

Title: Wednesday, November 21, 2007

Date: 07/11/21

Time: 8:30 a.m.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. If I could call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order, please. On behalf of all members I would like to welcome those in attendance. Perhaps we can quickly go around the table, starting with the vice-chair, and introduce ourselves.

Mr. Prins: Good morning. My name is Ray Prins, Lacombe-Ponoka.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. I'm Phil Massolin. I'm the committee research co-ordinator for the Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. A. Johnston: Good morning. Art Johnston, Calgary-Hays.

Mr. Eggen: Good morning. Dave Eggen, Edmonton-Calder.

Mr. Chase: Good morning. Calgary-Varsity representative, Harry Chase.

Mrs. Mather: Good morning. Weslyn Mather, Edmonton-Mill Woods.

Mr. Bonko: Good morning. Bill Bonko, Edmonton-Decore.

Ms Ferguson: Good morning. Karen Ferguson, Children's Services, family support for children with disabilities program.

Ms Fricke: Good morning. I'm Sheryl Fricke from prevention of family violence and bullying, Alberta Children's Services.

Ms Wosnack: Niki Wosnack, assistant deputy minister, Children's Services.

Mr. Goodman: Phil Goodman, assistant deputy minister, Children's Services.

Ms David-Evans: Maria David-Evans, Deputy Minister of Children's Services.

Mr. G. Johnston: Gord Johnston, assistant deputy minister, Children's Services. Good morning.

Ms Hutchinson: Shehnaz Hutchinson, senior financial officer, Children's Services.

Ms Lopatka: Sharon Lopatka, assistant director of communications, Alberta Children's Services.

Mr. Wylie: Good morning. Doug Wylie, Assistant Auditor General.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Dunford: Hi. Welcome. Clint Dunford, Lethbridge-West.

Mr. Herard: Denis Herard, Calgary-Egmont. Welcome.

Mr. Cardinal: Good morning. Mike Cardinal, Athabasca-Redwater.

Mr. Webber: Hello. Len Webber, Calgary-Foothills.

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

Dr. Brown: Neil Brown, Calgary-Nose Hill.

The Chair: My name is Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar. This committee is very ably assisted by Corinne Dacyshyn, our committee clerk. I would like to advise that the briefing material was posted for viewing and printing, of course, on Friday. There was additional information provided on Monday as well.

On that note, could I please have approval of the agenda that was circulated? Mr. Bonko. Approved by Mr. Bonko that the agenda for the November 21, 2007, meeting be approved as circulated. All those in favour? Opposed? None. Thank you very much.

Now our meeting with Ms Maria David-Evans, the Deputy Minister of Alberta Children's Services. If there are any of your additional staff that are behind you and they would like to participate or supplement an answer, they are free to do so. If they could go to the microphone, we would be very grateful for that. If you would like to give a brief overview of the department's activities for the year 2006-07, go ahead. Please proceed.

Ms David-Evans: Good morning and thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the Public Accounts Committee, Auditor General Dunn and staff. I'm really pleased to be here with probably the best team in the government of Alberta, and you'll soon know why. This ministry is one of the ministries that touches the lives of hundreds of thousands of people every day, and it's full of daily triumphs. But on occasion there are tragedies that do happen. I'd like to talk a little bit about last year's fiscal and talk about Children's Services and what we did and what we accomplished.

We spent approximately \$900 million on programs and services for Alberta's children, families, and youth. We made great progress toward shaping our ministry's vision of strong children, families, and communities, and the accomplishments outlined in the '06-07 annual report helped fulfill our three core businesses: one, promoting the development of well-being of children, youth, and families; two, keeping children, youth, and families safe and protected; and three, promoting healthy communities for children, youth, and families.

Our ministry's governance structure is integral to making sure that our core businesses are carried out. Our 10 child and family services authorities continue to provide direct services tailored to meet the needs of children and youth and families living in different regions of our province. Each authority is governed by an appointed board that is uniquely co-chaired by an aboriginal and a nonaboriginal chair. Each board hires a chief executive officer to oversee the authority's legislated responsibilities for service delivery. The CEOs are accountable to both the regional boards and to myself, the deputy minister. This ensures that regional service delivery needs remain a focus, allows for strategic policy direction to be set at the provincial level, and ensures administrative, operational, and system-wide co-ordination. We believe the dual reporting works well. I'm pleased to report that under this structure we were again very successful in ensuring that our expenditures were directed most effectively to meet the various service demands we have.

To illustrate, I would now like to take the opportunity to highlight a few of our accomplishments from the last year. In child care, to ensure that parents have accessibility to quality, affordable child care options, we consulted with Albertans and for the second time specifically talked to operators and the business community to find ways to create more spaces. Operators told us that attracting and keeping staff was their main concern, and the business community

made it clear that while they may provide one-time or workplace supports, they were not nor wanted to be in the business of providing child care services.

And we responded. We responded by providing \$2 million to increase the accreditation incentive on wages and by investing another \$1.5 million to introduce the child care bursary. The bursary facilitates leadership training for senior child care staff and helps build capacity in the system. In addition, we helped accredit 76 child care programs, with another 353 programs working towards accreditation. While all child care programs must meet the rules set out in policy and legislation to ensure the safety and well-being of children, accreditation is a voluntary step taken by operators to ensure that their programs meet child care standards of excellence.

Our minister also introduced the Child Care Licensing Act, which encourages new approaches to creating child care programs and places emphasis on quality care and the safety of children. We invested more than \$2 million to establish 10 new parent link centres around the province, including Edmonton, Calgary, Hinton, Peace River, and Chestermere. This brings our total to 46 centres in Alberta offering play-based learning activities, parenting workshops, seminars, and other valuable early childhood development resources to thousands of families every day.

Under our government's priority to provide safe and secure communities, the prevention of family violence and bullying was another main focus for our ministry last year. We made amendments to the Protection Against Family Violence Act to provide better protection for victims of family violence and included stalking in the definition of family violence, making Alberta only the second province in Canada to do so. We ran two award-winning awareness and prevention campaigns: one which targeted youth, called Stand Up and Stop Bullying, and the other was the End the Silence, Stop the Violence family violence prevention campaign. During these campaigns we launched the bullying helpline and the family violence information line to help Albertans deal with these very serious issues.

We also awarded \$3.6 million in grants to support 95 projects in 52 Alberta communities working to increase awareness and help prevent family violence and bullying at the grassroots level. A couple of the local initiatives we helped fund include the Lacombe Neighborhood Place Society's role awareness conference, which addresses family violence and bullying in rural areas, and Hinton's Friendship Centre project, which works to end violence in aboriginal communities.

Finally, we undertook a review of the women's emergency shelter program, looking at the challenges faced by Alberta women's emergency shelters, and acted on recommendations from the review, including providing a 3 per cent salary increase for shelter staff and establishing a women's shelter leadership bursary to assist senior shelter staff in their professional development and also to increase capacity.

Alberta broke new ground with the introduction of the Drug-endangered Children Act. This is the first legislation in Canada to make it clear that children exposed to drug activity are specifically victims of abuse and need to be protected. In 2006-07 the act helped us apprehend 25 children and keep them safe from dangerous crystal meth labs, grow operations, and other dangerous drug-trafficking and -manufacturing environments.

The Internet can also be a dangerous place for children, so to help protect children and youth from sexual predators on the Internet, we launched two campaigns: www.weron2u.ca and www.badguy patrol.ca. Both sites have been highly successful educating children and teens about safe Internet use and received more than a quarter million visits in that first year.

