



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session

Standing Committee  
on  
Health

Department of Children and Youth Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates

Wednesday, March 16, 2011  
6:30 p.m.

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**Legislative Assembly of Alberta  
The 27th Legislature  
Fourth Session**

**Standing Committee on Health**

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**Department of Children and Youth Services Participant**

Hon. Yvonne Fritz                      Minister

**Also in Attendance**

Boutilier, Guy C., Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo (W)  
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6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, March 16, 2011

[Mr. McFarland in the chair]

**Department of Children and Youth Services  
Consideration of Main Estimates**

**The Chair:** Welcome, everyone, to the meeting. It's time to start promptly at 6:30. I'd like to remind everyone that the usual rules regarding electronic devices and food and beverages in the Chamber continue to apply, as they did in the past.

Members and staff should also be aware that all the proceedings of the policy field committees in their consideration of the budget estimates are being video streamed, which means everyone can see you at home. The minister whose department's estimates are under review is seated in the designated location, and all other members wishing to speak, a reminder: you must speak from your assigned seat in the Chamber. You can move around, but if you want to speak, you have to come back. Any official or staff member seated in the chair of a member must yield the seat immediately should a member wish to occupy his or her own seat. Members are reminded to please stand when you're speaking.

Note that the committee has under consideration the estimates of the Department of Children and Youth Services for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2012.

We'll just go through a quick review of the process. The speaking order and times are prescribed by the standing orders and Government Motion 5, passed on February 23, 2011, and they are as follows: the minister or member of the Executive Council acting on the minister's behalf may make opening comments not to exceed 10 minutes, please; for the hour that follows, members of the Official Opposition and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of the third party, if any, and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes after that, the members of the fourth party, the NDs, if any, and the minister may speak; for the next 20 minutes the members of any other party represented in the Assembly and any independent members and the minister may speak; and, finally, any other members may speak after that. Within this sequence members may speak more than once; however, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes at a time.

A minister and a member may combine their total time for 20 minutes. Members are please asked to advise the chair at the beginning of their speech if they plan to combine their time with the minister's time.

Committee members, ministers, and other members who are not committee members may participate. Department officials and members' staff may be present but may not address the committee.

Three hours have been scheduled to consider the estimates of the Department of Children and Youth Services. If debate is exhausted prior to three hours, the department's estimates are deemed to have been considered for the time allotted in the schedule, and we will adjourn; otherwise, we will adjourn at 9:30 p.m.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, and the clock will continue to run.

Then we've got some votes and amendment things. I think, if we have a question, we'll deal with them later.

If everyone is clear on the procedure, I would ask the Minister of the Department of Children and Youth Services to please begin her remarks.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm pleased to be here tonight to discuss my ministry's 2011-12 budget and our three-year business plan. I'd like to begin by introducing members of

my staff who've joined me this evening. They are here on the floor of the Assembly. You won't see any members of the staff that are in the gallery. I have my deputy minister, Steve MacDonald, here to my left. I'm going to ask my staff to wave just so that you know who they are for the people that are here. I have assistant deputy ministers with me as well: Gord Johnston, from the ministry support services, and Karen Ferguson, from our ministry community strategies and support. We also have Mark Hattori, from child intervention program quality supports, along with Susan Taylor. Susan is our executive director for the family violence prevention, bullying, and youth strategies. We have Shehnaz Hutchinson, our senior financial officer, and I also have my executive assistant from the ministry, Jennifer O'Callaghan, here as well.

Mr. Chairman, we have 10 minutes, you said, for opening remarks?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you.

The decisions that we make in our ministry are based on fulfilling our commitment to enhancing the safety and well-being of the children and families that we serve. In 2011-12 we are going to invest approximately \$1.2 billion in programs and services to meet our objectives. This, Mr. Chairman, will meet our ministry's priority, which is now, will always will be supporting Alberta's most vulnerable children, youth, and families. The \$1.2 billion that we have in programs and services to meet our objectives: that's an increase of \$110 million over the original operating budget for 2010-11. This includes an increase to our base funding of \$70.8 million through a supplementary estimate in the current year, and that will be maintained in 2011-12 with an additional increase of \$39 million in the operating budget.

Funding for child intervention programs, Mr. Chairman, will increase by \$17 million to a total of \$607 million, and that will include \$362 million for child protection and family enhancement to help keep children and families safe and, most importantly, to help keep them together.

Another \$171 million will be invested to support foster and kinship parents, who provide vital care and guidance to more than 5,400 children and youth in our province.

The supports for permanency program will increase by 19 and a half per cent to a total of \$37.5 million. This reflects what I believe is our success in increasing the number of permanent placements for children through adoption and private guardianship. More than 3,100 children on average are currently benefiting each month through the supports for permanency program, and our significant investment in child intervention programs will also provide us with the opportunity to move forward with the 10 recommendations made by an external panel of experts to strengthen our child intervention system.

These recommendations include the establishment of the child and family service quality council and the enhancement of services for aboriginal children, who represent about 65 per cent of children in care. A key step in addressing these concerns will be the recruitment of an assistant deputy minister whose primary role will be to build service capacity and ensure that the aboriginal perspective is reflected in the supports that we provide to our aboriginal children and families both on- and off-reserve, and that includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

My ministry will also continue to move forward with innovative and proactive initiatives that will provide support to at-risk families, and that will be before they reach a crisis point. I know we've mentioned this in the Assembly recently, Mr. Chairman, but in

Calgary, for example, the ministry is establishing the Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team, also known as AVIRT. This \$1 million initiative will enhance risk assessment for newborns under three months of age and strengthen supports for families, especially families who are not prepared for parenting who have complex issues like addictions, mental health issues, family violence, poverty: a whole host of issues that we all know. This response team will be four case workers, four public health nurses, one Calgary police officer. They'll work together as a critical response team. Our plan is to take what we learn from the AVIRT model and implement a similar team in Edmonton by August.

Also, Mr. Chairman, one of our ministry's mandated priorities was to help ensure parents have access to quality child care choices. In partnership with Alberta communities – and it was a true partnership – we've exceeded our three-year space creation goal by creating more than 18,000 net new child care spaces. Due to this success, we're going to focus on ensuring resources are in place to sustain the more than 90,000 child care spaces that are currently in Alberta. While our space creation grants will end as planned as of March 31, our operational budget for child care will increase by \$17 million to a total of \$229 million. This reflects the increased demand for programs that are priorities for Albertans in the child care community. Subsidies assist more than 20,000 children of lower income families. We have accreditation funding as well and wage top-ups, which we may speak about later.

A number of other program areas will also have budget increases, and that includes family support for children with disabilities, FSCD. It's a leader in Canada. This program offers a wide range of support, and the funding will rise by \$2.7 million to \$129 million to address the overall caseload increase that's relative to autism, which we've talked about before in the Assembly.

6:40

Another priority for our ministry is supporting at-risk youth as they become adults. Our youth in transition investment will increase by almost 30 per cent to \$8.9 million, and that will include our advancing futures bursary, which helps many, many young people.

There are a number of other programs and services, Mr. Chairman, where we've maintained funding. That includes emergency shelters for women, sexual assault shelters, youth shelters, prevention of family violence and bullying initiatives. These are all vital programs in our ministry.

We also have funding that, as I said earlier, overall will support those that are affected by fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Also, funding for the Child and Youth Advocate has been maintained.

We've also maintained funding at \$76 million for our family and community support services, known as FCSS. Because that is matched by municipalities, we have a total investment of nearly a hundred million dollars to support locally designed preventative social programs in 320 municipalities and Métis settlements across Alberta.

You can see, Mr. Chairman, as the ministry moves forward, that we are going to continue to support the good programs that we have in place for our vulnerable children and their families and for our youth. In the upcoming year we're going to move forward with innovative approaches to service delivery that will result in better outcomes for young people in care because we are committed. I have a very committed staff here this evening.

That concludes my brief overview, Mr. Chairman, for our Ministry of Children and Youth Services 2011-12 budget. I'm looking forward to this evening and answering any questions.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.

I neglected to mention to all the members that during the course of the questions and the to and fro, if there isn't time or you can't provide a response, a written response by the office of the minister will be deferred during this meeting and can be tabled in the Assembly by the minister or through the Clerk. That's just for information.

I'd now invite Calgary-Varsity for one hour. We'll have it in 20-minute segments. If I interrupt, it's just to let you know your 20 minutes are up.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. I'll be following my usual routine of three sets of 10.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I would like to begin by thanking my researcher, Avril McCalla, for the dedicated effort she put into the preparation of last year's CYS budget questions as well as this year's, much of which was done on her own time and dime.

When you are forced by a 30-minute time restriction to debate \$37 million per minute, insufficient time is provided for either asking or adequately answering questions. I sincerely hope that this year the ministry is prepared to respond in writing to all the unanswered questions recorded in *Hansard*. This isn't a game, a conversation; it's an accountability session. In the best interests of Alberta's children and their families all questions deserve thoughtful, thorough answers, preferably prior to the end of session.

Ministry business plan goal 1, families are supported to create the foundation for children and youth to grow and reach their full potential. What exactly will the continuum of evidence-based prevention and early intervention services referred to in priority initiative 1.2 of the business plan look like? Can the ministry provide some more detail on this, please?

We hear a great deal from this government about efforts to streamline processes and programming, which can be the cause of some concern. This is also included in priority initiative 1.3 of the business plan. Can the ministry provide some more detail on what this streamlining will entail? Will this primarily be reflected in the application processes, or will it directly impact the way in which services are delivered, for example? When strengthening of quality child care is referred to in priority initiative 1.3, will this include minimum requirements on qualifications and pay for staff?

Performance measures. Why is the target for performance measure 1(a) only 95 per cent? Should a hundred per cent not be the goal? What means of assessing information are included in performance measure 1(b)? What exactly does performance measure 1(b) reflect in terms of the success of this department?

Goal 2, families are supported to provide a safe and healthy environment for children and youth. This ministry has really been pushing for a move to outcomes-based service delivery, claiming that it will improve outcomes for children and families who enter the system. Why, then, does the target listed under performance measure 2(c) decrease and remain at the lower level until at least 2013-14?

Goal 3, children in need are protected and supported by permanent, nurturing relationships. Recruitment and retention of staff continues to be one of this ministry's biggest challenges. How will you address this challenge? What are the specific initiatives that you will be implementing in the next year to recruit and retain skilled staff? Under what line in the estimates is the funding required for "enhancing human resource capacity and supporting front line staff" reflected? Will initiatives implemented to support

priority initiative 3.1 include minimum qualifications and improved pay for front-line workers to reduce the high turnover many organizations, especially those contracted out, experience? What initiatives and programs will be implemented to support priority initiative 3.2? What exactly is this collaboration expected to look like? What will it entail?

Performance measures. How do performance measures 3(a) and 3(b) reflect success in achieving the priority initiatives listed under goal 3 as there seems to be some disconnect? How do these performance measures reflect an improvement in access to programs and services for vulnerable youth, for example?

Goal 4, the well-being and self-reliance of aboriginal children, youth, families, and communities is promoted and supported. What will the collaboration listed under priority initiative 4.1 look like? Are there specific programs or meetings planned, for example? Will implementation of Jordan's principle be one of the mechanisms utilized by this ministry to achieve success under priority initiative 4.2? I know, obviously, the ministry is aware, but for anyone tuning in who isn't aware of Jordan's principle, it is that the first government, whether federal or provincial, that comes into contact with an aboriginal child sees that child's care throughout.

Why isn't goal 4 and the associated performance measure directly focused on keeping aboriginal children out of the system? The goal as it stands gives the impression that this ministry is just reacting to a growing problem rather than making efforts to address the roots of the problem in order to reduce the number of aboriginal children in care, which is slated to be up to as many as 70 per cent within the next year. Is this why we continue to see an increase in the overrepresentation of aboriginal children in care year after year, at this point a percentage that is trending upward to 70 per cent according to this minister?

Goal 5, communities are responsive to the needs of vulnerable children, youth, and families. What will the client-centred supports model referred to in priority initiative 5.1 look like? Will this be a sort of advertising or marketing initiative? What line item will this be reflected under in the budget? What will the social-based assistance initiative referred to in priority initiative 5.2 consist of? What line item in the budget will this be reflected under?

The ministry talks a great deal about its focus on preventative measures; however, after reading the ministry goals and performance measures, I am left with the impression that the ministry is more focused on reacting to problems once they happen rather than on prevention. Is this a reflection of a budget that is too small or one that is incorrectly focused? Is the system currently just so overwhelmed that the ministry's hands have been tied in a cycle of reacting rather than preventing?

Last year I asked a number of questions regarding the deep cuts to child intervention services. I asked, for example, what the minister would do if upon monitoring the impact of these cuts on the delivery of services it was determined that they were in fact having a negative impact. It is now clear that the cuts were made up through supplementary supply.

With this in mind, I must ask if part of the reason why the supplementary supply of \$40 million was required was because cuts made to the 2010-11 budget for child intervention services were made before the review of the child intervention system was completed. Child intervention services was cut by almost \$17 million in the 2010-11 budget, but they needed a supplemental supply of \$40 million midway through the year. This suggests to me that the ministry severely underestimated what the demand would be for this program area. Can the ministry explain this gross underestimation in child intervention services?

