

Title: Wednesday, December 3, 2003 Public Accounts Committee

Date: 03/12/03

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like to call the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please.

To the members, there has been an agenda circulated. Are there any questions concerning the agenda?

Mr. Goudreau: I'll move approval.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Goudreau.

Could I also now seek approval of the minutes of the November 26 meeting as circulated, please?

Mr. Cenaiko: So moved.

The Chair: Thank you.

Today on behalf of all members of the committee I would like to welcome the Hon. Iris Evans, Minister of Children's Services, and her staff, but before we hear from the minister and from the Auditor General, we should quickly go around and introduce ourselves. Perhaps this morning we will start with the Member for Edmonton-Centre.

[The following members introduced themselves: Ms Blakeman, Mr. Cenaiko, Ms DeLong, Mr. Goudreau, Mrs. Jablonski, Mr. Lukaszuk, Mr. MacDonald, Mr. Ouellette, and Dr. Taft]

Mrs. Dacyshyn: Corinne Dacyshyn, the committee clerk.

[The following staff of the Auditor General's office introduced themselves: Mr. Dumont, Mr. Dunn, Mr. Hoffman, and Mr. Wylie]

Ms Evans: Iris Evans, Children's Services.

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Mr. Goodman, Mr. Henke, Mr. Meade, and Ms Tyler]

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any additional staff members, hon. minister, that you would like to introduce?

Ms Evans: Yes, please. I would ask that they stand because I'm not exactly sure of their positions. They're a dream team. We've got a new position here.

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Ms Fiset-Cassidy, Ms George, Ms Haunholter, and Ms Hutchinson]

The Chair: Thank you. If they would like to participate at any time in assisting the minister or the other staff in answering questions from the members, please feel free to do so.

At this time if you have any brief opening remarks, hon. minister, in regard to your portfolio, you are very welcome. Then we'll hear perhaps briefly from Mr. Dunn before we get to questions from the members.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. I gather we haven't been here for two years, so there may be questions that you've had in your mind for some time, and we look forward to answering those questions.

I want to just comment on a couple of fronts. First of all, I'd like to thank the Auditor General for the excellent work by the staff of the Auditor General. I think this is one ministry that has really benefited from a good and positive working relationship. We are approaching problems together as problems that we're looking for solutions, and I'm very pleased with the dialogue. I've personally had the benefit of speaking with the Auditor General about the work that we've done and with Ken Hoffman as well and understand clearly, as clearly as I can, some of the ways that we need to improve, so we're very happy to have them with us here today and have their advice on a 24/7, 365 days a year basis.

I'm also very happy that with the reorganization of Children's Services, we have got our Children's Services alignment somewhat strategically relocated from the last time we were here. I think it will help people in Alberta communities to understand that community expectations, needs can fall through Phil Goodman, that child welfare services and all those things that relate to permanency, planning, and adoptions can fall through Bill Meade, through strategic supports, finance, and those supports for our communities as well as for the department and relationships there can fall through Keray Henke and also through our deputy, who has done, I think, an excellent job of networking through the Alberta children and youth initiative, which is, as you know, our partnership with at least seven other ministries and Treasury that gives us the capacity to deliver programs for children, youth, and families.

In the 2002-03 year our budget increased by \$25 million. It was \$672 million. As you know, we're now over \$700 million.

The accomplishments in our 2002-03 annual report are listed and help fulfill our three core businesses; in other words, promoting the well-being of children, youth, and families; keeping the children, youth, and families, especially children, safe and protected; and promoting healthy communities. That promotion of healthy communities has been one of the challenges we've embraced through FCSS as well as work through the child and family services authorities.

I think our real accomplishments last year were a furtherance of the Alberta response model. Just to refresh your memory, this is not necessarily removing the child from the home but finding ways to work with the child and the family in the home and not simply removing the child and allowing parents to wait until some long-awaited court date to come forward and become reconciled and rejuvenate their responsibilities for children.

Our adoption web site came onstream last year, our Child Welfare Act amendments – and thank you to the Member for Calgary-Buffalo and also to the Member for Red Deer-North, who did yeoman's work on the resources for children with disabilities – and our child care initiative, a \$5.6 million investment to strengthen child care standards and supports to families; in other words, to try and do more with those children in day cares and to upgrade the capacity of the day care through supports that will enhance the worker's salary and give additional capacity to retain qualified staff for children.

I'm just going to recite briefly the family violence prevention and the FASD initiatives, the work with Alberta's Promise, the research, and also the topping up of the FCSS funding, which I think has been well received in the field. We are pleased that all 20 financial statements that we've had with the authorities – in this business plan we had 18 authorities; now we're at 10 – received unqualified audit opinions from the Auditor General.

I'd like to address in my remarks some of the questions you might have about the Auditor General's report. The Auditor General recommended that we improve the strategic management systems, and the department of the AG has acknowledged that we've made great strides in the four years of this ministry.

The emphasis we've placed is first and foremost to focus on the need for quality and timeliness of data through the information systems. We see this as a shared responsibility that highlights the need for each person to take responsibility ensuring that the data is entered correctly, and our own core business in child protection must have the support of well-managed and well-entered data. I think the Auditor General has quite clearly cited the need to know why choices were made for data to be entered, for menu selections to be made in support of children. We agree with that.

Secondly, we've worked to clarify the management information required to appropriately analyze and assess the services and the delivery decisions, and that's an important component along with the data entry.

Thirdly, by investing in system development, we believe that the emphasis there will improve service, system, and delivery managers in being able to assess what is relevant in their work.

I want to take a minute and just cite the issues related to delegated First Nations accountability. As you know, the delegated First Nations are accountable for the dollars they receive not only to the federal government but to us as well, and this is challenging. We have 18 delegated First Nations, and we are working hard with them to improve the service-monitoring capacity of our department in dealing with the work that they do. We are also working hard to work with the federal government in that partnership to make sure that everybody's accountability is firmly in place.

In the report the Auditor General focused on the accountability and recovery of expenses for those First Nations children who are the financial responsibility of delegated First Nations agencies. In one part of the letter there is a citing of inconsistency on reporting of the CSA, or the child supports, and the dollars received back from government. If we take a child into care, the family allowance, as it has been called, follows the child, so that same practice occurs in delegated First Nations, but that recovery may not always be recorded in the month that it was received. So sometimes we're out of step with it, but we always get the money that is due to follow the child, and that is an accounting item that Keray Henke can speak to later if you want more comment on it.

8:40

So expense recoveries with First Nations are important, and we're doing our best to improve and strengthen our recovery capacity there. We're also working on our contract management systems, and I think we've made quite a stride with the new cross-ministry contract management administration system which will help us identify where the contracts are held and how we're targeting their performance.

Finally, we agree with the Auditor General on performance measures, that it's important to have outcome-based measurement systems, and we are working on that.

We're never happy when we have a tragedy in child welfare delivery services. It's always something that we take very seriously. It is one thing that we do track, and for the many years that I've been in government – it seems many years this morning, but I guess it's not that long – we've had through either chronic illness or some dreadful accident or tragedy nine, 10, or 11 children that have died, and we've had as many as 12 in the last five years. This past year – although it's certainly still regrettable; one child lost is a tragedy – we've lost five children.

