



Legislative Assembly of Alberta

The 27th Legislature
First Session

Standing Committee
on
Public Accounts

Children and Youth Services

Wednesday, November 19, 2008
8:31 a.m.

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First Session**

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Woo-Paw, Teresa, Calgary-Mackay (PC)

Also in Attendance

Pastoor, Bridget Brennan, Lethbridge-East (L)

Department of Children and Youth Services Participants

Karen Ferguson	Assistant Deputy Minister, Community Strategies and Support
Sheryl Fricke	Executive Director, Prevention of Family Violence and Bullying
Stephen Gauk	Director of Business Strategies
Mark Hattori	Acting Assistant Deputy Minister, Program Quality and Standards
Shehnaz Hutchinson	Senior Financial Officer
Lynn Jerchel	Director, Child Development
Gord Johnston	Assistant Deputy Minister, Ministry Support Services
Fay Orr	Deputy Minister
Richard Ouellet	Director, Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act

Auditor General's Office Participants

Fred Dunn	Auditor General
Jane Staples	Principal
Doug Wylie	Assistant Auditor General

Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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8:31 a.m.

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[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

The Chair: Good morning, everyone. I would like now to please call this Standing Committee on Public Accounts to order. On behalf of all members I would like to welcome everyone who is here this morning. I would like to advise everyone that we do not need to touch microphones; this is taken care of by the *Hansard* staff. Please note that this meeting is recorded by *Hansard* and is also audiostreamed live on the Internet.

Perhaps we can quickly go around the table and introduce ourselves. We'll start with the vice-chair, please.

Mr. Griffiths: Good morning. Doug Griffiths, MLA for Battle River-Wainwright constituency.

Dr. Massolin: Good morning. Philip Massolin, committee research co-ordinator, Legislative Assembly Office.

Mr. Jacobs: Good morning. Broyce Jacobs, Cardston-Taber-Warner.

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

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

Ms Pastoor: Good morning. Bridget Pastoor, Lethbridge-East.

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

Mr. Hattori: Good morning. My name is Mark Hattori. I'm the acting assistant deputy minister for program quality and standards, Children and Youth Services.

Ms Ferguson: Good morning. Karen Ferguson, assistant deputy minister, community strategies and supports, Alberta Children and Youth Services.

Ms Orr: Good morning. I'm Fay Orr, Deputy Minister of Alberta Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Johnston: Hello. Gord Johnston, assistant deputy minister, ministry support services.

Ms Hutchinson: Good morning. Shehnaz Hutchinson, senior financial officer, Children and Youth Services.

Mr. Wylie: Doug Wylie, office of the Auditor General.

Ms Staples: Jane Staples, office of the Auditor General.

Mr. Dunn: Fred Dunn, Auditor General.

Mr. Drysdale: Wayne Drysdale, MLA, Grande Prairie-Wapiti.

Mr. Dallas: Cal Dallas, Red Deer-South.

Ms Woo-Paw: Good morning. Teresa Woo-Paw, Calgary-Mackay.

Ms Rempel: Jody Rempel, committee clerk, Legislative Assembly Office.

The Chair: Hugh MacDonald, Edmonton-Gold Bar. Good morning.

Could I have, please, approval of the agenda. Moved by Mr. Harry B. Chase that the agenda for November 19, 2008, be approved as circulated. All those in favour? Seeing none opposed, thank you.

Now can we have, please, approval of the minutes that were circulated. Mr. Dallas. Thank you. Moved by Mr. Cal Dallas that the minutes for the November 5, 2008, Standing Committee on Public Accounts be approved as distributed. All those in favour? Thank you very much. None opposed.

The chair would like to welcome Mr. David Quest from the Strathcona constituency. Good morning, sir.

Mr. Quest: Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We come to item 4 on our agenda, of course, our meeting with Alberta Children and Youth Services. We are dealing this morning with the Auditor General's report from October 2008; the annual report of the government of Alberta 2007-08, which includes the consolidated financial statements and Measuring Up, the progress report on the government of Alberta business plan; and the Alberta Children and Youth Services annual report from 2007-08 fiscal year, ended March 31. I would like to remind everyone of the briefing material prepared for the committee by the LAO research staff. Thank you, Dr. Massolin, for that. We appreciate your efforts every week.

Now if I could please invite Ms Fay Orr, deputy minister, to make a very brief opening statement on behalf of Alberta Children and Youth Services. Thank you.

Ms Orr: Okay. Thanks very much. Good morning, Mr. Chairman, members of the Public Accounts Committee, Auditor General Dunn, and your staff. I'd like to just take a few moments to talk a bit about some of our accomplishments from 2007-08 as well as talk a bit about the challenges we do face as a ministry and how we are making a positive difference in the lives of children, youth, and families.

You'll see that the bulk of our budget, more than half a billion dollars, is invested in keeping children and youth safe and protected. We are responsible for ensuring the safety of Alberta's most vulnerable children. We're dealing with children who have been abandoned, abused, neglected, found in drug dens, who have been sexually exploited, exposed to family violence, and sometimes all of the above. Our front-line staff deal with difficult, tragic matters every day, and the health and safety and well-being of children is their first, number one, priority.

We operate on the philosophy that ideally the best place for a child is at home with their own family. That's why we work very hard to intervene as early as we can in situations and to work with the family, the children, and their natural support networks to try and help families build on their strengths and solve their own problems so that they can look after their own children. That's the philosophy behind our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act. It's also the philosophy behind our new casework practice model, which we began implementing last year.

However, as you probably know, despite our best efforts some parents are either unable or unwilling to look after their own children. When that happens, we step in. We remove a child from the home, and we work as hard as we can to find that child a safe, permanent home as quickly as possible. Last year we found over 500 permanent homes for the children in our care, and that is a great accomplishment when you consider what we're dealing with with our children: 86 per cent of the children in our care have been exposed to alcohol or drugs prenatally; two-thirds of them have behavioural or emotional issues.

More than 60 per cent of the kids in our care are part of sibling groups, and we try as much as possible to keep these sibling groups together when we place them. Also, 60 per cent of the kids in our care are aboriginal, and we know how important it is to try and keep aboriginal kids closely connected to their heritage and their families. Last year we did support a 28 per cent increase in the number of permanent placements we were able to get for aboriginal children and a 12 per cent increase in the number of kinship care homes for aboriginal kids.

Our province is also really privileged to have thousands of foster parents who are willing to take these high-needs children into their care, couples like Beverly and Merv Miller from Camrose, a couple who have fostered 60 kids since 1992. One of the biggest challenges facing our ministry right now is the lack of foster parents and aboriginal caregivers. That's why we have launched a recruitment effort to try and find more of them. The ones we have do an excellent job, but we simply need more of them.

We also rely very heavily on contracted agencies to deliver services and programs to children. I think you know that as in all sectors in the province right now, the social service sector is dealing with staff recruitment and retention issues and rising cost issues. Last year we did provide \$10 million to that sector to help them with staff issues.

A good portion of our budget is spent on prevention programs. We do believe that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. We have initiatives like the prevention of family violence and bullying. It's an important initiative for us because family violence accounts for nearly one-quarter of the child abuse cases we see in Alberta, and over 50 per cent of young people in the province report being bullied, so it's one of our very key initiatives.

