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Department of Children and Youth Services
Consideration of Main Estimates

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6:32 p.m.

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[Mr. Horne in the chair]

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The Chair: Good evening, colleagues. I'd like to call this meeting of the Standing Committee on Health to order. Minister Tarchuk, welcome to the committee. In just a moment I'll ask you to introduce your officials as well. We'll just begin by going around the table and introducing members of the committee, beginning with Ms Pastoor.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East, deputy chair.

Mr. Fawcett: Kyle Fawcett, Calgary-North Hill.

Mr. Vandermeer: Tony Vandermeer, Edmonton-Beverly-Clareview.

Ms Notley: Rachel Notley, Edmonton-Strathcona.

Mrs. McQueen: Good evening. Diana McQueen, Drayton Valley-Calmar, substituting for Cal Dallas.

Mr. Denis: Jonathan Denis, Calgary-Egmont.

Mr. Olson: Verlyn Olson, Wetaskiwin-Camrose.

Mr. Quest: Dave Quest, Strathcona.

Dr. Sherman: Raj Sherman, Edmonton-Meadowlark.

Mr. Chase: Harry Chase, Calgary-Varsity, playing the dual role of protagonist and antagonist.

The Chair: I'm Fred Horne, MLA for Edmonton-Rutherford and chair of the committee.

Minister, would you like to introduce your officials?

Ms Tarchuk: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'd like to introduce those I have with me today: Fay Orr, deputy minister, to my immediate left; Gord Johnston, ADM, ministry support services; Shehnaz Hutchinson, senior financial officer, is behind me; and Trevor Coulombe, my communications director.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much. Before we begin, I'm just going to read a few notes with respect to procedure. I'm sure all members are well versed in this now, but we should do it for the record.

Votes on the estimates are of course deferred until Committee of Supply, which will be held tomorrow, May 7. Votes on any amendments which may be presented are also deferred until Committee of Supply. I believe you're aware that amendments must have been reviewed by Parliamentary Counsel no later than 6 p.m. on the day they are to be moved.

The speaking order is set out in the standing orders. Just to review quickly, we have three hours for consideration of these estimates. The first hour is devoted to members of the Official Opposition. The second segment, 20 minutes, is devoted to the member for the third party. The remaining time is allocated to all members. As we've done in previous meetings, once we get to that final segment, I will recognize government and opposition members on a rotating basis.

As well, as most of you are likely aware, speaking time is limited to 10 minutes. Alternatively, a minister and a member may combine their time for a total of 20 minutes. It would be helpful to the chair if the member would please indicate which option you intend to use.

Just a reminder that in no instance may a member speak for longer than 10 minutes at one time. In the event that you've elected to combine your time into 20 minutes, if, for example, a member were to continue past 10 minutes, I would then interrupt that member and invite the minister to reply.

Points of order will be dealt with as they arise, of course, and the clock continues to run during any debate on a point of order.

I believe that's everything I need to cover. Are there any questions with respect to procedure? Okay. Of course, the very first thing that happens is that the minister has the floor for 10 minutes. With that, Minister Tarchuk, the floor is yours.

Ms Tarchuk: Great. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I've already introduced the five individuals that I have with me, and I just want to comment that they are a few of the almost 3,000 staff that we have, that are committed to building stronger communities in Alberta as well as stronger children, youth, and families.

I'm really pleased to be here tonight and to speak about a budget that helps us achieve the goal of stronger families and communities. Our budget is \$1.14 billion, which is \$42 million over last year, which is a 4 per cent increase. The additional funds that we are receiving are going to be used to provide children and families with the supports that they need to continue reaching their full potential.

Our business plan and budget are also consistent with a commitment made by the Premier to protect the programs and the services that support families and the most vulnerable in the province. I often describe this ministry as one of triumphs and tragedies, and while we're in the very serious business of making difficult choices in very difficult situations, I can tell you that we're also inspired and amazed on a daily basis by some incredible stories.

I just wanted to quickly share a story of a young lady, Samantha, with whom I had the opportunity to visit last week. Samantha is a very bright woman. She dropped out of school when she was 12. At the age of 16 she was abandoned by her parents. They were struggling with substance abuse and unable to take care of their children. With help from the ministry Samantha and her older sister rented a basement suite. She reconnected with school. She got caught up in school, and she was able to get her life back together. She got a part-time job during high school. She saved enough money for a car. With support from us, again, she was able to pay for driver training and got her licence. A few months later she drove her car to the ministry office, and she hand delivered an invitation to her caseworker inviting her to her grad. She's currently accessing the advancing futures bursary, studying accounting at a postsecondary institution, and today the woman that I met last week is a beautiful, confident 18-year-old and one of many who say to our staff: "Thank you. You have saved my life."

What does Samantha's success have to do with our business plan and budget? In a word, everything. Every item in our business plan and budget is doing what is right for individuals like Samantha. Ensuring the safety and well-being of children and families at the most immediate risk has always been job number one for our ministry, and we will stay on that path this fiscal year.

Our budget increase this year will be invested and legislated in mandated priority areas that will make a meaningful and lasting difference: child intervention, family enhancement, foster care, supporting families with children with disabilities, promoting safer communities through our family violence and bullying initiative.

In addition, our budget provides us with the tools needed to make progress on our revised mandate from the Premier to continue

supporting the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces by 2011; to work to address the needs of high-risk youth; to engage the public in a recruitment campaign to increase the number of foster parents and kinship caregivers; to expand support to aboriginal people and immigrants, particularly family violence prevention resources; to move towards an outcome-based approach with agencies that deliver services to children and families on our behalf. We've also allocated additional funds to community-based prevention and early intervention programs and initiatives.

I'll just spend a couple of minutes going into a little bit more detail about the areas where we're planning to target our funds this fiscal year. Child intervention and foster care are receiving the largest budget increase, \$25 million for this year, for a total investment of \$560 million. That's a 4 and a half per cent increase from '08-09. Around 9,000 children are currently in our care, and the majority of this funding increase will go toward sustaining the current level of supports by addressing caseload and cost-per-case increases. The remainder will be used to increase the basic maintenance rate provided to foster parents for foster children, which is part of the announcement that we made last week. The funding increases will ensure that our foster parents remain among the best supported in the country.

Raising a child with a disability can be a challenge for families, and I think that we all recognize that our family support for children with disabilities program is unique and is a leader in the country. No other program in Canada offers families funding to help cover such a wide range of supports and services. To make sure families continue receiving the services they need, we're increasing the budget this year by 5.8 per cent to \$113 million, and this will support caseload and cost-per-case increases.

6:40

With respect to child care, as I indicated earlier, the Premier has mandated that I continue to support the creation of 14,000 spaces, or an increase of 25 per cent. Our made-in-Alberta child care plan is already working. It's been well received in communities and has been very effective in both supporting new spaces and attracting new staff. We have seen 9,000 new spaces in the first year of that plan in 204 communities, and the number of child care programs that are accredited has risen to 76 per cent. This year our budget for child care will increase by an additional 4.7 per cent to \$206 million to sustain the existing spaces and continue to create new child care spaces. We're also investing \$12.6 million in expanding the accreditation program to out of school care.

Our province has long been considered a national and international leader in combating the devastating impact of family violence and bullying. Nearly \$42 million will be earmarked for this purpose this fiscal year. That is a \$2.8 million, or 7.1 per cent, increase. In this budget \$1.6 million is going to support the safe communities initiative. With this funding we will support the additional 79 beds that we added to women's shelters this past year; enhance the supports and services available to those affected by family violence and bullying, maintaining an emphasis on aboriginal people and immigrants; and provide a 5 per cent increase for the attraction and retention of staff. We're also using a portion for mentoring opportunities for youth and supporting families of at-risk children through parent link centres.

I also want to mention our recent efforts to enhance supports and services for at-risk youth. A number of municipalities last fall conducted homelessness surveys, and the results were suggesting that we have more youth homelessness on the streets. That was very concerning and troublesome to both myself and the Minister of

Housing and Urban Affairs. So earlier this year we asked our departments to conduct a review to try to determine the scope of youth homelessness and also to come up with some recommendations that would help us make sound decisions about how we can better serve these individuals in the future. Officials from both of our ministries are currently speaking to stakeholders, including youth shelter operators, homelessness foundations as well as youth who are or have been homeless, and you'll hear a lot more about this review in the next couple of months.

A significant part of our work in supporting children and families at risk is working with community-based social service agencies. One of the challenges we've all heard that these contracted agencies face is recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. We're going to continue supporting them in meeting this challenge. In 2008-09 we were able to provide them with an additional \$11 million, and we will duplicate that support for 2009-10.

This additional funding is just one way that we are supporting these agencies. We're also continuing to work with them to develop innovative ways to better serve children and families. One of these innovative approaches is outcomes-based service delivery, and this means moving to a system where agencies are funded on outputs, like the number of stable permanent placements found for kids in care. Instead of buying beds, we want to be in the business of buying plans and futures for children. The first pilot project will be implemented this summer. Again, over the next couple of months we'll hear more about that pilot project and the outcomes-based approach.

I think all of you would agree that FCSS is one of the best examples in the province we have of successful partnerships. They effectively provide programs that are tailored to what local citizens need most. Our ministry remains committed to prevention and early intervention. We'll be committing \$75.6 million to FCSS basic grant funding. That is a 4.1 per cent increase for them.

We also remain committed to supporting other initiatives, including over \$18 million to support those affected by FASD, \$6.8 million to assist youth who are transitioning to adulthood, \$6.2 million toward the prevention of child sexual exploitation, \$2 million for the Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, and over \$1.5 million through Alberta's Promise to create hope for those at risk.

I should remind everybody that today is McHappy Day at McDonald's, where half of the proceeds are going to Alberta's Promise agencies, so I suggest that you all take a detour on the way home tonight.

This budget reflects the commitment by our government to continue providing supports and services to the most at-risk people in our society. Our ministry and its staff are proud to be involved in this work, and I want to take this opportunity to commend and applaud their passion and their commitment. It's a job where you can never do enough, yet every little thing that you do can make a difference, and it does. Samantha and thousands of other children like her are proof of that.

Lastly, I just want to conclude by mentioning the importance of community involvement in our business. Our work is based on the principle that parents are responsible for the care and supervision of their children and have both an obligation and right to raise them according to their values. [Ms Tarchuk's speaking time expired] Is that the end or a warning?

The Chair: That's 10 minutes, Minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay.

The Chair: Thank you.

The next hour will be devoted to members of the Official Opposition. Mr. Chase, that bell will go after the first 20-minute segment. You can either continue, or if another member is going to participate, you can do that.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm going to do 10 minutes at a time, and if the minister is unable to provide responses due to the specificity of the questions, I'll look forward to written responses.

The Chair: All right. Please proceed.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. A major problem that members of Children and Youth Services have brought to me is the decertification of staff, what they view as a dumbing-down of credentials, a lack of accreditation.

There is a large concern that's been expressed to me by a number of individuals on what they view as almost an Americanization of the program direction towards greater contracting out of services to the lowest bidder.

There is a concern with regard to high staff turnover, particularly in contracted-out agencies. Those in contracted agencies are concerned about the major difference in salary for an individual directly employed by the government in comparison to contracted-out employees. A person who graduates with a degree in social welfare would earn approximately \$62,000 a year as a starting salary under the government. That same social worker within a contracted agency is looking at a salary of about \$35,000, a major discrepancy. As a result, there's a tremendous turnover the farther you get from contracted agencies.

I am concerned about the number of treatment beds, the facilities, the interaction between ministries: Health, Children and Youth Services, and Education as well. I have raised numerous times in the House concerns that I have with regard to the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, which is not a professionally accredited residential treatment centre, yet it operates on having a number of children in locked bedrooms in homes as opposed to treatment centres on a nightly basis.

Does the minister believe that 80 minutes is sufficient time to debate an entire budget of \$1.13 billion? That breaks down to \$14.1 million a minute. I have to speak quickly. Does the minister believe that this honestly gives sufficient time for oversight of government spending?

Will the minister table a list of all the program areas that are starting the fiscal year in a deficit position and a statement of how each program area is going to be impacted in terms of outcomes for children?

What expectation is there for timely approval of child and family services authorities' budgets? I brought out the example of Calgary. While they do a wonderful job of accounting once they get started, last year they didn't get started in terms of approving the budget until November.

Will the minister also table a list of services that have official or unofficial waiting lists broken down by authority?

