Commission to Promote
Sustainable Child Welfare

Commission de promotion de la viabilité
des services de bien-être de l'enfance

Strengthening Family-Based Care
In a Sustainable Child Welfare System

Final Report and Recommendations

June 29, 2012

The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare was created by the Minister of Children and Youth Services to develop and implement solutions to ensure the sustainability of child welfare. The Commission reports to the Minister and will complete its work in the fall of 2012. Further information is available from the Commission's website: www.sustainingchildwelfare.ca.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

This document is the product of the goodwill, honesty and energy of countless individuals who made the time to share with the Commission their insights and experience.

The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare gratefully acknowledges:

- The many foster parents and kinship parents who participated in telephone interviews, contributed to formal submissions and attended consultation sessions with the Commission over the last two-and-a-half years;
- The leaders of countless private agencies of foster and group care who contributed to submissions and attended consultation sessions with the Commission;
- The many leaders and front-line staff of Children's Aid Societies across the province and the individuals who acted as informal advisors throughout the Commission's work on family-based care;
- The leadership of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies, the Foster Parents Society of Ontario, the League of Ontario Foster Families, the Ontario Association of Residences Serving Youth and the Ontario Residential Care Association;
- The members of YouthCan and the Youth Leaving Care Hearings group; and
- The valuable contributions of PART (Practice and Research Together) and the Child Welfare Institute which informed the Commission's research and literature review.

A special note of appreciation to the Commission staff who supported the Strengthening Family-Based Care work: Sarah Beatty as the Research Coordinator and Mary Dinally, MSW Intern.

Finally, the Commission extends its deep appreciation to the many children, youth and young adults who have lived the experience of "out-of-home care" and who drew on that experience to help us understand the changes that can make a difference today and in the future.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If you ask the average Ontarian what comes to mind when they think of Children's Aid Societies, more often than not the answer will be something about "children in foster care". In reality, children and youth who are supported by CASs in foster care and other out-of-home placements represent the minority of children and youth that CASs serve. For every one child or group of siblings in out-of-home placements, CASs are actively supporting many more while they remain at home with their families or as they transition to a permanent family through adoption or legal custody.

Nonetheless, *how* CASs provide out-of-home care to children and youth is critical to the sustainability of the entire child welfare system. It is critical because the decision to remove a child or youth from his/her home to ensure his/her safety has such powerful potential to both improve or diminish well-being and long-term outcomes. It is critical because out-of-home care represents well over half of all the expenditures of CASs. Therefore, how these services are provided has implications for the overall cost of child welfare and for the quantum of resources that are available to support vulnerable children and youth at home with their own families.

The Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare was established with a three-year mandate to develop and implement solutions to ensure the sustainability of child welfare in Ontario. Reporting directly to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, the Commission will complete its work in September 2012. Out-of-home care for children has been one of several areas that the Commission has closely examined and on which it is making recommendations to the Minister.

This report describes the findings and conclusions from the Commission's work on out-of-home care and sets out a number of goals and actions and makes the following five specific recommendations for how to move forward:

1. **MCYS, with input from the sector, should establish five-year provincial targets against which to design strategies for change and to monitor progress.** Targets should be incorporated in the overall accountability framework[1] and should address:

   - The proportion of children and youth supported by CASs while remaining at home;
   - The proportion of days of care provided in family-based settings;
   - The proportion of children and youth in placements that are geographically in, or close to, their home community;
   - The proportion of all children in care who are in placements with kin; and
   - The number of moves experienced by children in care.

2. **Each CAS should set and agree on its agency's local target with the MCYS.** MCYS should aggregate the combined outcome of all CASs meeting their individual targets and adjust, as necessary, the associated provincial targets.

[1]The Commission has undertaken a separate piece of work to develop an overall accountability framework for child welfare in Ontario. The report and recommendations from this work are targeted to be made to the Minister of Children and Youth Services by summer 2012. Note that this report includes a recommendation of establishing accountability agreements between MCYS and each CAS setting out expectations, performance targets, budgets, etc.

3. **The sector, working through OACAS, should incorporate the actions described in this report into its work plan for the Family-Based Care Project. T**his project should be designed to incorporate the active input of all stakeholders.

4. **MCYS should actively support the OACAS Family-Based Care Project and should take leadership on projects to address province-wide policies relating to family-based care.**

5. **OACAS, with the active support of MCYS, should convene a dialogue between CASs and providers/provider associations of out-of-home care.** The objective of this dialogue should be to determine an appropriate mechanism(s) for strengthening communications and priority setting relating to out-of-home care for children and youth.

The average Ontarian will never fully appreciate the challenges faced by children and youth whose life circumstances require that, at least for a period of time, they continue their lives in out-of-home care. Nor will the average Ontarian ever fully appreciate the extraordinary measures that foster parents, kin parents, biological parents, volunteers and frontline staff go to in order to make positive day-to-day moments and lasting lifelong changes happen for these children and youth.

Throughout its work, the Commission has heard, and been inspired by, a multitude of successes on how people working together are making good things happen for children and youth in out-of-home care. Much as these many successes should not be understated, nor should the shortcomings. The Commission has heard too many stories of children and youth for whom the good intentions of out-of-home care fell short.

We can do better. We must do better. We will not have sustainable child welfare unless we do better.

This report lays out a roadmap for how we can build on the many strengths that exist in the system today. In developing this report, the Commission has benefited from extensive and varied input from all groups involved in out-of-home care: CASs, foster parents, kinship parents, biological parents, private agencies providing out-of-home care and, most importantly, youth and young adults who have the lived experience of having been "in-care". The Commission has been impressed by the widespread level of recognition and commitment among all involved of the need to make changes. The actions outlined in this report are intended to contribute to the development of a concrete action plan to move forward in making these changes happen.

I. INTRODUCTION

In July 2010, the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare issued its First Report. In this report, the Commission set forth a four-tiered strategy through which to move towards realization of this vision. The fourth-tier of this strategy is *"Strengthen and Improve Direct Service Delivery."* This document reports on the findings and conclusions from one dimension of this work: specifically, the area of "out-of-home care" for children and youth.

We have referred to this piece of the Commission's work as: "***Strengthening Family-Based Care***". By this, we are incorporating multiple objectives: promoting the likelihood that children and youth will remain with their families; promoting the likelihood that when out-of-home placements are required for short or longer periods of time that these placements will give children the supports and intangibles inherent in growing up in a family setting; and finally, promoting the likelihood that out-of-home placements will lead to permanency through family reunification, adoption, legal custody or other forms.

These multiple objectives are also inherent in a parallel piece of work that the Commission has undertaken relating to the "Scope" of child welfare services. Both pieces of work reflect this shared conclusion that, as much as possible, CASs should aim to support children and youth within their existing families and avoid out-of-home placements in general and, failing that, avoid long, out-of-home placements.

The Commission has undertaken two phases of work examining sustainability opportunities relating to the provision of out-of-home care for children and youth. The first phase of this work was an exploratory phase and resulted in the *In-Care Services Working Paper* released by the Commission in 2010. The second phase has focused on specific actions in response to the following questions:

1. How to reduce the need for out-of-home care by keeping children and youth safe at home?
2. How to encourage and ensure home-like, family-like settings?
3. How to increase placements that are "close to home"?
4. How to increase opportunities for children and youth to be placed with kin?
5. How to decrease multiple moves?
6. How to enable children and youth to develop positive lifelong relationships?

During the course of this phase, an additional area of consideration arose relating to the mechanisms for CASs to collaborate with foster parents, kin, private agencies and youth on matters relating to out-of-home care. This seventh area of consideration is also addressed in this final report.

Remaining true to its principle of "objectivity based on evidence and the lived experience", the Commission sought inputs through several sources, notably:

<u>Data Analysis and Published Literature</u>

- Literature review;
- Review of documents from relevant reports from the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies;
- Data analysis drawing on:

- A survey of six CASs regarding placement of children and youth "close to home";
- An analysis of OACAS/MCYS data;
- OnLAC (year 10 report);
- OARTY's Partners in Care research reports.

<u>"Lived Experience"</u>

- More than fifty telephone interviews with foster and kin parents;
- Formal submissions requested from six major stakeholder groups:
  - Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth (OARTY)
  - Ontario Residential Care Association (ORCA)
  - Foster Parents Society of Ontario (FPSO)
  - League of Ontario Foster Families (LOFF)
  - The Youth Community Advocacy Network at OACAS (YouthCan)
  - The "Youth Leaving Care Hearings" group from the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth (PACY)
  - The OACAS's Caring for Children and Youth Council (CCYC)
- Direct consultations through meetings and attendance of conferences and related events for all the above groups;
- Full-day working session with more than 40 leaders from Children's Aid Societies.

The Commission's work on SFBC has not included a specific component relating to the unique considerations of out-of-home care for Aboriginal children and youth in-care. More focused work on Aboriginal child welfare has occurred as part of the Aboriginal part of the Commission's work. However, several of the findings in the SFBC work have relevance to supporting Aboriginal children and youth.

The Commission's analysis for this work benefited from access to information from MCYS Quarterly Reports, the OACAS Children-in-Care Factsheets and the OACAS Funding & Service Analysis. Many charts in this document are drawn from these sources. It should be noted that data and charts for which the source is OACAS represent the activity of all Ontario CASs *except two* — Weechi-it-te-win and Abinoojii — which are not members of OACAS.

Terms Frequently Used in this Document

Children "In-Care" Refers to children and youth who are formally in the care and custody of a Children's Aid Society. Unless otherwise stated, references to "children-in-care" in this document Includes children in foster care, kinship care, customary care, group care, adoption probation and youth living independently and on extended care and maintenance agreements. These figures do not include children and youth in *kinship services.*

Family Any combination of two or more persons who are bound together over time by ties of mutual consent, birth and/or adoption or placement and who, together, assume responsibilities for such dimensions as: socialization of children; physical maintenance and care of members; love and nurturing; and others.[1]

Kin Kin are individuals who have a relationship with the young person and may include: biologically related kin (either known or not previously know to the young person) or individuals without a biological connection but with a significant social connection to the young person (e.g. stepparent, godparent, friend or community mentor – such as teacher, coach, neighbour). [1]

Kinship Care Formal kinship care occurs where the child has "in-care status" with a CAS and the kin have been approved by the CAS to provide care for the child. Kin-in-care are included as part of a CAS's placement resources for children in-care and, as such, are eligible for supports (e.g. per diem rates, training, respite) afforded to placements with "in-care" status. [2]

Kinship Service Kinship service occurs when a child is placed in the home of an approved kin but the child does not have "in-care" status. While supports are available through the CAS (e.g. kinship or family services worker) these homes are not eligible for a CAS per diem.

Foster Care Foster Care is defined under the *Child and Family Services Act* as the placement of a child or young person in the home of someone who receives compensation for caring for the child but is not the child's parent.

Outside Paid Resources (OPR) Stands for "Outside Paid Resource". Sometimes referred to as "Independent Residential Service Providers" or "Private Agencies". Refers to an independently-run organization that provides foster care and/or group care on a contractual basis with CASs. Note that many of Ontario's "OPRs" also provide foster and group care to children and youth from other sectors including children's mental health, developmental services and youth justice. Several OPRs also provide care for adults with developmental disabilities and other complex needs. For the purposes of this document, the Commission has used the term "OPR" as it is the term most commonly used to describe this group of providers.

Out-of-Home Care/Out-of-Home Placements Refers to children and youth who are in placements outside their "own home" and, as such, includes "children-in-care" as well as children in "kinship service".

Close-to-Home "Close-to-home" refers to young people maintaining quality connections with their family, friends, school, culture, religion and community as well as their Aboriginal ties and their community. In most instances, "close-to-home" is best realized by the young person remaining *physically* within or near their home community. [3]

Roots and Lifelong Relationships (permanency) Permanency refers to young people in-care maintaining their sense of identity, belonging and/or certainty of their cultural roots along with creating lifelong nurturing relationships with positive adult role models. It is interconnected with stability (e.g. consistency of caregiver, length of time in placement) and the quality of the caregiver-child relationship. Permanency takes many forms including: returning home to their family of origin/kin; realizing permanency through kinship arrangements, adoption or legal custody and customary care; or realizing permanency through building lifelong connections with their biological or alternative-care families to enable a smooth transition to adulthood.

[1] Adapted from definition used by the Vanier Institute of Family.
[2] Kinship Service and Kinship Care definitions have been adapted from the OACAS July 2010 LD Section Survey on Kinship Services
[3] Close to Home and Roots'Lifelong Connections definitions were developed from various sources and confirmed by the "Ad Hoc Advisors Group", a group of individuals who served as liaison to the formal structures within OACAS relating to out-of-home care.

Related Resources and Activity

Four related items from the Commission's work can be found on the Commission's website www.sustainingchildwelfare.ca :

- *In-Care Services Working Paper* (from the Phase 1 Work), December 2010
- *Aboriginal Child Welfare in Ontario: Discussion Paper,* July 2011
- *Talking to Kinship Parents and Foster Parents in Ontario about their Care-Giving Experiences* (Summary of Findings from Telephone Interviews), February 2012
- *Clarifying the Scope of Child Welfare Services: Report and Recommendations,* June 2012

Copies of the submissions to the Commission from the groups listed on pg. five are available at the websites of the respective groups.

In addition, during the course of the Commission's work, several other related endeavours were underway and were very helpful in informing the Commission's work. Three initiatives deserve particular mention:

- ***Youth Leaving Care Hearings*** From spring 2011 through to spring 2012, a group of youth-in-care and former-youth-in-care engaged in an extensive process to create dialogue among youth and multiple stakeholders on the challenges faced by youth leaving care. Supported by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, this group presented their final report in May 2012. Over the course of its work, the Commission met frequently with individuals involved in this work as well as with individuals from YouthCan, a related organization supported by the OACAS that has also done considerable advocacy work relating to these issues over the past several years. The report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings report is titled *"My Real Life Book"* and is available at: http://provincialadvocate.on.ca/main/en/hearings/pages/report.html

- ***OACAS Family-Based Care Project*** OACAS has standing committees that focus directly on matters relating to out-of-home care for children and youth. The Commission met with leaders and members from these committees over the course of its work. In October 2011, the Local Directors section of OACAS annual conference focused specifically on the topic of Family-Based Care and the Commission was invited to participate in this conference. Subsequently, the OACAS initiated the "Family-Based Care Project". The Steering Committee for this project collaborated with the Commission to co-host the full-day sector working session on Family-Based Care in May 2012. OACAS is currently in the process of structuring sector-wide action priorities arising from these collective examinations of Family-Based Care. The Commission has worked closely with the OACAS and leaders of this project with the intention that recommendations from the Commission's work will directly inform the shape of the OACAS project going forward.

- ***MCYS Customary Care Project*** MCYS has a project underway to increase understanding and use of customary care as a placement option for Aboriginal children and youth through the development of a customary care process guide for use by CASs and by Aboriginal communities. Related work is underway to identify and address barriers to culturally appropriate placements of Aboriginal children and youth.

- ***Child Welfare League of Canada – Every Child Matters Project*** Beginning in 2010, the Child Welfare League of Canada embarked on a multi-year initiative aimed at repositioning and rebranding fostering in the minds of Canadians and developing strategies to strengthen recruitment, retention and training of foster parents. Further information on this initiative is available at: http://www.cwlc.ca/ecm

- ***OACAS "Early Help" Project*** In 2012, the sector, through the Local Directors Section, has had a project underway examining the literature and existing approaches used within CASs to provide proactive early intervention to at-risk families to reduce the risk of out-of-home placements. The Commission has had the benefit of multiple consultations with the leaders of this group and had the opportunity to review the report produced by this group.

II. WHY STRENGTHENING FAMILY-BASED CARE MATTERS TO SUSTAINABLE CHILD WELFARE

There is broad evidence and consensus that healthy child development is best supported within the context of a strong and supportive family environment. Therefore, any discussion of out-of-home care for children and youth in need of protection must begin with the questions "How do we keep children/ youth safe at home with their family and, if an out-of-home placement is required, how do we ensure the child/youth is able to continue to experience the many dimensions of family essential to his/her development?

The universality of this family-focused principle is evident in its appearance as the first principle in the 2009 United Nations framework, *Guidelines for the Alternative Care for Children* which states:

> "The family, being the fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth, well-being and protection of children, efforts should primarily be directed to enabling the child to remain in or return to the care of his/her parents, or where appropriate other close family members. The State should ensure that families have access to forms of support in the care giving role."

For a child or youth, remaining safe at home — or, failing that, in an environment that is as "family-like" as possible — is important for many reasons. The act of separating children from their parents and placing them in another home setting can, in many cases, be very traumatic for children. This trauma and loss can be compounded if children are also separated from siblings, extended family, friends, community and culture. In addition, statistics tell us that the more time a child spends in out-of-home care, the more likely they are to experience multiple moves which in turn bring multiple school changes and the constant challenge of having to build new relationships within the home, school and community.

The stressors associated with this experience often manifest as ever-increasing behavioural, emotional and mental health needs and declining school performance. Statistics show that older youth who have experienced multiple moves are less likely to realize permanent attachments in a family and more likely to "age-out" of care. Research also shows that youth who "age-out" of the system without the support of a permanent family have poorer life outcomes in terms of educational attainment, employment, teenaged pregnancy, addictions and mental health issues and, for some, crime and incarceration.[2] [3]

A sustainable child welfare system must optimize positive outcomes for youth. Therefore, the focus on keeping children and youth safe with family or in a setting as close to "family" as possible is vital to a sustainable and high-performing child welfare system.

The relationship of *Strengthening Family- Based Care* to sustainability is not solely one of promoting positive outcomes for children and youth. There is also a significant financial relationship. This has two dimensions: longer term costs to society as well as the actual costs of providing out-of-home care.

Regarding societal costs, a 2006 U.S. study estimated the combined costs of child maltreatment at $ 94 billion (U.S.) — 1% of the country's gross domestic product. This estimate reflected the direct costs of

[2] R. Gilbert, C. Spatz Widom et al. "The Burden and Consequences of Child Maltreatment in High Income Countries", *The Lancet,* Vol. 373, January 3, 2009.

[3] C. Forbes and B. Inder. *Measuring the Cost of Leaving Care in Victoria,* Monash University, Department of Econometrics and Business Statistics, August 2006.

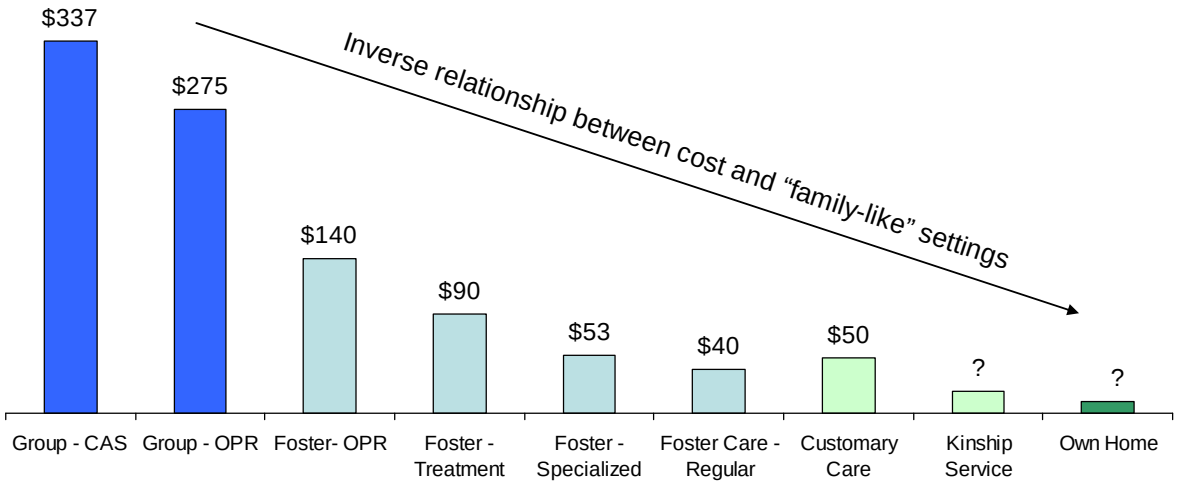
child welfare, the poorer physical and mental health outcomes resulting in higher health care costs, costs of adult criminality and other factors. An Australian study that focused exclusively on young people who "aged-out of care" found the average lifetime costs to society for each young person who ages-out of care to be $740,000.[4]

Within the child welfare system, the costs for out-of-home care represent the largest single expenditure for every Children's Aid Society (CAS) in the province. In 2011/12, out-of-home care represented 54% of child welfare costs when boarding rates, staffing costs and the associated expenditures are included. For Aboriginal and northern CASs, this figure ranges from 62% to 81%. For all other CASs, this figure ranges from 39% to 60%.

