

Collaboration News

Some updates, notes and other such things:

The **Service Provider Fair** was a smashing success and FSCD is looking at repeating the experience in late spring this time to include all known service providers. I think we will need a bigger space... Shall we go with a Mexican theme this time around?

The **Alberta Children's Hospital open house/ Child Development Centre launch** were wonderful events showcasing two magnificent grouping of services for children with disabilities. We are blessed as a region to have such child and family centered service groups. If you haven't stopped by for a peak, you are strongly encouraged to do so.

I have had and will continue to have the opportunity to **make presentations about FSCD services** to our immigrant communities and parents receiving service from our contracted service providers. Remember, if the parents you serve are not understanding our processes, the reasons behind our work and/or simply want some answers to questions, don't hesitate to contact me and I would be more than happy to show up!

Gilbert Drapeau
FSCD Program Coordinator

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AND WHAT WENT ON THIS MONTH... INITIATIVES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

In order to address the ongoing concerns in regards to accessibility to respite, CFSA and AACL are partnering in a unique project to increase respite capacity for families who have children with special needs. The program has the following objectives:

- Establish partnerships with interested community members and sectors to locate individuals wanting to provide in-home respite,
- Create partner networks systematically promoting generational respite,
- Facilitate partnerships and networking through the capacity of community and its resources to provide support to families with children with disabilities,
- Develop materials and presentations promoting the value of respite and a community response to the need,
- Create a community infrastructure able to assume the provision of respite, provide training and act as a focal point for the coordination of services,
- Generate knowledge about strategies and capacities of a community to provide respite, which knowledge can be transferred to other communities, and,
- Develop information materials that may be provided in different forms enabling families to access resources.

Stay tuned for more as the project develops!

DEMISTIFYING APPEALING AN FSCD DECISION

Right off the bat, let's set some language straight: in regards to FSCD, an appeal is an integral part of the FSCD Concerns Resolution Process therefore try to keep that in mind when speaking about not agreeing with a decision made by the Director.

Often, FSCD is asked who the Director is. The Director is any employee of FSCD who has been delegated powers to administer FSCD policies by the Minister through the Deputy-Minister, etc, all the way on toward the FSCD caseworker. So, no matter who represents the Director at that moment in time, it is a Director's decision that is being reviewed.

When disagreeing with a decision made by an FSCD worker, it is important to first discuss concerns with the worker to see if the matter can be resolved then and there. The worker may choose to consult with third parties to review the decision. If there is disagreement with the worker, then the matter can be brought to the supervisor. Should the issue still not be resolved through the supervisor, the matter can be brought to the manager. From the manager, one can go to the program executive-manager, the regional CEO, the assistant deputy-minister, the deputy-minister and last by not least, the minister herself. Please note most decisions where a parent has directly accessed the minister's office are referred back, usually to the program executive-manager so that a report may be prepared in a timely manner to assist the Minister in understanding the issue at hand.

While the above is occurring other parts of the Concerns Resolution Process may be accessed.

Once the Director has made a decision, it can be reviewed through what is called an Administrative Review. The person wanting the decision reviewed has 30 days from which they were told of the decision to complete the necessary documentation (one form) and submit it to any office in the region but preferably their worker. *(Cont. in the next column)*

QUESTION OF THE MONTH

I have a family that is requesting respite through the Supports for Permanency Program. Do they have to meet with me first as their FSCD worker before approaching Children's Services?

Families do not have to access services through either program if they don't feel it will benefit their child. In the Calgary region, most families receiving supports from both programs have one assigned worker thus coordination occurs between both.

(From previous column)

Once the form is completed, two managers or manager and FSCD specialist who were not involved in the decision will review decision within 15 working days. Once the review is completed, the reviewers complete another form. The family and FSCD worker are informed of the decision in writing. The administrative review is an internal quality assurance process focused on the Review of a FSCD Program Decision. The family is involved throughout the process.

Throughout the above, a person may decide to appeal a Director's decision. If such is the case, the person must present the Director's decision they disagree with the appeal form with 45 days of the decision. At that time, the Director must deliver the appeal request within 10 days of receiving it to the appeal secretariat. From that point on, the matter is to be reviewed in no longer than two months. Should the person still disagree with the decision, we encourage that individual to access legal counsel to look at other legal remedies.

Please note the above are general guidelines; we understand each decision is unique. Good practice suggests all the Director's representatives should provide the person with appropriate supports in the Concerns Resolution Process.

Raising a Disabled Child

As a teenager in the late 60's I couldn't have imagined my life as anything other than being a housewife and mother, a June Cleaver look-a-like. Maybe a "little" job that was cute and didn't require much work or brain power on my part. But that was not to be. Ultimately, I became the parent of a mentally challenged child.

My son was born with a heart defect that required surgery. A tissue graft in his heart failed and blocked blood to his lungs. He went through renal failure as a result. As a believer in a higher purpose, when my son was so near death after the second heart surgery, I swore an oath to take care of him despite my limited understanding that the "normal" child was gone and not sure what would be left.

