

Auditor General report on Group Home Plan - 2020

Introduction

The Auditor General's Report on Group Homes and Specialized Placements (December 2019) expressed concerns for children in the care of the Minister. As a result of this report, a motion (which was subsequently amended) was tabled in December 2019 calling on the Department of Social Development to submit to the Legislative Committee a plan including reference to those who were consulted, based on the recommendations of the Auditor General.

The following outlines Social Development's plan to address these concerns. Appendices are also attached which include a list of various stakeholders consulted and a discussion paper that was planned for MLA's in March of 2020. SD's response to the Auditor General Recommendations can be found in the Department's Annual report for 2019-2020.

Issue: Lack of appropriate Placement Resources for children in care
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Strategy 1: Increase retention and recruitment of existing and new foster homes which would increase fostering as a placement option for children in care.

- **Action(s):**
 - **Rate Increase for Foster Families:** As of April 1, 2020, foster families received a 25% increase over all child in care rates and benefits at a cost of \$1,644,776.
 - **Recruitment Strategy:** Enhance partnership with the New Brunswick Foster Family Association to strengthen recruitment efforts. Deliver PRIDE Pre-Service blended delivery model (online/face-to-face) (Spring 2020).
 - **Enhance Training:** Foster families have been identified as a critical group to receive trauma informed training. This training will be based on the ARC (Attachment, Regulation and Competency) Reflection Model.
- **Result:** The number of foster families increased by 3%.

Strategy 2: Review existing resources and explore alternative models in the continuum of care.

- **Action(s):**
 - **FSA Amendment:** An Act to Amend the Family Services Act (Bill 28) introduced the child placement resources of Kinship Placements and Child-Specific Placements (June 2019).
 - **New Regulation:** March 2020, the *Children's Services and Resources*

Regulation (2020-21) was filed, replacing the *Children in Care Service Regulations 91-170*. The new regulation clearly defines expectations and requirements for child placement resources in the areas of assessment, service delivery and outcome monitoring.

- **Result:** Child-Specific Placement and the Kinship Care Model – Kinship Services, Post-Kinship Services, Kinship Placement Service Standards (Interim) were effective on **April 1, 2020**. **In 2020 Social Development had an increase of 9.8 % in kinship placement homes.**

- **Action(s):**
 - **Engage Stakeholders in future directions:** Stakeholders are involved in discussions and planning for resources for children and youth.
 - On **February 26, 2020**, a stakeholder engagement session was held to explore the continuum of care for children. During this process, the idea of Professional Care Homes was presented, discussed and this option as a resource for children with complex needs was well supported by those in attendance. (Appendix A)
 - On **February 28, 2020**, a planned Engagement with MLAs was postponed at the Minister’s request with the plan to reschedule it for late March. Due to the pandemic, this engagement did not occur. (Appendix B)
 - On **March 23, 2021**, a Stakeholder Engagement Session is being held to re-engage and update those from the 2020 session and review the model of Professional Care Homes before it is fully implemented.

- **Result: Develop and Implement Professional Care Homes:** The trend towards professionalization of care has been identified as a long overdue reform in child welfare. Professional Care Homes have an individual or couple who are skilled and intentional in providing intensive individualized treatments and interventions in a family-based environment for children who have serious behavioural and emotional needs and require enhanced, full-time care beyond what can be provided in a regular or therapeutic foster home. The initial focus for these resources would be children aged 10 and younger who have high care needs and have been or are at risk of placement in a group home or specialized resource setting. The joint plan with Department of Health will ensure that high needs children have a mental health clinician assigned to them and the family will have access to the planning and co-ordination of a care plan through a consulting psychologist and clinical Social Worker.

Professional Care Homes Model has been developed including competencies, standards, and outcomes. The goal is to launch the initiative in April 2021.

Issue: Placement resources must be effectively monitored for care standards and practices.

Strategy 1: Modernize Legislation for Children and Youth

- **Action(s):**
 - **Create stand-alone legislation for Children and Youth**
 - The *Family Services Act* (FSA) has been in effect since 1981. Since the Act was implemented, societal change has affected values and beliefs about children and families; additionally, issues confronted by families are much more complex.
 - The Department is conducting a review of the child welfare provisions in the FSA, as recommended in A Review of the Effectiveness of New Brunswick's Child Protection System.
 - As part of its effort to develop modernized stand-alone child welfare legislation, the Department has undertaken several approaches to obtain public feedback. These included an online survey, a request for response to a public discussion paper developed by the Department, direct engagement with Child and Youth stakeholders and First Nations (November 2020; list of attendees in Appendix C), and targeted engagement with youth (February – March 2021).
 - In January 2020, the Discussion Paper and online survey were publicly released. The Department received 22 Discussion Paper responses and 950 completed survey responses.

