

ALIGN Calgary Chapter Submission to the Child Intervention Review Panel

The ALIGN Association of Community Services is a unified community of agencies that represent the diverse needs of Alberta's children and families and advocates for the causes and issues that directly affect our member agencies and the people we serve.

The Calgary Chapter of ALIGN currently includes 40 member organizations serving children and families in Calgary and surrounding communities. On behalf of the ALIGN Calgary Chapter, we would like to share with the Panel feedback that was received from our member agencies related to the current Child Intervention system. Agencies were asked to give feedback in the spring of 2017 and this information was collated and summarized into 5 separate submissions. The themes that emerged include:

1. Working Relationships and Collaboration
2. The Practice of Child Intervention Work
3. Funding Community Agency Services: a Sector in Crisis
4. Responding to the Needs of Indigenous Families
5. Ensuring Quality Services for Vulnerable Children and Youth

We thank you for reviewing this submission and taking the information into consideration as you formulate recommendations to improve our Child Intervention system.

Hazel Bergen and Bjorn Johansson,
Co-Chairs of the Calgary Chapter of ALIGN

Submission # 2 - The Practice of Child Intervention Work

Introduction

The Calgary Chapter of Align has reviewed agencies' feedback regarding experiences with the current practices of Children's Services and the impact these practices have on families and children in the Calgary area. From an agency perspective, Children's Services is to be commended for their all their recent efforts in reviewing and improving their own practices. Approaches like "Signs of Safety" and "Trauma Informed Care" provide a common language for better communication and a common practice foundation for moving forward. These practices also help to remove individual biases and values in the work and provide a more objective and consistent approach in Child Intervention. Models such as the "Caregiver Support Model" closely align with the services that agencies provide and assists Children's Services, Community Agencies and families in working more collaboratively. The overarching system is clearer about the goals for children, youth and families to determine when their involvement with Children's Services is completed. As agencies we also recognize that shifting models of practice takes time to implement, both to train and to support all staff members in working in a new paradigm. From an agency perspective it is very clear when Children's Services frontline staff have adopted the new models versus when they continue to work from outdated practice approaches. When this happens, agencies report that families can be treated very differently, and as advocates for families, this can be challenging.

Current Concerns

As agencies who work in the Calgary area, we have noted that children, youth and families continue to experience a wide range of case management responses to their situations depending on the Caseworker and/or multi-service team involved. Agencies must then also work to adjust their services to best meet the needs of the child, youth or family depending on the directives of the Caseworker. When Children's Services intervention practices and directives are inconsistent, the result is that children, youth and families receive inconsistent and unpredictable direction as to what to do next and which goal to achieve; subsequently, more intrusive measures may be taken by a system that should be there to support them in addressing their issues. Clear and consistent practice that is based on meeting the needs of individual children, youth and families is the approach required in responding to the issues that are being presented.

Recommendations:

1. There needs to be a greater focus on building and strengthening the family/natural support approach in all of the work of Children's Services.
2. We work with a wide diversity of families, which requires us to use a culturally competent approach in all we do. Increased resources meet these multi-cultural needs at an agency level would improve service delivery for the increasing number of immigrant families in our client population.
3. It is vital to for the Government of Alberta and the Ministry to be a leader in Prevention and Early Intervention practices that are so critical to achieving a decrease in families accessing Child Intervention services. Investment in community agencies providing prevention and early intervention programs must also increase to meet this objective.
4. It is important to develop a 10 year plan for Child Intervention Services that can remain in place regardless of shifting government representation and other political changes.
5. Continued investment is required in research to ensure best practices remain at the forefront, based on current knowledge and responsive to the emergent needs of children, youth and families.