

STRENGTHEN THE COMMITMENT

An External Review of the Child Welfare System

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protection. They felt this approach would provide better accessibility to treatment resources and prevention programming. With a more client centered service approach the government could then tackle the larger problems of poverty and substance abuse and develop appropriate initiatives and resources to deal with these issues. The recommendations which specifically relate to these issues can be found in the sections of this report on child centered service delivery and differential response – support and prevention v. protection.

XII CONCLUSION

Manitoba owes its children the best possible child welfare system. Achieving such a system must be a priority, not just for people in the system or those who are politically accountable for it, but for all Manitobans. There must be a commitment to supporting the child welfare system on a long term basis.

The design of our child welfare system must be strengthened. It must be a system that not only responds to crisis, but identifies and addresses family and societal issues that can lead to crisis if not resolved.

Child welfare in Manitoba is at a turning point. We have the opportunity to make improvements now that will strengthen the commitment to all children and families. The AJI-CWI was the most significant change ever made to child welfare in Manitoba and the promise that that change represented needs to be kept. We now have the opportunity to make system wide improvements that were necessary long before AJI-CWI implementation.

This review has examined the child welfare system with the goal of identifying improvements to its administrative structure. Accordingly, some of our recommendations call for significant expenditures and system wide changes. However, because our findings and conclusions are based in large part on the experiences of people in or affected by the system, we believe that the implementation of these recommendations can directly improve the lives of children and families touched by that system.

XIII SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

V STRUCTURE OF THE CURRENT CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Compliance with Legislation

We recommend that funding be provided to the department immediately to begin the process of planning and implementing support and prevention programs throughout the province. We further recommend that by 2008/09 the full costs of providing these programs be included in the Family Services and Housing budget and that the savings realized from the program be reinvested in the system.

We recommend that Winnipeg CFS and Rural and Northern CFS report to the General Authority, consistent with the reporting structures for all other agencies in the province.

VI COMMUNICATION

We recommend that the Standing Committee annually invite the media to an information session to fully explain how the system works and how decisions are made, and to answer their questions about the system, unrelated to any case.

We recommend that before the end of the calendar year two meetings be held, one with the Executive Directors in the North and one in the South, with Standing Committee to advise of the immediate and short term implementation plans.

We recommend that a further two meetings of the same groups to discuss the accomplishments to date be held before the end of the fiscal year, and the plans for the upcoming fiscal year be set out.

We recommend that this forum continues in Manitoba with funding allocated to the Authorities for the purpose of allowing the quarterly meetings among agency executive directors and supervisors.

VII SERVICE DELIVERY ALTERNATIVES

Child Centered Service Delivery

We recommend that government programs designed to enhance the well-being of children and promote their development be coordinated horizontally, and include child welfare investment to ensure a rational approach to providing government services even in times of family crisis.

We recommend that the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet should be expanded to include representation from the Child Welfare system on its working groups to ensure that the co-coordinated approach to promoting healthy children includes children in the child welfare system who are often those most in need of this kind of co-coordinated support.

Differential Response – Support and Prevention, Protection

We recommend that the government immediately begin the research and planning necessary for the implementation of a differential response model of service commencing in 07/08.

We recommend that the Alberta response model be studied for this purpose.

We recommend that \$ 750,000 be allocated within this fiscal year to begin the process of planning an effective differential response model in the child welfare system.

We recommend that funding be allocated in 2007/08 to begin staffing action for the differential response model in that year in the amount of \$7,500,000.

We recommend that the model be fully implemented in 2008/09 with funding allocated in the amount of \$15,000,000 and that ongoing funding in that amount plus price and volume increases be provided in following years.

We recommend that any savings achieved elsewhere in the system as a result of the differential response model be reinvested in the system.

We recommend that the differential response capacity be attached to the designated intake agencies throughout the province and in First Nations communities in order to ensure assessment and appropriate service at the point of intake.

We recommend that a responsibility of the differential response system will be to connect families with other early intervention programs developed by government that may assist in dealing with the issues they are facing such as Healthy Child Programs including, Healthy Baby, Families First, Triple P, and FAS Strategy but that this brokering service be in addition to and not instead of providing direct service to children and families.

We recommend that sufficient funding be put into place to ensure the support and prevention services to a family needing those services follows the family when the file is transferred to an agency as an ongoing case.

We recommend that sufficient funding be allocated to allow support services to continue through the support and prevention program even after a child welfare protection file is closed where a family may need ongoing support.

The Child Welfare Secretariat

We recommend the creation of a Child Welfare Secretariat which will be staffed by those people now working in the Branch and in Strategic Initiatives whose responsibilities relate strictly to the authorities and that the Joint Training Unit become part of the CWS .

We recommend the creation of 10 new FTEs with the necessary salaries, benefits and operating funding required allocated equally to the Authorities and the Branch and those employees will have an employee/employer relationship with the entity they represent.