In general, costs of out-of-home placements increase as children's needs and resource requirements increase. The result, as shown in Exhibit 1, is an inverse relationship between the costs of meeting children's needs and the environments that are most "family-like."

Exhibit 1

Average 2011/12 Per Diem Costs by Placement Type



Notes:
* OPR costs are not directly comparable to society-based per diems as OPR diems often incorporate additional costs for supports to children and foster families that are separately accounted for in CASs. OPR costs also include HST. Some similar comparison issues may exist between OPR and CAS group costs.
** No data is available to determine the "per child" cost of "kinship service" or for supporting vulnerable children and youth in their "own home" in order to keep their children safe at home and avoid out-of-home placement.

Source: MCYS 2011/12 Q3 Financial returns.

In considering the information in this chart, it should be noted that the costs shown are not fully comparable. Per diem costs for outside paid resource placements are inclusive of many of the "wrap-around supports" required to support youth in their placements. Per diem costs for agency-based foster and kin placements do not include these supports. Moreover, as will be discussed later in this report, there is an argument for increasing the "wrap-around supports" for children and youth in regular foster placements so as to avoid the need to move the youth to another placement in order to access

[4] Ibid.

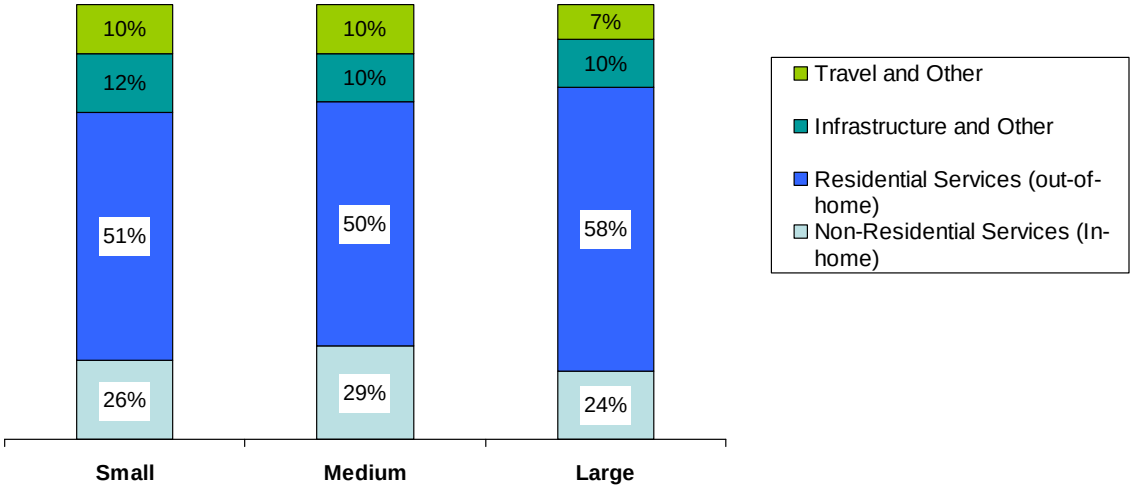
appropriate supports. These caveats aside, there is general agreement that thoughtful attention to supporting children and youth in the most "family-like" settings will, in most circumstances, reduce the escalation of needs, reduce the corresponding escalation in costs and increase the likelihood of positive outcomes.

The economics of out-of-home care has important implications for the overall child welfare sector. As the largest spending item, the relative cost of out-of-home care has a direct implication on the funds available for earlier, less intrusive interventions that support vulnerable children and families at home. The lower the proportion of children placed in more expensive and less "family-like" settings, the greater the supports available to maintain children in regular foster and kin placements and with their families.

A comparison of spending in small, medium and large CASs illustrates this point. As shown in Exhibit 2, medium CASs spend 5% more of their budgets on "non-residential services" (supporting children and youth at home) than large CASs. This corresponds to proportionately greater spending by large CASs on residential (out-of-home) services. A similar pattern is evident with small CASs but higher administrative costs offset the ability to fully realize the benefits of lower proportionate spending on out-of-home care. Hence, all other things being equal, the lower the spending on out-of-home care, the greater the resources available to support children and youth at home with their families.

Exhibit 2

Proportionate Spending By Size of CAS
Based on 2011/12 Q3 Forecast

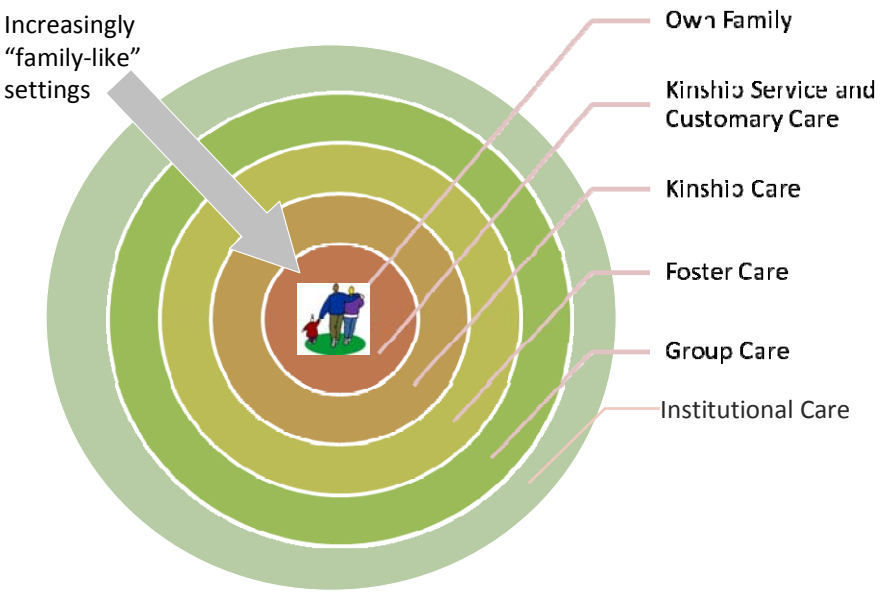


Source: MCYS Quarterly Reports, 2011/12 Q3

Exhibit 3 visually depicts the centrality of family in the multiple levels of living settings for children, beginning with the "own family" setting and continuing through placements with kin (or community in the case of customary care placements for Aboriginal children), through foster care through to more intensive group and institutional settings. It should be noted that "own family" could include the child's biological family or a family created through adoption or legal custody.

Exhibit 3

The Multiple Levels of Out-of-Home Placements and their Relationship to Family



Conceptually, our aim as a society should be to maximize the number of children and youth that grow up in settings at or near the centre of these concentric circles. At the same time, we need to recognize that the best setting for a child or youth should be based on his/her needs, not on an ideological framework that promotes one level of care as "better" than another. The Commission recognizes that there are certain situations and periods of time in which the *best* setting for a particular child or youth will be in staffed group care. Similarly, there are many situations in which a placement in a foster home is a much better option for a child than a placement with kin. Thus, at the case level, placement decisions must be made based on the needs of the child or youth and then, whatever the right placement is, every attempt should be made to enable that setting to manifest the "family-like" dynamics known to contribute to positive outcomes.

This is how we will maximize positive outcomes during childhood and adulthood for vulnerable children and youth and how we will ensure the sustainability of Ontario's child welfare system.

III. CONCLUSIONS, GOALS AND ACTIONS REQUIRED

The Commission's work and dialogue on *Strengthening Family-Based Care* led to a number of observations and conclusions in each of the six areas explored. For each of these six areas this chapter:

- Summarizes the conclusions and observations reached by the Commission;
- Sets out specific goals for what MCYS and the sector should aspire to in the future; and
- Outlines actions required by the sector and/or MCYS to realize these goals.

More detailed appendices are provided for each of the areas explored. These appendices describe findings from data analysis, literature review and insights from "lived experience" that led to the Commission's conclusions, goals and recommendations.

In finalizing its goals and recommendations, the Commission has also reflected on goals defined by the Ontario youth who participated in the recent *Youth Leaving Care Hearings.* These goals are shown in the shaded box on this page.

Goals of Youth-in-Care

The following goals were published in the final report from the Youth Leaving Care Hearings and incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

From the moment we begin our journey in care to the moment we leave, please ensure

1. We are safe, protected and respected as equal human beings.
2. We have people in our lives who are THERE for us.
3. We have stability and connections to family, roots and culture.
4. We are part of our lives and have a say in what happens to us.
5. We have access to the information, resources and options we need.
6. We are supported throughout care to become successful adults.
7. We are part of a strong and proud community of youth in and from care.
8. That the best experience for some children and youth in care becomes the standard for everyone in care.

Source: Ontario Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, *My Real Life Book:*

1. Reducing the Need for Out-of-Home Care by Keeping Children and Youth Safe at Home

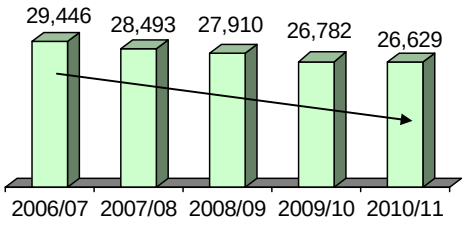
OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Since 2006/07, CASs have been successful in reducing the number of children and youth in out-of-home care (Exhibit 4).

Exhibit 4

Total Number of Children in Care Served

(MCYS – Children served over the course of the full year)



Source: MYCS Year-end Quarterly Reports

The Commission has observed significant variation across the province in the rate of children in care. This variation does not always correlate with differences in socioeconomic conditions within communities. The observation of areas with comparable socioeconomic status but differing levels of children in care suggests the value of challenging CASs to examine sources of variation. It also suggests that in some areas of the province there may be further opportunity to reduce the number of children coming into care.

The Commission has heard from CASs of opportunities to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care by increasing the emphasis on purposeful intervention with families where there is a high risk of children coming into care. The Commission has also heard of situations of children and youth staying in out-of-home placements longer than required – often due to court-related or other factors. Conversely, the Commission has heard of, and appreciates the importance of, not rushing children to family reunification or placements with kin or adoption placements but rather taking the time for a smooth transition. Informants have also talked about the inadvertent influence the current funding model can have on restricting the capacity of CASs to increase the proportion of resources focused on supporting children and youth at home rather than in out-of-home placements.

Thus, the Commission concludes that we can do better as a province in reducing the number of children in out-of-home care *and the length of time in out-of-home care* through a combination of:

- Examining variation;
- Purposefully focusing on targeted in-home services in situations where there is an imminent risk of requiring an out-of-home placement;
- Addressing factors that are causing delays to family reunification or other permanent placements;
- Creating the funding flexibility for CASs to direct a higher proportion of their resources towards family preservation and to supporting transitions from out-of-home care to permanent placements.

GOAL

Increase the proportion of children and youth remaining at home or who return home and remain safe while realizing the other dimensions of wellbeing that will lead to positive outcomes in childhood and adulthood.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- The project MCYS should, in consultation with the sector, set a provincial target for the proportion of children and youth supported by CASs while remaining at home as a proportion of all children and youth serviced by CASs. MCYS should work with the sector to agree on an accurate way to capture data to monitor this target;
- Within the context of the provincial target, and taking into account its own starting point, each CAS should establish its own target and develop a strategy for achieving that target. As part of this strategy development, each CAS should examine its rate of children in-care and days-of-care in relation to other similar CASs and reach conclusions on potential practice changes arising from this review.

The Therapeutic power of "Family"

"…. the naturally occurring opportunities in daily living may ultimately prove more therapeutic than attempts at helping that are specially devised or engineered. Daily or regular routines and rituals in family and school may often help children to begin to recover from the effects of stress in their lives. Familiar routines at home around meals, bedtime stories, getting up or family outings may prove important sources of a sense of order and structure"

Gilligan, R. (2004). Promoting resilience in child and family social work: Issues for social work practice, education, and policy. Social Work Education, 23(1): 93-104

2. Making Out-of-Home Care Feel like "Home"

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

There is no doubt that for some Ontario children, remaining in their "own home" will not always be safe or in the interest of their well-being. CASs will always be challenged to differentiate between children who can be supported while remaining in their "own home" and children and youth who at some point need to be cared for in an "out-of-home" setting.

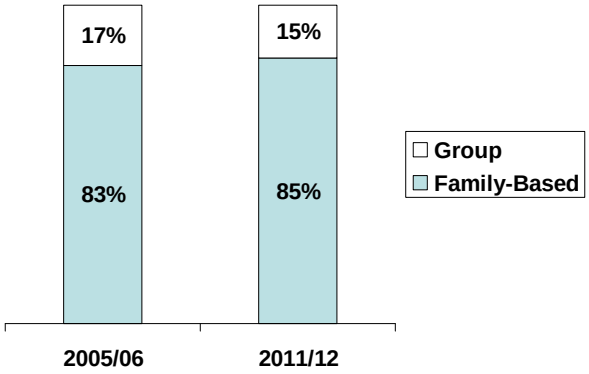
Whether their time in out-of-home care is for only a brief period or a longer period of time, the goal should be to create as "home-like" and "family-like" an environment as possible. Realizing this goal will provide these vulnerable children and youth with the security and therapeutic value inherent in the natural rhythms of a strong, supportive family setting.

Over the last several years, CASs have been increasing the proportion of children and youth in family-based settings for children and youth. In 2011/12, 85% of all "days care" were in family-based settings[5]. This figure is up from 83% in 2005/06 (Exhibit 5).

[5] Note: This calculation is based on all children and youth in some form of residential setting and excludes older youth on independent living or extended care and maintenance contracts. Family-based care is inclusive of: foster care, customary care, kinship care and adoption probation.

Exhibit 5

Change in Mix of Family-Based versus Group Care,
Days Care 2005/06 to 2011/12

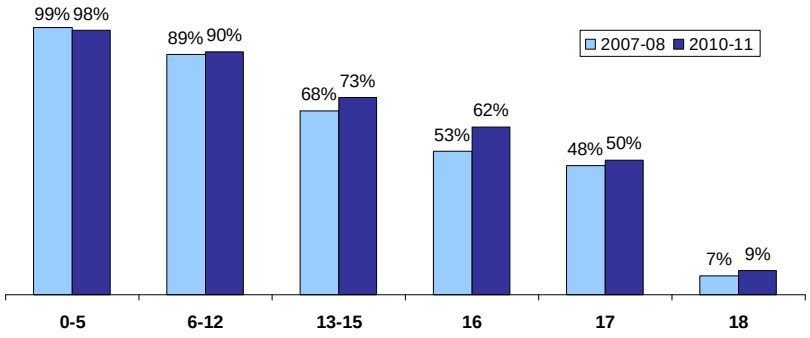


Source: MCYS Statistical Reports, 2005/06 actual and 2011/12 Q3 forecast, Note: Only includes family and group placements (kin, customary, foster, group, adoption probation). Excludes: ECM, Independent Living, Elsewhere, No cost homes / institutions.

As shown in Exhibit 6, almost all very young children are in family-based placements and gains have been made in family-based placements in all other age groups. Notwithstanding the gains, the statistics for adolescents are more concerning and increase with age. Slightly less than two-thirds of sixteen-year-olds (grade 10) and only half of seventeen-year-olds (grade 11) were in family-based settings in 2010/11.

Exhibit 6

Proportion of All CIC in Family-Based Care*, by Age
2007-08 versus 2010-11



*Denominator includes CIC in *any* environment. Therefore, includes older youth in independent living or on ECM
Source: OACAS CIC Fact Sheets, 2010-11 and 2007-08.

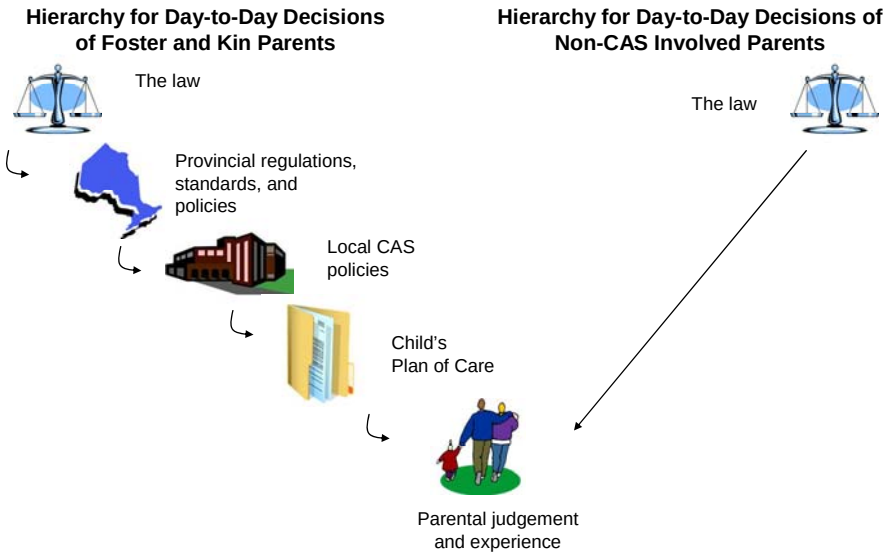
The probability of being placed in a family-based setting also varies by CAS. In 2011/12, 19 CASs had more than 90% of their days of care in family-based settings while 10 CASs had less than 80% of days care in family-based settings.

Beyond the type of placement, the necessity of checks and balances for out-of-home placements creates dynamics that can inadvertently undermine the authority of foster/kin parents, give rise to stigma for children and youth and create a sense of being "an outsider". Exhibit 7 depicts the hierarchy of considerations and policies that foster and kin parents need to incorporate into their decision-making and compares this to the experience of parents raising children without CAS involvement. In short,

parents providing care for children under the supervision of a CAS must incorporate multiple additional rules, guidelines and policies in responding to the many day-to-day needs of children in their care.

Exhibit 7

Foster / Kin Decision-Making versus Routine Parent Decision-Making



Throughout its work the Commission heard examples from children, youth and caregivers of the kind of rules, policies and complexities that challenge the experience of "home" and "family". Several examples are included in Exhibit 8.