6:50

In the estimates for 2011-12 a slight increase for child care is reflected under line 2. This is certainly not something that I disagree with. However, despite the increase in dollars we continue to see issues with the delivery of child care services in Alberta, which leads me to believe that taxpayers are not receiving good value for dollars spent here. Why, despite the increased dollars, do we continue to hear from Albertans and service providers that the government isn't paying child care subsidies on time? Will the ministry provide a list of all program areas that are starting the fiscal year in a deficit position, with a statement of how each program area is going to be impacted in terms of outcomes for children? What expectation is there for timely approval of child and family service authorities' budgets? This has been an ongoing problem.

There are a number of changes to how the line items are broken down in the Children and Youth Services estimates for 2011-12. What is the reason for this restructuring?

Line 3, page 60, estimates, prevention of family violence and bullying. Shelters for women are to receive \$39.5 million. In the past more than twice the women who have attempted to get into shelters with their children in tow have been turned away. In the 2010-11 budget prevention of family violence was listed on its own line and received a budget of \$38.1 million in isolation of other programs. In the 2011-12 estimates, line 3.1, prevention of family violence and bullying is \$11.1 million. Does this reflect a significant decrease in the budget, or is the budget for shelters for women previously included in the same line as prevention of family violence and bullying? What percentage of the total funding provided to women's shelters by this government is covered by this ministry under line 3.2?

How is the budget for prevention of family violence and bullying allocated between family violence and bullying-specific initiatives, line 3.1, page 60 of the estimates? What specific family violence prevention initiatives and programs will this money fund? Will the focus be on educational programs or in-home supports for families? What specific antibullying programs will be funded?

Line 9, page 60, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives. In 2010-11 \$18.3 million was spent on fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives. What was this money used for specifically? The estimate for 2011-12 is again \$18.3 million. What programs and strategies will it fund? What will the priorities be? Will these reflect what we saw in 2010-11, or will there be a different focus?

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.

Madam Minister, 10 minutes, please.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, we all have our own style, and mine is to answer questions fully here, which I'll begin to do. The first question was on 1.1. You asked about performance measures. We are increasing emphasis on comprehensive early childhood development and parenting programs that promote positive parenting skills and knowledge and, ultimately, optimal child development and will reduce the need for future, more costly child and family intervention. Also, we will continue to build on the success of our parent link centres as community-based service hubs, which I know you didn't mention, hon. member, but they're a very important part of this program.

We will be establishing a continuum of evidence-based prevention and early intervention services, as 1.2 says. We will ensure that we have a range of early intervention services, that there's evidence supporting their effectiveness with that. That the services must address known risk factors for child maltreatment – poor

parenting skills, social isolation – and strengthen protective factors such as parental resilience and knowledge of parenting skills and child development.

I think it's really important, as well. You asked about the goals that are being set out in the business plan, whether or not they're being met. The answer to that is yes. The goals were identified for outcomes in the performance measures for each of the five business plan goals. There's a total of 11 measures, as you saw, and four of the measures are linked to national outcome measures for child welfare. National outcome measures are developed through extensive research, as you know, and consultation with professionals working in the child intervention field. The national outcome measures related in the annual report are 2(b) service recurrence, 3(a) serious injury and death, 3(b) adoption and private guardianship, 4(a) aboriginal foster and kinship care.

How do we ensure that we have the best performance measures? That's through our staff assessing the current performance measures to determine whether they're the most relevant, valid, and reliable. I trust what my staff come forward with after they determine that, Mr. Chairman.

I can tell you that I believe that the performance measures, especially back to 1(a) for child care accreditation, were restated to better reflect Alberta child care providers' commitment to quality care, which you'll see with the child care awards in Calgary in the near future. Also, measure 5(b) Alberta's Promise was added to allow us to measure and report our partnership with community funders to better respond to the needs of our vulnerable children and families.

The other question that you asked was in regard to Jordan's principle. I can tell you, absolutely, the answer is yes. We are moving ahead. We've had those discussions previously as to how that came about that we would move ahead. We're actually moving quite quickly with assisting the aboriginal First Nations people in that regard. We have an accredited programmer agency that demonstrated that it meets standards of excellence in 10 different core areas over and above licensing requirements. You alluded to the licensing requirements.

In terms of funding we offer funding to help programs achieve and maintain accreditation. I can go on. That includes wage tops, professional development for staff, quality programming funding, which helps programs with cost of purchasing toys and equipment, and grants to help operators recruit their staff.

I think the other interest that you had was in regard to the child intervention report. You were wondering if it was the child intervention report that determined the increase in the child intervention monies and why the report was delayed. I can tell you that the child intervention report has a lot of meaning, with the 10 recommendations that we've approved, and that the funding that was allocated will assist with implementing those recommendations. But the funding that's been allocated – that's the significant \$40 million that you mentioned that was allocated for child intervention – is to assist overall, especially with how many children we have who are aboriginal children in care. I know that you agree fully that that's the right way to go, kinship care, for aboriginal people and also assisting our aboriginal people with the partnerships we need to develop through a memorandum of understanding for the care of the children on- and off-reserve. I think that answers that.

Also, you had asked about what we're doing to reduce the number of aboriginal children in care and improve the services overall. There is some very extensive work being done. The number of aboriginal children in care is not just a concern for us – and that's why the partnership is being created – but it also is with the elders, leaders, and communities across Alberta and the rest of Canada.

The social issues faced by aboriginal communities are complex, and they require collaboration and partnership. We have created an aboriginal policy and initiatives division that will be led by the aboriginal assistant deputy minister. That will provide senior leadership around enhancing the ministry's capacity to support aboriginal children and their families.

You had also asked about child care subsidies. You coupled that with being in a deficit position. I can tell you that our child care subsidies are very substantial. If you have a single mom who has a 19-month-old or younger infant, that mom, if she's making \$25,000 a year, will be subsidized with government funding \$10,000 in that year for her child care. The mom herself will pay \$258 a month for child care. The threshold we have for child care subsidies is actually quite high.

I think, too, you may have wondered about the formula. The formula for child care subsidies is the number of adults in the family, the number of dependents, the number of dependent children who require child care in a licensed or approved program. You know, those are significantly different, with a program being licensed or the approved program for day homes and the daycares being licensed. They are different. It is also about the family's annual income.

7:00

The other question that you had was in regard to prevention. Are we more into prevention or intervention? I can tell you that that as well goes hand in hand. The program that I mentioned here earlier in my speech about the million dollars that was allocated for the new Alberta Vulnerable Infant Response Team, that's going to be an intensive approach for community supports for families in need, especially relative to being new parents for infants aged zero to three months, is very much about prevention, but when you take the supports in the community and you make them very intensive and you have highly, highly skilled professionals delivering those supports to the family, there may be times within that three-month period that it may be determined to be child intervention. That doesn't necessarily mean what people often think, that you will take, you know, the child into care; it means assisting the family with however you intervene in helping with that care.

You asked about bullying and family violence. I'm with you on that. Bullying is an unacceptable behaviour any time, anywhere, and we work hard. I've seen everyone in the Assembly at various functions, you know, that are either fundraisers for women's shelters or for bullying programs relative to schools and what the community brings out as far as educating people about bullying and creating awareness on how to help stop bullying in our neighbourhoods and schools.

We support the Alberta Prevention of Bullying Youth Committee. They provide us with advice. They provide us with leadership. They provide us with training and tools to assist our youth. I know that in September in Leduc, when I joined young people there in regard to bullying, they were spreading the word about bullying prevention and the resources that are available.

Many people are interested in the languages that we have to help with people understanding about bullying. There's a toll-free bullying helpline that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week in more than 170 languages.

I also would like to comment just a wee bit further about shelters. You had mentioned that people were being turned away from shelters. I can tell you that I hear it framed in that way often. I know that you know this, but I'd just like to restate it. No one is turned away from an emergency shelter for women without help if they are at risk of harm. You have to be very, very clear about that

in the community because women with children or just women on their own that have experienced family violence and are in crisis still need to go to get the best assistance in the community, and that is going to a shelter. They will be assisted if they're at risk of harm. We refer to other shelters or services to keep them safe, like community outreach services or other emergency accommodations.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madam Minister.  
Back to Calgary-Varsity.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Personal style aside, probably the most important question tonight is: is the ministry prepared to provide written answers for all unanswered questions? Will the minister commit to answering all questions?

I am assured that Jordan's principle will be upheld.

When I left off, I was expressing concern over initiatives for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, which, unfortunately, is statistically high with First Nations children. I was referencing line 9, page 60, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives. In the past FASD-specific programming has been reflected in the ministry's priority initiatives or strategies; however, it is absent from the 2011-14 business plan. Why? How will prevention strategies be improved in the next year? How will it be determined if these programs and strategies have actually improved, and how will the success of these programs and strategies be measured? How will supports for children, youth, and families impacted by FASD be improved, and again how will you be able to evaluate this?

Family enhancement and prevention versus protection, line 4.1, page 60, 2011-12 government estimates. How much of the child intervention services estimate amount of \$357.7 million will be applied to family enhancement services versus child protection services?

Will the minister provide a breakdown of the following line items listed on page 60 of the 2011-12 government estimates: lines 2.1 through 2.3, child care; line 4.1, child intervention services; line 5, family support for children with disabilities; and line 11, family and community support services? The reason I do this is both for the ministry's benefit and for anyone who is trying to follow the debate or has an interest in children's well-being and wishes to do the research after the fact. How much of each dollar spent in these programs goes directly to front-line staff doing the work compared to the amount spent on administration? How is the decision for how to distribute these funds made, based on what measures and priorities?

Foster and kinship care. Can the ministry provide a breakdown of the \$171.2 million listed under line 4.4, foster care support, on page 60 of the estimates? How much will be spent on recruitment of foster and kinship placements in the next year? How much will be spent in direct support for existing foster families? How many new foster and kinship homes were approved in 2010-11, and what is your target for 2011-12? What specific programs and strategies will be implemented for recruitment of foster and kinship families in 2011-12? How do these differ from the strategies you employed last year? How many foster and kinship homes in the province have more than their approved number of children at this time? This was a recurring question that came up last year.

Staffing. Full-time equivalent employment remains at 2,861 people, no change from last year. This is noted on page 84 of the fiscal plan. How many vacancies are there in ACYS at the present time? Will you provide a breakdown of vacancies by position and region in writing?

There was a decline in full-time equivalent staff between 2009-10 and 2010-11. The number remains unchanged in this year's fiscal plan. What positions are not being filled? Have they been permanently removed, or are they just not being refilled at this time as they are considered nonessential? What is the process by which it is determined if a position will be filled or not? How is a determination of essential or nonessential reached? How many employees of this ministry are currently on stress leave? Is this an increase or a decrease from the last fiscal year?

What I hear from front-line workers is an increase in caseloads without an increase in support. How can the ministry reasonably expect the front line to accomplish all of the expectations as laid down in policy, many of which have been added within the last few years, with regular changes to expectations and processes?

What mechanisms are in place to ensure that every individual working in the children's services industry in Alberta meets a minimum qualification requirement, especially for special-needs children?

Will the minister provide what the average wage difference is between government and agency workers? In the past I've noted that it's almost 50 per cent higher. Actually, forget that. It's 100 per cent higher if you're directly under the umbrella of the government as opposed to way out on a contracted agency. What are the total staffing numbers for the child and family services authorities? Can the minister provide the total staffing numbers for contracted-out agencies? What are the target staffing numbers for both the authorities and contracted agencies?

Outcomes-based service delivery. How much was spent on implementation of outcomes-based service delivery in 2010-11? Is the cost expected to increase in the 2011-12 fiscal year as implementation continues? How much has been budgeted for implementation of outcomes-based service delivery in 2011-12? What line item is this included in? How many contracts and agencies were transferred to outcomes-based service delivery in 2010-11? Where will the ministry be implementing outcomes-based service delivery in 2011-12? Will the scope of the pilot projects be expanded, or are you looking at implementation across the DFNAs and the CFSAs in the next year? What I'm looking for here are timelines for full implementation.

How many contracts and agencies will be transferred to outcomes-based service delivery in 2011-12? Where will these be located? How will the transition to outcomes-based services affect qualification requirements for service delivery staff? The recurring theme that I've heard is that front-line staff are spending more time at their desks filling out reports than actually being with families and children in need. Will it require further training of staff, and if so what training and at what cost? How has the ministry determined successes and failures of outcomes-based service delivery? What are the cost savings associated with outcomes-based service delivery?

**7:10**

Child and Youth Advocate. Does the ministry not recognize that having an internal advocate who reports directly to the minister significantly compromises that individual's ability to advocate for our most vulnerable population? I realize that the ministry is undergoing a search for a replacement for the children's advocate.

Recommendation 7 of the final report of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel was: "Clarify the role of the Child and Youth Advocate to focus on individual advocacy and not system-level advice." The minister or ministry, if you prefer, did not accept this recommendation. Can the minister provide more detail on why the recommendation was not accepted? What steps are being taken to improve upon the current system?

Aboriginal children. Sixteen years ago aboriginal children made up 50 per cent of the children in care. That number is now rapidly approaching 70 per cent. This ministry talks a lot about efforts made to address this overrepresentation, but one thing remains alarmingly clear: all of this government's efforts thus far have failed to reduce the number of aboriginal children in care. How does the minister respond to this fact? I am very aware that the largest growing portion of the population is within the First Nations.

