

**Title: Wednesday, April 20, 2005 Public Accounts Committee**

Date: 05/04/20

Time: 8:30 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

**The Chair:** Good morning, everyone. I would like to call this meeting of our Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please. I would like to welcome everyone. Please note that the agenda packages were sent out on Monday.

Before we go any further, perhaps we could start going around the table introducing ourselves. Reverend Abbott, could you please start this morning.

[The following members introduced themselves: Rev. Abbott, Ms Blakeman, Mr. Bonko, Mr. Chase, Mr. Eggen, Mr. Johnston, Mr. Lindsay, Mr. MacDonald, Dr. Morton, Mr. Oberle, Mr. Prins, Mr. Rogers, and Mr. Webber]

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

[The following departmental support staff introduced themselves: Ms Alcock, Mrs. David-Evans, Ms Fricke, Mr. Goodman, Mrs. Hutchinson, Mr. MacDonald, and Ms Wosnack]

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I'm Heather Forsyth, MLA for Calgary-Fish Creek.

**Mrs. Dacyshyn:** Corinne Dacyshyn, committee clerk.

**The Chair:** The agenda was circulated. If there are no changes to the agenda, may we have that approved, please?

**Mr. Rogers:** So moved.

**The Chair:** Moved by George that the agenda as circulated be accepted. All those in favour? Any opposed? Thank you.

Now, again on behalf of the committee I would like to welcome the hon. Mrs. Heather Forsyth, Minister of Children's Services. In the past there was up to 15 minutes for the respective ministry to give an overview of their department, but the committee last week decided to reduce that to 10 minutes, please, because we are finding that there is a great deal of interest in asking questions from the members to the department. We decided that we would allow the hon. members that extra time before 10 o'clock to get as many questions as possible to the minister or to the Auditor General.

If you could please proceed, Mrs. Forsyth, we would be very grateful for a brief overview of your department.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you. Good morning, everyone: Mr. Chairman and members of the Public Accounts Committee, Auditor General Dunn and your staff. I'd like to introduce the ministry staff here with me today. I know we've done introductions, but we'll sort of put some titles with them. Beside me is Deputy Minister Maria David-Evans. I have with me my assistant deputy ministers Niki Wosnack, Phil Goodman, and Steve MacDonald. Beside me is the director of financial strategies, Shehnaaz Hutchinson; director of communications behind me, Jody Korchinski; and executive director for the prevention of family violence and bullying, Sheryl Fricke; and also my capable assistants, Maureen Geres and Debbie Malloy.

Last fiscal year the Children's Services ministry spent \$700 million on programs, services, and initiatives for Alberta children, youth, and families. The ministry made great strides toward fulfilling our vision of strong children, families, and communities.

The accomplishments outlined in the 2003-04 annual report help to fulfill the three core businesses, the first goal being promoting the development and well-being of children, youth, and families; secondly, keeping children, youth, and families safe and protected; and thirdly, promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families.

I'd like to highlight some of the accomplishments. Children's Services provided over \$4 million in funding to provide quality child care programs in Alberta and prepare daycares and family day homes for accreditation. This initiative aims to help families choose quality child care that meets their child's developmental needs. We improved access to child care with the Kin Child Care Funding program and by making the child care subsidy applications available online.

In consultation with parents and stakeholders we developed draft regulations and policies to support the new Family Support for Children with Disabilities Act. This act sets the stage for a wide range of proactive, family-centred support and services for children with disabilities and their families.

Children's Services invested \$4.75 million in FASD prevention and support programs and launched an FASD education and awareness campaign.

The prevention of family violence was a major focus for Children's Services in 2003-04. We held dozens of workshops and focus groups across the province involving community stakeholders. These consultations laid the groundwork for a number of key actions to address family violence and bullying in Alberta, which we will undertake in the upcoming 3-year business plan. In 2003-04 we opened 14 new provincially-funded beds in women's shelters in Edmonton and Calgary, and we helped with province-wide training for 2,500 RCMP officers on the dynamics of family violence.

In 2003-04 Children's Services placed 302 children in adoptive homes, a 30 per cent increase over the previous year. Our adoption website received international recognition. It was nominated for the Premier's award of excellence, and it was a finalist for the Canadian information productivity award in 2003. The international adoption program initiated 120 adoptions from 29 countries.

We also worked on developing regulations, policies, and training for the implementation of the new Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act.

In the past year the ministry focused on continuing to promote the development and well-being of children and youth through preventive programs. This investment continues to benefit children and youth as they develop into young adults.

We are pleased that all our 12 financial statements received unqualified audit opinions from the Auditor General in 2003-04. I would like to address the issues the Auditor General raised and the action taken by the ministry to ensure best practices are in place.

The Auditor General recommended that Children's Services "improve the Authorities' strategic management information systems." We are implementing this recommendation over a three-year period, and we continue to refine the process and improve the system.

The Auditor General noted that further improvements are still needed in the monitoring of services required by the delegated First Nation agencies. We agree with this recommendation and are making progress to implement it. The Auditor General recommended that Children's Services improve the quality of its reporting to ministry senior management on programs delivered at the delegated First Nation agencies. The proposed standards, monitoring checklist, annual report format, and quality assurance review will all assist with improving the reporting process.

The Auditor General's report indicated that the ministry needs to make more improvements in its cost-recovery systems regarding third-party billing and payment reconciliation for resident-on-reserve services. We are making good progress on implementing new processes to ensure best practices are in place.

The Auditor General said that the ministry must work on the processes used to award and manage contracts. We recognize the mistakes made in the past due to the lack of formal contract management systems, and we are taking steps to ensure that this will not happen again. We will implement a new contract framework and policy in early 2005-06.

The Auditor General recommended that Children's Services "complete its risk assessment" and use it "to plan internal audit activities." The ministry will work with the office of the chief internal auditor to ensure that 2005-06 audit activities match the ministry's evaluation of risk areas that require consideration and review. The ministry will also help the authorities with risk management systems and assessments.

The Auditor General again recommended that the ministry use performance measures and reporting data when deciding which measures to include in the business plan. I want to stress that we have made good progress toward addressing this issue by implementing improved data quality assurance and data availability testing for existing and proposed performance measures.

8:40

We welcome the opportunity to work with the Auditor General as a means to improving our services to children, youth, and family. We've taken steps and will continue to improve our systems, information, and performance practices as recommended by the Auditor General.

Thank you for your time this morning. I'm now happy to answer questions. I have staff here that will answer, and if there's something we can't answer, Mr. Chairman, we'll provide it in writing to the committee.

**The Chair:** Thank you, hon. minister. That will be in writing through the clerk to all the members.

Mr. Dunn, would you like to . . .

**Mr. Dunn:** Very briefly, if I may. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. As you've heard from the minister, our comments on this year are on pages 87 to 99 in this year's annual report.