I think that the work that's been done in the field is helping us bridge the risk that so often plagues vulnerable families. Our workers are very conscious of the fact that we want to overcome tragedies to children, and they're working very hard to get both the system side correct, the accountability in place, and at all times to work with the families and get children into capacity so that they will

be not only sustainable, but their growth and development will be at their greatest potential.

I've probably spoken for long enough, Mr. Chairman, and will be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dunn, do you have any comments to add at this time?

Mr. Dunn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the committee members: our comments on this ministry are located on pages 57 to 76 of our 2003 annual report. In this section this year we provide three numbered and two unnumbered recommendations, and this compares to last year when we provided five numbered and five unnumbered recommendations.

Of our 2003 recommendations recommendation 6 was identified as a key recommendation because it concerns the safety and welfare of children. On page 67 we note a number of areas that the department should improve regarding the monitoring of the services provided by the delegated First Nations agencies. Recommendation 5 on page 59 deals with the authorities' strategic management information systems. On pages 60 and 61 we note five actions that the department and the authorities need to take to improve both financial reports and management information on performance effectiveness.

We've repeated three recommendations where the ministry has not made satisfactory progress in implementing our recommendations, and these deal with, one, improving the systems to recover First Nations' expenses, that the minister has just spoken about; two, strengthening the processes used to award and manage contracts; and three, ensuring that authorities' business plans are approved before the start of the year. This latter issue is similar to other ministries where the governmentwide estimates are required at least six weeks before the year-end in order to finalize the authorities' business plans.

Throughout our 2003 section on Children's Services we note 10 previous recommendations which have either been fully implemented or satisfactory progress towards their implementation has been noted, and we congratulate the ministry on that. These deal with the costs and results information in the new costing project, child welfare program accountability; implementing service level agreements with service providers; the funding allocations amongst the authorities; year-end accounting processes; improving accountability for audit services previously provided by ACSC and in the future to be provided by the new centralized internal audit services; three recommendations concerning the effectiveness of the Children's Advocate office, and those are noted on pages 72 and 73 of our report; the authority boards properly assessing their information requirements; and, finally, improving the authorities' business plans to provide suitable targets for each year in the three-year business plans.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, those are my opening comments. My staff and I will answer any questions directed to us. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. There's quite a list developing here of members interested in asking questions, so we should get started straight away.

Ms Blakeman, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you very much. Welcome to the minister and her staff and any fans that we have here this morning. I'll direct your attention to page 75 of part 1 of the Children's Services annual report. Under note 6 I'm noticing quite a few claims where the

ministry was a defendant in court cases, and I'm wondering. I don't expect the minister to have this with her, so if it could be supplied through the clerk and distributed to the committee, that would be great. Could we get a list, please, of the divisions or the authorities, the executives, the employees that are or were sued in this particular time period and why they were sued?

I can give the supplemental question at the same time because I don't expect you to have that. So the supplemental question is: why the increase? I note that in the previous year there were 66 claims with a specified amount of – I'll round it off – \$220,000 and 10 with no specified limit. We jump to the year that's under examination, where we've got 80 claims, 72 of those with specified amounts totaling \$1,306,265 and the remaining eight without a specified amount. Wow, that's a honking big jump here. So what happened?

Ms Evans: If I may – and we would be pleased to provide the list the hon. member has requested – to just make it very brief, in cooperation with Justice we have been working to clean up old claims. These are not current claims where things have happened within the last three or four years; these are often outstanding claims from many years ago. We said that it wasn't fair to the claimant to leave them lingering, so that's why this has been an attempt to clean them up, and I'd ask Paula: do you have any further comment on that?

Ms Tyler: Certainly. Just to answer your first question, our ministry is very rarely sued individually; it's the Crown and then a number of people are named. So the vast majority of these cases are cases that are at least 10 years old where people have come back as adults saying that in their youth they have suffered some abuse or lack of service with social services. The numbers, just to be clear, are not additive. So the bulk of those 80 cases this year were cases that we're still negotiating on from the previous year, so these are not 60 plus 70 plus 80. There's a core that tends to continue on that we're continuing to discuss with Justice and with the folks that are suing us.

So we'll certainly get you the information. This is unfortunately not something that is specific and irregular to Alberta; this is the case with all child welfare systems. In actual fact, we've had far fewer complaints over the last 10 years. So we will get the information.

Ms Blakeman: Good. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Lukaszuk, followed by Dr. Taft.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, the delivery of child welfare services to our children and families here are carried out by two bodies. In the municipal areas it's by family services authorities, but on reserves it's done by the delegated First Nations agencies, or DFNAs, if you wish. My initial question would be: is there a common standard that you apply for the quality and level of services applied shared between those in urban areas and on reserve?

Ms Evans: Under the terms of the Child Welfare Act there is, obviously, only one standard; that is the legislative standard. But we have to distinguish between the delegated First Nations in that they are not Crown agents as the child and family services authorities are. They share an accountability with the federal government. It makes it much more complex. If you look back at the activities with Kasohkewew, for example. Frequently, when called to attention for services not perceived to be adequately provided, they will retreat to their other partner and suggest that their accountability to this

government is less.

So it poses some challenges, but we believe that our preferred standard is the one where every child in Alberta has the same type of service delivery, where there are accredited agencies in place to deliver that service. Where we believe and perceive that those services might not be up to standard, we provide supports either through the existing child and family services authority that's in that same geographic area or through native liaison units, which are in various regions and provide additional supports.

8:50

I think I have to say that the delegated First Nations authorities accountability is a contractual accountability. Over this next year we will be looking at every contract renewal as an opportunity to more clearly emphasize the role of the director of quality assurance, active under the management of Bill Meade, so that we can even accelerate and improve our supports for delegated First Nations authorities having a standard similar to the child and family services authorities.

Mr. Lukaszuk: My first and last supplemental is: how do you ensure that the staff on the reserve are trained to your high standards?

Ms Evans: Part of that is that we've been ramping up our training with Grant MacEwan College delivering the training and monitoring how successful that is, and we've actually been bringing in closer contact to the ministry the directors of child welfare that are working in the field on delegated First Nations, so there's a frequent contact of staff development with them as well. We've also got the University of Calgary. Dean Gayla Rogers offers a bachelor of social work – there's an outreach there – and we have a very deliberate targeting of First Nations child welfare workers so that they can receive a BSW. Periodically – and I will alert all the hon. members here – when we have a graduation, a gang of First Nations graduates who come and then work in the field, when we get those cultural similarities of First Nations graduates with a BSW working with their delegated First Nations, we have the best of both worlds: people working with their own people and feeling that confidence. There's a cultural sensitivity.

Mr. Lukaszuk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Taft, followed by Mr. Goudreau.

