

**FOSTER CARE REVITALIZATION
IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT:
A REPORT CARD
OF OUR
SUCCESS**

PRESENTED TO AND APPROVED BY
CALGARY AND AREA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES AUTHORITY
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THE FOSTER CARE REVITALIZATION IMPLEMENTATION PROJECT

The Calgary and Area Child and Family Services Authority (CFSA) Foster Care Revitalization Implementation Project is the final phase of a three-part initiative to increase the number and capacity of foster parents in Calgary and Area Region. The scope of the project was broadened from its early beginnings to include Agency Foster Care in the initiative.

BACKGROUND TO THE INITIATIVE

In the fall of 2000, Calgary and Area CFSA struck a Steering Committee comprised of internal and external representatives to guide the review of the Authority Foster Care Program. The purpose of the review was to:

- Rationalize the Authority Foster Care Program for Calgary and Area CFSA.
- Ensure that the delivery of foster care and home assessment services is efficient and effective.

In December of 2000, approximately 350 Calgary and Area Authority foster homes were sent surveys asking for feedback on how to improve the system. Eighty families responded to the questionnaire. At the same time the staff were sent a survey asking for their input. As well, staff focus groups were held throughout the region. This process provided a rich source of data for analysis and several key themes emerged.

The Authority Foster Care Revitalization Steering Committee, again with representatives from staff, management and Authority foster parents, was formed in October of 2002 under the direction of Executive Manager Ruth Copot to address the important issues of foster care. The Steering Committee's mandate was to:

- Develop implementation plans for the themes that emerged in 2000.
- Develop additional recommendations for the improvement of foster care within the region.
- Review the Provincial Government's foster care report.
- Review the structure of foster care in the region and make recommendations to the Calgary and Area CFSA Board for improvement of the delivery model.
- Strengthen the relationship between Calgary and District Foster Parents Association (CFPA) and Calgary and Area CFSA management.

From the themes that emerged in the work that was completed in 2000 and other important initiatives, 15 implementation strategies were developed for the review and approval of Calgary and Area executive management.

Approval was given to proceed on eight different strategies and in November of 2003, Executive Manager Gloria Atkinson was assigned the important task of implementing the strategies.

HOW WE ORGANIZED THE WORK

A series of working groups with representatives from appropriate stakeholders were formed, along with a Committee of Chairs, responsible to coordinate the work. An Advisory Committee, representing a variety of stakeholder groups, was assigned responsibility to provide advice and support to the various working groups as well as communicating the work done on the project and, where appropriate, obtaining feedback.

Although Calgary and Area executive management approved eight projects, work on two of the initiatives, at the regional level, was completed by the end of January 2004. These projects are highlighted in this report but were not part of the implementation strategy.

November and December of 2003 was a time to “get started” by recruiting appropriate team members and developing strategies to ensure the work was coordinated. Committee work started in earnest in January of 2004.

PROJECTS COMPLETED PRIOR TO OR DURING JANUARY 2004

1. Foster Care Compensation Guide

During 2003, a committee of Authority staff and CFPA members worked to revise the Foster Care Compensation Guide. The purpose was to ensure the information was accurate, complete and represented practice within the region. The work was complete with the exception of editing the document by fall of 2003. The plan was to distribute the material to all foster parents and staff in Calgary and Area CFSA before December of 2003 with the belief that this information would provide a consistent application of policy as it relates to financial matters impacting foster care. The CFPA presented the material to the Alberta Foster Parent Association (AFPA) who in turn provided it to the Ministry of Children’s Services. The Ministry decided that the work should become part of a larger provincial initiative and offered to take responsibility for reviewing the work and distributing one document to the entire province. This work is almost complete and a draft document entitled, “Foster Care Financial Guide” will be on the Web in early 2005.

2. Implement a More Efficient and User Friendly Home Assessment Process

In January of 2004 a group of knowledgeable foster home assessment staff reviewed the work done to improve the assessment format for the Adoption

Program and made minor changes to adapt the process for foster care. Calgary and Area CFSA started to use the revised format effective February 1, 2004. This format was also provided to the Calgary and Area foster care agencies and they now use the same process.