Recommendation 7 deals with the quality of "reporting to Ministry senior management on program delivery" at the 18 agencies which were responsible for the program delivery at the First Nations.

Over the last two years our office has directed a significant amount of time at this ministry at the delegated First Nation agencies, their accountability, and the ministry's monitoring of services provided through these 18 agencies. This year we have reported on the four delegated First Nation liaison units – they are the oversight, or monitor the report on compliance of standards at the 18 agencies – that their annual reports need greater consistency in reporting on progress, that these reports should be summarized to provide senior management with key information, and that the ministry should undertake a complete review of all of the critical uses of the agencies' child welfare information to ensure that the current file review processes are sufficient.

The minister has also mentioned some other comments that we have, but I want to go on to something slightly different for a moment. I just want to share a bit of background with this committee on this ministry. This ministry was created on May 23, 1999.

Starting with our 2000 annual report, we have made approximately 35 recommendations to this ministry, covering matters ranging from governance, business planning, budgeting, accounting policies, contracting to financial management and reporting. For example, in our 2002 annual report we made five numbered and five unnumbered recommendations. The purpose of providing this committee with this prior year's information is to emphasize how far this ministry has come in improving its practices, processes, and systems.

Recently the ministry has also embraced the advice of my office on improving the effectiveness of audit committees and agencies and boards. The ministry, with the assistance of two of my assistant auditors general, has provided training to all CFSA boards on the role and effective operation of audit committees. In all, nine separate training sessions were held throughout the province, and a training video is now being produced by the ministry. I thought I'd share a little bit of history with you.

Those are my opening comments, and certainly I and my staff will answer any questions that are being directed to us. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Dunn.

We will proceed with questions, but the chair would remind all hon. members that you are given an opportunity to ask two questions. It's not necessary for a lengthy preamble, and there is to be no preamble with the second question. Some members have expressed frustration to the chair that they have waited patiently to ask a question and time has run out. So if we could manage our time better by keeping our questions brief and to the point, I think the chair would be very grateful and the members would be grateful as well.

Ms Blakeman, please proceed, followed by Mr. Webber.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Referring to the recommendation appearing on page 96 of the Auditor General's report around risk assessment, can the minister detail what the risk tolerance is that the ministry has established for principal risks?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** If I may: are you asking, Laurie, about the formal risk management process?

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** This ministry has been assigned responsibility for special delivery that is inherently high risk. As such, we have a long history of identifying and evaluating risk, particularly as it relates to the risk of harm that a child may be exposed to. The competency requirements for our front-line service delivery staff require that they be able to assess and evaluate risk and make appropriate risk management and risk decisions. Legislatively we are required to ensure that decisions are in the best interests of the child and that inappropriate risk situations are identified and acted on.

**Ms Blakeman:** How do you know that these steps, these protocols that you have in place, are actually mitigating the risks?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I can only tell you from an experience I had last night when I was visiting the crisis unit. The staff that were on the crisis phone that we were watching were incredibly experienced, dealing with very, very high-risk situations and the way they evaluated high-risk situations. I would say that a lot of it is the training that they have gained and what they're taught through going to school.

Maybe the director – Laura, would you like to add to that, please?

**Ms Alcock:** Thank you, Madam Minister. Certainly, in terms of quality assurance activities that we undergo around doing the file reviews, file audits, we're also implementing interviews with youth and children in terms of ensuring that the services that we provided are making a difference to them.

**Ms Blakeman:** Mitigating the risks.

**Ms Alcock:** Yes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Webber, followed by Mr. Bonko.

**Mr. Webber:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If you're making a list for next week, I would like to get on that one, please.

Good morning, Madam Minister. I would like to refer to page 97, the next page. It's the schedule 5. It's the comparison of expenses to the authorized budget. Under the ministry support services, the financial support to child and family research, there's an overexpenditure of about \$800,000. I would like it if you could provide details of this expense and how the research conducted by the research centre benefits children.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you. I think that in the ministry, Len, this is probably one of the most exciting things that is happening in this province for us, as particularly an interest in FASD. In fiscal 2003-04 \$2.8 million was contributed by Children's Services for the establishment of the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research. Innovation and Science also contributed a hundred thousand to the start-up funds. Over \$2.5 million of these funds were devoted by the research centre to its research fund, that will assist in research projects. The research fund is going to be used for the research in regard to FASD, and we feel that this is an important beginning and a strong foundation for building the research that we want to be doing on FASD.

It's important to know that our department took the lead in working with all three Alberta research universities, community partners, First Nations, Métis communities, Alberta science and research, Innovation and Science, all to the establishment of this particular unit. I know that we're not supposed to be talking about this year's budget, but we've put some money, more money, into it. It's an exciting project, that we've asked them to provide us with a lot of research data on FASD. They had a conference a couple months ago that I attended, and all the people that are dealing with FASD are very excited about what's happening from the research centre.

**Mr. Webber:** Okay. I've got a second question here. What progress has the Alberta Centre for Child, Family & Community Research made since its inception, and briefly what are the future plans of the research centre?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, what they have started on, again, is the research analysis on FASD. In the future we've — are we allowed to talk about this year's?

**Ms Blakeman:** No.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** No. Oh, okay. Sorry.

**Ms Blakeman:** Only this fiscal year.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I can only talk about this fiscal year. I can tell you that I'm on Committee of Supply, I believe, next week, so we can talk about the new year.

**Mr. Webber:** Sure. I'll ask you then.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Okay. Sorry.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bonko, followed by Mr. Rodney, please.

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What co-ordination did this ministry do with the Ministry of Education to improve the learning environment, such as social programs for children with disabilities?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I'd like to first of all say that we have many cross-ministry initiatives that are going on right now, and again what I consider groundbreaking and first in Canada is our legislation on children with disabilities, which incorporates the whole family.

What we've done is brought forward legislation which encompasses the whole family. Instead of just treating the child that has the disability, we're working with the whole family. We realized that families who are living with children with disability also need healthy approaches and work in that particular area. We felt that it was important to have a more co-ordinated and multidisciplinary approach to assessing children's short- and long-term needs, including transition planning for children up to 18 years of age. So in my mind — and this is one of the other things that is being watched across the country — the legislation is a piece of legislation that will better support the whole family instead of just the child.

8:50

**Mrs. David-Evans:** If I may supplement, the complex cases were also something that went very well between our Ministry of Children's Services and Alberta learning and a number of other ministries as well. Why that's really important is because the work that is done there is trying to make sure that there's good health built around students who are having difficulty in school and to help them succeed. What's been really important about that is that these children that are very complex have situations that almost no one agency can afford to deal with. They require case conferencing, and they require detailed and expensive types of services. So our SPC passed a policy for complex cases, and we have since introduced a model right throughout the province and funding to fund that as well.