Exhibit 8

Examples of Challenges to "Family-Like" Settings

"Being excluded and reminded of our differences made us feel like a burden, and like we were boarders or lodgers in a family's home" (YouthCan)

- Excessive daily emphasis about safety eg. Lists on fridges, fire drills, "Are you safe"?
- Permission requirements regarding travel
- Permission / police checks for sleepovers
- Permission for field trips and school activities
- Restrictions on family activities eg. trampolines, ATVs, snowmobiles, etc.
- Frequency of home and school visits by CAS and other staff (licensing, etc.)
- Having to leave home at age 18 before even finishing high school
- Respite (versus "babysitter")
- Various family practices (eg. Separate meal times for foster kids versus biological kids, exclusion from family celebrations, vacations, etc.)
- The capacity limit of 4 children (and the implications for a child that returns to care)

There is an opportunity to reduce this complexity at both the provincial level and agency level. At the provincial level, a 2010 project by the OACAS Local Directors Section identified several potential changes to provincial Children in Care Standards and Foster Parent Licensing Standards that would retain the intent of these standards while reducing complexity. At the level of CASs, increased attention could be placed on identifying child-specific requirements in the "plan of care" and reducing agency-to-agency variation that impacts on all children. As an example, a plan of care could specify restrictions on riding

an ATV or snowmobile for a child for whom this activity would be known to be high risk rather than having an agency policy that applies to every child, youth and foster/kin placement situation.

GOALS

Increase the proportion of all days-care provided in family-based settings from 85% to 90% and, in particular, increase the proportion of adolescents in family-based placements.

Strengthen and enable the day-to-day decision-making authority of foster and kin care providers while preserving sufficient checks and balances to ensure safety and well-being of children and accountability of providers.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- Within the context of the provincial target of 90% of days-of-care in family-based settings and taking into account their own starting point, each CAS should establish its own target and develop a strategy for achieving that target;

- The sector should initiate a province-wide project focused on increasing the availability of family-based placements for adolescents. This project should include active participation of foster parents, private providers and youth;

- MCYS and the sector should identify and implement changes that will create the flexibility for youth to remain in their placement setting beyond the age of 18 to allow increased stability and supports during the completion of high school and/or transition to post secondary studies or to employment. These changes should be consistent across CASs; and

- The sector should undertake a review of all agency-level policies and make resulting changes to reduce agency-to-agency variation in policies and practices relating to foster and kin parent decision-making authority.

3. Keeping Kids "Close to Home"

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The "close to home" concept has many dimensions: *geographically* (e.g. same neighbourhood/town/ city/school, etc.); *psychologically* (e.g. with or without geography being close to home, the many ways children preserve relationships) and *culturally.*

Today's networked world of "Facebook", "Skype" and text messaging has introduced a plethora of new possibilities for how children and youth stay connected to each other and to relationships that matter to them. Nonetheless, in *most* situations, the ideal for a child or youth requiring out of home care would be that this care can be provided in a geographic location that does not necessitate a change in school, severing of relationships with friends and family and losing connections created through community and extra-curricular activities.

There are some exceptions. In some instances, it is simply not safe for a child or youth to remain in the same community as their parent(s). In some instances a child or youth may benefit from – and may indeed desire — an opportunity for a fresh start.

In examining available information about "close-to-home", the Commission's main conclusion was that Ontario lacks good data on where children and youth are with respect to their "home" community. There is also an absence of data on whether or not children and youth are in placements reflecting their cultural and ethnic heritage. Data analysis and "lived experience" point to three populations of concern with respect to distance from their home community:

- Aboriginal children and youth;
- Children and youth in the care of the four Toronto-based CASs; and
- Adolescents.

The greatest cause for alarm relates to Aboriginal children and youth. The 2008/09 Crown Ward Review found that for Aboriginal children and youth who are Crown Wards:

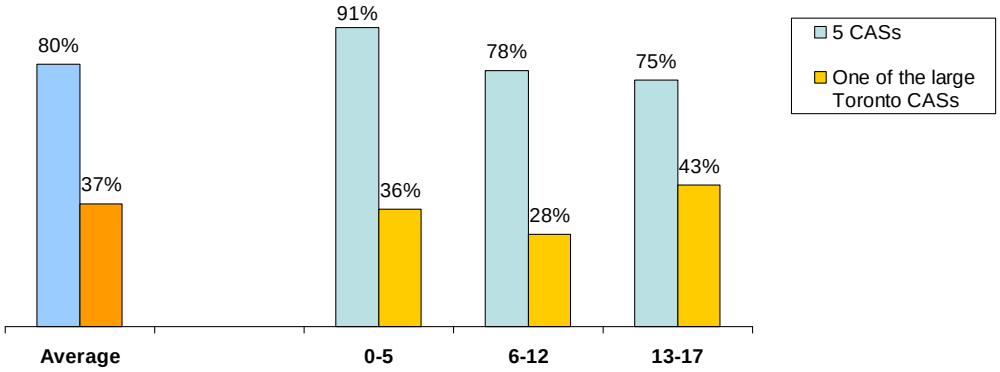
- Only 22% were in placements in native homes;
- Only 8% are in placements in their home communities; and
- Only 22% are maintaining contact with their home communities.

Regarding all children and youth, three different analyses were undertaken to provide an indication of placement patterns for all children and youth with respect to home communities. The results suggest that roughly 80% of CIC are in placements that are "close to home" as defined by a one to two-hour drive from their home community. Exhibit 9 presents the findings from one of these analyses which drew upon a survey of six CASs and used "two-hours-drive" as the boundary for "close to home". As illustrated, the likelihood of being placed "close-to-home" declines with age.

The data from the Toronto-based CAS that was part of this survey was consistent with anecdotal comments made by all four Toronto-based CASs: the *minority* of children and youth in their care are in placements that could be deemed "close-to-home". Of note, the Toronto data in this sample illustrates a higher proportion of adolescents in placements "close-to-home". This *may* reflect the greater availability of group home placements in Toronto than in other parts of the province.

Exhibit 9

Placement Proximity
% of CIC within Jurisdiction and Within 2 Hours Drive
From Survey of Six CASs, Winter 2012



Note: Includes only children and youth from aged 0 through 17.
Source: Commission Survey of Six CASs (CCAS + representative sample of 5 non-Aboriginal CASs

GOALS

Increase the number of Aboriginal children and youth remaining in their home communities and in placements with their own culture.

Increase the proportion of "close-to-home" placements for children and youth with particular attention to adolescents, children and youth in the care of Toronto CASs.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- MCYS in consultation with the sector should ensure that CPIN is being designed to incorporate data elements to inform geographic and cultural close-to-home;

- MCYS, in partnership with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal CASs, should implement changes that will reduce barriers to culturally appropriate and close-to-home placements for Aboriginal children and youth;

- The four Toronto-based CASs together with the 905 CASs should develop and implement a strategy to increase the number of close-to-home placements for children and youth from Toronto.

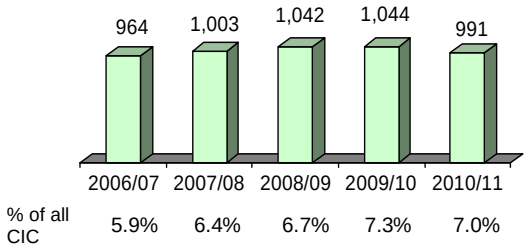
4. Increasing Kin Placements

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The concept of extended family and close community members taking care of children and youth for short or long periods of time is arguably as old as human civilization and has always been a part of modern child welfare. In Ontario, the 2006 Transformation Agenda placed increased emphasis on kin — both kinship care and kinship service. Notwithstanding this emphasis, the actual number and proportion of children in kinship care and kinship service has not increased substantially over the last five years (Exhibits 10 and 11).

Exhibit 10

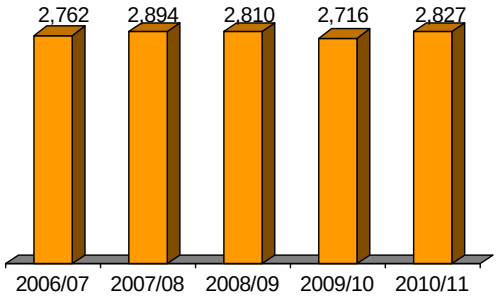
Average Children in Kin Care 2006/07 to 2010/11



Source: OACAS CIC Fact Sheets; % provided by OACAS based on total children in care 18 years and under.

Exhibit 11

Average Children Per Month in Kinship Service



Source: OACAS Funding & Service Analysis, 2006/07 to 2010/11

The ratio of kinship service to kinship care is roughly one child in kin care for every three in kin service. When kinship service is added to "out-of-home care" figures, **22%** of all children and youth from birth to 18 who are in out-of-home placements are with kin. [Note that this calculation is based on "average" figures at March 31, 2011 and excludes 18 year olds on ECM but includes 18 year olds in all other placement types.]

There is significant variation across CASs in their use of kin care and kin service. In 2011/12, for kin care, the provincial average (as % of all CIC) was 7%, however:

- 15 CASs were below3 % (four of which have no children in Kinship Care);
- 11 CASs were above 10%. of which …
- … two CAS are above 20%.

Similar patterns of variation exist in the use of kin service and there is variation in the relative use of kin service versus kin care from one CAS to another.

There is considerable support in the literature and in policy in other jurisdictions for increasing the focus on kin as a placement option for children and youth who require out-of-home placements. The literature also points to a range of unique challenges and limitations of kin placements. The most comprehensive analysis to date was undertaken in 2007 by Winokeus, Holtan and Valentine in the form

of a meta-analysis of 62 studies (57 U.S., one Norway, one Israel, one Sweden, one Netherlands and one Australia).[6] Some of their findings from this work include:

- Kinship children tend to have lower internalizing/externalizing behaviours than foster children;
- Foster children were 2.2 times more likely to have a mental health issue than kinship children;
- Foster children were more likely to receive mental health services than kinship children;
- Kinship children were 1.9 times more likely to report positive emotional health compared to foster children;
- Foster children were 2.6 times more likely to experience 3 + placements than kinship children;
- Foster children were more likely to be adopted than kinship children;
- Kinship children were more likely to be cared for by relatives through legal custody than foster children;
- Kinship children are more likely to remain in care than foster children; and
- Non-significant results regarding the kinship children's educational attainment and continuous attachment outcomes.

Notwithstanding the positive results, Winokeus et al caution researchers when interpreting the findings that some of the studies have methodological flaws. There is a considerable positive support for the benefits of kinship in the current research. Further research is required particularly with respect to how to support some of the dynamics that are unique to kinship families arising from socio-economic circumstances and familial relationships.

Inputs from kin parents, foster parents, private providers, CASs, MCYS and youth/former youth-in-care included a range of views but four themes were common:

- First, while kin placements can have tremendous benefits for some children and youth, circumstances vary. Therefore, a kinship placement is not the right placement for every child and youth. Decisions need to be made based on what is right for an individual child not based on a view that a kinship placement is a superior placement to a foster placement (or, for that matter, a group placement depending on the child's/ youth's needs);

- Second, foster care will always play a vital and prominent role in out-of-home placements for children. Even if one were to imagine a four-fold increase of the number of children and youth in kin care placements, foster home placements would still account for three out of every four "in-care" placements;

Perspectives on Kin Placements...

"One thing that needs to be stressed very strongly is the fact that kinship care is VERY individualized. There is no way that kinship care will work if you try to generalize it to fit everyone's needs." (YouthCan)

"If the placement is well mapped out and the plan is driven from a clinical basis then placing with kin can have a huge benefit for the child and family." (OARTY)

"Kin parents are kind of overlooked, we feel like we are the last thought, the parents first, then the children, and then left in the dark. We don't have rights. We don't have a lot of say in things such as plans of care." (Kin parent)

"More resources should be made available for kinship service families and thereby reduce the number of children and youth entering "in care"…… training and support groups for kin service families would be an asset." (OACAS Caring for Children and Youth Council)

"It would appear that clients experience a greater sense of 'personal failure' (in kin breakdowns). Perhaps it is easier for a client to lay blame on foster parents than birth family." (ORCA)

[6] Winokur, M., Holtan, A., and Valentine, D. (2007). *Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency and Well-being of Children Removed from the Home for Maltreatment*. Philadelphia, PA: The Campbell Collaboration Social Welfare Group.

– Third, there are various financial concerns relating to kin placements. Some providers perceive that kin placements are sometimes pursued for financial reasons without sufficient consideration of what placement best meets the need of the child or youth. Other providers express concern that kin placements are not always receiving appropriate levels of financial and non-financial supports; and

– Finally, while some individual CASs have been pacesetters in innovating and advancing kinship placements, there is not a consistent, province-wide approach and commitment to kin placements.

Looking to the future, a consistent commitment and focused attention on the part of MCYS and CASs will be essential. Service models in which a dedicated kinship team is in place appear to be the most effective. The Commission's work on Shared Services has identified the area of recruitment and training of kinship homes as one of the service areas that can benefit from being organized at a regional level. Increased clinical training for staff involved with kin will also be important to ensuring that the unique needs and dynamics faced by kin families are effectively supported. SAFE and PRIDE need to be re-examined and recognition given to the fact that these tools were not originally designed with kin parents in mind. MCYS will also need to place more emphasis on kin and be open to collaborating with the sector to address barriers relating to training, financial support and standards. MCYS collaboration with other ministries will also be essential. In particular, collaboration is required with Community and Social Services with respect to providing financial support to family members who are willing to care for a child. Sources other than CASs should be available so that children and families do not need to become (or remain) CAS "clients" only to receive financial support.

GOAL

Increase the proportion of children and youth in-care who are in kinship care from 7% currently to 10%.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

– Each CAS should set a target for increasing the proportion of children and youth in-care who are in kinship care;

– The sector should take the lead on developing and advancing the adoption of best practices in kinship service and kinship care;

– The sector should build on the early foundations of work during 2011 and 2012 relating to "extreme recruitment" and "family finder" approaches to increasing kin placements;

– When undertaking a review of Child Protection Standards, MCYS should incorporate the Kinship Service Standards as part of the scope of this review; and

– MCYS should collaborate with the Ministry of Community and Social Services in securing sources of financial support for relatives who are able to care for a child but need financial support to do so and where there are no protection issues warranting child welfare involvement.

5. Decreasing Multiple Moves

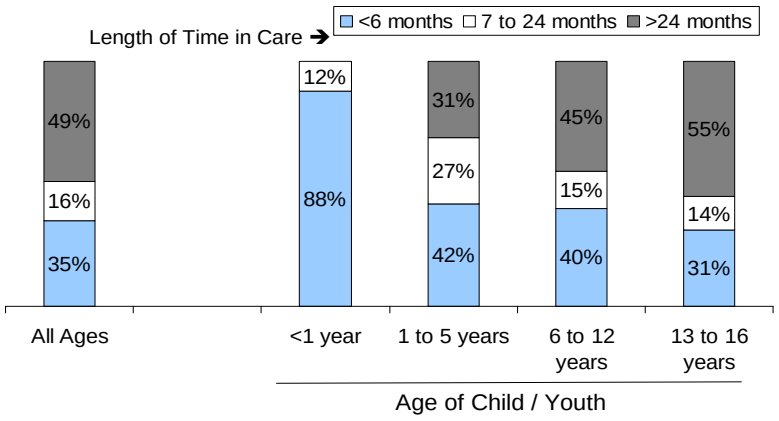
OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The image of foster care most commonly depicted in today's media is of a child or youth spending years of his/her life moving from one placement to another and eventually "aging out" of care or in some cases being adopted. In reality, the journey any child or youth takes in out-of-home placements can take any number of forms. Some children come into care for a matter of weeks or months and then return to family. Some children come into care for less than a year before returning home or being placed with kin or being placed for adoption. Some children are in care for many years but eventually return home or find permanency through legal custody or adoption. Some children are adopted or transferred to the legal custody of the kin or foster family they were placed with. And yes, some children spend many years in foster care before "aging out" and entering adulthood. And in each of these scenarios, a child or youth may experience a single out-of-home placement or many, many placements.

In Ontario, our understanding of the actual experience of children in care is hampered by an absence of longitudinal data that reflects the experience of individual children over time. Most data currently available is point-in-time information reflecting the current status of children in care in the system. So, while we have data on the average number of children in the system or the average days of care for children in any given year, we are much more limited in information that reflects the experience of children over time. In the course of the Commission's work, we were able to access some limited information that begins to inform the understanding of the placement experience of children.

Exhibit 12 informs one part of this understanding by characterizing the length of time children and youth are in care. Based on a 2010 sample of children in care from a representative cross-section of six Ontario CASs, this data shows that over one-third of children are in care less than six months and roughly half of children are in care for less than two years.

Exhibit 12
Length of Time in Care – Overall and By Age
Based on a survey of six CASs



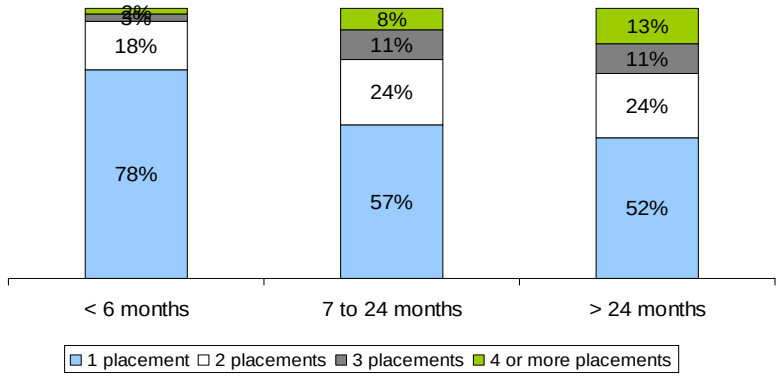
Source: Steve Lough & Associates, 2010

What this information does not tell us is how often children and youth move from one placement to another. The new provincial indicators developed as part of the Commission's work on Accountability begin to answer this question. Exhibit 13 groups children in care based on their length of time in care and shows the number of placements. As would be expected, most children who are in care for a short period of time (six months or less) will only be in one placement. In fact, four out of every five children in care for less than six months were in only one placement. For children in care seven to twenty-four months, the majority (close to 80% or four out of five children) experience only one or two placements. It is encouraging to see that even when children in care for longer periods (over 24 months), the majority (roughly 75% or three out of every four) will experience only one or two placements.

Exhibit 13

Number of Placements by Length of Time in Care

Based on all children in care as of March 31, 2010 in the 22 CASs participating in Phase 1 of the Provincial Indicators roll-out



Source: Commission Analysis of Provincial Indicator data.

We can conclude that, *on average,* children in care appear to experience more placement stability than the general public might expect. However, the reality is that a subset of children in care do experience a high level of moves. This level of movement was evident in the Commission's examination of OnLac data which reflects the experience of children who have been in care for one year or more. This data (which is included in Appendix F) show a high proportion of children and youth in care who experience multiple changes of residence and lack of "continuity" in their lives. The Commission met many such individuals over the course of its work. In addition, many young people who had experienced multiple moves shared their stories as part of the Youth in Care Hearings in November 2011.

Perspectives on Multiple Moves

"If [the young persons] are bad, you can stay with your placement. If you are good, we are moving you somewhere else. If your behaviour is poor – run and do drugs – you get to stay with the family you connected with. However, if you go to school and hang out with the right people, we are going to move you." (Foster parent, OPR, 12 years)

"The service delivery system needs to become child driven. The money needs to follow the child, not the bed." (OARTY)

"In an ideal situation they can return to their previous foster family, unfortunately this is not often possible (due to the four bed limit). The provision exists in the agency regulations from the ministry to go over a bed for siblings or to have a child returned to their previous foster home. Unfortunately, it is reported that the agency then gets their wrist slapped for having more than four children in the home." (FPSO)

We know from the literature that multiple moves and ongoing placement instability can be very damaging for the well-being of children and youth. Placement instability often is linked to decreased placement outcomes (e.g. poor education outcomes). Multiple placements make it a challenge for foster children to establish secure attachments with caregivers and maintain social/support networks.[7] For children and youth, multiple moves can give rise to a self-perpetuating cycle. A 2001 study found that one of the most significant predictors of placement disruption is the number of previous placement disruptions a child or youth has experienced.[8]

Over the course of the Commission's work, several themes emerged on how to reduce the likelihood that a child or youth will experience the negative outcomes that can arise from multiple moves:

- Get the **placement match** right at the start;
- Provide **family counseling** to keep foster families intact in the same way that family counseling and keeping the family together is often the first response when biological and adoptive families are experiencing stressors;
- Make decisions based on the **needs of the child** — not based on system issues or ideologies;
- Wrap **services and supports** around the placement (move the supports, not the child);
- Fully exercise the exemptions related to the **four client maximum** when doing so would enable a child or youth returning to care to return to a familiar setting rather than starting again in a new placement; and
- Recognize that **sometimes a move is the right outcome.**

Overarching the discussion of "placement stability" is the larger issue of creating continuity, belonging and a sense of permanency for children and youth. A youth spending five years in a single placement may or may not experience a sense of permanency and place in the world. This will be a function of many factors that extend well beyond whether or not the youth will have the same street address, bedroom and school. Thus, while reducing multiple moves is an important goal for out-of-home placements, success will not, in and of itself, necessarily mean that more children and youth are experiencing a sense of permanency, belonging and connectedness. This will require other, sometimes intangible factors that will be discussed under the next heading.