8:40

Our family supports for children with disabilities, normally known as the FSCD program, continues to deliver quality services for children diagnosed with autism, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and a wide range of other disabilities. Last year we developed program standards in partnership with the Provincial Parent Advisory Committee and the Provincial Stakeholder Advisory Committee to ensure that service delivery is consistent with our FSCD legislation. We also provided core training for program staff across the province to help reinforce their understanding of the legislation, what it means for them and for the children and families whom they serve.

One of the most important initiatives that this ministry undertook was the development of the casework practice model because it directly impacts how we work with the children and families we serve. The new casework practice model allows our front-line staff to more thoroughly assess the causes and conditions of a family situation. It facilitates early intervention, and workers are better able to provide the right services at the right time. It also allows for more input from children and families into decisions that affect them. It encourages solutions that build on their strengths and ultimately leads to more families having the skills and resources to take care of their children in their own homes. In 2006-07 we began testing the model and trained front-line staff in 13 champion sites across the province. It was a big step towards province-wide implementation.

In addition, we partnered with First Nations in Alberta and lobbied INAC, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, to enhance services for children, youth, and families living on reserve by providing sufficient funds for First Nations to be able to meet the intent of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. The funding commitment from the federal government, which will be \$15.3 million for the first year and, hopefully, \$98 million over five years, will help provide the prevention and early intervention services that families on reserve need to have before they reach crisis situation.

The ministry continued to support youth who are or have been in our care to achieve their education and career goals through the advancing future bursaries program. The bursary helps youth to attend postsecondary education, learn a trade, earn a licence, upgrade high school, or even earn a diploma. The great thing about this program is that it supports youth in many ways, not just financially. Program co-ordinators provide guidance and support to the youth while the recipients get the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and peer mentoring and listen to guest speakers, including advancing futures alumni, at various events throughout the year. In short, we remain engaged with these young people to ensure their success. In total, the ministry increased its funding to more than \$4 million for advancing futures, and with that we helped over 400 Alberta youth who have been previously in care in the 2006-07 year.

We remain very committed to providing comprehensive services to youth with complex needs involved in high-risk behaviours. We're talking about youth who use drugs, alcohol, who have mental disorders, various behavioural problems, who are homeless or have other situations where their behaviour and/or their environment put them in danger. The high-risk youth pilot projects in Edmonton and Calgary are examples of the quality services we provide to youth who need them.

During these two pilot programs we had child protection workers, mental health professionals, AADAC staff, and other appropriate agency people working, collaborating together, being in the same facility, just down the hall from each other, so that when they're working with youth, they can be easily accessible to the youth, depending on their needs. This meant that everyone involved in a

child's case could communicate more easily, tailor and co-ordinate their services, and thus youth had an easier and quicker access to the help they needed.

Now, the results have been very positive for youth in our care, and we're looking to expand that throughout the rest of the province. Ultimately, all of the ministry's key activities and initiatives in '06-07 served to strengthen children, youth, and families in Alberta.

Having touched on the ministry's highlights from '06-07, I would now like to take a moment to reference the Auditor General's report. We are pleased the Auditor General concluded that Children's Services has good systems in place to deliver child intervention services. External reviews like this one help us to see where we can improve our systems, where we can improve services and accountability.

Our Auditor General made five recommendations. They were to review and update our standards according to our new legislation, evaluate the accreditation processes we use for our licensed facilities, expand compliance monitoring by the department, improve the training processes and feedback right back to the caseworkers when we are looking at compliance monitoring, and improve the flow of information about monitoring activities between the department and the child and family services authorities. We have reviewed and accepted these recommendations. We've developed a work plan to address the requirements for each specific issue, and we submitted that to the auditor October 31.

We continue to develop an organization in creating ways and means to more effectively serve children and youth and families, and we welcome the opportunity to work with the Auditor and many of the other accountability mechanisms we have as a means to accomplish this goal.

Thanks for your time this morning, Chair. We would be very happy to answer any questions that you've got.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dunn, do you have any opening comments?

Mr. Dunn: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We completed the financial statement audits of the ministry and the Department of Children's Services and the 10 CFSAs as described in their 2006-2007 annual report. We issued unqualified audit opinions on those financial statements for the year ended March 31, 2007.

We also completed specified audit procedures work on performance measures in the ministry's 2006-07 annual report. You'll note on page 27 of that annual report that we found one exception for the measure which is described as "percentage of adults staying at government funded women's emergency shelters who report that they are better able to keep themselves and the children under their care safer from abuse." As described in that report, we found inconsistencies in the process to compile the survey data from the measure and were not able, therefore, to conclude that the results presented were reliable and comparable.

As described recently by the deputy, our recommendations to the Ministry of Children's Services are included on pages 63 to 89 of volume 1 as a result of a very large systems audit that we did on the child intervention services. We reviewed the systems used by the department and the 10 child and family services authorities in the child intervention services program to communicate to the CFSAs and the federally funded delegated First Nation agencies, known as the DFNAs, the legislation, regulations, and standards and to monitor their compliance thereto and ensure that the standards are current and that staff are trained in what is required. We did conclude that the department and the CFSAs have comprehensive and generally well-designed systems to deliver the child intervention

services. The deputy has just described the five recommendations that we made.

On page 198 of volume 2 of our annual report are two recommendations that were addressed through our child intervention services audit and do not require further work by our office. Those recommendations are First Nation agency accountability, which we reported in 2004-2005, described as recommendation 25, and reporting to senior management on the delegated First Nation agencies, 2003-04, recommendation 7. Both of those were followed up in the child intervention services audit.

We also report on page 198 two other outstanding recommendations. One is dealing with contract management systems, which we described back in 2002-03. The ministry has not fully implemented a recommendation made in that year to strengthen the processes to award and manage contracts. In addition, the ministry hasn't fully implemented our recommendation to complete its risk assessment and to use that assessment to plan its internal audit activities. We plan to report on the results of our follow-up work on these two recommendations in October of 2008.

There are two other recommendations that we have not followed up yet. These are recommendations that management asserts now were fully implemented during the current year: one, cost and results of services, which we reported back in 2000-2001, recommendation 5; and two, First Nation expense recoveries, 2002-2003. That was recommendation 7. Our April 2008 report will include the results of our follow-up audits on these two recommendations.

In closing, I and my staff will answer any questions that the committee directs to our attention. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

8:50

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will proceed quickly to questions. Mr. Bonko, please, followed by Dr. Brown.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you, Mr. Chair. On page 72 of the Auditor General's report it states that at the end of 2006 about 5,700 children, or 55 per cent, that were in protection were aboriginal, though aboriginal only make up about 15 per cent of the children in Alberta. What specific programs are in place to ensure that the high proportion of aboriginal children in care is properly addressed?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much for that question. One of the things that we want to be able to do is to ensure that we are making sure that aboriginal children get the very best possible services and linkages with their own particular culture. We want to make sure that in doing so, we have established a permanency plan that has meaningful consultation between our CFSAs and the DFNAs, the delegated First Nations.

We were also very concerned, as I mentioned in the report, that the actual legislation was not being funded by the federal government for on reserve. The legislation, our enhancement act, requires that services be provided to families prior to they being taken into care for early intervention, and because the federal government is the one that funds, they were only funding once a child was taken into care, so once a child was in crisis.

We focused our efforts quite a bit, I must tell you, to be able to work with the federal government, lobby, and be very persistent with them. The only province in Canada where they are going to provide early intervention funding will be Alberta. They base that on the fact that we have what they believe to be the best model in Canada, the Alberta response model, where it does in fact take into consideration those issues. So several things that we are doing not only within our services but also within the delegated First Nations.