As of September 2004, the assessment process has been centralized within the region to facilitate more efficient contracting out and tracking of the home study process.

ONE YEAR LATER: A REPORT CARD ON OUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

1. Communications Committee

Chair: Mandy Latiff

Implement strategies with foster parents and Calgary and Area CFSA staff to increase understanding and respect for each other's roles.

This committee recognized that if work focused on the three key areas of communication, recognition and dispute resolution this, along with many of the other Foster Care Revitalization initiatives, would vastly improve understanding and respect between Authority foster parents and staff.

What We Accomplished

Communication

- A flow chart was developed identifying all the key foster care stakeholders.
- Calgary and Area CFSA will be launching a website with a section devoted to foster parents.
- Calgary and Area CFSA is advocating that the Ministry of Children's Services develop a secure electronic system to allow staff and foster parents to use e-mail to communicate case specific information.
- Calgary and Area CFSA has enhanced the role of the foster care trainer to include communicating information to the region about foster care.
- There is a plan to develop a regional newsletter and a section of this communication vehicle will be devoted to information about adoption and foster care.

Recognition

- The CFSA has approved the implementation of an Ovation Program to recognize foster parents for their contributions at stated intervals. The actual presentation will occur at the annual CFPA awards banquet.
- Staff will be encouraged to use the High Five cards to thank foster parents for their extra-ordinary efforts.

- All staff will be reminded about the importance of responding promptly to messages left by foster parents.

Dispute Resolution

This committee recognized that disputes occur when there is miscommunication or a void of information between various stakeholders. For this reason, circulating the Foster Care Financial Guide will go a long way to ensuring that all foster parents are treated equitably and will help reduce conflict arising from financial matters.

Sharing of information in a timely fashion between staff and foster parents is critical to reducing conflict. The Matching Committee has implemented a mandatory intake meeting between staff and caregivers within the first two weeks of a child's placement.

The Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act (Enhancement Act) introduced a dispute resolution model that utilizes mediation as a method for addressing concerns when they arise rather than always relying on more formal mechanisms.

2. Recruitment Committee

Chair: Karen Tinevez

Recruitment, screening and commencement of new foster homes must be enhanced.

What We Accomplished

The CFSA remains committed to increasing the number of Authority foster homes by retaining the foster homes that are already approved and locating new families interested in fostering. The committee recommended hiring a person to focus on recruitment activities that will locate prospective foster parents by targeting events families are known to attend.

It is known that adequate respite for existing foster families is an important element to retaining foster families. Therefore, a decision was made to combine these two activities and to link the recruitment activities with the need to coordinate respite homes. Funds were allocated and the CFSA is in the process of completing a tender to cover this full-time work.

3. Support Committee

Chair: Jon Reeves

Foster care support workers roles/expectations must be clearly defined and understood by foster care support workers, child welfare workers, foster parents, team leaders and managers.

What We Accomplished

A survey was sent to approximately 700 Agency and Authority foster parents asking them questions specific to the area of support; 133 families responded. Foster families stated that the most valuable support they receive is from their extended families and other foster parents. The times that they most need support are weekends and evenings and after children have returned from visits with their parents. The type of professional support that is viewed as most helpful provides assistance and advice on specific behavioural issues that a child is exhibiting. Planned respite is a key component to a strong support system.

The licensing requirement of the Enhancement Act requires that CFSA staff be responsible for the issuing of all licenses. In order to do this staff must be involved in a monitoring function for both Agency and Authority foster homes. This has created an opportunity to examine all of the functions of foster care and determine a better approach to delivering support services in the future.

A one-year pilot project has been launched effective October 1, 2004, in which Authority foster parents in the Strathmore area will receive their support from an Agency. This project will also introduce a foster parent-mentoring component in early 2005.