I think that's all I can say without getting into this last year, but it was going very well. I happened to be, at the time, the deputy minister of Alberta learning, and I can say that the Ministry of Children's Services was very forthcoming in making sure that we had the kind of supports needed for kids.

**Mr. Bonko:** That's why I asked the question, because of your basis with Alberta learning and now with Children's Services.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yes.

**Mr. Bonko:** What did you do to improve their experience and how did you measure that improvement with regard to their educational experience?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** If I just stay in the '03-04 year, we were not able to actually get improvements measured yet because that was the

year in which it was implemented. So we'll be able to see that over the time period as we move forward.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Rodney, followed by Mr. Chase.

**Mr. Rodney:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. Thank you, minister, and thank you to your staff. I've had the opportunity to work personally and professionally with so-called disabled children even during the election. Of course, Minister, you met one of them at the Great Kids awards, the youngest one. I need to report back to these young folks, and I noticed in your extremely comprehensive report that on page 39 there is indeed a new "1-800 child disability information line." That's at the bottom of the first paragraph on the left. I'm just wondering if, indeed, the line is available and what you can tell us about what it offers for families.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Yes, the line is available, and again it's quite exciting. Yes, it's been very, very busy and extremely helpful to the parents that are looking for help. One of the things that I'm going to do is yet again put out – oh, I can't talk about this year. Sorry.

**Mr. Rodney:** That's okay.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** It's very exciting, and we've had huge success with the particular line, and it's been a huge resource for the parents who are looking for help with their children with disabilities.

**Mr. Rodney:** Sure. I appreciate that you can't answer it for the future. I'll look forward to more information on that.

The second part of that question, I suppose, is for last year: what can I tell these young disabled constituents about supports and services for families with children with disabilities and how they were improved last year?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I think that the phrase that comes to mind for me, Dave, is all encompassing. It's working for the whole family, not just the child with the disability. If it comes to respite care, any of that, we will provide. So we're treating the whole family, not just the child. That is what has got families with children with disabilities excited in this province because you finally realize that it's an all-encompassing piece of legislation, and it's not only treating the child; it's treating the entire family. Parents who've got children with disabilities at times have difficulty dealing with those disabilities. As cute as Brendan was, I'm sure there were some challenges for him, his family when he was young.

**Mr. Rodney:** You betcha. Thank you very much. All the best.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Prins.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you very much. On page 98 of the Auditor General's annual report under the heading 1.8 Annual Reports the recommendation for the third consecutive year is "that the Ministry consider the availability of data for performance measurement and reporting when deciding which measures to include in its business plans." Why has this recommendation been made two times without satisfactory progress?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Harry, I'm going to answer part of that, and then I'm going to ask one of my staff. It's one of the challenges and ques-

tions that we're dealing with now, but performance measures within the department have been a challenge for us to try and figure out how to deal with. One of the examples I can use is: for example, if you're talking about serious injuries or a death to a child in our care, well, we're fully acceptable of any of those, whether it's a tragic death or an incident within the department. If you have a child, for example, that is in foster care at a particular time and a death occurs because of riding a bike or something, how do you incorporate that into the care? When they're in your care, they're in your care. So it's trying to define the differences. If you have a child – God forbid that something has happened – that has been in the control of a foster family, for example, we've been struggling with how to do those performance measures.

Maybe somebody from the department would like to add. Phil?

**Mr. Goodman:** Yes. Thank you, Minister. The issue of creating performance measures for the very difficult work that we do is one that hasn't had much life across Canada. Alberta has taken the lead because of the importance of this initiative in working collaboratively with all the provinces and territories across Canada to create some national outcome baseline data and targets that speak to the important business of keeping kids safe. Often when we create measures, we do them because we know they are for the right reason, but our ability to reference it against baseline data still needs to be developed. So as we look at the issue of safety for children in our care or safety for children who we know of, as examples, as the minister is saying, at this point, particularly in this cycle, that was still skewed with general sociological information. Like, a dog biting that child would come in through our information system as a child maltreatment marker.

Not to get into the future, we're trying to clean that up so that the measures are important, but the veracity of our data was what brought that measure back to the table year over year.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. My supplemental: why did 14 out of the 18 authorities have 25 per cent or more of their performance measures lacking?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I think that goes to one of the criticisms that the Auditor General mentioned on dealing with the authorities. We're striving to improve that particular performance measure. When you're dealing with that many authorities and that many boards – we've struggled. We have now, as the Auditor General alluded to in his earlier comments, gone out actively training the staff out there and providing them with training manuals, staffed on the financial statements, and things like that. We think we're doing the right thing.

The deputy may want to comment and the Auditor General. He's recognized that we're improving that.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** One of the issues for the authorities, in fact, has been the number of authorities and the very smaller ones with capacity issues. That year, of course, you know that Children's Services reduced from 18 to 10. That really has helped in making sure that the regions are large enough to have the capacity to do the work that they need to do and meet the measurement criteria.

9:00

I think that when you see subsequent year reports, you'll see that, in fact, the level of attainment for those measurements has been much better, as has our own ability to monitor and to support them in the work that they're doing. So I think a combination of all of

those things is leading to an improvement. But 18 – in some cases some of them had a staff of 12. I mean, you just don't have the capacity to be able to do the kind of work that's necessary.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you.

**Mr. Dunn:** Maybe I can help. Thank you for the question because this hits at the heart of what we've been preaching for many, many years. If you're going to spend I believe you said \$700 million, there should be some outcomes, and the outcomes need something that you can trace or track as to what's happened over some time. Albeit that this organization, as I've emphasized in my little bit of history, has only been around for five years, it has struggled a little bit because of the integrity of the data coming from its predecessor type of groups. So it's only been around for five years.

In turn, we've emphasized this throughout the whole of the Alberta government, which says that we will measure our outcomes, and that's the challenge. Prior to doing your business plan and completing it, you should have assessed what your outcome measures are going to be and from where you will get the data. What we're recommending is: don't put in an outcome measure that you cannot get data for. Clearly, if you're going to put in an outcome measure, make sure you have the ability to get the data. That's the challenge back to this ministry. It has certain expectations it would like to see being measured, but it doesn't know how to measure them.

So your question hits at the heart of one of the challenges for this ministry: just how do you measure outcomes?

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you for those clarifications.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Prins, followed by Mr. Eggen.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've a couple of questions. It seems that Alberta takes the lead in many areas. I'm looking at page 5 in the Children's Services annual report. A paragraph here talks about the child care accreditation program: "Alberta's Child Care Accreditation program is the first of its kind in Canada." My first question: what actually led to the implementation of the Alberta child care accreditation program?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** A very, very exciting initiative, Ray. In fact, it's an exciting enough initiative that the federal government came to visit and look at it. As indicated, it is a made-in-Alberta response from the Alberta government to the challenges identified by the child care sector. Our focus was on high-quality child care, and it fulfills the government's goal of making sure that our children are safe, have healthy starts, and reach their full potential in life.