GOALS

Decrease the proportion of children and youth who experience multiple moves (with a provincial target to be set once fuller information is available through the provincial indicators).

[7] MacDonald, G.M. and Turner, W. (2007). *Treatment Foster Care for Improving Outcomes in Children and Young People*. The Campbell Collaborations.

[8] Smith, D.K., Stormshak, E., Chamberlain, P. and Whaley, R.B. (2001). Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care. *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders,* 9(3): 200–205.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- The sector should continue to evolve the "placement stability" indicators developed as part of the provincial performance indicators so that accurate longitudinal data is available on the placement stability of children and youth;

- Each CAS should have its own "placement stability" target and put a strategy in place to achieve it;

- Using information from the provincial indicators, the sector should examine practices of CASs in which children in care move less often and apply insights from these CASs to develop province-wide strategies to reduce multiple moves in all CASs; and

- CASs and MCYS should work together to use the flexibility that is available to them to seek and receive exemptions to the "four client maximum" in order to allow a child or youth returning to care to be placed in a familiar setting.

6. Enabling Children and Youth to Grow Roots and Lifelong Relationships

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Many youth and former youth-in-care describe a feeling of being an outsider and lacking roots in their world. This emotional instability and the absence of a "secure base" can have devastating impacts on a youth's sense of confidence and purpose. For many youth, this can add to the trauma that may have precipitated their entry into care in the first place.

There are many ways that children and youth can experience roots and lifelong relationships. Over the course of its work, the Commission heard and witnessed the multiple ways through which CAS workers, foster parents, kin parents, group home staff and the youth themselves enable young people in out-of-home care to forge the networks and relationships and sense of self essential for childhood well-being and success in adulthood. Some of these avenues are formal and structural. E.g.:

- An Aboriginal child staying connected to all members of his/her extended family while living for periods of time with his/her auntie, then his/her grandfather and then a with a close family friend who was himself/herself raised through customary care;
- Youth coming together through formal networks and support systems like YouthCan, PaRC, Youth Leaving Care Hearings, etc.;
- The work that CAS workers and foster parents undertake to develop "Life Books" to record the many connections and sources of identity for individual children and youth;
- Formal processes in CASs to enable young people to create life-long connections. As an example, the Ottawa CAS has a target and an associated initiative to enable every child and youth in care to establish at least two positive adult relationships that will be lifelong; and
- Other CASs have Youth Transition Teams that, among other things, focus on creating positive adult connections for youth.

Several other more informal avenues were also identified through which children and youth can develop connections, roots and belonging:

- The relationships that foster parents sometimes forge with birth parents and the way in which both foster parents and CAS workers speak of foster parents;
- The use of Facebook by children and youth to stay connected with siblings and other family members;
- The role foster parents play in facilitating child and youth connections to their home community and culture;
- The many informal, supportive relationships that youth develop with their CAS workers, teachers and significant others in their communities; and
- The ongoing connections that many foster parents maintain with children and youth through weddings, birthdays, significant holidays and other events after they have become adults.

In terms of avenues that result in legal permanency and children and youth transitioning from the care of the CAS to the care of parents and legal guardians, there has been much progress in recent years. More children and youth are realizing permanency through adoption. There has been an increased use of legal custody to enable foster parents and extended family members to become legal guardians of the children in their care.

However, barriers persist. There continues to be significant variation among CASs on the use of the various avenues to permanency. Tools and resources at a provincial level are not consistently understood or used. The current funding approach inhibits a consistent province-wide approach to providing subsidies that enable permanency for children and youth. There are differing interpretations of legal tools for permanency among the legal/judicial community. These various barriers must be addressed in order to ensure that when an "out-of-home" placement is required, it is a temporary part of a child or youth's life, not the reality of their path from childhood to adulthood.

GOALS

Increase the number and quality of connections that youth build while in care so that when they leave care they take with them positive, supportive relationships that will be with them throughout their lives.

Increase the proportion of children and youth who realize permanency through family reunification, legal custody, adoption and in long-term, stable placements with kin, foster parents or customary care arrangements.

The Importance of Attachment and Roots

"Secure attachments supply the child with a reliable 'secure base' that encourages – and renders safe – exploration of the wider world (Bowlby, 1988). Such a sense of a 'secure base' in daily living may be cultivated by a person's sense of belonging within supportive social networks, by attachment type relationships to reliable and responsive people, and by routines and structures in their lives".[1]

[1] Gilligan, R. (2004). *Promoting resilience in child and family social work: Issues for social work practice, education, and policy*. Social Work Education, 23(1): 93-104

"We can never have enough family" (YouthCan)

"The more people in a child's life the better: Does it hurt you to have twenty people who love you?" (CAS foster parent)

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- The sector should undertake a review of best practices among CASs in enabling children and youth to build positive, lifelong relationships while they are in care;

- MCYS, with input from the sector, should lead in addressing barriers (e.g. differing legal interpretations) and promoting enablers (e.g. the use of subsidies, the use of provincial tools and resources) to permanency; and

- The sector should continue to develop strategies for child-specific recruitment (e.g. Extreme Recruitment) and regional recruitment of foster and adoptive homes (as recommended in the Commission's work on Shared Services). These strategies should aim not only to find permanent homes for children but also to open doors for supportive relationships.

7. Creating Stronger Mechanisms for CAS Collaboration with Foster Parents, Kin, Private Agencies and Youth

OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Child welfare requires collaboration among many partners: CASs, children's mental health agencies, schools, police, community agencies and countless others. The critical dimension of collaboration is particularly germane when it comes to out-of-home care for children and youth. The 24-hour, seven-day-a-week nature of out-of-home care makes the partnership between CASs and care providers (foster parents, kin parents and private agencies) absolutely critical.

In spite of this critical inter-relationship, there are currently very few structures or mechanisms through which the providers of out-of-home care (foster parents, kin parents, private agencies) come together to collaborate with the "purchasers" of out-of-home care (CASs). The current observed structures and relationships include the following:

- Most CASs have a Foster Parents Association (FPA) to which most foster parents belong. The actual relationship between each CAS and its FPA appears to be highly variable both in terms of the quality of the relationship and the formality of structures for dialogue;

- There are two stand-alone foster parents associations in Ontario: FPSO and LOFF. Each holds an annual conference. Funding for these associations and their activities comes from a combination of CAS contributions, member fundraising and conference registration fees. The work of these organizations is highly dependent on volunteer capacity of individual foster parents. Participation is often a function of level of support of each CAS to make funding available for foster parent participation in regional and provincial functions. While CAS (and MCYS) representation is typically invited to the annual conference of each association, no other formal tables exist that bring together foster parents and CASs to discuss common interests and priorities. Similarly, no formal table exists through which members of the two associations discuss common concerns and ideas;

- There are two associations for private agencies: OARTY and ORCA. These two associations are self-funded through member dues and have many of the same features as the foster parent associations: annual conferences, other regional meetings, etc. Membership in an association is not a requirement of being licensed as a provider of out-of-home services for children. It is estimated that only one-third of all licensed private agencies are members. MCYS holds responsibility for licensing these providers and negotiating rates on a regional basis. Beyond these functions, there are no formal tables that bring together MCYS and the private agencies or the private agencies and CASs to discuss matters of mutual concern and interest;

- The OACAS has as part of its structures the Caring for Children and Youth Council. This body oversees the implementation and evolution of the Ontario practice model consisting of PRIDE, SAFE and OnLAC. Membership includes two foster parents and MCYS representation. This is the only body the Commission is aware of that provides a formal vehicle to integrate the perspectives of more than one stakeholder group relating to out-of-home care (in this case CASs, foster parents and MCYS); and

- In recent years, youth-in-care and former youth-in-care have benefited from YouthCan, (Youth Communication Advocacy Network) an initiative of the OACAS. This initiative focuses on empowering youth through communication, enabling peer-support and creating a channel for advocacy and influence on policy, programs and activities. Recent years have also seen a significant increase in youth empowerment and related activity by the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. This role was particularly evident in the Youth Leaving Care Hearings that have been previously referenced.

The Commission has observed significant good work underway within the mandates of each of these various bodies. However, it is noteworthy that all bodies are largely working in parallel with each other and lack even a single forum for shared dialogue and the development of shared priorities.

GOALS

Increase the degree of collaboration between CASs and providers of out-of-home care in setting and working together on common priorities.

ACTIONS REQUIRED

- OACAS should convene a dialogue between CASs and providers/provider associations of out-of-home care. The objective of this dialogue should be to determine an appropriate mechanism(s) for strengthening communications and common priority setting. Advice from YouthCan should be sought as part of this dialogue. This dialogue should also include consideration of how engagement of foster parents and other care providers in training, priority setting and other common functions should be funded. MCYS should be engaged in this conversation as and when appropriate.

- Each CAS should have structures and processes in place to dialogue with: kin parents, foster parents, private agencies and youth-in-care/former youth-in-care.

IV. MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN: RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLEMENTATION

Every day, in communities across Ontario, good things happen for children and youth whose life circumstances require them to be in out-of-home care for a period of time. Every day, hundreds of children… sleep through the night without the fear of violence or threats to their safety…. hear the words "good job" for the first time…. get a hug… have the comfort and affirmation that comes from seeing a familiar face in the audience at their school play… and are able to yell or get angry without fearing that their adult caregivers will yell back or strike. Every day, children and youth are reunited with parents who have received and continued to receive the support they need to keep their children safe, cared for and feeling loved. Every day, hundreds of workers collaborate behind the scenes to enable individual children and sibling groups to realize permanency in adoptive, kinship and legal custody homes. Every day, countless older youth are supported in building the skills, networks and relationships they will need to be successful in adulthood.

The average Ontarian will never fully appreciate the challenges faced by these vulnerable children and youth. Nor will the average Ontarian ever fully appreciate the extraordinary measures that foster parents, kin parents, biological parents, volunteers and front line staff go to in order to make positive day-to-day moments and lasting lifelong changes happen for these children and youth.

Much as the many successes should not be understated, nor should the short-comings. In the course of its work, the Commission has heard too many times of children and youth who have felt stigmatized by their experience of being in out-of-home care. We have heard too many stories of youth who felt like outsiders and boarders in their foster homes. We have heard too many adults who look back on their experience as foster children feeling they left care more damaged than when they entered. We have heard biological parents as well as kin express their frustration in feeling that they have not been able to access the support they need in order to raise their children. And we have heard and witnessed the impact of hundreds of Aboriginal children who have been left feeling disconnected from their families, communities and cultures as a result of the well-meaning attempts of "the system" to keep them safe.

We can do better. We must do better. We will not have sustainable child welfare unless we do better.

This report lays out a roadmap for how we can build on the many strengths that exist in the system today. The report does not presume to be comprehensive. Many other important strategies and recommendations have been voiced through other related efforts like the ones listed at the outset of this report. In developing this report, the Commission has been impressed by the widespread level of recognition and commitment among all involved of the need to make changes. The actions outlined in this report are intended to contribute to the development of a concrete action plan to move forward in making these changes happen. The Commission makes the following recommendations for translating these actions into concrete changes:

1. **MCYS, with input from the sector, should establish five-year provincial targets against which to design strategies for change and to monitor progress.** Targets should address:

   - The proportion of children and youth supported by CASs while remaining at home;
   - The proportion of days of care provided in family-based settings;
   - The proportion of children and youth in placements that are geographically in, or close to, their home community;
   - Proportion of all children in care who are in placements with kin; and

– The number of moves experienced by children in care.

Targets should be set as five-year goals with progress towards them monitored on an annual basis. The Commission has proposed initial targets for several of these areas. Others will require a further examination of current data. Targets relating to "close to home" cannot be set until data is appropriately captured as part of the CPIN roll-out.

2. **Each CAS should set and agree on its agency's local target with the MCYS. MCYS should aggregate the combined outcome of all CASs meeting their individual targets and adjust, as necessary, the associated provincial targets.**

   Targets will vary by CAS but, in general, all CASs should be expected to be able to move at the same rate in bridging gaps between current performance and target performance. MCYS should have a system in place to ensure that the collective achievement of all CAS targets will result in achievement of the province-wide targets. The five-year targets should be translated into specific performance thresholds for each year and incorporated in the accountability framework. Individual CAS targets should be incorporated as part of each CAS's accountability agreement with MCYS.[9]

3. **The sector, working through OACAS, should incorporate the actions described in this report into its work plan for the Family-Based Care Project. This project should be designed to incorporate the active input of all stakeholders.** Specific actions to include are:

   – Develop strategies for child-specific recruitment and regional recruitment of foster and adoptive homes (as recommended in the Commission's work on Shared Services). Particular attention should be given to homes for older youth;
   – Identify and implement changes to create flexibility for youth to remain in their placements beyond the age of 18;
   – Review agency-level policies and make resulting changes to reduce agency-to-agency variation in policies and practices relating to foster and kin parent decision-making authority;
   – Engage Toronto-based and 905-based CASs in developing a strategy to increase "close to home" placements for children and youth from Toronto;
   – Develop and advance best practices in kinship service and kinship care;
   – Work with MCYS to use the flexibility available regarding exemptions to the "four client maximum"; and
   – Undertake a review of best practices among CASs in enabling children and youth to build lifelong relationships while they are in care.

4. **MCYS should actively support the OACAS Family-Based Care Project and should take leadership on projects to address province-wide policies relating to family-based care.** Specific actions should include:

   – Implement changes that will reduce barriers to culturally appropriate and close to home placements for Aboriginal children and youth;

[9] The Commission's work on Accountability is described in greater detail in: *Implementing a New Approach to Accountability and System Management: Report and Recommendations*, June 2012.

- Incorporate Kinship Service Standards as part of the review of Child Protection Standards when it occurs;
- Collaborate with the Ministry of Community and Social Services in securing sources of financial support for situations in which relatives who are able to care for a child without any protection concerns but require financial support; and
- Further work to address barriers and enablers to permanency.

5. **OACAS, with the active support of MCYS, should convene a dialogue between CASs and providers/provider associations of out-of-home care. The objective of this dialogue should be to determine an appropriate mechanism(s) for strengthening communications and priority setting relating to out-of-home care for children and youth.**

Appendix A
GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CAS: Children's Aid Society

CIC: Children in Care

CCYC: The Caring for Children and Youth Council affiliated with OACAS

CPIN: Child Protection Information Network

ECM: Extended Care and Maintenance

FPSO: Foster Parents Society of Ontario

LOFF: League of Ontario Foster Families

MCYS: Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services

OACAS: Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies
The voice of child welfare in Ontario

OARTY: Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth

OCANDS: Ontario Child Abuse and Neglect Data System

ONLAC: Ontario Looking After Children

OPR: Outside Paid Resource

ORCA: Ontario Residential Care Association

PACY: Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

PARC: Pape Adolescent Resource Centre – Toronto, Ontario

PART: Practice and Research Together (a membership-based organization funded by most of Ontario CASs. PART's core function is to distil and disseminate practice-relevant research to child welfare professionals)

PRIDE: Parent Resources for Information Development and Education

SAFE: Structured Analysis Family Evaluation

YOUTHCAN: OACAS Ontario Youth Communication Advocacy Network

Appendix B
REDUCING OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS/ KEEPING CHILDREN & YOUTH SAFE AT HOME

Note that the Commission's analysis for the work on Strengthening Family-Based Care benefited from access to the OACAS Children in Care Factsheets and the OACAS Funding & Service Analysis. Many charts throughout these appendices are drawn from these sources. It should be noted that these sources represent the activity of all Ontario CASs except two — Weechi-it-te-win and Abinoojii — which are not members of OACAS.

WHAT DATA DO WE HAVE?

There is currently no data that can provide an accurate picture on the number of children and youth who are being supported at home with their families. Similarly, data is not available to inform whether this number has been increasing over time and whether the number of children and youth supported at home in proportion to children and youth supported out of home is increasing over time. What we do have is considerable data on trends relating to the number of children in care and this is summarized within this section.

Trends in Number of Children in Care

From 2006/07 to 2011/12:

- 10% decrease in the *total* annual number of children served
- 7% decrease in the *average* number of CIC (as measured at March 31)
- 1.4% decrease in the number of days care provided

Source: MCYS Financial Reports (using Q3 forecast for 2011/12)

BUT after a 26% decrease in *new admissions to care* between 2006/07 and 2009/10:

- 3% increase in new admissions between 2009/10 to 2010/11
- OACAS has indicated that this trend is also evident in the preliminary 2011/12 statistics.

Source: OACAS Children in Care Fact Sheets

Exhibit B1

Total Number of Children in Care Served
(MCYS – Children served over the course of the full year)

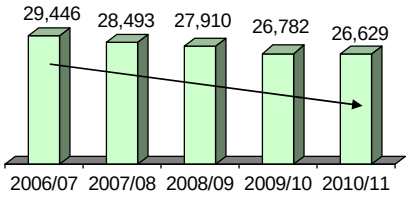
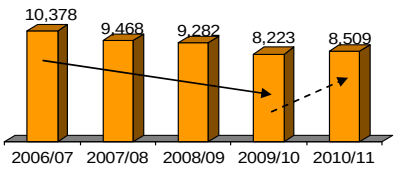


Exhibit B2

New Admissions to Care
(OACAS)



Source: MYCS Statistics and OACAS Statistics (Note: OACAS statistics do not include Weechitiwin or Abinoojii).

The service volume picture for Aboriginal CASs is very different. Between 2006/07 and 2011/12:

- 20% increase in the *total* annual number of children served
- 25% increase in the *average* number of CIC
- 28% increase in the number of days care provided

Source: MCYS Financial Reports (using Q3 forecast for 2011/12)

Variation Between CASs

The proportion of children in care varies widely between CASs. In 20010/11, the total CIC per 1000 children:

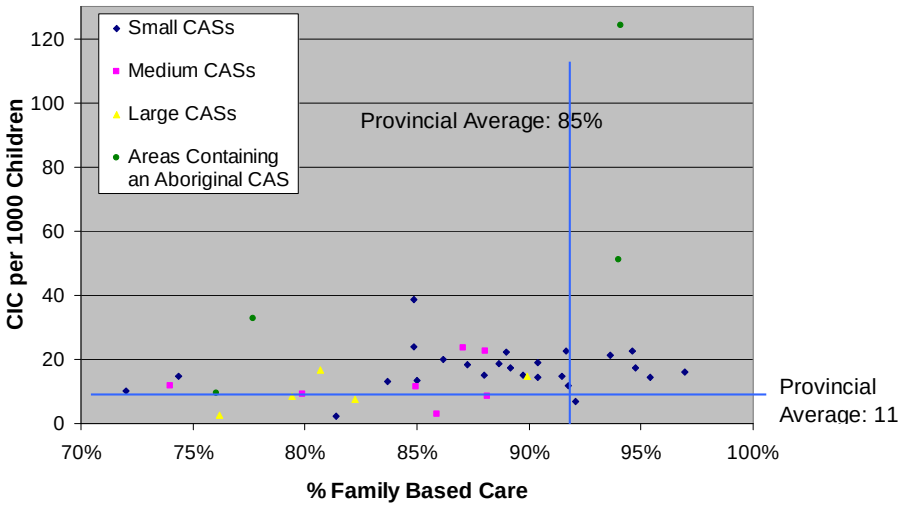
- Province-wide ➔ 11.2
- Lowest: ➔ Three CASs have rates of < 4
- Highest ➔ Aboriginal CASs
  ➔ Six non-Aboriginal CASs range from 22 to 24 (2x the provincial average)

One non-Aboriginal CAS has 38 CIC per 1000 (more than 3x the provincial average)

The chart below (Exhibit B3) shows the variation in the number of CIC by CAS mapped against the % of CIC in family-based care.

