

**Office of the Child and Youth Advocate Quarterly Report (October 1 to December 31, 2008)
(Alberta Children and Youth Services Response)**

Response to Provincial Overview

As part of the quarterly reporting process the advocate may make generalized observations that are not specific to a particular child or youth or Child and Family Services Authority or Delegated First Nation Agency.

The table below provides ministry responses to these generalized observations.

Concern Reported	Ministry Response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulty accessing resources and supports from the ministry, concerns about inability to receive certain services requested, and having some requests denied. • Concerns about placement decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Criteria and rates for accessing all financial benefits for children and youth in care, including daily living costs, basic needs, clothing allowance, recreation allowance, and camp/vacation allowance, are set in provincial policy. • Orthodontic services are provided based on the approval of a diagnosis and estimate sent to the Alberta Dental Services Corporation. • The criteria for entering into a support and financial assistance agreement with a youth and the supports that may be provided under such an agreement are identified in the Child, Youth and Family Regulation. Provincial policy outlines the procedures to follow when terminating a support and financial assistance agreement. • Every effort is made to ensure that children and youth have frequent contact with individuals who are significant to them, when such contact is appropriate and safe. In some situations, it may not be safe for a child or youth to visit with a family member and in other cases, the family member may not wish to visit with the child or youth. • Placement decisions for children and youth in care are made based on several factors, including meeting the specific needs of the child and the needs of other children in the placement, the skill set of the caregiver, the availability of an appropriate placement, and the number of spaces available in a placement under licensing requirements. In some cases, a child or youth may not be pleased with the placement option that his or her worker feels is in the best interest of the child or youth. • Provincial policy is that caseworkers must ensure that any decisions concerning the placement of a child or youth take into account the benefits of placement with extended family, in their home community, and be respectful of the child or youth's familial, cultural, social, religious backgrounds, and significant relationships. • Provincial policy is that children and youth in care must be advised of the range of formal and informal mechanisms available to them to have their concerns heard and resolved, including through the Child and Youth Advocate.

Report on Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) and Delegated First Nation Agencies (DFNAs)

The tables below include information about how cases where mandatory notifications were made to the advocate were addressed by CFSAs and DFNAs. CFSAs and DFNAs are required by ministry policy to inform the advocate whenever:

- A child or youth is alleged to have suffered physical, emotional, or sexual abuse while in provincial government care.
- A child or youth receiving services, or a significant person in their life, disagrees with the services planned for a child or youth in care.
- It is felt that the viewpoint or interests of a child or youth in care are not being considered or the rights of a child or youth in care are not being respected.

The ministry response section of the table shows the number of such incidents reported to the advocate and whether they were founded or unfounded, based on the facts discovered when the incident was investigated.

When an allegation is verified, the first priority of the ministry is to take immediate steps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the child or youth in care. The nature of these steps vary, depending on the unique circumstances of each case and can include:

- The permanent closure of a foster home or kinship care home, or the discipline of group home staff, up to and including dismissal. Incidents that are criminal in nature are referred to the appropriate police authorities.
- A requirement that foster parents or kinship caregivers receive additional training before being able to care for children or youth in their home again. In some cases a child or youth in care may remain with the foster parent or kinship caregiver, provided their safety and wellbeing can be assured.
- The need for foster parents or kinship caregivers to take additional steps to ensure the continued safety and wellbeing of children and youth in their care, such as making sure third parties who have placed the safety and wellbeing of the young person at risk are barred access to the child or youth.
- The ministry providing additional supports and services to the foster parent or kinship caregiver and increasing its monitoring activities.
- Forwarding verified cases of abuse to the ministry legal services branch for referral to the Office of the Public Trustee.

Child and Family Services Authorities

CFSA	Concern Reported	Ministry Response
Southwest CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two mandatory notifications involving two children. • Placement of youth out of region. • Conflict between family members in kinship care situations. • Permanency placements for children and youth in care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry follow-up found that neither report related to allegations of abuse in care. • Placement for high-needs or high-risk youth are an ongoing challenge for the ministry. It is sometime necessary to place a youth outside of their home community, so they can access specialized services that may only be offered in larger centres. • The use of family group conferences put in place in circumstances where children are placed in kinship care has helped address this concern. • A regional permanency committee has been established with membership including parties involved in determining the most appropriate permanency option for children and youth in care (including the aboriginal community).