Another of our very big challenges is finding child care, affordable, quality child care for parents. It continues to be a big issue in the province. Last year we supported the creation of nearly 3,500 daycare spaces in 51 communities in the province, and one of our very successful initiatives is our space creation innovation fund. For example, last year daycare operator Lynne Robson from Stettler used a \$24,000 grant to turn an unused classroom in a local high school into a daycare setting, therefore providing parents in Stettler with some daycare options. Last year we also spent over a hundred million dollars on our family support for children with disabilities program, which is a program unique in Canada. We're currently serving over 8,000 families, and through this program we enable thousands of families to look after their disabled children at home instead of having to put them into institutions. It is an incredible program.

Many of the youth who come into our care were traumatized early in their lives. They've been affected by alcoholism, addictions, mental health, disabilities. The list of challenges is endless. We never give up hope on these children, however. We have found that these children have incredible resilience, and if they're given a chance and the opportunity, they do succeed.

8:40

Really strong evidence of that is our advancing futures bursary program. Through that program we pay for the postsecondary education of children who are either in our care or who have been in government care so that they can go to postsecondary education. While they're doing their studies, our staff stay engaged with them and help them through their studies to help guarantee their success. Last year we had 492 of our youth take up the advancing futures bursary. One example is one of our students who came from a history that's beyond belief: abuse, depression, and attempted suicide. That young woman today is currently in her third year of

studies working toward her bachelor of child and youth care degree, and she's doing well. Her dream is to one day help children who have gone through circumstances similar to the ones that she went through. I just want to say that I am continually inspired by the stories of the children, youth, and families in our care that do turn it around, that do well, that do succeed.

I'd like to just conclude with a story from an Edmonton foster parent who said: 20 years ago I received a call to take in a medically fragile foster child that was born prematurely. She weighed a pound and a half, and we were told she wouldn't live long. We adopted her, and with love and a lot of support that child is now 20 years old. It's true that miracles do happen every day. It's so special to be part of them.

Alberta is privileged to have so many miracle workers like that Edmonton foster parent. We have a lot of those miracle workers in Children and Youth Services and working for our many partners. We have people that are passionate. They're devoted individuals who believe deeply in our mission, in our ability to help others and to bring them hope, to solve problems, and to support positive outcomes for the kids that come into our care.

The challenge we face as a ministry isn't easy. Society is always changing, and our understanding of best practice is continually evolving. No system can be perfect, but as our minister has said, our intentions must remain so. Our leadership team is committed to continuous improvement of our legislation, policies, and practices, and we're committed to being accountable to the Albertans we serve. Most of all, we are committed to doing everything we can to support the children, youth, and families of this province.

Thank you. My staff and I are happy to answer any questions you may have.

The Chair: Thank you very much. If there are additional staff members at the back who would like to participate in the discussions this morning, feel free to go to the microphone just to your right.

Ms Orr: Great. Thanks very much.

The Chair: Mr. Dunn, please.

Mr. Dunn: Doug Wylie will read our opening comments.

Mr. Wylie: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The results of our work for the ministry are reported on pages 239 and 240 of our October report. We are pleased to acknowledge that the ministry implemented two previous recommendations: the first, the First Nation expense recoveries, and the second one was relating to costs and results of information.

We issued unqualified audit opinions on the financial statements of the ministry, the department, and the 10 child and family services authorities. Further, we did not find any exceptions when we completed specified auditing procedures on the ministry's performance measures.

Mr. Chairman, no new recommendations were made to the ministry. However, on page 381 of our October report we identify seven outstanding prior year recommendations. Five of the seven recommendations relate to our work on the child intervention standards, which was reported on pages 69 through 89 of volume 1 of our October 2007 annual report. We plan to include the results of our follow-up work on these recommendations in our October 2010 report. The remaining two recommendations, contract management systems and risk assessment and internal audit services, will be followed up and reported on over the next year.

We'd be pleased to answer any questions the committee may have of us, Mr. Chairman.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll proceed quickly now to questions. We will start with Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Griffiths.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just a very brief statement. I'm pleased to hear from Fay Orr examples of dedicated parents in foster care. The experiences I receive at my constituency office are families broken up, families separated, early apprehension, and very little attempt made to keep them in their home with counselling, so I'm glad to hear that there's another side to the story.

As the department of children's services received \$55.5 million in lottery revenue in 2007-08 and horse racing received \$56 million, has the minister petitioned for more money from this source to be directed towards services for children rather than for horses?

Ms Orr: No.

Mr. Chase: My second question: how is the \$55.5 million received from the lottery fund allocated? We know where the horses get it, but how about the children?

Ms Orr: Well, that \$55 million goes into our budget and is allocated to a number of the programs and services that we provide for children and youth and families.

Mr. Chase: So it's not a special initiative; it just blends into the general revenue stream?

Ms Orr: Right. That's right.

Mr. Chase: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Griffiths, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Griffiths: Thank you. Please excuse me if I crack out a bit with this cold.

I don't know how you guys do your job sometimes. I would never want to be in that position. You're dealing with very sensitive matters. I think you do an exceptional job, and I commend you for it. I don't know how you do it with such grace and dignity.

My questions are usually around performance measures. In the annual report, page 58, the performance measure talks about "the percentage of community stakeholders reporting an increase in the community's ability to meet the needs of children, youth and families." Now, your target is 63 per cent. I'm just wondering why you chose 63 per cent as a target. I know 100 per cent is unrealistic, but why not 80 per cent? Why not 50 per cent? Why did you choose that as a target?

Ms Orr: We try to set a benchmark for our target originally. Then we look at the past year's performance, and we try to gauge what will be a realistic target that we can reach in that year. So we stay away from setting idealistic, unrealistic targets and try to aim for something that we are reasonably confident, based on our past experience, based on our budget, based on our initiatives, we will be able to achieve and, hopefully, even exceed by a bit. We usually do try to set a target that's a bit of a stretch, you know, maybe a couple of percentage points of a stretch, so that we're pushing ourselves to do a better job.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you. The following page, page 59. I'm always asking department staff how they improve performance

measures from satisfaction surveys to output measures and, finally, to outcome measures because those are the most critical and tell us how effective we're being. That performance measure on page 59 is one of the best performance measures I've seen in any department. Just for the record, it reads, "Percentage of children and youth who received family enhancement services and afterwards did not require protective services." So it shows the real outcome, whether or not they're coming back to reuse the services. It's a fantastic measurement. How long do you follow outwards from the first time they need protective services to see if they come back? Like, it says they're not coming back, but how far out do you follow them to see if they are?

Ms Orr: Well, I know we do continue to track them through our system. In terms of the performance measure, though, I'm not quite sure how long we track them for that particular measure, so maybe I could ask Gord. Would you be able to answer that, Gord?

Mr. Johnston: Yes. We generally track kids from zero to 18, so if a child comes into care when they're four and go out of care when they're five, we have a permanent record on those kids. If they come back into care when they're 12, then we would be aware of that, and that would be tracked in that particular year in the actual performance measure.

Mr. Griffiths: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Pastoor, followed by Teresa Woo-Paw.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you very much, and good morning. I think I can certainly appreciate the heartache that your department has to deal with because, of course, it comes through our offices as well. One of the things that I find really difficult with some of the older children, you know, 10 to 13 kind of thing, is that by the time they've sometimes been through my office – the families or whoever – there's a whole pile of street smarts that these kids have. These survival skills are amazing, and it's very difficult to try to work through them. So I can appreciate having to almost go back and start at square one and then work through it.

