

Child Intervention Panel Submission

Submitted by ALIGN: Partners in Child Intervention

ALIGN Association of Community Services is a membership association of diverse agencies providing services to children and families in Alberta. ALIGN (formerly Alberta Association for Services to Children and Families AASCF) formed in 1967 as a network of agencies with common interests. During that time, we championed the development of standards dedicated to residential and community childcare; influenced social policy and legislation; and advocated on behalf of service providers. It should be noted that all of the agencies that started the movement 50 years ago, still remain in one form or another and still provide services to Child Intervention. ALIGN agencies form a crucial sector of services that play a key partnership role in Child Intervention in Alberta.

ALIGN Objects:

- To serve as a community of agencies respecting the diverse needs of Alberta's children, youth, individuals and families.
- To act as a collective voice advocating for the rights, causes and issues that directly affect our members and Alberta's children, youth, individuals and families.
- To support excellence in service delivery through shared diverse knowledge, wisdom and evolving practice.
- To Influence and collaborate with government in the development of legislation, policy, and procedures.

Through our oral presentation we highlighted some of the advocacy, professional development; policy and procedure development; and our collaborative relationship with government in the child intervention area.

Who are we?

We have 120+ member agencies, individuals, other associations and learning institutions. The majority are agencies that contract to Children Services (and other

ministries) to provide services to children and families. ALIGN agencies represent about 80% of the contracts Children's Services holds for Child Intervention services. In 2016, the agencies estimated that they served about 202,013 children, or families per year.

As a workforce, we estimate there are 10,000 employees in the early intervention to child intervention service delivery.

Child Intervention includes a range of services (for example, family-based services, child protection, out-of-home placements, and adoption services) encompassing prevention, intervention, and treatment. Services are intended to protect children and support their well-being, strengthen families, and provide permanency when children cannot safely remain with their families. Child Intervention services should be strength based; family centered; trauma informed; and respectful of a family's culture, values, customs, beliefs, and needs.

In Alberta, most of the direct services provided to children and families that support their ongoing safety, care, and wellness are provided by agencies. Once a caseworker/assessor has completed their assessment the plan most often includes agency services. In some areas of the province this includes intensive services through an OBSD/CSD lens, or in others through a specialized arrangement or a menu of services that are offered.

Contracted agencies must maintain independent accreditation as a requirement of the Ministry for Child Intervention services. There are specific accrediting bodies that are approved for the agencies to use. In all cases there is a comprehensive set of standards that the agencies are required to maintain as it relates to human services. These agencies are reviewed regularly.

To enhance the Child Intervention system, we believe there needs to be changes in approach in the following areas:

- Reforming funding models to include more flexible funding and amounts that are equal to the actual cost of care, and including wage allocations so staff receive a fair livable wage;
- Fuller and further implementation of community and collaborative service delivery;
- Subsidized and supported kinship and guardianship;
- Advancement of post care services, beyond financial;
- Trauma- informed and evidence- based supported practice for both the contracted providers and the ministry staff;
- A broader, more inclusive look at poverty, homelessness, mental health services for youth;
- It seems that while leadership at the Ministry and senior leaders within regions often are able to understand collaborative practice, and are engaged in discussions and planning for change, the front line workers often don't understand the rationale and struggle with collaboration with other service providers. This often leads to conflict and misunderstanding. It is a workplace culture that has struggled to change;
- Ongoing indigenization of the system; and
- Recognition of Indigenous and provincial economic factors.

For the contracted sector, the top recommendations to change the current system are:

- **A clear, flexible, well funded procurement process.** Recommendations have been made. Services want to be able to produce good outcomes for families, cover operating costs, regular costs of living and stable livable wages for the staff that provide the services. This will equal a viable healthy workforce that can sustain the challenges of this work and meet the wellbeing and safety needs of children and families alongside the Ministry staff. Areas of priority that need to be reviewed are the relationship between contractors and the Ministry (what is the nature of the relationship: partnership vs employee) and determining full cost funding.

- **Collaborative service delivery** - Service providers must be part of the plan. They can often wrap services around a family or child. Outcome Based Service Delivery (OBSD) is a good example, but other service models will work, but they must be collaborative, share authority, and allow the agencies to use their expertise. They are not and should not just be a menu of services. They need to be part of the planning. This requires respect and trust on all sides to provide the best services possible, including all perspectives. Service providers can and will ensure the well-being of those involved, based on the following:
 - Family centered decision making – support workers in both agencies and the ministry to offer and use tools such as family group conferencing, circle process, family finding, and shared services models. Both parts of the sector can, and should, be trained in these processes which can help families develop their own plans. These skill sets are not the usual approaches for child protection workers.
 - Treatment resources like treatment group care are well researched, evidence-based programs that provide superior service to young people. More recently there are requests to place children because of their complex needs. Sometimes this is not appropriate. Careful screening of placement and early planning for discharge are key and essential for these young people.
 - Provincially there should be a long term planning table that includes the agency sector that looks at all initiatives from a collaborative perspective and communicates the principles behind new initiatives and look at how collaboration is exemplified in each case.
- Young people do not grow up over night. Most young people are not ready to launch into the world at 18. In typical families, the parents most often provide both emotional and financial support well into their 20's. **Supports for youth transitioning to adulthood need to be more than just financial**, they require ongoing support as all young adults do. Foster families can work with young people into their adult years, but they still require some financial support. Often the youth is offered room and board support but the family does not receive their

skill fee or an alternative support for their work with the young person. This area needs to be reviewed and enhanced as policy supports good practice but practice in this area does not seem to be applied consistently across the province.

- If children are not able to remain with their parents then kinship should be considered. **Kinship placements need to be financially and emotionally supported.** In these cases, they are family members, so it is extra sensitive. Often the caregiver is not considered a professional at the table, and feel like they are getting told what to do. There is a system of disrespect for foster and kinship caregivers that is pervasive in the system. This has been recently discussed with ministry staff and the Foster Parent Association.
- The complexity of the young people coming into care is increasing. Sadly a neglected area of support is in **mental health services for young people in care.** Significant attention needs to be paid to this area to increase the health of young people and to prevent even more serious mental illness in adulthood. Treatment group care or residential care is the only option for complex young people with mental health problems. They need to have community support when they need it and that is easily accessible. In Alberta, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children Services need to work together to better this area of concern.

Many of our members have sent in other suggestions to the panel. We collectively thank you for taking the time to review our submission and hope we are helpful in your deliberations. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.