On June 17, 2010, the ministry held its inaugural meeting of chairs of DFNAs, co-chairs of CFSAs, and representatives of First Nation organizations served by child and family services authorities, entitled Gathering Today for our Aboriginal Children's Future. The minister's message and the executive summary of the report have been read. Why was this initiative only implemented last year? What finally spurred this ministry to start taking collaborative action now? When will the second meeting be held, or has it been held already? The minister committed to developing a memorandum of understanding. Has this step been completed, and if so could it please be tabled?

The minister rejected recommendation 4 of the final report of the Alberta Child Intervention Review Panel, which was: "Establish an off-reserve Aboriginal service delivery stream to provide child protection, investigations and case management for Aboriginal children and families." When asked about this following the release of the report, the minister suggested that much work needs to be done before any such system could possibly be implemented. In the interim more children get taken into custody. What specific initiatives has the minister implemented since the release of the final report of the Child Intervention Review Panel to keep aboriginal children out of the system and to improve outcomes for aboriginal children who do enter care?

**The Chair:** Madam Minister, please.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will answer these questions fully as well with these answers.

To the first question. Our program budget includes \$261.8 million, or 72.2 per cent, for child protection services, including adoption and postadoption services; \$22.3 million, or 6.2 per cent, for family enhancement services; \$37.1 million, or 10.2 per cent, for intake and assessment; \$22.8 million, or 6.3 per cent, for child intervention and management; \$5 million, or 1.4 per cent, for child and youth support programs; about \$5.7 million – you might be interested, hon. member, in this – or 1.6 per cent, for the Siksika Family Services Corporation, which is a renowned service for that nation; \$7.6 million, or 2.1 per cent, for program support related services such as research, evaluation standards, practice, mediation programs, and human resources.

In 2011-12 the FTE target is 2,861. It's allocated 2,478 to the child and family services authorities, which is 87 per cent, back to your question about percentages, and the department is 383, which is 13 per cent. Front-line staff consists of over 1,800 FTEs, which is approximately, back to that question, Mr. Chairman, two-thirds of our ministry's total staff.

Since the start of the hiring restraint, which began in July 2009, the ministry has hired approximately 278 front-line staff, and the front-line vacancy rate has not increased since the hiring restraint came into effect. We monitor staff vacancies closely, and we'll continue to fill critical front-line positions.

The front-line vacancy rate, which was your question, is approximately, I think, from what I recall, about 12 per cent. What comprises the front-line staff is child and youth care workers,

human services workers, facility support workers, individual support workers, medical and health, rehabilitation, psychologists.

Extended leave. Approximately 200 staff, for your question on that, are on extended leave: LTDI is 112, adoption two, maternity 78, personal 14. You should note that these positions are back-filled. I think that's basically the interest that you had in regard to those issues.

Outcomes-based service delivery: I've heard you ask that question before. I think you know a lot about that area and are very interested in it, and you know that it is about improving the way that caseworkers, contracted agencies, and families work together to provide services and supports and that they be in a timely manner. It's not about privatization or reducing government staff or cutting services, and no legislation has been developed or passed, nor are there any plans to transfer delegated responsibilities of government staff to contracted agencies. I know by your questions that that may be some of your worry. The partners gather around the table and figure out the best road map for the family in order to achieve success. I've given you stories before in the Legislature of specific examples of why that is working and how.

Other jurisdictions employing the OBSD model have found that children find permanent homes faster and that fewer children re-enter the child intervention system. The goal is that children experience less overall time in care. The benefits are to strengthen and clarify partnerships with agencies that serve our children, youth, and families. It gives agencies opportunities to set up their resources in a way that leads to more financial stability and predictability while providing a framework to be able to effectively evaluate the services that they provide, and it ensures that our ministry can have our children and youth supported through a continuum of supports and services so that they have the right services at the right time from the contracted agencies. That is a program that is working very well, especially as they're working now in partnership and in tandem.

You asked about the role of the Child and Youth Advocate. We've had that discussion before. It never changes. Your question is the same; the answer is the same. I don't anticipate that that answer is going to change in the future. I can go back to telling you that we've taken important steps to make the system more open and transparent, including a review of the advocacy in Alberta. The advocacy review committee included former youth in care. That committee found no evidence that one reporting structure results in greater public accountability, transparency, or better outcomes for children, and the review acknowledged the importance of the autonomy needed for the advocate to carry out his legislated responsibilities. For those that are listening, it's important that people recognize that the Child and Youth Advocate in Alberta only looks after our children and youth that are in care, that are in our child intervention system, not all children in Child and Youth Services and not all children in government.

It was recommended that there be the creation of a memorandum of understanding through the advocacy review committee to explain how that is achieved, and the committee also made recommendations that provide a comprehensive plan for strengthening the child and youth advocacy system, positioning Alberta as a leader in the area of child and youth advocacy. That includes making the advocate's quarterly and annual reports available to the public, which we have done, Mr. Chairman.

Also, you had asked about the aboriginal children in care, back to the delegated First Nation agencies meeting, along with the child and family services authorities meeting. Those were the board governance areas. As you know, with the co-chairs one is aboriginal, one is nonaboriginal for each of our 10 CFSAs, and you also know how the delegated First Nation agencies, the gover-



nance model there, operates. Yes, we did have the inaugural meeting, which was an excellent meeting, the first of its kind in Canada. I can also tell you that the second meeting has taken place. You asked about that. There's an excellent report. Mr. Chairman, the meeting is held at Government House, and at that meeting we operate in exactly the same way we do here in this Assembly, and that is through recording every word. So there is a second report. There is a third meeting anticipated, and actually I note it is in the works through the staff to meet once again in June.

Through the meeting, yes, we have addressed recommendation 4, that you were concerned about not being addressed, through that child intervention report. It's so that the elders, the leaders, the people in the community, whether it's on-reserve or off-reserve, know exactly what they want in place for their children. That's what that memorandum of understanding will be about is for the children, youth, and families, and that the grand chiefs and the treaty chiefs and the protocol agreements that are in place by this government are in place for a reason and one that we can move ahead with. So that is working very, very well.

7:20

The other that you asked about was our child intervention system review. I can see why you asked about that because that was an important part of our continuing journey toward achieving our ministry's vision of providing protective services that strengthen families and communities. We never stop looking for ways to better serve our vulnerable children and families, Mr. Chairman, so when you say, "Why didn't this happen three years ago or five years ago?" it's always a continual improvement. I believe in the staff and the good work that they're doing with what they have, especially with years of experience and knowledge, that they continue to move forward with protecting our vulnerable children and families and are very committed to keeping pace with leading practices and with demographic shifts.

I can also tell you that when you asked about the aboriginal community – once again I'm going to go back to that – you wanted to know about the number of delegated First Nation agencies in the way that you framed that one question. We have 18 delegated First Nation agencies in Alberta. They serve First Nation families on 103 reserves, and the agencies deliver services to approximately 2,000 children on-reserve, and that includes both child protection and family enhancement.

Your question in regard to that was about: why can't you keep them linear; why can't you keep them separated; why can't you keep them isolated from one another? I can tell you that they have to work hand in hand because they balance one another in the way that the services are being offered. Family enhancement services refer to child intervention services that are provided to a family where a child has experienced abuse or neglect but can still be safe in the home if supports are provided to help the family address their issues. The goal is to support families. Just as with the AVIRT team the goal is to support the family so that crises can be avoided and that the family can stay together. We know that in supporting families, as I said earlier, to support them early on makes a huge difference.

Back to that question about the funding. In 2010-11 we're providing \$1.7 million for early intervention on-reserve programming, and we're providing that through 17 First Nations. The types of programs and supports vary, depending on the unique needs of the community. I think that you would agree with that, hon. member – I see you nodding your head yes – because there are unique needs in the community, and you can't just, you know, throw a program and the resources at every family in exactly the same way. It's the same with the aboriginal community, whether

the child is on-reserve or off-reserve and often goes back and forth, which is why those meetings that are taking place with the DFNAs and the CFSAs are critical so that at the governance level they're talking. The deputy minister has met with the CEO's. He has a third meeting, I think, coming up here, too, with the CEOs. So it is working.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

The hon. member.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. Alberta remains the only province in which the children's advocate reports directly to the minister rather than to the Legislature, which compromises their independence and ability to advocate for children. A similar shortcoming, that has been playing out this past week and a half in this Legislature, is the shortcoming of the Alberta Health Quality Council in terms of its ability to investigate because the quality council reports directly to the minister and not to the Assembly. Likewise, the proposed Alberta Health Services patient advocate would report directly to the health minister rather than to the Assembly, so it's a matter of who is being served and whose interests are being upheld.

Alberta's Promise, line item 13, page 61 of the estimates, \$1.6 million. The forecast amount for Alberta's Promise 2009-10, listed on page 78 of the 2010-11 estimates, is \$1,578,000, but the actual amount listed in the 2011-12 estimates is \$622,000. Why is there such a disparity? How is the \$1.6 million for Alberta's Promise allocated? What specific programs is this for?

Parent link centres. There is significantly less emphasis on delivery of services through parent link centres in the 2011-14 business plan than there was in the 2010-13 business plan. Why is that? Has the ministry determined that parent link centres have proven to be unsuccessful or ineffective in the delivery of services? I don't believe that's the case, Minister. My understanding is that this does provide a safe spot for families to have supervised visits, so how was this conclusion to reduce reached? If not, how much funding will be dedicated to parent link centres in 2011-12? What line item is this included under?

What programs, services, or initiatives are included under line 8, parenting resources initiative? How will the value for dollars or the success of these programs be determined? What programs, services, or initiatives are included under line 11, family and community support services? How will the value for dollars or the success of these programs be determined?

What work was done to determine if the emphasis on parent link centres that we saw in 2010-11 led to further declines in in-home family support and enhancement services that can be effective in preventing the need for protection services?

ISIS, intervention services information system. Is the implementation of ISIS complete? How much has the ministry spent on the implementation of the intervention services information system to this point? Where is this included in the budget? How much will have been spent on ISIS by the time it is fully implemented?

What steps has the ministry taken to date to address the Auditor General's October 2010 findings regarding daycare and day home regulatory compliance monitoring?

One of the biggest ongoing concerns that I have is the determination that a child is potentially in danger and the speed at which a child is taken into custody, into care, contrasted with how long it takes a parent to prove through extended court appearances, psych assessments that they are now worthy and have been sufficiently supported by Children and Youth Services to be able to have their child back. My feeling, particularly having been a teacher for 34

years, is that the prevention aspect of children's services is certainly as important as dealing with those children who are taken into custody and care.

Minister, I would like to offer a bouquet to staff in Falconridge. I recently, as you are aware, dealt with a young woman who was sent to the remand centre over unpaid LRT tickets. When I was speaking with her and to representatives in the Falconridge area, there was a very great understanding shown towards this young lady. It is my hope – and I have not heard back from my constituency office – that this young woman's now 3-month-old child has been returned to her with the appropriate oversight and support continuing.

I have gone to a number of the family services offices in Calgary. I've been in Marlborough, for example. I've been in Huntington Hills. I've been in the Forest Lawn location a couple of times. In most cases I would suggest that I have been welcomed and that I have had an opportunity to express concerns raised to me.

This is, beyond a doubt, the ministry that has the greatest degree of a necessity for sensitivity. When children's lives are interrupted, it's very hard, if ever, to get them back on track. Having been a teacher, as I say, for 34 years and looking at the success in terms of completing various levels of school for children who have been taken into care, it's an extremely great challenge.

7:30

I am very grateful, as I know you are, Minister, for the number of foster families that are willing to take children into their homes and provide at least a temporary respite for both them and at times for their families until such time as their families can, I suppose, get their act together, show that they are able to act in the best interests of the children.

As you are well aware, the growing number of First Nations children that get taken into care is of great concern. Part of that concern is the number of non First Nations individuals that provide the foster care. Far too frequently children are transported from northern areas, where there is insufficient foster support, to southern areas, and in that transfer sometimes the placement is not appropriate. Sometimes there is a lack of religious understanding. Sometimes there is a lack of appreciation of First Nations customs, such as a child maintaining their traditionally long hair. These are things that should have been dealt with when residential schools were finally abolished.

The care of children is obviously of utmost importance, and it is my hope, as I say, that through educational programs, through in-home support for families and children not only the number of children taken into care is reduced but the time they spend out in care, particularly when they're infants, is also reduced.

I thank the ministry and the officials tonight. I felt this was a very productive session. I appreciate the support you have provided to your minister. I am looking forward to more extensive budget-specific answers to questions.

With that, Mr. Chair, I will thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Madam Minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I'm going to begin with what was referred to about the health quality assurance council at the beginning. As you know, in the child intervention report one of the recommendations that was here in children's services was that we establish a child and family service quality council. This council was to help strengthen our ability to achieve continuous improvement in the system by increasing transparency and

accountability and making recommendations that would support improvements in child and family outcomes. The child and family service quality council will report about how well the system is serving children and families.

The council will also assist in developing recommendations about how we can improve service delivery. The mandate, scope, and structure of the council is still being determined and will be developed in consultation with ministry stakeholders. But I have heard your warning that you've shot across the bow here, you know, about the quality assurance council and about how important it is to ensure that they're operating in a way that really helps what they were meant to do within the ministry. I know the staff have heard your comments here tonight in regard to that as well.

I'd also like to address the tripartite agreement with INAC, that you asked about once again. We are developing the memorandum of understanding, as I mentioned earlier, with the grand chiefs and with the federal government through INAC as well. This will be a partnership. The memorandum will facilitate discussion on issues of mutual concern regarding services for aboriginal children, youth, and families in Alberta. We are working closely with all parties involved. We have developed the framework document to initialize our work on the MOU, and consultation with our aboriginal communities continues.