8:50

My question arises from something that you said this morning, Deputy Minister. We talk about child care spaces, and day homes always pop into my mind. What about child development? Why are we not using the term "child development"? I'm not sure how much real development they would get in day homes. I mean, some of them are less than ideal.

Ms Orr: Why don't we use the term "child development" for child care?

Ms Pastoor: As opposed to "child care," which to me is sort of just warehousing or babysitting.

Ms Orr: Right. It is an evolving area. What we are trying to do as a ministry is evolve from the notion of child care being a warehousing, babysitting service to a service where children are getting early childhood development and good programming so that they are learning and developing and reaching milestones and also where there'll be more screening going on to identify children that may have early development issues.

That's why we have an accreditation program in Alberta. In fact, we're the only province in Canada that has an accreditation program.

Through that child care operators who are able to exceed regulated standards are eligible to be accredited, and through that accreditation they do become available for extra funding from us for things like wage top-ups as well as additional funding every year to purchase additional equipment, toys, that kind of thing so they can do better programming for their children. We now are at, I think, over 50 per cent of our child cares who have now achieved accreditation.

We also have a big focus on training and encouraging people and helping people with support to get more training so they'll go beyond the really basic child care training, which I believe is about a 48-day program. We do have incentives to get people to go to college and get their child care certificate. We're trying to increase the education level of the workers involved in the child care field. Our objective is very much, as you say, to move from that warehousing to a system where children will be getting good, high-quality care.

We do see it as really important for our child welfare system. Through child care our hope is that maybe we can reduce some of the stressors and some of the things that may cause a family to break down or may cause a child to need to come into care or to use the services of maybe the health system or some other system. Our hope is that by continuing down this road and continuing our focus on quality, training, education, we will, you know, lift the level across the system for all forms of child care.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Those standards and those accreditations: do they apply straight across the board for nonprofits and for-profits? Of the contracted agencies how many would be private for-profit?

Ms Orr: They do apply across the board, whether they're for-profit or nonprofit. In Alberta the majority of our daycare operators are for-profit. It's quite a high percentage. I don't have the exact figure, but it is high. It's definitely the majority. I don't know, Karen, if you have that figure. We could get that later for you. But it is definitely the majority. It's over 60 per cent, I believe.

Ms Pastoor: But the standards are the same, and you have the same power to go in and examine and accredit?

Ms Orr: That's right. Each of our child and family services authority regions has staff whose job it is to monitor and license our operators, and they do. They go in and regularly monitor and check and write out reports. If there are any violations of standards, those are noted, and they are kept track of. If an operator, whether they're profit or nonprofit, is repeatedly violating regulations and standards, then we will move in to close them down or somehow reprimand them. Before we close anyone down, though, we like to work with them as much as possible to help them meet the standards. As well, if we do have to take that step, we like to give parents enough notice so that they have a chance to find alternate child care arrangements, and our staff will work with those families to help them find alternate care.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. Yes, I do have a bit of experience with that one.

The Chair: Ms Woo-Paw, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I know the ministry has not finalized all the evaluation tools for the new casework practice model. However, I understand that some performance measures were used to assess the pilot sites. Could you tell us a little bit about the results of the performance measures used to evaluate the pilot sites?

Ms Orr: For casework practice models?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yes.

Ms Orr: We had 13 champion sites across the province. We did do an evaluation of those pilots, and we really focused on three things in the evaluation of the pilots. One was whether the casework practice timelines were being met. The other was whether or not a sample group of clients felt that they were indeed being more engaged in the work with their family; also, whether our front-line staff felt that their supervisors were responding appropriately and effectively to them and supporting them in this new model.

Our early results were encouraging. I don't have specific results, numbers, for you. I do know, though, that we are encouraged by the results. I could get you some specifics. We're also hoping that as we continue to roll out the casework practice model across the province, we will see an improvement in our outcome-based measures.

In our business plan we have 10 measures. Seven of those are quite deliberately outcome-based measures that were developed in conjunction with child welfare experts, professionals and academics, from across the country. Alberta is part of an initiative called the national outcome measures initiative for child welfare. We've been working with our colleagues across the country to develop good, solid outcome-based measures that will really tell us if we're getting anywhere in terms of outcomes for our kids. It's really focused on measuring safety, permanency, the development of the child. As I say, seven of our measures are already those outcome-based ones, and we're hoping through casework practice to see improvements in those measures.

In addition to that, we're hoping that there are some other things that we can start to measure as well on casework practice as we move forward. One of the things we want to try to measure is whether we're getting better at streaming our children. Right now when children come to our attention, we have two streams. One is the family enhancement stream whereby we leave the children with the family, but our workers work with the family to try and get them the supports and the counselling, the programs they might need to get healthy enough and strong enough so that they can take good care of their own child.

The other stream we have is the child protection stream, and that's where our workers have made the judgment call that, you know, despite all our best efforts, it's just not a safe environment for the child and we do need to apprehend and take the child out. What we're hoping through casework practice is that by spending more time at the beginning of the process really assessing and working with the family and doing research into that family, we'll make the right call the first time, and we won't have to be in a situation where, you know, because we don't have the time, we're making the decision to apprehend when actually if we had taken more time, we might have been able to find a way to leave that child if not with the immediate family then perhaps with relatives or extended family.

Ms Woo-Paw: Would the ministry use any nonsurvey performance measures to evaluate the child care, foster care, and family support for children with disabilities programs?

Ms Orr: Whether we would use . . .

Ms Woo-Paw: Nonsurvey.

Ms Orr: Nonsurvey?

Ms Woo-Paw: Yeah, nonsurvey performance measures.

Ms Orr: Right now we do rely on a survey for that. I think that's something we're always looking for, if there are other outcome-based measures we can use. It's tough, though, in the human services field to always find an outcome-based measure. So in those areas we have relied on a survey of the families using the service to find out whether what we're doing is having positive outcomes for their kids.

In terms of future plans I'm not quite sure on that particular one if we're looking at outcome based, but maybe I could ask Stephen Gauk, our director of business planning and performance measures, if he could supplement my answer on that one.

9:00

Mr. Gauk: Thank you. As the deputy said, we're doing work in a number of our performance measurement areas. I know that with child care, certainly, their outcomes are in terms of quality of care, access, and affordability, and I believe they are looking at performance measurements in those areas.

FSCD has seen some ties between the outcomes in their program and client satisfaction with the survey results, so I think that's one where research has demonstrated that there's a connection between the survey results and the final outcomes for clients.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Benito.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm referencing page 18 of your 2007-08 report. What specific initiatives or programs will receive the additional funding from the federal government as a result of the agreement signed between Alberta's First Nations and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada? How will that money be passed along?

Ms Orr: Yes. That's an agreement we're particularly excited about and proud of. It took a long time. Actually, we were working with our delegated First Nation partners and INAC to develop this agreement whereby \$98 million will flow over five years to our delegated First Nation agencies to provide family enhancement service on reserves. Where that money will go and what the issue had been was that the federal government was paying our DFNAs for basic child protection service. They were not getting any funding to be able to do any of the family enhancement work that we do. If you remember, I was talking about the family enhancement stream, where we work really hard with families to try and build on their strengths and get them the supports and counselling they need to be able to look after their own children. With this funding our DFNA partners will now have the ability to provide some of that programming to their clients on reserve, so they won't simply be in the child apprehension and protection work. They'll be able now to offer programming on that really critical family enhancement and support side.

