

ALIGN Calgary Chapter Submission to the Child Intervention Review Panel

The ALIGN Association of Community Services is a unified community of agencies that represent the diverse needs of Alberta's children and families and advocates for the causes and issues that directly affect our member agencies and the people we serve.

The Calgary Chapter of ALIGN currently includes 40 member organizations serving children and families in Calgary and surrounding communities. On behalf of the ALIGN Calgary Chapter, we would like to share with the Panel feedback that was received from our member agencies related to the current Child Intervention system. Agencies were asked to give feedback in the spring of 2017 and this information was collated and summarized into 5 separate submissions. The themes that emerged include:

1. Working Relationships and Collaboration
2. The Practice of Child Intervention Work
3. Funding Community Agency Services: a Sector in Crisis
4. Responding to the Needs of Indigenous Families
5. Ensuring Quality Services for Vulnerable Children and Youth

We thank you for reviewing this submission and taking the information into consideration as you formulate recommendations to improve our Child Intervention system.

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Co-Chairs of the Calgary Chapter of ALIGN

Submission #1 -Working Relationships & Collaboration

Introduction

The Calgary Chapter of Align has reviewed agencies experience with the current relationship between Children's Services and the agencies contracted to offer services to children and families. Overall there is an acknowledgment that even though there continues to be systemic challenges and struggles there has been a significant shift over the past five years to collaborate more with contracted agencies. This was clearly identified at a senior leadership and at a ministry level. An attempt to reach out, support new initiatives, and attention to new models and shifts in practice has not gone unnoticed. A view by Children's Services that agencies are essential in the work of improving "well-being" for children and families has been an important shift and has helped evolve the practice of child-protection from a narrow safety focus to a focus on well being and reducing the number of children coming into care. Models such as Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD), Signs of Safety, Caregiver Support, and Trauma informed care are examples of collaborations that have been created and implemented throughout the province and is fundamentally changing the work of Child Protection.

This review of agency experience also identified several areas that need attention and are current challenges that impact negatively children and families and the agencies that are serving them.

Current Concerns:

- There is no identified formal process to address concerns about a Caseworker or how to resolve conflict at a systemic level and/or from the agency perspective at the child and family level.
- Collaboration at a front line level continues to be a struggle. The experience and the role of agency staff with children and families is often not acknowledged and not included in the decision making or in the assessment and intervention process.
- Children's Services does not consistently acknowledge or appreciate the expertise and knowledge of agencies currently serving children and families. This at times involves prescribing best practices without consulting with agencies and reflects a lack of recognition for agency expertise.
- Heavy administrative expectations prescribed by Children's Services is not acknowledged or financially supported and impacts direct care.
- Agencies adhere to accreditation standards that require time and resources and this is not always supported or acknowledged both at a practice or contract level.
- The agency investigation process (e.g. PRAT) is often experienced by agencies as intrusive, disrespectful, and non-collaborative. Most of the concerns addressed through this process could be resolved in a more collaborative way.
- There appears to be some inconsistencies across the Province related to practice, for example in the implementation of Collaborative Service Delivery (CSD) that is concerning to agencies.

Recommendations:

1. Honour good work more often and encourage creative initiatives.
2. Take a more accepting stance towards unanticipated or undesired results and encourage learning from these.
3. Promote the attitude that we are all working together towards common goals, and not the perspective that the nonprofit sector works for Children's Services. The challenge is to embrace our partnership and truly give up the "shame and blame" culture. This shift in belief would lead to true collaboration and working together to best serve children and families.