4. Respite Committee

Chair: Linda Eirikson

The committee was assigned responsibility to develop and implement a new method of providing respite services to Authority foster families for Calgary and Area CFSA.

What We Accomplished

As a starting point the committee recognized that all foster parents require regular and planned respite in order to maintain healthy and committed foster parents. The committee reviewed several successful programs in other jurisdictions and learned that as a minimum each foster family required 48 hours of respite per month. Families caring for children with complex needs required additional respite. The committee also recognized that implementing any respite program requires the support, including financial support, of the Ministry of Children's Services and the Alberta Foster Parent Association. As a result, Calgary and Area will be developing a strategy to involve other Regions, the

Alberta Foster Parent Association and the Ministry of Children's Services to address this critical issue.

In the meantime, the Region has allocated resources to hire a respite coordinator to assist protection, adoption and families receiving services under the Family Support for Children with Disabilities Program (FSCD) to locate respite homes. The coordinator will also work on recruitment activities. One strategy will be to recruit foster homes that are specifically interested in providing respite services.

5. Matching Committee

Chair: Lisa Halcrow

The mandate of this committee was to implement a more effective matching system.

What We Accomplished

The work of this committee successfully linked with the reorganization of the Placement Services Office. The committee's motto was "matching not placement" with a goal to reduce the number of placements that occurred as a result of a crisis telephone requests. The committee has reintroduced and expanded the use of matching conferences, which are being viewed positively.

Statistics are being maintained and will be provided to the Region in the form of a quarterly report so that Calgary and Area CFSA has a better idea of the needs of children requiring foster care and where they previously resided. This information will be provided to the recruiters, as it is the goal of the Region to keep children as close as possible to their home community when they require out-of-home care.

This committee also introduced a regional practice standard requiring that a conference be held with all caregivers, caseworkers and significant others within two weeks of a child's placement in a foster home.

6. Joint Training of CFSA Staff and Foster Parents

Co-Chairs: Pat Boser and Gladys Hall-Baranitsky

Regional CFSA staff should be jointly trained with Agency and Authority foster parents to enhance communication and respect for each other roles.

What We Accomplished

The CFSA maintains a commitment to joint training. This committee examined a variety of different approaches and venues for joint training. The members recommended that because of the large volume of Enhancement Act training any new joint training initiatives be placed on hold until fall of 2005. At the appropriate

time the committee recommended the most efficient event is a one-day conference held over a three-day period to include all Calgary and Area regional staff and Authority foster parents. When the timing is right for the training to be planned, Calgary and Area Executive Management needs to examine and provide approval to the proposed budget.

The Region has also established an extended faculty made up of caseworkers from all program areas to assist with the foster parent training.

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Most of the committee work is now complete and the results are part of the regional foster care program. Other initiatives, such as respite care require the support of the entire Ministry of Children's Services. Calgary and Area CFSA will continue to voice the need for change in this area. Lastly, joint training of staff and foster parents will only proceed when the organization has the time and resources to implement the training. This committee's work is poised, "ready to happen when the time is right".

HOW DO WE CONTINUE TO SUPPORT THE WORK?

A Foster Care Steering Committee with Gloria Atkinson, Jon Reeves, Lisa Halcrow, Linda Eirikson, Pat Boser and community representation has been established to ensure that the positive momentum within the Foster Care Program continues. This committee will support all the initiatives until the work is complete and will also be used to generate new ideas and strategies for the betterment of the foster care program.

The committee will also examine the other seven recommendations made by the Foster Care Revitalization Steering Committee to see if its recommendations still have merit. Several of these recommendations, such as implementing a foster parent mentorship project, exploring appropriate numbers of placements in foster homes, joint training of staff and foster parents to enhance understanding, and creating a dedicated budget to support foster families have already been worked on as part of the Foster Care Revitalization Implementation Project.

Foster care will remain a priority program for Calgary and Area CFSA.

AND NOW OUR THANKS

Many staff and stakeholders put in countless hours to bring this work to fruition. Each and every person deserves a High Five.