Dr. Taft: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. The Auditor General makes various comments about outcome performance and achieving desired outcomes. In your report, section 1, page 19, in the full paragraphs on the lower half of the page the first one talks about the evaluation of child-centred outcomes, and then the second one from the bottom talks about reductions in child protection caseload. My fundamental concern with this ministry would be with the outcomes, and I know some of them are difficult to measure. I'm wondering if you could fill us in a bit on some of the measures of success centred on the child and the family that your department uses systematically. I'm not just looking for anecdotal descriptions of, "Well, this child got back in the family." Rather, is there a systematic set of child-centred, family-centred outcomes that you use as a department to measure the success of your casework?

Ms Evans: I'm going to ask Phil Goodman to supplement, but on the face of it I'm going to give you one thought. To the hon. member: we significantly reduced the number of children that came

into permanent placement. You know, today we've got over 5,000, but we've reduced by about a thousand the ones that came into permanent care. We had a corresponding increase of not quite the same number but several that came under temporary guardianship.

On the face of that, while you say, "Well, is there any difference there?" there's a huge difference because in the case of a thousand children we were working to strengthen the families instead of – you could accuse us of warehousing children in foster placements or in group homes because we weren't making adequate strides to move them to a closer reunion with their families. That's the first desired effect, provided that the family can do the appropriate job. But the Alberta response model trains the social worker to attack it from a very direct point of view.

Phil, do you want to go after that for direct outcomes?

Mr. Goodman: Yes, certainly. The whole issue of outcome acquisition in child welfare across Canada has been an outstanding issue, just as you say, sir. What Alberta has done is take national leadership with the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare out of the University of Toronto, the primary researcher being Dr. Nico Trocme, who had created with all directors of child welfare six years ago a national outcomes matrix particular to the questions that you ask.

Alberta is in the position, unlike most jurisdictions in Canada, where we really have, through our information system and our commitment through our minister, a capacity to start collecting data specific to the national outcomes matrix – as specific as: how are our children in care doing in relation to school-grade acquisition? How are they doing in relation to involvement with the criminal justice system? What does "returning home to community" really mean in terms of developmental milestones? Et cetera, et cetera – to the point where Alberta has been asked by the national desk of directors of child welfare, supported by all the deputies in Canada, to take the leadership in outcome development.

To add to that, we have invested with the Canadian Outcomes Institute out of Calgary, who have been collecting data particular to all agencies in this province. So we now anticipate that over the next year we'll be able to have the ability to collect data not only in terms of the children in our care but in terms of the children in our care and how they're doing in the agencies which provide them service. I think that in relative terms we are very well placed in Canada to really take the leadership in this outcome business, recognizing, as you say, that up to a couple of years ago it's been nothing more than input analysis.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Well, then, my supplemental will be pretty straightforward, I hope. Could you provide us a copy of the outcomes matrix that you describe? Thank you.

Ms Evans: Yes. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Goudreau, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Goudreau: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the minister: I'm referring to page 6 of your section 1. You identify that every child deserves a permanent and loving home, and with that in mind a web site was implemented and at one stage caused some issues. I'm just wondering how those issues were resolved concerning the web site to adopt children and whether those issues are coming back again. Or have they been resolved?

Ms Evans: Well, one thing, Mr. Chairman, you'll be sure that I

won't use "bulletproof" unless I know for sure that I'm not going to get a bullet somewhere else. I learned that through the process. What I really meant to say was that you can frequently open a web site and find that you can peel off yet another layer and get deeper and find out what's going on, and in this web site what you see is what you get.

When we initially put the children that were cited by the member of the community on the web site, she was actually very aware that the videoing of those children had been done with her full knowledge and consent. So having said that, we realized that the concerns that were expressed by the Privacy Commissioner also pointed out that it was important for us to make sure that everybody in government – all our partners, not just the co-ordinator that looks after Children's Services – was onside with what we were doing with the page.

The page has been hugely successful, increasing our capacity to have children placed in permanent homes by over 50 percent of what it was the year previous, and currently we have 81 children on the web site. Fifty-six have been placed as a result of either being viewed on the web site or the initiative of parents that have come forward. You know, we've had over 1.3 million hits. We have a clean bill of health from the Privacy Commissioner now.

9:00

The Adoption Council of Canada has cited us for an award because they believe it is one of the proactive ways that we are trying to get children into permanent homes. I think my own struggle, and here's an obvious question, is that if you've got 5,000 in permanent care, why aren't more of those children on the web site? A lot of that relates to two things: one, the policy that this government has with First Nations, that we will get agreement by the band before placing children into adoptive circumstances; and the other, that some children, regrettably, just simply are not able to be adopted either because of behavioural problems or a combination of both behavioural problems and developmental disabilities.

So I believe that the web site will continue. When we spoke about it in Vancouver, we had such enormous praise, not because it's so unique, because in North America there are now over 41 states and this province that are involved, but because people have looked at the unique way that we've used the technology. We hope to see more children placed on that in the future.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, if you covered this in some detail before I arrived, I apologize.

Ms Evans: All of it. A hundred percent.

Mr. Mason: Well, I was going to ask about deregulation.

There are a couple of I think fairly strong indications in the Auditor General's report that some of the recommendations haven't been adequately dealt with. One of them is the contract management system where it says, "We again recommend that the Ministry of Children's Services strengthen the processes used to award and manage contracts." He goes on to identify some of the things where improvements are still needed, including "a mechanism to identify potential conflicts-of-interest when renewing contracts." I wonder if you could comment on these recommendations and indicate the department's plans to meet these recommendations of the Auditor General.

Ms Evans: Yeah. I think that that's significant and very important. May I say that our own ministry working on these shared some of those concerns. One of the things that we have done is orient new people hired to the ministry to the code of conduct, making sure that everybody has an ethical standard for management of the service delivery system, and I think that ethical standard goes with the understanding of what the contract itself should entail. So a lot of work has been done with new hires.

We've made it clear to the service providers that the hiring and commencement process must have an expansion so that the requirements for prospective employees will include a full briefing for any of those employees covered under the Health Professions Act so that we've got a very strong understanding by those that are managing the contracts. You know, to some degree, hon. member, it will become simpler because we have moved now from 18 authorities to 10, so the focus from the management perspective will be to strengthen those people that are actually providing that.

One of the other areas is the contract management administrative system that we've improved on a cross-ministry basis that I spoke about in my opening remarks. I'm going to ask Keray if he would just detail that a little more for the hon. member so that he knows how we're progressing with contract management.

Mr. Henke: Certainly, Madam Minister. We are dealing with a cross-government initiative to implement a stronger information technology system that will allow us to do a better job of categorizing and capturing information around our contract administration, contract management.

I think the other thing that we are doing in this ministry that is perhaps different from the rest of the ministries is acknowledging that the contractual relationships that we have with our service providers are not contractual relationships around the creation of widgets. We are dealing with people in very specific circumstances, so when we enter into contractual relationships, we have a very strong need to ensure good management for good outcomes, as the other hon. member talked about earlier.

Also, we cannot simply terminate a contract at a point in time without disrupting people's lives. If the service provider is not appropriate to these circumstances, then of course that's what we have to do, but in some circumstances we do need to in fact have the flexibility to be able to extend contracts, to place contracts differently than other program delivery areas might.