Apprehension versus prevention. Can the minister answer: why is there a greater focus on intervention services than on promotion of healthy communities? According to page 78 of the 2009-2010 government estimates child intervention services receives \$396,663,000 – this is from line 3.0.1 – while in total community initiatives, child and family research, and Alberta's Promise, all under Promoting Healthy Communities for Children, Youth and Families, lines 4.0.1, 4.0.2, and 4.0.3, receive \$12,571,000. That is 31.5 times more spent on intervention than prevention. How can the

minister justify this trend when, if you can prevent the circumstances where children will need intervention services, the cost of intervention will be saved?

6:50

When will the minister realize that putting money into the front end of social services will save money on the back end? It's the same argument I make in education. Spend the money up front, K to 3, and then you won't be even seeing the dropouts at the end, in high school.

Performance measure 3(a) on page 48 of the 2009 business plan states the percentage of children who suffer injury that results in hospitalization or death while receiving protective services. Will the minister provide the percentage for this measure for '08-09? It's not reported, or we couldn't find it. How can the minister justify having any injuries while children are in protective care?

Performance measure 3(b) on page 48 of the 2009 business plan is the number of children in the permanent care of the director for whom adoption or private guardianship orders are granted. The last actual for this measure was for '07-08, which was 509. What is the reported number for '08-09 for this measure? It's not included. The target for '09-10 is a reduction from the last actual given by 32, going from 509 to 477. Then the targets increase from '09-10 onward. What is the reasoning behind this increase?

A comment based on the experiences of people that have come to me. I am concerned about the speed at which children are taken into custody, into foster care for quick adoption. The justification sometimes is lacking.

Performance measure 3(c) on page 48 of the 2009 business plan is the percentage of children and youth who received child intervention, family enhancement or protective services, and did not require protective services within 12 months of file closure. What is the percentage for the '08-09 fiscal year? Again, it's not reported. The last actual reported is 87 per cent, and the target for '09-10 is again 87 per cent. Does the minister not see a need for improvement in this area? Does this mean that fewer funds will be allocated to improving this performance measure if the desired target is already presumably reached? The continued safety and protection of children should be the highest goal that the minister sets. How can the minister justify seeing no need to improve in this area?

Page 46 of the business plan, strategy 2.2: "Implement Safe Communities pilot projects in Parent Link Centres to address child and family risk factors associated with the development of antisocial behaviour." Parent link centres provide information and support for parents and caregivers on how to assist with their child's learning development and health. They have information about becoming a parent, promoting a healthy pregnancy, locating and choosing child care, various health issues, communications, discipline, and a special section entitled Ages & Stages.

An individual who contacted me was having difficulty with their child in terms of discipline and what appeared to be the potential onset of a degree of mental illness. The mother contacted Children and Youth Services, and instead of having in-home support, the mother was blamed for the child's difficulties, and the child was taken into custody and a year later is still in custody. The mother was beaten senseless by the father, who broke her skull, blinded her in one eye, and she's legally blind. The father fled to Poland. Yet the system continues to be in a combative mode.

Where will the link projects be located? How much money is allocated to them? Where is the money coming from? How will the project be measured for success?

Objective 5 of the ministry-wide corporate objectives on page 50 of the 2009 business plan is: "Develop strategies and capacity to

support the Ministry's requirement for legal services, identify legal risks and respond to legal issues and legislative needs." Will the minister clarify if this objective refers to legal services meant to aid children, or is this legal support in defense of the ministry? How much does the Ministry of Children and Youth Services spend on legal costs? Will the minister provide the numbers for legal services going back 10 years? Why does the ministry need an entire objective that refers to legal services? Is this admitting that there is a problem in this ministry?

Another family example that was brought to me: the parents have had 45 different court appearances. The grandparents have spent over \$265,000, which obviously had to be matched by taxpayers, and the custody battle continues. The mother asked that the parents be given guardianship of the children from two different fathers. It goes on and on.

Objective 5 of the ministry-wide corporate objectives on page 50 of the 2009 business plan is to develop strategies . . . [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll continue from there. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.

Minister, we'll reset the clock for 10 minutes, and you can proceed with your reply.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Yeah. Great. Thank you very much. That was a huge number of questions, so I will make sure I get back. We'll go through *Hansard* and make sure that you get responses to all of those.

I'm just going to start talking about contracted agencies. You had mentioned their importance to us. We have, I think, over \$200 million of contracts with community-based social service agencies that provide services for us, and you raised the issues that they are experiencing with staff recruitment and retention. A few comments that I would like to make there. I had mentioned in my opening comments that we do work closely with them. We are aware of the financial issues that they are having with staffing, and that's one of the reasons that we wanted to ensure that we followed up on the commitment that we had made to forward another 5 per cent for staffing issues.

I had also mentioned the outcomes-based approach. I can tell you that we're working very closely with our agencies on that, and they are enthusiastic about that. One of the reasons is that not only does it create better outcomes for children and families, but jurisdictions that do use that approach are seeing greater financial stability and predictability for agencies. So that is one of the reasons that they are excited about it.

As well as the 5 per cent, we also created a bursary that offers some training and some postsecondary opportunities for individuals working for contracted agencies. I think it's worth while noting some of the comments that were received in our office just in the last couple of weeks after the budget came out. I know that the agencies were quite pleased with that budget. We also have had letters that confirmed that attracting staff is not as critical as it has been in the last year or two years.

Just to randomly refer to some of the comments from organizations that got back to us after hearing the announcement of the 5 per cent: pretty amazing announcement in very difficult economic times; many thanks to you and your team for supporting us; this is wonderful news; a sincere thank you; I continue to be amazed at the wonder of the year; please accept my thank you as all of us together try to provide the vulnerable a voice and safe place within Alberta.

We heard from numerous organizations, and I think the response was good. Certainly, their co-operation and their involvement in how we move forward on taking care of their issues is very positive.

In terms of your questions about the performance measures, you wanted to know what some of them were for '08-09. We're still finalizing those figures, and they will be shared publicly in the annual report. I think we expect those to come in July.

The comment about the CFSAs in Calgary. It's not true. CFSAs don't approve a budget. It is approved as part of our process. When we go through the budget process, we are considering the budgets of all CFSAs. So the comment about budget development in November just doesn't make any sense.

7:00

I totally agree with your comment about making sure that we put an emphasis on preventative and just the importance of that, and I would just draw everyone's attention to page 41 of the business plan. That is why when you take a look at our programs, well, the intervention and the family enhancement is significant, just over \$500 million of our budget. As important in our budget is all of the preventative; I couldn't agree with you more. That's why it was important to make sure that we saw adequate funding for family support and children with disabilities, family and community support services. A lot of our child care is involved in our accreditation and ensuring that quality in child care is linked to intervention and prevention. All of our work with the fetal alcohol spectrum, FASD, strategy is linked to that.

I think that when you take a look at our entire budget and then include the \$250 million that Alberta's Promise has given to children and families over the last five years, we're probably getting close to 50-50 in terms. I think that that's important, so I do agree with you on your comments there.

The comments about whether or not we spend enough time on family enhancement versus quickly going in there and intervening or apprehending or whatever: I think it's worth just talking a little bit about generally how our process works and what our focuses are. When we have a child at risk, you know, if somebody has reported to us – it doesn't matter whether that's the school or police or whoever – we, obviously, get in there and do the assessment, you know, the work that's been done with the casework practice model, and make sure that that's a very extensive and detailed and a valuable assessment.

If we get a sense that the family needs help, our first priority, our first step, will always be to work with the family. It goes back to the comment I made earlier about what we believe on who is responsible for children. It's only when a family is unable or unwilling to keep their children safe that we actually take a look at taking the step further and looking at apprehending. Every effort is always initially made to try to strengthen the family and keep the family together. If they need support, whether it be addiction treatment, counselling, parenting programs, whatever, that will be our first choice.

If there is the need to apprehend, we do look at placements in foster care, kinship care, group homes. I think it's important to note that those are always intended to be temporary. The desire will always be to either reunite with the family or have to go the step further and get a permanent plan for that child. Then you're looking at hopefully getting a PGO or an adoption. That is always the priority. In terms of statements about wanting to get in there quickly and do something else, those are the logical steps and the practice of our caseworkers and how they make decisions.

It's also worth noting that when we're looking at aboriginal care, for instance, we do know that 60 per cent of our workload is aboriginal and again to make the point that the front end of family enhancement and helping with supports for the family is most important. That's one of the reasons that we had advocated with our aboriginal people in getting the INAC money. We got the \$98

million over five years that was announced, I guess, just over a year ago. The good news there is that all of our delegated First Nation agencies now have family enhancement workers in place, and they've already seen just in the past year I think it's something like a 19 per cent increase in the number of families who are receiving family enhancement supports. So that's really good. What's happening with our aboriginal care is following the same practice that we have right across the board in terms of where the priorities should be and where the good investments are.

You had referred to the child and youth care worker certification, and I just want to make the point that we have not walked away from quality. We still require minimum recruitment standards for our staff. What that issue was all about is making sure that we didn't favour one kind of training over another and make sure that employees that have similar training and experience are paid at the very same level. I think the child and youth care worker certification was put in place back in the '70s, when there were very few choices of how you got educated to get into these positions. Now we have all kinds of opportunities, so that, really, was a human resource adjustment. The bottom line, I think, from my perspective is that it did not interfere with the requirements of the work.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chase, do you want to continue?

Mr. Chase: Yeah, and again the 10 minutes.

The feeling about staff is that the educational background, the requirements are now so varied that the credentials specific to looking after children have been watered down.

With regard to my comment on November and approvals, I'm very aware that the ministry establishes the budget basically in April. Whether it's an implementation or approval of the budget, these figures came from the ministry's records indicating at what month and at what point each of the outlying areas that offer children and youth services initiated their budgets or locally dealt with them.

I have a concern with regard to cross-ministry connections. I mentioned the need to be connected with both Health and Education. Unfortunately, so much of Children and Youth Services revolves around the courts, so a connection with the Ministry of Justice is absolutely important. One of the concerns I have is the amount of legal aid that is provided and the number of lawyers who are expected to basically be altruistic and do it for the good as opposed to receiving an equivalent salary that they would receive in a private practice circumstance. I would like to know what the court costs are to the ministry for legal aid. That's all coming out of the taxpayer, and obviously we want to avoid as much as possible the confrontational style of courts. What is the cost to the ministry and to individuals for lengthy custody cases? Has the ministry investigated the cost and emotional benefits of implementing a unified family court?

I brought forward Motion 511 in November of 2007, calling for a unified family court. It doesn't seem to have gone anywhere, although it was unanimously accepted within the Legislature. So while we still have, for example, the Court of Queen's Bench dealing primarily with divorce, other court systems are dealing with every other family matter, and kids and families can be hauled before three or four different types of court systems. That ping-pong effect is not only expensive; it's extremely hard on trying to restore any type of family unity or dignity.

How does the minister answer the concerns of grandparents of children who are involved in custody cases when they may not be able to have access to the child? I have again heard numerous circumstances where front-line child care workers have ignored

judicial orders in terms of visitation for grandparents and have made it exceedingly difficult for grandparents to have that access in a timely manner as noted by the court.

Line 3.0.1, child intervention services received an increase of \$18,838,000, or 5.0 per cent. How is this increase distributed throughout the province? Have these funds been allocated because of higher caseloads? Is the minister concerned with the rate at which children are being apprehended?

7:10

What type of respite care is available for families of children who are not qualified for family support for children with disabilities?

Does the government do any re-evaluations after children are apprehended?

For the following line items listed on page 78 of the 2009-2010 government estimates – 2.0.1, family support for children with disabilities; 2.0.2, family and community support services; 2.0.3, child care; and 3.0.1, child intervention services – could the minister provide the breakdown of the following? How much of each dollar spent in these programs goes directly to front-line staff doing the work? How much is spent on administration? Is the minister currently trying to find ways to increase the efficiency of funding dollars so that more will be directed towards front-line staff?

Page 46, business plan, strategy 2.3: "Collaborate with other ministries and government agencies to improve prevention strategies and supports for children, youth and families impacted by substance abuse including those affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder." What other ministries and agencies are included? What specific strategies are being improved? One of my overreaching concerns is with the creation of the superboard. I am very concerned that organizations like AADAC, like Mental Health, are getting lost in the overall shuffle.

Page 86 of the 2009-2010 government estimates shows that community initiatives under promoting healthy communities in the southwest child and family services authority has had funding cut by \$34,000 from the previous year. Why is it that the minister appears to not be recognizing that by promoting safe and healthy communities, fewer children will be subjected to child intervention services? Again, put the money up front. What is the minister's reason for the imbalance?