This accreditation program was incorporated by – I think it's important for people to understand – the child care sector and expert advice that we received when we were developing this. It's very, very exciting. I can tell you that I think we're at a huge percentage of child care that have applied to be part of the accreditation program. And I'm trying to stay out of this fiscal year. So it's an exciting initiative that we launched. It was brought together by a team of experts and, again, a first in Canada.

Does that answer it?

**Mr. Prins:** Partly. I'm going to ask another question. How is this program actually being implemented?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, the accreditation program was developed in partnership with the Alberta Child Care Network and the Canadian Child Care Federation in consultation with our Alberta community. Children's Services has contracted with a newly developed organization, the Alberta Association for the Accreditation of Early Learning and Care Services to deliver the accreditation process.

The accreditation will recognize quality programs and assist parents in evaluating child care programs to ensure the most appropriate setting for their children. Through this program Alberta's nearly 500 licensed day care centres and 87 approved family day home agencies that choose to pursue the accreditation are eligible to receive financial support – and I think that's important – to sustain the delivery of high-quality early learning and child care services to families across the province. Currently 95 per cent of the licensed day care centres and 99 per cent of contracted family day home agencies are receiving quality funding, staff support funding, and benefit contributions for staffing.

**Mr. Prins:** Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Very exciting.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Eggen.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes. Thank you. My question is in reference to the Auditor General's report, page 92. The Auditor General has identified in the report: "The Ministry has not yet developed a timeline for providing the training for the Agencies' delegated child welfare directors." So my question is: why has the ministry failed to do so, and when might we expect to have fully trained directors?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** David, I'm sorry; I missed the question.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** It's training for DFNA directors.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Oh, the delegated First Nations? Oh, sorry. I apologize because I hadn't heard the question.

**Mr. Eggen:** That's okay. Maybe I didn't enunciate.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I can tell you that we struggle with the delegated First Nations, but I am very, very pleased with the progress that we have done. It has been a challenge trying to get people on board and on side on this.

I am going to refer this to Phil because he's an expert on this, and we've had many, many discussions on the delegated First Nations and where we're going.

**Mr. Goodman:** Thank you. Certainly, during the period of this report and subsequent the critical objective for us was how to bring the appropriate quality of leadership from our DFNA colleagues to a common table. During this period, for example, there was little opportunity for DFNA directors, or delegated First Nation directors, to be working collaboratively with our CFSA child welfare experts.

During the period of this cycle great steps were made to bring those processes together, and the processes were brought together in a couple of ways, sir. One, through collaborative training. As the new legislation emerged during this period, critical in that was the relationship of a designated child welfare expert in the DFNA locale reporting through to our provincial director of child welfare similar to what would happen in our child and family service authorities.

That was a breakthrough moment in terms of building the team.

In relation to that not only were they then developing common expectations for service quality but were participating during this cycle in the development of appropriate training for all staff who deliver child welfare both on-reserve and off-reserve. I'm aware of the encumbrance in terms of subsequent, but I hope in terms of your question significant activity during this period was brought to the fore to bring the DFNAs and the CFSAs together to look at that critical issue of training and quality assurance.

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. In regard to that, then, given that perhaps the larger proportion of our population that's in care that is of a First Nations origin, is the allocation for these specialized programs adequate to meet the needs of the reality?

**Mr. Goodman:** The issue of funding to our DFNA colleagues is one of a great historical and present critical nature. Clearly, from our perspective First Nations people as a recipient of federal dollars to deliver service that apparently by federal obligation is to be consistent with provincial legislation and standards has been significantly flawed year over year. As we begin transformational activity to try to move the world of child welfare through new legislation into something that's far more community-based, preventative, and able to deal with emergent crises of kids being hurt and deal with them in a timely way, we are struck daily with the fact that our aboriginal friends on the DFNAs have little ability, based on historical funding formula, to be able to meet that expectation.

First Nations colleagues that are our service partners have come to our table in this cycle and subsequent saying: we want to figure out ways to participate in these transformational opportunities, but our hands are tied, based on our capacity to look at new ways of delivering service, when we are hamstrung by archaic funding formulas with the federal government.

At this juncture and I would say, with the respect of the table, including now this government has taken a very active role in trying to walk hand in hand with First Nations to the federal government and say: for goodness sake, based on the expectation but also based on the rightness of what's happening to aboriginal people, there has to be more flexible funding opportunities for these folks to catch up to best-practice adjustments.

9:10

**Mr. Eggen:** Thank you. That was a great answer.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Rogers, followed by Ms Blakeman.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Madam Minister, on page 19 there's a paragraph on partnerships, and I know you talked earlier about FASD, but it mentions here a partnership with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and AADAC. Could you maybe just expand on the success of that partnership?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I think probably the partnership, or the cross-government ministries as they're sometimes called, is something that has been successful within government. So when you're dealing with children – for example, my portfolio is dealing with children; I'm the minister responsible for children – yet you know those same children are accessing the resources of AADAC and Health, I think it's always important for us to continue to work with our partners when we're dealing with anything to do with children. So we have taken on with the cross-government ministries some very innovative initiatives working with Health, working with AADAC. For

example – and Dave will know this – the collaboration between the partners is important.

For example, if we apprehend a PCHIP child, which is a child who is involved in prostitution, and take them to our safe house, that child usually comes in with some significant health issues. Whether it's drug and alcohol addiction, they're usually coming in with some communicable diseases, which means you have to be partnering with the people who are involved. I can apprehend them into the PCHIP house and leave them there, but there are significant issues that we have to deal with at that particular time. So our partnership is with AADAC, whether the child goes into a voluntary program after that or we have to get a court order to keep the child there for three weeks. So I think that's one example of the ways we partner very well.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** If I can supplement two other examples. We worked with the College of Physicians and Surgeons and AADAC to develop really simple check lists for doctors, you know, when there's somebody who's pregnant that comes to them so that they can talk to them about it. So as simple as check lists and perhaps as important as research. As the research is being done, it's really important that doctors participate with us in that research, and we've done some excellent research in Alberta that's being used now. It's really important that the doctors are participating with us and that the Alberta college is supporting that participation in the research. That research will lead to better outcomes as we deal with FAS both from the prevention perspective as well as maintaining and managing the kids that are FASD.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you. I like that tie to outcomes.

My second question, Madam Minister, is on the community partnership enhancement fund and its support for municipalities. Could you enlighten us a little bit more about the type of support that's provided to municipalities from that fund?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I'm cautiously thinking how I'm going to answer. It was an initiative that was brought together from the Roundtable on Family Violence, and our partners were telling us that they wanted more – have I got the wrong one?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yeah, you've got the wrong one. Can I?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Right. Go ahead. Sorry.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** They're a community initiative, which is what the minister thought you were talking about, but I think the question you're asking is the enhancement grant.

