

Child Review Panel Submission by Kathleen Kufeldt, MSW, PhD June 9, 2017

TO: Hon. Ric McIver, MLA,

Member, Alberta Child Intervention Panel

Dear Ric,

As you will note from the attachment, I have had a long and fruitful career devoted to the welfare of children. I would like the panel to consider that the well-being of children who come to the attention of child protection services is highly dependent on the quality of front line services. The protection of children, including the decision whether or not to remove a child, is a complex and demanding task that one would expect to be in the hands of specialists. Sadly this is not the case. Data from the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect have documented that approximately 60% of workers surveyed had less than four years experience and roughly half of these had less than two years. More than one-third did not have the professional social work degree (Fallon, MacLaurin, Trocmé & Golden, 2011). Kendrick (1990) gave a similar message. Henton & Kleiss (2014) reported that 50% of the Alberta workers have two years' experience or less and many do not have social work credentials. We expect specialist care for complex health needs. Vulnerable children deserve a similar quality of care.

Sadly the documented outcomes for too many children receiving services show that the quality of life they receive is not what we would wish for our own children. Various studies have documented disruptions and discontinuities: changes of social worker, of foster homes and schools with consequent adverse effects on educational outcomes (Gilligan, 2002; Kufeldt, Simard, Vachon et al. 2000; Tuff, 2012). It is an established fact that as they grow older these children are at risk of being drawn into street life and homelessness (Rees, 1993; Stein, 2008; Webber, 1991). A Calgary study discovered that 53% of homeless youth in the downtown area were from child welfare facilities (Kufeldt, & Nimmo, 1987). Discharge from care occurs in most jurisdictions at age 18, with insufficient support available (Sherlock & Culbert, 2014). Many drift back to their own family but the services themselves have been remiss in promoting family connectedness. The importance of family connections, and the lack thereof, was first highlighted in a major New York study (Fanshel & Shinn, 1978) and since reinforced by the findings in British and Canadian studies (Farmer, Moyers & Lipscombe, 2004; Kufeldt, Armstrong & Dorosh, 1989; Kufeldt, Simard & Vachon, 2002; Sen & Broadhurst, 2011; Steinhauer, 1991). It is therefore no surprise that research has documented the sad fact that graduates of the service have poorer adult outcomes than their contemporaries (Kufeldt, 2003; Mann-Feder, 2011; Pinkerton, 2002; Rutman & Hubberstey, 2011; Sherlock & Colbert, 2014; Stein, 2008). The jurisdictions charged with their protection have not yet proven themselves to be good enough parents.

I would like to offer for the attention of the panel the availability of a good proactive practice model. This is the use of the Looking After Children Assessment and Action Records. These records actually constitute guided practice that can enhance the work of even the least experienced worker. My colleagues and I carried out highly successful demonstration studies in

the 6 most Eastern provinces, with funding from the Federal Government. I am attaching reports of these studies. Should Alberta wish to adopt the model I would be willing to offer assistance in the necessary training.

With my best wishes to the panel for fruitful discussions and helpful outcomes.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Kufeldt, MSW, PhD.

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