the dates are being finalized) and will be open to 25 participants from agencies, Regions and DFNAs. The evaluations of the first two sessions as well as notes from the follow-up session with participants, their managers/CEO's and ministry staff are available: www.aascf.com and clearly identify the long-term benefits to staff and agency programming as a result of experiencing omanitew. Registration will be open soon.
- Facilitation training for **Family Group Conferencing** and the two day **RAP Training (Response Ability Pathways - Circle of Courage)** will again be offered. We are working on the details as to when and where.

- There are many upcoming training opportunities listed on the AASCF web-site:
www.aascf.com/training/sectorworkshops

Other Resources:

- The latest ***AASCF Research Journal For Services For Children & Families - Volume 7 June 2014*** (available at: [www.aascf.com/ AASCF Initiatives/ AASCF Research Journal/ Volume 7 June 2014](http://www.aascf.com/AASCF%20Initiatives/AASCF%20Research%20Journal/Volume%207%20June%202014)) includes the following articles:
 - ***Balance Required When Examining the Child Welfare System***; an editorial by Dorothy Badry, Chris Lee, Bruce MacLaurin and Jackie Siepport
 - ***Imagine – A System Willing and Able to Protect Children and Support Families***, Original research by Chris Boyle
 - ***The Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (AIS- 2008): Select Findings*** Bruce MacLaurin, Nico Trocme, Barbara Fallon, Vandna Sinha, Richard Enns, Richard Feehan, Hee-Jeong Yoo and Morgan DeMone
 - ***Caregiver Turnover in Alberta Accredited Day Care Programs*** Cecilia Bukutu, Xinjie Cui, Tara Hanson
 - ***Indigenous Concepts and Framework Vital for Human Service Workers: The practice of omanitew*** Ralph Bodor, Leona Makokis, Sarah Friesen
- ***A cursory Review of Evidence-based Child Maltreatment Prevention Programs for Child Welfare and At-Risk Children and Families***, Version 1, April 24, 2014 was compiled by Calgary and Area child and Family Services and is available on the AASCF website or from Calgary Region. This 38 page document represents a cursory review of evidence based child maltreatment prevention programs operating in Canada, United States and Australia. Programs were selected based on their focus on prevention of child abuse and neglect along with the following areas: child and family well-being, safety, communication, and other factors that play an important role in the prevention of child maltreatment. Special attention was given to programs that work with child welfare populations and/or high-risk families.
www.aascf.com/ResourceLibrary/ChildWelfareOutcomes/AlbertaChildWelfareOutcomes/Report2014Calgary
- ***Transitioning from Care – a Guide for Care Givers*** created by Jeff Solberg Spring 2014 (AASCF and AFPA) was developed to improve outcomes for youth in care and their caregivers. When the average Canadian turns 18, the usual feelings they experience can probably be summed up as excitement and anticipation. Not so for the average youth leaving care. For youth leaving care, 18 often feels like a cliff – a black hole full of unknown and dread. “Cliff” is a term that youth in care have used but is echoed by many caseworkers who say the fears are real and well founded. Youth in care need intentional, informed guidance to prepare them.
http://www.aascf.com/doc_view/12379-aascf-and-afpa-new-transitioning-from-care-guide-available-now-may-2014
- A new section that has been added to the AASCF web-site entitled Occupational Health and Safety under the Resource Library (www.aascf.com/ResourceLibrary/OccupationalHealthandSafety) As health and safety is becoming a larger issue within the sector and there are many resources / tools already developed, we thought it wise to try and collect them. If you have resources, not currently listed please forward them.

If you want more information about any of the upcoming workshops or an overview of what is happening within the province please feel free to contact me at smaygard@aascf.com or by phone 780-451-0898.