I'd like to ask Phil to also comment on some of the other very important things we're trying to do to make sure that we deal with the large number of aboriginal children in our system.

Mr. Goodman: Thank you very much, Deputy, and thanks for the very important question. The impact of child and family services on aboriginal children is an obvious issue of great concern throughout Canada as well as in Alberta and is an issue that we try very hard to come to grips with in a very real partnership with aboriginal leadership. As the deputy has indicated, our relationship with our DFNAs and the subsequent agreement with the federal government I think will go a long way to increasing the capacity of our First Nation colleagues to be able to come up to a more comparable foundation to deliver quality service.

I think it must also be said that the issue of aboriginal children in care also has to take a look at the urban aboriginal reality that's facing folks throughout this province. We as well are investing with community organizations: the Métis Nation of Alberta, one of our CFSAs, region 10, to try to create creative opportunities both in the city, on settlement, and as indicated, on reserve, to try to deal with this critical issue.

One of the tremendous movements that we're seeing in terms of aboriginal children in care is the opening of our legislation and subsequent regulations to start increasing the ability for aboriginal children to remain within their communities and within their family networks, even if they are in care, through programming that we call kinship care. We're seeing significant increases in uptake in that and private guardianship orders being awarded to aboriginal families to care for aboriginal children, and '06-07 was an opportunity where we started to see real progress. Without getting into this year, we are seeing that trend continue. That's becoming a very formative difference for aboriginal children, who historically would have ended up in non culturally specific foster care or residential treatment.

The Chair: Your second question, please, Mr. Bonko.

Mr. Bonko: Thank you. I'm sure we can all realize the impact if they're not taken care of, that the impact is going to be to the rest of us. Are we getting good value for our money? Are the programs being effective? Are we going to be able to save these kids?

Ms David-Evans: I don't know that I would use the words "save these kids."

Mr. Bonko: Well, that are at risk, yeah.

Ms David-Evans: We do our very best to try to make sure that we not only put children in safe and nurturing environments when we do take them out, but we try to work very hard – and we can do so under this legislation – to try to strengthen the families and build capacity within the families. One of the advantages of the casework practice model is that it does enable us not to work with just the family in crisis but with the extended family as well. What we're finding is that if mom and dad or mom or dad are in crisis, perhaps uncles and aunts and elders and others are within the extended family and can provide support to the children. So we're really trying to approach this in a different way that not only keeps children safe but, in fact, is building capacity within the families. It's early at this point in time to be able to tell that our numbers for aboriginal children are moving down, but we are hearing from our First Nations communities and from our Métis folks that this seems to be working.

One of the things we've tried to do in working, as Phil said, with the Métis Nation and region 10, which is the Métis settlements, is look at repatriation back to settlements and look at what the genealogical history of some of these children is, so to bring the community to wrap around the children. We think it works. We hear from the aboriginal communities, Métis and First Nations, that it's much better than it's ever been before, so we are extremely hopeful that we'll see differences.

The Chair: Thank you.

Neil Brown, please, followed by Weslyn Mather.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We see examples of the abject failure of Canada's reserve system in all sorts of fields, including education, employment, housing, health, and again in children's services, where we see that aboriginal children are disproportionately represented in the population of children requiring protection, making up a staggering 55 per cent of the children in protection. As I understand it, the delivery of children's services to these aboriginals is accomplished through 18 delegated First Nations agencies, only two of which are in the urban centres, despite the fact that about half of the aboriginals in Alberta live off the reserve and in the urban centres. My question is: how can we be assured that the tribal governments and the delegated First Nations agencies are doing the job that they need to do with the urban aboriginals and are delivering services in an unbiased way?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you for that question. There are a couple of things that we're doing. First of all, the standards for our act that were mentioned are in fact monitored through the DFNAs. We through the ministry, through staff that work under Phil actually go out and work with the First Nations and monitor for the standards that we have. The agreements we have with those 18 delegated First Nations do require them to ensure that the standards of the act are met. We work very well with them to try to make sure that they continually improve the standards. We have a whole unit that helps build capacity amongst those First Nations, and our CFSAs have good partnerships at the local level with those DFNAs, again, trying to build capacity and help.

In addition to that, the Auditor General has communicated with the federal Auditor General, and I understand that the federal auditors also audit from the perspective of financial fiduciary responsibilities that they have how the delegated First Nations carry out their work with the funding that is provided by the federal government.

I think that there are several other kinds of things that we try to do throughout the process, and I'd like to have Phil again comment on what else we are trying to do to make sure that services are well provided by the DFNAs.

Mr. Goodman: Yes, just quickly. The operational relationship between our CFSAs and the DFNAs usually gets down to case-level relationships. Many of our CFSAs have developed operational protocols with DFNAs that deal specifically with band members who are off reserve for periods of time. It may not sound complicated, but it certainly is in terms of residency obligations, requirements, expectations, et cetera, et cetera. In order to do that beyond case-specific protocols, our CFSAs and DFNA leadership also meet quarterly, when service issues, systems issues, protocol development issues are also part of that conversation and prototypes established that then can be audited at the end of each year in order to see progress being made in this very critical relationship.

9:00

Dr. Brown: Well, I think, with respect, Ms David-Evans, you have not answered the question that I asked. The question that I asked was relating to urban aboriginals and how we can assure ourselves, given the political realities of tribal governments and so on and the AFNs, which are children of those governments, that delivery to urban aboriginals is being done in a way that is equitable?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you for that question to clarify. Any aboriginals living off reserve are the responsibility of the provincial government, the CFSAs, and they do not get services delivered by the DFNAs to them. So if they are living off reserve, they're our responsibility, and we ensure that the services they get are equal to what Albertans get. The DFNAs do not have responsibility to provide any services to those aboriginals living off reserve.

Dr. Brown: Does that mean that they don't have to be accredited in accordance with the standards, which I understand require aboriginals to deliver services to aboriginals?

Ms David-Evans: No. That's incorrect. I'm sorry. No. It requires First Nations to deliver only on reserve. Only on reserve. They are not required and do not deliver services to off-reserve aboriginal folks.

The Chair: Thank you.

Weslyn Mather, followed by Mr. Art Johnston.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I appreciate the opportunity to ask some questions today. I'm looking at page 198 of volume 2 of the Auditor General's report for '06-07, and it includes two outstanding recommendations going back to contract management systems 2002-03, page 69. At that time it was recommended that the ministry strengthen the processes used to award and manage contracts: we found that the ministry lacked policies and processes that are key to managing contracts, such as when to request competitive bids. Contracts accounted for more than \$400 million of the ministry's 2006-07 expenses of \$900 million. Given the significance of contracting to this ministry and the number of years this recommendation has been outstanding, what has been done, and when will the recommendation be fully implemented?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you for that question. We have done a number of things. We have developed policies on contracting. We have worked with the CFSAs on when to do contracts and how to do contracts. It has been very clear that competitive processes and RFPs are required in the contracting process, and CFSAs have undertaken that. Our policies are being implemented, our staff are being trained, and there are contract managers in each one of the CFSAs that are also looking at making sure that those contracts are properly implemented and followed through by the agencies who are then contracted.

I'd also like to just defer the second part of your question to Gord Johnston.