Mr. Chase: My follow-up: how will the success of this increased funding be monitored?

Ms Orr: It will be monitored very similar to the way that we monitor the success of our work across the ministry: through our business plan measures. We do measure, for example, the percentage of aboriginal children who are hospitalized through injury or death. We also have measures that measure the number of aboriginal children who are placed into permanent placements or kinship care. We measure that for the children on reserve as well. We

include them in our count. So, certainly, through those sorts of measures. As well, our DFNAs are expected to implement and comply with standards for child intervention, and we do work with them to help them implement and comply with those standards. We do see the results of how they're doing. We do monitor that as well, so we should have a pretty good idea of how they're doing.

I have to say, you know, about the percentage of children who are injured or killed while in care, that for both aboriginal children and nonaboriginal children, our measure there, our result is that 0.1 per cent of the children in care end up hospitalized through injury or death. That's quite remarkable when you consider that that's lower than the rate for children in the general population. I actually feel that does say something when we can say that children in our care are less likely to be hospitalized through injury or death than children in the general population.

Mr. Chase: Thank you.

Mr. Benito: Good morning. I have a sister who has had foster children throughout the years, more or less around 7 years. I adopted a dog because my kids are all grown up. Now, I had a discussion with my wife about a week ago about being foster parents. Is there a fast-track system so that MLAs can – I'm just wondering. My wife is a nurse. We have three kids, and my youngest is in grade 9 already. We always miss the noise in the house. We did a couple of years ago adopt a dog, but now we're not happy anymore with the noise that the dog is making. I'm just wondering.

Ms Orr: That's wonderful. Well, we'll follow up with you.

Mr. Benito: Okay. Thank you. I think it will be appreciated. I missed the meeting last Thursday because we had to attend an overview meeting with somebody who is doing this kind of system, fostering kids, but I think that my wife and I are really interested to do this.

My second question. Your ministry is undertaking to improve Alberta's foster care system. What specific action has the ministry taken in this regard?

Ms Orr: To improve the system. Thank you. Yes, we've done a number of things there. First of all, we have about 2,300 foster families generally in the province at any one time. As I said in my comments on our existing foster families, they do an excellent job. However, you know, we're dealing with human beings, and sometimes things may go wrong. I think you may remember – there's a court case going on right now, so I probably shouldn't really talk about it too much except to mention it – there was an incident in early 2007 where we had a child killed while in foster care. As a result of that tragedy, we did launch a review of our entire foster care system, and we invited some outside experts, including some people from out of the province, to help us with that review. It did result in a number of recommendations for improving our foster care system.

First of all, it concluded that we did have a good system but there were some things we could do to improve it, particularly when it comes to new foster parents, like you, maybe. We are initiating some measures to improve our screening of new foster parents and to ensure that our new foster parents are getting the support and training that they need.

Also, we're doing a better job of making sure that new foster parents do not get more than two children to start. The maximum we would let a foster family have, our desired maximum, is four

children per placement, but for new parents we're going to try and keep it to two so that we don't inadvertently overwhelm a new foster parent. As I mentioned earlier, a lot of the children we're putting in foster care have really high needs, and we have to make sure that these parents have the skills and the ability to cope with these children. So tougher measures there on screening; training for new foster parents.

As well, we've done a better job in recent years of reviewing with the Alberta Foster Parent Association the rates that we pay foster parents, and we've been able to increase those rates every year so that our foster families are able to keep up with the costs of looking after these children.

Also, we're trying to do more in the area of respite care, to be able to provide these foster families with a break now and then. So there are some initiatives we're doing on the respite side.

There are quite a few things there that we're doing, and I might ask either Mark or Richard . . .

The Chair: No. That's fine. I think we're going to move on, if you don't mind.

Ms Orr: Okay.

The Chair: The chair would like to remind all members of the committee that we're dealing specifically at this meeting with the annual reports from the Auditor General, the government of Alberta, and the department of children's services for the 2007-2008 year, ended March 31.

With that, Ms Pastoor, please, followed by Mr. Dallas.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. With that admonishment I'll change my question. Referencing page 39, did the number of women and children using government-funded emergency shelters increase in the last fiscal year? If so, have we determined what the reason is for the increase or the decrease?

9:10

Ms Orr: I'll let Sheryl Fricke supplement in a second there, but generally I don't believe that we've seen an increase. The reason that women would need our shelters – you know, there are a number of drivers that are behind family violence and women needing our help. Some of that has to do with having a strong economy. You have a lot of people that have moved to the province who are, you know, away from home and their natural supports, and they're living kind of in a bit of isolation, and you get family stresses, and problems arise, problems of alcoholism and financial problems that can lead to violent situations.

I think we've done a really good job in this province over the last few years of making people aware of our services and the fact that there are shelters, that we do have outreach programs and that there is a place for people to go if they need help. You know, originally we had thought that there would probably be reluctance on the part of the immigrant communities to make use of our service, but we're finding that we're starting to see more women from that community take advantage of the services we have to offer.

I think, maybe, with that, I'll let Sheryl supplement.

Ms Fricke: Sure. Actually, last year the number of women and children that we served was pretty consistent with previous years. The Alberta Council of Women's Shelters, a partner that we work really closely with, released their stats in September. Based on their statistics, they show a decrease, actually, in the number of women served: from 13,000 to 12,000. They also show a decrease in the

number of women, though, that were unable to be served or accommodated, and that dropped from 25,000 to 14,000, recognizing that 14,000 is still a lot of people. The crisis calls also have decreased significantly.

What we're attributing that to, at least in part, is some of the things the deputy just mentioned, which is that over the last three to four years this government has undertaken the prevention of family violence and bullying initiative and put over \$59 million into that and other services, like domestic violence courts, like outreach services, like enhanced police responses. So we believe that people have more options.

Women's shelters are an extremely important service for us, one that's absolutely critical, but women now have more choices than they had before, and I think we're starting to see that in the numbers.

Ms Pastoor: My quick supplemental would be: are these women and children tracked after they leave the shelter? If so, for how long, and what are the findings?

Ms Orr: No, they aren't tracked. However, we do have outreach services for people after they leave our shelters, so if they want us to follow up and continue to help them, there are supports there for them. Again, Sheryl, if you could maybe elaborate on that.

Ms Fricke: Sure. Yeah. The philosophy for the women's shelter program over the years has been that it really is a community-based, not-for-profit program. The fact that women aren't tracked is really based on the fact that they really wish to be anonymous. It has been shown in research over the years that if women lose that anonymity, they're unlikely to engage in the service. It's different from some of the other services that we provide in that it's not mandated through legislation; it's a voluntary program. So the anonymity is kind of outweighing our tracking ability. We don't track through names. We certainly keep track of numbers, and we have a highly developed information system that we developed with the women's shelters that really gives us a good sense of the numbers and those kinds of things and what the experiences are but not names and whether they're coming back through the doors or what happens three to six months later.

Thank you for the question.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Dallas, please, followed by Mr. Mason.