Of course, the big thing here was that as the new enhancement act moved into looking at more prevention and more issues – did you want to continue, Minister?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** No. Go ahead.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** . . . looking more into prevention and early intervention, that space was also in some cases occupied by FCSS. Of course, municipalities were also part of the FCSS program on an 80-20 funding ratio.

So two things. The act required the province and the authorities to move more into early intervention and co-ordinate the services with the community there. FCSS was already in the community providing some of those services. What the partnership grant did was bring the two entities together and actually recognize the importance of collaborating and working together and making it not

only an expectation but also providing the training that's required for two entities.

If I can give you an example, in Calgary you would have one authority, and you have 23 FCSS agencies within their boundaries. That's not an easy thing to co-ordinate, therefore. And each FCSS agency doesn't do the same thing. The FCSS group in Calgary is not the same as the FCSS in Cochrane or the FCSS in Airdrie in terms of the service delivery. So the grant is very important in trying to bring together a very coherent way of dealing with the issues within a geographic region.

**Mr. Rogers:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Ms Blakeman, followed by Reverend Abbott, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. As a jumping off point for reference, page 115, in which the budget is laid out by expenses. Stakeholders have indicated that in the previous year and this year their liability insurance started to skyrocket, and in a quick survey that I did with a number of service delivery groups that are contracted under this department, their insurance went from double to fivefold. So I'm wondering: did the department do any work in this year with the Department of Finance to try and control some of these insurance costs for the agencies that do the actual program delivery on behalf of the department or contract with the department to do the program delivery? It's such a huge chunk of their budgets.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, you know, Laurie, I went one way with George, and I thought I was answering one question when he was really asking another. I apologize to George for that.

I'm not sure exactly about your question, but I'm going to see if one of the staff is aware and can answer that particular question for you.

**Mrs. Hutchinson:** On the insurance we have worked with the foster families, as our agencies do, to get their insurance. However, it was done in the '04-05 fiscal year. In '03-04 the issues were identified, saying that there is a problem. It was not necessarily getting the insurance but trying to get an umbrella coverage for our foster parents. Whatever we did with the insurance was in the fiscal year '04-05.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay.

**Ms Fricke:** Just a point of clarification. One thing that was done in that '03-04 year – some of the realities that our agencies face in terms of some of those escalating insurance costs, and I'll give you an example of the women's shelters. In that particular year we enhanced their core funding partially in recognition of the rising costs that they were facing, insurance rates being one of them.

In terms of your other question, I know that there are things going on to look at that in the bigger picture in this upcoming year, but that was the one thing that we directed money to in '03-04 in recognition of the pressures that are facing them.

**Ms Blakeman:** Okay. My supplementary then: in this fiscal year, once you'd identified the issue, did you look at any sort of self-insuring funds as a way of addressing the problem to assist the agencies?

**Ms Fricke:** No.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thanks.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** It's a good question, though. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Reverend Abbott, please, followed by Mr. Bonko.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, Minister, for being here today. I guess my questions are around the prevention of family violence. Schedule 5 of your ministry's annual report, page 97, talks about the spending on that. Again, this is one of those things that you're sort of on the side of angels, so it's very difficult to criticize. However, you still have to be fiscally responsible, and I've noticed that the ministry did overspend their budget on the prevention of family violence by close to \$2 million. I'm wondering if you can give us an explanation on that.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I guess sometimes you beg for forgiveness, and we have to do this on this particular initiative because it's so important to the government. It started off with a commitment. I believe that went back to a commitment from the Premier. It got bigger from that by all the round-tables that we had. It's a huge, huge issue and one of the saddest issues that I have to deal with in my particular department.

9:20

So for me \$2 million, even though it is a deficit, I guess as the minister responsible I'll say it's a worthwhile debt. We have made huge gains on this particular issue. And you're right: you have to be on the side of the angels on this particular initiative. We think we have lots more work to do, and because I have to stay between the 2003-2004 – we recognize that it's an important initiative for the people in the province. It's a big issue, and we really need to bring this issue to the forefront. In that year we spent a lot of time on education, and I alluded in my speech to the training of the officers.

Sheryl, do you want to add anything because you're the expert?

**Ms Fricke:** Sure. That was a bit of a watermark year for us. It was really exciting. As the minister has already mentioned, that was the year the Premier announced that we would do the round-table, a huge recognition of the issue, and it gave us a real chance to bring together agencies from all over this province who have been working on this issue for a long, long time.

One of the other things that was exciting in that year, that may have got lost in some of that profile – that was also the year that we enhanced the core services to the women's shelters in this province. So in that year we also implemented the core services model that was developed by a number of people across this province, a recognition of the high utilization, the differences in services that were available across the province. That was the year when we brought that together. So the round-table, yes, but that was a great year for the women's shelters in this province, as well.

**The Chair:** Before we continue, just a point of clarification. Was there a transfer of authority from all the respective regional authorities to the Department of Children's Services?

**Ms Fricke:** The next fiscal year. When we did the reorganization of the boundaries, that was when we centralized again.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thanks.

Proceed, please.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you. I guess my follow-up is on the same subject of the prevention of family violence, and you sort of touched on it, Heather, but I'm just wondering about some measurable outcomes; for example, tracking family violence and statistics, et cetera. Is there something like that where we can see, you know, that we got value for money?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, again, I think, if I may – and the Auditor General may want to supplement my answer – it goes back to outcomes. You can't have performance measures if you don't know how you're going to track the outcomes. We could probably provide you details with how many women are entering the shelters. What happens from then, once they leave, we can track some part of it. In my mind, if you're going to have performance measures, then as the Auditor General has said, you have to have outcomes. So how you track those outcomes and those performance measures – we know that we've aggressively at this point in time been dealing with the issue of family violence. We could tell you exactly: beds. But how do you provide outcomes on whether your money that you're pouring out is dealing with the issue of family violence? So it's a struggle.

Does anybody want to add?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Just maybe a couple of supplementals. The difficulty in the work with this is how to measure who hasn't returned because of the work that has been done. How do you measure the benefit that a child receives when they're not exposed to continuous family violence? So it's a very difficult one to measure, as the minister is saying. We're certainly trying with some measures, and I'll just let Sheryl supplement with a couple.

**Ms Fricke:** One of the ways that we are tracking the data and taking a look at the difference that we're making in the services through women's shelters: we have an information system that was refined in that year, and what we've been able to do is take a little more of an evaluative look at what that data tells us. So one of the measures that we've used and have been able to track data on is exit surveys from women that say: as a result of being in the service, are you in a better position to keep safe, keep your children safe, et cetera? So for that service we have gone to great lengths to be able to go to an outcome focus.

The prevention piece, a harder piece of work and something we're working real hard to address.