So those are the areas where we have encouraged increasing supervisory capacity to ensure that the contractual services provided are well suited to the presenting conditions of the case.

Ms Evans: If I may just add to that, Brian. One of the things that makes it a real challenge right in this community – and that was one of the areas I first was in touch with – is when a foster placement moves from northeast Edmonton to southwest, for example, the contract management of those various neighbourhood centres and how you do that. As Keray said, you have to do it with very strong sensitivity to the needs of that child. Accordingly, it means that managing the system sometimes is a challenge, but we agree with the recommendations to improve.

Mr. Mason: I appreciate that you can't just cancel a contract if there's some unsatisfactory performance because it just leaves people without anything. I recognize that. I'm concerned about putting in place, I guess, the criteria, the mechanisms. You can train people as much as you want, but unless they're operating to a standard, it's difficult. If I can just zero in on this one: "a mechanism to identify potential conflicts-of-interest when renewing contracts." What do

you plan to do about that, specifically on conflicts of interest?

Ms Evans: Keray, can you help me with this one?

Mr. Henke: Well, what we do with our staff now is that staff that are engaged in or involved with the administration of contracts are required to declare to us in a positive way that there are no conflicts of interest. Our issue there is that we also need to establish a fairly good supervisory relationship with those people because conflicts of interest change over time, so we have to not only have a point in time establishment that there are no conflicts of interest, but we have to be able to, through supervisory contact with these people, maintain that there is no emerging conflict of interest because of changing circumstances.

Mr. Mason: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much, Madam Minister, for coming so early this morning, because of the fact that many of us did work till the wee hours of the morning in the Legislature last night. My question refers to page 6, section 1 of the ministry's annual report. The second paragraph from the top discusses working with the policing community regarding family violence. I was wondering if you could elaborate on the ministry's accomplishments and, as well, what you are looking for in the future regarding addressing the issues we face in our society in terms of family violence.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much. I think that over, I'd say, the last three to four years, especially the last two years – and I hope that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre here will agree – we've made some strides that have improved the lot of people who are facing difficult circumstances and come to women's shelters.

One of the biggest success stories has been the work initiated by the Council of Women's Shelters, that we have supported, to get an MOU with the RCMP so that there is proper protocol for people and training for officers in the field to know about either the interrogation or the ways to manage people in those circumstances. I think particularly in rural Alberta, where often you know absolutely everybody in town and you know where the women's shelter is and you want to make sure that that woman is protected even though the perpetrator of family violence might live, then, just a block from the shelter and be able to view that, it's been extremely important to have this working relationship with the RCMP. This year to build on that we are spending \$20,000 with our family violence office to train officers and to further expand on the work that has been done, and I really believe it's going to net some positive results.

9:10

We've improved our operational funding to women's shelters, added dollars so that the staff there, who previously weren't acknowledged on the same level as other agency support staff to the ministry, could be acknowledged.

We've done a review of the programs in collaboration with the child and family services authorities, a review of both the data collection as well as how we are delivering programs, how we are supporting children in shelters. We've done a lot on public education with materials being provided to communities: Children Learn What They Live; Family Violence. Last year's program was a direct result of some collaboration with agencies, and this past Saturday we had a hundred people from all over the province at a local meeting room here looking at the success of those programs

and trying to work to set the stage as we move towards the mini-roundtables and the roundtable on family violence.

We will never be satisfied as long as children and families are still in peril because of family violence, but I think we've made some huge strides in trying to manage those issues in support of their best interests.

Thank you.

Mr. Cernaiko: Thank you very much, Madam Minister. Just to follow up on that, then, can you expand on the initiatives that would roll out of that regarding the family violence issues and what your ministry is looking at in the future?

Ms Evans: I think one of the things that we are focusing on now is how we work with the children's authorities to make sure that there's no child lost in the system, so that the caseworkers that might see them in the shelter are connecting the dots with other caseworkers. We're exploring the possibility of a children's lawyer to help us on those custody and access cases and make sure that the child is always protected in situations where both the criminal court and the family court may not be exactly in step with one another. That, hopefully, will help us bridge some of the time.

We've spent over this past year some wonderful time with Bill Hurlburt, QC, with the Law Society, and with retired judge Walder White looking at the legislative capacity across government to see where we can make improvements in our legislation. Through the upcoming weeks, as we go through the process of collecting information for the many roundtables, I think we will from the mini-roundtables see a family violence roundtable that looks at all the pieces from all the ministries. All the other partner ministries are involved, their deputies and the ministers. It's been amazing to see everybody working, putting their piece on the table to see if we can accomplish something.

You know that the Council of Women's Shelters has asked for a commission to address family violence. There's been a recommendation to me of a Premier's council on family violence, and I'm hoping that through the process of the roundtable we will see what ultimately should be a cohesive, coherent strategy by government to address family violence issues and, hopefully, get ahead of the river so that there's prevention work done and not merely mitigating when tragic and dreadful circumstances apply. I think that's public education. Mrs. Colleen Klein has been pushing the issues on bullying, and we've looked at the bullying strategies as connecting with this through the roundtable, and hopefully we'll be able to take it on every societal front and actually stop this.

Mr. Chairman, I could probably talk for an hour on this subject because I'm quite passionate that we have to do more. Of course, my hon. members would enjoy this, but I want to be fair to all sides. So thank you. Maybe they will ask questions on this wonderful opportunity we have to make a difference.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Mr. Cao.

Ms Blakeman: Thank you. I'll direct your attention to the Auditor General's report pages 68, 69 flowing from recommendation 7. This is somewhat following on your previous comments. We're talking here about recovering expenses: "the Department reimburses the Authorities for the costs of delivering these services. The Department then invoices [designated First Nations agencies]." It's clear that this is happening with the provision of services to children. Is this also happening with women's shelters? Because in my discussions in this fiscal year with some of the shelters, they were

struggling with trying to recoup costs from First Nations, from bands and reservations, where the shelters had provided services to aboriginal women and then they had to go and sit in the office of the band for a day and a half to try and get their money back. So it looks like that service is not being provided to women's shelters. Can you comment on that, please?

Ms Evans: It's very complex, hon. member, and I think I should make the statement right off the bat that many of the delegated First Nations are doing a very commendable job. They're not all having difficulty in that capacity. Many are very up to date and are making strong efforts to improve. Some of the issues with recoveries on reserves for women's shelters are issues that have been more complex because of the federal government developing the shelter, often paying significant dollars for capital construction, with no agreement from ourselves in the mix of that decision-making.

So you can have those First Nations question whether or not they should be providing moneys for someone who's attended at a shelter off reserve when they've had this new capacity there. There's an expectation that they frequently have that may not be realistic that the women will attend their own shelter, and it becomes a complex of personalities dealing with that issue.

Quite specifically, on how we're going to help the women's shelters retrieve those recoveries in a better fashion, Keray, do you want to comment?