Mr. Dallas: Thanks, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to everyone from the ministry that has joined us this morning. I'm going to reference page 47 of the ministry report. There's a chart there that speaks to the number of children that were in care that were either adopted or there were private guardianship orders for, and I note that in 2007-08 the target was not met. I know you spoke earlier, too, a little bit about the stretch on the targets. But looking back over the three years prior to that, I notice that there is a very large variability in the numbers, and I wonder if you could speak a bit to that.

Ms Orr: Yeah. In terms of those targets, we actually did meet our target in terms of private guardianship orders that we were able to get, but in terms of adoptions we didn't meet our target there. You're quite right; there was a spike in adoptions in, I think, it was '06-07 or '05-06. I don't have the chart in front of me. What happened there was that when we brought in our new Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, one of the things we did at that time

was we enhanced or expanded our supports for permanence program to provide financial support to families adopting children. Previously we didn't do that, so for someone who was looking after a child, once they adopted, they would lose financial support. Through that enhancing of our supports for permanence program we found there was, I guess, if you will, a pent-up demand there that was higher than normal because we had these people who had sort of been on the cusp of adopting, and once we did that with supports for permanency, they went through and proceeded with the adoptions.

With that experience that year the level of adoptions, we had hoped, would continue to stay at that level, but we were a bit overoptimistic. What seems to have happened is that what we did experience was a bit of a pent-up demand, and that's now kind of decreased and stabilized at the levels we're seeing now. The encouraging thing, though, that we're seeing is that if you look to that prespike year, we are experiencing about a 10 per cent increase over that every year. So we're encouraged by that, that while we haven't met the target yet, we are showing improvements over previous years with the exception of that one spike year.

Mr. Dallas: As a supplement to that, then, can you perhaps mention another initiative or two in terms of building the numbers of families that will look at this type of activity, that would like to engage?

Ms Orr: Yes. Certainly, we're really trying to look at not only adoption but kinship care, kinship placements, and private guardianships as well. We're finding that those kinds of arrangements are very successful and do result in good outcomes for our children. Some of the things we're doing: through our casework practice model, for example, we're really emphasizing permanency and permanency planning for all of our children, and we're really emphasizing working really hard with families and extended families and communities to look for healthy kin, significant people that are known to the child that might be willing to either adopt or take in under a private guardianship order. There's real renewed focus and emphasis on that work, and as I say, we have permanency planning. We need a permanency plan for all our children.

We're working very closely with our aboriginal partners to try and find aboriginal families that are healthy and able to take on children. Their preferred placement, actually, is either kinship or private guardianship. There's sort of a philosophical difference in the aboriginal community, and a lot of them, particularly the elders, don't like adoption. I heard one elder describe it to me as akin to treating a kid like a puppy when you take them from their family and just put them with a family that's not related or connected in any way. So that's why we're really emphasizing those areas, kinship placement and private guardianship, especially with our aboriginal community.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Mr. Quest.

Mr. Mason: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I apologize for being late, and if my question has been asked, please let me know.

The Chair: Proceed, please.

Mr. Mason: Okay. Thanks very much.

Ms Orr, nice to see you.

Ms Orr: Nice to see you, yes.

Mr. Mason: The province received a \$25.9 million transfer in 2007 from the federal government for child care space creation. What was the money actually used for?

Ms Orr: That money did go into child care. There was an under-expenditure in child care that year; is that what you're referring to?

Mr. Mason: Well, I know that there was money transferred from the federal government to the province of Alberta that was supposed to be used for the creation of child care space, and I'm just wondering how it was spent.

9:20

Ms Orr: Yeah. Well, that money that comes from the federal government does get transferred to the province. As I understand it, it does go into general revenue and then is allocated to the various ministries, so we certainly did get money for child care. We spent a lot more than \$25 million on child care. In 2007-08 we spent \$117 million on child care. You know, we spent well over \$25 million on child care in '07-08.

Mr. Mason: Well, just let me follow up. Was the spending, then, increased by \$25.9 million over the previous year?

Ms Orr: I don't believe it was that much. Gord, do you know the percentage increase?

Mr. Johnston: No. If I recall correctly, we spent approximately – I'm just looking to our SFO for the numbers. It was \$104 million, \$107 million on child care in the prior year if I recall, then \$117 million and change in the next year.

Ms Orr: As I say, that money that's transferred from the federal government does go into general revenue and then gets reallocated out to our ministries. As I say, as a government, as a ministry we spend well in excess of \$25 million on child care for Alberta families.

The Chair: Thank you. The chair would like to note, before we proceed to Mr. Quest's question, that on page 61 of the annual report 2007-08 there is an indication that the child care budget was underspent by \$17.9 million in this fiscal year, and the reasons are explained there. Interesting.

Mr. Quest, please, followed by Mr. Chase.

Mr. Quest: I would just like to follow up or second the comments that the deputy chair had made a little bit earlier. It is incredibly important work that you do. I would say that most of what you're doing probably is of such a huge benefit to our society that it's not measurable, so thank you for that.

I think you had said in your opening comments, if I got this right, that for children that had been in our care and are in our care, their postsecondary education is paid for by us.

Ms Orr: Yes. We have the advancing futures bursary program. Our children are eligible to apply for that. To be eligible, they have had to be in government care, I think, between the ages of 13 and 18 for a certain period of time, and if so, they're eligible to apply. We will pay for their tuition, books, basically all the costs associated with attending university, college, an apprenticeship program, post-secondary, whatever. We also provide a caseworker that will work with them and provide support and guidance to them as they pursue their studies. As I mentioned, we had 492 take us up on that last

year. Actually, one of the performance measures we're looking at developing in the future is a performance measure on that program to try and track the percentage of kids that graduate from post-secondary.

Mr. Quest: How advanced a level would we take that to? I mean, do we train them to be teachers, or do we train them to be orthodontists? How far along do we go? It's probably in here somewhere – I'm sorry; I couldn't find it – but I'm just wondering what kind of cost is attached.

Ms Orr: It's about \$5 million that we're spending on the advancing futures bursary right now, and I believe it is for a degree or a diploma. We're not yet into, I believe, doctorates or master's degrees. This is for the first, initial degree. We certainly are seeing kids that are going into become social workers, dental hygienists. I met a fellow the other day who's studying to be an archaeologist. There is really quite a wide range of careers that these children are pursuing. It's really quite inspiring.

Mr. Quest: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Chase, please, followed by Mr. Jacobs.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just a little bit of background to the question. The fastest growing segment of our population is First Nations. We're into the third generation of families that have gone through the residential school system. Prior to residential schools traditional families were highly supportive. The tribe looked after the most vulnerable. But what we've seen as a result of residential abuse are increases in addiction, depression, diabetes, suicide, high levels of incarceration. We need to move past the apologies, such as our Prime Minister provided this summer, and get into concrete, supportive action. My question, then: how many children in foster care in the last fiscal year were aboriginal? A percentage or a number.

Ms Orr: In foster care? Sixty per cent of the children on our caseload are aboriginal. What percentage is in foster care specifically as opposed to other sorts of placements? I don't have that figure handy. I'm not sure if anyone on my team would have that. If not, we could get that figure to you. You're talking about the percentage specifically in foster care placement?

Mr. Chase: Right.

Ms Orr: Overall, it is 60 per cent in our system.