**Mr. Dunn:** If I could supplement there. If you turn to the annual report, pages 50-51, it's what Sheryl was talking about. It shows that performance measure and the difficulty in trying to gather that information. What you were restricted to, really, were exit surveys. It shows that the people come in, and they then through their responses to the survey said that they felt they were better protected. But as the minister and the deputy have said: what happens after that, when they leave?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** One of the things that I found when we were working on the PCHIP legislation – once the child had left the safe house and we had provided either voluntary services or had them under a court order, I was finding that the family wanted to move on. They wanted to forget that part of their life, and they wanted to move on. I recall phoning one of the families that I had significant dealings with way back when I was working on this piece of legislation, and the dad clearly said to me: Heather, we want to move on; we want to forget that part of life. So sometimes it's difficult to provide outcomes when, you know, people want to move on with their life.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Bonko, followed by Mr. Oberle, please.

**Mr. Bonko:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. What accountability control measures were in place to ensure that the safety and the quality of life for children in government care are there? What do we have that's there that we're measuring?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** We're measuring a number of things, and we'll give you some examples, but certainly one of the things we're very interested in is making sure that children are not hurt or they don't die while in the care of government. We have safety standards, and we monitor those standards. From the department we work to make sure that not only the authorities but the services that they contract with are also providing those kind of safety factors. So there are regular reviews.

We also have the Social Care Facilities Review Committee, that also talks to kids in care and in group homes and in government-run facilities, and we get feedback from that. So there's a variety of ways that we try to measure to make sure and try to look at making sure that we get that.

I'll just get Phil to supplement as well.

**Mr. Goodman:** Thank you. The only supplement from my perspective would be the very important dynamic relationship with the child advocate's office, as well, the child advocate being a critical part of our ministry but also apart from us enough to be able to provide critical commentary from both an individual case circumstance to system concern. We've worked during this cycle and subsequent very closely with the child advocate to make sure that as he's hearing from children, as he's hearing from the system we're integrating that into our planning and standards compliance.

**Mr. Bonko:** My second supplemental: do we have enough people to accurately monitor and review the standards and check in with the agencies, and how often is that done?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Well, as the deputy I would say that I would always like to have more staff because the staff are really pushed to the limit, but I'm not sure that that's the answer that my minister wants to hear.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I struggle because I have to look at that year, and we're in this year, and I'm not allowed to comment on that year. As the new minister responsible for Children's Services in this year I tend to agree with the deputy. I can only tell you how incredibly busy the department is, how complex the cases are that we're getting within the department of the children that we are apprehending. They come in with incredibly complex needs. To monitor and check: probably not. I agree with the deputy. It's something we'll work on, though, as the new minister.

9:30

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Oberle, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you, Mr. Chair. If I could refer you to page 42 of the annual report, the beginning of the section "Percentage of Alberta children demonstrating healthy social and emotional development." Then the first bar graph in that section, the first actual measure, on page 43, reports the "Percentage of Children, 2-5 Years Old Not Displaying Attributes Associated with Emotional



Problems/Anxiety,” and I could infer from that graph that the percentage of children who are displaying those attributes has actually increased over that period, which is the entire period of the existence of the department. Can you help me with that graph? Are you confident that the survey methodologies or the data sources are consistent between those two reporting periods there? Do you think that trend is significant?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** That’s a good question, Frank, and I’m going to ask Laura or Phil to answer that.

**Ms Alcock:** Perhaps I’m not understanding, but when I look at this graph what I look at is a decrease, so these children are not displaying attributes.

**Mr. Oberle:** That’s right. It means fewer children are not displaying the attributes, which means more children are displaying those attributes.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** “In 1998-99, 87.8 per cent of Alberta children aged two to five did not display attributes.”

**Mr. Oberle:** Which means 13 per cent did display attributes.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Right.

**Mr. Oberle:** Right. Then in 2000-2001, 15 per cent displayed attributes, right? So it’s actually increased.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, my only comment on that goes back to what I just said a few minutes ago. The children that are entering our care are entering with very, very complex needs, and whether they’re emotional or physical, we’re dealing with some very, very complex needs.

**Mr. Dunn:** Can I just interject because you’ve got a very good question. That’s exactly why you need performance measurements. The performance measure was to look at comparison to national average, and what it was was the national average was falling faster than the Alberta average, so Alberta is actually – you’re right in your 12 per cent versus 15 per cent; it’s just the national average fell even more. So the complexities across the country are there. It’s just Alberta is also struggling with trying to deal with those complexities. Back to the department staff.

**Mr. Oberle:** Okay. Obviously we’re dealing with a national trend and perhaps not significant. I don’t know whether 2 per cent or 3 per cent change is significant over that period. But this same graph and many others in the book show that there’s a significant difference between Alberta and the rest of Canada, which is not surprising. There are significant differences in social and economic conditions. So it begs the question: why as a primary performance measure would we compare ourselves to the rest of Canada instead of comparing ourselves to our own past performance?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, again, that’s what the Auditor General alluded to about developing performance measures within a portfolio and then the outcomes. Some of these we have no other comparison other than what the national data is providing us or the national average. You know, I can go back to when I was a Solicitor General. You had the Canadian Justice that you were comparing particular stats to versus what was happening in Alberta. A new

portfolio and we struggle again with what is available for us to compare to. So you use a national average, and then you say: well, this is what Alberta is doing. Now, we could go into Saskatchewan and say: what is your comparable data, and what are your performance measures at? We may be able to get something from another province, but all of the national data, from my understanding, is collated and sent into Canada, so that’s our comparison. It again goes to the fact that when we’re developing performance measures and outcomes, we struggle.

Fred, do you want to add?

**Mr. Oberle:** Well, I think you’ve done an admirable job in the short time. I just wanted to point out that one graph.

Thank you very much.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** You’re welcome.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Lindsay, please.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you. My questions have to do with children in custody, specifically youth in care transition to independent living. I would like to know: how does the department ensure that contracting agencies maintain suitable government standards?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** They, in fact, are monitored. First of all, they have to be accredited. We’ve got an accreditation process within the province. The agency that does the accreditation is independent. That accreditation goes through regularly when they go through the accreditation system, checks for a variety of things that would identify them as being suitable, and makes sure that children are safe, well cared for, and are having positive outcomes. When the authorities contract with those agencies, they make sure that they are accredited. So that’s certainly one of the ways that we ensure.

**Mr. Chase:** As part of this sort of accreditation and supervision process, how often are government contract agencies investigated and monitored by government officials or officials of this department? The cycle of monitoring, how frequently does the monitoring of these extended agency contracts take place?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** I’d like to have us get back to you. I believe it’s three years, but I need to have that confirmed. Is that right?

**Ms Alcock:** In terms of accreditation it’s a once every three- or four-year cycle depending on the accreditation body.

Supplement to that in terms of the monitoring of the contracts: the contracts are monitored on an annual basis. The contracted expectations are of course set out within the contract, and those are monitored, too, on an annual basis as well as in terms of case by case.