Strategy 2: Update Standards, Practices and Outcomes.

- **Action(s):**
 - **Develop a Common Vision, Principles, and Children and Youth outcomes**
 - The Department's vision of safety, wellbeing, a sense of belonging and lifelong connections for every child/youth in NB was developed in **August 2020**.
 - **Ongoing review of existing standards, competencies and practices** to ensure alignment among and between all resources for children in care.

Result(s):

- Successful engagement sessions were held during the challenges of the pandemic.

- Target date for introduction of Bill for the new child welfare in the Legislature is December 2021.
- The common vision, principles, along with child and youth specific outcomes inform standards and practices and will provide the framework for future enhancements.

Conclusion

The Department remains committed to addressing the concerns raised by the Auditor General in her report. The Department is dedicated to meeting the unique needs of all children in care and remains engaged with stakeholders and community partners to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and youth.

Government needed to change many of its priorities to focus on the COVID-19 pandemic in March of 2020 and throughout the ensuing year. Despite these unique challenges, Social Development is very pleased with the progress made with the Kinship Model, the Children's Services and Resources Regulation, Professional Care Homes, the new legislation and the various stakeholder consultations which were held.

Appendix A

Stakeholder Session(s) Placement Resources

February 28, 2020 Session		March 23, 2021 – Upcoming Session	
Stakeholder	Name	Stakeholder	Name
NB Association of Social Workers	2 representatives	NB Association of Social Workers	Offered 3 representatives
NB Youth in Care Network	2 representatives	NB Youth in Care Network	“
NB Association of Youth Residential Services Inc	3 representatives	NB Adoption Association	“
The Child and Youth Advocate’s Office	2 representatives	NB Association of Youth Residential Services Inc	“
	1 representative	The Child and Youth Advocate’s Office	“
		Department of Health	1 representative
		NB Foster Family Association	‘



Discussion Paper
Enhancing Child Placement
Resources in New Brunswick

Department of Social
Development
February 2020

1.0 Introduction

Our New Brunswick is one where kids can reach their fullest potential, where they experience good health, wellbeing and are able to fulfill their purpose. This means having stable home lives, success in school, a sense of belonging to their community, an opportunity to contribute, and relationships that will support them throughout their lives. Children are our greatest resource, the future of our province. We need to recognize them as citizens, and as citizens they need to feel safe and engaged. When they need help, we need to be able to respond adequately and quickly.

The needs of children in the care system are becoming more complex and we need to evolve how we respond. If we want to improve outcomes for children and youth in care so they have equal opportunities to reach their fullest potential, we need to take a systems approach, coordinate government services, work closely with community partners and consider all the factors that affect a child's health and wellbeing such as education, income, culture, early childhood development, the physical and social environment and other determinants of health.

The profile of children in care is changing. Increasingly, children in care are characterized by high levels of impairment across multiple domains largely as a consequence of early maltreatment, trauma, disabilities such as fetal alcohol spectrum disorder and autism, and the early onset of mental health issues. The Department of Social Development recognizes the necessity to shift from more traditional models to supporting the complex needs of many of the children in the care system and working in parallel to prevent the need for children to be in care. The Department is exploring new, innovative, evidence-based supports to improve outcomes for children and youth in care. The Department is working to develop a comprehensive continuum of child placement resources that is responsive to the needs of children in care.

Proposed changes to the *Family Services Act* enable the practice of Kinship Services and introduce Kinship Placements and Child-Specific Placements to better respond to the needs of children and youth. A broad review of child welfare provisions of the Family Services Act is ongoing. An online survey to seek input from the public has seen a high response (500 in the first 24 hours) and public engagement sessions to create a collective vision for children in care are being planned for Spring 2020.

The Department led a jurisdictional review in late 2019 to identify potential outcomes for children and youth and a couple of key initiatives that can be implemented early in 2020 to help achieve these outcomes, while the broader engagement exercise is being conducted.