Mr. Chase: To what extent does Children and Youth Services work with First Nations, either through education or through support, to develop within reserves or in downtown locations First Nation counsellors so that they can, you know, provide the historical background, the cultural sensitivity, and, therefore, the support? Is there a very defined outreach program, training for First Nations counsellors?

Ms Orr: Making sure that we can connect our aboriginal children with their heritage and their culture is a very important focus in our work with aboriginals now. It's something that's part of our Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, one of the amendments that we're bringing in there. I don't know if I can talk about it. Anyway, we do want to have cultural plans done for all of our aboriginal children to make sure they're being connected to their heritage. That

would mean that if we're not able to place a child with an aboriginal family or kin and we do have to place them with a nonaboriginal family, we have that family sign off on a plan for how they're going to ensure that that child remains connected to their culture. That can include a variety of things: you know, taking them to visit the reserve or to participate in events or getting to know some of the elders.

We also have an aboriginal liaison unit in our ministry. Not all of our CFSAs but many of them with large aboriginal populations have an aboriginal unit that liaises with First Nations to try and ensure that the kids that we encounter in the urban environment, off reserve, are being connected to elders, to aboriginal counsellors, to people that can work with the children and teach them about their heritage and about native spirituality and engage the children in things like sweat lodges, naming ceremonies, learning about their history. We work really closely with our DFNAs as well to help them. We provide support to them in terms of human resource training and support and recruitment support so that they can get the staff they need to be able to provide this kind of support to the kids.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Jacobs, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. First of all, I'd just like to commend the department for the good work you do with children. I understand, you know, that there are problems and there will always probably be, but I thank you and congratulate you for the good things you do. I hear many good examples of good things in my constituency.

As I was reading some background material in preparation for this meeting today, I was interested to note that – I think I read it correctly – the number of children who need protective care following your enhancement service program increased between 2006 and 2008. I wonder if you could comment and perhaps explain why you think that happened.

Ms Orr: I'm sorry; the increase in . . .

Mr. Jacobs: Children needing protective care following the enhancement program. They would go into enhancement, I assume, and then the number increased that needed protective care following that.

Ms Orr: I'm quite sure of why that was. Maybe I'll ask our director of child welfare, Richard Ouellet, who is with us today, if he could maybe provide some comment or insight into that.

9:30

Mr. Ouellet: I'm sorry. I was doing some math on the earlier foster care question. Would you mind repeating the question for me?

Mr. Jacobs: Sure. The increased number of children between 2006 and 2008 who needed protective care following the decision to leave them in the enhancement program.

Mr. Ouellet: The process often is, as the deputy said, that when we're beginning our involvement with the family, we will be looking at enhancement. Sometimes the circumstances that we're encountering are more severe, so while they may not be any longer served appropriately in enhancement, we then move into the protection stream. The differentiation for why, when leaving enhancement, it's actually ramping up a little bit more could be because the circumstances have become a little bit more serious.

Mr. Jacobs: Have you done some studies on the decision-making process going from enhancement to protective care or vice versa? Are we leaving too many children in enhancement care? I hesitate to say that because I think children should stay with the family as much as possible, but I guess sometimes it becomes, you know, a situation where they have to be moved. I guess the follow-up question is on the decision-making process for that to happen.

Ms Orr: That's the major reason why we've developed a casework practice model. The intent of that model is to improve our ability to make the right judgment call the first time. Through casework practice what we're doing now is spending more time up front in taking the time to assess that child's situation – the strength of the family, the real needs, the circumstance, situation – so that we can have better decisions. Our workers have to make really tough judgment calls, and the emphasis is to try whenever possible to keep a child with family. That sounds on the surface maybe easy to do, but it isn't. It does require judgment calls and tough decisions.

Our hope and our intent with the casework practice model was to do exactly that and allow more time up front for a proper, thorough assessment to be done so that our workers in partnership with the family and with other supports in the community can make the more correct determination about what that family needs and whether it's even possible to keep the child there and through family enhancement to strengthen that family.

Actually, in some of the early results we're seeing through casework practices fewer decisions being made to move kids into child protection maybe whereas earlier, under the old system, they might have put them in family enhancement. Now that they've been able to do this longer assessment, more thorough assessment, they realize, "You know, we'd better move because this family is maybe beyond help right now," especially in cases where parents have severe addictions.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms Pastoor, followed by Mr. Vandermeer, please.

Ms Pastoor: Yes. Thank you. My question would follow up on one that was previous. I find it interesting that the federal dollars really aren't on a flow line directly through to the department. However, why was almost \$18 million unexpended for the child care line? It was listed on page 85.

Ms Orr: Right. Yeah. That year we had less than anticipated uptake on our child care subsidy. One of the reasons we think that may have happened was there was an increase in incomes for Alberta families as a result of the strong economy. Some families that may have been eligible for a subsidy may have through increased income no longer been eligible, so we had less uptake there. We had less uptake on some of our other programs under that area, too. That was the reason it was underspent. It was just, you know, just less demand than we had anticipated. I can assure you we were able to put that unexpended money to good use in our foster care program and family services for children with disabilities as well as our child intervention programs.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you. That pretty much answered my supplemental question as well. I guess the point was that the money did stay in the department. It wasn't returned to general revenue.

Ms Orr: Oh, yeah. It stayed in the department, and as I say, it went through to excellent use in a number of our really key areas.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Vandermeer: You mentioned in your opening statements \$10 million extra for contracted agencies to attract and keep qualified staff. My question is: has the \$10 million made any kind of impact on the agencies' ability to reduce the wage gap and their ability to retain staff?

Ms Orr: It has helped them. It hasn't really helped reduce the wage gap per se, but what it did do is help prevent the wage gap from getting wider, so it helped them catch up a bit there. It did help to some degree for some of them with being able to keep and retain staff, but it by no means solved the problem in that sector. In fact, we had to put in another \$11 million this fiscal year, and we've already committed to an additional \$11 million next year to help them with this issue.

Also, in addition to providing more funding to that sector, we have formed a working group with representatives from a number of the agencies to try and develop a new business model for contracting that will be outcomes based and, we hope, will enable agencies to take advantage of some administrative efficiencies and efficiencies on the human resources, recruiting, retention side that will help alleviate some of these problems in the longer term.

Through reports we're getting – I don't have any hard data – we are hearing that the money did help. It certainly didn't solve the problem. There's still a wage gap there, and we're still working with them and trying to address the issues that they're facing because they are such critical partners for us. I mean, if they didn't deliver the services to children and families, you know, we'd have to do it. We really need them, and they need to have the appropriate resources to do a good job.

Mr. Vandermeer: Right. My follow-up question. Like you said, we would have to take care of them as government. But when the government agencies get a 5 per cent increase and the contracted agencies get a 5 per cent increase, the gap actually becomes greater, right?

Ms Orr: Well, that's what the agency sector is arguing. In recent years government workers have been getting increases, and either they haven't or they haven't been getting similar increases. That's something we have been trying to correct in the last couple of years. I believe that this year with the \$11 million that was equivalent to a 5 per cent increase. Next year we've already committed to another \$11 million, which is equivalent to another 5 per cent increase. Our aim is to try and at least get it stabilized so that the gap doesn't grow. That's the challenge we're facing right now.