Exhibit B3

Patterns of CIC and Family-Based Placements by CAS



Notes: Based on *total* CIC (not average). Includes all placement types (inclusive of ECM and independent living. Agencies sharing common geography (eg. Hamilton, Thunder Bay, Toronto, etc.) have been grouped together and calculated against the child population in the shared catchment area.
Source: 2011/12 Q3 MCYS Quarterly Reports

Demographic Profile of Children in Care

The age of children in care at time of admission is fairly evenly distributed and has not changed significantly over time as shown in the table below.

Exhibit B4

Age Group	Year of Admission			
	2008	2009	2010	2011
5 & Under	35%	35%	38%	38%
6-12	35%	33%	31%	33%
13-16+	30%	31%	31%	29%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: OCANDS dataset from the Commission's Phase 1 Roll-out of Provincial Indicators

The age profile of children in-care at any given time is continuing to shift towards older children as shown in Exhibit B5 below. This may reflect the higher proportion of younger children who realize permanency through family reunification, adoption and legal custody.

Exhibit B5 – **Proportion of Children in Care by Age**

Age	2008	2011
< 13	47%	44%
>= 13	54%	56%
>=16	30%	34%
>=18	14%	17%

Source: OACAS CIC & Permanency Fact Sheets, 2010/11 (*average CIC)*

Future Forecast for the Number of Children in Care

Commission analysis of the current age profile and new admission trends suggests that the number of **children in care will decrease by as much as 12% (2048 CIC) by 2015 to around 15,000.**

Ontario Patterns Compared to Other Jurisdictions

The Commission has undertaken an examination of the number of children in out-of-home care per 1000 population in Ontario versus in other jurisdictions. In general, this kind of comparison is confounded by multiple factors including: Ontario's proportion of Aboriginal children relative to other jurisdictions; different age cut-offs for data from each jurisdiction; different definitions of "in care" (some jurisdictions include youth justice and other numbers in their overall reported statistics); use of "average children in care" versus "total children in care over the year"; and differing timeframes for the most recently available data.

Given the data challenges, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions on whether Ontario tends to have greater or fewer children in care than the comparators. However, in general, it appears there is not strong evidence suggesting a higher than average number of children in out-of-home care in Ontario. Nor does the evidence suggest a substantially lower than average rate of children in out-of-home care in Ontario. Of note:

- The latest available Canadian comparison of children in out-of-home care is from 2007 and is based on *average* number of children aged 0 to 18 in care. This data shows Ontario at 6.4 per 1,000, the second lowest province or territory (with PEI the lowest at 5.2). However, there is general agreement that Ontario numbers are not directly comparable to Canada's western provinces and territories because of the proportionately higher numbers of Aboriginal children in those jurisdictions;[10]

- In the **United States,** the number of children in care per 1000 aged 0 to 17 in 2009 was 5.6. This figure ranged from a low of 3.1 (New Hampshire) to a high of 18.6 (District of Columbia). U.S. statistics appear to be based on the *total* number of children in care (not the *average)* over the course of the year. Factoring these considerations in, it *appears* that Ontario has a slightly higher rate of out-of-home placements than the U.S. average.[11]

- Ontario appears to have a lower rate of placement than **Australia** (which is 13.7 based on 2010 figures for children 0 to 17). However, Australia is influenced by the high proportion of indigenous children in that country.[12]

- Figures for **England** for 2010 show a placement rate of 5.2 children (aged 0 to 17) per 1,000 population, a number that would be slightly higher if children up to ages 18 were included. When Ontario numbers from 2010 are used as a point of comparison, Ontario placement rates appear to be roughly equivalent to those in England. [13]

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

In General …

- As noted in the opening section of this document, there is considerable commentary in policy and research literature favouring the increasing emphasis on supporting at-risk children and youth in their home if possible and, failing that, in the most family-like settings.

- There is some research evidence that children placed in foster care can sometimes be more negatively impacted by the trauma of being removed from their parents (and in some cases, being subjected to multiple placements) than had they remained with their families.[14]

- A 2011 review of the relationship between foster care reductions and child safety in the United States concluded that: "*While enough data are not yet available to estimate the full impact of these recent changes on the reduction of children in foster care, there is growing evidence that*

[10] Mulcahy, M. & Trocme, N. (2010). Children and youth in out-of-home care in Canada. *Centre for Excellence in Child Welfare Information #78E*.

[11] Administration for Children and Families. (2012). Child welfare outcomes 2006 – 2009: Report to congress executive summary. *United States Department of Health and Human Services.*

[12] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). *2011 Census tables: Australia – Population by Age and Sex* and National Child Protection Clearinghouse (2011). Children in care. *Australian Institute of Family Studies*

[13] National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. (2012). *Looked after children* and Office for National Statistics. (2011). *Population Estimates for UK, England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Mid-2010.*

[14] O'Donnell, M., D. Scott and F. Stanley, 2008. "Child Abuse and Neglect: Is it Time for a Public Health Approach?" *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health,* 32 (4): 325-330.

children are as safe, and possibly safer, following the implementation of new practices and policies [aimed at preventing out-of-home placements].[15]*"*

Family Preservation Services[16][17]

- A large body of policy, literature and research exists relating to "*Family Preservation Services".* Multiple definitions exist but, in general, Family Preservations Services refer to: comprehensive, short-term, intensive services for families delivered primarily in the home when there is "imminent risk" of an out-of-home placement in the absence of proactive services. Family Preservation Services have also been defined to include intensive services supporting a foster care placement or an adoptive placement as well as services designed to promote family reunification.

- Many models of Family Preservation Services (often referred to as *Intensive* Family Preservation Services) exist, but the literature describes several similar characteristics:
    - Small caseloads of two to six families per primary worker;
    - Short, defined timeframe … some sources cite no more than three months, others cite no more than 12 months;
    - Home is the primary service setting
    - Flexible service model: workers available 24x7; broad range of supports available to families; and
    - Intensive services … sources cite a range from six to 20 hours of service per week per family.

- Family Preservation Services are, by design, family-focused and incorporate the following principles:
    - Family unit is the focus of attention;
    - Strengthening the capacity of families to function effectively is emphasized;
    - Families are engaged in the design of the program; and
    - Families are linked to more comprehensive, on-going community networks of supports and services.

- Although a multitude of research studies have examined the effectiveness and impact of Family Preservation programs, the findings have varied. This is, in part, due to different targeting of families for the programs, different fidelity to program principles and methodological limitations of the studies themselves. In general, the evidence appears to indicate that when families are clearly targeted (imminent risk of out-of-home placement), family preservation programs can deliver better outcomes and better cost-benefit than traditional out-of-home placements options.

Note that the research being undertaken by the LD Section's 2012 Project on "Early Help" also explores several of the opportunities and current evidence relating to keeping children and youth safe at home.

[15] Casey Family Programs, *Foster Care Reductions and Child Safety*, May 2011

[K] Nelson, B. Blythe et al, *A Ten-Year Review of Family Preservation Research: Building the Evidence Base,* Casey Family Programs, January 2009.

[17] L Tully, *Family Preservation Services: Literature Review,* New South Wales Department of Community Services, January 2008.

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

> *"CAS's must continue to develop skills and supports to enable biological parents to successfully keep their children at home. It is a fundamental mistake that natural parents are typically only dealt with after the children are removed and often as a bandage measure …."* (LOFF)

The question of how to reduce out-of-home placements was not directly posed in the interviews and submissions. However:

- Some youth suggested that they felt that had their parents had better support that remaining at home – or kin service – would have been a better option than their experience in care.

- There is definitely a theme regarding delays in reunification and moving to other permanency solutions. Fifty-seven percent of the 33 foster parents interviewed felt that the road to permanency takes too long for the children (e.g. due to a slow court process and other factors).

- There is also a caution around the need to avoid moving too quickly with reunification kin/ adoptive placements and to take the time to fully prepare both child and family to ensure a successful outcome.

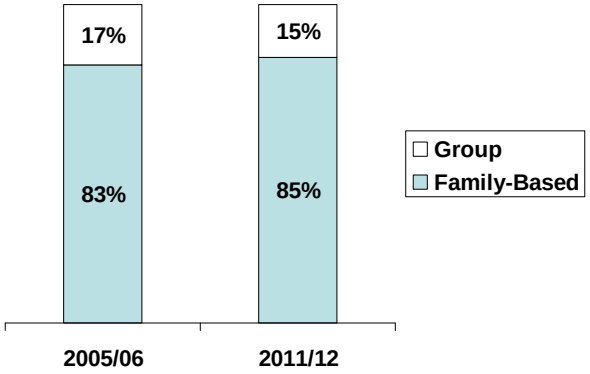
Appendix C
MAKING OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENTS FEEL LIKE HOME FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

WHAT DATA DO WE HAVE?

The proportion of youth being served in family-based versus group environments has increased in recent years and is now 85% (Exhibit C1). Note that this chart shows "days care" which provides a more accurate representation than "average CIC". The latter will understate CIC in family-based placements as the large proportion of CIC who are in care for less than a year are in family-based settings.

Exhibit C1

Change in Mix of Family-Based versus Group Care,
Days Care 2005/06 to 2011/12



Source: MCYS Statistical Reports, 2005/06 actual and 2011/12 Q3 forecast, Note: Only includes family and group placements (kin, customary, foster, group, adoption probation). Excludes: ECM, Independent Living, Elsewhere, No cost homes / institutions.

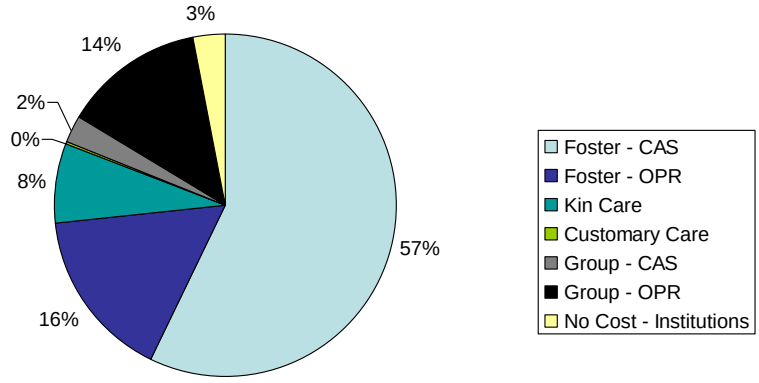
The proportion of CIC in family-based care varies across CASs. This variation was illustrated earlier in Exhibit B3. For 2011/12,

- 19 CASs had greater than 90% days care in family-based settings; and
- 10 CASs had *less than* 80% days care in family-based settings with the lowest proportion being 58%.

The pie chart in Exhibit C2 represents all CIC who are in some kind of group or family-based setting. *Youth in Independent Living, youth living on ECM are excluded, children and youth on "adoption probation" and children in placements labelled "elsewhere" are not included in this analysis.* CASs are the *primary* provider of foster and kin care and outside resources are the primary source of group care. However, 16% of children in foster care are in a foster home through an outside provider.

Exhibit C2

Children and Youth in Family-Based or Group-Based Care: By Placement by Type
As of March 31, 2011

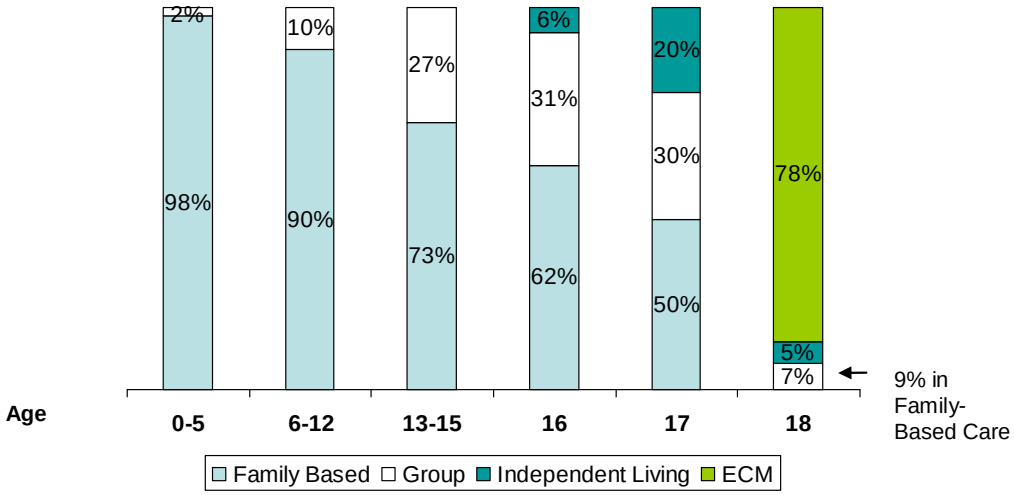


Source: OACAS CIC Fact Sheets, 2010/11
Note: Only includes formal residential placements. Excludes: "Elsewhere" and youth on ECM and Independent Living. Also, all OACAS data excludes Weechi-iti-win and Abinoojii. Therefore, will understate Customary Care.

The likelihood of being in family-based care decreases markedly in adolescence (Exhibit C3). Only half of 17 year olds (grade 11) are in family-based settings and one in five are living on their own (independent living).

Exhibit C3

CIC by Placement Type and Age
As of March 31, 2011



Source: OACAS CIC & Permanency Fact Sheets, 2010/11. Note: "Elsewhere" has been excluded and represents less than 1% of CIC in each age category. Note also that 19 to 21 year olds have been excluded from this data.

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

- Over the past several decades there has been an increased emphasis within the literature and in policy across multiple jurisdictions on family-based care (including foster, kinship and customary care) as the preferred setting for children who require alternative care;[18]

- The literature suggests that the family home-like setting plays an important role in shaping the emotional and behavioural outcomes of children in care[19]. For example, according to Orme & Buehler (2001), they found that foster families who provide home-like settings (e.g. fewer children in the home) had positive social behaviours and negative impact on the internalizing and externalizing behaviours of foster children; and

- Notwithstanding the positive evidence towards the potential positive outcomes of family-based care, there is a general consensus in the literature that there are some situations in which a child or youth will do better in an alternative placement (e.g. group care).

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

In the submissions we asked for examples of limitations faced by foster parents and by children and youth in care that detract from a "home like" experience for children and youth in care. We heard very moving and compelling themes about dynamics that undermine the experience of "home" and "family" for children and youth in care.

Policies and Practices that Leave Youth Feeling Excluded or Different

Youth talked candidly about experiences that reinforced their "outsider" status within foster families and urged for attention to how to make the experience more natural and comparable to what their friends experience. Several comments were made about the experience of being treated differently than biological children in the same home.

> *"Being excluded and reminded of our differences made us feel like a burden and like we were boarders or lodgers in a family's home."* (YouthCan)

- Being sent to respite while the family goes on vacation[20] or celebrates Christmas or other major holidays;
- Being sent for "respite" with people you have never met before – versus being with a familiar "babysitter" as is more the norm for children in families;
- Being asked to take the (biological) "family picture" – and not being included in family pictures;

[18] Fernandez, E., & Barth, R.P. (2010). Introduction: Reviewing international evidence to inform foster care policy and practice. E. Fernandez and R.P. Barth (Eds.), *How does foster care work? International evidence on outcomes* (pp. 20-28). London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2010

[19] Buehler, C., Cox, M.E. and Cuddeback, G. (2003). Foster Parents' Perceptions of Factors that Promote or Inhibit Successful Fostering. *Qualitative Social Work*, 2(1): 61-83.; Nixon, 2007

[20] Note that foster families shared with us the challenge of not being financially supported for including foster children on family vacations.

- Foster parents not being able to teach a teenager how to drive and teenagers having no access to the family car for a drivers' exam due to insurance reasons;
- Watching biological children have permission to ride the family ATV or snowmobile but not be able to do so because of being in-care;
- Being threatened that they will have to leave the foster home as a result of behaviour.
- Having to watch the foster parent clock mileage or record names on receipts for the purposes of reimbursement; and
- Being introduced as a foster child.

Examples were also raised of experiences foster children have outside the home particularly at school that add to their sense of "being different":

- Workers and drivers picking kids up from school for family visits and meetings during the school day; and
- Lack of permission for foster children to have photographs taken by the schools due to confidentiality. This interferes with class projects and further segregates the children from their peers.

Limitations on the Authority of Foster Parents and Kinship In-Care Parents

A significant theme among responses from foster parents (FPSO, LOFF, OARTY, ORCA) was the degree of constraint on day-to-day decision-making (e.g. hair cuts, travelling, vacations, medical appointments). This constraint was described both as a function of agency and government policy and also as a function of having to adjust their behaviour to safeguard against allegations.

> *"Foster parents are required to implement and tolerate a number of "unnatural" realities that negatively impact the foster families' ability to create a naturalized family setting for foster children."* (FPSO)

> *"In a "normal" family, daddy can tuck in a child, daddy can drive a daughter to the store, mommy does not have to do everything with a young child. In a "normal" family the children can be hugged, the child can be tickled, the child can play naturally and if they trip or fall and get a bump or bruise it is okay. In a normal family the children can be children. In a foster family the children cannot play naturally. Foster families have to be hyper-vigilant to protect themselves from false allegations; it causes a very unnatural environment."* (FPSO)

> *"Everyone is feeling like this is a permanent placement but the agency is so involved in the control of that sort of thing. If we want to go on trip, we have to get permission and they can say "yes" or "no" and that is a big thing about making this our family. That is a barrier to making- decision."* (Kinship parent, 7 years)

Foster parents and kinship parents talked about the extensive screening and training process they go through only to then have to ask permission for many parenting decisions that would feel more natural and appropriate if the parent were able to make them real-time for the children and youth in their care. This dynamic becomes even more problematic when it results in a child missing an opportunity due to the timing of permission or when a child or youth sees a worker over-riding a decision by a foster parent. Examples included:

- Permission for sleepovers and school trips;
- Police checks for alternate caregivers (even family members); and
- Micro-management by workers including: what kind of school lunches are packed; what kind of meals are prepared; over-riding a doctor's decision to medicate a child and telling the foster parent not to medicate – or the reverse, insisting that the foster parent medicate a child when the foster parent and doctor are unconvinced.

> *"The agencies have highly screened, and highly trained the foster parents, they have approved them as safe and competent caregivers, they need to trust them as such and give them the freedom to parent the children."* (FPSO)

Policies that Create Excessive Protectiveness/Risk-Avoidance with Children in Care

Both foster parents and youth in-care talked about the paradox of children in care being excessively protected while in-care but then largely cut-off when they reach young adulthood at the age of 18 and 21.