This consultation is a first level engagement to look specifically at short term residential options for children and youth in our care as a first step to engaging on the broader issue. Key stakeholders will include front line Social Development staff, partner departments and organizations who are also supporting children and youth in care. Based on this feedback, recommendations for the development of initiatives will be created and brought forward for Government approval in April 2020. As you can see from this aggressive timeline, we are committed to improving care and are aware that business as usual will not do. It is time to ask ourselves hard questions about what is really helping our children and youth, and what legacy programs, services, and approaches may no longer be in the best interest of our children and youth.

2.0 Background

The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* stresses the role of the State in assuring the right of children to appropriate care and this is never so pressing as when the child is in the care of the State. As child welfare agencies succeed in preventing and reducing the need for out-of-home care, more innovative and intensive services are required to care for the complex needs of the children who require child placement services. Carers need to be supported to develop the skills to properly and adequately care for these children. Additionally, numerous academic studies have indicated that residential placements, including group home care, are consistently associated with poorer outcomes than family-based placements (De Wilde, L., Devlieghere, J., Vandebroek, M., & Vanobbergen, B. (2019). Foster parents between voluntarism and professionalisation: Unpacking the backpack. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 98, 290-296) (Lee, B., Bright, C., Svoboda, D. Fakunmoju, S. & Barth, R. (2010) Outcomes of Group Care for Youth: A review of Comparative Studies).

Children placed in family settings have greater opportunities to form a connection with consistent caregivers and to experience the benefits associated with membership in a family. Young children, children not attending school or children with important daytime appointments, need at least one carer available during the day. Many families, in today's society, require dual incomes to maintain a household meaning they are unable to meet the demands of fostering and this is believed to be one of the primary factors that has impeded recruitment and retention efforts.

New Brunswick, similar to other jurisdictions in Canada, is experiencing a decline in the number of individuals and families who are offering to become foster parents. Since 2016, there has been a reduction from 374 to 313 (16%) in available foster families. The primary reasons attributed to the declining number of foster families include the increasing number of women engaged in the workforce; the changing characteristics of children requiring foster care; and an increase in the complexity and magnitude of demands being placed on foster families (multiple placements, placement disruptions, complexities of birth family dynamics). This has resulted in a shortage of foster home resources, and in some cases, has resulted in children being placed in group homes, when a more suitable placement would be a family environment.

As of November 2019, there are 423 children in permanent care and 489 children in temporary care of the Minister. In that same month, 532 children were receiving services from 313 Foster Homes, 154 children in 137 Provisional Homes and 130 children in 35 group homes.

The Department has intensified ongoing efforts to enhance child placement resources, including tabling *Bill 28 An Act to Amend the Family Services Act* which introduced the child placement resources of Kinship Placements and Child-Specific Placements (June 2019), increasing the financial rates and benefits paid to foster parents (April 2018), forming a working group focused on modernizing the Department's foster family recruitment strategies (September 2019), and introducing a PRIDE training blended delivery model (online/face-to-face) (Spring 2020). In addition, the Department has been focused on enhancing its partnership with the New Brunswick Foster Family Association to strengthen recruitment efforts as evidence has showed that current foster parents are our strongest recruitment tool.

In December 2019, an audit was conducted by the Auditor General of New Brunswick that focused on Group Homes and Specialized Placements. The recommendations for the Department focus on: improving standards; executing more effective planning for child placement resources; enhancing the quality of care a child in care receives; and heightened monitoring and reporting on child placement resources.

The Department conducted a review in late 2019 to identify potential outcomes for children and youth. The following recommendations were developed to help guide actions moving forward with all child placement resources, including fosters. With this consultation, the Department is looking to collect feedback on these ideas to hear others that have not yet been considered.

Recommendation 1: Increasing the reimbursement allocated to foster families to help increase retention and recruitment of existing and new foster homes and increase placement options for children in care.

Recommendation 2: Introduce Professional Care Homes where children struggling with serious behavioural and emotional skills are placed with a skilled and trained caregiver in a family-based environment.

Recommendation 3: Introduce publicly available data metrics on the social development website.

The Minister of Social Development is deeply committed to these efforts and has obtained other party support in House to create a strategy moving forward.

3.0 Stakeholder Engagement

While the Department of Social Development has the mandate to protect children (and adults and seniors), we know it takes many partners to ensure the success of our most precious resource. The Department recognizes the importance of early and effective engagement with stakeholders in the pursuit to enhance child placement resources in New Brunswick. The intent with this first level, targeted consultation is to seek feedback on the proposed recommendations and hear other ideas about how to achieve better outcomes for children in residential care of the Minister. Consultations will be open and transparent, focused on intended outcomes and resulting recommendations for implementation will be based on evidence.