During my son's crisis a black minister from Louisiana with a daughter facing a similar crisis, whispered these words of comfort "God gives no more than you can handle." When times have been difficult, that phrase has been my rock. I can handle whatever the trial, because God gives no more than I can handle.

My son's father couldn't "deal" with the residual health and learning disability issues and left a few years later. I was left with a special needs child and the courts back in the late 70's did nothing to protect his future needs.

The situation sounds grim, but we managed. I had to for my son and his sister's sake. As the saying goes, "failing was not an option". When I began my journey as a single parent I had a \$7.00 an hour job in a flower shop and an order for child support that seldom came. We managed because I had no choice. Meanwhile, I became a better person for the struggle. A hobby a few years later became a livelihood and now makes an income six times that beginning salary.

My son and I still live together after all these years. I own my own house, I have a new car, and I have a career as a writer. My son and I travel together, go to movies and both our lives are filled with outside activities for each of us. I am a firm believer; you make your life what it is. I decided a long time ago to have a happy life despite the challenges thrown my way. Over the years I have faced my son's health crises, job lay-offs and my daughter's diagnosis of being bi-polar. Despite it all I chose to be happy. I am a successful person on so many levels.

My crowning achievement is my son. He functions academically as an 8 or 9 year old. But as an adult, socially he is charming, personable and friendly. He is everything a parent could want in a son. He takes his job seriously. He is a hard working young man who still opens doors and isn't afraid to scrub the toilet while I do laundry.

Not everyone would consider my situation a blessing but I do. The struggles have been rewarded time and time again. I stood at my son's bedside and made a promise. That promise of "I'll endure whatever hardship" has turned out to be "heaped with blessings". My life is not what I expected, but it is richer than I could have ever imaged. Having a disabled child is not the end of the world, it's the beginning of a more rewarding life filled with unconditional love and great joy.

Charlotte Hoaks is a successful technical writer in the Houston area. She and her son are members of the Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) a support organization for the disabled. Charlotte uses her skills as a writer to share information and inspire others to be more pro-active with assistance for the disabled. The disabled are the "silent" minority. They only have a voice when others advocate for them. Her favorite response when asked about raising her son alone: I didn't put it on my list during high school career day, but I wouldn't have missed it for anything. I'm the woman I am today because I raised a special person. He taught me strength, compassion, and peace of heart.

**The FSCD Parent Advisory Committee
for Calgary and Region update:**

The FSCD Parent Advisory Committee's meeting on Thursday November 1st, 2007 was a very productive and invigorating session. The PAC was warmly welcomed and made very comfortable at the Marlborough Office, where we met this time instead of our usual meeting place at the Richmond Office. We spent from 10:00 am until 1:00 pm together.

We received updates from our Provincial PAC member, who co-chairs the Edmonton-based meeting. Our group is excited about helping to fine-tune the Welcome to the Family handout, subtitled An Information Guide for Parents who Learn their Child has a Disability, still now in draft form. We feel that this will be a wonderful helping tool for families with a child who is newly diagnosed or newly part of the FSCD program, with its message of support, a list of helpful organizations, and its overview of services that the Alberta government provides. We are excited for the completion and distribution of this guide as the PAC feels that it will help many families in the years to come.

The main topic of our meeting was a discussion of "Who is FSCD?" and, by association, "Who is the FSCD PAC?" The PAC feels that it is important to establish a handout so that we can reach more of the families of children with special needs in Calgary and Area. We also felt that this brochure would offer us a guideline for our presentations in the community as it would provide the PAC members with a consistent message: "We are Your Voice". We agreed on a one-page brochure which can be used in many different ways: as an insert in the folders for the new families receiving FSCD contracts; as a mail-out to families with pre-existing FSCD contracts; as a brochure to place in the Children's Hospital and other places where families might access them (i.e.: school, community centres); as a handout, when PAC members have a speaking engagement out in the community.

The creation of this handout will be overseen by Dawn Delany, Communications Coordinator for FSCD. In the next few weeks Christina Tortorelli and Carol Alderson (co-chairs of the FSCD PAC) will meet with Dawn to discuss how this brochure will look. We want our email address to appear on the brochure, in order that the families have a contact for the PAC. We also feel that it is important to impart the following messages: that we are the voice of the families that we were chosen to represent; that we are the communication link between families and FSCD. We want to give the families that we were chosen to represent a clear sense that we will listen, bring their ideas forward to FSCD, and then report back to the families as to outcomes. The PAC feel that by making personal connections with families in the community and by being accessible via email (address:calgaryarea.PAC@gov.ab.ca), we can make a difference in helping those families we were chosen to represent have this voice.

Please stay tuned for further updates, and an upcoming sneak peek at our new brochure!

Thank you,
From Carol Alderson