We recommend that the staff currently at the Branch and the Strategic Initiatives Program that are assigned authority relations responsibilities become part of the CWS. We recommend that the Joint Training Unit become part of the CWS.

We recommend that a manager of the secretariat be designated whose functional reporting will be to the Director, but who will have operational responsibility to the Standing Committee.

We recommend that the Secretariat undertake the developmental activities as specified on page 29 – 31 of this report.

Aboriginal Approaches to Child Welfare

We recommend that the standing committee research and evaluate the alternative approaches to child welfare as specified on page 35 – 38 of this report.

VIII FINDINGS OF THE CHILD WELFARE REVIEW

Oversight of the Child Welfare System

We recommend that The Fatality Inquiries Act be amended to remove the responsibility set out in Section 10 from the Chief Medical Examiner and amend the CFS Act to include the responsibility under those duties and responsibilities of the Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA).

We recommend that the necessary amendments be made to the CFS Act, to require the OCA to inquire into the circumstances surrounding the death, and make recommendations to prevent similar deaths in the future. These amendments should ensure that the OCA is provided with access to all records held by government that relate to collateral services provided by government, regardless of which department.

We recommend that the staff, staff years, salaries and operating funds be transferred from the CME to the OCA and that those staff become a separate division within the office of the OCA to ensure that they are not investigating complaints. Further, we recommend that two additional full time permanent staff years, and necessary salary and operating funds be allocated to the child death review division of the OCA.

We recommend that the reports of the investigations into the deaths of children conducted by the Office of the Children's Advocate, forwarded to the Director and Authorities, also be forwarded to the Ombudsman to determine what action has been taken in accordance with the recommendations made.

We recommend that The Ombudsman Act be amended to require the Ombudsman to submit a separate annual report to the Legislature on the results of investigations of the system's compliance with recommendations made by the Office of the Children's Advocate concerning child deaths.

Compliance with Standards

We recommend that the provincial standards (foundational standards) to ensure the safety of children be applicable in all situations throughout the province and be completed as a priority.

We recommend that every worker in the province receive training on the foundational standards.

We recommend that the foundational standards be published online and that every agency office and sub office receive a manual containing the standards as well.

We recommend that no standard be implemented without the opportunity for meaningful comment from front line protection workers representing each authority.

Intake

We recommend that the standard that requires supervisors to sign off on decisions in the intake module be replaced with a requirement that a supervisory decision be made in consultation with the worker and that the recording of that decision be done by administrative staff on the direction of supervisors.

We recommend that in order to ensure that necessary information to make decisions is available to DIAs funding be provided to agencies to hire the additional resources necessary to have sufficient staff available in each agency to answer questions that may come from them regarding children and families. These staff can work on an on call basis, but this responsibility should not be added to front line workers who are already overburdened.

We recommend that the issues with CFSIS be addressed and that staff have access to cases across the Province.

Authority Determination Protocol

We recommend that the ADP process be streamlined to the extent possible and be written in language that can be easily understood by people with limited education.

We recommend that the ADP process be evaluated to determine how choice can effectively be offered to every family in situations where only one agency provides service.

We recommend that the ADP process be able to be completed by staff other than front line workers in order to reduce the administrative functions performed by workers.

Joint Intake Response Unit (JIRU)

We recommend that the Department and the Interim board of JIRU collaboratively determine a single reporting structure for JIRU.

We recommend that clear parameters around each program of JIRU be developed, inclusive of the identification of roles and responsibilities within each program area.

We recommend these parameters be consistently communicated to the staff of JIRU, the staff of other mandated agencies, and to the core social service agencies that interface with JIRU.

We recommend that strategy be developed to address how collateral agencies and organizations can send non-urgent referrals to JIRU.

We recommend that clearly defined processes around the dayside workers requests for afterhours service be developed and consistently communicated to all agencies which interface with JIRU.

We recommend that clear program parameters be established for the general intake program at JIRU.

We recommend that a consistent model or standardized tool for the assessment of risk be implemented and adopted by all agencies across the province.

We recommend that clear program parameters be developed for the Abuse Investigation Unit. If the unit remains as an auxiliary unit it is imperative that roles and responsibilities of the unit and involved agency be clearly defined.

We recommend that the abuse investigation unit criteria be expanded to include the scope of abuse as outlined in legislation.

We recommend that adequate funding be made available to facilitate specialized training in the area of abuse investigations and child maltreatment on an ongoing basis to all workers responsible for investigating abuse.

We recommend that opportunities be established for regular communication between JIRU and the other mandated agencies to address issues that impede the coordination of seamless service delivery.

We recommend that the EPR system continue to implement the recommendations of the OCA's March 2004 review of the shelter system, where appropriate.