Foster and kinship care. Strategic priority 3: "Enhance outcomes for children in need and in care." Page 43 of the 2009 business plan refers to a recruitment campaign for foster parents and kinship caregivers. Will the minister please detail how much is being spent on the campaign? Are there certain areas of the province that are being targeted? If so, which areas? Could the money being spent on the recruitment perhaps be better spent on monitoring and standards for foster parents? Is the province worried about quality over quantity? What is the minister's response to parents in Alberta who are concerned about the province's rush to place children in adoption – I brought that up earlier – as opposed to in-home family support?

Strategy 3.4 on page 47 of the 2009 business plan:

Enhance the continuum of placement options for children in care, including foster care and kinship care, to ensure that children who cannot remain in their parental homes receive quality care, and that the individuals who care for them are supported.

How much is going into foster care? How much is to kinship care? We've seen a horrendous circumstance of kinship care: five children being given to a 21-year-old aunt, so she drops out of university, but there appears to be very little oversight, very little in-home support, and a young child dies. How much of this funding is allocated to the monitoring of kinship care placements? What is the funding amount for monitoring foster care? What standards are there in place for

both? How often are there inspections for both types of placements? There's an appearance that if it's kinship care, there's less need to supervise and support. That should not be the case.

Are there health assessments for children in care to determine any signs of abuse? In the House I raised the situation of the disabled child who was frequently taken to the hospital with many fractures during the foster care time period. She eventually died. Parents were given the impression that they couldn't possibly look after her based on the severity of her disabilities. Support wasn't provided for them at that time.

Strategy 4.4 on page 48 of the 2009 business plan states: "Kinship care for Aboriginal children in care will be enhanced to include significant individuals, not only family members." If the minister is looking to expand the scope of who will be included in the definition of kinship care, will she provide the evidence that was used to make this decision? What type of financial support is given to families that provide kinship care? What are the types of inspections that take place before a family will be granted kinship care? Will the number of children already in the home be considered?

What type of follow-up happens once a child is placed in kinship care? Are there inspections of the home and the health of the child on a regular basis? Are the inspections surprise inspections, or are the families notified beforehand? What is the time frame for inspections? Is it every year, two years, three years? How frequent?

Are there re-evaluations of the kinship care granting after a certain amount of time? Will the minister legislate that when a parent has their child apprehended, every year the biological parent will be evaluated to see if they are capable of caring for that child? The breakdown of families because of the amount of time in custody makes it almost a foregone conclusion that they will not be reunited. After all, keeping families together is of the utmost importance.

Performance measure 4(a) on page 49 of the 2009 business plan is for the percentage of aboriginal children in foster care/kinship care who are placed with aboriginal families. [Mr. Chase's speaking time expired] I'll continue from there.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.
Minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you very much. Once again, there are a lot of questions there. I can see that we'll be quite busy after we leave tonight. But I appreciate the questions, and we will get back.

You touched on so many different topics there. I think I'm going to maybe start talking about foster care and kinship care, but I just want to go back to the certification. You had referred that staff were upset. I just want everyone here to know that we have a hundred front-line child and youth care workers who this impacts, that are employed by our ministry, and 12 of them have that certification. The rest of them would be equally qualified and educated but through a different mechanism.

You had a number of questions about kinship/foster care, similarities, differences. I think just generally I'll touch on a few topics. I had mentioned that we have 9,000 children in care. I think we have 4,600 in foster care. We have just over 700 kinship care homes. We didn't really formalize kinship until about three years ago, and we have seen a dramatic increase in the use of it. It is a preferred option with aboriginals. Because it is fairly new and because it's very popular – it's fairly new in a number of jurisdictions – we have started a review on it in terms of looking at best practices, looking at the supports assessment, and all of that. That work has started and will continue over the next couple of months.

To a great extent kinship and foster care are treated similarly. They are in terms of checks that are done on the individuals. Do they get supported? They do. They get the basic maintenance fee that foster care parents get. The monitoring is the same. I guess what is slightly different is maximum numbers. To a great extent kinship is very popular for keeping siblings together. However, I do remember that a couple of months ago we were talking about number of kids in homes and how we cap those. When we took a look at the 2,300 foster care homes that we had, and these are just ballpark figures, it was just over a hundred, I think, that were – what do you call it? – approved to have more than four children. In kinship care, out of the over 700 we had far less than a hundred that had more than four kids. So even as I say that it's a great mechanism for taking care of large families, we have more approved in the foster care system.

7:20

You had asked about training. I think it's worth mentioning that the criteria for becoming a foster parent is quite extensive. The screening includes things like a home study, criminal record/child intervention checks, personal references, medical references. It requires training sessions, environmental safety checks, compliance to health and safety legislation.

When you look at foster training, all new foster parents start at level 1. They must complete an additional nine hours of training each year after they become a foster parent. Core training for foster parents is delivered through 31 three-hour modules, which are grouped in eight different categories. They're everything from identifying influences on child development, guiding behaviour of children and youth, managing the environment of youth, maintaining the child's culture, working with the child's birth family. So it's very extensive.

I just want to comment that we are looking for more foster parents and kinship caregivers. We had seen over probably the last several years an increasing decline in the number of homes. That has leveled out, so that is good news. We officially started our campaign last October. We have now got, I think, 352 approved foster care parents and kinship caregivers. That's going really well. Last year at this same time we were talking about launching that campaign and hoping for, I think, a ballpark figure of 400. So considering that's since October, things are going well there. We do get a report every couple of weeks on how the campaign is going and where it's successful. We are seeing a response right across the province, which is good, most of it, obviously, in Calgary and Edmonton.

Just a comment on supports. We announced last week an increase in the basic maintenance for foster parents. Overall it was a 2.5 per cent increase to the basic maintenance rates. We did give an additional 10 per cent increase to the basic maintenance for infants just because of some of the costs that related to diapers and formulas and whatnot. When we take a look at overall supports for foster parents, we are averaging just over probably about \$1,450 a month per foster child, and that wouldn't include some allowances for vacation, recreational allowances, some babysitting reimbursement, respite. That would include basic as well as skill fees. Kinship is the basic. I've just got a number here. Kinship care averages about \$781 per month. I think that when we look at – and I had said this earlier – the overall support, we are doing fairly well compared to other jurisdictions.

I think the other important point to make is that we don't do that in isolation of foster parents. That is negotiated and discussed with the Foster Parent Association each and every year. So we are continually taking a look at the supports for them.

You had made some references to I guess what I would call the accountability of the system. A few points that I want to make. First of all, like I had said, there are 9,000 kids in care. The Foster Parent Association does consider that our system is a front-runner in the country, mostly surrounding our enhancement act and the casework practice model. The foster care review, which, as you know, came out last year, said that we had a very strong system. They had recommendations, and we have accepted those recommendations. The Auditor General just over a year ago had done a fairly extensive audit of this ministry, and he said that it was a very well-designed system and made the point that, you know, even with the most stringent checks and monitoring, practices cannot absolutely prevent tragedies. I agree with your comment about deaths and injuries: how are any acceptable? They're not. That's why the goal is zero. I think what's really important to say is that what we focus on is always, always, always continuous improvement. Personally I think anything less is unacceptable.

In terms of accountability I think a number of steps have been taken just in the past year to improve, I guess, the openness and transparency of the ministry. For one thing, we have done a fair amount of work to make sure – you're always trying to balance the privacy of the individual and the families that we serve, but we also want to be very open and accountable to the public. So we've taken steps: adding more information to our annual reports, making that foster care review public.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Chase, are you going to continue?

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Within the 10-minute frame. Just from your most recent comments it appears that kinship care receives about half as much as foster care. If I heard correctly, it was something like \$1,400 a month for foster care whereas it was in the area of \$700 and change for kinship care. Why the difference in funding? A child is a child, and need are needs.

Going back to aboriginal children in foster care/kinship care who are placed with aboriginal families, the last actual result for this measure is '07-08, where it was 38.5 per cent. Will the minister provide at least an estimate of the result for '08-09 for this measure? The target for '09-10 is 45 per cent, which is a 6.5 per cent increase from the last actual reported. As the minister noted, with aboriginal children representing 59 per cent of the cases that the ministry deals with, what's the plan for trying to involve more First Nations families in terms of offering kinship or foster care provisions?

Line 3.0.2, foster care support, according to page 78 of the 2009-2010 government estimates, received an increase of \$5 million, or 3.2 per cent. Will the minister provide a breakdown of how this money is distributed through the province? How much is spent supporting families that provide foster care services? How much is spent monitoring foster care placements? How much is spent educating foster families? How much is spent checking the qualifications of foster families? How much is spent on continuous follow-up with foster families after they receive the foster children? I do appreciate the expectations and the education programs that you mentioned with regard to helping foster parents to become better qualified, and I'm assuming that while they're taking these courses, they're provided with babysitting services or respite care so that they can fulfill their mandate.

Aboriginal children. Is the minister concerned by talk from the Minister of Health and Wellness about the delisting of aboriginal youth suicide prevention programs from Health and Wellness? After all, according to page 42 of the 2009 business plan "the Ministry has an excellent opportunity to build on recent improvements to the

availability of preventive and early intervention services on-reserve." Obviously, with the First Nations being our fastest growing segment of the population and the majority living off reserve, looking after aboriginal children is becoming an increasing concern. Also, with regard to the suicide, there are abnormal numbers of children in addictive circumstances as well as potential for suicide. Addiction and suicide sometimes go hand in hand. Has the minister discussed this with the minister of health? Are there any programs through her ministry which will make up for this elimination?

Strategy 3.7 on page 47 of the 2009 business plan states: "Continue to support the development of culturally appropriate training for Ministry staff." I had a call from a father – actually, it was a Métis grandfather – in the Grande Prairie area. His two grandchildren were taken into custody, driven in the winter 600 kilometres south. The very first thing that happened with the children was that their hair was cut. They were placed with a family that, you know, didn't appear to be culturally sensitive. Eventually the family received a kin care placement in Drayton Valley, and the mother and father had limited visiting rights, but as I said to the grandfather: well, at least they're still with the family as opposed to in custody and in foster care.

7:30

How much is allocated to the strategy of culturally appropriate training? Is this for all ministry staff? Are contracted agencies included in this? On page 48 of the 2009 business plan one of the expected outcomes for goal 4, that "the well-being and self-reliance of Aboriginal children, youth, families and communities will be promoted and supported," is that there will be a reduced number of aboriginal children represented in the child intervention caseload. However, page 42 of the business plan states that aboriginal children "constitute 59 per cent of the total child intervention caseload but only represent nine per cent of the total Alberta child population." So, obviously, a variety of ministries need to work up front in terms of support, education, health, addictions prevention, and family management.

When Pearl Calahasen brought forth her motion on Monday, I was extremely supportive of that particular motion in terms of celebrating aboriginal circumstance, but I also pointed out that the effect of three generations of residential schools is still causing a terrific number of problems. An awful lot of support and positive intervention is going to be necessary to break that, as I say, three-generation cycle that began in foster care abuse. That's what two generations of families learned was standard procedure within the residential centres.

Has it not been the minister's responsibility to reduce the percentage throughout her tenure as minister? Why has there been such little improvement in this area? According to page 48 of the 2008 business plan aboriginal children represented 58 per cent of the intervention caseload. Why the increase?

Strategy 4.1 on page 48 of the 2009 business plan states that the ministry will "promote innovative strategies and ensure necessary policies are in place to advance outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth and families." What specific innovative strategies are currently being developed and implemented? How much influence does the ministry have in this? Is it the delegated First Nations authorities that are doing most of the work?

Speaking of delegated authorities, on the Hobbema reserve two months ago six caseworkers were let go. I'm sure the number of cases wasn't reduced, but the number of workers was. It would be interesting to know how closely you work with the reserves in terms of funding and providing support. How much support to develop-

ment does the ministry provide? How much funding is specifically allocated to this strategy? What are the necessary policies in place that the strategy refers to?

Strategy 4.3 on page 48 of the 2009 business plan states: "Ensure cultural plans are in place for all Aboriginal children in care." How much is being allocated to ensure that cultural plans are in place? What type of training is it mandated that support workers have? What is the number of aboriginal staff that support aboriginal children? What is the minister doing to enhance recruitment of aboriginal staff? Does the minister agree that having an aboriginal support worker would provide far more cultural awareness than whatever training the ministry would provide? What guidelines or expectations does the minister have to ensure the cultural heritage of aboriginal children?

Child and family services authorities. Page 36 of the 2009 fiscal plan states that there is "\$11 million, allocated across many programs, to support . . . recruitment and retention by contracted agencies that provide services to children, youth and families." What are the total staffing numbers for the child and family services authorities? Can the minister provide the total staffing numbers for contracted-out agencies? What are the target staffing numbers for both the authorities and contracted agencies? Which of the programs is the \$11 million shared by? Will the minister provide a list of which programs and how much they are receiving? Is the recruitment and retention funding going to be targeted to agencies that have the greatest need? We talked about turnover earlier.