Engagement sessions will be by invitation and will be provided in both official languages. They will be held in different regions and will include an opportunity to participate by videoconference.

3.1 Social Development employees

Engaging Social Development front line staff who are supporting children throughout the province everyday will ensure that diverse perspectives and practical ideas contribute to the design of initiatives

that achieve the intended positive outcomes.

3.2 Partners

Engaging partners in the early development stage is critical. Partners include the New Brunswick Youth in Care Network, the New Brunswick Foster Family Association, the New Brunswick Association of Youth Residential Services, the Child and Youth Advocate's Office, and the Network of Excellence for Children and Youth with Complex Needs (ISD Child and Youth team).

3.3 Other Government Departments

There is a need for coordinated services between government departments to provide support to children in the care system. The Departments of Health and Public Safety will be consulted.

4.0 Discussion Questions

To facilitate discussions, the following questions have been proposed.

4.1 Identifying outcomes

- a) What outcomes do we want to see for children in care in New Brunswick?

Recognizing that success looks different for different children and youth, here are some possible outcomes:

- Better retention of existing and recruitment of new foster homes
- More placement options for children in care
- More longer-term successful placements
- Increased connection with family
- More children and youth attending and performing well at school
- More youth attending post-secondary education
- Better access to mental health services
- Children and youth demonstrating pro-social behaviours
- Other

4.2 General questions

- a) When it comes to supporting children and youth in our care, and with particular attention to placements, what are we already doing well and should continue?

- b) How can we build on these assets to create desired change?
- c) What models are working elsewhere? What can we learn/adopt from these models?
- d) What are some opportunities to enhance partnerships between Departments?
- e) What data would you like to see made available to the public (e.g. Social Development website)?

4.3. Exploring the recommendations

Foster Homes:

- a) Children placed in family settings have better outcomes. What can we do to develop/establish/support more family-based child placement resources? What is needed for children to be successful in family-based placements?

Professional Care Homes:

- a) There is evidence to support the effectiveness of Professional Care Homes. For children with complex needs, an initiative for Professional Care Home resources will provide a skilled and trained caregiver in a family-based environment to care for children struggling with serious behavioural and emotional concerns. What is good about this idea? What might not work? What needs to be considered?

5.0 Next Steps

Following the completion of this first level, targeted stakeholder engagement, the Department will finalize recommendations for the implementation of key initiatives early in the 2020-2021 fiscal year. In parallel, the Department is leading an ongoing review of the child welfare provisions of the *Family Services Act*. This will include broader public engagement in Spring 2020 which is another opportunity for partners to provide feedback in relation to child and youth welfare.

The recommendations developed from this engagement process will be mapped against others resulting from the Audit, the Youth in Care Hearings recommendations, the Savoury Report and the public online survey to review the provisions of *Family Services Act*. These actions, recommendations and priorities will be integrated to form one comprehensive and collaboration action plan for the future of the children and youth in care in New Brunswick.

Appendix C

Stakeholder Session – Child Welfare Legislation Changes

Stakeholder
Child Welfare Stakeholders - Thursday, November 19, 2020 @ Hanwell Community Centre
Ability New Brunswick
Child and Youth Advocate
NB Adoption Foundation
NBDEN
NB Foster Family Association
NB Association of Social Workers
Partners for Youth
Safe Harbour House
STU Social Work
UdeM Social Work
Mi'gmaq First Nations - Monday, November 23, 2020 @ Rodd Miramichi
Elder - Miramichi session
Esgenoopetjt Child and Family Services
Esgenoopetjt Child and Family Services
Esgenoopetjt Child and Family Services
Eel River Bar Child and Family Services
Eel River Bar Child and Family Services
Mi'gmaq Child & Family Services of NB Inc.
Wolastoqey First Nations - Tuesday, November 24, 2020 @ Crowne Plaza Fredericton
St. Mary's Child & Family Services
St. Mary's Child & Family Services
Oromocto Child and Family Services
Oromocto Child and Family Services
Woodstock Child and Family Services
Woodstock Child and Family Services
Woodstock Child and Family Services
First Nations Organizations - Wednesday, November 25, 2020 @ Crowne Plaza Fredericton
New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council
New Brunswick Aboriginal Peoples Council
In addition: The following GNB Departments were consulted
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Justice and Attorney General • Aboriginal Affairs • EECD • Health • Public Safety • Public Health.