Mr. G. Johnston: Thanks, Deputy Minister, and I appreciate the question as well. The amount of time that goes into our contracting system on a province-wide level both on a ministry basis and on a child and family services authority-specific basis is very significant. Over the course of the past number of years we have continued to develop our contract management approval system. This is a system that is in use in all of our child and family services regions as well

as within the department, which ensures consistency related to our contracting process.

The other piece that the deputy minister referenced is that we have completed a very extensive provincial contract policy manual, which outlines very clear expectations for both the department and for the child and family services regions specific to rules that they need to be following in our contracting process. The deputy minister also referenced our regional contract-monitoring professionals who are out there working with contracted agencies on a regular and ongoing basis to ensure that outcomes that are inside of individual contracts are being monitored and adhered to.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Johnston.

Mrs. Mather: I'd like to have a little bit of clarification on what specific services these contracts might provide and if we're getting good value for the money.

Ms David-Evans: One of the ways that we believe we are trying to get good value for the money is through an RFP process, where we take a look at that and evaluate the contract bids as they come in. The kind of contract bids we would have would be everything from the provision of group care homes, residential care. There may be contracts that require transportation services as we transport children from A to B. There is just a whole variety of services.

Many of the services that are delivered to our children and families, as you have well indicated, do in fact get delivered through contracted agencies, about a quarter to a third. So it's community opportunities that many of these agencies offer. There may be situations where they provide direct services to FASD clients, you know, and we would contract them for that. So it's everything from beds to a variety of specific services.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you.

Ms David-Evans: Just one other thing. You asked when we would be fully finished. I believe that when the Auditor comes back this year to take a look at how we are doing with the contracts, I think that it'll be more than just progressing well. I think he'll be able to put a stamp on that and say: done.

The Chair: Mr. Johnston, please, followed by David Eggen.

Mr. A. Johnston: Thank you, Chair. On page 44 of the Alberta Children's Services annual report '06-07, performance measure 3A, the percentage of children who suffer injury that result in hospitalization or death while receiving protective services. In 2006-07 12 children in the care of the director suffered a serious injury while receiving protective services. Three of these children died as a result of their injuries. How does Children's Services respond to these tragic cases, and what have you done to reduce the incidents?

Ms David-Evans: At the beginning I indicated the triumphs and the tragedies that do happen from time to time in the system because human behaviour is very difficult to fully control and predict. We do our very best at that.

We have a measure, that 3A measure, as zero. We don't believe that any children should be injured or die in our care. It's a very difficult one for us, but we don't think that zero can be anything other than zero. We did have 12 this past year. Some of them, as you will see, would be accidental. Some of them would be perhaps perpetrated by someone close to the child. We do our very best to ensure that we have direct contact on a regular basis with the

children that are in care. We provide training and all kinds of screening for foster parents when we provide foster care, group care, and so on, but tragedies will happen.

Every time a tragedy or a serious incident happens, we take a look at our system in a very specific and a very broad way to see: what can we learn from this, and what can we implement to mitigate? There are many examples I can give you. For example, one time we had a tragedy because there was a skidoo involved, and we then learned that what we needed to do was provide certain kinds of information and training to foster parents about the use of ATVs. So many kinds of things come out from those reviews that help us to continually improve the system and try to mitigate future issues and problems.

The only thing I can say is that at least in our care children actually do better than on the average in the population in general. Zero is the only thing that's acceptable, but unfortunately we rarely get to zero.

9:10

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. A. Johnston: Thank you. You've actually answered my supplemental, but I'll make up another one. The members of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee visit about 225 a year. With the number of facilities that we have, that's 1 in 5. I would say that every five years or whatever might be the average that they visit a facility. Is that enough? Should we have more members on that committee? If you can help me with that.

Ms David-Evans: Funny you should ask that, chair of that committee.

Mr. A. Johnston: Thanks. Like I said, I made that up.

Ms David-Evans: I just wanted to let the Public Accounts Committee here know the various things that we do have in our system that are checks and balances around what we do. Certainly, we have the Auditor General at the table that checks what we do in a variety of ways. We also have the corporate internal auditor that we use on a continual basis. We even have in the ministry an internal review and audit team that checks. We have the Ombudsman. We have the Privacy Commissioner. As you know, we deal with much, much private information, and he does regularly check what we do. We have fatality inquiries. We have the children's advocate. We have appeal panels. We have special case reviews, and indeed we have the Social Care Facilities Review Committee that does that kind of work. There are many checks and balances in the system.

Is it enough? It's not enough. We'd really like to be able to have overall funds that check every single piece of work that we do. But is that the best use of tax dollars? I'm not sure about that.

What we have is an opportunity for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee to take a sample and, hopefully, from that sample be able to give us guidance as to what the trends are, what the issues are, and from that we can pull further improvements that we can make in the system.

May I say that we find that the work that your committee does exceptionally helpful. You provide very specific instances of your visits and that goes back directly to the CFSAs and they investigate every single situation to see if there's more that can be done. Not only are we looking at the broad trends and pulling from that issues that we might be able to address province-wide, but each individual case that you visit, if there are concerns around it, the CFSAs immediately follow up and do any necessary work. So it's a good thing that you do, and more of it would be better.

The Chair: Thank you.

Please proceed, Mr. Eggen, followed by Mr. Webber.

[Mr. Prins in the chair]

Mr. Eggen: Well, thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks so much for appearing before us here today. My questions are in regard to child care spaces. It's becoming obvious that there is a shortage of accessible and affordable child care spaces available to Alberta families, and this creates a whole universe of difficulties for families that have two working parents. I was curious to know, first of all, how much your department was spending last year to create child care spaces in the province. What criteria are you using to assess the effectiveness of this expenditure?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much. The five-point plan which we worked on with Albertans was developed in '04-05. In the latter part of '05 we started to implement it for the '06-07 year. That did include looking at the things needed to make a child care space available and accessible. Several things that were very important in that were the incentives that are required for accreditation that attract and retain staff. You can have physical space, but if you don't have staff to staff them, then you don't have space. We also needed to make sure that parents had the ability to access them from an affordable perspective. We did provide an increase in subsidies to parents so that not only low-income parents but, in fact, middle-income parents, if I can put it that way, had accessibility. Child care operators needed to bring up the costs of their services to ensure that they had kind of the lights on in facility but also to pay for the staff that they needed to have. Those were two things we did to make sure that it did increase the number of spaces.

Last year we recorded an increase of 227 new spaces across the province, roughly about a 10 per cent increase, but it's certainly not enough with the kind of workforce demands that we have, and we need to do more.

You asked on the spending. On that, \$134 million was budgeted, and our actual spending was \$105 million.

The Deputy Chair: Next question. Go ahead.

Mr. Eggen: Thank you. Well, I'm perhaps being a bit simplistic, but spending that degree of money to create 227 spaces hardly seems efficient. I was wondering if your department last year made any assessment as to how you could in fact fix this problem more specifically because it's not working now. Specifically, to what level should staff be paid at child care facilities that would in fact attract and retain staff, and what's the magic number that would make child care affordable for families, which, again, to the best of my knowledge, is not happening at this time?

Ms David-Evans: Once we put the program in last year and started to assess the uptake on the program, we did several things. For this year – so I'm going to slightly move into what our findings were – we did find that there weren't sufficient funds available to attract and retain staff, so we tripled the amount of money available for child care workers through the incentive process.

We also made sure that there was a bursary put in place, as I mentioned in my report, to try to build capacity in the system, allow people to get their education, and it's also an incentive for staff to stay in the system because they get that kind of assistance.