I go back to that about creating the senior executive position at the assistant deputy minister level. That will strengthen the ministry's direction and the priority on aboriginal issues specifically. We do have a working group in progress, and the work that they are doing is multifaceted. I would hope that we have a memorandum of understanding in place sometime this summer.

Now, the parenting resources initiatives, which you asked about in regard to line items, as well as the parent link centres and the home visitations. Our parenting resources initiatives are made up of both the parent link centres and the home visitations. It's both of them with that. The parent link centres are 15 and a half million dollars and the home visitations \$8.6 million. We've worked very closely with our parent link centres to help them enhance their programming.

I'm with you on that. They provide a really strong service for the community and very early on, once again, with families. In every community that has a parent link centre they offer their parent link centre services in a very unique way for their children. I have visited many. I know their triple-P program is working as well. It was a million dollars that we'd allocated last year to help train the staff to deliver the triple P, which, as you know, is the positive parenting program, in all of our 46 PLCs across the province.

The triple P, as many of our ministries work together, is also funded through our safe communities initiatives. The parent link centre operators, as I find, are continually finding very creative ways to manage their operating budgets to ensure that they have the ability to offer optimum services to parents.

Are we dismissing parent link centres and saying that they no longer have value in the community, that they've been in place for some time and community needs have changed? Well, the parent link centres evolved with that change. We definitely will not stop funding our parent link centres. We will be continuing with that because they strengthen and they integrate early childhood development services, child development screening, parent education, and family supports to promote optimal child development.

You also asked about ISIS, which is our integrated services information system. This was the new IT solution. It was needed to update outdated technology and support the casework practice model and the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. Your question was: why hasn't it been implemented yet? Well, imple-

mentation was delayed from the projected start date due to changes and updates to the software that will improve the usability of the product. Some of the changes incorporate suggestions from staff members who were involved in initial tests of the system and overall staff feedback from the training session. It's good news. It's been positive. So the staff really do know that this system will help them.

You asked about it being implemented. It will be phased in. It will be used to implement ISIS, beginning with the first release to one CFSA and one DFNA in 2011, and more regions and DFNAs will be added every few months, leading to province-wide implementation. Each release is going to include groups from similar geographic regions that have existing relationships.

You asked about the capital budget. It was initially set at \$29 million, and that was set approximately four years ago. The current capital projection to complete the ISIS build and testing is going to be approximately \$34 million. That original budget four years ago was established as part of the overall strategy to integrate the systems and the information. As I said, it is \$34 million now when you look at that in the budget.

Now, the foster care support, kinship care, et cetera, that you asked questions about: well, first of all, the budget estimate, as you'll see in the budget book for '11-12, is \$171 million. Placement resources: the monthly average is 2,459 foster homes and 1,350 kinship homes, and since the launch of the provincial caregiver recruitment campaign 147 net new foster homes and 631 kinship care homes have been approved as of December 2009. I know you wanted those numbers to be net, just from listening to your question. More foster and kinship homes are needed. I agree with you about that. They are, particularly for aboriginal children. We work continually. The staff work hard and work with the aboriginal community to assist with the establishment of kinship homes not just for aboriginal children but also for children that are not aboriginal as well because kinship homes are very safe, very loving, just as foster homes are, but there's also just that connection with family that's personal through kinship homes. So we know the value of those.

7:40

Hon. member, 8,582 children were in care – you asked about that – from April to December of 2010. The family-based care, as I said, is the preferred placement option. Twenty per cent of the children in care are in kinship homes, and that's 1,735 children. Fifty-three per cent of children in care are in foster care, and that's 4,555 children.

The other question that you asked was in regard to aboriginal children in foster kinship homes. In the way that you framed that several times throughout your questions, I can tell you that the financial support that foster parents receive on average is \$1,441 per month per child. The basic maintenance rate covers the child's day-to-day costs for food, clothing, et cetera. Skill fees: there's compensation for foster parent skills training and level of experience and respite funding to encourage necessary breaks from the demands of fostering. Kinship caregivers receive the same basic maintenance and respite funding but not the skills training fees. I think what you were looking for was that comparison between the two.

Now, you asked about the Auditor General's report in regard to child care. We are continually improving. I have to say that because we are continually improving the way the ministry provides services and support to children, youth, and their families as it's an ongoing part of our work. The Auditor made three recommendations. One was that the Department of Children and Youth Services work with child and family services authorities to review

documentation and training requirements for monitoring licensed and approved programs. The second was that CFSAs improve their systems to ensure that they comply with monitoring and enforcement policies and processes. The third was that CFSAs improve systems for monitoring and enforcing child care program compliance with statutory requirements.

Did we follow up with the Auditor General on this? That was really, basically, your overall question. Are we working with the Auditor General? Yes, we are. We're working closely with the office. As you know, we are a ministry that takes very seriously what the Auditor recommends for our ministry, especially for the people that we serve.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Madam Minister.

Are there questions from the third party, the Wildrose Alliance?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Indeed, it's a pleasure to rise tonight to speak about the Ministry of Children and Youth Services to the minister.

**The Chair:** Are you sharing your time back and forth for 10 minutes?

**Mr. Boutilier:** Yeah. Back and forth would be fine.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

**Mr. Boutilier:** I'd like to start, first of all, by touching base with the mandate letter that was presented. As I mentioned last night, it was my view that the mandate letters that were constructed within the Premier's office were, in my judgment, by an unelected fiat. Consequently, I find that there could be a disconnect between what Albertans are thinking versus the elected officials. I would like to ask the minister in terms of such an important ministry of children's services – I might add that she has certainly demonstrated her ability, certainly, from her profession as a registered nurse to understand the importance of such a ministry. Really, it's a ministry – and I say this with the deepest respect – that could blow up so easily because of the nature of the business, no matter who the minister is. I will say that I believe that this minister has done her very best.

My question is on the mandate letter and, in actual fact, the goals that are set out. Of course, I've gone over the goals: goal 1, goal 2, goal 3, essentially five goals, ending with community responsive to the needs of vulnerable children, youth, and families, which is an important goal. Then also goal 3, where children in need are protected and supported by permanent, nurturing relationships. I know all members of this Assembly do agree with that important goal because at the end of the day this is about what we do to help our children.

Families are supported to create the foundation for children and youth to grow and reach their full potential. In my question to the minister – of course, she receives her mandate letter from the Premier, who appoints her to the ministry – I would ask her, if in fact she were to add into this budget another goal, what she would envision as another goal that is so important from her experience in dealing with so many incredible children's services ministry officials.

I've had the honour and privilege of working with so many of the civil servants who work in her ministry. I must say, with the pleasure of being the father of a three-year-old son, being at the Glenrose, where children's services have played a role in the past, the staff are absolutely incredible. I do know that, in fact, people travel from all over Canada to come to Alberta in dealing with

special needs, in coming to deal with its important programs. First of all, I compliment the minister for the excellent reputation that is out there. That is my opinion. I congratulate the minister for that reputation that's been developed.

With that, if you were to add another goal to your ministry that I think none of your civil servants would have – so it really will be from the heart of the minister – what goal do you see adding to the ministry, based on your experience and your professional background, in terms of enhancing the service that your ministry provides to Alberta children and families?

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Well, that's quite the opportunity from the member, you know, when you ask a minister to speak about what they've learned over the year that they've had in the ministry and what they would like to see evolve from what they've learned. I think that for me I would relate to – I'm not certain which goal it is here in the business plan right now, but I know that there is a goal there for aboriginal children and youth and for their well-being, that of their families.

As you mentioned in your opening remarks, hon. member, it's about the promotion and supporting of families and children and youth. For me it's about the child intervention report that I mentioned earlier. It's an external report by external panel members. We had two members from the province of Alberta. That report was commissioned by the previous minister. I had looked forward to seeing what the recommendations were and had the opportunity to meet with the co-chairs of the report, Peter Dudding and Dr. Nico Trocmé. That was, for me, just a real learning opportunity for what we could assist with through what we do in Children and Youth Services.

That panel had announced a review back in July of 2009. They heard presentations from service providers, from foster parents, from aboriginal agencies, legal representatives, youth and families involved in the system, ministry staff. I recall going to a presentation – it was actually very moving – about how the community indicated that they could assist aboriginal children and youth in a more enhanced way if we implemented what it is that they were bringing forward to the panel. That was the stakeholder symposium, I think, that I'd been at in March.

[Ms Pastoor in the chair]

I would like to see that we move forward on the panel recommendations quickly. We've already made progress with the recommendations. As I indicated earlier, we are hiring an assistant deputy minister, which is the senior executive position level. What they're going to be doing: they're tasked with enhancing the capacity and cultural competency of the child intervention system to serve our aboriginal children and their families and then also about establishing the ongoing formal tripartite process to collaboratively address the inequity for First Nations people in the child intervention system. Those discussions, as I said earlier, are under way. That, too, has been a very important initiative. I'm pleased to say that we're having our third governance meeting in June, hon. member, and that, too, is going to advance it further for aboriginal children and youth.

7:50

Also, one of the recommendations of that panel had been that we

enhance capacity for Aboriginal-led agencies to provide services for Aboriginal people in off-reserve communities. As capacity is built over time, enable Aboriginal-led agencies to provide a greater range of child intervention services to Aboriginal children and families off-reserve.

If we move forward with that quickly, I know that we can assist the community much better. You know, all of the goals that you mentioned, actually, are the underpinnings for what we can achieve overall here for the aboriginal community.

When we achieve that for the aboriginal community – as you heard earlier from the member, 65 per cent of children in care are aboriginal. In fact, I was in Grande Prairie about two weeks ago meeting with the college there and the social work students. Approximately a hundred people were there, and they were very aware of the situation with aboriginal children and youth, and they let me know – and you would know from being in the north, in Fort McMurray – that actually 75 per cent of children and youth are aboriginal in that area. The needs they have I believe we could meet if we really work to implement the child intervention report overall, and it goes back even to what was mentioned with the quality assurance council, with all of what the report has in place.

I think that next year you'll see. As I said, much of this is under way. Next year, as it becomes stronger and is more understood and we learn as we go, I think you'll see that as a goal in the next business plan.

Thank you for the question.

**Mr. Boutilier:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Where did Barry go? You're far better looking.

I appreciate the minister's response. There are a couple of things that I would like to ask. One of them, coming from Fort McMurray, is the issue of shelters for children and women. As you know, we've had a situation in the last year in Fort McMurray regarding the fact that the shelters that actually house children ultimately have not changed over the last 10 years even though our city is now the third-largest city in Alberta, with 105,000 people. Obviously, it becomes very difficult to be able to keep pace with the growth.

We're very proud of the fact that Fort McMurray, the oil sands capital, is laying a lot of the eggs that are providing the revenues in the budget this year. It indicates that the budget will go from \$4 billion to \$7 billion over the next three years. So I call Fort McMurray the goose that's laying a lot of the golden eggs. Fort McMurray is just looking to be treated like all other communities, no more, no less. Obviously, I believe we still have a lot of catching up to do.

With the children's shelters situation that evolved, it was very serious. The first part of the question is on what the minister sees as an opportunity to be able to deal with high-growth communities such as mine, where we've migrated from, when I was mayor, 50,000 to 60,000 to where we're at, 105,000. Now, I know 105,000 people is not a lot compared to Calgary or to Edmonton, but the reality of it is that 105,000 is the third-largest city in Alberta, a little bit larger than Red Deer. With that, I find it really important to say: how do we keep up with that growth? I know the government had a policy on high-growth communities that started under Premier Lougheed. He said that special attention would be given to high-growth areas.

I've been disappointed by something that I created when I sat on that side as a minister, when we formed the oil sands secretariat. Nowhere in the oil sands secretariat is there any mention about children's services and the women's shelters that they experience. I view it as something that concerns me. Now, the oil sands secretariat has really just evolved into another level of bureaucracy based out of Edmonton, who really don't know a lot about my community. That concerns me. It was dealing with high-growth communities.

To the minister, who has visited my community of Fort McMurray in the past – and I compliment her – here we have shelters that are not able to keep up with the tremendous growth. We expected \$20 billion over 20 years, and actually it worked out to be \$120

billion over 10 years. It's tough to imagine what you could do to be able to help. That was my first question.

I'll just add one other question, and it actually is a question that is important and that I think only the minister could answer. It's a personal issue. I had a constituent call me. Actually, Minister, the constituent was living in Calgary. He and his wife had moved from Fort McMurray. About three years ago the minister – actually, the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek was the minister of children's services.

This is what happened. They were unsuccessful in having children, and they wanted to adopt. Pertaining to this, the gentleman, who I coached in hockey and who is a policeman in Calgary, and his wife were told by the bureaucrats within children's services at the time – they actually were foster parents for this child, and I need to understand the policy of children's services – that if you're a foster parent, you can't adopt that child. So I got a call from two crying parents. They had fallen in love with this young little girl, two years old. She certainly had a very interesting, shall I say, background to arrive as a ward of the state. They were fostering her, and ultimately they wanted to adopt her.

Now, I will say and compliment that children's services and the minister of the day ultimately did intervene, and it was the Member for Calgary-Fish Creek. I know that this minister would have done exactly the same thing. I just got a Christmas card from these parents, who are proud parents and have legally adopted. But the original response from children's services in Calgary was that they could not adopt because they were foster parents. They truly are wonderful parents.

