

June 29, 2017

### **Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention (via e-mail)**

Dear Panel Members,

Collectively, IFCC members provide approximately 50% of the Foster Care placements available in the Edmonton Region. IFCC is made up of seven accredited agencies who are contracted to provide Foster Care Services in the greater Edmonton area, as well as other regions in Central and Northern Alberta.

Foster Care is evolving in Alberta, with child intervention focusing on the least intrusive level of care and protection. To this end, the first intervention for families in crisis is to support children to remain in their home. The next level of intervention is to locate a kinship home, where children are cared for by extended family. When these options are inadequate, caseworkers turn to foster homes to meet children's need for safety and family-based care.

This progression is indicative of the fact that children being placed in out-of-home care have higher needs than those who are able to be cared for by family members. In response, Provincial Foster Parent training is now beginning to focus on trauma-informed care.

IFCC advocates for the Edmonton area non-department foster families. The work of trained, licensed Foster Families occurs within the rules and structures that Children's Services has built up over time in response to issues, concerns, as well as tragedies that have occurred in the child intervention system.

## **POSITIVES IN CONTRACT AGENCY FOSTER CARE:**

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**IT WORKS BETTER** - Contract foster care provides more support to foster families, more training, and access to a more professional infrastructure. Agencies create a community for families, including extended family, bio-kids and kids-in-care. Foster children in Agency care have a strong high school completion rate, and a high permanency rate (adoption, Permanent Guardianship, room & board arrangements after they reach adulthood.)

We create communities. Our Agencies focus on building a sense of connectedness which gives kids access to a supportive and healthy community. Many agencies provide respite internally. This provides consistent and ongoing support by several foster families in the agency community.

As independent agencies, we are able to be nimble, and can meet the needs of our families by responding quickly as situations change. Since we can create targeted training, we provide up-to-date, research-based skill-development to meet a child's individual needs.

Staffing is stable in Agencies. Our support workers can be a consistent presence for the kids. Children in care often experience a continuing rotation of caseworkers who are unable to stay abreast of children's history and permanency plan. Each change of worker can result in "system drift", where the child remains in care for a longer period of time.

Agency staff recruit foster families, complete their home assessment, train, help prepare for licensing, and then support the families over a long period of time.

Long term connections: Most agencies' families make a permanent connection with the kids in their care. These connections are strongly established; the child often remains part of the extended family life. Kids reconnect with the family for stability and assistance, receiving ongoing emotional and financial support from their former foster families, or siblings.

**ACCREDITATION:** Contract agencies must meet a consistently higher standard than what is required in Department Foster Care. Agency Foster Care has higher requirements for visits in foster homes, higher reporting requirements, increased documentation; this results in monitoring the care provided on a consistent basis. Agencies must demonstrate adherence to standards during required accreditation reviews. In addition to ongoing internal reviews and quality controls within the Agency, the accreditation review is a comprehensive quality control check completed by peers from outside the Agency. Such accountability strengthens the care we are able to provide in our homes.

## **WHAT WE NEED TO MAKE CONTRACT FOSTER CARE BETTER:**

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We have listed several key issues which impact the care children in foster homes are able to receive. Our intention is not to provide a list of negatives, but rather to highlight **issues** that affect Foster Parents, and the children in their care. We hope this will give the panel a base for exploration into how Alberta might continue to build the efficacy of our Foster Care system.

### **FOSTER PARENTS ARE PARA-PROFESSIONALS:**

- Great strides have been made in Alberta over the past 20 years to support our Foster Parents. However, the Skill Fee paid to Foster Parents does not address the professional level of care expected of them. Foster Parents receive \$15/day [Level 1], or \$27.50/day [Level 2] to compensate their 24 hours/day time and effort.
- Crisis supports can be hard to access, and may not adequately meet the needs.
- These factors can be a disincentive for skilled Foster Parents to remain in this field.

### **RECRUITMENT:**

- Family dynamics have changed significantly over the past decades. The two-parent family where one stays home is no longer the norm. New strategies are needed to recruit the type of foster home in which parents can fully address trauma in children.
- The negative image frequently portrayed by the media is detrimental to Foster Family recruitment efforts. There is a need for a continuous advertising campaign, highlighting success stories, and depicting foster parents as para-professionals, describing their training and the high standard of care provided.

### **FOSTER PARENT TRAINING:**

- Although Provincial core-training contains important concepts, certificates reflect attendance but the level of learning is not measured. Training would be more effective if it was competency-based, and offered with more options for working parents (Skype group training, Individual on-line training; distance education with a combination of approaches; experiential training, etc.)
- Agencies are encouraged by the advances made in understanding the importance of trauma-informed care. Foster Families benefit from a deeper understanding of the trauma underlying the higher needs of children coming into care today.

- Since children coming into care are impacted by trauma, many Agencies supplement existing training to strengthen the Foster Family's skill-base.

### **EVOLVING WORKLOAD & COLLABORATION:**

- Agencies are supportive of the Provincial move to collaboration, as this develops we are aware of the additional resources required to facilitate this. More staff must to be involved with service team meetings, there is increased need to coordinate service plan strategies, increase in the number of meetings, paperwork, and communication
- Hours available for Agency front-line support of the foster family have decreased significantly. This is due to the increase in administrative requirements, as the Ministry has heightened the level of vigilance and documentation required without increasing funding for staff.

### **CULTURAL RESOURCES**

- Additional training for staff and Foster Parents is required for this growing need
- Funding is needed to ensure Cultural Resource people are available for all agencies
- Funding for the child to maintain involvement with their culture should be a priority. The cost of attending cultural events should not reduce money available for the child to take part in other activities (e.g. soccer, swimming lessons etc.).

## **FUNDING**

Despite increases in operational costs, and dramatic increases in administrative requirements, Edmonton area Foster Care Agencies have had no increases to overhead budgets since 2009. Additional resources are required to more fully meet the needs of children and families in the Edmonton area.

We are very encouraged by the Panel's focus on the needs of children in care in Alberta. We hope to be able to provide additional information and clarification as you work to strengthen resources for children and families in Alberta.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our insights.

Sincerely,

*Elaine Roemmich*

IFCC Chair  
Executive Director, Crossroads Family Services

*On behalf of:*

- Crossroads Family Services
- Métis Child and Family Services (Edmonton)
- Mountain Plains Family Service Society of Edmonton
- Pathways Family Services