The third thing we did was to put in an attraction bonus. For people that were leaving the system for other jobs, we put in a \$5,000 bonus this year to attract them back, if they came back into the system.

Also, this year, when we discovered last year that the spaces weren't moving fast enough, we put in a space-creation fund of \$1,500 per space that's available. This year that is moving along nicely. People are able to use that to upgrade facilities and create new spaces.

We're continually trying to assess what we can do more and continually are talking with our stakeholders on how to try to improve that.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

It's Len Webber, followed by Harry Chase.

Mr. Webber: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you, Ms David-Evans and your staff, for coming out today and presenting to us, in particular to Mr. Phil Goodman, who I had the honour of working with with the Alberta Affordable Housing Task Force and the report. It was an honour and a pleasure working with you, and I have nothing but extreme respect for you, Mr. Goodman, for the work you do.

Mr. Goodman: Thanks a lot.

Mr. Webber: Anyway, I would like to refer to page 63 of the Children's Services annual report 2006-07 regarding the comparison of the 2006-07 budget to actuals. Now, it says here that the ministry was provided with an authorized budget of just over \$922 million and ended the year with a budget surplus of \$19.3 million. In particular, child care, the budget for this program in child care, was increased by \$41.6 million relative to the prior year. However, the child care budget was underspent by \$43.3 million. I guess my question is: why were the resources allocated in '06-07 to support child care initiatives not spent on child care?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you for that question. As I said earlier, it was the latter part of '05 when the five-point plan went in. One of the bases for this program is parental choice. When we put the budget forth, we wanted to make sure that in every one of those areas of the five-point plan that we looked at, what's the possibility, what's the maximum uptake that we could have? That prediction was the best we could do. The five-point plan, though, has a lot of interrelations: some people take up this, and some people take up that. We found that kinship care was more popular than child care, but kinship care is cheaper, in actual fact. If you chose not to put your child in a child care centre and you put your child with grandma living in a different, you know, home and got kinship care funds for that, then that's a lot cheaper. So we actually save money in the system, but we wouldn't know that until the year-end.

9:20

Likewise, the federal government came out with a program that also talked about \$100 per month. That was the same dollar value that we had in our program for stay-at-home parents: \$100 per month. Huge confusion existed out there in the community. What we budgeted and the uptake on that were miles apart because the parents were getting the \$100, they were thinking that that was the same \$100, and we have seen that now that the parents have learned this year that, no, it's a different \$100, there's actual uptake in the program.

In some of these places it takes a while to find out what is a good mechanism by which to predict. In some cases you can't control externalities that come in that also impact the program. Those are some examples, sir, of what we had to deal with. We think that as

a new program that has many elements, we're getting a good handle on how to predict what the budget ought to be.

By the way, I do agree with you: as I said earlier, we do have the best team in all of the government of Alberta.

Mr. Webber: Absolutely. I would definitely agree.

The Deputy Chair: Go ahead, Len.

Mr. Webber: You did answer a number of my supplemental questions here. Actually, Mr. Eggen took one of mine here with respect to the labour market shortage and what you're doing to attract and retain child care staff, so I'll just go on to the next one, Mr. Chair.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Harry Chase, followed by Mike Cardinal.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. I very much appreciate Auditor General Fred Dunn's expertise, and my questions will be to the Auditor General. As a grandfather and former teacher I consider expenditures on children an absolutely necessary investment. Auditor General Dunn pointed out that our infrastructure deterioration is causing safety concerns. Mr. Dunn, you mentioned a \$6.1 billion figure. The figure of \$56 billion is now being suggested for deferred infrastructure. I realize this is a broad question, but is the infrastructure deficit placing children at risk?

Mr. Dunn: I'm not in a position to answer that, Mr. Chairman. I have no knowledge of what the \$56 billion is and where that comes from. Certainly, when we looked at the matters around deferred maintenance through the public sector itself – and we reported that in our report last year and came to \$6.1 billion – we felt there was a fair amount of credibility behind the \$6.1 billion. But it was restricted to the public sector, obviously, including roads, bridges, and postsecondary education, et cetera. I have no knowledge around what is being done in the way of deferred maintenance in possibly what may be the various agencies or organizations that child care services deal with. I'm not sure if the ministry/departmental people have any knowledge as to what the state of repair is out there for the service providers.

Mr. Chase: This may be another lost question – and I appreciate whatever ideas you can provide – but I'm trying to get a sense of how children are affected by this infrastructure deficit. I'm aware of schools with ceiling tiles falling and so on, so I'm trying to get a sense of how children are affected. The growing number of homeless families has stretched programs like Inn from the Cold to the limit. Two-thirds of women fleeing abuse are turned away from shelters. Therefore, if you can give even a global estimate, what percentage of the overall deficit affects the quality of life of children, whether they are housed temporarily in provincially funded shelters, church basements, or attempting to survive on the government's minimal welfare payments?

Mr. Dunn: Again, I'm in no position to be able to provide any of that sort of information. I leave it to the department regarding how they feel the quality of services are being provided to the children at risk in the agencies that they employ.

Mr. Chase: In terms of children's shelters, where we're having an increasingly large homeless population – and amongst that population are children – to what extent in 2006 and 2007 did you approach that problem?

Ms David-Evans: I'm sorry, Chair. I don't think I'm able to answer that as well. Perhaps we can get back to you with information. In '06-07 the level of children coming to our attention where there's abuse or neglect because of homelessness was negligible, in my knowledge, but we can certainly take a look at that.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

Children come to our attention because somebody calls in because of abuse. That's a variety of things and matters to be considered, among them, certainly, family violence, but family violence doesn't always cause people to have to leave their homes. One of the things we've done in this legislation, in fact, is try to improve the legislation to allow people to stay in their homes, meaning the victims and the children, and the abuser is the one that leaves. So we've made some progress on our acts to try to reverse that situation of people having to flee. In fact, they should stay, and we want to put strength around that.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Cardinal, please, followed by Mr. Bonko.

Mr. Cardinal: Thank you very much, and I hope to be reasonably brief. I'd like to, Maria, commend you and your staff for the good job you're doing. No doubt you are the best.

Anyway, in relation to the aboriginal children in care it is very unfortunate, but those challenges will no doubt continue because until the federal government changes their social support policies on the reserves, we will continue to be faced with the issue of high caseloads of children in care, but at the same time we have the responsibility of delivering, of course, some of the programs ourselves. One of the plans in the restructuring of Children's Services was the issue of the First Nations and the ability of the ones that are ready to take over child welfare on and off reserve. Sometimes programs would be developed for the federal government to be able to provide legislation and federal dollars for on and off reserve. I just wondered where that program may be at.

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much. Some of those areas are the areas that are of big concern that the federal government has not funded in terms of early intervention, and we hope that with the additional monies that I mentioned, the \$15.3 million and the \$98 million over five years, First Nations will have an opportunity not only to fund the present programs that they're running but, in fact, new programs that they ought to be running that they cannot run now because they don't have the particular funding.

The other thing I wanted to mention is that in some cases there are some wonderful examples of how First Nations are moving forward, and I wanted to talk a little bit about the Blood tribe and their negotiations with the federal government, and child welfare is the first area that they are looking at. Those negotiations have been ongoing for a number of years, and it's very, very close. It now just rests on one single thread before there's an agreement.