I just need clarification. Is it true that if you're a foster parent, you cannot adopt? When I learned about it – and I was still then a minister of the Crown – I then at that point said: this makes no sense. These are very, very incredible parents. They've adopted two children since. My purpose behind the question is for those who are foster parents. I just want to be reassured that there is not a policy where someone within the ministry would say: oh, because you're a foster parent, you could not legally adopt. I'd really appreciate it for those Albertans out there that perhaps I'm not aware of or that you're not aware of, and I thank children's services. They intervened.

The head of children's services in Calgary intervened, and the issue was resolved successfully. You know, the little girl, who was two, is now five years old, going to school, and is with loving parents. That happened. I just would really like to know – it's something that I never ever found out – if there's a policy that says that if you're a foster parent, you're not allowed to adopt the youth that you have in your care. I'd really appreciate it if, in fact, you could enlighten me on my question.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I'd be pleased to answer that question. More importantly, the good news is that that child now has a good home and a very loving home, by what you were saying. The people, that were foster parents, have opened their hearts and their home to that child.

Unless maybe the policy changed at the time – I can't speak for back then, but I can say what I know today from being here over the past year – my experience is that there hasn't been a policy in place that says that foster parents are not allowed to adopt their foster children. In fact, what I do know from staff – and we've discussed this – is that one of the highest adoption rates that we have is with foster parents that have fostered the children and would like to create real permanency for them and adopt them and care for them, be a part of their families forever. They're forever families.

8:00

It's a very good question. I'm glad that you've raised it so that people that are listening tonight know that that is the case. Fortunately, we have increased the number of foster homes that we have, we have increased our kinship care homes, and we have increased our permanency rates for children over the past year.

**Mr. Boutilier:** So there's no policy.

**Mrs. Fritz:** It's not the case that there's a policy that stops that.

I wanted to talk a bit with you, hon. member, about what you had raised earlier. I think that the society that you're referring to in your remarks is the Family Crisis Society in Fort McMurray. As I had mentioned in my opening remarks, we have Susan Taylor here with us, who is our executive director for family violence prevention, bullying, and youth strategies. I can tell you that she did meet with me specifically about this society and about what the needs were in the community in Fort McMurray. You articulated them very well, and that's very much in line with what I was told, you know, by Susan as well.

Susan indicated to me that the society was working with community partners. Fort McMurray is really building community partners in a much stronger way now that I've seen. The community partners had planned to build a facility or to expand on the facility to help women in crisis, especially relative to family violence. From what I recall, we had provided 1 and a half million dollars to the society, and that funding was to support their existing shelter as well as their child care program and their sexual assault centre and community co-ordination and victim supports.

[Mr. McFarland in the chair]

Having said that, we did increase funding for emergency shelters across the province, which you know. We've increased that by 73 per cent since 2004-05. That's from \$15 million to more than \$26 million per year. We provide core funding for 619 beds in 29 emergency shelters for women and children across Alberta.

I want to go back to Fort McMurray. It's really important that the Family Crisis Society truly understands and works with the department of housing through their affordable housing dollars. [Mrs. Fritz's speaking time expired] Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We'll now move to the fourth party. Would the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona care to share her time? Are you wanting to go back and forth?

**Ms Notley:** No. I think I'll do the 10 minutes. Thank you. In the past I've done the back and forth, and it's worked quite well, actually, but I have found, this being my fourth or fifth set of estimates in this setting, that it's a lot more difficult to have an actual back and forth, so you don't get through as much stuff. So at least in my first 20-minute exchange that we have, I'll just go through my questions, and then perhaps in subsequent opportunities we can have a little bit more of a back and forth.

I want to start just talking a little bit about questions that remain from last year. We did have a back and forth, and there were a number of questions that I asked last year that the minister had committed to responding to, and I didn't get a response to those questions. There was only one question of about the six. There are about five that are outstanding. I'm going to put them back on the record and hope that this time I can get the responses and then in a couple of cases update them and ask that I be provided that information for this year as well.

Last year we had a good exchange about front-line workers. We had concluded that there were about 1,600 front-line workers, and the minister had said that under no circumstances would any of those positions be subject to the hiring freeze and that no vacancies would remain. We'd kind of gone back and forth, but ultimately the question I'd asked was whether the minister could provide me with information about the number of positions where there was not a posting put up within 30 days of the vacancy. How many were those? That was the question. That was the first one.

The second question that I had asked was this concern that had been raised to me by people just in conversation about the frequency or the occasion that appeared to be occurring at the time, anyway, of children in care periodically having to stay overnight in administrative offices as a result of the ban on hotel usage. So I will simply ask that again. Then I will also ask for this year whether there have been any incidents of children who have been apprehended staying in hotels or whether there have been any instances of children who've been apprehended staying in offices – and I understand that if the child was apprehended at 5:30 in the morning, they may well not find a place to go till 10 – so any child that's apprehended before midnight who still is in the office in the morning. That is still there.

I had asked about the total net kinship care as of March 2010. The minister had indicated that as of November '09 there were 381 kinship homes. I had asked for the number as of March 2010, so I'm still looking for that. Then, of course, I'd be asking, obviously, for the number as of March 2011. I apologize if the minister has actually given that number. She may have in the answers that she has already given.

Then I had asked as well for the number of group homes and the number of beds for children in the care of the government as of April 2009. I'd ask for that, and then I would also ask for that as of March 2011.

Finally, what I had asked for was whether the ministry has information about the average fee charged by both of the following two categories: one, a full day care – I remember using the categories that the minister herself had provided to me – and the second one, the average fee for a family approved day home. Those appear to be the two categories within the larger child care group that actually deal with providing spaces for children five and under.

Those were the questions that I was looking for answers to at that time.

From there maybe I'll just stay a bit with child care. I understand that from last year, when the minister reported about 11,700 new net spaces having been created by the ministry, this year we're up to 18,000, so roughly an increase of 6,300 spaces. As with last year I'm asking again this year if the minister could provide for me within that 6,300 the number that are daycare program, the number that are preschool program, the number that's a group family child care, the number of an innovative child care, the number that are out of school care, the number that are family day home approved, and the number that are kin child care subsidy cases. Adding to that, the minister has identified that there are roughly 90,000 child care spaces in total in Alberta, so I'd like the numbers broken down by those same categories for the total amount at this point now. That would be very helpful for those of us who are very concerned about the issue of accessible child care in the province. That is an issue.

Still related to child care is the issue of accreditation funding. Immediately prior to estimates last year one of our hard-working researchers had written to the minister's office and asked a number of questions, and the minister's office did respond. We had asked about, in particular, the breakdown for child care accredita-

tion. At that time the minister's office responded saying that there was in the 2010-11 budget \$64.5 million dedicated to child care accreditation, that included wage enhancement and, quote, other accreditation grants. I see that that particular line item has gone up not insignificantly this year. I wonder if the minister could provide me with a breakdown of that almost \$83 million figure. How much of that accreditation money goes to wage top-up? How much of that accreditation money goes to other grants? Could we get a bit of a description about what those other grants cover?

**8:10**

Related to that, with that accreditation money, I'm wondering if we could be provided information with respect to the amount of that accreditation money that goes to nonprofit agencies and how much goes to what I will call publicly traded agencies. I'm not looking at the small family day home, because that would be privately owned or whatever. What I'm interested in is what amount of that money went to publicly traded, incorporated private-sector daycare providers in the province. So that's something that we're very much looking at.

Going back to sort of breakdowns in terms of the 90,000 spots, I certainly know from people that have spoken to me about this repeatedly that one of the areas which causes the greatest crisis is the availability of quality child care for children who are zero to 18 months. So I'm wondering if the minister could provide me in particular with the number of child care spaces for children that are zero to 18 months and where those are found, whether they're in daycares or family day homes. That seems to be the area that causes some of the biggest level of stress in the lives of Alberta families and probably contributes to Alberta's less-than-stellar record with respect to the decreasing level of earnings of women in Alberta relative to men and also relative to women in other provinces.

Another question that I have with respect to daycare is that in June of 2010 an Australian day care conglomerate – I think it was ABC care – went bankrupt and basically shut its doors. But one subsidiary of that corporate daycare chain had set up shop in Canada and had, I believe, 12 or 13 places in Alberta, that being, I think, 123 Busy Beaver or something like that. So my question is, obviously, some concerns around the financial health of that organization. I'm wondering if the minister could provide how much accreditation funding went to that particular corporate entity given what happened with it and its record in Australia. It's obviously not the same corporate entity, but they are related corporate entities.

I think I am out of time. Am I at about 10 minutes? Yeah. So I'll leave it there, and I very much look forward to being able to ask more questions of the minister in the next round.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member.

Madam Minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Back to the questions from last year. The first question that you'd asked, regarding the current employees, I had answered. The second question and the third question and the fourth question: there are answers in . . .

**Ms Notley:** No, they're not. I went through it. I read it. They're not.

**Mrs. Fritz:** They've indicated to me our responses out of *Hansard*. I'm just checking with staff if that's not correct. They've indicated to me here that there are answers from *Hansard*.

**Ms Notley:** I just read it. They're not in there.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Well, what I'm going to do is read every answer, then, okay? I don't recall last year what I answered. I was here eight weeks, and I remember the meeting, but I don't recall the specific answers. I'll read what they've given me, then. So question 1 here is:

That's a very interesting question. I asked my staff, and I haven't had the answer yet, so I'll see if they have it here because I was thinking of the comparisons when I was in nursing and where that would be, especially with what's going on now. It's 30 people, but that doesn't include mat leave.

That sounds like something I would have said last year.

**Ms Notley:** As a subsequent question to that.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Okay. Then that does sound like me.

Then the other I could look into for you, about the 30. I'll definitely get back to you with that. I'll just read the additional responses to those answers. The additional response was that once approval to staff for a front-line position was received, generally the job was posted within one week. There was one situation of a delay due to staff being away from work.

Human resources conducts interviews weekly to ensure an available pool of potential staff. The department backfills staff on extended leave using the same candidate pool used to fill the vacant jobs. There are some areas in the province that experience challenges in hiring staff given that fewer people are interested relocating to the centres. Some jobs are filled within six weeks while others may take a few months to attract a qualified individual and have them relocate to that area of the province. Funded positions are recruited to when the need for staff is identified.

Then children in need and in care, the question about prevention and intervention. The response to that was that the crisis units in both Edmonton and Calgary have rooms that are equipped to care for children for a short period of time in the following situations: if it's late in the night or very early in the morning and young children are exhausted due to being brought into care and need to be allowed to fall asleep while placements are being located or older children who have been banned from shelter placements and arrive late in the night or very early in the morning. Staff are available at the office to support the children, and until they can have the children or youth go to a safe place, the staff are with them.

The crisis units in Edmonton and Calgary are equipped with the following: a baby room with a crib, playpen, change table, an age-appropriate toy, baby toddler clothes, and blankets; children's room with couches, pillows, television, DVDs, books, and games; a bathroom with change table, bathtub, and shower; kitchen with a stock of juice, baby bottles, formula, and food for all ages of youth and children; laundry service to have blankets and clothes washed. I don't think that's changed or been taken away at all. I think that would still be in place.

The next question and answer was in regard to kinship, the new kinship care homes. How many kin care homes do you have now? What they've responded here now is that as of March 31, 2010, we have a total of 1,299 kinship homes. This is up from 788 in March of 2009, which is an increase of 511 homes. A total of 897 kinship homes have been approved since the launch of the campaign in October of 2008.

The third question was about group homes. In April 2009 we had 258 group homes, with 1,329 licensed spaces, and in March 2010 we had 256 group homes, with 1,338 licensed spaces.

Then in response to the fourth question, about foster care and foster compensation, foster parents receive basic maintenance for each child in their home to cover the child's day-to-day needs.

Basic maintenance rates are based on the age of the child. For '09-10 the daily rates: under one was \$21.49; two to five, \$21.85; six to eight, \$23.96; nine to 11, \$25.32; 12 to 15, \$28.67; 16 to 17, \$32.77. In addition to basic maintenance, all authority foster homes and agency kinship care homes receive \$2.60 per day per child for respite. Was that it?

**Ms Notley:** It was just, I think, that the child care costs were the last one.

**Mrs. Fritz:** So the child care. Now, those are the answers to last year's questions. The child care costs as of December 2010: the average for daycare cost was \$752, which was an increase of 9.1 per cent over the last year, and the family day home was \$581, which was an increase of 12.2 per cent over the last year, and out of school care charged an average of \$382, which was an increase of 15.1 per cent over the last year.

**8:20**

Okay. I think one of the questions that you'd asked here this evening was about child care, the spaces and programs. As of December 31, 2010, there were 91,416 child care spaces, including 88,093 in licensed and approved child care spaces and 3,323 in kin child care, and these broke down like this: 30,955 in daycare, 18,204 in preschool, 26,890 in out of school care, 11,734 in family day homes, 40 in group family child care, 270 in innovative child care programs, 3,323 in kin child care. As of December 31, 2010, there were 2,450 child care programs in operation, and the breakdown was 647 in daycare, 957 in preschool; 716 in out of school care; 89 family day home agencies, 10 direct care providers, seven in group family child care, 24 in innovative child care.

