

RESPONSE TO THE CHILD DEATH REVIEW COMMITTEE

The Child Death Review Committee investigates the deaths of children younger than age 19 who have been either in the legal care of the minister of Social Development or have been known to the child protection system within the last 12 months prior to their death. One of the objectives of the committee is to make recommendations that will lead to improvements to prevent future deaths and to improve services to children.

The Child Death Review Committee investigated the case of a child receiving services from a First Nations child and family services agency at the time of death.

Following is each recommendation by the Child Death Review Committee and the minister of Social Development's response:

Recommendation 1

Since kinship placement is still the expectation of community members and band government in First Nations communities, the committee recommends that written guidelines be established to clarify kinship placement practices, with specific emphasis on the use of criminal record checks in all instances; the need to ensure PRIDE (Parents' Resources for Information, Development and Education) training be made available, with emphasis on the role and importance of both parents in fostering children, even when one is clearly less engaged in day-to-day care of the child(ren).

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

First Nations' Child and Family Service Standards require that prospective foster families and provisional homes (kinship) undergo a criminal record check. Placement of a child within his or her extended family or with a significant person in the child's life -- an action known as kinship care -- is the preferred option when a child cannot remain with his or her parents. Accordingly, Social Development is designing a kinship-care model to be implemented as part of the New Directions for Child Protection Initiative. First Nations have had active participation on the project teams designing the various models for this initiative, which include Family Group Conference, Child Protection Mediation and Multiple Response.

Under the kinship care program, Social Development and First Nations will be required to conduct prior-contact record checks to determine if a prospective kinship placement family has been involved with child protection services.

Social Development and First Nations follow what is known as *Operational Protocols Between The New Brunswick Department of Social Development and First Nation Child and Family Service Agencies*; these protocols provide for information-sharing. Social Development is committed to working with First Nations to revise these protocols to ensure that a clear process is established to enable First Nations child and family services agencies to complete prior-contact checks involving the department.

PRIDE training is provided to all foster families and kinship placement families. This training emphasizes the role that all adult caregivers have with children living in the home. PRIDE is available through the regional offices of Social Development to families from First Nations.

Under PRIDE, the completion of in-home assessments is required. Social Development will work with First Nations to develop a process for completing these assessments; in addition, Social Development will help First Nations recruit PRIDE trainers from within their communities.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that a training module be developed to address the challenges of working with dual relationships, and that all social workers in First Nations child and family services agencies be provided with this training.

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

In many communities, social workers are often personally familiar with the families with whom they work. If managed properly, such ethical and personal dual relationships can be very effective. However, such relationships can also pose challenges to social workers serving in small communities. Social Development will explore with the Mi'kmaq / Maliseet BSW (MMBSW) program the possibility that training be added to the curriculum. The MMBSW is a partnership with the schools of Social Work at St. Thomas University and Dalhousie University. Social Development will collaborate with various First Nations child and family services agencies to conduct research with other First Nations, the First Nations Caring Society of Canada, and other child welfare jurisdictions in North America to determine if training models exist that specifically address the challenges of working with dual relationships and that can be adapted to New Brunswick.

If no such models exist to address this issue, the Social Development Child Welfare Training System, in consultation with First Nations, will develop specific training or update present core training.

The committee recommends that a clinical audit be carried out to assess the effectiveness of social work practice in First Nations child and family services agencies, with a view to identifying best practices and areas of limitations and providing necessary training to address these limitations.

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

Program reviews have been completed to monitor compliance with child welfare standards for all 11 First Nations. The director and staff at each First Nations Child and Family Service agency, in conjunction with Social Development, develop action plans to address the recommendations made in the program reviews. Social Development will consult with First Nations Child and Family Service agencies to develop a process for conducting clinical audits.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that Social Development give priority to assessing if there is a need to increase resources for monitoring and support of quality child welfare practices in First Nations child and family services.

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

Social Development is intent upon working in close collaboration with First Nations communities and the federal government to support these communities across New Brunswick to implement in the shortest time possible a culturally appropriate and outcomes-driven prevention-based child welfare model.

There should be a review of reporting mechanisms between the agencies and the provincial government

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

The minister of Social Development has requested that the Child and Youth Advocate conduct an independent review of child welfare services within First Nations communities and to issue recommendations to renew the delivery of services. This will include a review of roles, responsibilities and reporting mechanisms.

The standards should continue to be sensitive to cultural differences and needs of First Nations communities, while ensuring the safety and quality of care of its children.

Social Development accepts this recommendation.

The *Family Services Act* governs child welfare throughout New Brunswick. Social workers on First Nations must meet, provincial child welfare standards. Recognizing this, in 1994, First Nations child and family service agencies staff developed culturally relevant child and family service standards; these standards were revised in 2004. For example, these standards have guidelines for involving elders and the extended family when a child is at risk or when prevention services are required. However, a mechanism is not in place to update easily First Nations standards when Social Development revises its child welfare standards. During the next 12 months, Social Development will explore with its First Nations partners how to incorporate their cultural guidelines into departmental child welfare program standards. As Social Development and its First Nations partners move forward, the intent will be to have in place one set of standards that apply throughout New Brunswick.