The Blood tribe over the past decade or so has been increasing their capacity, increasing their strength, making sure their staff are trained, and working very hard to be able to take over under their own legislation child welfare if they get that granted from the federal government. We see that as real strength-building in the aboriginal community, and many of the other First Nations are looking at that as an example and are kind of lining up looking at how they, too, can create their own legislation, their own strength, and get the necessary

funding from the federal government to provide those programs. Some of those programs are doing very well and are out in front. I must say that some of them falter and are not doing well, and when they falter, we try to get in there and give whatever support we can to the First Nations folks.

9:30

Mr. Cardinal: I just have one more question, my final, in relation to recruiting foster parents and foster homes. I know it's a real challenge to do that. I know you have a children's advocate now, and that process works very well. Have you ever considered having an advocate for the foster parents? I think there's a gap there.

Thank you.

Ms David-Evans: Thanks very much for that question. We have a very close working relationship with the Foster Parent Association, and they do play an advocacy role for foster parents both from a training perspective as well as the kind of funding that we provide and a variety of other areas. I don't believe we've ever considered that part, but I'll just see if there's anything that Phil would like to add.

Mr. Goodman: Just further, the relationship we have with the Alberta Foster Parent Association really is the advocacy function, and that's both from a systems perspective and from a funding negotiation perspective. But I think that most importantly for foster parents, if there are allegations of concern, for example, the Foster Parent Association acts as the individual family advocate in bringing forth issues to government.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bonko, please, followed by Mr. Herard.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chairman. In the Auditor General's report, page 79, he's reviewing and asking to update the child intervention standards in order to support the new casework practice model. What steps have been taken to address this recommendation?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much for that question. As a matter of fact, yesterday our senior team just happened to review the new standards we intend to put in place. Those standards tomorrow, in fact, are going in front of our CEOs and all the child and family services authorities senior staff for confirmation. We are following the auditor's suggestion around how to make sure our casework practice model and the way we are fine-tuning it does align with the kind of new standards we have to have. So we've got new standards in place. I actually believe my staff will be chatting with the Auditor to make sure that this is what he had in mind. We intend to do that perhaps in the next week or so, and then it'll be off to the minister for her review and for her approval. We are taking action very quickly on that. We think it's a very important recommendation.

Mr. Bonko: Okay. What supports for the front-line staff can be expected with this model?

Ms David-Evans: Training, training, and more training. Actually, much more than that. Training is really an important part of it. I need to just tell you that.

We have a whole structure set up not only for the training but making sure that front-line staff have the ability to input into the fine-tuning of the system. So as they're working, as the 13 champion sites are actually practising, the others across the province are not.

We are on a regular basis fine-tuning things like their assessment tools. We have provided a higher level of technology. One of the things I need to just say to this committee is that much of the work we do has to have supports, and technological supports are really important in this process. So along with the casework practice model development we have a whole system development going on that is going to make sure that front-line workers have the tools to make their work easier and more effective.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Herard, followed by Weslyn Mather.

Mr. Herard: Thank you very much. As I'm about to ride off into the sunset, I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank Maria David-Evans for all of the support and good counsel over the years in the various departments that you've served. Certainly, I have a lot of time for you and for most of your staff as well.

When I look at this particular department – and I'm going to be talking from generalities here just to set the scene for the question. At best case there are about 60,000 clients a year; worst case there are about 15,000 in care. So if you look at \$900 million and divide that by 60,000, the least amount that we're spending per case is \$15,000, and the highest amount that we're spending per case is \$60,000. So somewhere in there, I guess, is the real amount. That's only the dollars being spent by this particular department. There would probably be cases and costs from other departments, cases that receive services from other government departments, perhaps from education, from human resources, from health, from municipal affairs, from seniors in the case of families on AISH and handicap services. So my question is: are there systems that identify clients or their families who also receive benefits or services from other departments and/or other levels of government?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much for your comments, Mr. Herard. We do try to look at serving children and families in a collaborative system. I'd like to talk about a couple of things that we do have. We have the Alberta child and youth initiative. We've had that for about eight years, Niki?

Ms Wosnack: Yes.

Ms David-Evans: About eight years. That has all those departments plus a few more. For example, there are funds spent on children in jail, so we've got the Solicitor General at the table. We have 11 ministries around the table looking at things like aboriginal suicide, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, complex cases which we all have to come together on and figure out who pays for what and how those services need to be co-ordinated for those very complex cases that are difficult for any one department. One of the things we see there, of course, is the different funding mechanisms that are available. There are many more examples I can give you of the work that we try to do cross-ministry to get exactly at that issue, to make sure that to the best of our ability we're co-ordinating our services, filling the gaps where necessary, and are aware of the services that are being provided by each other to make sure they're effective.

The second area I want to talk about is our casework practice model. One of the requirements of the casework practice model is case conferencing before a child is taken into care, and everyone that has something to do with that family needs to sit at that table. Whether it's a service provider from another ministry or whether it's an agency, because there are many agencies that provide services to families as well, we all come together and sit around that table to make sure that we understand what best services we can wrap

around the family and how to best utilize the resources that are available from the various areas. We work very hard at that, and we're finding that there is real success at making sure we're getting the right services to the child and the family at the right time through this casework conferencing.

There are approaches and opportunities to use, ways of getting at your question. Very specifically, if you're asking, "Are there systems that outline the variety of dollars available in the various programs?" I'm not sure we've got that kind of specific technological system. But we sure try to make sure that when we've got children and families in care or about to come in care, we use the resources as best as possible from all ministries and all other agencies that are available to provide services.

Mr. Herard: Thank you. You've answered, I think, what my next question would have been, so I'll ask a different one. I know that in the years that are covered under this Auditor General's report, you've had some pilot projects where you've placed Children's Services professionals in our schools. As we all know, our teachers are not trained to deal with all of the baggage that comes in the door every day with respect to children in need. How has that turned out, and are there plans to move forward with more of that?

9:40

Ms David-Evans: On that front it depends on the nature of the school and some of the issues. We have provided through CFSAs, not directly from the department but through CFSAs, staff that will visit and/or have visiting offices in education complexes. In other cases through FCSS there are school liaison workers that do the same kind of preventive work. So there is a variety of ways that one can access that opportunity.

We've also seen that in some cases school boards have the opportunity to determine how they spend their own dollars and in some cases have actually done that. Principals direct where the dollars go in a school, and have done that directly. What we do find is that in places like the SHIP program, that you might be aware of, where we have school boards, health authorities, and child and family services authorities all working together locally to determine what the needs of children are from a health perspective in a school, they plan together, and the funding flows to them to deliver together, and in some cases there are co-ordinators in schools to make that happen a lot better so that there are successful outcomes in schools. So there is another example of a collaboration that provides good services, wraps it around the unique needs of children and youth in the various regions. We have had tremendous success with our SHIP program. We are in the process of assessing that program, and maybe I can ask Niki Wosnack to just talk about that.

The Chair: Excuse me. We have a long list, and we only have 15 minutes left in the meeting.

Weslyn Mather, please, followed by Heather Forsyth.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you very much. I'd like to refer back to the five recommendations in the Auditor General's report for '06-07, particularly the one regarding the compliance monitoring processes. I consistently hear concerns about the process, about its inconsistencies and often unreasonable results. I'm wondering what changes have been made to improve that monitoring system.

Ms David-Evans: Thanks for that question. We are continually looking at how to improve it. I might add that the standards had only been in place, when the Auditor reviewed them, less than a year. So we're still in the process of working out the bugs and how

to do the monitoring better. We learned from the Auditor that if, indeed, we provide our attention to risk assessment as opposed to monitoring the monitors in the authorities, we may be able to use our resources better. So we're looking at how to do that. We're also looking, as I mentioned earlier, at revisions to the standards.