Children receiving subsidies was another question. As of December 31, 2010, 20,545 children were receiving a subsidy: 10,067 in daycare, 3,467 in family day homes, 19 in group family care, 5,286 in out of school care, 1,111 in stay at home. The current monthly subsidy rates for infants up to 18 months: daycare at \$628 per month, family day home at \$520 per month. For preschoolers 19 months to six years daycare is \$546 per month, family day home \$437 per month, kindergarten out of school care \$546 per month. For children in grades 1 to 6 out of school care was \$310 per month.

Also, the question about children staying overnight. They stay overnight if a placement cannot be located or if they are waiting for a parent, guardian, or caregiver to pick them up. An example would be group home staff from out of region. Children 15 and younger or older children with developmental delays requiring additional support stay in the back children's rooms, and we mentioned what they have at the crisis centre and whatnot, the Edmonton crisis centre. The Edmonton crisis centre does not have beds, but the room does have two couches and a TV. I know you'll be interested in that for the crisis centre here.

There is a large window into the room that allows staff to supervise. The baby room, again, has a bassinet and playpen typically pulled out, placed beside the worker's desk. The worker stays one-to-one with the child in the crisis centre. It goes on: a bathroom with a tub and showers there. Older youth are also with one-to-one staff. For sleeping accommodations they have a mat, a sleeping bag, a pillow. This is for a very short period of time – right? – while they're waiting for places to open or whatever they need for that youth. It's got a whole host of food here listed for children. We could talk about that a bit further if you'd like to.

Now for the front-line workers and vacancies. The ministry's 2011-12 FTE targets, 2,861: allocated to child and family service authorities, 2,478, which is 87 per cent; to the department, 383,

which is 13 per cent. Front-line staff consists of over 1,800 FTEs, which is approximately two-thirds of the ministry's total staff. Since the start of the hiring we've hired approximately 278 front-line staff.

I hope that helps.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Minister.

Would the independent Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark want to take advantage of the 10 minutes back and forth?

**Dr. Sherman:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yeah, back and forth would be good.

Minister, I'd like to thank you for appearing as well as everyone from the ministry. I have to say that you have probably one of the most difficult, most challenging jobs, and I appreciate all the work that all of you do. Having spent 18 years of my life, unfortunately, having to apprehend children on the front lines and seeing the effects of the most difficult things in society on our young, I can certainly appreciate the challenges that you all face.

When a child has a problem, it's actually a community and a family problem. The problems in our children and youth, the problems in our community and our family: they end up in the weakest and the most vulnerable, and those usually are our children. Things that cause me due concern going forward are that low-income young mothers are having babies at 11 times the rate of high-income young mothers between the ages of 15 and 19. We have a baby boom. Unfortunately, we have babies having babies, and many times it's sick babies having sicker babies.

Our mental health rates for our children are going through the roof. Having been the parliamentary assistant to the health minister, the child mental health program was one of the first programs that I had an opportunity to work on. Mental illness presents by age 14 in 50 per cent of our population. It's really a childhood illness. The evidence from Harvard in a conference presented for the developing child is that the damage is actually visible in brain development between the ages of 18 and 24 months, so the damage is actually done pre-conception. Before a mother gets pregnant, the health of the mother determines the epigenetics, the genes that are turned on and off in the child, and if that child is conceived and then born into a very stressful, unhealthy environment, the unhealthy genes are turned on.

With our childhood obesity and diabetes rates going through the roof, our childhood obesity rates have gone from 20 to 29 per cent. The nutrition of our children: they have hypertension at a much earlier age. They have adult diseases. Diseases that we should get in our 40s and 50s, they're getting at age 12 or 14 or 16: type 2 diabetes.

The smoking rates in our children have gone up in the first six months by 50 per cent. Our goal was to get down to 9 per cent. They've actually gone from 12 to 18 per cent recently.

I have very big concerns for your ministry because your needs are going to go through the roof. They're going through the roof right now, through no fault of yours. But I have due concern because at the end of the day, when these young people leave your hands, they turn into adults with that transition from adolescence, you know, 18 to adulthood, and that's where they all fall through the cracks. In medicine there's such a need for mental health workers: psychologists, psychiatrists, mental health nurses. I have first-hand knowledge that it's a major challenge at the Royal Alexandra hospital, where child psychiatry is centralized. We've had major challenges recently getting these children the care that they deserve, that they require because, you know, it's hard enough having enough doctors, especially mental health physicians, for these children. It's a very big challenge.

In the aboriginal population my big concern is that the high school completion rate is so low. The suicide rate is 700 times that of the norm. The incarceration rate of the aboriginal community is just unreal, as is the homelessness rate. The effects of illiteracy, poverty, addictions, and mental illness: these are the root causes of people being homeless. With the lack of supports for mental health in the community what we're finding is that many of these young people have interactions with the law. Record numbers of kids that we have to send to EYOC or YYC: these numbers are going up.

Recently the federal government wanted to put 14-year-olds in jail. I agree with putting bad people in jail. There are some really bad people out there, and they need to be punished. For many of these 14-year-old kids this was damage that was done to them in early childhood. We have incarceration of the mentally ill, and after we have incarceration of the mentally ill, the supports for addictions and mental health treatment for them is paltry. When they are discharged from the prison system, they're discharged to the street with no treatment or follow-up.

These addictions and mental health issues are actually childhood issues; they're childhood illnesses. We in the health care system have not even made a dent on the prevention side.

**8:30**

My question to you. With this tsunami of sick young children coming down the pipeline – I understand everything that you're doing and the challenges that you face today – you have severe, severe challenges coming two years, three years, five years, 10 years down the pipeline. What are your plans on the prevention end, on preventing the need for you to require the doubling and tripling of your resources in the future to look after the problem that we have coming up?

**The Chair:** Madam Minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm going to ask for the courtesy of Edmonton-Meadowlark. If I could just put something on record for the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona just before I answer your question, I'd appreciate that.

The question you asked was the number of infants in daycare from December 31, 2010, that were zero to 18 months, and I can tell you that that answer is 4,437.

Also, there was a question regarding group home capacity, and the number of approved group homes was 242 in January of 2011. The previous comparables had been in January 2008, 251; in 2009, 253; and in 2010, 262. As of February 28, 2011, there were approximately 1,380 spaces. I know that you had an interest in that as well.

To the Member for Edmonton-Meadowlark, I know that you're keenly interested. I've heard you discuss this previously on children and youth and about their health, about their mental health, their physical health, especially relative to nutrition and lack of exercise, and about the parenting skills that parents have and, you know, how we can assist parents with that.

The ministry has been phenomenal in what they've provided for prevention. We have in the estimates in the budget book there – I know that you would have seen it – the 2011-12 estimate for early intervention and early childhood development. That was \$36,405,000, and the 2010-11 forecast was \$35,566,000, so there's a 2.4 per cent increase in that budget. That would be approximately an \$839,000 increase. Now, the minimal increase of about a million dollars, or 2.4 per cent, to maintain the program: it's important that that was kept in place and actually had an increase, especially in the way that budgets can be.



The development and implementation of early childhood development programming across Alberta is what supports the healthy development of children and their readiness for school. Examples include – and I know you’ll be interested in this, hon. member – parent education programs, parent-child literacy programs, early learning programs for at-risk children, screening for the identification of children not meeting developmental milestones, and parent resource libraries. When you take all of those and especially if people utilize those, whether it’s the educators, whether it’s the people in the health care field, whether it’s the families themselves, that would assist greatly. With just these alone, these examples, the primary clients for the early childhood development area and early intervention, which is about prevention – right? – are expectant mums, children zero to six years old, and their caregivers and their families.

This includes funding for the community initiatives program, CIP, which I know you’re familiar with. Just to recap for those that are listening, communities will have the capacity for shared planning and delivery of services that promote the well-being of children, youth, and families. The community initiatives program is not achieved through the delivery of specific services but through ministry support. That’s what it’s about, right? It’s reaching out and supporting those that are in need of, as I said, parenting skills or just the actual nutrition for their children or exercise.

The ministry support in facilitating collaboration and enhanced partnerships out in the communities, where training can occur in the community for people that will deliver the services, results in delivery of effective programs and services. Those are all related to prevention and, I would say, even preservation and protection, those three Ps.

The purpose of the community initiatives program is to avoid the need for individuals to access the child protection services, for example, when other alternative services are readily available in the ministry, as with other ministries. That would go to what you were saying about the federal government, you know, with the 14-year-olds and what you’d indicated. I didn’t know that until you’d mentioned that here tonight. This is very much what this would do: assist families so that their 14-year-old would not even be in that position where they’d have an interaction with the law and then on into the remand centre or in through the courts.

This is done by educating and informing the community of the services available from the ministry, as I said, and from other organizations because it’s all about partnerships. That includes other organizations, whether they’re in Justice, whether they’re in Health, even with seniors, which I know you’d be interested in. We saw seniors in hospital recently on TV, where they were part of the cuddle program. It just starts right from day one, doesn’t it, about how people need assistance. It’s also working with and ensuring that communities are involved in the identification of the issues. The issues are what you mentioned, and they’re also, you know, much more than that. It’s also in the development and planning of preventative activities and initiatives. This program also informs the community. They publicize their programs. They publicize the services available.

They have the organizations out in the community. I know that in our area we have Heart of the Northeast. We have different wellness centres. This is what this is all about. It’s working with the communities to identify the issues, as I said, to help people become active participants in the community in planning for the delivery of the services or in developing the initiatives that will address the issues. These activities are undertaken to ensure access to services is provided before child protection services or the law or some other system within the community would become in-

involved and where that might be the only viable option. Before it gets there, this community incentive program will assist.

Funding for the Youth Secretariat is also included in this program. If you’ve met with the youth on the Youth Secretariat, they’re a very dynamic group of young thinkers that really have shown us the way to respond to what the needs are for them in the community, especially where the challenges and the barriers are for them.

The other area, too, that I think assists parents – in fact, I know it does, not just think it does – in a huge way out in the community is our parent link centres. I know you’re familiar with those because I’ve been in your community with you, and we had that discussion about parent link centres and about the goodness of the people that we had visited within your community. I can still recall what amazing people they were with what they were offering for the people within the community. I remember that all they needed was, you know, some assistance with some computers. Hopefully, they got that. But you’d know what that’s about.

The parent links are an extension of that kind of service out in the community to assist families. There are 46 parent link centres located in the 10 child and family services authorities. They serve over 160 communities through satellite sites and outreach services. Now, people often say: “Okay. If you have 46 parent link centres and we know the aboriginal population and the needs of youth and families in the aboriginal population, how many are there in five of our aboriginal centres?” We have Awo Taan in Calgary; the Métis Calgary child and family services; Bent Arrow in Edmonton, which is just an amazing place – I think you’d be familiar with Bent Arrow here in Edmonton – the aboriginal PLC in Stony Plain; and region 10 Métis settlements.

They offer programs – and I’m just going to name them – that would relate to what it is you’re looking for. They offer programs in early childhood development, parent education, family support, information and referral, and developmental screening. More importantly, not just about the programs, what really occurs when parents take their children to a parent link centre, no matter what age the child is, is that they’re taught parenting skills. What really occurs, too, though, is the connection. Some that go to the parent link centres are very isolated in the community. They develop connections amongst one another, and they create that bond. They assist one another in the community as they get to know one another. That’s what the beauty is of what parent link centres can do. In one parent link centre that I’d been to here in Edmonton, they were teaching parents all about cooking, going back to nutrition and the needs of the child.

**8:40**

**The Chair:** Minister, I’m sorry, but your 10 minutes have just disappeared.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Sorry. Thank you for the question.

**Dr. Sherman:** Your ministry is a symptom of a greater societal problem. One area where I believe that we can improve is just in basic access to basic primary care. Fifteen per cent to 20 per cent of Albertans don’t have access to basic primary care, and if you have it, you have to wait a long time to get it. You don’t get much interaction with primary care when you do get it. I’m just going to throw a couple of thoughts and suggestions and ideas out there.

One, all the children in your custody: I’d like to know what kind of access they have to primary care, especially the young pregnant women. Part of the problem we see is that they present for their first prenatal checkup in the emergency room at 25 weeks in their pregnancy. We had 50 pregnant women out there last year with

syphilis. By the time they present, the damage is done to these kids, not only from syphilis but from all the other issues of maternal health.

Secondly, the school system. I wonder what kind of connections there are with the school system to your ministry. To be honest, I'd love to put your ministry out of business. I think that should be all our goal, to have the need for your ministry not to exist. I'd like to cut your funding, not for the sake of reducing your need but reducing your need to exist. But I don't think that's going to happen in a big rush.

Nutrition is a big problem. We have a chair in aboriginal nutrition on the university campus, Dr. Gita Sharma, a wonderful woman. I wonder if you've had a chance to get a presentation from her on the economics of nutrition. She's done wonderful work in the aboriginal community along with Dr. André Corriveau in the north. I would suggest that if you haven't had a chance to talk to her, if you can get her into your ministry, that would be very useful for society. It will save money, and it will improve the nutrition of our kids.

Exercise. An idle mind is the devil's workshop. Our kids need to be kept busy, and they need to be exercised. We have too many of our kids on drugs. I believe that as a physician I've always said: before we drug a kid, we've got to unplug a kid. You have to unplug them from everything that they're doing; you know, television and the Internet and all this. When a child gets ill, it's a family and community and societal problem. The village needs to focus on that child. It's really the village and the family that actually has the problem.