How much funding will be going to nonprofit agencies, how much to profit agencies? Will the minister provide the staff turnover rates for the agencies the government contracts services out to? What is the minister's explanation for the trouble that contracted agencies have in finding and keeping good staff? Could this be related to the wage difference between government workers and contracted workers, that I referred to earlier? Will the minister provide what the average wage difference is between government and agency workers: same work, different wages? Will the minister answer as to why there is a discrepancy between the government staff and staff of contracted agencies? Is the minister concerned about accreditation and the fact that there is a lower standard for people who work with children? What is the minister going to do to address this problem?

Page 47 of the 2009 business plan, strategy 3.1, support the FNAs and community partners "to successfully integrate the Casework Practice Model into practice, and develop and implement mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation and continuous improvement." Shouldn't mechanisms for monitoring, evaluation, and improvements be designed already? How much funding is going into this strategy? What has been the cost of implementing the casework practice model? What problems from this implementation has the minister encountered? Is there increased administration? What is the minister going to do to address staff burnout from doing 15 pages of paperwork?

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Chase.
Minister Tarchuk.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. Thank you. That was amazing. Simply amazing.

There are several things I'll touch on. One is that you had mentioned youth suicide. I can tell you that, you know, suicide is a tragedy not only for the person who dies but also for the survivors. It just has a devastating impact on families and communities. If a youth is at risk of suicide or a parent feels that their child is at risk of suicide and they contact us, contact the crisis line, we will make

sure that they are referred to the appropriate supports. We do train our staff, all of our staff. We do train foster parents and other licensed caregivers of children and youth; for instance, in our group homes. We train them on how to recognize and respond to the signs of youth suicide.

We will continue to advocate for general child mental health initiatives. We are on a cross-ministry with health. You know, I guess what I would say: we know that so many of our children and so many of our families do struggle with mental health issues, and we also know that we don't have good health without having good mental health. We do sit as a member of the implementation team for the child's mental health plan and do support that plan, which is talking about hiring more mental health workers and creating mobile mental health teams, more in-patient mental health beds, and enhancing community services. So I do appreciate your comments on mental health.

Lots of information that I can share with you on the aboriginal. You know, you're asking me if we care about or if I personally care about the number of aboriginals in care. Absolutely I do. It has been a priority. You're right that it is the bulk of our kids in care. I would like just to mention a number of initiatives that we're focused on and that are making a difference. I've already referred to the INAC funding. Alberta was the first province in Canada to get that early intervention funding for reserves, and other provinces are following suit now. In fact, the Alberta response model was quite instrumental in putting us forward as a front-runner for that funding. I do think that other provinces are having to show a similar model to the Alberta response model in order to get that funding.

7:40

We work very closely with our aboriginal leaders on their children's care, and we show it in a number of ways. I'm sure you know that one of our board chairs of the CFSA is aboriginal. We have a CFSA that is only for Métis settlements. We have very positive relationships with DFNAs, the delegated First Nations agencies, and work closely with them. You had commented on cultural planning and permanency planning. It is a very important part of our care for aboriginal kids, and both of those, cultural planning and permanency planning, would require – what do we call them? – designates off the reserve to be part of those plans. So it is very important.

We have five aboriginal parent link centres, six aboriginal women's shelters. We do support early intervention programs on the reserve. Our mentorship programs are heavily involved with aboriginal young people. I think it's worth noting some of the results that we're starting to see. I had mentioned the number of foster care and kinship care providers that we're getting through the campaign, and we are starting to see – I don't think we can call it significant – that a number of those that are being approved are aboriginal. We've seen an 87 per cent increase in the number of kinship care homes in the last three years for aboriginal kids. We have seen a 15 per cent increase in children being placed with aboriginal families. As you know, that's one of our goals. We've had a 25 per cent increase in the permanency for aboriginal children.

Just a couple of things I want to comment on. Your question about whether it's a priority: it absolutely is. I can tell you that last September we had hosted a western ministers' meeting for ministers responsible for social services in the four western provinces. We hosted that in Banff, specifically to talk about aboriginal issues and to share best practices on our approaches to addressing aboriginal issues. We identified common areas of interest. We talked about continuing to work and co-ordinate maybe responses to the federal government or lobbying efforts. We have our officials continuing

that work. We do plan – and I think it's in June – that we will be meeting again and getting an update and further discussing issues like Jordan's principle and whether we take a similar approach to that and a number of other things. So definitely this is a priority for the ministry and myself.

You had mentioned parent link centres. You probably are aware that we currently have 46 funded parent link centres. I guess the good news with them is that we have seen a significant increase both in the numbers of children and parents that are using them. I know that we had an opening of our francophone parent link centre just a couple of weeks ago. They really are a success story. I know that our goal, when we first started talking about parent link centres, was to try to get up to a number of 60. We're at 46.

I think something that we should try to do is encourage the development of more of them and support them when we are able to. The number of programs that they're picking up and the positive responses they're getting from parents in terms of the information that they're accessing and the referrals to resources have been very positive. This francophone one that I mentioned: we got feedback afterwards of the excitement in the community, the number of stakeholders that were involved in that opening. I think that that is just a really positive initiative of ours.

It's also tied directly to some of the work that we're doing for the safe communities initiatives. The programs that we're piloting – I wonder if we have the communities for that. We're piloting projects for families that have high-risk behavioural – I don't know that I have that handy right now, in which five locations we are piloting those.

Early childhood development. I'll just comment on a few of the initiatives that we are involved with. We're part of an early childhood development mapping project. It's actually led by Education, and I think it's going to be very important information for ourselves and Health as well as Education. They have embarked on a mapping project, which is a five-year research project that's going to give school boards, communities, and parents a comprehensive range of information on children's development prior to kindergarten. It will gather information on family and community factors that influence development and local programs and services that help children reach their full potential. It will also collect socioeconomic data and information about community assets, so I think once this information is plotted, it's going to be very useful for communities to identify where their strengths are, where their capacity is, and where their gaps exist.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

The next 20 minutes are allocated to the third party. Ms Notley, please.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, thanks to the Member for Calgary-Varsity I don't imagine there's a question, actually, that hasn't been asked yet.

Ms Tarchuk: That was good.

Ms Notley: The good thing about this new process is that every answer is going to come to every member of the committee, so I'm actually going to get all that information anyway. That's great, and good luck to you in putting that together because I suspect you'll be quite busy for some time, but I think it will be really good information, too. I appreciate the point that the Member for Calgary-Varsity is trying to make in terms of the complexity of the issues and the time within which we have to actually discuss them.

Having said that, I'd like to instead try more of the back-and-forth approach that I've used in my other estimates debates and just try and have a bit more of a discussion back and forth on the questions. Just to say at the outset that if I ask you a question and if you're answering it and I appear to be interrupting you, it's not in any way a sign of disrespect, nor am I going to get into a debate because I don't want to do that. It's just that I'm very conscious of the amount of time I have, and it's just me wanting to move on to a different question. So I just want that out there at the outset.

I think what I'd like to focus on first is the child care plan and some of the work that the ministry is doing around child care. I may have misheard, but I thought in your opening remarks that you mentioned that we were at this point at the number of 9,000 new spaces. I had had just a document, not an internal document, one that was widely publicized, dated April 2009, talking about, I believe, 6,500 new spaces, so I'm just curious as to what the actual number of spaces were. Then the document that I have talks about how of those 6,500 spaces 2,400 are in licensed daycares and approved family day homes, so are the remaining whatever that would be, I guess 4,100, from kin spots, or where are those from? That's my question to start out with.

Ms Tarchuk: I can tell you that, just like our foster care campaign, we receive an update every week on where exactly the space creation is and exactly what types of child care spaces. The number since we announced the child care plan, which I think was – was that May 18 or somewhere around there? May 8.

7:50

Ms Notley: Of '08, right?

Ms Tarchuk: Of '08: 9,329.

Ms Notley: And how do those break down?

Ms Tarchuk: We have over 2,500 daycare, 1,900 preschools – this is just ballpark – 3,100 out-of-school care. We've got 753 in approved family day homes, and 892 in kin, so kin would not be one of our larger ones, for sure. We are just passing in a couple of days our anniversary, and I do plan on coming out with a first-year report. I think the news is awfully good: as I mentioned earlier, 9,300 spaces in 204 communities.

I have to tell you that the whole tool box approach has been very well received in communities. If I can just share one good-news story. We see these coming in every single week, but I thought: boy, this is really what that plan was all about and intended to do. The town of Edson didn't have any full-time child care prior to this announcement. The daycare society, the early learning and child care centre, the friendship centre got together with business and community groups, and they opened up a multipurpose early childhood program. They now have spaces for over 178 kids. They created partnerships with industries. EnCana contributed \$50,000, Suncor \$50,000, the Rotary Club \$50,000, and it just goes on. Quite phenomenal. That story has been repeated all across the province.

There's something that I would like to share with you. This is interesting because it just came out today. There is a study that came out from the Frontier Centre in Manitoba dated today. A fellow who works out of the Frontier Centre, Peter Taylor, studied the child care systems in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta. He's current editor at large, actually, of *Maclean's* magazine and also was a senior analyst with the Alberta Liberal caucus, so that's interesting.

Here's verbatim what came out this morning. When he did a comparison of the three provinces, he said:

- Alberta's policies have led to a more responsive and entrepreneurial daycare system, which is better able to meet the needs of parents.
- Alberta is also more efficient in turning government subsidies into new daycare spaces. Thus it serves the needs of parents and taxpayers alike.

For every thousand dollars spent, Alberta creates twice as many child care spaces as Manitoba and three times the spaces created by Saskatchewan.

While no one would argue that Alberta's daycare sector is entirely trouble-free, treating for-profit and non-profit child care centres equally has led to a much better outcome for everyone concerned.

Alberta's child care accreditation system

wisely puts the emphasis on raising quality across the board, which benefits all children, regardless of whether they attend a non-profit or for-profit centre.

His last comments about Alberta:

Complaints from advocacy groups that for-profit daycares sacrifice quality are misplaced. Both for-profit and non-profit centres must meet exactly the same licensing, staffing and quality requirements, which is true, and

where differences are identified, it is typically the result of unequal funding policies in other provinces.

He also goes on to just make some comments on Manitoba and Saskatchewan. I think this is just really good news to think that this has been recognized seeing that this plan has been in place for only one year.

Ms Notley: Okay. I need to . . .

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. That's where you interrupt me?

Ms Notley: Yeah. I want to kind of get going. I think we'll just have to sort of agree to disagree on some of those findings for a number of different reasons. I don't want to really get so much into a debate.

I'm wondering if you can, first of all, confirm whether or not this number is, in fact, the net number. Of course, we have this whole process of spaces being lost as well. There have been a lot of people in the field who are concerned that, you know, the way it's measured doesn't necessarily deal with the people moving across the street or the ones that are closed or that kind of thing. So just a quick yes or no.

Ms Tarchuk: No, it is not net, but when I referred to the annual report that I want to do, the year-end report, we will have those numbers. There's always a percentage of closures. We will have those numbers, so it'll be quite clear. These are spaces that have been as a result of that tool box and getting supports.

Ms Notley: Okay. So we're not quite net, but thank you for that information. I'm wondering, then: can you provide us – and this may have been in the list of questions that the Member for Calgary-Varsity already provided.

Ms Tarchuk: I'm sure it was.

Ms Notley: It's very possible that it was. You can jump in, member, if it was.

What is the average cost per space of your newly created spaces? If we could break that down from 18 months and under, 18 months to end of preschool, and then out of school.

Ms Tarchuk: I don't have that breakdown, but we can get it. I can tell you that the average – I'm going to ballpark – has been reduced over the past year by \$100. Last year we were sitting somewhere around \$640 or \$650 average per month, and it's now at \$100 less than that. So it also has been effective in supporting child care spaces to the extent that those savings can be passed on to parents.

Ms Notley: Okay. On the issue, then, of cost. I'll talk about this first. For the child subsidy, what's the average subsidy that your ministry is paying out to those people who are eligible for child care subsidy?

Ms Tarchuk: I would have to get back to you on the average.

Ms Notley: I know the range is anywhere from zero to \$650.

Ms Tarchuk: The maximum is about \$630.

Ms Notley: Right.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Our subsidy – I guess the average number is important here – for many people will be covering the full cost of child care.

Ms Notley: Okay. So if I could get that average number.

Then what is the ministry's policy vis-à-vis the inclusion of child support for single-parent families in determining eligibility for the child care subsidy?

Ms Tarchuk: I'll get back to you on that. What is the eligibility?