Mr. Henke: Well, as the minister has indicated, we have issues both around data collection and data sharing. We have circumstances where individuals, for rights of privacy and because of the situation that they're in, don't want to disclose, quite frankly, and certainly don't want to attend at a shelter that is in a neighbourhood that is perhaps part of their problem. So when they don't disclose off reserve and they attend various other shelters, then we have an issue around data collection and data sharing and the verification that, in fact, whoever we're billing for these actual transactions is an appropriate funder of those particular services.

So not to minimize it, I think that we have systems in place and we have identifiers in place, but there are still concerns, especially in these circumstances, about people disclosing personal information and where that personal information does go and how they are in their personal circumstances affected by other people knowing that.

I'm not sure that I'm answering your question, but I'm suggesting to you that the answer isn't as simple as matching people's names to band lists or whatever, because these people are, because of their very circumstances, reluctant to reveal that information.

Ms Evans: I know that the hon. Member for Edmonton-Centre has shared the same concern I have: whether or not a woman would be requested or forced to reveal that information and then get the double jeopardy of being punished twice as severely because of that revelation. That is not happening, but we've still got a lot of work to do to help the shelters with their recoveries with First Nations. There's no doubt about it.

Ms Blakeman: The follow-up to that then. As part of the same recommendation it notes, actually in the last bullet there, that as at March 31, 2003, 44 percent of the designated First Nations agency accounts receivable were over a year old. Can you tell me how much money that is in dollars?

Mr. Henke: I'm sorry. I don't have that information.

Ms Evans: Could I say that we'll get that accurate figure and

provide that later to the hon. member so that it is recorded correctly?

Ms Blakeman: Okay.

The Chair: Yes. A reminder that if those written responses could be through the clerk, please, to all members.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cao, followed by Dr. Taft.

Mr. Cao: Thank you, Mr. Chair. From my perspective I'd say that the minister and the department have done a fantastic job taking care of very, very important issues, our vulnerable children especially. I also commend the Auditor General in his work looking into the matter.

Now, my question is from kind of a general perspective. I know that at the end of the chain would be the child. Probably I'll put the question to both the Auditor General and the minister: how do we measure the effectiveness? For example, there are many cases where the government intervenes to help, and then there are disputes that come to my office and so on, all of that, so my view is from that perspective. How do we measure, for example, how many disputes we have or if we are too aggressive or we are not aggressive enough in helping children? So that's from the auditing perspective. I'm not talking financial but on the effectiveness for the clients, the children and so on.

Thank you.

9:20

Ms Evans: Does the Auditor General wish to go first?

Mr. Dunn: No. I'll wait till you're finished.

Ms Evans: I think that for the first time Alberta Children's Services has a basis for measuring the effectiveness of child welfare services: working to improve child safety and their well-being, their permanence in family, and community support. I think there's still a lot of work to do with partnering to establish the national outcomes. Over the past year we've worked with the Hon. Jane Stewart on the national indicators. We have 11 national indicators that we have agreed to Canada-wide. In these ministries, various departments of government, I think we've been very successful – I think the federal government would tell you that – in collaboration on common strategies and indicators.

I think our work on early child development has improved the leveraging of some dollars that are slow, but they are coming. It has improved. I think we have more to do on the issues of FASD and FASE. There's no doubt about it. I'm pleased to have the hon. Member for Edmonton-Glenora, who's been working on that. Also, the work that we've done in carving off an Alberta centre for research and getting Dr. Matt Spence and Dr. Terry Klassen and other experts in Alberta to help us, Dr. Jean LaFrance and others who understand the delivery systems and where the gaps might exist and where we can improve. So I think we are doing some work there to define better outcomes.

I'll give you an indicator. One of my indicators is that I get far fewer complaints than I used to. We get far fewer ARs. I get far fewer of those letters that say that we're not listening. I get many more people that will say, "You know, it's not perfect," or they'll have an individual complaint, but we have noted recently that we get far fewer complaints about the quality of service delivery, and I think

it's because there's a lot of work being done at the community level to improve the community understanding. In this year's budget we've got \$2 million as an incentive grant for family and community support services to work with child and family service authorities to make sure they're not duplicating each other's programs. So we're not there, but we're working to get there.

Mr. Dunn: Thank you. This has been a matter which has been raised in other meetings with your committee here: how do you measure an outcome? It's something which certain members have asked quite regularly. How do you know these things are effective? This is an area which all departments have to be challenged on, and certainly it's beyond just the Alberta jurisdiction. It's federal as well as all other provincial jurisdictions.

You heard earlier from Mr. Goodman that they are now starting to establish – I believe you referred to it as the matrix, and I think you said that there were going to be 12 expectations or outcomes. Certainly, we're encouraged to hear that sort of information because this is a very, very difficult issue to be resolved: how do you know the program that we're putting substantial dollars into is making a difference out there?

So just be clear that we can always measure inputs and you can measure some outputs, but how do you ever measure outcomes to see that we can either stop doing something because we've now satisfied the need or we must do more of this type of program because the outcome is so important? That's what we'll be looking at. Mr. Cao, we'll be looking at this and dealing with the department and the ministry and seeing how they are applying or installing this 12-point matrix as we go forward into the future. I'll be very blunt: it won't be a simple 12-month type of process or program. We believe this is going to be something that will take a period of time, but we want to work with the ministry and department to see that it is effectively installed.

[Mr. Goudreau in the chair]

Ms Evans: If I may add just one more thing that I should have mentioned. I looked the other day at how I was going to interpret my business plan to this government, and I realized that about \$200 million of the \$706 million we spend this year – that year it was \$672 million – could be very simply expressed this way. We spend \$15 million, roughly, on domestic violence. We spend \$60 million, roughly, on three things: FCSS supports in communities; child welfare supports for children that are handicapped, with special needs, often on an individual contractual basis in support of those children; and \$60 million, roughly, on day care supports.

Now, none of those particular programs are delivered by child welfare staff that are staff of this government. They may be in support of, but predominantly they are delivered outside. They're delivered by day cares. They're delivered by agencies. They're delivered through communities and the shelters, obviously, there. So you can look at the times that we have to work to build our partnerships to make sure our outcome strategies are coincidental with theirs, and that's a part of the challenge. Obviously, the two-thirds that's involved with child welfare delivery and administration of the system is more easily controlled and more finite, but these other areas are in part very human in their element. Also, that's where it's important to strengthen our partnerships to make sure that that delivery out in the field is solid.

Mr. Cao: Well, thank you. That's a very good answer.

I look at the financial side now, and there are hundreds of millions spent. In the department you have a separate item called salary and

benefits and so on. Then I notice the other hundreds of millions of dollars in the kinds of services out there like the one you just mentioned, where we contract or we do service. I know this work is very labour intensive, meaning that it's a lot of money paying people to do the work. So my view is: what about the client? What kind of either financial or other benefits? My view is: what if I want to give that family, let's say, \$1,000, but I want to track whether it took \$2,000 to give that family \$1,000. Is there any way to separate that; meaning, for example, as I just said, paying the people to deliver that service versus the dollars that actually go to that person?