Mr. Vandermeer: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Mason, please, followed by Ms Woo-Paw.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. One of the factors contributing to the shortage of child care spaces is a lack of people. That has its roots in part in the relatively low wages that are paid. What steps has the department taken to improve the wages of child care workers?

Ms Orr: Thanks for the question. We've started to take steps on that. In the '07-08 year we did have our strategy for child care not

only create spaces but, as you point out, get the workers. We added incentives there to attract people into the field who maybe had left it because of the low wages. We now pay an incentive to get people to come back in.

Also, for accredited daycare agencies, operators we provide wage top-ups. I know that for this year it was increased to 60 per cent. I believe that in the '07-08 year it was a 40 per cent top-up that we were paying. Through that wage top-up, through bursaries to encourage staff to increase their education so that they'll qualify for a higher wage, we're taking steps to increase the wages for the child care industry to make it more attractive to people. I think that in '07-08 we did manage to attract I think it was about 160 people back into the field.

9:40

Creating space is a real challenge for us. Probably the hardest part is the staffing side. That's why in our child care creating spaces initiative we have a lot of initiatives and incentives in there designed to do exactly that, you know: increase the wages that they're paid. Another result of the wage subsidy is that it helps operators keep the costs down that get passed on to the parent so that we can keep child care affordable in the province. Right now in Alberta the average monthly rate for child care is something like \$600 a month, and that's an average rate now. The average per-day rate is about \$27. Part of keeping that cost down is the wage top-up for staff and supports to staff training.

[Mr. Griffiths in the chair]

Mr. Mason: In terms of the wage top-up or subsidy can you tell me whether that's paid directly to employees or whether it's paid to the operator of the child care? If it's paid to the operator of the child care, what measures do you have in place to ensure that that money actually gets paid in an increase to the employees?

Ms Orr: We do have measures in place to ensure that the money does go for wages to the employee. Maybe to explain and elaborate on that, I'll turn to Lynn Jerchel – she's in charge of our child care programming – to explain in more detail how we do assure that.

Ms Jerchel: Sure. With regard to payment of staff support funding or wage top-ups the money does flow to the operator on the staff's behalf. In order to ensure, as you've raised, that the money goes to the purpose for which it was intended, staff members do need to record the hours worked each month, sign for those hours, and the operator needs to provide a record back to us indicating that the staff member has received those wages.

We also have an audit program under our quality assurance unit that we've put in place over the past couple of years. Certainly, through our audits we've been pleasantly surprised that there have been no issues to date.

Thank you.

The Deputy Chair: Thank you very much.

Ms Woo-Paw, followed by Mr. Chase.

Ms Woo-Paw: Thank you, Mr. Chair. My question is on the annual report, page 147 and then 181 on the, I guess, reimbursement, salaries for co-chairs of the different authorities throughout the province. I'm just curious about the difference in operations in terms of payment to co-chairs because for the southwest Alberta child and family services authority there's a base salary for the co-chair whereas, for example, for Calgary and area the co-chairs do not

receive a base salary. There are cash benefits for the co-chairs. I'd like to understand the difference in practice.

Ms Orr: Okay. Thanks for that question. I think that to elaborate, give some detail on that, I'll ask Gord Johnston to respond on that.

[Mr. MacDonald in the chair]

Mr. Johnston: Thanks. If I heard the question correctly, there are, in fact, no differences in the amounts of reimbursement per meeting that co-chairs or board members receive across the whole province. Those are set by policy on an annual basis specific to – co-chairs receive different amounts and then regular board members. So if one particular co-chair has charged back more in per diems in a particular year, that would be related to the number of meetings that were held at a board level or perhaps out in the community. It's really dependent on how busy the individual co-chairs were in any given year.

Ms Woo-Paw: But on page 147 it says that there's a base salary.

Mr. Johnston: Yeah. That's somewhat of a misnomer in that it's not an actual salary as we would traditionally define it. It is, basically, the amount that those individual co-chairs have charged through their per diems. The co-chairs are not GOA employees.

Ms Woo-Paw: Okay. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Drysdale.

Mr. Chase: Thank you very much. A brief background. Individual families who have contacted me have spent hundreds of thousands of dollars trying to get access to their children who were apprehended under questionable circumstances. The government has spent millions of taxpayers' dollars in limiting or denying access of any kind. Child care workers continue to ignore or alter judicial visitation orders. Money that should have gone to the children is lost. However, there is a middle ground, a potential resolution process, and that's where my question comes from, page 31 of your annual report. How much money was spent toward the safe visitation pilot program that was launched in the Calgary and area CFSA?

Ms Orr: In responding to that, I do have to point out that our first priority and number one concern is always the safety and well-being of the child, and everything we do is to make sure that if we think that child is in danger or is being abused or sexually abused, we will not leave a child in that situation. Of course, sometimes we will have families that don't like having their children apprehended. They don't like seeing child welfare come to the door, but we have to put kids first, and their safety is paramount, above anyone's opinion or feelings. The important thing is that if the child is in danger, we do what we have to do to protect that child.

In terms of the safe visitation program, we did launch pilots in '07-08 in five sites, in five cities. It's proving to be a very successful pilot. In terms of the amount we're spending there and to elaborate a bit on that program, I think I'll ask Sheryl Fricke to supplement on that.

Ms Fricke: Yes. If I heard your question, you were interested in the Calgary one in particular.

Mr. Chase: Yes, specifically.

Ms Fricke: Yeah. On that particular pilot we spent about \$130,000 last year. Of the safe visitation sites the Sheriff King one, in particular, is considered a best practice in Canada. It was one of the first ones that was ever put together. That program is very specific to families who've had experiences of family violence and continue to be at risk for that. Those are the people that are served in that program in particular. Certainly, the paramount outcome of that program is safety and the ability for both parents to have access. We know that whenever we can do that, it's better for the child. So that really is the underpinning of that program, but it really is for high-risk families at that high end, in particular the violence.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. Just prior to my follow-up, what I've experienced, very specifically: a family of five, three of the elder children going to one family, the two youngest fast-tracked for adoption. It's almost as if the decision was made early on. Then the young ones are bonding, and the chances of return access are limited. So I'm very concerned about this.

With regard to the safe visitation, I appreciate understanding the highly specific nature of it, and potentially that justifies the small expenditure, but how is this program monitored, and what have been the results thus far?

Ms Orr: Actually, before you do, just in terms of results, I do have a specific example. I can't give you names, but we do have a case in Calgary where a Calgary family was referred to that safe visitation site because of severe family violence problems, and at the beginning the mother was very much afraid for the safety of her children and herself. She was the custodial parent. The father at the beginning of that program was really reluctant. He was negative about his children, showed little motivation to interact with them. However, as a result of participating in this program, he began to express interest in attending support groups and taking parenting courses. As a result, he became more involved with his children during the visits, and today that same individual is now able to have unsupervised visits every week with his children, and the mother is no longer in fear that her kids are in danger. So there's one example of a family where this really turned it around for them. Maybe, Sheryl, if I could have you supplement.