Ms Notley: The policy. When you're determining whether someone is eligible, you consider their income. Is child support included in that consideration of income?

Ms Tarchuk: Yes, apparently it is. I'll just double-check that for you.

Ms Notley: If you could double-check, that would be great.

Then the one question I have – of course, we have a budget that globally is just ever so slightly ahead of what your finance minister has said is required to keep pace with population and inflation – with respect to the increase of child care spaces: what's the number of new staff that your ministry has hired to inspect, to license, and to administer child care subsidies?

Ms Tarchuk: I'll get that number for you. But just speaking of staff, I think it's worth mentioning these numbers. I had mentioned 9,300 in 204 communities. Since '07-08 we have 506 more certified staff. Actually, I have a better stat than that: we have 571.

Remember how we had two incentives. One was to attract staff who had been in child care and then left it for awhile. One of our tools in the tool box was to get them back in. As well, for people entering child care for the very first time, we had another incentive that would encourage them to enter the child care field and make a commitment to work in child care for a year. With those two categories, for those that have been out of child care for six months, 571 have come back – that's quite phenomenal – and 598 new hires, people that have come on and are entering child care for the first time and signing that one. It really has been quite phenomenal.

I'll get that number about . . .

Ms Notley: And can you get me, to the extent that you have it – I'm sure it varies between particularly the private providers and the

nonprofits and all those places – the average wage for each child care provider given their certification? I ask, in part, because a few days ago I ran into a daycare worker who had worked in our wonderful nonprofit, relatively well-funded child care space, and she had unfortunately left it to go work as a nanny in Glenora because she couldn't afford to stay working in the centre because of the rate of pay. So I'd just be curious to see what's going on in terms of the overall rate of pay and average rate of pay in there. Notwithstanding that, I mean, it's good that you're bringing folks in, but where does that put people's long-term income in that industry?

8:00

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. I'll see if we can get that. I don't know if we know if there's any kind of a differential. I think it's interesting. Before this plan we were sitting approximately at 50 per cent private and 50 per cent nonprofit, and that has been maintained. So it's still a combination of who's coming on board in creating the spaces. Whether there's a differential: we, of course, don't set the wages. We do provide the wage top-ups, and it's up to the operators to set the wages. So I'll see if that's available.

Ms Notley: Okay. Just to clarify, when I was talking about daycare staff, what I was talking about was not staff in the daycares but in terms of your ministry, the number of staff hired.

Ms Tarchuk: The question before. Yes.

Ms Notley: Okay. Good. I'm just checking to make sure.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. I got that.

Ms Notley: Okay. That would be great.

Maybe, then, I'll move on quickly because I'm going to run out of time fairly soon, I think, to the area of foster care and child protection. First of all, before we get there, we'd talked about the 2008-2009 performance measures, and I believe the Member for Calgary-Varsity asked for that information. You indicated that it would be included in the annual report, but I'm hoping that we could get that information before then because, certainly, that fiscal year is over, so presumably that information is available. More to the point, what I'm looking for is not the percentage but the absolute number. For instance, last year in your performance targets you did talk about the number of 11 in '07-08, so I'm just seeking the number for '08-09 and, hopefully, before your annual report is actually completed and published and glossed and everything. Presumably that information is available now.

Ms Tarchuk: Yes, I'll see if we can get that. You're talking about serious injuries?

Ms Notley: Serious injuries and/or fatalities for last year.

Then I'm going to jump around in this area because, again, so much of it has already been covered to those few things that I'm not sure if they have. We've had a lot of discussion about the kin care program versus the other foster programs, and you had quickly thrown out that there were 9,000 children in care. Then you said 4,600 in foster care and 700 in kinship. So what was the difference between the 9,000 and the 5,300? I guess that would be about 3,700. Did I misunderstand the information you were giving? Where are those kids?

Ms Tarchuk: It'll be a combination of things. It's including family enhancement.

Ms Notley: So the 9,000 is including family enhancement?

Ms Tarchuk: Yes.

Ms Notley: So some of those 3,600 are with their families right now is the answer.

Ms Tarchuk: Yes.

Ms Notley: Can you tell me how many are with their families and how many are in group homes and/or some other arrangement?

Ms Tarchuk: We can get that for you, that breakdown.

Ms Notley: Okay. Thanks.

So, then, moving from that back to the issue of kinship. There was some talk about the criteria, and I wasn't sure. Is the screening for foster parents in the two programs exactly the same between the kinship program and the other foster program?

Ms Tarchuk: It is. In terms of criteria I've got a little chart here. Both foster care, kinship care: child intervention record checks, criminal record checks, home studies, environmental safety checks, three personal references, medical references, yes, yes. The modulars that I had mentioned are offered and encouraged.

Ms Notley: With the kinship care if you do a criminal record check and there is found to be a record, are they automatically excluded, then, from taking on the role as a kinship caregiver?

Ms Tarchuk: It's going to depend on the circumstances and what their criminal record was.

Ms Notley: Is that the same for the nonkinship foster families?

Ms Tarchuk: It would be the same approach, yeah.

Ms Notley: Do you have a policy sort of defining a little bit what criminal records are okay and what aren't?

Ms Tarchuk: I'll check if we do, and I'll get that information to you.

Ms Notley: Okay.

Then moving on to the issue of the maximum numbers of children in foster care, you mentioned that there are roughly a hundred families where they've had approval to go above the number of four. When that number of four is identified, is that in addition to the foster family's own children?

Ms Tarchuk: Yes, it is.

Ms Notley: Is there any policy about how the foster family's own children are factored into the cap? Does the cap change, or is it always four regardless of how many children the foster family itself has? What is the policy?

Ms Tarchuk: I don't know if there is a cap. I think what we all have to understand with this business is that it's going to come down so much to the individual circumstances: to the environment, to the capabilities of the caregiver, to a whole number of things. So the capping has to do with the number of foster kids. I'm sure the number of biological or natural kids in the house will come into play when you're taking a look at assessing the capabilities.

Ms Notley: I guess my question is: is there a written policy for how that's done that we could get a copy of? [Ms Notley's speaking time expired]

The Chair: Thank you very much. We will now take a break of exactly five minutes and reconvene at 8:13.

[The committee adjourned from 8:07 p.m. to 8:13 p.m.]

The Chair: Ladies and gentlemen, we'll come back to order, please. The balance of our time this evening is devoted to any member who wishes to speak. We will, as I said, rotate between government and opposition members, beginning with Mr. Olson.

Mr. Olson: Well, thank you. As has already been commented upon, it feels like kind of slim pickings left in terms of questions to ask. This will not take 20 minutes or anywhere near, so I think I'll just have a short discussion with the minister.

Thank you, Minister, for being here and for all of the information you've been providing. I just wanted to ask you to comment a little bit on the status of the Child and Youth Advocate and the work that you're doing on that and how that's going to roll out.

Ms Tarchuk: Sure. Thank you. Just to backtrack on, I guess, the advocate report and why it was asked for. We know that back in the fall we had a couple of issues. One was that the advocate had been late in submitting annual reports. In the fall we did table that current year plus the two previous years.

There's a mechanism by which I'm reported to from the advocate through a quarterly report, which really is a report on observations and activities and complaints that he has heard over the last quarter. It really is the front end of a checklist. What it doesn't have and what it does not reflect is any follow-up and how any of those issues were or were not substantiated or were resolved. It has been the practice for the last couple of years that that's how he communicates with the minister. It is the advocate's responsibility to bring to my attention any of those issues that are unresolved. It certainly gives us an opportunity in our office to take a look at that list and raise questions about a number of issues.

When those quarterly reports were made public, that was very troublesome to have kind of half a story out there in the public without knowing how any of the issues were resolved or even if they were substantiated in the first place. So we made a commitment – I think it was back in November – to take a look at advocacy across the country, take a look at other provinces in terms of how the advocate operates as well as how he reports to the public. We put together a committee who started work, I think, in late December. In the terms of reference we asked them to examine appropriate accountability measures that both facilitate effective individual advocacy and enhance the ability to identify and report on issues to help improve child intervention services.

We also asked someone to take a look at best practices and promising approaches regarding transparent and accountable child and youth advocacy, including a review of other jurisdictions, as I mentioned. The board members: we had internal experts as well as external. We also had youth, which I thought was really important. Youth who are or have been in care, actually both of them, were part of the review, and it was really important to get their perspective. I thought two things were important: one was to get the youth perspective as well as to make sure that this wasn't just internal, that we have external. We did have a person from the University of Calgary, the Faculty of Social Work. We had the past president of the Child Welfare League of Canada. They have reported to me, and

I am going through the process of approving a government response and as soon as I am able would like to release both the report and recommendations and the response.

Mr. Olson: Thank you. If I could, I'll just carry on and ask one more question. I was interested in your comments on the aboriginal programs. I have First Nations communities in my constituency. Myself and Mrs. McQueen were – I assume it's okay to use names in committee. If not, I should maybe correct myself.

The Chair: It's perfectly fine.

Mr. Olson: Okay. We were out at a safe communities meeting in Hobbema a while back, and I was interested to hear comments from community members about parenting and the importance of parenting programs, to the extent that there were even some people suggesting that if you would make it a program for credit in high school, then people would be interested. It would be a motivator. That was an interesting idea. It certainly speaks to the whole issue of cross-ministry collaboration, too. I'm kind of of two minds on this. I think those kinds of initiatives are great, but I guess I kind of worry a little bit about – well, I guess I should worry if we have siloing as well. One of my concerns is just making sure that there's a clearing house for all of these different programs that might evolve, whether it's in this area or in any other area. I made the same comment yesterday in a different context at rural caucus. But I really think that parenting is something that deserves your department's support.

8:20

I spoke to a doctor in Wetaskiwin who talked about the number in the general population – I think it's something like 70, 80 per cent, but I'm going to have my statistics all wrong, so maybe I shouldn't even quote them. A shockingly high number of 15-year-old aboriginal girls present at emergency, and that is the first time they talk to a doctor about being pregnant. So there's no prenatal care, no parenting help of any kind, according to the doctor I spoke to. I know that's just one anecdotal incident, but it struck a cord with me, just the importance of support for parenting, both prenatal and afterwards. I know that your department is doing that. I'm just wondering if you can speak a little bit to how you're collaborating with other departments.

Ms Tarchuk: So you're interested in the kinds of programs that we offer through parent link and wanting to ensure that there's not duplication?

Mr. Olson: I want to ensure that they're being delivered, but I want to ensure that they're being delivered in the most efficient way so that we're not working at cross-purposes.

Ms Tarchuk: I don't think we are because everything that I have found out regarding this particular program is that in the communities it's kind of like FCSS; they're all community-based. They're delivering to the needs of that particular community, but from my observation they work very well with their Health counterparts and Education counterparts. Quite often there's a direct link to PLCs and FCSSs and then directly to Health and Education as well. I think your point is a good one and, you know, one that I guess we should always be on the watch for, but my sense is that we do have a lot of co-operation out there.

Mr. Olson: Okay. Well, thank you. I think that's it for me.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

I neglected to mention the procedures. In the event that we do run out of questions, there is a provision in the standing orders for early adjournment. So if that's of any help.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Denis.

Mr. Chase: I appreciate your optimism.

When we left off at 7:40, I had been commenting about the amount of time filling out 15-page forms as opposed to providing face-to-face family intervention support. I would also go on to say that that creates worker burnout and further adds to the stress of the family. If the person is back at the office filling out multiple forms, they're not out there doing what they need to be doing.

With regard to suicide, which we had been talking about, particularly aboriginal suicide prevention, a mother from the Tsuu T'ina reserve pointed out that it not only takes a village to raise a child; it takes a village to bury one, a whole village.

With regard to mental illness 1 in 5 Albertans suffer from mental illness, and 40 per cent of mental illness shows up by age 14, so the Ministry of Children and Youth Services plays a very important role in dealing with that mental illness in young people, in addition to addictions.

What is the minister's explanation for the fact that the flow of information goes from the bottom up, yet little information or feedback goes from the top down? Is the minister doing anything to change this complaint? I've heard from a number of front-line workers that they'll bring up a problem, they'll anecdotally record it, they'll pass it on to a supervisor, but they don't receive a whole lot of collaborative feedback or support on potential solutions.

Ministry-wide corporate objective 3 on page 50 of the 2009 business plan includes both "assess opportunities to improve business capacity, efficiency or reduce administrative costs," and "increase transparency focusing on outcomes when awarding Departmental contracts and grants." What opportunities is the department assessing with regard to reducing administrative costs, and when will the minister reveal what these plans are? By having an objective that is increasing transparency when awarding contracts, is the minister admitting that there were problems around this in the past? If so, will the minister provide examples? Will the minister explain what, in quotes, performance-based contracting is? What will be the outcomes through the agencies and their capacity to provide services?