Ms Evans: That's a very good point. I think that if you ask the parents, in many cases they are asking us to be able to broker their own care for the children. I'm looking at the children with disabilities now and the strategies there. They're very astutely aware of where the dollars are going. There's a shared accountability there. But on whether or not overall in the administration of the system there are sufficient controls on that, I think that I'm going to ask Keray to comment about how we control that. Part of it is data collection and our shared-service delivery through ACSC.

I think the other thing, though, that we have to look at, in a broader conversation that I've had with the Auditor General for some time down the road, is the way that we look at where governments similarly using various vendors deliver services to see that we're all being equally satisfied and that the accountability from outside boards and agencies, especially nonprofit agencies, is delivering the expected outcomes. That's where, if Health and Learning and Children's Services are involved, it becomes a challenge with the expense officers in all three.

I wonder, Keray, if you would like to comment further about how we make sure that the child that gets \$1,000 doesn't have a \$2,000 bill in delivery of that.

Mr. Henke: There are a number of ways that we monitor that kind of cost effectiveness. Much of the money that we have is delivered in a very direct form through payments to foster parents or payments to contracted agencies who are in fact providing services and housekeeping to children as we speak. That direct payment to foster parents is, I think, demonstration to us that the money is actually providing for the care and attention of the individuals in our care.

9:30

We've also embarked in the past year on a significant residential review program. Our intent there was to examine the cost effectiveness of a variety of services across the province, and what we found was that there's a significant variation, and that allows us, then, to focus our attention on trying to discover what the drivers are of some of those cost variances and how we can make better use of the resources that are entrusted to us.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The other thing that we do on a regular basis, then, is to calculate a whole bunch of information matrix, if you will, about cost per case in various circumstances: cost per case in terms of residential circumstances, foster care, in care, out of care, those kinds of things. Again, the cost per case isn't intended to simply focus on this as a financial issue, because it's more than a financial issue. But what it is intended to do is give us information about the management of those various services, and where there are aberrations or exceptions, then we can focus our attention on what's driving that particular issue.

Mr. Cao: Thank you.

Dr. Taft: I'll be keeping in a theme here on outcomes measurement, at least for my first question. Page 59 and page 60 of section 1 of your annual report talk about FCSS, which is a program I'm sort of a natural fan of. But I notice that the outcome measure described on page 59 – of course, it's very favourable – is essentially a satisfaction survey. That is how I would describe it. The survey goes out to FCSS boards and asks them, in my view, basically: have you done a good job? They say: yes, we've done a good job. I'm oversimplifying a bit, but that's how I distill it.

Then on the next page you have an interesting paragraph, just the very second paragraph. It's just one sentence. "In 2003-04, a measure focusing on FCSS programming specific to children, youth and families will replace this measure." So I would hope it's something more sophisticated than a survey. Are you prepared to talk about what that intriguing sentence refers to?

Ms Evans: The Making a Difference program. Phil Goodman, would you like to expound on that, please, for Dr. Taft?

Mr. Goodman: Thank you, Minister. Certainly, we're interested in the general responsiveness of the FCSS community as to: are we doing a good job, is the funding appropriate, and is the program right? At the same time, FCSS through municipal sponsorships had used their own capacity to create the Making a Difference outcome measurement program. Again, with the direction of CEO Kelly Ernst from the Canadian Outcomes Institute in Calgary we have been using the FCSS outcome measurement on a specific program-by-program basis as the template for our developmental activity within our outcome measurement.

The FCSS community has been most rigorous in really wanting to ensure programmatic outcomes in terms of their municipal allocations. What we are able to imagine this year is, with a very strong handshake and partnership with 99 percent of the municipalities in this province, particular to the ARM initiative, that the FCSS program is now prepared to look at: what is the impact of their investment on the kids that we mutually are interested in beyond just the generic kind of best interest of community health and wellness? So that's what that will move to, sir.

Ms Evans: And we can provide some more detailed information about that if you would like.

Dr. Taft: Yeah. I would.

Ms Evans: If there's a personal interest in that, I think it's important. May I just say that I'm really pleased that the hon. member sees a value in this program. I think it's an amazing program, but sometimes it doesn't get the recognition it deserves.

Dr. Taft: Okay. Then my supplemental really goes to the other end of the management cycle, which is the budget, which is the plan, comments from the Auditor General about the fact that the budget approval process is often later in the fiscal year than it ought to be, which seems to be a common problem in a number of departments. How and when can we see that sorted out? Do you understand my question?

Ms Evans: I absolutely do. I think it'll improve, hon. member, now that we have moved from 18 to 10 authorities because we'll be able to more intensively focus our attention with those 10 authorities in the development of the plan. But, simply put, when those plans come in, if they don't meet the expectations of the staff and they don't meet the expectations of the minister – and I read every scrap

of every one – then they are sent back to be reworked. I think that through the process we have to do the work step-by-step and understand what the drafts are before the eleventh hour. I think we're building some stronger capacity at the community level through the regions to make sure that these plans will conform not only to the financial accountability on the outcome measurements but that they will improve still further.

One of the pieces that we are working on is board evaluation. We've got work being done directly right now to make sure that boards understand what their responsibilities are to the development of the plan and to the gathering of information and making sure it's not simply anecdotal but that it is substantive. So a lot of that work, I think, will help us move closer to getting these things in on the right time frame.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mary Anne, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Before I ask my question, I just want to give the ministry a big thank you for the very important programs that have been developed in Children's Services, especially the PCHIP legislation, what we're doing in adoption, day care, fetal alcohol syndrome disorders, and now the bursary program in Youth in Care.

I just want to comment on the bursary program because I saw the faces of three young people this weekend when they were told that they were going to get money to carry on to postsecondary education, and it was one of those Kodak moments that I really can't tell you about. The realization came that their whole life was going to be changed now because they had the opportunity to further their education. So thank you to the ministry for working so hard on that. It's so important.

My question was referring to recommendation 6 with First Nations, but Mr. Lukaszuk covered most of that. It is a big concern to me because, as you know, central Alberta has had more than its share of deaths of children in care.

But I want to move on, then, since you answered most of that question with Thomas, to the fact that 30 percent of our children in care are aboriginal. There is a large percentage of children in care who also have fetal alcohol syndrome. I don't understand exactly how the federal government pays for our children who are on reserve and then are in care, and that care is the responsibility of the provincial government. What I wanted to know is: does the federal government take any responsibility for paying for diagnosis of fetal alcohol syndrome disorder in children who are on reserve, knowing how much it costs for us to look after those children and to meet their needs? Does the federal government take any responsibility in helping us to pay for diagnosis and care for those special children?

Ms Evans: About two weeks ago we were in Winnipeg with the Canada northwest partnership for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and we had an opportunity to speak with the Minister of Health and Minister Ethel Blondin-Andrew about the issues surrounding support on reserves for FASD programs. The only tangible evidence that we could provide was a common theme for of a program that everybody had access to was the prenatal nutrition program in place federally since the early '90s, where a modest amount of dollars, I believe across the country – I think about \$6 million – has been provided, and some of these programs have been very boutique. They may have found a place where somebody qualified for a program, so they received some dollars.