Southeast CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two mandatory notifications involving five children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One allegation of abuse was substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One case of inappropriate disciplinary strategies used by a kinship caregiver. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kinship caregiver being provided with additional supports and training.
Calgary & Area CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 mandatory notifications involving 75 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nine allegations of abuse involving twenty-three children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One case of sexual play between two pre-school children in a foster home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster parents were found to have responded appropriately. One case of a foster parent leaving foster children unattended in a vehicle while running into a grocery store. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quality of care issue addressed with the foster parent. One case of excessive force by group home staff to restrain a high-needs youth. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The staff member is no longer employed in the group home. One case of two youth in a group home exposing themselves to other youth in the group home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immediate safety plans and counselling, and matter referred to the police. Both youth moved to other placements. Two separate cases of inappropriate sexual behaviour toward foster children by the adult child of foster parents. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In one case additional supports have been provided to the foster parents and a no contact between foster children and the adult child put in place. In the other case all foster children were removed from the home and the foster home was closed. Three separate cases of a kinship caregiver using inappropriate discipline strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional training provided to the caregivers in two cases. Child was moved to a foster home and kinship home was closed in the other case.
Central CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Six mandatory notifications involving 11 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry follow-up determined that the allegations of abuse were not supported by what was discovered during the investigation into these allegations.
East Central CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three mandatory notifications involving eight children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ministry follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation.
Edmonton & Area CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 27 mandatory notifications involving 86 children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Four allegations of abuse involving eleven children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One case of a foster parent having physically abused their adopted child <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Foster children were moved and foster home placed on hold. One case of the uncle of a kinship caregiver using inappropriate discipline strategies. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child moved to foster home and additional training provided to kinship caregiver. Two cases of peer-on-peer sexual assault in a group home. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety plan in place and counselling provided, and matter referred to police.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to parents, siblings, friends. • Number / suitability of placements. • Information not documented in the Child and Youth Information Module (CYIM) in a timely manner • Timelines for and documentation of investigations. • Youth involvement in their own transitional planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The region continues to make a concerted effort to ensure that children and youth are able to have contact with individuals that are significant to them. • In some cases, a child may not be permitted contact with someone for reasons including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact could place the physical, emotional, or psychological safety/wellbeing of the child or youth in care at risk. ○ The individual with whom the child or youth wishes contact does not want contact with the child or youth in care. • The region strives to ensure that suitable placements are found in a timely fashion. • It is not uncommon for region staff and children and youth to disagree with each other regarding which placement is in the best interests of the child. • Region staff continue to work to find the best solutions for children and youth. A foster parent and aboriginal caregiver recruitment strategy is currently underway and is yielding positive results. • Ministry follow up on this concern found that documentation is being placed on CYIM and that the region has clear policy in place regarding documentation, which was developed in consultation with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate. • The region continues to take steps to reduce timelines for completing an intervention-type investigation. • Regional staff work to ensure a child and youth's wishes are factored into planning for them. Sometimes children and youth make requests that are not in their best interests or safe. Children/youth have and are made aware of recourse mechanisms available to them including speaking with a supervisor or manager, access to an advocate, an administrative review, or an appeal.
North Central CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three mandatory notifications involving three children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two allegations of abuse involving two children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One case of physical abuse by a kinship caregiver. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved from home, kinship home closed, and matter referred to police. ○ One case of sexual abuse by a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child was not in the foster home placement when disclosure was made. Matter referred to police and criminal charges laid.
Northwest CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four mandatory notifications involving eight children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two allegations of abuse involving three children were substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate.

	<i>Two referrals were sent twice to ensure the advocate received them, therefore, only eight children were involved, not 12 (as reported in the quarterly report).</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One case of a foster parent and youth involved in a shoving match during a disagreement. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Youth moved from home and foster home placed on hold. ○ One case of inappropriate discipline strategies being used on foster children by the adult daughter of a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster children moved and foster home closed.
Northeast CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ministry follow-up found that the report did not relate to allegations of abuse in care.
Métis Settlements CFSA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving two children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One allegation of abuse involving two children was substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One case of inappropriate discipline strategies being used on foster children by the adult daughter of a foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster children moved and foster home closed. <p>* This is the same allegation as reported above for the Northwest CFSA.</p>

Report on Delegated First Nation Agencies

Delegated First Nation Agency (DFNA)	Concern Reported	Response
Bigstone Cree Social Services Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation.
Kasohkowew Child Wellness Society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two mandatory notifications involving two children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow-up determined that the allegation of abuse was not verified by the facts discovered during the investigation into the allegation.
North Peace Tribal Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two mandatory notifications involving two children. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One allegation of abuse against one child was substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One case of a minor nephew of a foster parent sexually touching a foster child. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Child moved to another foster home.
Siksika	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One mandatory notification involving one child. • Youth requesting placement closer to or in home community. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One allegation of abuse against one child was substantiated and addressed to the satisfaction of the advocate. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One case of abuse of a foster child by the adult biological son of the foster parent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Foster child moved, foster home closed, and criminal charges laid by police. • Agency staff work to ensure that children and youth are in placements that are as close to their home community as possible, while still able to meet the needs of the child or youth. • A provincial aboriginal caregiver recruitment campaign is currently underway.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to parents, siblings, friends. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The agency continues to make a concerted effort to ensure that children and youth are able to have contact with individuals that are significant to them. • In some cases, a child may not be permitted contact with someone for reasons including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Contact could place the physical, emotional, or psychological safety/wellbeing of the child or youth in care at risk. ○ The individual with whom the child or youth wishes contact does not want contact with the child or youth in care.
Stoney Child & Family Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialized placement for youth with high needs. • Transitional planning. • Face-to-face contact. • Communication between service providers and caseworkers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agency staff work to ensure children and youth are in placements that meet their needs, including making sure caregivers have the skills to meet the youth's needs and appropriate caregiver-youth ratios. • SCFS continues to work on starting transition planning for youths in care earlier. Current policy was reviewed with agency staff and monitoring is taking place. • Provincial policies are in place requiring that caseworkers have contact with a child or youth in care on a monthly basis and face-to-face contact at least every three months, including time spent with the child with no caregiver present (for school-aged children). • Provincial practice is for caseworkers to attempt to return calls from children and youth by the end of the next business day.

* The Child and Youth Advocate did not receive any mandatory notifications or have additional observations regarding the Delegated First Nation Agencies not listed in the table above.