Thank you for coming to Edmonton-Meadowlark, Minister, a little while ago. It encouraged us to put 33 community organizations together. We started an organization called West Edmonton Synchronicity. When you and I were working together, I believe we were the sparkplug, but they've actually carried this group to where they will co-operate together with the neighbourhood and the community and the business organizations in a village sort of concept for community capacity building. This is really a community problem when children are ill.

For me the big issues are education and nutrition for children. It's not an ER problem. It's actually a health care system problem that sits in the ER. The health care system is a greater symptom of a societal problem, what we all term the social determinants of health: the economic participation of the parents, which is the poverty level of the parents, and the emotional environment of the children and the nutrition of the children. I'd appreciate it if your ministry is able to link more with the schools and the health system to help these children, to reduce the need for you to get these children.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. member.

We will now unfortunately have to move on to the next questioner, and that would be Edmonton-Rutherford, please.

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Good evening, Minister and members of your department staff. I join my colleagues in thanking you for being here this evening and also in thanking you for the very important and, I think, the very challenging work that you're doing each and every day. It's much appreciated. The setting is a little odd. I'm actually speaking to the back of your head in this particular configuration.

I don't want spend a lot of time, Minister, but there is one area I'd like to hear you talk a little about, and that's the area of the family support for children with disabilities program that's offered by your department. I know that program is very highly valued,

particularly by parents of children who suffer from autism. I have a number in my constituency that have come to talk with me over the last three years, and I have followed them through a number of the processes that are involved with being a part of this program, including the assessment process, the process of contracting for funding on an annual basis, the challenges some of them face in terms of co-ordinating care from the various providers that are engaged by them through funding provided through this program. I must say that all of the families I've talked to are extremely grateful for the opportunity not just to access the funding but to have the flexibility to design a program and to select service providers and caregivers that will help them meet outcomes that they themselves have established by and for and in conjunction with their children.

One of the areas that I'm hearing a lot about: I would appreciate your comments, first of all, I guess, on the process of the multi-provider assessment. MDT, I believe, are the initials. One thing I would appreciate is a bit of an explanation as to how that process is conducted and, in particular, whether you've encountered any concerns, as I have in my constituency, that in not all cases do those providers doing the assessment, which determines eligibility for funding, have the opportunity to meet the children involved and, perhaps, get to understand the specifics of their case in as sufficient detail as their parents would like to have. That is one concern that has been raised, and I'd appreciate a bit of feedback on that either now or subsequently in writing.

The other area that I would like to talk about really relates to, I guess, cross-ministry work that you would be involved in with the Department of Seniors and Community Supports, and that's the area of transition between this program and the persons with developmental disabilities program that some Albertans become eligible for when they reach the age of 18.

I have talked to a number of parents of children around that 18-year-old mark, maybe a year in advance, who are certainly thinking ahead and planning and working diligently to try to determine what the needs of their children might be when they reach that age, which I'm sure you would acknowledge is somewhat of an arbitrary marker in terms of an individual's readiness to move to a higher level of independence. The parents are planning for their children to become more independent, to enter early adulthood, but they are not always encountering, at least for the constituents that I've talked to, a particularly seamless transition between the services that you're providing through your programs and what they may be eligible for through PDD. This can range from things like respite care for parents of children over 18 who are going to be continuing to live at home to access to professionals such as psychologists and other professionals that deliver care all the way through to housing and other supports that they will need.

What I would say, Minister – and I'm sure you appreciate this better than anyone in the Chamber this evening – is that the parents that come to me and that I'm sure come to everyone in the House here want nothing more and nothing less for their children than any parent does. I had the opportunity to meet with a group of about 20 families recently through the Autism Family Network here in Edmonton, and I must say that the overriding concern that came out of that meeting as I listened to each story – there was one concern that was repeated over and over, and that was the parent or the guardian or just the family in general worrying about what would happen to their child or, more often, their adult child when the family was no longer around, when the parent was no longer going to be alive to look out and to advocate for his or her child.

8:50

I would be interested in a bit more description around the FSCD program if you can provide it and also just an indication and perhaps assurance of what cross-ministry efforts might be under way to try to improve that transition from FSCD to the PDD program. I think that's a very important issue.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I'm going to ask the hon. member if he doesn't mind if I respond to one other question that the Member for Edmonton-Strathcona had asked, and that was the overall proportions that were represented between nonprofit versus profit child care programs.

**Ms Notley:** Publicly traded.

**Mrs. Fritz:** I don't think I have the publicly traded, but you'd asked both. I can give you the one, and that was that in Alberta they've been consistent over the past three years. It's 55 per cent for the not-for-profit compared to 45 per cent for the profit. I hope that helps. I'll get you a further answer than that if you need a further answer.

Back to your question. This is one of the most important questions, I think, that can be asked, especially for our families that require support for their children with disabilities. To the member, Mr. Chairman, the area of autism is one that's been, you know, very publicized, well discussed.

As you know, autism is a spectrum disorder that affects each child differently. We provide a wide range of supports and services for families of children with disabilities, and for autistic children we know that approximately 30 per cent of our program caseload is families of children with autism, but over 45 per cent of the FSCD budget is spent on supports for families of children with autism. The average level of support for a family whose child has autism is \$22,000 per year, which ranges from \$5,000 per year to as high as \$400,000 per year. We have had some experience with knowing that – as I said, it's just very unique to each family what the needs are and what the costs are. That's why – it's such a wide spectrum – we don't just target a certain amount of dollars to each child. It's because of the unique needs.

What the member asked is critical in that once the child reaches 18, how are they going to transition to supports through our PDD program for persons with developmental disabilities? We work very closely with the ministry of seniors to assist with that because we recognize that transition for children with disabilities and their families requires proactive planning. Working with families, we identify their needs. We create plans for their child's transition to adulthood and relevant adult services. As I said, especially for children with autism: they're unique, so their adult services as well need to be relevant. It's generally through the PDD program, and that's part of our standard case planning.

People often say: you wait so late to make that happen. It's as if we know that the child's 18th birthday is coming, and then three months before the birthday we begin to plan, but that's not the case. You'll find that caseworkers, caregivers work closely with children and their families most of their lives, and in working with them, they know how much transitioning support they need. They walk the walk with them, many staff, as they're planning for them because for some caregivers they've just become so close. It can start as young as 14, but generally around the age of 16 is what I've seen. I've talked with workers who've, you know, explained to me why they become so involved with the development of that plan.

Can we do better? Yes, we can always do better. We're learning as we go. I can tell you that our FSCD caseworkers and our parents, in discussing the anticipated needs and relevant adult services as they move forward to making the next steps, are learning about what can actually be supports and services that are more generalized for the population of children that are in FSCD as a whole.

As I said about the transition planning, that can assist the parent even with participation in the community, their postsecondary education, their employment. The plan is reviewed annually, and it's reviewed six months prior to the child turning 18. People in the community can become involved as well, Mr. Chairman, whether it's neighbours or whether it's the kinship: the aunts, uncles, people involved in the family. There's a lot that goes into assisting that child into becoming an adult, but hopefully in formalizing the transitions, they are more prepared. Hopefully, in the service that we are offering, we are assisting them in the way that they need it the most. For a lot of children anyway, overall, that's the independence that happens as they move from home or move on to postsecondary, but children that had family support for their disabilities still require support through the AISH program or other programs that are in the seniors ministry.

Now, I can also let you know about our multidisciplinary team. I've had a lot of experience with this in my ministry, and they are outstanding as well. The multidisciplinary team is a team of health care professionals, Mr. Chairman. It's a team that assists through our FSCD program, and it's the team, when they're making decisions, that assists with the making of decisions about providing specialized services for children with severe disabilities.

Now, in 2009 there was a review of that process, and it was found that overall families' experiences of the process had been positive, but the review did provide several recommendations. I think it was seven recommendations, actually. It says several, but I think it was seven recommendations. Those recommendations were approved unanimously, and we've gone ahead and begun to implement the recommendations.

In December 2010 we updated the policy. We clarified the MDT process to support more consistent and transparent decision-making and improved information sharing with the families, which will result in better supports for families. We also ensured that the service providers would play a more integral role in the MDT process in the service planning for children. So when a family is presenting through the MDT process, they may not present in person; they may present in writing. It's up to whatever they engage with with their workers as to what that presentation would be, but we're ensuring that it's timely and it's consistent regardless of where the family lives.

I just had experience with a family in the very far north that were accessing the MDT process. The question they had: would we assist them with transportation in coming to Edmonton? The answer was: absolutely. It was the first time for this family to be accessing the service. I know that in the call back that I got from them, they were pleased with the assistance that they got even when they arrived here in Edmonton.

We also support the family in preparing for and participating in the MDT process as well, overall, because it can be frightening for parents, and they want to do the very best they can for their child. The staff is very experienced. They're a very caring staff. They know the family well. They have improved their information sharing, the staff, and the communication with the parents and service providers. They've ensured that the decisions that are made are consistent and transparent and that they clarify eligibility. They've clarified the eligibility criteria, which is good, and provided additional explanation for decisions about the provision of specialized

services. Now, because the MDT is a team, though, if that team makes a recommendation, it doesn't necessarily have to be followed. The families like that, too, and so do the workers because it's not prescriptive then.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr. Horne:** Do we have a bit of time remaining, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Four and a half minutes.

9:00

**Mr. Horne:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just a couple of thoughts, Minister. There may or may not be time to respond. Thank you very much for the answers to those questions. I'm sure they'll be of great interest to the families I've been working with in my constituency.

Two points. You talked about the work that you do with Seniors and Community Supports in terms of the transition to the PDD program. Another area that was raised in this meeting that I referred to earlier was the need also to link with housing. We've done a lot in Alberta to develop housing opportunities for people with physical disabilities, and also I think we've done a lot more in recent months to help those suffering from mental illness to access appropriate housing and the associated supports.

A number of the parents of what I'll call adult children who are approaching, you know, 30 and 40 years of age that I've spoken to are very interested in accessing housing and related supports for their adult children with autism. When they talk to me about being worried, their overriding worry being what will happen to their adult child when they're no longer able to look out for them, it really doesn't seem to have very much at all to do with accessing, necessarily, the same level of support in terms of dollars. It has to do with accessing services that will help build a sufficient level of independence so that when the parent or the family is no longer present, a caseworker or someone else who is trained and in a position to be a support or a mentor to that adult suffering with autism is sufficient to allow that individual to live as fulfilling a life as is possible, as independent a life as is possible.

I'll just leave that thought with you in terms of the need, also, in planning for the future, particularly around that critical age of 16 that you mentioned, to look at housing opportunities as well.

The other point I wanted to make is that in talking to parents of children in the FSCD program, many of them, while they're grateful for the flexibility that's available, are also dealing with many, many providers. I know one family, in particular, that has twin boys, both with autism, around eight, nine years of age now. Between them I believe there are something like 14 to 15 different service providers at any given point in time. My understanding is that currently the funding doesn't cover what this particular parent called brokering, you know, some of the administrative costs involved not in doing work the parent should be doing but in basic case management activity that's required to co-ordinate the services that are provided by these many different professionals. I'm wondering if there is any funding within your program that's available to assist with that or if it's something you might consider for the future.

Thank you.

**The Chair:** You've got about a minute and 20 seconds, Minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to address the whole area of housing. In the way that the member asked the question, it shows you that we work closely together with other

ministries. The minister for housing, I know, would be very interested in your comments this evening about the need for housing, especially for children that are making that transition to adulthood to have housing. We can discuss that because along with the affordable housing program is the rent supplement program.

You can see that the ministries tie in with one another, whether it's the housing ministry, the seniors ministry with AISH and the supports that the seniors ministry has, as we transition the young person to the next step. The co-ordination of programs and providers and the organizations that people need, depending, as I said, on the unique needs of the child, is very much under discussion with the ministry. We're very well aware of that occurring. I can tell you that, hopefully, next year as we're standing here, we're able to say to you that we've made a difference in that area in this way.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We'll now move back to Edmonton-Strathcona, followed by Lethbridge-East.

**Ms. Notley:** Thank you very much. I think I will just continue with the 10-minute process because I still have a few more questions that I need to get through. I do want to begin by thanking the minister and also her staff for providing so many answers thus far. I think there are maybe one or two outstanding but, overall, really good information, and I do appreciate that. Also, thank you to the other members who didn't object to you using up a bit of their time answering my questions as well. That was also good.

In one of the responses that you gave in relation to my question about the spaces for zero to 18-month-old children, you did give me a number, and I just want to clarify – and maybe give me that answer when we get to that – whether you were talking about the actual number of children in that setting or whether you were talking spaces. It may be the same number – I'm not sure – but if I could just get that clarified.

I think the only one outstanding that I could find was the questions around accreditation funding. If it takes longer, if you want to get back to me on that, that's fine.

I'd like to quickly switch to a less pleasant area but one that I think I've probably asked about in the last couple of years every time, which is basically trying to get a current number with respect to the issues that are typically identified in your annual report, and that is, in particular, the number of serious injuries or fatalities of children that are in care over the particular period in time. I know you did give me the answer to that up to March of 2010, and I'm wondering if you can provide me with the answer to that with respect to the period up to today from March of 2010 and if you could just identify, when you do, the month and the region within which those incidents occurred.

Related to that is that my staff went through the reports of the Child and Youth Advocate. We have fabulous staff, and they're trying to do research for a whole bunch of different ministries at the same time, so if this was an error, I figure I should just put it out there and find that out. What he did was that he went through the number of what were referred to as mandatory notifications to the Child and Youth Advocate over the course of several years. I do understand the mandatory notifications include a number of things, a significant number of which, though, are allegations of abuse although certainly not exclusively. So it's a measure when you're looking for measures.