We have, I believe, now got a commitment from the federal government through the regional offices to work with First Nations

to develop the criteria for funding programs that the First Nations would prefer to see on the reserves for FASD, FASE. Whether it will include assessments or not, I can't say, because it will be as individual as the program description of the delegated First Nation that's delivering that program.

But I can say this: it is one example of the single most frustrating situations where we know that work has to be done, we are helping in support of that work, and we are frequently told that the money is coming. It's sort of like I used to say to my now ex-husband: I'll cook the steak when I see the whites of your eyes. I have been cooking the steak, quite frankly, with Alberta resources, whatever is offered, and I think we're often too stretched.

9:40

The other point that I'm always torn with – and I'd like to say this in this audience, knowing that you all have similar sensitivities. I don't want nonaboriginal people to ever believe that FASD/FASE is only a disease of aboriginal people. It is very much a disease of people that have ignored some of the obvious health teachings. I am frequently reminded that the greatest increase in FASD is among nonaboriginals. The treating officers at the Glenrose refer to them as the martini moms and the people that have just simply ignored the health teachings that we know that they should be responsible to.

Sometimes when I'm talking about the numbers of children that are in care that are aboriginal, either urban or on reserve, and talking about FASD, I feel compelled, as I'm doing right now, to immediately cite that if we could have a diagnosis, if people came with UPC codes, we could find out that there are a lot of undiagnosed behavioural and learning incapacities that exist in people of other races that haven't been identified because we haven't looked at them as potentially hosting that brain injury of FASD/FASE.

Frankly, we're doing education prenatally, Mr. Chair, but one of the best educations is to educate kids at a grade 5/6 level and to go in and talk to them about it, much like we do the DARE program. When I talk to them about the fact that 86 percent of grade 6 students usually tell me that they pour alcoholic beverages, either beer or wine or something for their family, and then I draw the baby that's peeking out of the tummy and show them how brutal it is for the brain if the mother has been served alcohol while she's pregnant, I can turn around and I have never yet looked at a class where I haven't seen one child look absolutely sick to their stomach because they have known and poured drinks or seen somebody pour a drink for a pregnant woman. I'll bet we could go out this Christmas season and see that happen as well. So it's a huge societal challenge, and we've got to find ways to bridge that insecurity so that people will quit drinking when pregnant.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you. I didn't mean to imply that the problem was only aboriginal.

Ms Evans: No. I know. I understand.

Mrs. Jablonski: But knowing how critical it is for early childhood intervention in problems such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and how necessary it is to help people at that stage of development and knowing that we have a new family and children research centre, are we developing any tests to determine early diagnosis of FASD?

Ms Evans: We should have the results very soon of a clinical trial that's going on in Calgary with the meconium study, with willing volunteers to look at what they've ingested. The baby's first bowel movement can be interpreted clinically to tell that story. I think that

we've all got an opportunity to get the medical ethics community, the community of physicians, to agree that we should work on taking a hair off the head of every pregnant woman when she comes in and looking at that diagnosis as well because they can tell what she's ingested for nine months. That new technology gives us yet another tool, and I think we should be treating it like we do HIV, where testing isn't necessarily at the discretion of the person that's coming in as a patient. I think that with the delivery of every child we should be able to do that, because if we could get a leg up on the assessment, then maybe we could get two legs ahead on the treatment of those children affected.

Overall, I want to say one thing though. We can find out what's happened after the horse is out of the barn, but what we have to do is stop people who think they're going to make love, and this is what I tell kids: stop and think that if you're going to make love, you might have a child, so you better not drink. In Harry Ainlay, when we had 50 students last spring, most of them were young men. They were very, very bright and very interested in the fact that when they created their first son, they didn't want him to not be able to play football because he wouldn't understand all of the rules and the requirements of the game. So we have a job to do to get people to stop drinking to stop the problem, and I think that's everybody's job.

Mrs. Jablonski: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, followed by Mr. Lukaszuk.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to come back to the Auditor General's report and, again, on page 69 the recommendation 1.4 on contract management systems. Six or seven years ago we all read the book *Reinventing Government* and the whole model that we should be steering and not rowing and so on, and I think this department has embraced that fairly heavily as a model. I guess, in my experience, in practice the theory is great, but the implementation has always been sort of uneven and spotty.

I'm coming to the criteria set out, again, in the Auditor General's report that "an analysis to ensure contracting is the most cost-effective way to provide the services." I'm going to go to the Auditor General on the supplementary on this, but I'd just be interested to know if the minister believes that the model that currently exists is being effectively managed and that outcomes can be predicted and that there's not a better way to do it.

Ms Evans: I'm going to give you a couple of observations. We are not contracting more than we were 10 years ago, but because in this Auditor General's report there's a very definite reference to Ma'mōwe capital region, although Bill Meade is not currently in that position, I'm going to ask, Bill, what you did to try and improve on this so that next year we won't have this same kind of report, because you were there firsthand, please.

Mr. Meade: My pleasure. One of the challenges as we move from outputs, at best, and mostly input measurements to outcomes is that then we have to start using that information to be more informed on all the decisions we make, including contracting, but especially contracting because it's such a large amount of money. So we're beginning to implement our decision-making in terms of what's good for children with outcome.

It's really a question of what role does institutional care play in supporting children in their developmental stages as opposed to should that be an in-house or out-house activity. So when we make our decisions about contracting, then, we want to take a look at what

are the best options in terms of ensuring that outcome for children. Specifically in contracting we are holding retenders, and what that is doing is causing the industry to take a look at: given the new advancements around outcomes, what do we have to do to modify our programs so that we make sure within the contract that we're doing everything possible to obtain those outcomes for the children?

Mr. Mason: Mr. Chairman, if I could go to the Auditor General. What sorts of things do you think are necessary to ensure that the model for service delivery is the most cost effective with respect to providing services through other agencies?

Mr. Dunn: We've had discussion with the department for many years around this subject. One of the more controversial matters that we raise and we haven't mentioned in our report is: have you evaluated the alternatives to service delivery? You appreciate, as somebody had mentioned, that it all comes back at the end of the line to an individual child, and they're with a caseworker, and that caseworker will have many, many children under care that they examine.

We look for evidence to see if they've evaluated alternatives to their service delivery. What type of service alternatives have you considered, and then what was your thought process when you selected this type of service delivery? It's very easy to measure certain things such as adequate housing, food, clothing, but what about mental care, emotional care, those other types of matters? How have you arrived at the decision to approach the child holistically to provide all those other services?

So we have been challenging the department, and we haven't yet come to a rational agreement at this point, to evaluate the service alternatives and then demonstrate to us why the alternative that you selected is the best alternative, which means getting together with other service deliveries to find out what is the best approach for these types of common attributes that a child may have. Have you checked with other caseworkers to find out how they have served those sort of attributes? Which is the best way that it is most cost-effective as well as overall for the child totally effective?

I'm not sure if the ministry wants to supplement.

9:50

Ms Evans: I'd like to add one more thought to you, Brian. This ministry is new, relatively, you know, Children's Services carved out in the last four years from a larger structure. I think at some point now that we're getting our new authorities up and running that this ministry may well look – I have contemplated how it would look, what the frame of reference would be, working with the Auditor General – at the challenge of whether or not we're better served to contract out a service delivery and child welfare to the agency supports or whether or not the move of having it staffed within government was a better way of assuring accountability as well as positive treatment delivery.