> *"By the very nature of our regulations, children are 'trapped too long' by our protective services then abandoned too quickly by their discharge."* (ORCA)

> *"As much as foster families are fully aware of the needs to keep the children safe, the boundaries that have to be upheld can be unnatural to the point of interfering with the child's ability to learn, grow, and explore. A child who has never fallen down is a child who has not learned to walk, yet if he is a foster child he better not get a bruise from having fallen down."* (FPSO)

Examples raised by foster parents of policies that reflect the high level of risk avoidance include:

- Some agencies will not allow any blankets in babies beds;
- Boundaries around recreational activities (pools, trampolines, motorized recreational vehicles);
- Specific rules around which pets a foster family is allowed to have;
- Bunk beds;
- Mandatory posting of rules and regulations; and
- Fire drills that have to be held and documented.

Some OARTY agencies are interpreted as falling under the Boarding Home Act and as such treated as rooming houses with requirements for fire separation between levels and fire doors on all bedrooms – all of which creates an institutional feel to the home.

Foster parents pointed to inconsistencies in safety rules for biological children and foster children as well as inconsistencies between agencies.

> *"In some cases, a birth child can use a snowmobile while a foster child cannot. One child can fly in an Air Cadet glider and another cannot."* (ORCA)

With regard to the overall issue of foster parent decision-making latitude and the specific issue of risk management, several suggestions were made to shift away from policies to guidelines and to defer more to foster parent judgement. There was recognition that some situations will require differing

levels of permission and/or risk management but that these should be addressed through the plan of care rather than as global policies affecting all foster parents and all children in care.

Having to leave home (at 18) before finishing high school

A recurring theme in Youth Leaving Care hearings, submissions and conversations with youth throughout this work has been the trauma and sense of abandonment that youth experience in having to leave their foster home at the age of 18, often while still in high school.

This experience appears to vary between agencies and foster homes with some youth being able to direct their ECM payments to cover the costs of remaining in their foster home and others not being offered this option.

> *"I think that it is abusive to expect that these 18- year- olds, who are 16 years cognitively, are expected to succeed on their own with minimal support. It is very frustrating. None of them succeed without support. They are promised the world. You are in care and we will do our best. Eighteen years comes and it is sorry there is the door, especially since you have done so well."* (Foster Parent interviews)

Engage former youth-in-care in sensitizing/training foster parents

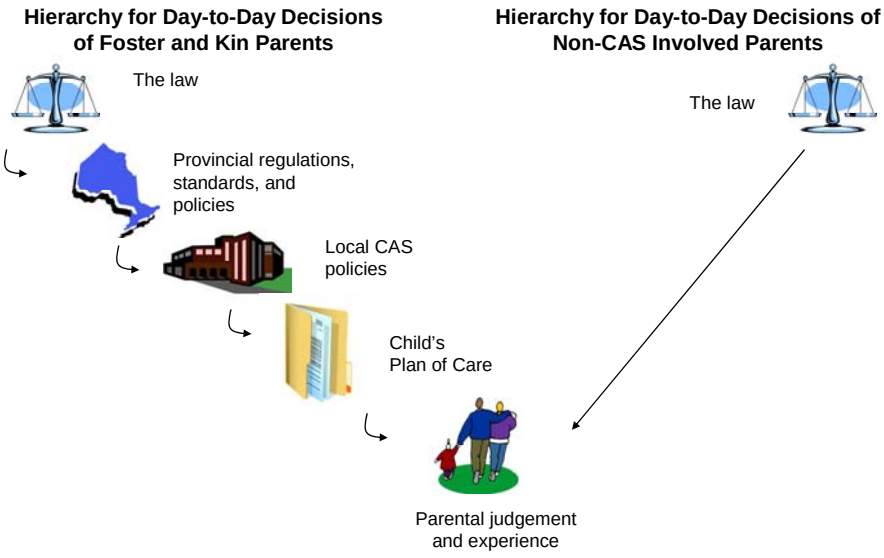
YouthCan advised of the value that engaging youth in PRIDE and other training so they can bring the insights from their experience into sensitizing foster parents around the use of language and other parenting choices so as to enhance the quality of home-like experience for children in their care.

Re-examine policies and procedures influencing day-to-day foster kin decision-making.

Several of the themes urged a re-examination of policies that foster and kin parents must take into account in their day-to-day decision-making and day-to-day efforts to fulfil their role as parents and, in so doing, create a family-like experience for children in their care. Exhibit C4 depicts the hierarchy of considerations and policies that foster and kin parents need to incorporate into their decision-making and compares this to the experience of parents raising children who are legally their own.

Exhibit C4

Foster / Kin Decision-Making versus Routine Parent Decision-Making



Appendix D:
KEEPING KIDS "CLOSE TO HOME"

The '"close-to-home" concept has many dimensions: *geographically* (e.g. same neighbourhood/town/ city, same school, etc.); *psychologically* (e.g. with or without geography being close to home, the many ways children preserve relationships) and *culturally.* This section addresses only the geographic element of "close to home". The psychological and cultural dimensions of "close-to-home" are discussed in later sections on increasing kin placements and enabling young people to grow roots.

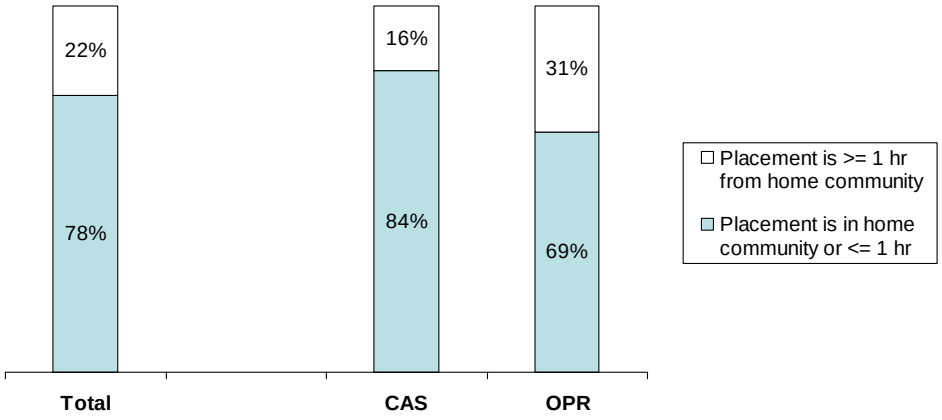
WHAT DATA DO WE HAVE?

For the purpose of this work, three different analyses were undertaken to provide an indication of placement patterns with respect to home communities. The results suggest that roughly 80% of CIC are in placements that are "close to home" as defined by a one to two-hour drive from their home community.

Foster parents interviewed by the Commission for the SFBC work reported that 78% of the children in their care were "in their home community or within an hour's drive of their home community" (Exhibit D1). The probability of being within or close to home community was higher for children and youth in CAS-based foster homes versus OPR homes.

Exhibit D1

Placement Proximity to "Home Community"
From Interviews with Foster Parents



Source: Commission Interviews with Foster Parents. N = 33 foster parents; 81 children & youth

Commission staff worked with CASs to undertake a survey of six representative CASs. Of the six CASs, one was a large Toronto CAS. This sample did not include any Aboriginal CASs. This survey used **two hours** as the "close to home" threshold. Exhibit D2 shows the proportion of children and youth who are in placements within their home jurisdiction and within two hours drive. Several observations can be drawn from the results:

– With the exception of Toronto, the majority of placements are within the home jurisdiction and within two hours;

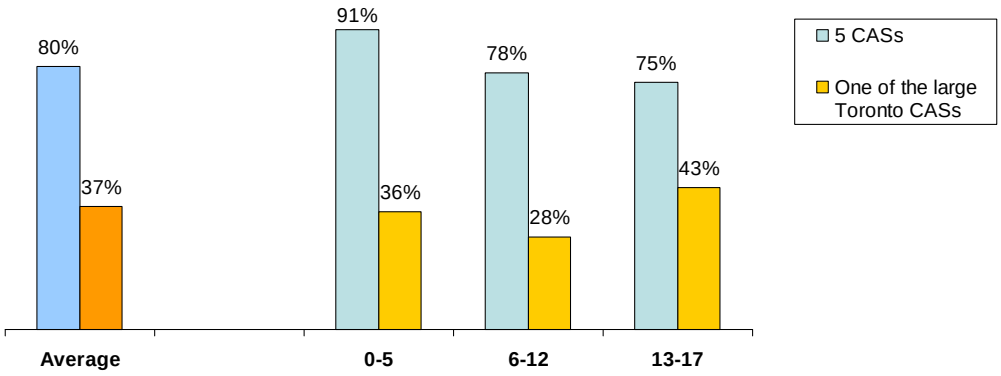
– In general, out-of-jurisdiction placements increase with age;

– CASs in Toronto had shared with the Commission the challenges they face in placing children within Toronto. The survey demonstrated this challenge. As shown, **only 37% of children in the Toronto sample are in placements within Toronto** versus 80% of children from other CASs being placed within their home jurisdiction; and

– For the CAS in Toronto, adolescents are more likely to be in placements in Toronto. This *may* reflect the higher availability of group homes in Toronto and the higher proportion of adolescents in these placements.

Exhibit D2

Placement Proximity
% of CIC within Jurisdiction and Within 2 Hours Drive
From Survey of Six CASs



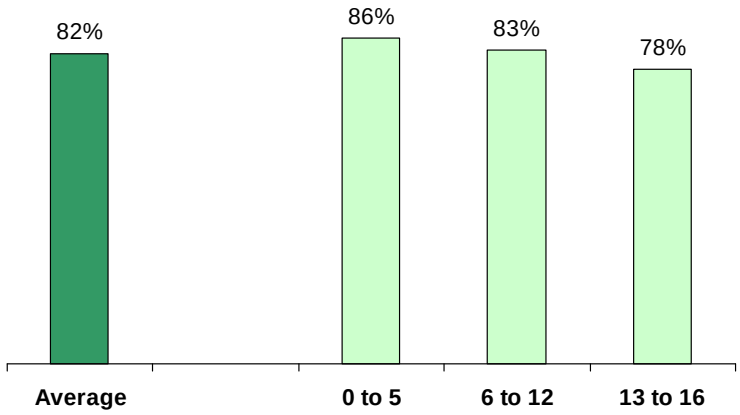
Note: Includes only children and youth from ages 0 through 17.
Source: Commission Survey of Six CASs (CCAS + representative sample of 5 non-Aboriginal CASs

Note that when placements *outside of jurisdiction but within 2 hours drive* are added, placements "close to home" for all children and youth are over 90% for all CASs in the sample. In hindsight, 2 hours appears to have been too wide of a band to fully inform our understanding of "close to home" placements.

When the proportions obtained from the foster parent interviews described earlier are applied to the entire CIC population based on placement type, we find a similar pattern: 82% of CIC are close to home with the proportion declining as children get older (Exhibit D3).

Exhibit D3

Placement Proximity - % "Close to Home"
Using OACAS Data and Interview Results



Note: Calculated by applying % within 1 hour ratios for OPR and CAS foster & group homes to actual placement types from data from OACAS CIC & Permanency Factsheets. Customary care, kin care, and adoption probation all treated as 100% "close to home"

Source: Commission analysis based on data from the 2010-11 OACAS CIC and Permanency Factsheets and findings from the foster parent interviews.

For Aboriginal children, the "close to home" picture is quite different and very concerning. The 2008/09 Crown Ward Review found that for Aboriginal children and youth who are Crown Wards:

- Only 22% were in placements in native homes;
- Only 8% are in placements in their home communities; and
- Only 22% are maintaining contact with their home communities.

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

- We have found no research addressing the relationship of geographic placement relative to home community to outcomes for children and youth in care.

- However, placing a child or youth within his/her home community is generally recognized as the preferred scenario in most cases. Children whose protection needs require an out-of-home placement bear the impact of the trauma that required out-of-home placement as well as the trauma of being uprooted from their home. "Close to home" placements reduce the additional losses and trauma that can come from: loss of familiar surroundings; having to start at a new school; loss of friends; loss of social connections from clubs, teams, church, etc.; loss of cultural connections; etc.

For Aboriginal children and youth, placements geographically removed from home community also create cultural displacement and additional impacts:

- "A child removed to residential school, foster care or adoption outside the community is placed in what Johnston (1983) describes as 'triple jeopardy' (1983, p.59): separation from parents and simultaneous loss of the kinship network and cultural context, typically including the child's birth language and connection with the land."[21]

- In late 2010, Payukotayno James and Hudson Bay Family Services has been working on an initiative to reduce the number of children and youth relocated from their communities as a result of foster and group placements. A brochure relating to this work[22] notes that:

    - *"Of the 106 children currently in care in the Moosenee area, 56 of them have been displaced to southern communities, including Timmins, Sudbury and North Bay, and as far south as Huntsville, Toronto and St. Catharines."*

    - *"Because adequate, safe housing for foster care is in such short supply, children must be removed from the town, village or reserve where their parents live and are taken up to nearly 1,000 miles away. While the care they receive is safe and loving, they are denied so much that has become common-place and provides comfort."*

    - *"Often, children whose first language is Cree are often placed in homes where no one speaks their language . . . they are rendered isolated in every respect — by distance, by a language barrier and by a cultural and spiritual divide."*

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

We didn't directly ask questions about geographic proximity to home in our submissions or phone interviews. However, submissions and interviews indicated that it is important to keep children 'close-to- home' *provided that it is safe to do so:*

- Distance from family and siblings can play a huge part in how much connections can be maintained. The youth recommend that travel costs to see family are covered and that placing close to family and siblings allows for more time together and relationships to grow. Making sure family is accessible and not being placed so far away.

- Informants from CASs have often cited the additional cost challenges with placements that are at a geographic distance. This includes the costs for the child and/or family to travel to enable access visits as well as associated costs for worker travel.

- An interesting perspective from ORCA that close to home looks different for our children and youth in care now in light of this modern age and global society. Connections maintained through technology such as email, texting, Facebook, etc. and perhaps "spending more effort on improving their sense of self over sense of community" in order to prepare them for the realities of this generation.

[21] Mandell, D., Blackstock, C., Carlson, J.C., & Fine, M. (2006). From child welfare to child, family, and community welfare: The agenda of Canada's Aboriginal Peoples. In N. Freymond and G. Cameron (Eds.), *Towards positive systems in child and family welfare: International comparisons of child protection, family service, and community caring systems* (pp. 211-234), Toronto: University of Toronto Press. (Quote: p.213)

[22] Payukotayno One Family, *Build a safe, loving home for a child: Keeping our children close to home.* Brochure produced by Payukotayno James and Hudson Bay Family Services together with Key Assets Fostering, 2011.

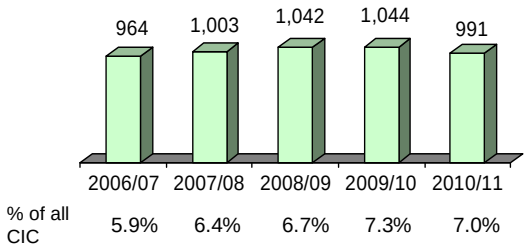
Appendix E
INCREASING KIN PLACEMENTS

WHAT DATA DO WE HAVE?

Notwithstanding the emphasis on Kinship through the Transformation agenda, the actual number of children in Kinship Care and Kinship Service has not increased substantially over the last five years (Exhibits E1 and E2). The ratio of Kinship Service to Kinship Care roughly one child in Kin Care for every three in Kin Service.

Exhibit E1

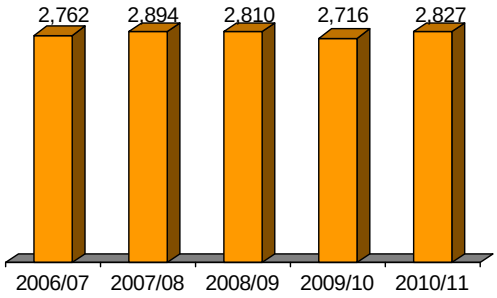
Average Children in Kin Care 2006/07 to 2010/11



Source: OACAS CIC Fact Sheets; % provided by OACAS based on total children in care 18 years and under.

Exhibit E2

Average Children Per Month in Kinship Service



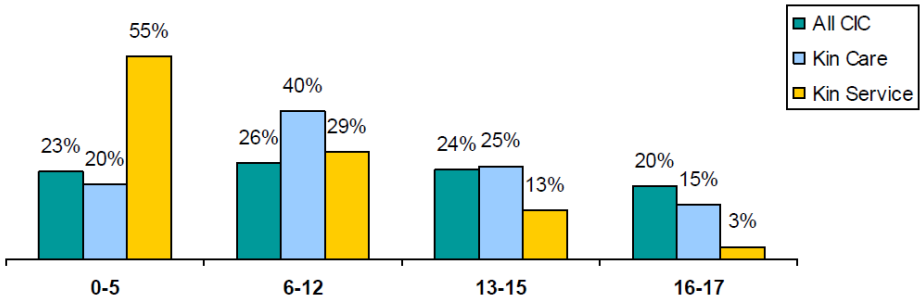
Source: OACAS Funding & Service Analysis, 2006/07 to 2010/11

Children in Kinship Care represent 7% of all children in care. When kinship service is added to "out-of-home care" figures, **22%** of all children and youth from birth to 18 who are in out-of-home placements are with kin [Note that this calculation is based on "average" figures at March 31, 2011 and excludes 18 year olds on ECM but includes 18-year-olds in all other placement types].

Children and youth in kin homes are younger than children in care overall. As illustrated in Exhibit E3, this is particularly evident with kinship service where 55% of children are five or under.

Exhibit E3

Age distribution of all Children in Care, Children in Kin Care, and Children in Kin Service



Source: CIC and Kin Care stats are from OACAS 2010-11 CIC Fact Sheets. Note that OACAS age data on Kinship Service shows 26.8% as "age not reported". Hence, Kin Service profile in this figure is from the Commission's data sample in which 5 CASs provided this age data. Age data for all CIC is inclusive of all children and youth regardless of placement type (i.e. Independent Living and ECM are included).

Use of Kin Care and Kin Service varies widely between CASs. In 2011/12 (Q3):

- Province-wide, for every child in Kin Service, there were 6.2 children in Care (any form)

- But … the ratio by CAS ranged from 2.6 to 17.5 with one outlier CAS at 42.6

- The provincial average for kin care (as % of CIC) was 7% … but there was a broad range across CASs:
  - 15 CASs were below 3% (4 of which have no children in Kinship Care)
  - 11 CASs were above 10% …. of which …
  - 2 CAS are above 20%

- The relationship between Kinship Care and Kinship Service also varies greatly across CASs. Province-wide, for every one child in Kinship Care there are 2.7 children in Kinship Service. However, the relationship varies widely across the province:
  - 2 CASs do not have any children in Kin Service
  - 5 other CASs have fewer children in Kin Service than in Kin Care
  - 7 CASs have more than 10 times as many children in Kin Services as in Kin Care

- There is no geographic, size, or other evident pattern in the variation between CASs relating to the level of Kin Service and Kin Care relative to each other and to other forms of In-Care placements.

A challenge for kin caregivers can be the difficult socioeconomic stressors that they themselves may be living with. These factors, combined with the often complex needs of children requiring out-of-home care, can be potentially overwhelming. In their submission, OARTY provided the following statistics from their 2009 survey of children in the care of OARTY providers. These statistics demonstrate the often complex challenges of family needs and child needs.