We recommend that \$1,000,000 be allocated in 2006/07 to begin the process of planning, recruiting and training for additional foster homes for emergency placements for children as an alternative to placing them in hotels with contract care, or in shelters; and that this be a process of continuous recruitment not a targeted number recruitment.

We recommend that the savings achieved through this process be reinvested in the continuous recruitment of these foster placements.

We recommend that the system be designed with the necessary flexibility to allow and encourage emergency foster placements to be converted to regular foster placements where a bond is created between the child and the foster care provider.

We recommend that the Authorities and the Branch who are jointly responsible for the protection of children in the province be responsible to ensure that JIRU is functioning effectively and appropriately before it becomes an agency in its own right. Because of the numbers of children and families who come into contact with JIRU and because each authority has agencies for which JIRU will do intake, it is appropriate that it remain under the guidance of the CWS until all issues are resolved and the members of the Standing Committee are satisfied JIRU is functioning to mitigate risk to children.

We recommend that the responsibility of JIRU to provide information to workers from other agencies from CFSIS be transferred to the CWS.

Designated Intake Agencies (DIAs) – Outside Winnipeg

We recommend that the DIA after-hours system in the various geographical regions operate with a full complement of staff who are not already employed in social work positions during the day, regardless of whether after-hours operates on an on-call basis or as an operational unit.

We recommend that the DIA function outside of Winnipeg and on-reserve, be adequately funded to allow for the delivery of the range of support and preventative services prescribed under legislation.

We recommend that all DIAs have access to CFSIS other than through JIRU.

We recommend that a service delivery steering committee be established in each region to promote the sharing of information, collaboration of resources, coordination of seamless service delivery among the DIA and the agencies. This should be promoted and encouraged by the Authorities.

We recommend that adequate funding be made available for increased emergency care resources outside the city of Winnipeg, and that these resources be accessible to each DIA.

Transfers

We recommend that to achieve the time frames for a case transfer throughout the province, if a receiving agency does not accept the transfer within the time frame prescribed by the standards, the sending agency will forward the case record and appropriate documentation to the relevant authority for transfer to the receiving agency.

We recommend that there be scheduled meetings among agencies operating in the same region to discuss and resolve barriers to acceptance of cases at transfer.

We recommend that court documentation required for a protection hearing be amended to permit a concurrent application for transfer pursuant to Subsection 28(2) of the CFS Act.

We recommend that the standard regarding the type of information to be included with a file at transfer be enforced.

We recommend that staff receive training regarding the completion of the documentation required at transfer to ensure that adequate and complete information is included with the case record.

We recommend that case consultations occur between sending and receiving agencies, upon the request of receiving agencies that have not received adequate information at transfer, in order to facilitate the transition to ongoing service.

We recommend that meetings occur between designated intake agencies and the agencies they serve in order to develop protocols delineating the roles and responsibilities of intake agencies and ongoing service agencies.

Transfers – Permanent Wards

We recommend that a review be conducted of the family histories of all permanent wards to ensure that siblings are served by the same authority and agency and to the extent possible that they are placed together.

We recommend that the necessary steps be taken for the future to ensure that siblings are served by the same authority and agency to avoid the system creating further fragmentation of children's families.

We recommend that efforts be made to ensure that permanent wards whose culturally appropriate authorities were misidentified during AJI-CWI be transferred to their culturally appropriate authority.

Ongoing Service Delivery

We recommend increase staffing of frontline workers to meet standards for client contact and administration.

We recommend that alternatives to the interventions currently used in the child welfare system be researched, evaluated and planned by the CWS.

We recommend that adequate funding be made available for family support programs to be accessed by families regardless of whether or not the child is in the care of an agency.

We recommend that the Authorities monitor the agencies use of VPAs and ensure that they are entered into under the appropriate circumstances.

Community Response

We recommend that the child welfare system provide assistance to children who have been in the care of the child welfare system and who are “aging out” of it, to ensure that the support that they receive focuses on independent living skills, rather than being cut off upon reaching majority.

We recommend that a mandatory requirement be written in the foundational standards that the social worker for a child who is incarcerated must ensure that an appropriate placement is available for that child so that release from correctional facilities occurs as ordered by a judge.

We recommend that a mandatory requirement be written in the foundational standards that the social worker for a child attend court with a child to ensure that the child can be released to his or her custody as required.

We recommend that workers establish and maintain effective contact with the children for whom they are responsible.

We recommend that every child over the age of twelve receive a card with the worker’s name and phone number printed on it, and alternatives to contact if they cannot reach the worker.

Foster Care

We recommend the recruitment and training of specialized foster parents for high needs children and sibling groups and further recommend that other government programs with responsibility participate in achieving this recommendation.

We recommend that the Branch be responsible for the licensing of “non-mandated” agencies’ foster homes.