The other piece out of that recommendation that's really important is talking to the front-line workers about the results we are finding in the files when the standards are being monitored. That dialogue we believe, as does the Auditor General, will be helpful for workers to know when to record and how to record. Often we have found that workers have done what was required but perhaps didn't record it in the right place. We are also thinking that our systems that I talked about earlier will also help us with that.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. My other concern is about the workload of our wonderful front-line workers, especially the social workers. With this new casework model, that has a wonderful intent – and I think it's a very good one – what is being done to address the workload of the front-line workers?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you for that question. In those champion sites we have put additional staffing resources. We've also looked at the upgrades that are required for staff to be able to carry out the assessment work, a very important piece of the work, and we're finding that the areas for the front-line staff in the champion sites with the additional resources are working well. The area that we're having a pinch on is with our supervisors and their load, so we'll be in the process of looking at that. We will continue as we roll this out provincially to look at how to make sure that we're providing the necessary supports to our workers.

In addition, we have a committee with union staff representatives and management representatives looking at caseload issues, looking at technology, looking at workload, looking at classification, and looking at structures in the various offices to make sure that we're able to do the very best we can with that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Heather Forsyth, please, followed by David Eggen.

Mrs. Forsyth: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'm a little biased, but I just want to say as the former minister the incredible job that the department and the staff in this province do every day for the children and families in this province. It was a wonderful experience and an incredible learning experience to have that privilege.

I had an opportunity dropped on me last Friday. I went to visit a very good friend. Her daughter is like a daughter to me, and I asked where she was, and she said that she was babysitting – because she's getting her nursing degree – a disabled child. She asked if I'd like to go over and visit Nicky, and I said sure. This child is mentally and physically disabled and is getting supports from a wonderful program that this government offers called the family support for children with disabilities. It was an incredible experience because what I saw was a little boy that to me was severely disabled until I was told about how well he has improved since he's been accessing this program as far as smiling, being able to stand a little, all of those things.

I guess my question to you is: has anyone ever done an assessment on the cost versus what it would be if this child was in a home? I know it's hard to analyze. What it's done for the family, I mean, just the whole experience of the family being able to deal with this because they're getting such good care with this child. That would be my first question.

My second question is: what are the plans of the department to let every Albertan know about this program?

Ms David-Evans: Thank you so much for that question and your comments. The FSCD program, as I mentioned earlier, has been a tremendous program. One of the things that the program did in '04, and it was an important year, was to separate supports for families with disabilities from the child welfare legislation – and we have two pieces of legislation – a tremendously important thing to do. I know that other jurisdictions across Canada are looking at what we're doing.

The first thing I would say is that, yes, we have done the studies. We know that when a family cannot cope with a disabled child, they give up the child, and they put the child into care. The cost of that is horrendous, not just from a financial perspective but from a human potential perspective, so what this legislation does is try to look at the strengths of the family and then look at the diagnosis of the child. We want to prop up, again, the capacity of the family to care for that child. We have a variety of programs in place to prop up the family, whether that's the respite that they might need, whether the child needs a certain kind of assistance. It might even be technological assistance to be able to do the things that they can enjoy in life and be the most productive that they can be. This program and our evaluations from parents tell us that. The number of appeals tell us that.

We used to have hundreds and hundreds of appeals prior to the FSCD legislation coming into force. Now we only have a dozen or so appeals on an annual basis from parents who are looking at how to get help for their children. We know the program is successful. Karen just came back from a national meeting. We know that all the other provinces are looking at what we're doing, whichever area we're working in in the disabilities, so it is a successful program.

Do we tell Albertans about it? I think I would generally say that the work of this ministry and the people in the ministry – we're modest, maybe, might be my best description, but the workers are committed to doing good things for families. They're not so interested in good word getting out about what they do. But it is important that the FSCD program makes those services available to people, that the word does get out. And the word does get out.

Thank you.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you very much.

David Eggen, followed by Neil Brown, please.

Mr. Eggen: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I'll be very brief. There is a process of urbanization that's taking place in the province of Alberta. People are moving in from the countryside at unprecedented rate, and what I'm seeing in my constituency is that people are moving to Edmonton and then not necessarily accessing some of the care that they require if it's a family at risk. So I'm just curious to know how you track people when they're moving in from the north, say, and moving into the city, families at risk, specifically. What mechanisms do you have in place to track and to be proactive when a family moves from the countryside into the city, specifically with aboriginal families?

Ms David-Evans: Thanks for that question. We don't actually track families that are moving into the province.

Mr. Eggen: To the city from different parts.

Ms David-Evans: Sorry. Yeah, from different parts of the province into the cities unless they've had previous contact with us, and in that case we have a technological system called CYIM, where they are tracked and workers from one area do connect with workers in

the other area if they know that they are moving. So we do have that kind of availability if they've had contact and if they're part of the system.

Mr. Eggen: How does CYIM interact with the families that might be under federal jurisdictions, say, moving from a reserve to the city?

Ms David-Evans: It's the same system.

Mr. Eggen: The same system? So you should be able to track them pretty well.

Ms David-Evans: Yes. We should if we know.

The Chair: Okay. Neil Brown, please, followed by, if you don't mind, Harry Chase.

Dr. Brown: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Ms David-Evans, you stated earlier that the services to off-reserve aboriginal children are provided by the province and through your department rather than through the delegated First Nation agencies. However, two of the delegated First Nations agencies are located in Calgary and Edmonton. I'm wondering how these agencies co-ordinate the delivery of services with other agencies in the urban centres.

Ms David-Evans: Siksika would be the one that you're referring to that also delivers services through a contract to their nations in and around the Calgary area. There is a protocol that they have with the Calgary CFSA, and they work jointly together with them in the provision of services. Siksika First Nations people do have the opportunity to either get services from the CFSA if they live in Calgary or from the nation. They make that choice, and the protocols between the two agents try to ensure that they get the services that are needed and that it's co-ordinated.

Dr. Brown: My follow-up question would be: how do policies relating to accreditation standards, specifically those that provide that aboriginal clients must be given the option of dealing with aboriginal caseworkers, impact the delivery of services and whether there are adequate numbers of aboriginal caseworkers to meet that expectation and those accreditation standards?

Ms David-Evans: Our CFSAs are not specifically accredited, so I'm not sure what accreditation standards you're referring to that have that requirement.

Dr. Brown: I'm referring to the Canadian Accreditation Council on Human Services, which I understood was a partnership designed through your predecessor of Children's Services.

Ms David-Evans: The only thing that I can suggest is that perhaps you're referring to agencies that we require outside accreditation for.

Dr. Brown: That's right.

Ms David-Evans: Okay. The CFSAs are not considered an agency, and they are not, therefore, under those accreditation requirements.

Dr. Brown: Well, specifically, I was asking whether or not with respect to the accreditation of those agencies there is an adequate number of aboriginal caseworkers to meet those requirements. Or is it a choke point with respect to the delivery of services?

Ms David-Evans: We do have aboriginal units in Calgary and certainly Edmonton that try to funnel in to make sure that aboriginal workers provide services to aboriginal families. But to your specific question – do we have enough aboriginal social workers? – the answer to that is no, we do not. We always would like to. One of the things we do, for example, is that we have a bursary program for Métis aboriginal folks who would like to take social work to provide one way to try to make sure that we get recruitment of aboriginal people into the system.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

That concludes this part of our questioning; however, there are other members who have indicated an interest in further questioning. What we usually do is read the questions into the record, and if your staff could please respond in writing through the committee clerk to all members, we would be very grateful.