Type of Family Distress			**Child-related Distress**	
Poverty	52%		Sexual abuse	27%
Close family member committed suicide	4%		Physical abuse	49%
Close family member incarcerated	28%		Child abused drugs/alcohol	9%
Close family in psychiatric hospital	18%		Child brain damaged	24%
Close family member is MR (developmentally delayed?)	20%		Child is long-term school failure	73%
Close family member addicted to drugs	51%			
Close family member raped	14%			
Current domestic violence in family	16%			
Sexually assault person in family	6%			
Child's mother started as teen mom	18%			
Average # checked "yes" across two dimensions (child and family) ➔ 4.07				

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

In general

- There has been a strong trend in favour of kinship placements evident in the literature and in policy over the last several years. Kinship families are viewed as generally providing stable placements due to the higher level of commitment a family member may bring to the relationship than an unrelated foster caregiver might.

- Kinship families are also viewed as providing the child with the familiarity of living with someone they know, access to biological family members and biological family activities (e.g. extend family gatherings), and reinforces their cultural and birth identity sometimes.

- One challenge identified in the literature with kin families appears to be that kin families are less likely to seek supports for children in their care.[23]

Some differences and similarities between kinship and foster care

In 2007, Winokeus, Holtan and Valentine completed a meta-analysis of 62 studies (57 U.S., one Norway, one Israel, one Sweden, one Netherlands and one Australia). [24] The conclusions of their analysis provided significant evidence on the benefits of kinship care compared to non-kinship care. Some of their findings are:

- Kinship children tend to have lower internalizing/ externalizing behaviours than foster children;
- Foster children were 2.2 times more likely to have a mental health issue than kinship children;
- Foster children were more likely to receive mental health services than kinship children;
- Kinship children were 1.9 times more likely to report positive emotional health compared to foster children;
- Foster children were 2.6 times more likely to experience 3+ placements than kinship children;
- Foster children were more likely to be adopted than kinship children;
- Kinship children were more likely to be cared for by relatives through legal custody than foster children;
- Kinship children are more likely to remain in care than foster children; and
- Non-significant results regarding the kinship children's educational attainment and continuous attachment outcomes.

Notwithstanding the positive results, Winokeus et al caution researchers when interpreting the findings that some of the studies have methodological flaws. In general, there is a sense that "the jury is still out" in terms of a robust evidence base for the merits of kinship relative to unrelated foster care.

[23] Winokur, M., A. Holtan and D. Valentine. 2009. "Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency and Wellbeing of Children Removed from their Homes for Maltreatment." *The Cochrane Library,* Issue 3 and Leslie, L., M. Hurlburt, et al, 2005. "Relationship Between Entry into Child Welfare and Children's Mental Health Service Use." *Psychiatric Services* 56(8): 981-987.

[24] Winokur, M., Holtan, A., & Valentine, D. (2007). *Kinship care for the safety, permanency and well-being of children removed from the home for maltreatment*. Philadelphia, PA: The Campbell Collaboration Social Welfare Group.

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

Kinship isn't right for everyone

Feedback from both youth and foster care providers presented a mixed picture of kinship care with an emphasis on the theme that kinship isn't right for everyone or in all situations.

> *"Being close to the biological family might help the child achieve what they need to and to remain on the right track. Since the family is so close, they can also be more understanding and helpful in dealing with the issues that the child might be going through."* (YouthCan)

> *"If there is a safe and secure place for a child among their own kin, there is a great opportunity for success. If this place is known to the child and shares the child's history, this will give the child a good foundation to have a successful placement that could last a lifetime. The minimizing of disruption within the child's family is a strength and benefit to the child if it is safe, secure and stable."* (FPSO)

Former youth-in-care shared that kinship has benefits but some of the benefits may also be challenges.

- In some situations, a child or youth may not wish to remain in contact with family – or it may not be safe to do so;
- Living with kin may result in continuing in the same community as birth parents, which in some situations can cause additional stress and leave youth feeling caught in the middle;
- There may be conflicts with family values, religious or political views;
- Kinship is not always with someone that a child knows but may be with a previously unknown relative, often a long distance from one's home community; and
- Sometimes, the positive relationship the child or youth may have had with their relative(s) prior to being placed can become strained and sometimes destroyed, resulting in the youth losing not only the placement but also an important family connection.

Kinship care needs to be considered on an individual basis and involve much planning. It is not the solution for everyone.

> "*If the placement is well mapped out and the plan is driven from a clinical basis then placing with kin can have a huge benefit for the child and family." (OARTY)*

> *"One thing that needs to be stressed very strongly is the fact that kinship care is VERY individualized. There is no way that kinship care will work if you try to generalize it to fit everyone's needs."* (YouthCan)

> *"Sometimes the kin are kind of no better than the parents. I have four siblings who all went a bad way. They all have problems and issues. Sometimes [kinship] is good. We couldn't turn our back on them. Other situations, it should be in foster home. Or they hear too much about that parent. Things can be worked out with the right family and right reasons."* (Kinship parent, 18 years)

Getting kinship right from the beginning

The overarching theme in the submissions was the importance of getting kinship right from the beginning. There was a sense that often kin placements were rushed because they were kin – resulting in undue trauma to a child both during the move from one placement to the kin placement and longer term trauma if the placement is not a good match.

Submissions from foster parents and outside providers expressed a perception that placement breakdown is *higher* in kinship care. There was also concern that the emotional costs to the child are even higher with a kinship breakdown than with a foster home breakdown. There is a sense that screening is often rushed and the standards of what is acceptable is too low, increasing the risk of placement breakdown. There is also a perception that the opinions and information provided by foster parents are disregarded when making kin placement decisions. There is also a perception that the interest in kin placements is influenced significantly by financial considerations.

> *"It would appear that clients experience a greater sense of 'personal failure' (in kin breakdowns). Perhaps it is easier for a client to lay blame on foster parents than birth family." (*ORCA)
>
> *"Most kin placements that we see are not well planned and are financially driven as a means of reducing the days of care, and as such we end up seeing a much more damaged child back in care."* (OARTY)
>
> *"The kin families are not regulated enough, there are not enough resources designated to oversee the placements of the children in the kin homes, and things get too far away from ideal before anything is done to rectify the situation."* (FPSO)
>
> *"There needs to be an in-depth assessment that encompasses the package of care and treatment needs, the cost of care, and the potential family stressors into consideration before placing a child in kinship care."* (OARTY)
>
> *"If foster parents are replaced by kin, many believe it will be at the cost of the level of care. CAS's can insist on a high level of care from their foster families as we are their volunteers. However there is no way a CAS can insist on any level of care from kin unless they are prepared to take the children out of the home if there is no compliance to a standard of care."* (FPSO)

Kinship parents need supports

There is a strong theme that *assuming kin is the right placement,* that the next critical success factor is ensuring kin families are appropriately supported. There was a general theme in all submissions that kinship placements appear to be less rigorously supported than foster placements.

- In order to be successful kinship service needs more resources and supports (e.g. Ontario Works, medical/dental services and other services supported by CAS)

> *"In order to minimize the breakdown of kinship care for children enduring serious emotional distress, the solution is to adequately support kinship care with day treatment programs, respite care and ongoing counselling and family support services."* (OARTY)

"The Kin families do not necessarily have the ability to tap into the resources the foster families can access through the CAS to support the placement." (FPSO)

"More resources should be made available for kinship service families and thereby reduce the number of children and youth entering "in care"…… training and support groups for kin service families would be an asset." (OACAS Caring for Children and Youth Council)

Note that OARTY proposed in its submission that private providers are well positioned to bring the experience and expertise to collaborate with local CASs to develop cost-effective support services for kinship placements.

Based upon the 18 telephone interviews with kinship parents in Ontario, the types of support vary:

- **Some kinship parents need financial support to maintain the placement**:
  "The new kin-in-care doesn't get the same rates as foster parents. Not fair! I have to buy clothes at Old Navy or are they being punished for being with kin? That is my opinion and I didn't find that it was fair. They wouldn't get the same board rates as foster parents, and also if you are going to hunt them down and coerce them, what benefit is it to them to quit [their] job and stay at home? I needed the financial help. I am grateful for it and without it I couldn't do it." (Kinship parent, 8 years)

- **Some kinship parents require quicker access to community supports**:
  "I experienced that on my own going to these support groups and things, I would be put on wait lists and the wait is so long but with the agency they were getting me into services much quicker." (Kinship parent, seven years)

- **Kinship parents want to be a part of the team**:
  "Kin parents are kind of overlooked. We feel like we are the last thought, the parents first, then the children and then left in the dark. We don't have rights. We don't have a lot of say in things such as plans of care." (Kinship parent, one year)

- **Kinship parents need to debrief about their kinship experience**:
  "Placements break down because there isn't a lot of support within CAS for foster parents, they don't have time to cry with me about how difficult it is and the craziness… everyone who does this should have access to provide them with support and be available to talk and I have talked to my counsellor and we very seldom talk now but I was weekly with her." (Kinship parent, two years)

- **Kinship parents need financial supports to adopt children to create permanency:**
  "I think that the government financially supports us so we can keep the children within our homes. I couldn't afford [adoption]. I have raised these children on my own. My husband makes minimum wage and I don't work. If the government gave us a supplement, the same as what we get to foster until a certain age, there would be no question in our mind to adopt the children." (Kinship parent, seven years)

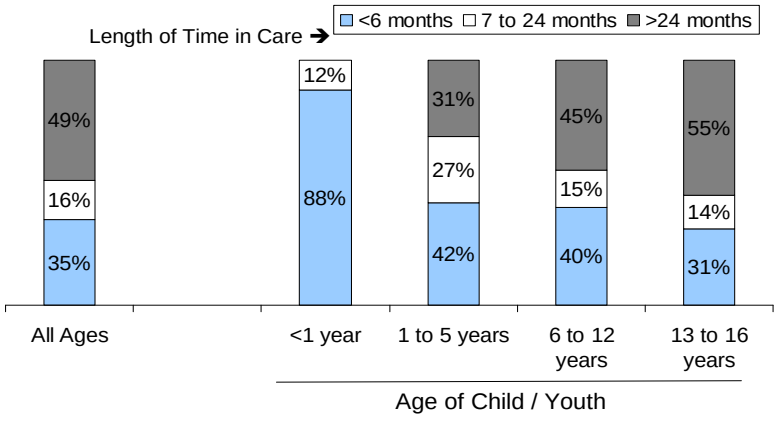
Appendix F:
DECREASING MULTIPLE MOVES

WHAT DATA DO WE HAVE?

In Ontario, our understanding of the actual experience of children in care is hampered by an absence of longitudinal data that reflects the experience of individual children over time. Most data currently available is point-in-time information reflecting the current status of children in care in the system. So, while we have data on the average number of children in the system or the average days of care for children in any given year, we are much more limited in information that reflects the experience of children over time. In the course of the Commission's work, we were able to access some limited information that begins to inform the understanding of the placement experience of children.

The length of time a child or youth is in care varies widely. As part of Phase 1 of the Commission's in-care work, Steve Lough & Associates undertook a survey of children in care over the two-year period ending March 31, 2010. Six CASs were included in this sample representing a mix of northern and southern rural and urban, large and small agencies. The sample did not include an Aboriginal CAS. Together, the CASs in the sample account for 20% of the province's total children in care. The findings from this survey are shown in Exhibit F1. As illustrated, roughly one-third of children are in care less than six months while half of children are in care for more than 24 months. Younger children tend to spend shorter time in care than older children. Note that these results do not capture the number of times that children or youth are re-admitted to care.

Exhibit F1
Length of Time in Care – Overall and By Age
Based on a survey of six CASs



Source: Steve Lough & Associates, 2010

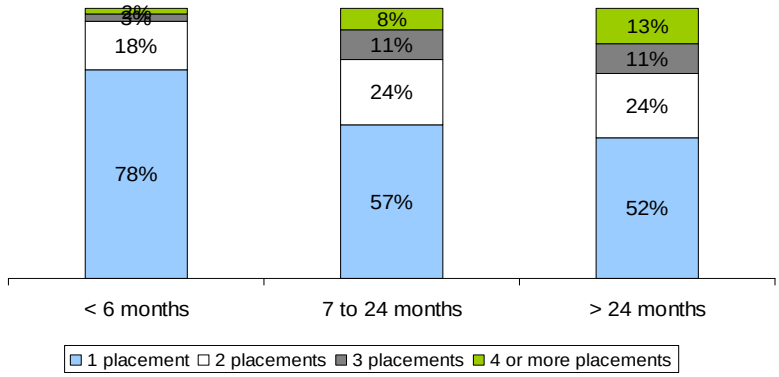
For the children and youth who do not return home or move quickly to permanent placements, it appears that multiple placement moves are very common. OARTY (Ontario Association of Residences Treating Youth – private operators (foster, group and residential membership) report that according to their research: the children and youth had on **average five prior placements** before being placed in OARTY's care.

What this information does not tell us is how often children and youth move from one placement to another. The new provincial indicators developed as part of the Commission's work on Accountability begin to answer this question. Exhibit F2 groups children in care based on their length of time in care and shows the number of placements. As would be expected, most children who are in care for a short period of time (six months or less) will only be in one placement. In fact, four out of every five children in care for less than six months were in only one placement. For children in care seven to twenty-four months, the majority (close to 80% or four out of five children) experience only one *or two* placements. It is encouraging to see that even when children in care for longer periods (over 24 months), the majority (roughly 75% or three out of every four) will experience only one or two placements.

Exhibit F2

Number of Placements by Length of Time in Care

Based on all children in care as of March 31, 2010 in the 22 CASs participating in Phase 1 of the Provincial Indicators roll-out



Source: Commission Analysis of Provincial Indicator data.

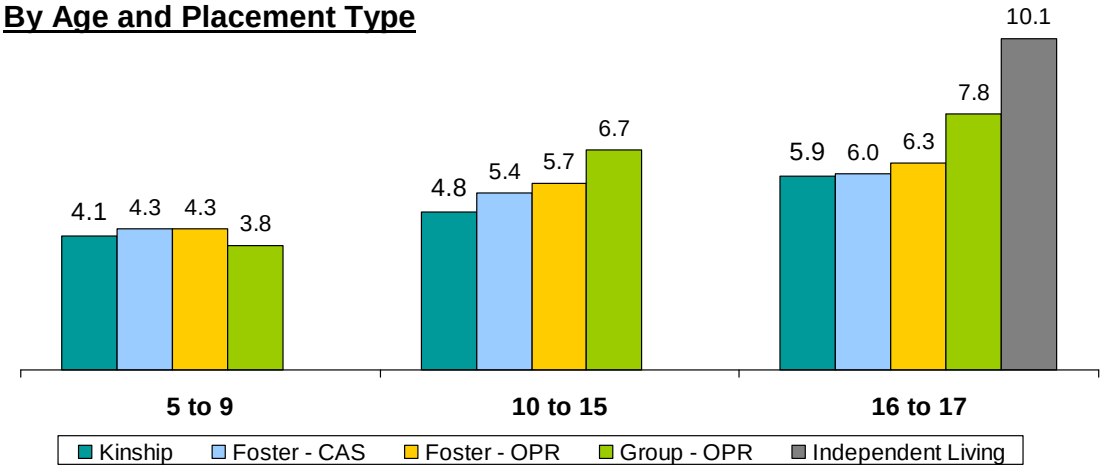
The October 2011 OnLAC report represents all children who have been in care for one year or more. The report shows that by the time children are five, if they are in care, they will have changed place of residence at least four times and the number of residences will continue to increase as they get older (Exhibit F3). Children in OPRs (both foster and group) will have experienced more change of residence than children in agency foster or kin. Youth who choose independent living have experienced the highest number of changes.

It should be noted that "change in place of residence" in the OnLAC data includes moves that have occurred over the child or youth's lifetime. As a result, this information incorporates both moves that may have occurred while a child or youth is living with a biological parent as well as moves that occurred when in out-of-home care. This information is based on worker estimates. This difference in definition may explain the different move profile found in the provincial indicator data from that suggested by the OnLAC data. However, the general pattern of higher moves correlating with age and type of placement is consistent with the themes shared with the Commission by workers, foster parents and youth-in-care.

Further attention will be required to this topic over time to ensure an accurate understanding of the actual placement stability of children and youth in care.

Exhibit F3

Average Change in Place of Residence Since Birth
By Age and Placement Type

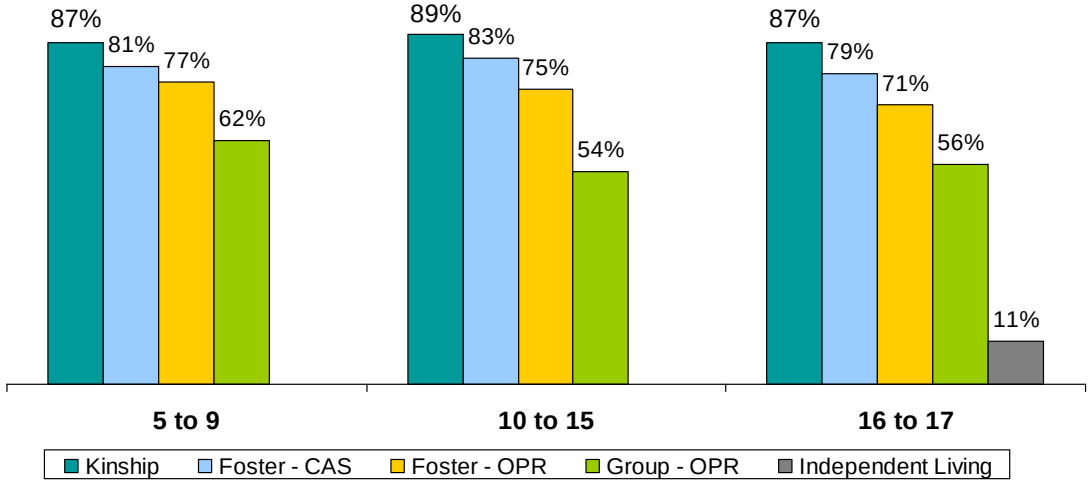


Source: Oct 2011 OnLAC Year 10 Report, "Average change in place of residence since birth".

Notwithstanding the volume of placement changes, CAS workers present a more optimistic picture in terms of "continuity of care" (Exhibit F4). Continuity is strongest in kin placements and poorest in group placements and for youth who have moved to independent living.

Exhibit F4

Worker Assessment of "Continuity" for Children in Care
By Age and Placement Type



Source: Oct 2011 OnLAC Year 10 Report, "Young people who have had 'much continuity of care' (as reported by child welfare worker)".

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

Note: The Commission's review of the research on this area relied significantly on a very extensive literature review completed by PART resulting in the nine-page 2009 "PARTicle" on *Placement Stability".* This section repeats key themes from this PARTicle.

- Finding the right in-care placement is critical, and the sooner the better! Research indicates that the first six months of the placement are vital, as approximately 70% of placement disruptions occur during this time. (Ekins, 2009; Jones & Wells, 2008; Smith, Stormshak, Chamberlain & Whaley, 2001; Webster, Barth & Needell, 2000).

- There are six key reasons for placement disruptions: (1) characteristics of the system or policy issues (e.g., limited placement options); (2) characteristics of child protection workers (e.g. worker turnover); (3) characteristics of the foster families (e.g. risk of harm towards the foster family; lack of support); (4) characteristics of kinship families (e.g. health issues); (5) characteristics of biological families (e.g., not adhering to the CAS or court requirements); and (6) characteristics of children and youth (e.g. age, behaviours).

- Place instability is often is linked to decreased placement outcomes (e.g. poor education outcomes). Multiple placements make it challenge for foster children to establish secure attachments with caregivers and maintain social/support networks.[25]

- In general, previous placement disruptions are a significant predictor of placement moves in the future.[26]

- In order to minimize placement disruptions, there are strategies that can be taken to promote placement stability. For instance, placement stability is more likely when the young person maintains a sense of identity, belonging and/or certainty of their cultural roots through connections to their social network, culture and community while they are in-care (Ekin, 2009; Sinclair & Wilson, 2004; Gilligan, 2006; Leathers, 2003). Placement stability is more likely when the kinship caregiver or foster parent is provided support and access to timely assessment/services for the young person (Ekin, 2009; Jones & Wells, 2008).