We recommend that foster rates should be consistent throughout the province taking into consideration the costs of providing services in the community in which the home is located.

We recommend that a fund be established from the Child Care Benefit remitted to the government for the purpose of enhancing respite and support workers for foster families.

We recommend that funding for education and training of foster parents also be provided from the fund established from the remittance of the Child Care Benefit.

We recommend that the foster care regulations be reviewed in consultation with the foster parents to ensure that their ability to establish a routine home environment is supported to the extent possible by the regulations and not impeded by them.

We recommend that the requirements for foster homes be redeveloped to take into consideration community standards and practices in order to prevent the requirements being a barrier to the preferred goal of keeping children in safe and loving environments within their own communities.

We recommend that the Child Care Benefit that will be remitted to the provincial government be used to create a fund for ongoing support of foster parents, to provide training, promote effective communication with agencies, and provide enhanced respite for foster families.

IX FINANCIAL RESOURCES

Provincial Funding

We recommend that the current funding model, including the Basic Maintenance rates, be reviewed and amended now to ensure that all necessary items are being funded at realistic rates.

We recommend that the funding model provide current price and volume funding for all requirements of operating the agency and funding the needs of children.

Support and Prevention Funding

We recommend that funds be allocated immediately to begin the process of implementing a support and prevention model in the system at the intake stage with additional funding to follow a family receiving support when the case is transferred for ongoing service.

Funding Assessments

We recommend that a standard child assessment form be established to be used by all agencies to ensure that a child receives the same level of service regardless of where s/he lives. The assessment must be structured to take into account the different costs in the province so that regardless of the cost, the service provided is the same.

The “existing envelope”

We recommend that the necessary resources immediately be dedicated to developing, and implementing, a fully researched, needs-based funding model and that the funding needed as a result be provided for the child welfare system.

We recommend that in the course of developing a needs based funding model that there be a study conducted focused on the costs of providing services in remote communities and that the results of this study be used to develop a model that is appropriate for each community, taking into consideration mode of travel, costs of goods and distance from the service centre.

We recommend that the funding model be changed from one that is based on the number of children in care to one that provides funding based upon the needs of the system to deliver child welfare services, including the flexible services that will be offered through the differential response that will prevent children from coming into care.

Impact of Differential Models of Funding

We recommend that the provincial government enter into discussions with the federal government to develop a plan to ensure consistent funding models that will provide services

equitably across the province regardless of the status of a child and regardless of where the child lives.

We recommend that standard rates and standard methods of assessment be established for all resources that may be required regardless of where in the province they are located.

Child tax credit/child day care credit

We recommend that the necessary time and research be devoted to the establishment of an appropriate funding model for the system.

We recommend that the child tax credit currently remitted to government be paid into a fund that will be used to enhance the child welfare system.

We recommend that the child day care credit to be remitted to government be paid into a fund managed by the Authorities for the purpose of providing appropriate additional training and support to, and respite funds for foster care providers.

“Jordan’s Principle”

We recommend that the child welfare system adopt Jordan’s Principle of Children First, to ensure the provision of uninterrupted services to children while awaiting resolution of jurisdictional funding disputes.

Transparency in Funding

We recommend that the government services available to the General Authority and its government agencies be fully costed to ensure that funding is equitable. We also recommend that the government agencies be costed and included in the allocation of resources to the General Authority to ensure transparency of funding among the Authorities and that the General Authority have the same funding responsibilities for its agencies as the other Authorities have.

Development of new agencies (Animikii)

We recommend that Animikii be reviewed to determine the level of funding appropriate to allow it to operate with a management structure that does not require that funding for workers be reduced.

We recommend that a study be undertaken to determine whether any of the children in the care of this agency have case files open in another jurisdiction from which funding could be obtained.

X HUMAN RESOURCES

Training and Orientation

We recommend that a system wide approach to training be implemented that ensures that workers receive the basic training that they need before being assigned to case work.

We recommend when a new worker begins employment they should shadow a more senior worker until completing an orientation program.

We recommend that completion of training be a condition of passing a probation period.

Mentoring

We recommend that a mentorship program should be established to allow workers to gain field experience while receiving advice and guidance from a social worker with experience in the child welfare field.

Findings and Conclusions

We recommend that the government allocate \$1,250,000 immediately to be annualized in 2007/08 and thereafter at \$5,000,000 million plus necessary increases for price and volume for workload reduction purposes.

We recommend that this funding be used to hire administrative support staff to relieve the front line workers and supervisors of administrative functions, to hire case aides to assist workers in providing non social work services to children and families, including home makers and hiring additional workers where the need is greatest in the system.

We recommend that access to a program similar to the government Employee Assistance Program be made available for all agency staff and training for the development of peer support programs be made available.

We recommend the infusion of workers to the system to provide supportive and preventative services as described in the section of this report on differential response.