

MARCH • 2021



ALIGN

Association of Community Services
Together for Children and Families

MLA UPDATE



Photo by Robert Collins on Unsplash

What ALIGN is working for

1. **Keep services in the community:** community agencies know what they are doing, they know their community and they are experts in their areas and provide services that are needed
2. **Invest in these services:** COVID has enhanced the struggles of vulnerable Albertans, we need to be there for them. Investments now will save costs in other areas – homelessness, employment, addiction and mental health treatment. Donor pools and other supports are not available and we cannot assume the community will support the vulnerable.

We have just seen one of the most challenging and difficult years in recent history; the pandemic has had a monumental effect on children, families and those working to ensure their wellbeing. Our belief is that through collaboration with stakeholders, a respectful and positive environment can be created. To that end, the ALIGN team has created this newsletter to provide Alberta MLAs news and recent activities of our member agencies.

ALIGN is a membership organization that supports a network of child and family service agencies, all committed to improving the quality of life for Alberta's most vulnerable children and families. We have been championing policy, standards, supports, research and training for more than 50 years. ALIGN provides support and representation on behalf of the members in many ways:

1. Knowledge transfer
2. Resources and research
3. Inclusive services including cultural understanding, diversity, racism
4. Policy input: a collaborative approach to policy development and a voice at many tables with the Government of Alberta to develop workable/ best practice policy
5. Advocacy with government: we advocate the value of the sector; help support social value investments in Alberta with the goal that we collectively can work towards a healthier, safe Alberta today.

An example of ALIGN agencies working together

Woods Homes pivots to address COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed mental health service delivery perhaps like no other event in recent history. At a rapid pace, organizations such as Wood's Homes have had to adapt mental health care practices to comply with ever-evolving public health recommendations and policies. This, while also balancing the need to provide continuity of quality care to clients when transitioning to new technology platforms.

When the pandemic first started, the Homes were forced to temporarily suspend walk-in access to our Inglewood campus, where vulnerable young people typically arrive looking for help. But staff there were determined not to leave clients out in the cold with no supports - staff went out into the community three times a week to deliver food hampers, delivering more than 350 hampers, 90 hygiene kits and 50 first aid kits to clients in the downtown core and surrounding areas. Between April and August, 352 youth were provided with crisis and social support. And help continues to this day in various ways.

Wood's Homes is no stranger to challenges, and thanks to loyal staff and a supportive community, they are able to continue their mission to help children, youth and families with their mental health needs.

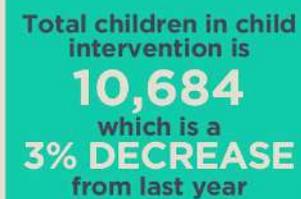
We are not one - we are many

Our member organizations provide services to vulnerable children and families in communities across Alberta. The network is over 120 agencies strong, employing over 10,000 staff. Together, each year, we provide services to over 200,000 children and families. We look to our communities and elected officials to advocate for the work we do and keep it in the forefront of public policy.



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ALIGN is a unified community of agencies that represents the diverse needs of Alberta's children and families. With a shared vision and a collective voice ALIGN advocates for the causes and issues that directly affect their members and the children and families of Alberta. ALIGN has 120 member agencies with 15,000 employees providing services to over 200,000 children and families every year in Alberta.



We Work Collaboratively

We have a reputation for collaborating with government, academia and other professional practice organizations. We are frequently asked to represent the voices of our member organizations during policy, practice, and legislative discussions. We have welcomed the voice and leadership of the Indigenous community to collectively strengthen and implement services that promote positive, and healthy outcomes for clients. The programs and services our members offer respect history and respond to many of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

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An example of an ALIGN agency using their experience

Closer to Home

*Jared is a single dad who lives in Calgary with his young daughter, *Mira. Jared was at risk of losing his little girl - he was suffering from PTSD and debilitating anxiety. Misty Swimmer, a Home Visitor with Closer to Home's Home Visitation program, began working with both dad and daughter, teaching Jared activities that would help meet Mira's developmental milestones, as well as coping mechanisms for his PTSD and anxiety. Through a lot of coaching, praising, and tiny steps, Jared's confidence began to grow.

Closer to Home uses an evidence-based, family-centred approach to all programs and services. The Home Visitation program focuses on healthy child development, parenting skills, connecting to community resources, and any other goals the family may identify. The program sees tremendous success because people are more comfortable in their own home, and it allows workers to observe the natural environment and interactions of the family. Swimmer says of the program, "it helps give families the support they need at such a vulnerable time of their lives and gives them the knowledge to succeed at being a parent."

It has certainly done that for Jared. Nikki Bagwell, Program Coordinator for the Home Visitation program, says that "without Closer to Home's Visitation program, Jared would just be scraping by...now, he is flying. We will probably be closing his file in a few months because they are doing so well." It is said of Jared that he is now "Wonder Dad," and it's no wonder. It's what happens when we lead and teach by example, set goals, and celebrate success; something Closer to Home has been doing for 25 years.

*name changed for privacy

We get results

ALIGN members hold approximately 80% of the Alberta Government contracts for front line child intervention services. Additionally, our members are contracted to provide family support for children with disabilities, early intervention programs and programs for prevention of family violence. Organizations are selected for these contracts because they consistently deliver high quality services at a competitive cost.

We are experienced

We are a respected source of knowledge and history about child and family services. In this professional field of practice, members look to us to offer leadership and training that builds front-line best practice and advances skills in executive leadership.

We continually work with academic leaders and international experts to bring members innovative and impactful opportunities for capacity building.

An example of an ALIGN agency celebrating results

The Family Centre

Crystal was caring for her grandchildren when her world turned upside down. She had been sober for 16 years but was accused of using drugs and alcohol. The next day her grandchildren were taken into care. After the kids were taken, Crystal struggled with addiction for almost two years, living with her sister and spending time with her grandchildren. With the threat of becoming homeless, Crystal became motivated to quit drinking, and did so.

To become the official kinship caregiver of her grandchildren, Crystal had to learn about rules, discipline, and structure. She took many parenting courses and received resources from a support group led by other caregivers at St. Francis School. She also received support from workers at The Family Centre. Over time, she knew they were there to help her achieve her goal of gaining kinship. After much effort, hard work, and dedication, Crystal was able to get kinship of her grandchildren. Loving her grandchildren is worth the struggle and is the easiest thing for Crystal to do.