Strategy 4.5 on page 49 of the 2009 business plan states that there is a bursary program that aims to increase the number of Métis and nonstatus aboriginal people in the delivery of social services programs. Will the ministry commit to a performance measure that would show the success of this program? What is the percentage to date of Métis and aboriginal individuals who are involved in the delivery of social services? How much money is allocated to this bursary? Are there plans to re-evaluate these programs? How many applicants for the bursary are there per year? Are there any unfulfilled applications? If so, how does the department advertise for the potential of applying for these bursaries?

Strategy 5.2 on page 49 of the 2009 business plan states: "Enhance the capacity of Child and Family Services Authority Boards to effectively govern the regional authorities." How is the minister going to accomplish this? What changes is the minister planning to make? Or please substitute ministry at any point. By having the strategy, is the ministry admitting that there is a problem where child and family services authority boards cannot effectively govern the regional authorities?

The only performance measure for goal 5 is on page 50 of the 2009 business plan, which is: Percentage of expenditures in the

children/youth/families project and service category of Family and Community Support Services." The last actual result given for this measure is for '07-08, which is 49.1 per cent, with the target for '09-10 being 50 per cent. The amount for the '09-10 estimates for family and community services is \$75,684,000 according to line 2.0.2, page 78 of the '09-10 government estimates. So the amount of funds spent is \$37.16 million. How was the 50 per cent target determined for this performance measure? How exactly is this money distributed throughout the province?

Line 2.0.6, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder initiatives, page 78 of the 2009-2010 government estimates, shows that there is a very modest increase of \$64,000, or .3 per cent. This corresponds to strategy 2.3 on page 46 of the 2009 business plan, where the ministry will collaborate with other ministries in this area. Are there any other ministries that are contributing funds toward fetal alcohol spectrum disorder? If so, how much? If this is one of the priorities of this ministry, can the minister explain why it received such a small increase?

On page 86 of the 2009-2010 government estimates the information for the southwest Alberta child and family services authority shows that prevention of family violence and bullying is receiving no funding this year as opposed to \$100,000 last year. Does this mean that there were no increases of family violence or bullying in this region? What is the minister's reason that this program is not receiving funding in this authority?

According to the supplementary sections, pages 86 through 100 of the 2009-10 government estimates, the cost for board governance in the various child and family services authorities can vary from as little as \$37,000 for the northeast authority to \$299,000 for the northwest authority. How can the minister account for the fact that there is such a large difference in the amount that is allocated for board governance between the authorities? What accountability does the minister have from the board of governors for the community boards? Does the minister determine or approve the amounts that the boards receive for governance? Will the minister provide the exact details of members on each board and how much each member receives for all of the 10 child and family services authorities?

Concerning accreditation for child care workers, will wages increase or decrease? Is this going to translate to a lowering of standards? Is the minister concerned, again, about the quantity versus quality argument? Why has the minister lowered the standard, especially considering the current economic times that are making children even more vulnerable?

Daycares. Page 43 of the 2009 business plan shows that strategic priority 1 states that there is the goal of development of 14,000 child care spaces by 2011. Will the minister answer how many of the 14,000 child care spaces are currently available? Will these 14,000 spaces actually increase capacity, or will other spaces be shut down due to staffing issues? An example would be the problem the University of Alberta has had with their traditional daycare program. We've seen, for example, the Australia outfit ABC child care go belly up. Child care spaces for profit versus not for profit: these are concerns.

8:30

How much money is being spent developing these new spaces? How many are in school, out of school, family day homes, and daycares? I know you did provide some of those earlier details. Who was consulted in the creation of the child care accreditation program? What is the amount of the subsidy for child care?

I would also like to know if there's any in child care facility training available so that the person can sort of get that on-the-job

accreditation as opposed to then taking extra night courses. Is there sort of a built-in child care practicum within the child care centres?

On page 45 of the 2009 business plan performance measure 1(a) states the percentage of licensed day centres and contracted family day home agencies that are accredited. The last year's percentage is 54 per cent. That was for '07-08. What is the number for '08-09? It's not reported in the business plan. Will the minister admit that this is proof the government is going for quantity over quality? In three years the target increases by 20 per cent. Is that not an overly hopeful, optimistic goal? What specific initiatives is the minister implementing to make sure we reach this goal?

Line 2.0.3, child care, on page 78 of the 2009-2010 government estimates shows a \$9.179 million increase to child care. Where are the additional funds allocated to this area going? How much is going to private child care providers? How much is going to public child care providers? Will the minister provide a percentage breakdown of where these funds are going? How much is allocated to nonprofit after school care, how much to private after school care? How much is for public after school care?

Family abuse and bullying. On page 45 of the business plan performance measure 1(c) is the percentage of Albertans who have information to better help in situations of family violence or bullying. For '07-08 both family violence and bullying had a 65 per cent target. For '09 it is 67 per cent. For such an important program the target and the actual results are both low. We know that recessions create greater abuse. Why is 65 per cent suitable for the minister? What specific funds will go towards creating awareness? Why are the targets for future years set so low? Shouldn't the target be at least in the 90th percentile? After all, this is the only access to information.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.
Minister.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Okay. Once again, I'll endeavour to get the answers to all of those to you, but I'll comment on a few things. Going back to the bursaries, I can tell you that with the one you mentioned, advancing futures, they are meeting the demand. Apparently we're not turning away individuals that are qualified. We had asked that question when we were determining the budget, and it looks like that level is fine.

With respect to private versus nonprofit, again, I had said earlier that I think the ratio is still about 50-50, and I'd refer again to that study that came out this morning that actually showed that we're seeing some benefits with having that mix. I do think it's important to say that, first of all, we don't believe in discriminating or having a preference for either for-profit or nonprofit child care. Whether or not a child care facility is private or nonprofit, they have to meet the very same standards. They get accredited in the very same way. They have the same certification for staff, and they have to operate under the same staff-child ratios. All incentives to support affordable, accessible, and quality child care are available to both.

You commented on online education for child care workers. I think it's worth pointing out that with our online orientation course – and we were certainly looking at using online more and more – just since last June we have had 2,800 individuals register for that course. That's phenomenal. Already 963 have completed it. I know that work is being done or is completed on similar courses for high school. So that is good news. Also – and we talked about this with the tool box as well – we were wanting to explore the development of an apprenticeship program for child care.

In terms of questions on the subsidies – and this is off the public pamphlet that we have giving parents information on what's

available. The new rate for daycare for up to 18 months – actually, this refers to a question asked earlier – is up to \$628; family day homes, up to \$520; preschoolers 19 months to 6 years, up to \$546 for daycare and \$437 for family day homes. The kin child care monthly subsidy is up to \$400 a month. Of course, you know that we took over the out of school programming in September and started to offer similar incentives for communities to create out of school programs and started with our top-ups for staff. We also are starting to accreditate our out of school programs. School age care monthly subsidies: kindergarten, up to \$546 a month; grades 1 to 6, up to \$310 a month.

I think I had mentioned the numbers earlier. You're right; we had broken out the latest up-to-date numbers. You had asked a question about capacity and whether or not it has increased. I can tell you that it has, and when we do our year-end report, we'll see that it has. Prior to announcing the creating child care spaces plan, we were hearing about daycare almost on a daily basis, and we certainly saw lots in the media about shortages and people on waiting lists and waiting lines. That is not the case now. I mean, we are not seeing those kinds of stories. We're not getting those letters in the office. We're not having to direct people as much where they can go to get information on daycares. So we know that the capacity has been impacted dramatically.

I think we're just now having the modulars getting ready to roll out, and we know that many of those are going to be used for out of school programs at schools, so we're really going to see this number of 3,100, I think, increase significantly this year, and that's good news. The other good news, just to go back to FCSS funding because it's worth pointing out, I guess, just the extent of our support for them, is that we had the 4.1 per cent increase over their basic grant from last year, but the other thing that's worth pointing out is that because we've taken over out of school in September, \$11 million that previously went towards out of school can now be redirected to other community initiatives. So that's good news for them.

Oh, there are so many things I want to tell you. I just want to comment on the staff. You mentioned this top-down or down-up, and I guess the comment that I'd make there is that when we look at our staffing and human resources issues and workload issues, they have been directly involved in both the development of the casework practice model, so being part of determining how they approach their business, but they're also extremely involved in the work that's being done on what staff workload should be.

You know, we have all kinds of mechanisms in place so that we can review staff workloads. We also have an ongoing provincial committee that takes a look at and is developing, I guess, what the standard will be for the casework practice model. I think that work is nearing completion or has completed, but I would make the comment that front-line staff have been part of the development of that as well as the union, so certainly nothing has been done in isolation in terms of either the casework practice model or any workloads. I guess I would maybe just comment that those kinds of comments are concerning because that's different from my understanding of how we operate, so if there is anything specific, I would welcome your forwarding that information.

8:40

I wanted to comment on the outcomes-based services, a few things that I want to say. I had mentioned earlier that we do work closely with our contracted agencies. There are really two initiatives that we focus on. One is how to support their staff, how to help with the issues that they have experienced in the past in terms of attracting or retaining staff, but the other part is taking a look at this outcomes-

based service. We have not done that, again, in isolation of the contracted agencies. We're working closely with them. I think I mentioned earlier that there's a fair amount of excitement around this approach for two reasons. From our perspective we see this as the means to improve outcomes for kids, and for contracted agencies it can be a way for them to have a future that is all about, you know, flexibility, stability, and predictability in their funding.

The jurisdictions that have had experience with outcomes-based services – and the main reason why we want to take this approach – are seeing some phenomenal results. They've seen a reduced number of moves that children make from foster home to foster home. They have more children that are achieving permanency. Their children have shorter stays in care. They've reduced significantly the long-term use of group homes and residential homes. What's important to the agency as well as wanting to be part of improving those outcomes is that it really gives agencies the flexibility to direct their funding where it's needed most. So we have less of a role there in having anything to do with staffing levels.

The Chair: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Denis, followed by Ms Notley, please.

Mr. Denis: Just do the dialogue here?

The Chair: Certainly.

Mr. Denis: Minister, I don't have anything to auction off or anything, so I'll try to speak slowly here.

Just dealing with FCSS, family and community support services, the budget itself went up by 4 per cent this year, but the FCSS budget only went up by 1.4 per cent. Do you want to maybe comment on that, Minister?

Ms Tarchuk: Sorry. Comment on the 1.4 per cent?

Mr. Denis: Why it was only increased by 1.4 per cent, the impact that they may have?

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. The increase to the basic funding is actually the 4.1 per cent that I had mentioned. When you take a look at the line item, it looks like it has only increased by \$1 million, whereas, in fact, the basic funding has increased \$3 million. Why that is is that included in that line item over the last couple of years has been a grant called the community partnership enhancement fund, and it was intended to be a three-year fund with specific goals in terms of FCSSs and CFASAs working together on various, I guess, joint exercises in terms of setting goals and relationships and all of that stuff. It was never intended to be a long-term program. In fact, it was extended a couple of years beyond what the initial commitment was. That \$2 million grant ended this year and then was redirected back directly into our FCSSs, so in fact their increase was \$3 million, 4.1 per cent.

Mr. Denis: I understand that the community partnership enhancement fund has been discontinued. Do you want to comment on the rationale for that as well?

Ms Tarchuk: That's the one that I was just referring to. It was meant to be a three-year; I think that last year it went into its sixth year. It really did meet the objectives that it was intended to, so this year that particular program ended.

Mr. Denis: Now, in the business plan your ministry references the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research. Could

you just talk about some details as to what role the centre plays and what type of research it does?

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. I sure can. The research centre was set up, initiated back in 2003, I believe. It's a centre that receives a \$2 million grant from us to build Alberta's capacity in research, and all of the research is connected to services for children, families, and communities. The reason this was one of the items in our budget that was flatlined is only because they had some underspent dollars from last year. Going into this next year, \$600,000 will be for operations and \$1.4 million for research projects.

Currently the research centre is sponsoring 45 research projects in areas such as FASD, youth in care, services to aboriginal communities, early childhood development, family violence, and child mental health. A number of ministries can go there and ask for help with respect to research. As an example, I had mentioned earlier that we are reviewing kinship care. The research centre is doing a portion of that and taking a look at best practices across other jurisdictions, so they're really beneficial in helping us do our work. I could go on. I mean, I've got a list here of the number of initiatives they have done over the last couple of years. It literally is hundreds, so it's a very valuable resource for us.

Mr. Denis: In your response you mentioned FASD. I understand there's a 10-year plan for dealing with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. I'm wondering if you could comment as to the implementation, the status of that plan.

