

Children & Youth in Care and Mentoring Advisory Committee
Submission to Child Intervention Panel
June 21, 2017

The Children & Youth in Care and Mentoring Project received six years of funding from Alberta Human Services (2014 & 2017) to increase the number of children and youth in care having access to a mentor. The agencies participating in the project are Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary and Area, Youth HQ, formally known as the Red Deer Youth and Volunteer Centre Foundation, and Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton and Area Society. As of June 2017, there are 154 Children and Youth in Care reported being matched in mentoring relationships as part of this initiative. As a result of familiarity with the Child Intervention system, the Youth in Care and Mentoring Advisory Committee is well positioned to provide information to the Child Intervention Panel. Members of the Advisory Committee would be pleased to meet with the Panel to further discuss the contents of their submission.

See appendix A for a list of the Advisory Members.

Key contact:

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What leads a child or family to become involved in the child intervention system?

A host of complex scenarios often lead a child or family to become involved in the child intervention system. More often than not, a variety of traumas are precursors to child intervention involvement which may include addiction, mental health concerns, illness, poverty, unemployment, abuse and neglect (Alberta Human Services, 2014). In addition, circumstances that challenge families can become catalysts to child intervention involvement as a result of stress (Rodriguez & Green, 1997). For example, unemployment, financial strain, lack of support systems, children with behavioural issues, lack of parenting skills or lack of healthy coping skills can all increase the level of stress on a family which can lead to involvement with the child intervention system (Rodriguez & Green, 1997). Under connected and under resourced families are further disadvantaged when experiencing cyclical or systemic forms of trauma (WHO, 2014).

According to Human Services, the main reasons for child intervention involvement are neglect and exposure to family violence; both of which can be precipitated by stressful or traumatic experiences (Child Intervention System Fact Sheet, 2014). In 2015, there were over 86, 000 victims of violence, accounting for 26% of all victims of police-reported violent crime (Statistics Canada, 2015). In the same year, 53, 500 child and youth victims were reported in Canada and the majority of these victims (58%) were victimized by a parent (2015).

What can be done so that families do not need to become involved in the child intervention system?

Focus on prevention and early intervention:

Prevention and early intervention are key to ensuring that families do not need to become involved in the child intervention system. A key component of prevention is strengthening natural support networks in communities and families lives. Cohesive family structures that are supported by other family, friends, caring adults and community resources helps to ensure that in the event of trauma or stress, families are aware of appropriate parenting techniques and have the emotional support they need.

Programs offered in communities that are easily accessible to families help to address challenges that contribute to unstable home environments. Early intervention and prevention strategies could address approximately 85% of situations that currently come to the attention of Human Services (Child Intervention System Fact Sheet, 2014). Better access to community supports, family/parenting programs, cultural programs, addiction supports, food banks and positive role models in the community can greatly contribute to preventing family violence, reduce stress on families and decrease the rates of child intervention system involvement.

Ensure all children and youth in care have access to mentors and positive role models

There is a cluster of protective factors that help to foster psychological resilience in the face of adversities, one of which includes bonds to non-related positive roles models (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). Having access to a mentor, a non-paid support, help children and youth develop confidence, self-esteem and skills to be successful in life (AMP, 2017). Positive impacts of mentoring include increased high school completion rates, improved attitudes about school, enhanced academic achievement, improvement in social skills and behavioural concerns, increased resiliency, better peer and family relationships, decreased involvement in risky behaviours and an increased sense of belonging (AMP, 2017).

The wrap around supports that mentoring offers for children and youth can help to strengthen resiliency and counteract some of the negative home life experiences some children may experience. In particular, children who do not have the benefit of being exposed to positive role models at home have the opportunity to connect with a person who is focused on them, provides emotional support and guidance, and helps to build positive skills. Mentoring can contribute to the prevention of child intervention involvement and support resiliency skills of children.

What other programs or services could make a difference or help children and families that are involved with the child intervention system?

In addition to programs focused on mentoring, the Youth in Care and Mentoring Advisory Committee believes that supporting parenting groups and therapeutic family work would help children and families involved in the child intervention system to heal and rebuild a positive family life. Supporting Alberta Works and facilitating easy connections to resources such as parenting groups, the food bank, subsidized housing and culturally relevant supports and connections would help to decrease stress on families and the resulting family disruptions that could lead to child intervention system involvement.

If there are things you can suggest to improve the child intervention system, what would that be?

The Youth in Care and Mentoring Advisory Committee offers the following considerations for improving the child intervention system:

- Support mentoring for children and youth, both in care and out of care. As one Advisory Committee Member notes:
 - *“Mentoring programs provide a consistent, positive relationship for young people experiencing many transitions, stressors and challenges. A mentor acts as a stable, positive relationship with a strong youth voice during a time when they may not feel in control of things going on in their lives. Young people find it very valuable to be able to just talk to someone uninvolved with their family and/or professionals and get out and do positive activities together.”*
- Offer more affordable child care and resources to after school care to decrease stress on families who are unable to find appropriate care within budget for their children;
- Support the building of positive connections to community organizations where families can find a sense of belonging and develop positive skills;
- Ensure access to easily accessible resources for specific issues like addictions counselling and the food bank to support families in times of crisis; and,
- Put coaches in place who can work with families to help parents understand Child and Family Services and their roles.

Do you have any final advice for the panel as they work to develop recommendations?

The Youth in Care and Mentoring Project Advisory Committee recommends the panel to encourage the child intervention to strengthen support for mentoring relationships. The child intervention system and the workers are well positioned to provide information to the community agencies that can match the children to a positive mentor. As one Advisory Committee member notes:

“Support from the child intervention system is an integral piece to having a strong mentoring relationship. They can provide important information about the young person to Big Brothers Big Sisters to ensure a strong match can be chosen and formed, provide updates on the young person’s new placement so the mentoring relationship can be consistent and stable, and be integral in encouraging and nurturing a positive bond between a young person and mentor, especially in challenging times, which can then become a long-term natural support for the young person.”

References

Alberta Human Services. (2014). Child Intervention System Fact Sheet. *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. Retrieved from <http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Child-Intervention-System-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Statistics Canada. (2015). Family violence in Canada: A statistical profile, 2015. Retrieved from <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/85-002-x/2017001/article/14698-eng.htm>

Rhodes, J., & Lowe, R. (2008). Youth Mentoring and resilience: Implications for Practice. *Child Care in Practice*, 14 (1), 9-17.

Appendix A

Youth in Care Advisory Members:

| First Name | Last Name | Organization |
|-------------------|------------------|--|
| Brianna | Berthaume | Youth HQ |
| Chelsea | Elliott | Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary |
| Corey | Dodge | AMP |
| Cynthia | Wild | Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary |
| David | Rust | Volunteer |
| Dawn | Flanagan | Youth HQ |
| Eric | Storey | Mentor |
| Erin | Jamieson | Office of the Child and Youth Advocate |
| Jennie | Carrier | Big Brothers Big Sisters of Calgary |
| Jessica | Paterson | Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area |
| Kerry | Woodland | Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area |
| Kim | Taylor | Alberta Human Services |
| Mariam | Sheikh | Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area |
| Mellissa | Gee | Alberta Foster Parent Association |
| Michelle | Anderson-Draper | AndersonDraper Consulting |
| Nav | Sandhu | Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area |
| Peter | Smyth | Edmonton & Area Child & Family Services High Risk Youth Initiative |
| Rhonda | Barraclough | ALIGN Association of Community Services |
| Showna | Blanchard | Boys & Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton & Area |
| Stephen | Kaiswatum | Youth Participant |