So if I’m a worker and I have a child in a contracted facility, then part of my role and responsibilities in terms of working with that child is to have regular contact with that child as well as with the agency in terms of ensuring that that child’s needs are being met and good outcomes are happening for that child. So it’s on a variety of levels.

**Mr. Chase:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Lindsay, please.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the hon. minister: on page 115 of your ministry's annual report under family and community support services and support to communities and organizations approximately \$60 million was budgeted there. Could you just give me an overview to highlight the services provided under that budget?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** The family and community support service funding allows people to become involved in planning and problem solving around the social concerns. Individual families and communities gain strength by attending to their mutual well-being. Once people become aware and involved, they can solve problems and tackle many issues as a result. I think you start seeing the community taking ownership, and the family and community support service program works to prevent families and individuals from getting into crisis in support situations. We feel that they're a very, very important part of the ministry because they're working in the community and identifying local needs and helping us to identify what the needs are and where the dollars have to be spent.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** If I can supplement: they will provide services depending on the community's needs, everything from information and referral services, assisting with organizations to make sure that there are volunteers well trained to do various kinds of work. They will provide preventative counselling. They will do community work and work in the community to ensure capacity building. They'll provide direct grants to service delivery agents in the community that they believe are preventative and early intervention, in some cases even crisis. So they do take a look at the whole community needs and at the community level look at the funds that are available.

9:40

In some communities the 20 per cent is actually even larger in terms of the matching ratio because the community feels that there are things that they may wish to support and fund. In Edmonton and Calgary, for example, FCSS funds out-of-school care, so there's just a variety of different things that the various FCSS, 199 of them, I think, around the province, do to provide good services for the community and community-based services.

**Mr. Lindsay:** A supplemental. When you consider performance measures and tracking outcomes, how do you measure the value of that particular program?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, we've developed a performance measure called making a difference – or it's sometimes known as MAD – for FCSS, and we've looked at and reported on tangible outcomes of the investment that's provided by both the province and the municipalities when they're dealing with the children and youth and families. The system has two components: a program logic model, which was developed by individual FCSS programs, that articulates short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes for clients and identifies if the goals and strategies of the program are achieved, and we have a database with the ability to create tools for measuring the success of the program logic model, and it's to collect, analyze, and aggregate the information gathered to measure success.

The first report of the aggregate data from information was entered into the Hull outcome monitoring and evaluation system database by local FCSS programs and their funded agencies, and it was released in November of 2004.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Just one supplemental to that. Again, this is

something that is unique in Canada. There is no other FCSS program of the like in Canada anywhere, so when we come up with how to measure the outcomes for this particular program, we're pretty much on our own in trying to come up with the kind of models that actually look at how to measure preventive and early intervention services. There is no other thing like it across Canada, so we're going at it on our own again.

**Mr. Lindsay:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Please proceed, David.

**Mr. Eggen:** Thanks. You can call me Dave.

On page 96 of the Auditor General's report there was an identification that the ministry failed to develop formalized conflict-of-interest guidelines, so I would just like to ask about that – it's on page 96 of the Auditor General's report, the first improvements needed – if you could report on what progress has been made in this area.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** David, I'm sorry. That's one of the things we'll have to get back to you on. Can anybody comment? Sorry. I apologize for that.

**Mr. Eggen:** That's okay.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I'll get that to the committee in writing.

**Mr. Eggen:** Sure.

A supplemental as well: if you could just, sort of, stick in there where the areas are where conflict of interest is perhaps more problematic and what has been specifically done to address those areas, I'd appreciate it.

Thanks.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Is it the contracting that you're referring to?

**Mr. Eggen:** Yeah. Conflict of interest in the contracting.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Thank you. As a result of that we have indeed developed new policies on contracting out and making sure that conflict of interest and other issues are dealt with, and in fact within the next month and a half we'll be implementing a new contract policy for the department.

**Mr. Eggen:** Okay. Thanks. If you can just give me the guidelines at some point, that would be great.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yeah. We'll do that.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** We can't answer the question on what we're doing this year because of the criticism and recommendations by the Auditor General, but I can assure the committee that we are working on it and would be pleased to provide you that information, either by writing or whatever day it is next week when we're – Wednesday.

**Mr. Eggen:** Yes, doing the budget.

**Mr. MacDonald:** Madam Minister, again I'd like to remind you: if you could provide written answers.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Yes, I believe you brought that up at the beginning, Mr. Chairman, and I'd be pleased to do that for you.

**The Chair:** Through the clerk. Thank you.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Madam Minister, I understand how difficult it is to curb your enthusiasm for the future in your ministry, but I do have to bring you back to the report. I want to refer you to page 17 and the summary of key activities, approximately half way down the page, in regard to the child and family services authorities. The boards had been reduced from 18 to 10. I'm not sure if you can answer this question in this direction, but I would like to know what sort of impact that had on the boards themselves.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, thank you, Ray. The reason for amalgamating the authorities was to ensure consistent planning and provision of services to local communities as well as to improve the government's and the administrative management that the Auditor General referred to previously. With the amalgamation we also aligned the child and family services authorities with the regional health authorities, except for two alignments, and that was in the northwest region. That extended the northwest boundaries to the Silver Birch. I think it's one of the positive things that were done in the department. Again, I keep alluding to one of the recommendations of the Auditor General, and that's the financial aspects of it.

We are pleased with what has been happening with the smaller boards, and the boards are pleased with what's happening, having that smaller board. There were some areas where we hardly had any board participation at all, so in our mind it's a positive move.

Deputy, do you want to answer?

**Mrs. David-Evans:** There's no doubt that in bringing 18 down to 10 there were some cultural issues as different boards from different regions amalgamated. Of course, not all previous board members, you know, got to be board members of the new region, and they had to be trained in new areas that they weren't that familiar with. Indeed, there were some cultural and organizational issues, but overall we actually experienced a reduction in the administrative costs of operating the boards themselves. So I think that's positive. We also see a way that they are able to move forward in a very positive way and are able to bring together other aspects of their operation, particularly as it relates to aboriginal children that are in the care of boards, where they're able to much more cohesively work together.

**Mr. Danyluk:** So, if I may, Mr. Chair. What I understand – oh, I'm not supposed to have a preamble. I'll make the second one very easy. I gather from your comments, then, that it has had a positive impact, and their performance has improved. Is that so?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Yes.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yes.  
It's a good thing we agreed.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Yes, it's been very positive for the boards, Ray.

**Mr. Danyluk:** Okay. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Ms Blakeman, followed by Reverend Abbott, please.

**Ms Blakeman:** Thank you. Two questions that I can quickly get on the record, and you can provide answers in writing. Obviously, I don't expect you to know the number. I'm interested in: what is the mean worker caseload, or what was the caseload in this fiscal year

as compared to the previous fiscal year? In other words, they've been very high at times, where one worker has been handling 415 cases. Has that gone up or down?