I'm always faced with some of the successes that I see where communities engage in child welfare delivery in ways they never did before, and that is the counterpoint. When I was reeve in Strathcona, I'll tell you, Paula came out with a number of people to offer us this opportunity to engage in child welfare delivery, and I saw it as off-loading. I didn't see it as the opportunity to build community capacity. So one of the successes that I think we have had with agencies and contract supports and community engagement through that model is more ownership on the front lines of service delivery.

No doubt the hon. Member for Edmonton-Riverview might have some thoughts about the philosophies behind those kinds of engagements on a societal perspective, but I think that at some point

this ministry will have to look at a term of reference, a frame of reference for developing that kind of policy analysis with the Auditor General and say: has this been successful? Most importantly, not just looking at the finances of it, but have the outcomes for children improved?

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Masyk, followed by Ms Blakeman.

Mr. Masyk: Thank you, Chairman. To the minister. On page 49 of Measuring Up, the cross ministry. I read through this, and it's very encouraging. But could you explain if you use a translucent sheet on the social workers: you know, the aggressiveness of a social worker going into a home and maybe not taking into account simple things like feelings toward the children versus pulling away from their parents; however, we perceive to see that the parent is inadequate; the child might not see that; they see it as mom and dad because they don't know how to measure it with any other measurement, so they consider that a standard. Being a cross ministry, at what point is the accountability of that social worker being overaggressive in terms of maybe justice or something in that nature?

In the housing debt that we have for social housing. I'm not trying to promote social housing; however, if we looked at it as a transition from not so good an environment to transitioning into a better environment, on that aspect.

Also on air quality. We know that FAS is linked to alcohol and so on and so forth, and gambling, you know, supports an unhealthy environment, but so does air quality in urban Edmonton, things like smog and other compounds that we find in their environment. Are there any studies, even through the Alberta Research Council or CASA, if they were interested, to link up these things with air quality to children having problems with learning?

Another question I would have is on the support for disabilities, the children with disabilities, and even the adults at that point. You know, I had one comment of a constituent who said that all the blueprints, one of them in a new subdivision, allow for a person with disabilities to buy a home. After they buy the home, they have to do a whole bunch of retrofits to the home to make it suitable for them, like taking out the stairs, and so on and so forth, moving the bathrooms. I'll let Mr. Lukaszuk talk. He's cutting in. Go ahead, Thomas.

Mr. Lukaszuk: No. Carry on.

The Chair: The question, please, to the minister.

Mr. Masyk: Okay. Anyway, what are we looking at with respect to cross-ministries?

Ms Evans: I'm going to review your question carefully from the transcript so that through the clerk we can provide this committee the expectations you would have for a proper follow-up, especially since you referenced the document Measuring Up, beyond the scope of the plan we're dealing with here today, and just comment briefly on the leadership role that the deputy minister has to play in co-ordinating the efforts of the ministries involved in the Alberta children and youth initiative.

Although it may not appear to touch the housing area directly for air quality, it does through the Seniors ministry – and the Seniors deputy is a part of that – look at living circumstances. Our predominant partners on that front are Human Resources and Employment, but the holistic evaluation that has to be brought to bear with how we address children, youth, and families is a

responsibility of this cross-ministry to develop and evolve.

I'd like to just make one observation. This deputy minister wouldn't brag about it, but in the external review she was given top marks for the efforts that she had made to co-ordinate that kind of capacity in government. So I'm very satisfied that the senior deputy, Mr. Nowicki, told me that she had done an exemplary job with the people outside that have reviewed those components.

To the specifics of that, we will try and provide you some reassurance with comments we'll make later, just given the time. But thank you for the question.

Mr. Masyk: Yeah. I am reassured that, you know, you're taking care of it ahead of time as our minister. The ad campaigns I think are wonderful: the two girls sitting in the boat with the dad going over with the life jacket, the cigarettes with the lungs and you can see the internal organs, and the one you mentioned where the baby is holding out for a flask. Those are all very encouraging to the public. I know that the children really can relate to that.

Thank you.

The Chair: We have a couple of minutes left. Ms Blakeman is expressing a wish to ask an additional question in the time permitted. Go ahead, please.

Ms Blakeman: Thanks. You may have to review the transcripts to get this and respond as well, Minister. I'm understanding of that.

On page 80 of part 1 of your annual report I notice that there is an underexpenditure on early intervention of \$11 million out of a \$51 million budget, and I'm wondering what the effect of that underexpenditure is. That's a lot of money not to have expended there.

My supplementary is around the over- and underexpenditure, overexpenditure on program services of \$4.1 million and an almost corresponding underexpenditure in child welfare of \$4.2 million. Were they connected? Was this a deliberate over- and underexpenditure to compensate or an accidental and unhappy coincidence?

I'll let you respond to those in writing. I just wanted to get the questions on the record.

Ms Evans: Sure. And one of the things I might point out is that if the programs weren't ready on the front lines to have an approval or if they weren't fully developed on the ECD, in the early intervention, then frequently there was money that had to be lapsed, but it's hard, given our year, to do that. We will give you a written response.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, hon. minister.

Now, Mr. Cenaiko has expressed an interest in getting a question on the record as well and would like a response in writing as well. Mr. Cenaiko.

Mr. Cenaiko: Thank you very much. Minister, just looking at page 69 of report 1 and the consolidated statement of operations, under Revenues we see transfers from the government of Canada, \$136 million. Moving to page 76, which is schedule 1, it shows the Canada health and social transfer as well as services to on-reserve status Indians. I'm just wondering: do we know actually the true amount – and I guess this could go to the Auditor General as well – of the funds that the province is providing services to, which is actually the responsibility of the federal government, and what that shortfall is? So what should be the true numbers of what the transfers should be in order to provide the programs that we now will

have in the new Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, which will be proclaimed next year?

10:00

Ms Evans: We'll be pleased to provide an accurate reflection of that. I think the hon. member is well aware that on the funds for some of the child care delivery, for early child development programs, we're not satisfied that we're receiving those. But we will make sure we've got a written response.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. At this time on behalf of all members of the committee present I would like to express our gratitude to the minister and her staff for their co-operation and their diligence this morning and also to the Auditor General and his staff. Thank you for your patience.

Ms Evans: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now, item 5 on the agenda, I would like to point out to all members of the committee, is the Canadian Public Accounts Committees' equivalent budget that was requested, I believe, by Dr. Taft earlier and has been compiled by the clerk. That is provided for your interest.

I would like to remind members of the date of the next meeting, December 10, with the Hon. David Hancock. If there are no other questions in regard . . .

Mr. Cenaiko: Are you entertaining motions for a raise for the chair?

The Chair: No. If the conduct of the committee doesn't improve, perhaps the chair will have to request danger pay.

Ms Blakeman: Motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Motion to adjourn. Thank you. See you next Wednesday.

[The committee adjourned at 10:05 a.m.]