Budget 2019 Update from ALIGN

Hi all,

I have received numerous notes from people wanting clarity on Budget items and the recent notifications of contract decreases or re- design of the Early Intervention sector into Family Resource Networks (FRN).

First off I need to remind you that this government is charting a path to balance. They are examining all their finances, including targeted reductions and thoughtful reallocations. The Children’s Services operating expenses include an increase of 68.5 million dollars, or 8.5 % - the majority of this is to address caseload growth in child intervention. That does not mean increased staffing.

For Early Intervention services and supports there was a $751,000.00 increase or .7%. The Wellbeing and Resiliency framework outlines the ministry’s approach to providing prevention and early intervention services to children, youth and families. Today there is an expression of interest from the Family and Community Resiliency Division inviting proposals from the sector to develop Family Resource Networks (FRN). This is a competitive process and those that are successful will receive grant funding from that provincial division.

I think folks have been caught off guard a bit in that all of the Parent Links (only few expectations) and Home Visitation and other programs ware all affected in this review and realignment of services. In my discussion at the Ministry level this is redesign is intended to provide a full continuum of services are all age groups. Please make sure you see the expression of interest on the Alberta Purchasing Commission website, review it, and make your decisions accordingly.

ALIGN recognizes that for many of the agencies involved in this sector they have not had to participate in competitive processes and proposal submission. We will endeavor to get you some help in this area. In 2015, we engaged Paul Brown in some assistance when there was large tendering happening for OBSD, and his information remains on our website and can be used a resources materiel - <https://alignab.ca/procurement-presentation-paul-brown-3e-training-2015/>.

With respect to Child Intervention, there are no increased in staffing, there may be some confusion about caseload growth and staffing but at this time the Ministry (and Government for that matter) have a freeze on hiring. The government has capped FTE levels for the Ministry and they have to manage to that level. Children Service’s is also encumbered from last year’s budget and debt. That needs to be recovered in this year’s budget. The overall priorities remain: group care, kinship care and foster care to manage the growth and the complexity of the young people who are in those care settings.

Support and Financial agreements (SAFA) have had the age limit lowered to 22 as of April 1, 2020. There is a review of all those agreements underway to ensure that there are transition plans in place for those young people.

This week there has been conversations and notices of reductions in contracts in many CI areas. The decision process for these reductions is 3-fold:

* Are services being underutilized;
* Is there a clear CI mandate for that service; and
* Should another ministry mandate be covering that service?

I am assured that nothing is written in stone, and conversation should be happening with contract managers about the proposed reductions to review these areas. There is more money that has to be spent to accommodate the caseload growth, and that will be targeted to the highest pressure areas.

What does all this mean? It means we need to keep advocating for children and youth, and that services can and will be well placed in communities, and that there is a need to ensure sustainable funding. ALIGN will be asking to meet with the Minister to discuss the stability of the sector and the need to review and realign carefully so as not to destabilize the delivery system. We also need to remind her that there have not been changes in funding for a long time and that it needs to happen as we have increasing turnover rates and complexity of young people in the care networks.

Red Tape remains a focus for this government and they have assigned specific targets to each Ministry. So if you have Red Tape suggestions please make sure you send them into the Red Tape website and copy me on those so I can reinforce them in my discussions. Children Services and Community Support Services are only a small part of the larger government machine and they have priorities from a larger government perspective to meet in these challenging economic times.

We also need to be an ally for indigenous people in this province and we want to see the number of indigenous children in care reduced and for those in care to ensure they are aware for their family and history. That means we need to continue on a path of working on a cultural framework and delivery system, which means funds need to be directed to support that work as well.

I have attached a number of documents for you to review and they will get posted on our website soon. Please let us know if there is something ALIGN can do to support a particular area of service. We have not had extensive briefings with the Ministry of Community and Support Services yet, but we expect to soon.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to reach out to me, Rhondab@alignab.ca or 780.233.5459

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