The second question is on page 98 of the ministry's annual report. I notice that \$53,000 was paid to the chief internal audit office. Could I get an explanation on the work that was done that's reflected in that payment?

Thank you.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** If I understand, Laurie, you would like that in writing?

**Ms Blakeman:** Yes.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Okay. We'd be pleased to do it.

**The Chair:** Yes, please . . .

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Yes, through her. We will. I catch on very quickly.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Reverend Abbott, please.

**Rev. Abbott:** Thank you. I'm going to be a little more positive than I was last time. I do want to congratulate your ministry on the recognition received internationally for your adoption website. In fact, on page 53 of the ministry's annual report you talk a little bit about that, but I guess I'd like to know how effective the adoption website tool is. And if I could throw in my supplemental now: what are some of the costs associated around that?

9:50

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I think the adoption website was highly successful. One just needs to reflect on the criticism of the adoption website when it was first launched by the previous minister. We still have a lot of children in care, obviously, that we'd like adopted, and we have people that still look at the adoption website. It has received numerous awards, and I explained earlier that we were up for one of the top awards in Canada. It's important for us to get the message out that we have children in care, many with disabilities, that we would like to find permanent homes for.

So I would have to say, all in all, the adoption website has been hugely successful. Has it been successful enough? No. Our ultimate goal would be no children on that website. But for all of the criticism that was laid at that particular time, I think it has been hugely successful, and we're extremely proud of it.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Just to add that when we take a look at the numbers of adoptions from the year before and the numbers of adoptions in the year in question, there was over a 30 per cent increase in the adoptions, and that can be directly attributed to the number that actually came off the website. Over 50 came directly off the website. It attracts a different kind of individual. When they're able to actually see the child and see their needs and see a face, it attracts a different kind of individual. So I think that it was a very brilliant move for the previous minister to go into that new information age and look at people that are connecting directly with that on a daily basis and engage them in the adoption process as well, and I think it has been very successful.

**The Chair:** Thank you.  
Mr. Bonko, followed by Mr. Oberle, please.

**Mr. Bonko:** I'm okay, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

**Mr. Oberle:** I'll try to be more positive too. My question went south the last time.

Goal 4 says: "The well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal children . . . families, and communities will be promoted, supported and comparable to that of other Albertans." I focus on the last part of that: "comparable to that of other Albertans." The document seems to make an almost concerted effort to report aboriginal children separately from other children. I'm wondering if the department has any plans to actually include hard targets to narrow the gap – and there are in some areas significant gaps – between aboriginal children and the rest of Albertans. Are you actually going to set hard targets to try and narrow those gaps?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Well, I think it has always been a priority of the government and the ministry to try and establish a smaller percentage of aboriginal children in care, period, whether it's in my ministry or under the Solicitor General's ministry, and the number of young offenders or adult population of aboriginal people that we have either incarcerated or in my ministry. It's something that's dear to the heart of the ministry about recognizing and trying to figure out how to have less aboriginal children in care. We have put a lot of thought and a lot of time and a significant amount of money into dealing with the issue of aboriginal children.

What I would like to say – and Phil alluded to this earlier – is that we need INAC, our federal partner, to come up to the plate and start to deal with the issue of the aboriginal children off-reserve. We will provide the services and do whatever we can, but they have to partner with us. This is not a criticism only today. This is something that we've been trying to deal with since 1999. I can tell you that it's one of the top priorities of our government, whether it was last year or whether it is this year, on how we deal with this particular issue.

**Mr. Oberle:** Thank you very much.  
No supplemental, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Time permitting, the chair is going to take this opportunity to ask the hon. minister a question.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Okay.

**The Chair:** Maybe the chair should have been paying more attention to the procedures of the meeting and less attention to the annual report, but I see on page 115 of your annual report, schedule 5, that there is money allocated for the fetal alcohol initiative: \$2.3 million. The amount unexpended was \$1.1 million. But I will just use two other authorities as an example. For instance, on schedule 4 the Calgary and area child and family services authority spent \$900,000 on the same initiative, and the authority in Edmonton spent, I think, \$1.1 million. That is on page 216. It is a huge problem. Why is this money that's allocated being unspent, yet we see at the regional authority level in some cases there is more money being spent than what is dedicated? So are they taking money from other programs to fund their own initiatives?

**Mrs. Forsyth:** I can answer right away the one question that you asked about taking money from one program to another. The answer is no. We have been very aggressive on dealing with the issue of FAS, and there have been some pilot projects that we've been dealing with, and the deputy is going to . . .

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yeah. There were some pilot projects that year that finished, and that's what caused the underexpenditure.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you. Maybe I'll pursue this.

**Dr. Morton:** I just have a request for some information. Do you have an internal report or study that describes adoption policy practices over the last decade or so, some indication of pre- and post-trends in terms of the website and private versus public adoption and legal rights? Is there some sort of internal report or study? Just a personal request; I'd like to inform myself more in that area.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yes, we have, and we'd be pleased to supply that information.

**Dr. Morton:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Through the clerk.

**Mrs. David-Evans:** Yes, of course.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That concludes this portion of the meeting.

I would like on behalf of all members of the committee to thank the hon. minister and her staff for their time and attention this morning.

**Mrs. Forsyth:** Thank you. I'd like to say I appreciated being here, but . . . It was very nice. Everybody was very kind. Thank you.

**The Chair:** And I would like to thank on behalf of the members the Auditor General and his staff as well. Thank you.

Are there any other items of business this morning?

**An Hon. Member:** Who's going to Boston? Do we know who's going to Boston?

**The Chair:** I have no idea.

**Mrs. Dacyshyn:** That's a different committee.

**An Hon. Member:** I thought we had one to Niagara and a different one to Boston.

**Mrs. Dacyshyn:** That's Leg. Offices, not Public Accounts.

**The Chair:** Dr. Morton has a question in regard to agenda item 4, Other Business.

**Dr. Morton:** The questions that I submitted in writing, when we get answers back on those, is that circulated to the entire committee?

**The Chair:** Yes.

**Dr. Morton:** Great. Thank you.

**The Chair:** Okay. Seeing no other business, I would like to remind all members of our meeting next Wednesday, April 27, with Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation.

**An Hon. Member:** Can we start at 5 a.m.?

**The Chair:** No, that is not possible.

**Mr. Dunn:** May I just mention one item. With the reorganization this minister now is involved in transportation and infrastructure, so you'll have to look up both reports and ours; also, the triple P, remember, is in a separate section. So you've really got three sections of our annual report plus two ministry statements to bring together.

**Ms Blakeman:** So start reading now.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dunn, for that.

May I have a motion to adjourn, please. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Webber that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour?

**Hon. Members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** No one's opposed. Thank you very much. We'll see you next Wednesday.

[The committee adjourned at 10 a.m.]