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

The topic of multiple moves generated significant commentary in submissions and in foster and kin interviews. In the interviews, the majority of foster parents indicated that they had children in their care that, in their opinion, had been relocated earlier than planned to the detriment of the child.

[25] MacDonald, G.M., & Turner, W. (2007). *Treatment foster care for improving outcomes in children and young people*. The Campbell Collaborations.

[26] Smith, D.K., Stormshak, E., Chamberlain, P., & Whaley, R.B. (2001). "Placement Disruption in Treatment Foster Care." *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Disorders,* 9(3): 200–205.

Get the placement match right the first time

- Lack of matching and sharing of information about child/youth. Full disclosure of all the information pertaining to the child was emphasized as critical.

- Lack of thorough/ineffective screening for kinship placements – Lack of higher standards for kinship environment – Lack of training and support for kinship taking on a higher needs or more difficult child – Dynamics within kinship family/dysfunction.

- "Getting it right the first time when choosing a family and services to meet the young person's needs" (OARTY) Place appropriately from the beginning by trying to match as best as possible the child/youth's needs with the appropriate caregiver (i.e. foster, kin, group etc.). More time and effort at the front end devoted to placement decisions.

- Training, skill level and maturity of child welfare workers in being able to work with all players (child, foster parents, private providers, etc.) to make the best placement decisions.

- Engagement of all players is essential. Foster parents spoke of decisions in which CAS made decisions to move a child with foster families having little or no ability to advocate for the child staying in their homes. Foster parents also referred to needing an environment in which they are free to be honest about what they can and cannot handle without fear of negative judgement or reprisal.

- Several submissions emphasized the importance of more rigorous attention to tracking placement moves, evaluating results and identifying systemic issues to be addressed around placement matching and outcomes. There was also a theme about the need for greater accountability/feedback loops with workers and CASs regarding placement outcomes.

  *"A good way for the CAS to make sure youth do not get moved around is to let the foster parents meet with the youth and also their immediate family so the foster parents can get to know what the youth and family is like before moving in." (*YouthCan)

  "Occasionally, an inexperienced intake service worker may view a child's needs through rose-colored glasses. Occasionally, a private operator may overly emphasize the skill level and/or experience of a home. Neither case benefits the child. The development of long-standing trusted partnerships between placing agencies and operators is a distinct benefit to assure continued long-term placement success. Both parties would gain from programs designed to educate front line staff to this need. Perhaps a joint effort of OACAS and ORCA, for developing such a program would significantly benefit all parties." (ORCA)

Provide family counselling and supports to keep foster families intact

A major theme, particularly from youth, was the need to treat foster and kin families as "regular families" by providing family counseling when times get hard rather than assuming its time to move the youth. Similar themes were raised regarding the need to address the source of the conflict rather than moving the child or youth. In responses and interviews, references were made to all parties – youth, foster parents, CAS workers – opting for a move without putting the effort into working through the source of the conflict. There was also a suggestion – by some foster parents who were interviewed –

that there is a need to set the expectation with foster parents that they will try to work through issues with children rather than assuming the solution is a move.

> *"Most importantly, by having family meetings to discuss issues, so that the foster parents/caregivers and children/youth can talk about their issues openly and not having "you're gone" or "I'm leaving" as the most common response to any problems." (YouthCan)*

> *"In many cases, letting youth and caregivers work out their issues like a "real" family would, is the best first option before making big decisions on moving a kid."* (YouthCan)

> *"There is a tendency on the part of CAS's to move a client as a result of a complaint as opposed toactually dealing with the issue and resolving it as we would do within a normal family environment."* (OARTY)

> *"There should be a test to "stick-to-ed-ness" for foster parents. There are a lot who can't stick to it without significant support*." (Foster parent, OPR, 25 years)

> *"Numerous breakdowns in foster homes occur when foster children decide THEY don't want the placement to work. We feel there needs to be more prevention of breakdowns by involving a team of support services that would come into the home to try and resolve issues or conflicts before they lead to a breakdown in placement*." (FPA, Nipissing-Parry Sound)

Make decisions based on the needs of the child – address system issues, practices and ideologies that are causing unnecessary placement disruptions

Several comments were made regarding returning home to the biological family too soon or rushing the reunification with biological family. Similar comments were made about rushing moves from foster care to kin care without sufficient due diligence or preparation. There is a sense that ideologies around family reunification and kinship may be giving rise to rushed moves and/or inadequate planning or support for moves. Result: greater risk of placement failure and/or coming back into care.

> *"There is not enough transition time between the foster placement and the kin placement, pre placements and transition placements would give the kin family a better opportunity to see what life will be like with the child before the child is placed there… this will give the child a good opportunity to develop a relationship with the kin family giving better opportunity for success." (FPSO)*

Continuity for children is compromised by rules and financial pressures relating to the 4 client maximum for foster homes. This results in children and youth not being able to return to a previous placement if their new placement disrupts. The most frequent example was of a child or youth returning home or to a kin placement and then needing to return to care. If the previous foster placement now has four children they have no option of returning. Same comment was made in the case of runaways. The bed fills up again, the home is at maximum capacity and they are not able to return if they change their mind. Respondents urged for short-term flexibility in standards to allow for more continuity for children and minimize traumas of placement changes.

*"Unfortunately the current maximum of four clients has no flexibility. Any interpretation that allowed for short-term placement under special circumstances would permit the foster home to keep space available for relief and/or emergency return of a child to the same home." (*In one recent license review, auditors spent several hours trying to prove that a licensee had actually slept one extra child in a home for one evening.)* (ORCA)

"As children move back into the CAS system, in an ideal situation they can return to their previous foster family, unfortunately this is not often possible. The provision exists in the agency regulations from the ministry to go over a bed for siblings or to have a child returned to their previous foster home. Unfortunately, it is reported that the agency then gets their wrist slapped for having more than four children in the home. We understand the funding of this placement would also be an issue." (FPSO)

There is concern that financial and ideological considerations – not child considerations – are driving multiple moves. Ideologies (i.e. kinship better than foster; agency better than private; family-based better than group) appear to be factors in driving decisions to move children and youth. Foster parents referred to the frustration of seeing a child improve in terms of behaviours only to be pulled and moved to a lower-cost alternative. Private providers referred to frustrations with the anti-private bias they experience. Compensation models are clearly a factor in multiple moves. Tying per diems to the type of home (regular, treatment, specialized, etc.) or the skill level of the foster parents has many benefits. However, it creates a dynamic whereby if a child's needs change, the child either needs to move or the CAS will be left paying more than warranted by the child's current needs.

*"If [the young persons] are bad, you can stay with your placement. If you are good, we are moving you somewhere else. If your behaviour is poor – [you] run and do drugs – you get to stay with the family you connected with. However, if you go to school and hang out with the right people, we are going to move you." (*Foster parent, OPR, 12 years)

"The service delivery system needs to become child-driven. The money needs to follow the child, not the bed. There is a need to fully understand the system including the cost of care so that placement decisions can be made based on the best treatment options at the best price." (OARTY)

"The rush to fill these vacancies is at the expense of the children and youth in care who are often "pulled" from private sector care where they are doing well and have formed attachments with their care providers and moved into the empty beds in the public sector as if to show a "need" for these empty beds. This problem has consistently occurred for many decades and continues to this day especially within the group homes that are operated by the child welfare agencies." (OARTY)

*"The slogan "Bring our Children Home" has been slanted towards an interpretation of 'stop using paid operators.' (*In a recent conversation one agency worker acknowledged being 'educated' with this philosophy and when asked, "If you had the option of a private operator home within the clients birth community or, the use of an equally suited but agency operated home in [a community 30 miles away] which one would you recommend?" The answer was a clear, definite "Our own home of course."* (ORCA)

Wrap services/supports around the in-care placement

A universal theme in reducing multiple moves is the need to ensure appropriate supports are available to foster parents. In this regard, there was a general sense that agency-based foster parents often struggle more than private provider foster parents in securing the supports that they need.

Foster parent and kin interviews emphasized the importance of supports providing multiple examples of the kind of supports needed to keep children in their homes: more consistent contact with the CAS workers; travel expenses covered for visits/appointments; awareness of past placement successes and failures; respite; support person and/or group; appropriate training relating to attachment and trauma, challenging behaviors, etc.

> *"Children with high needs have trouble accessing appropriate care in a timely way – in effect, the service delivery system runs an informal experiment on these children to see if a low cost cost/low intensity intervention will work. This informal "test" always results in a worsening of the child's symptoms and an increase in service costs."* (OARTY)
>
> *"Foster parents need to be able to ask for the supports they need without fear of unfair judgement." (*FPSO)
>
> *"We didn't have a lot of information before they moved in. Maybe CAS thought that we knew and we understood their challenges and their difficulties, but we got very little information."* (Kinship parent, 2 years)
>
> *"I think there is a breakdown in the length of timelines in trying to get kids into help. The waiting lists are far too long. They are broken down in the placement before we have gotten them into it. It is not all of the problem but I think that we as a family try our hardest to keep the child stable but if we feel that the child has broken down the family we can't allow this to affect our family. That is when we have decision to move."* (Foster parent, OPR, 12 years)

Recognize that sometimes, a move is the right outcome

The YouthCan submission acknowledged that some moves can be helpful because a move can:

- Give a youth a fresh start;
- Enable a youth to move in with a positive mentor like a teacher;
- Enable a youth to move from group care to a family-based environment and develop more "family-like relationships";
- Give a youth an opportunity to experience independence through independent living if family-based or group environments were not working for them.

Foster parents also talked about the reality that sometimes a move is required to protect the safety of other children in a home. Sometimes a move is required due to health or personal issues being faced by the foster parent(s).

> *"We try until the end of the placement, like when the police show up and the knife is pulled on me, or put my own child in danger. Those are the times that I have given notice to move a child.*" (Foster parent, OPR, 11 years)

Appendix G
ENABLE YOUNG PEOPLE TO GROW ROOTS AND LIFE-LONG RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE SAY?

- Courtney, Dworsky, Lee and Raap (2010)'s study found that 79% of the 732 youth in Iowa, Illinois and Wisconsin (aged 17-18 years) still felt very close to their family (with strongest feelings towards siblings).[27]

- "There is substantial evidence that children with secure attachments in childhood develop more positive social-emotional competence, cognitive functioning, physical health and mental health whereas children with insecure attachments are more at risk for negative outcomes in these domains"[28]. However, there is evidence that the attachment between the foster child and the foster parent impact one another.[29]

- "In a hallmark study by Dozier, Stovall, Albus & Bates (2001) (10), authors were able to demonstrate an association between foster mothers' attachment state of mind and foster infants' attachment quality. Specifically, the concordance rate between foster mothers and children was 72%, a rate that is similar among biologically intact mother-infant dyads. More importantly, concordance rates appeared to be higher for infants who were either earlier or later placed in foster homes. This observation is particularly important because it provides some evidence to show children are still able to reorganize their behaviours around the availability of new caregivers following a disruption in care. Some evidence suggests foster parents are able to help foster children reorganize attachment patterns; future research can examine the specific processes that help facilitate this change."[30]

- "Secure attachments supply the child with a reliable 'secure base' that encourages – and renders safe – exploration of the wider world (Bowlby, 1988). Such a sense of a 'secure base' in daily living may be cultivated by a person's sense of belonging within supportive social networks, by attachment type relationships to reliable and responsive people and by routines and structures in their lives".[31]

---

[27] Courtney, M.E., Dworsky, A., Lee, J.S., & Raap, M. (2010). *Midwest evaluation of the adult functioning of former foster youth: Outcomes at ages 23 to 24.* Chicago: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago.

[28] Kenna E. Ranson & Liana J. Urichuk (2008): The effect of parent–child attachment relationships on child biopsychosocial outcomes: a review, Early Child Development and Care, 178:2, 129-152 (p.129)

[29] Marie L. Caltabiano & Rosamund Thorpe, "Attachment Style of Foster Carers and Caregiving Role Performance", *Child Care in Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 2, April 2007, pp. 137-148.

[30] Goodman, D., Anderson, A.M., & Cheung, C. (October 2008). *The future of foster care: Current models, evidence-based practice, future needs*. Child Welfare Institute, Children's Aid Society of Toronto.

[31] Gilligan, R. (2004). Promoting resilience in child and family social work: Issues for social work practice, education, and policy. *Social Work Education*, 23(1): 93-104.

- "Hill (2002) rightly cautions against excessively optimistic views of social networks. Networks can be a source of stress and hurt when relations with network members are troubled, but where sufficient positive energy flows through networks, they can be a powerful and often preferred source of help, support and connectedness for children and adults." (Gilligan, 2004, p.94)[32]

- "When home life is difficult, grandparents and extended kin may provide very important 'arenas for comfort' (Thiede Call, 1996). Other adults outside the family may also be very important for instance teachers, neighbours and mentors (Smith & Carlson, 1997; Werner & Smith, 1992, p.209; Gilligan, 2001). It is worth stressing that it is not necessary for the child or adult to have a primary attachment to a person in order for positive value to accrue from the relationship." (Gilligan, 2004, p.95)

- "It is suggested that naturally occurring opportunities in daily living may ultimately prove more therapeutic than attempts at helping that are specially devised or engineered. Daily or regular routines and rituals in family and school may often help children to begin to recover from the effects of stress in their lives. Familiar routines at home around meals, bedtime stories, getting up or family outings may prove important sources of a sense of order and structure." (Gilligan, 2004, p. 96)

WHAT ARE THE ADDITIONAL INSIGHTS FROM LIVED EXPERIENCE? (Submissions, Foster/Kin interviews)

Note that the questions posed for submissions and foster/kin interviews did not focus specifically on legal permanency as an avenue for growing roots and life-long connections. Rather, the emphasis was on how to build relationships and lifelong connections regardless of the legal status of a child or youth.

Retaining and Enabling Family Connectedness

A major theme in all submissions, interviews and discussions related to the critical importance that relationships with supportive adults hold for children and youth and former youth-in-care. This was also a major theme in the Youth Leaving Care hearings. The overriding message appears to be to create multiple avenues through which children and youth can build meaningful relationships.

> *"We can never have enough family." (*YouthCan)
>
> *"The more people in a child's life the better: Does it hurt you to have twenty people who love you?"* (CAS foster parent, nine years)
>
> *"A meaningful adult connection for a youth can happen at any time. This supportive adult could be a teacher, a coach, a Big Brother or Big Sister, a community figure and the list goes on. The key is supporting youth in doing the things that they enjoy."* (YouthCan)

[32] Hill, M. (2002). Network assessment and diagrams – a flexible friend for social work practice and education. *Journal of Social Work*, 2(2): 233-254.

"One big thing he knows the family and extended family. That is one big opportunity. If he had of gone to a foster community, access to extended family is limited, but now he has access. It is a huge difference. I think it serves him as an identity. He is connected to his roots." (Kinship parent, one year)

Retaining and Enabling Family Connectedness

A culture that encourages ongoing connections with family – parents, siblings, extended family – was supported as an important element in fostering outcomes for vulnerable youth *in most situations.*

- Involving birth families in the planning for children and youth in care (e.g. plans of care meetings, etc.) help to build lifelong relationships with family as well as by providing counselling and support.

- Children and youth in care value maintaining relationships and connections with their biological families. Sibling relationships are important as they share common experiences or perhaps been through traumatic events together. The family they do have are there no matter what and help children and youth to be more open and able to communicate.

Foster parents were recognized as having a critical role to play in enabling children and youth to maintain and grow family connections.

- For the most part, foster parents maintain contact with the foster child's home community during the placement (e.g. such as birth family, school, friends, cultural activities). Connections are maintained through access visits, communication books or photo books, talking over the phone/texting/social media, providing transportation, visits within the foster home, participation in cultural activities/schools/libraries, etc.

- Foster parents can support a positive connection with the birth family by: building a parenting team relationship; drives to visits; including child's family story along with photos and details in life books; aim to have a positive relationship with the birth family and to encourage the child and youth as well and to speak of and present the biological family in a positive light and teach the child the good things about his or her biological family and what they have to offer.

- In interviews with foster parents, there was evidence that comfort with, and conviction around, the importance of enabling ongoing family connections varies from one foster family to another.

- Foster parent interviews and submissions identified a number of challenges in supporting birth and kin connections including:
  - Safety – sometimes, it is unsafe for the parents, the children or other children in the home;
  - Biological parents do not show up for access visits;
  - Unreliable support services (e.g. unreliable transportation services so the child can attend access visits or extra curricular activities);
  - Access visits can conflict with foster family activities or a child's regularly scheduled activities;

- Non-meaningful access provided to the foster child and their biological family – such as visits in parking lots, busy access centers);
- Emotional difficulties for the foster child, parents and foster parents if evidence of the circumstances that gave rise to abuse and neglect continue; and
- Conflicts and discomfort between biological families and foster families and the risk of allegations or harassment from biological parents, kin or friends of biological parents.

- A significant dynamic in the role that foster parents play in ongoing relationships with family as well as ongoing relationships between foster parents and youth after placement relates to the acceptance of the biological family towards the role of foster parents.

  "I think that there is a lot of negativity from the kin side if the children have been apprehended. They don't like the foster parents. They see the foster parents as the people who stole their children. If there could be communication it could go better" (Foster parent, OPR, three years)

Foster Families as a Source of Lifelong Connections

- 91% of the 33 foster parents interviewed remained in contact with at least one foster child who had been in their care with many expressing at least half of the foster children. With 82% of foster parents stating that no further changes are required to enable lifelong connections.

- Encourage or allow youth to stay in their foster home longer and develop open door practices with CASs, foster parents and encourage relationships not to simply end when youth turn 21. Practical things such as calling cards or other means to keep in touch. Having access to contact information and using social media/global technology. Youth feel abandoned at 21. Check in at least once in a while to make sure they are ok.

- Youth recommended that caregivers and youth that have strong positive relationships be presented with the opportunity to be adopted. Formal legalities could be the final step for some to feel that they belong with a family.

- The realities of foster families and the multiple children and youth that come and go in their care was raised as a practical issue around the extent to which lifelong relationships can be supported with children and youth.

- Foster families also raised the reality that remaining in contact requires acceptance by the birth (or adoptive) family – which is not always the case.

- Enabling foster families to remain in contact with youth requires openness around information on where youth are located. This was raised as an impediment by some foster families who have been told by CAS workers that they cannot share this kind of information for privacy reasons.

*"The reality is that many foster families consider it to be a "job" or they may have 10, 20 or 50 foster kids during their time as a foster family. This may not allow for meaningful ongoing relationships for youth who were in their care and now have left." (*YouthCan)

*"Having access to information on the location of birth families where children may be living after care would also assist in fostering these relationships." (*OARTY)

"Agencies need to allow and support ongoing relationships of foster families and their foster children as long as it is a good fit for the relationship and is mutually beneficial. The more people that love a child the better." (FPSO).

In conversations with YouthCan and the Youth Leaving Care Hearings group, peer networks and peer mentoring among youth and former youth-in-care was also raised and demonstrated as important vehicles through which children and youth can build connections that support them well into adulthood.

CAS workers also came up as a potential source of positive and ongoing relationships for children and youth in care. However, turnover of workers was cited as a challenge in providing continuity and a sense of connection for children and youth.

"The child has changed worker 7-8 times. It is hard on her. She needs to get close to people."
(Kinship parent, 4 years)