Now the list. Harry Chase.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'll be very specific. One of my constituents is a mother of a three-year-old child living in a subsidized apartment where the rent has gone up by 50 per cent. She survives barely on \$486 a month in welfare. She has exhausted her food bank opportunities. Therefore, I'll refer specifically to page 57 of your report. It states that the percentage of community stakeholders reporting an increase in the community's ability to meet the needs of children, youth, and families has been declining since 2002. Again, the reason given was the ministry's inability to keep up with the pace and demand resulting from a surge in Alberta's population. My two questions. Number one, what are the specific strategies that the report speaks of that will address this declining ability to meet the needs of children? Secondly, how much did these strategies cost the ministry? I don't believe the services are being provided.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

Mr. Herard, please, followed by Mr. Bonko.

Mr. Herard: Thank you. My question deals with antibullying initiatives past, present, and future. Other jurisdictions have found that bullying and other behaviours can be significantly reduced by programs delivered in our schools that focus on one of the root causes, and that's values and attitudes and the lack of them. Alberta Education has recently embraced a program that can be summarized as character accounts and is beginning to deal with one of these root causes with respect to attitudes and values. What is Children's Services doing to support and enhance the character aspects of bullying and other social dysfunction?

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Bonko, please, followed by Weslyn Mather.

Mr. Bonko: Thanks, Mr. Chair. On page 19 with regard to accreditation it states that child care programs are now voluntarily able to increase the quality of the child care they provide by becoming accredited. It also states that the child care facilities may choose the accreditation agency that they prefer. Since the criteria for the accreditation process is not standardized between agencies, why are the child care facilities given the option to choose between agencies that accredit them?

Part B, then, of that would be: how does the minister ensure that children receive the same standard of care regardless of which facility they go to?

The Chair: Thank you.

Weslyn Mather.

Mrs. Mather: Thank you. In the annual report on pages 58 and 59 there is yet another mention of the declining ability of the ministry to provide services to children because of Alberta's booming economy. The percentage of children who did not need child protection services within one year did not meet the target set and was lower than the previous year. How many children that required protection after they had already gone through family enhancement services does this percentage represent?

The second part of that is that the ministry reported a \$19.3 million surplus on page 62. How can this ministry justify reporting a surplus in its annual report two pages after it reports an inability to provide child protection services?

10:00

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I also have a question, please, for the record. On page 100 of your annual report in the schedule to financial statements, the Canada social transfer has declined between the year 2006-07 and the previous fiscal year, '05-06, by 16 per cent. Can you give us the reasons in writing for that significant decline? I'd really appreciate that. Okay?

I believe Ray has a question as well.

Mr. Prins: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Foster parents play an important role in providing a temporary place to put a child in care into a place called a home. How does Children's Services ensure that foster parents receive the supports they need to provide quality care to children and youth? I think that follows up on Mr. Cardinal's question.

Ms David-Evans: We'll be glad to provide those answers. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Before we conclude this portion of the meeting, Mr. Prins, do you have a comment or a suggestion?

Mr. Prins: Somebody has asked for the research paper that Dr. Massolin has prepared, and I would like to make a motion to release to the ministry the briefing paper prepared by Dr. Massolin.

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Seeing none opposed, certainly that will be provided forthwith. Yes.

Mrs. Forsyth: If I may, Mr. Chair, those research papers that he is doing I believe should be provided to the department at the same time as we get ours so that they can read them and, you know, have some answers like Dr. Brown was asking. I don't understand why the department can't get it then instead of after.

The Chair: That would have to be a decision of the committee. This is committee research.

Mrs. Forsyth: May I make that motion, then?

The Chair: Maybe you could bring this up under Other Business in a minute.

Mrs. Forsyth: Sure.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee I would like to thank you

and your staff, Ms Maria David-Evans, for your time and your thoughtful presentation and the answers to our questions. We wish you the very, very best in this fiscal year and onwards in your department. While we're finishing our meeting you can feel free to go. Thank you.

Ms David-Evans: Thank you very much.

The Chair: Item 4, Other Business.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, if I may, Mr. Chair, I think that with the new way we're addressing public accounts, open and accountable and, you know, bringing forward some of the other – I think it's important that if we get a briefing paper from Ronald, we allow the department to have that access at the same time as us because he's done good research and there are some very good questions in there.

The Chair: Okay. It's a working document of the committee, but it's the will of the committee, whatever the committee would like to do.

Mr. Herard: I really hate to disagree with my good friend and colleague, but I think that it is a working document of the committee. I think that providing it after the meeting is probably the right way to do it because the element of questioning would be lost if we did it the other way. So I would disagree.

The Chair: Thank you.

Dr. Brown: I agree with Mr. Herard on this issue and probably on another ground, and that is that there may be issues that are raised in there or potential questions that are raised which we would as committee members not necessarily agree with or not think were appropriate to be asked. I don't think it would be helpful in all instances to circulate those issues.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase: I'm speaking in favour of Heather Forsyth's motion because today we had the least number of questions answered that I can recall of any other Public Accounts event. If the individual departments are forewarned and have an opportunity to do the types of research that I believe Heather is hoping they could, then we could potentially have more specific, detailed, focused answers, and the committee would have a better usage of their time.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you.

David Eggen and Mr. Herard to conclude.

Mr. Eggen: I would respectfully oppose the idea. We're here assembled in person to ask questions. If we were just exchanging letters of information, then probably that would be appropriate, but there's an important temporal aspect. We're all gathered here together, and it's an interaction that will reveal things that you would not otherwise get.

The Chair: Thank you.

Perhaps we can hear from Dr. Philip Massolin before we conclude with Mr. Herard.

Dr. Massolin: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just wanted to say that, obviously, it's up to the committee to decide what to do with these

reports, but I want to echo Dr. Brown's comments in terms of saying that this research that I provide is background information, and the questions are just simply suggested questions. We hope that they're relevant questions. A lot of times they're based on what the Auditor indicates in his report. I suppose that whether the questions themselves are posed is a decision that individual committee members make themselves.

The Chair: Thank you.

To conclude before we finalize this matter, Mr. Herard.

Mr. Herard: Well, mine is just a comment on Mr. Chase's comment: the fewest number of questions answered. They were all answered.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Questions asked.

Mr. Herard: Perhaps.

I just wanted to be clear that the questions were answered. Perhaps the questions were too long and the answers were too long.

The Chair: And that's my fault.

We're going to decide this matter. Since Heather Forsyth is proposing the motion, she has the last word before we vote.

Mrs. Forsyth: Well, Mr. Chair, I've listened to my colleagues

around me, and I'm quite prepared to withdraw the motion if it's the will of the committee. The research that, you know, is being provided I'm quite fine with, but then I would hope that we would have the same respect for the departments before us if they don't have the answers and they're willing to provide them in writing.

The Chair: Yeah. That's fine.

Mrs. Forsyth: I'm okay with that.

The Chair: And the committee is in agreement unanimously that she can withdraw her motion?

Hon. Members: Agreed.

The Chair: Okay. Thank you very much for that. That concludes that matter.

I would like to remind you, please, that the date of our next meeting is Wednesday, November 28, with the Minister of Seniors and Community Supports, the hon. Mr. Greg Melchin.

If there are no other matters, can I please have a motion to adjourn? Art Johnston. All those in favour? None opposed? Thank you very much.

Have a good day.

[The committee adjourned at 10:08 a.m.]