Ms Tarchuk: I can. The FASD 10-year strategy is in its third year. This one was flatlined, wasn't it? That was because last year we added five FASD networks, but most of them were implemented at the end of the year, so we just didn't have the need for the increase. Oh, yeah. We have an increase of \$64,000. That's only to cover salary increases for management and nonmanagement, and \$6.1 million, or 33 per cent, of the program for financial assistance is given to organizations who are involved with FASD initiatives, plus the cost of their staffing and promoting of programs.

If we look forward to 2009-10, what we expect to accomplish, we're going to develop leading practices in FASD, especially as it relates to assessment, diagnosis, prevention, and intervention. We're going to continue to implement projects such as the FASD video conference learning series. That provides resources to both parents and caregivers. We now have 12 FASD service networks, so we'll continue to develop and enhance the services there.

8:50

Mr. Denis: I just want to move, lastly, to foster care. I'm wondering if you know – if you don't, that's fine; we can get back to it later – how many children are in foster care in Alberta and what your department is doing to recruit more foster parents and what criteria, if you have criteria, they have to meet in order to become foster parents.

Ms Tarchuk: Like I said earlier – and this kind of reflects on your question – we have 4,600 kids in care. I will get those numbers to you that you had mentioned. When we take a look at the additional kids that we were talking about, there will be a number of things, not just group homes and residential facilities. Also, we have the supported independent living. We also have some cases where we share custody. We'll get that information to you, but it's going to be a whole variety of different kinds of placements.

Back to your question about the foster care campaign. Like I had said earlier, we did a lot of research earlier last year in terms of what

people needed to understand about foster care, the kind of information that would be useful going into a campaign. The media, the radio, the TV part of the campaign has been launched. The results, I think, have been quite successful. I think we've had a great response, but more importantly, as I said at the end of my opening comments, this business is all about community involvement. We need Albertans to support our work because we need Albertans in delivering our services.

One of the things that I have found equally valuable about this campaign isn't just the number of people that are coming forward and making a decision that I think is absolutely a huge one and phenomenal. To open your home to someone else's child and give them that love and support is just magnificent. But what I find equally as important is engaging the public in the conversation about the work that we do and the needs that we have.

Right across the province we have CFSAs and, well, a number of people that are out there involved in engaging communities in this campaign. For instance, we have people going out there and meeting with our different service clubs. There's a very interesting initiative in Edmonton where – I've got a blank right now to the name – they are going out and approaching churches and seeing if they can get an entire church body to commit to one family agreeing to become a kinship caregiver or a foster parent, and the entire church family will help them in supporting their work. We've had information sessions all over the province. A number of our MLAs have been involved in hosting them. We also have some that are very specific to aboriginal communities and also immigrant communities.

Again, I think having the discussion is as important as anything. When we look at our work, this truly is about a ministry that is taking leadership in helping our children and families, but we need so many partners in order to actually do it.

Mr. Denis: Just finally, I'm wondering if you could comment on if there are any performance measures and, if so, some of the details as to how foster parents are audited on a continuous basis.

Ms Tarchuk: We have through policy and legislation rules that surround our casework practice. The following activities and requirements are designed to monitor child safety. There's regular contact with the child by the child's caseworker. They have to have contact with the child at least once a month, and they also have to have face-to-face contact with that child every three months. There's also regular contact with the foster parent by the foster care caseworker. I do believe that that's the very same. Yes, it is. They have to be in contact once a month and face to face every three months. Actually, this is every four months with the foster parent. So there's not only the stringent criteria at the front end, but there is a fair amount of monitoring afterwards.

Mr. Denis: Those are the extent of my questions unless you had anything else to add.

Ms Tarchuk: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Notley, please, followed by Mrs. McQueen.

Ms Notley: Thank you. Well, I guess I'll just sort of go back to the line of questioning that I was at when I ran out of time before, which coincidentally comes very nicely from the most immediate last set of questions.

On the issue of caseworkers and the obligation to have some type of contact once per month and the face-to-face contact, I think, once every three months, can you provide us with the average caseload and the minimum, maximum caseloads of your workers who are in child protection?

Ms Tarchuk: I don't have that here. I'll have to get that for you.

Ms Notley: Okay. That's great. Just looking for that. If it's possible – and who knows; it might be a good-news story – can you also advise what those have been over the last couple of years? I'm more interested in getting the absolute numbers now, but if you have it at your disposal, what those numbers were, say, last year and the year before.

Ms Tarchuk: I think you're aware that with the casework practice model we have a far more intensive front end to the assessment. I do know that the workload has to shift to accommodate that, and it is shifting, but again I would point out that we have staff and the union working on this provincial committee to determine that. But I'll get what information is available.

Ms Notley: Okay. That's great. Again, you mentioned before, if I didn't misinterpret it, that there were 352 new families this year, I think, that are new foster families of one type or another. You may have answered already the question and I may have missed it, but can you just say what the breakdown is between the kinship homes and the nonkinship homes of that 352?

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. These are the numbers since October: 202 new foster homes and 150 kinship care homes.

If I can just go back, I have information. The average casework caseload is 14 cases per worker – that's a low – to a high of 24 to 27. That's last year. We will update that number.

Ms Notley: Okay. So maybe going back to that, would that worker be charged with the responsibility of simply postplacement monitoring, or is that caseworker also dealing with the upfront assessment?

Ms Tarchuk: It changes, doesn't it? Yeah.

Ms Notley: I think you might have said that; I just didn't hear it.

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. It changes. I know that I was visiting a Métis settlement a couple of weeks ago, and the caseworker up there did everything from the assessment to the placement to the follow-up. So I think that depending on the area, that will change.

Ms Notley: Right. I don't know if it's possible, but what I'm looking for is in terms of postplacement assessment duties. What is the caseload of postplacement people, postplacement obligations? Does that make sense?

Ms Tarchuk: Okay. If we can get that all.

Ms Notley: Yeah. If you can get that. Okay.

We, of course, had the conversation earlier this spring about the incident which occurred just outside of Calgary. At that time you'd indicated that you were going to have a special case review and that there would be an expert co-chair appointed to engage in that case review. I'm drawing a complete blank now as to who it was that was appointed to be that expert external person. I'm just wondering if you could advise me of that and what the status of that case review is and when we can expect to see that being made public.

Ms Tarchuk: The co-chair was Bruce Rivers, CEO of Community Living Toronto. He's president of the International Forum for Child Welfare and past president of the Child Welfare League of Canada. I've got a whole list here of other members.

Ms Notley: Sorry. This is not the review about . . .

Ms Tarchuk: This is the special case review, yes.

Ms Notley: Oh, okay. Maybe you can just tell me about it.

Ms Tarchuk: Mr. Rivers is co-chair. Then we have the director of the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. We have the advocate. We have a couple of ADMs. We have a CEO from a CFSA. We have aboriginal representation. We have the Alberta Foster Parent Association represented a couple of times there and the Métis Nation of Alberta. So it's a good cross-section. Timelines I don't have. It's just down here that they're still meeting, and they've got upcoming meetings in June, so obviously it'll be after that.

9:00

Ms Notley: Okay. This is clearly distinct. Is there some similarity between this group and the group that reviewed the issue of the child advocate's role?

Ms Tarchuk: Just a couple of crossovers. Yeah. Not a lot.

Ms Notley: Okay. So they're meeting again in June, but we don't have . . .

Ms Tarchuk: No, I don't have a date for that.

Ms Notley: Okay. So, then, just jumping a little bit to a completely different topic, we talked about the need to provide additional funding to the contracted agencies in order to help with their staffing issues. You talked about an additional \$11 million in the budget this year. I'm just wondering, first of all, can you tell me where that is in the budget?

Ms Tarchuk: It's spread among line items. The 5 per cent is going to all of our contracted agencies, so they're going to show up on a variety of line items there. They're going to show up in family violence. They're going to show up in our child intervention, parent link centres, FSCD. They all have the 5 per cent, so it'll be reflected in their increases.

Ms Notley: So it's a 5 per cent wage increase?

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah.

Ms Notley: Okay. Then I'd like to just go really quickly to an issue that I know Mr. Chase did mention before, about the child and youth care certification issue. I know you had mentioned that there were only 12 staff within your particular ministry, but my understanding around this is that the history around the certification process, of course, was to raise the education level and the professionalism amongst this group. The concern, of course, that we have, above and beyond the fact that internal to the ministry there's been an elimination of the incentive to pursue that extra education – of course, ultimately what will happen over the long term is a flattening of that wage scale. That's one issue.

The other issue, of course, is the bigger issue around the expertise and the education of the people who are doing this work and what the expectations are of the ministry with respect to your contracted agencies and the staff that they have and what impact this has with respect to the contracted agencies encouraging their staff to get this type of certification. I think we mentioned it when we had this discussion in estimates last year, that globally there is a real problem out there, and it's very much connected to the whole issue of the wage of people that work with contracted agencies although I'm only talking about one subset right now. But people who do child and youth care – particularly those who are dealing with vulnerable youth, youth with addiction issues, youth with mental health issues, youth with behavioural issues, who are working with their families, who often have additional challenges – need quite a bit of education. The more training that they have, the better.

So the whole Child and Youth Care Association itself was moving to try and create a level of professionalism and to enhance the level of education and standards of people who provide this kind of service so that we don't have them being treated like babysitters and we have, ultimately, a career path and a higher level of accountability and quality in terms of services that people can provide. This is one area. I mean, in terms of human resource management there's a whole slew of different areas that we can look at to show how the professionalization has ultimately increased the quality of care provided in a whole bunch of different sectors. So I'm very worried about what the removal of this requirement means for the people who work in this area and for the services received by the children who need the assistance in this area. What criteria are there, then, to provide for a standardized set of educational requirements, whether within the government or for people working in the contracted agencies in this sector?

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. Thank you. My understanding is that this has not impacted at all any staffing issues and certainly hasn't impacted quality. I had mentioned earlier, you know, just a couple of details about this. Thirty years ago certification was the only game in town, and now we have multiple programs that offer similar training. That's why we find that most of, you know, the bulk of the staff are actually getting the same training but somewhere else outside of this certification. So it really was just about similarly treating staff for the same and recognizing similarly experiences as well as training.

You know, in terms of agencies, agencies have to be accredited, and when we go through the contracting process, staff qualifications are discussed and tied directly with whatever services that we're buying. So I don't think we're talking about any changes in quality or requirements for those that work with young people.

Ms Notley: I think before you did have the certification requirement and now, although there may be some people out there with the degrees and some with, you know, 20 years of experience with no degree and some with a diploma and whatever, there is no actual crystallized identification of a certain standard, there's no increased pay level for having reached a certain standard, and there's no way to really define it in relation to the contracted agencies. It's all nice to say: well, your folks should be qualified. But what's the alternative criteria or standard that you're demanding in the absence of the certification?

Ms Tarchuk: Yeah. I can only stress that we didn't have a requirement for the certification.

Ms Notley: No. But it was an identified level that gave extra money, and so it was something people could point to.

Ms Tarchuk: That was corrected. At the end of the day we were rewarding people with a certain kind of education over similarly qualified staff with the same education but coming from a different source, so that was eliminated. Those who were getting that slight differential will stay there, but we just eliminated the difference going into the future is my understanding. That really was a human resource issue but does not impact requirements or quality or contracted agencies.

Ms Notley: I guess what I'm trying to get at is that, separate and apart from the human resource issues, this was a measure of qualification that people could point to. Yes, it may in some cases have been a criteria, a requirement for a contracted agency or in other cases it might not have been, but it was identified, and people could point to it. I mean, there may be people with degrees or no degrees or whatever, but now what can people point to? If you're a child and youth care worker now, what can you say is the standard of quality in terms of your qualifications?

Ms Tarchuk: I think what I'll do is see if we can get a fuller answer. I don't want to debate you, but I don't think – a good example is the Yellowhead Youth Centre. You know, just in the last month or so they were awarded this incredible – incredible – recognition, I think, the top-tier four-year accreditation for excellence in care. As an example, their staff are all equally qualified, but the majority of them have got the training somewhere else other than the accreditation, and we don't view them differently. We value them the very same. Anyway, if there's more that I can share with you, I will.

Ms Notley: I guess I'm just looking for some kind of . . .

Ms Tarchuk: Well, they would have other qualifications.

Ms Notley: But what I'm looking for is a consistent description that can be used throughout the sector for people within the sector to measure the staff by. What's happening by not requiring the certification is that the certification provided by this group becomes less relevant. Then the question becomes: what is relevant? What is the standard? That's what I'm looking for, you know, whether it's a degree in social work or . . .

9:10

Ms Tarchuk: What all the equivalencies are.