He has indicated to me that in '05-06 we had 676, in '06-07 there were 1,042, in '07-08 there were 1,068, in '08-09 there were 1,032, and in '09-10 there were 1,174. So although '09-10 shows an increase, which we should be concerned about, what was par-

ticularly concerning was what I think he added up in the first and second quarters in the quarterly reports. There may have been a miscalculation, so this is why I ask. The total he provides me with is 1,301 mandatory notifications, and that appears to come simply from the first two quarterly reports from the Child and Youth Advocate. So, obviously, that shows quite a substantial jump if those numbers are accurate. I'm wondering if you could let me know whether those numbers are accurate and what is going on there.

I'd like to flip over to the issue of women's shelters. There's already been a bit of conversation about that from the Member for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. I want to just follow up on that a little bit. I heard from the minister that there was some slight additional funding that went to that centre for the purposes of programming and, I think, sexual assault counselling services or support services, but my notes suggest that 30 years ago there were 35 beds in this shelter and that at this point we still have 35 beds in this shelter. I'm just wondering if that can be confirmed one way or the other because, for obvious reasons, that's concerning given the tremendous increase in the population there as well as Alberta's relatively disturbing measures on the issue of domestic violence relative to the rest of the country.

**9:10**

As well on the issue of funding, I have been provided information that core funding – core funding – for women's shelters, i.e. operational costs and salaries, has essentially been frozen since 2005, so I'm wondering if I can be given some information on that issue, whether core funding has increased or not increased. Then provide me with your definition of core funding in so doing. It's, obviously, a very serious concern, that whole area. We note, of course, that even with the \$400,000 increase we're still not keeping up with population and inflation. Certainly, the year prior to that we didn't do that either, so I'm very concerned that we're falling behind on this issue.

Another area that I was hoping to touch on was the issue of child and family enhancement agreements and then also the number of children in care. We had a good conversation, if I recall, last year where we talked about the two streams, essentially, under the act. There is the protection, or the guardianship, stream, where children who are at risk are taken into care in some fashion. I appreciate that the nature of the care also has different categories within it. They're either taken into care or there is an enhancement agreement. We had talked last time about our concerns around, you know, sort of the measurables with respect to enhancement and the performance indicators with respect to enhancement agreements. I'm wondering if I can be provided with a raw number of the number of enhancement agreements that the ministry enters into now and if you would like to provide to me, as well, how that compares to those measures over the past couple of years, shall we say, prior to that.

How am I doing? Oh, I've got to hurry. I know there were a couple of other really important questions I had to get into.

I appreciate the information that you provided with respect to what was happening in relation to the average fees for child care spaces. With the increases ranging from 9 to 15 per cent, I'm wondering if the minister could comment on what the implications of that were for the child care subsidy and what would happen with respect to people that are receiving that subsidy. Is it anticipated, then, that people who are eligible for the child care subsidy would be paying more out of pocket, generally speaking, or is there some cap in relation to what can be charged to parents who are eligible for the child care subsidy? I don't believe I saw that the subsidies were going up at that rate, so that was a question that I had.

As well, you provided the answer to my question from last year around the foster care rates related to the age of the children and various different categories, and I'm just wondering if you could advise whether those rates are intended to go up this year at all for families who make that huge contribution.

I was advised last year around May or June that the social workers who were employed by ESHIP had had their program terminated, and that was roughly 22 people in region 6. They, in theory, were to have had their function transferred to Alberta Health Services, but we have been unable to track that transfer. Certainly, the communication with the employees was such that there was no ability for them to simply transition to a different ministry; rather, that they needed to terminate their employment and then apply over at health depending on how health managed to deal with it.

I appreciate that part of it is health, but obviously the work that these 22 people were doing in schools was profoundly valuable to helping these kids in a preventative manner within the school system. Having those 22 people in the school system disappear: it's really very important that they reappear in some other fashion. I'm wondering if we can get some explanation of how many positions reappeared in September of 2010.

Now I guess I have to sit down. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Member.  
Madam Minister.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to talk about the accreditation piece because that was from the previous question. What we have for child care accreditation, as you saw in the estimate, was \$82,720,000, and the forecast is \$74,034,000. That's an 11.7 per cent increase, \$8,686,000. Now, the increase will address the forecasted increase in the number of new licensed daycare and out of school care programs resulting from the success of our creating child care choices plan. The movement of programs from preaccreditation to accreditation status: the programs that meet the higher standards are eligible for increased grant funding rates. In April of 2009 accreditation was expanded to include licensed out of school care programs.

There are currently 135 out of 616 licensed out of school care programs that are meeting the higher quality child care standard. Eighty-five per cent of our licensed daycares and approved family day homes are now accredited, and 95 per cent of our licensed daycares and approved family day homes are participating in accreditation. The accreditation program, fiscal 2010-11 to date: in total of the 85 per cent, 539 out of 636 of the licensed daycare programs and approved family day homes are accredited, of the daycare program it's 463 out of the 544, and for family day home agencies it's 76 out of 92.

Now, accreditation was expanded to include the licensed out of school care programs. That was effective April 1, 2009. It wasn't as recent as some may think. As of January 31, 2011, 22 per cent, which is 135 out of 616, of the programs are accredited. Accreditation gives parents with children needing child care an additional assistance to help them identify programs with standards of excellence over and above our regulated requirements.

You had asked earlier about the grants that are available to the participating programs. It's a staff support funding grant. Wage top-ups are paid to staff over and above what employers pay. People ask: well, how much would the wage top-ups be? There is an actual difference if you're an employee. When you look at your cheque, you'll see what the government of Alberta through Children and Youth Services provides as a top-up and what the employer provides. For example, in an administrative position it's approximately \$6.62 per hour, if you're accredited, that's provided

by the government of Alberta, and if you're not accredited, it's \$4.42 per hour. The good news, though, is that so many are moving toward accreditation. Eighty-five per cent and the percentages I've put here are a good percentage. It's a good percentage, but we want it at 100 per cent.

The quality funding grant is also available through accreditation, and that's to improve the quality program and resources for the staff and the children. That's the quality toys, the equipment, and the supplies that we said earlier. The grant is \$4,000 per year if you're preaccredited and \$7,500 a year if you're accredited.

The professional development grant is to support staff education and participation in workshops and conferences, and that grant is up to a thousand per year if you're preaccredited, and it remains the same if you are accredited as an accredited program.

Once the program receives accreditation, they're eligible for the differences that I've just outlined for you in the grants.

I hope that's what you were looking for.

**Ms Notley:** I was looking for the amounts of money: how much going to wage top-up, how much going to the grants, how many of the grants going to publicly traded in terms of dollar amounts.

9:20

**Mrs. Fritz:** Yes. So the dollar amounts I will get for you.

Now, the shelter program: the definition of core funding is right here. The core operational funding is for crisis intervention, referral, and outreach to community. That's the core operational funding. I know the Sunshine centre in Calgary was looking for core funding, and that was for core funding for maintenance. It was for ongoing operation as well. I don't know if that's the centre that you were referring to. The funding covers as well staffing and administration and the facility-related costs in utilities and beds. In 2008 79 additional beds were funded with \$1.7 million.

There is still ongoing funding, though, to shelters. I know I was just with the Minister of Justice in Slave Lake last week, I think it was, or the week before but just recently, where we provided \$250,000 to a shelter there that the local community had established in a home, where they had nine beds. They'd worked hard to ensure, you know, that the shelter was safe, and it was available to the community and the outlying area. We provided \$250,000 further funding to what they already had for the cost, and we also provided a \$70,000 grant from the ministry for that home. So we still are providing that kind of funding.

What's really important for shelters, too, is that next stage of housing. That next stage of housing has been referred to as second-stage shelters. I know that there's work being done between shelters that apply, like the Family Crisis Society in Fort McMurray, that applied to the minister of housing for the affordable housing dollars, so that they qualify for those dollars to assist with the housing as people leave shelters after 21 days, assist with the housing for up to a year, whatever the community and the organization would like to see established.

I think the minister had mentioned that there's a hundred million dollars in the affordable housing, but I can't say that for sure here right now. It was approximately that that I thought I heard in question period today.

So I'm hoping that's the care and the shelters.

**Ms Notley:** I had some specific questions, but maybe it would be better if I just read it over and you can answer so that I don't have to interrupt.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Okay. So there was that.

Also, there was one other response, too, and that was to the ESHIP. I saw that here as well. What I learned from the staff that are here with me this evening is that the staff that had looked for positions that were to be available in health to transfer to: those staff that wanted the positions were able to achieve that in health.

**Ms Notley:** Were there the same number of positions?

**Mrs. Fritz:** I think there were 22 staff, was it? Twenty-two staff, they're saying, but not all 22 staff wanted to move to health to work. So the positions were available for them, but not all people wanted to work there.

**Ms Notley:** Are the same number of people still doing the job?

**Mrs. Fritz:** In health?

**Ms Notley:** Exactly.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Yes. Positions were available. The funding was transferred from this department to health for those positions, yes.

The serious injuries. I think it was: how many children were seriously injured while receiving child protection services?

**Ms Notley:** Or fatalities.

**Mrs. Fritz:** For serious injuries there were 11 children who were in care who had received court-ordered supervision who sustained an injury that led to an overnight hospitalization. That's one of the definitions of a serious injury. One child swallowed a coin, one child fell out of their stroller, one child overdosed due to a prescription medication error, one youth attempted to self-harm by strangulation, two youth overdosed on drugs, and five youth were involved in physical altercations. That's from April 1, 2010, as I said, to February 28, 2011. The age breakdown for the above injuries: under one year was none, one to six years two children, seven to 12 years one child, and 12 to 18 years eight children. We do report that publicly in the ministry.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Minister.

We now move for the last five minutes to Lethbridge-East, please.

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. I don't speak quite as quickly as my colleague from Calgary-Varsity, but I will try to get it all in. We're speaking about youth, and it's just been drawn to my attention – Madam Minister, I'm not sure if you were in Lethbridge on the cabinet tour, because I wasn't there. You were? Okay. The other thing. I know that you visited a number of times, and I'm not sure if you've ever visited 5th on 5th, which is a very, very good organization.

It really has had a marvellous success rate in turning around young lives. Many of them go on to secondary education. In 2010 they had 15,000 visits, which was up from 12,000. It's been drawn to my attention that they've had cuts to their funding. I believe that funding came out of Alberta Employment and Immigration, but these are still your youth. I understand how there's an awful lot of cross-ministry. I guess my question would be: who made the decisions? What was the justification? The organization was just told that the cut was coming on February 28, and I believe that they were expecting their money in May. It's 40 per cent of their budget, which is pretty substantial.

One of the things with the youth connections program, which would be directly affected, is that they have access to computers. They have access to the job board. There are casual labour programs that they help get these kids, who are undereducated and who could well be labelled street kids, some of them. Certainly, some of them

end up couch surfing, et cetera. They also get employment counselling, but I think anyone that's worked with people all know that you may start off as employment counselling, but it's going to end up in personal counselling. I think that that's probably one of the strongest points, where they actually can make connections and create those relationships that are imperative for people to trust. Then, actually, they can go forward with that.

I'm very concerned with that piece of information. I don't know whether you knew that ahead of time or not. I'll just let you quickly respond to that because I'm just amazed that something that is as successful as what we call 5th on 5th would be cut. We're going to have an awful lot of kids wandering that really just need that extra care, and 5th on 5th has been very successful.

**Mrs. Fritz:** When did that happen?

**Ms Pastoor:** Well, my information is that they learned February 28 that they wouldn't be receiving 40 per cent of their budget. But, as I say, my understanding is that it's the money out of Employment and Immigration. I know it's not your budget, but these are your kids, in a way, that are moving up and that are the ones that are really going to require it. These are the kids that are going to cost us in the end. More often than not these children's problems are really more mental health than they are physical. Some of them may be a little bit developmentally delayed mentally, but these are children that can easily be worked with and brought along. Some, as I say, go on to secondary education, but others can actually find their way through trades. I guess maybe there's not an answer required, but I just wanted to make sure that you were aware of that because 40 per cent is a huge cut.

Thank you.

**Mrs. Fritz:** Thank you. I'm pleased to respond, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for bringing that to my attention. I can tell you that this ministry is not responsible for 5th on 5th, as you indicated. It's not within my budget. It is concerning that a budget is cut by 40 per cent, though, for an organization. That sounds to me, by what you've said for your community, hon. member, as something that should be looked into. You know which ministry is responsible.

I can tell you this, though. We have good programs that are in place to assist our youth. We have a Youth Secretariat, an advisory group of youth. Also, for youth we have in place bursaries, our advancing futures bursary. We have approximately \$7.13 million, or 7 per cent, of our program budget. That does assist a bit, but I don't know if it will help your youth.

9:30

**Ms Pastoor:** Thank you. I'm hoping my numbers are right because it's pretty substantial.

**The Chair:** I would now like to thank everyone for attending tonight. Thank you, Minister, and all your staff for your diligence.

Just a reminder for anyone that didn't get their questions answered. I'm sure the minister is willing to file some written responses either in the Assembly here or through the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly.

This meeting is adjourned now that we have considered the estimates under Government Motion 5 for Children and Youth Services.

Thank you very much, and good evening.

[The committee adjourned at 9:31 p.m.]