Ms Fricke: Sure. I'm going to have to answer you more in a process realm at the moment because we did just implement it last year, so we're just starting to get some numbers in. That program is rolled out through grant funds, but there's a program that was put together by all the sites, from the 10 CFSAs across the province, around what we ought to measure in that program. For most of the things that we're going to be monitoring, there'll be the standard, "How many families are you serving? How many kids are there?" but there will be some safety reporting that will be required in that. We're also going to do some change in attitudes and behaviours kind of measurement, pre and post, for both parents and for kids. So I can't give you the results right now just because it's brand new, but if you ask next year, we'll be able to give you some.

9:50

The Chair: Thank you. We're moving on. Mr. Drysdale, please, followed by Ms Pastoor.

Mr. Drysdale: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Page 36 of the ministry's annual report references establishing seven FASD networks as part of a cross-ministry 10-year FASD strategic plan. It also states that the networks "received a total of \$350,000 in start-up funding, have submitted business plans and begun operating." Page 85 of the

ministry's annual report identifies \$9.5 million for FASD initiatives. How does the \$9.5 million relate to the strategic plan?

Ms Orr: Yeah. Of that \$9.5 million \$4 million was invested in the development of the initial seven FASD service networks. These networks were designed to address three service categories in Alberta's 10-year FASD strategic plan, and those are the prevention of FASD, supports and services for individuals that are affected by FASD as well as their caregivers, and increased capacity to support the diagnosis and assessment of FASD.

The remaining \$5.5 million in that was invested in ongoing FASD projects within the ministry. That includes allocations to our CFSAs, our regions, for direct programming for this area as well as demonstration projects. We have 12 independent projects providing a variety of FASD programming in communities throughout Alberta. As well, some of that money went to a video conferencing series that was providing video conferencing seminars for parents and workers and people dealing with individuals with FASD. Some of that money went to public awareness, prevention campaigns, to sponsoring an FASD conference, a newsletter, a website. All of these projects also support that 10-year strategic plan for FASD.

Mr. Drysdale: What are the 10-year targets for the FASD strategic plan?

Ms Orr: There are a number of targets over the 10 years. One is that 95 per cent of Albertans will understand that drinking alcohol during pregnancy can lead to FASD and lifelong disabilities, that 75 per cent of Albertans agree that supporting women during their pregnancy to prevent FASD is a shared responsibility between the woman and her circle of support, that 75 per cent of women at risk of giving birth to children affected by FASD and involved in targeted prevention programs report a reduction in their use of alcohol or abstaining from alcohol, that the capacity for assessments will be 900 assessments annually, also that 80 per cent of caregivers report that they do have the services they need to meet the needs of the individuals in their care who are affected by FASD. As well, of course, we want to see a decrease in the incidence rate of FASD from a current rate of about 9 per 1,000 population down to 2.7 per 1,000. Generally, too, we want to see increased availability of assessment and diagnosis for individuals.

The Chair: Thank you. We still have a number of members who have indicated an interest in asking questions. In light of the time we will read our questions into the record. Ms Orr, if you could respond in writing through the clerk to all members, we would be very grateful. We'll proceed now with Ms Pastoor, followed by Mr. Jacobs.

Ms Pastoor: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll put my first and supplemental together. Referencing page 79, why has the number of long-term leases or contractual obligations of the ministry decreased by more than half from the previous year, and what's the nature and cost of those contracts?

The Chair: Thank you.
Mr. Jacobs, please.

Mr. Jacobs: Thank you. Regarding respite care, does your program allow family members of the children or parents to be involved in receiving respite care to give the mother or dad a break from taking care of the family?

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mason, please.

Mr. Mason: Thanks very much, Mr. Chairman. My first question is: how does the department ensure that the wage top-up funds transferred to operators of child care centres are actually used to increase wages of child care workers as opposed to being used to either fully or partially offset the existing wage costs of the operator? My supplementary question is to the Auditor General, and it was to be asking the Auditor General's opinion on the sufficiency of the department's measures to accomplish that.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Dallas, followed by Mr. Chase, please.

Mr. Dallas: Thank you. Reviewing the structure of the organization, looking at the 10 regional authorities and recognizing that perhaps the greater amount of the strategic work is done at the ministry level, I wonder if you could outline how those responsibilities are shared with the regional authorities and, as a percentage of expense in terms of delivery of services, the expenditures supporting the board and activities as a percentage of total costs.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Chase, followed by Mr. Benito.

Mr. Chase: Thank you. I'm referencing page 153 of your annual report. Why were there no expenditures or budget for the prevention of family violence and bullying for the last two years in the south-east Alberta child and family services authority area, which was announced as a priority for the ministry in May 2007? My follow-up: how does this CFSA address violence and bullying, and what are the statistics in the region for incidents of violence?

The Chair: Thank you.

To conclude, Mr. Benito.

Mr. Benito: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I heard from Albertans that more foster parents are required to provide safe, secure placements for children in government care. What actions has the ministry taken to address the shortage of foster parents in Alberta?

The Chair: Thank you.

That concludes this part of the meeting. Ms Orr and your delegation, on behalf of all members I would like to thank you for your appearance this morning and wish you the very best in all your endeavours in the next fiscal year. Thank you, and please feel free to leave.

Ms Orr: Thanks very much.

The Chair: Now we'll go on to other business. Any members have any other business to discuss at this time? Seeing none, thank you.

Then on our agenda the date of the next meeting. I would like to remind you that we have a meeting next Wednesday, November 26, at the usual time with officials from Executive Council.

Mr. Dunn: If I may just remind committee members, when you look at Executive Council in our annual report, it's very sparse. However, we've directed three recommendations at Executive Council. If you'll refer to page 379, you'll see that we had made recommendations directed at Executive Council on the recruiting, evaluation, and training of boards of directors. That is underneath the Executive Council's responsibility. That work led itself to subsequently involving the McCrank report and then, of course, the response to the McCrank report. So if you're going to be looking at matters you may want to inquire about, it's recruiting, evaluating, and training boards of directors.

This year, in October 2008, we directed a recommendation to Executive Council on the CEO selection, evaluation, and compensation, which also would go to that governance secretariat. Finally, the third area that we directed to Executive Council was regarding the recommendation on establishing the central security officer regarding information security.

Those three matters could be considered by yourselves in addressing it with Executive Council when they're here next week.

The Chair: Thank you very much for that.

Mr. Chase.

10:00

Mr. Chase: Sorry. I didn't get my hand up fast enough when you asked about other questions. We've had circumstances based on our marathon sessions in the Legislature that have resulted in the cancelling of Public Accounts. We have a ministry appearing before us on December 3. If for some reason we have a marathon debate and we lose the opportunity to meet with that ministry on December 3, is there the potential of either having an out-of-session meeting with that ministry, or will it be added to the spring list of ministries under review?

The Chair: It probably would be added to the spring list. If a session was to occur and it was to go on uninterrupted from one day to the next, then under the standing orders this committee would not meet. If there is an interruption, then the committee would meet, unless we were to get consent from the House for this committee to meet while the House is meeting. It's unusual, but those are the rules. In the past what we have done is if we had a list of ministries that were to appear and the meetings were cancelled because the session was over, then they sort of go to the front of the line for the next time we meet.

Mr. Chase: Thank you for explaining the system.

The Chair: Okay. Are there any other issues at this time? No.

May I please have a motion to adjourn? A motion by Ms Woo-Paw that the meeting be adjourned. All in favour? None opposed.

Thank you very much. Have a good week.

[The committee adjourned at 10:02 a.m.]