Ms Notley: Right.

Ms Tarchuk: I'll get that for you.

Ms Notley: The last thing I want to go into if I have – how much time do I have left?

The Chair: Four and a half minutes approximately.

Ms Notley: Okay. Well, this will be really quick, then.

I have not in question period raised the issue of the Alberta Adolescent Recovery Centre, in part because I've heard from people from a number of different sides of the issue, but I'm very, very concerned about it. So I'm going to use this opportunity in a less, sort of, viewed context – shall we put it that way? – to raise the concerns that I have and ask you to give some consideration to them.

You know your act allows for the director, where the director has grounds on which to believe there is risk, to do some investigation.

I'm fully aware that the stories that have been in the media are stories that were told by people who are no longer under the authority of your ministry because they're over 18. However, I would suggest that there is enough of a question out there on simply meeting the standard of the reasonable grounds that I would ask that you give some very serious consideration to how this issue be dealt with.

Here are the things that I want to bring to your attention if you're not already aware, and this is not about the stuff that, you know, was included in the TV show that was about this.

Mr. Chase: *The Fifth Estate.*

Ms Notley: Right.

The structure that is used there is that families become both custodians and caregivers outside of the regular hours of the day, you know, from 5 at night till 8 in the morning, of children who have theoretically documented addiction issues and in many cases behavioural and mental health issues. They are given the custodial responsibility of those children. The capacity of those families to be in that position is defined solely by the fact that their own children are now about six months through the program. The homes within which the children reside are assessed once, usually by people who have graduated from the program. Typically they're under 18, they're paid the minimum wage, and they've had no type of home assessment or social work training, and these are the people that are going to the host homes to assess whether they are a safe place for the child to be placed from 5 o'clock at night till 8 o'clock in the morning.

The rules around how the host homes function, as you probably know and as Mr. Chase has mentioned, have a number of elements to them which are somewhat problematic: you know, the six-month child having responsibility to take the brand new child and watch that child showering, being with them all the time, being in a locked bedroom, sharing the bedroom with them, that kind of stuff.

The concern I have is that we have children who themselves only six months earlier were in the program, are still in the program, in fact, and have theoretically a proven addiction problem, and in some cases other issues as well, being in that position and their families being the overseer. There is no external mechanism to ensure that if things do go sideways – if things go wrong, if the old-comer becomes abusive, if the old-comer has a problem staying with the program, if the family from which the old-comer comes has inherent in it some qualities that makes them maybe not the best caregiver of another family's addicted child. There is no way for that problem that goes off the rails to be reported because the child cannot speak to their parents for the first few months of the program and because there is no external monitor.

So what I'm saying to you is that notwithstanding the best intentions of the families who sign up with this program and the fact that there may well be some successes, there are enough reasons to anticipate that things could go wrong and a complete lack of safeguards. There ought to be some mechanism for your ministry to look into this.

The Chair: I'm sorry, Minister. The time has expired.

Ms Tarchuk: Okay.

The Chair: We'll now go to Mrs. McQueen, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mrs. McQueen: Well, thank you, Mr. Chair. I do have a few questions, but first I just want to put them into a little bit of context.

I had the opportunity and the pleasure to serve five years on our central region board, CFSA. With some of the items that you've talked about here tonight, Minister, it's really quite incredible to be able to hear the great results of that work that you've been doing because many of those programs were things that we were starting and talking about at that time. A lot of times when we're in government or on boards or agencies, the process seems very, very slow, and we may not see the results quickly enough. But to hear you address some of those, especially as they relate to the parent link centres, those are doing wonderful work in our communities, and we're seeing the fruits of the labour – I'll speak for rural Alberta especially – with the partnerships that they have created in our communities and other partnerships that were formed and have come together. So I have to commend you. You may not be at 60 yet, but 48?

Ms Tarchuk: Forty-six.

Mrs. McQueen: Forty-six is excellent. I think that when I left CFSA, we were at six or eight, so you've come a long way. It's been great.

The Alberta response model, I know, is just at the beginning stages. It has really developed and is really a leading model within the province, so it's excellent.

The kin care was interesting. We had both an aboriginal and a nonaboriginal co-chair. When we had the early discussions about kin care and how that could be developed, it was really interesting to hear from the aboriginal side some of the issues and the concerns that they had and how, importantly, they felt committed to kin care for their people. You know, any ministry or any government has its problems, but I think that if we looked over at the positive part of kin care, the number of positive cases, and in talking to our aboriginal folks, the positiveness that they've seen within kin care, too. I want to raise that because I think it's been an important addition with regard to how we look after our youth.

Alberta's Promise has just blossomed. Unbelievable how we've managed to be able to bring community and organizations in there. I think the one that's probably most impressive is the daycare. I remember talking about daycare and how we were going to – as you mentioned, daily phone calls and letters. We used to get those as a board as well. I know that certainly in the other chapter of my life as mayor and councillor in our community it was a constant discussion as well. So I'm very impressed that out of the 14,000 you've got 9,000 spaces but probably more impressed with the 204 communities. I think that's excellent.

The work that FCSS does in our communities is unbelievable and probably one of the greatest partnerships we have with our municipalities, to leverage 20 per cent from municipalities and 80 per cent from the province, and we've seen great results of that. Speaking to that one in particular, one of the challenges, whether it's FCSS funding or other provincial funding in your ministry or other ministries, is that we've got great programs, lots of dollars – some would say not enough, but good, significant dollars; nice to see more dollars going to FCSS. But one of the challenges that seems to come up with these programs is the issue of transportation. It doesn't matter whether it's in FCSS or other programs. We struggle with the transportation costs not being able to be included. I know that we talked about it back then. We talked about it when I was on council. Certainly, I believe they are still talking about how we can deal with transportation. So not necessarily an increase in dollars, but I'm wondering if there's any discussion in your ministry or in the GOA as a whole with regard to changing some criteria within the dollars

that are given so that transportation could be included as part of a program. That was a long question.

9:20

Ms Tarchuk: Well, I'll get to that. Thank you. I appreciate your comments. It's always interesting to hear someone who has the experience and their observations on where we are.

I would like to just give credit now since you mentioned it. You talk about how much has been accomplished and that a lot of these things were ideas when you were on the CFSA. I have to give credit to the CFSAs. They really are quite remarkable. They may be different than some other boards; they really are hands-on and really work the communities. It's quite refreshing on a regular basis to be meeting with those CEOs or those chairs and having discussions with them about what my mandate is and engage them in that discussion and ask them to participate. They always perform. The results happen really fast. Whether it was the child care and immediately setting the targets, so individually they kind of ballparked, set goals for themselves, and started to report on a weekly basis. We took the same approach to the foster care campaigns. I really just want to mention that.

The child care. You're right in the fact that we're just not hearing as much. But when was the last time you saw an advertisement for spaces open? You see that at child care centres now, which we didn't see there for a couple of years.

The foster care review. There was an extensive review done. It must have been in 2007. There were two outstanding issues. You're right; the transportation for specialized services was one of them. The other one was the out-of-school. There were some other recommendations that, you know, were equally as important but smaller. When we released that report, we accepted the recommendations. We moved on the out-of-school portion and parcelled the transportation off to Municipal Affairs. The last that I checked, how they had decided to deal with that was through the MSI funding for specialized transportation. I just haven't heard more about that issue in the last 18 months when I'm meeting with the FCSSs. So that's the update I can give you.

Mrs. McQueen: Thank you for that. I really echo the words that you had with regard to the CFSAs. That group of people are doing an excellent job, as are the other partners.

How are we doing with the number of group homes? I know there's been a challenge in the past about placing new group homes in communities and trying to have them in communities where they're located across the province. How are we doing with those numbers?

Ms Tarchuk: You know what? I may have to get back to you on that. Going back to the outcome-based services, when you talk to jurisdictions that have implemented it, one of the high points that they see is that they actually have less of a need for group homes. Rather than the current way we do things, which is check-boxing how many beds were filled for how many days – you know, just the what, not what did we accomplish – when you get agencies engaged in outcomes and permanency plans and creating incentives that will promote their wanting to get involved as soon as possible in finding more permanent placements for kids as opposed to just the number of beds, the end result with jurisdictions was that kids needed a shorter stay, and they actually had far less of a need for group homes. I'd mentioned earlier that foster care, kinship care, and group homes are always meant as a temporary placement, not long term. But I'll see if there's an answer to that. I have not heard of any new ones coming on stream.

Mrs. McQueen: Right. We're not hearing as much about it, so that sounds like good news as well.

Just finally, then, I guess the last question that I would have would be with regard to aboriginal children in care, and you've answered part of it. We're always trying to reduce the numbers. We know that that's always the highest number of children in care. I guess that if you can talk about some of the successes you've achieved as a department in dealing with that and some of the strategies that you have to continually reduce that, it would be helpful.

Ms Tarchuk: Well, I think a couple of things. One is the way that we do business, and that would be the focus. We know that prevention is the answer. We have to stem the number of aboriginal kids that are coming into care. I think that whole initiative, supported by the INAC funding, to get family enhancement services on reserves is very good news.

Really, it all ties to the Alberta response model, to the enhancement act, and to the casework practice model. They're all tied, and actually the outcomes-based is just an extension of that. Applying that whole approach to aboriginal issues is a benefit: developing cultural plans for aboriginal kids – you know, we have to do that now; it's hugely important and will only have a positive impact – and also the permanency planning, I think all of it.

The kinship care is dramatic. What did I say? Almost a hundred per cent in the use of it in three years. It really is a preferred choice for aboriginal families, and I think one of the reasons we want to make sure, because it is fairly new as a formalized placement, that the review will be very helpful. We're seeing good results, and we actually want to continue with it. We want to make sure that we have the proper criteria in place as well as the supports. So I think there is lots of good news.

The other thing I mentioned, too. One of the reasons that we hosted the ministers' conference: to see if as western provinces we can learn from each other. I had mentioned that we have an upcoming meeting in June, and it's really going to focus on urban aboriginal and just this influx. The other thing, as well as the fact that it's such a large percentage of our caseload, is that that's where the highest growth is, so we'll always have that to consider.

I think the last thing would be the connection. From what I see over the last couple of years, there's been a real evolution into more co-operation between the CFSAs and the DFNAs and having to use the on-reserve designate, get them involved with all of the case planning. So I think there are a number of good things.

Mrs. McQueen: Absolutely, and I think it's important to share some of those good-news stories as well.

I think the final one that I'd mention is the cross-ministry collaboration. I just think that has been a great initiative of the government. It's certainly, I know, helping out communities, groups, and that to have that collaboration happening because of the silos there were in the past. If you could give us any feedback from

the minister's point of view on how you feel that they're going as well and perhaps what ministries you collaborate with in general.

Ms Tarchuk: Oh, we have a lot of cross-ministries. We have the ones that I'd mentioned earlier, lots with respect to early childhood development, but we also have a number that are related to FASD. We are the lead on that strategy, and that's 10 or 11 ministries. Have we got a list here? We're also the lead on family violence and bullying. I think it's going well. Cross-ministries are always a bit of a challenge because you're always trying to avoid the silo approach, but at the end of the day you all have separate business plans and you have separate budgets. I think it goes well, but I think cross-ministries are something that you just can't take your focus off because I think they can go sideways quite easily if not given the attention.

Certainly, when I look at the ministries that we have the lead on, I see everything moving ahead quite nicely. If you look at FASD, I think it's quite phenomenal what has been accomplished in the last two years. On the family violence and bullying: I mean, who would have thought? Here's an indication of success. How often do you see bullying covered in the papers today? It's daily. It's daily. That was an initiative, that was a concern at – what was that? – the round-table back in 2005. That initiative and engaging the public in understanding what it is and taking action on changing behaviours and giving kids the strategies on how to deal with it and having people understand the long-term effects of it: look how engaged the public is, and look how it's a top issue, and we all understand it. Right across this province on a daily basis people, community organizations, schools are continuing to keep that at the top of their agenda and to tackle it, and that's wonderful. So that would be my comment. I think they're going well, but we have to always, you know, focus on them and work hard at them to make them work.

9:30

Mrs. McQueen: Well, I want to thank you and the staff. I think you're doing an excellent job. Thank you for the opportunity tonight to discuss the estimates with you. It was excellent.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We've reached the expiration of our time. Minister, on behalf of our committee I'd like to thank you very much for your answers, and I'd like to thank the members for their interesting and plentiful questions.

The committee will meet next on Monday, May 11, at 6:30 p.m.

With that, I just want to thank our staff as well. This concludes our responsibilities as far as the estimates are concerned. I certainly appreciate all the work that went into making this run so smoothly. Thank you, Erin. Thank you, everyone.

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

