



255 Bonnie Doon Mall
8330-82 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta T6C4E3
Phone: (780) 809-0890
Fax: (780) 428-3844
Email: cycaa@telus.net
Website: www.cycaa.com

Honourable Debbie Jabbour,
Chairperson, Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention

Dear Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention,

As the president of the Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA), I am writing you to introduce you to the profession of Child and Youth Care and the important role that Child and Youth Care Counsellors (CYCC) play in the lives of the vulnerable children, youth and families involved with Children's Services. I appreciate the opportunity to submit this information to the Child Intervention Review Panel on behalf of the approximately 3000 Child and Youth Care Counsellors in Alberta.

Child and youth care practitioners work with children, youth and families with complex needs. They can be found in a variety of settings such as group homes and residential treatment, community mental health clinics, community-based outreach and school-based programs, parent education and family support programs, as well as in private practice and juvenile justice programs. Child and youth workers specialize in the development and implementation of therapeutic programs and planned environments and the utilization of daily life events to facilitate change. At the core of all effective child and youth care practice is a focus on the therapeutic relationship; the application of theory and research about human growth and development to promote the optimal physical, psycho-social, spiritual, cognitive, and emotional development of young people towards a healthy and productive adulthood; and a focus on strengths and assets rather than pathology.

(CCCYCA as cited in Stuart, 2013, p. 6)

The Child & Youth Care Association of Alberta (CYCAA), in existence since 1970, believes that practitioners with relevant education and experience offer a higher standard of care for Alberta's children, youth and families. This provides an employer with a well-trained professional with a commitment to quality care for those being served.

The CYCAA strives to improve professional standards for all CYCC's to ensure the best quality of services for the young people and families we assist. Some CYC practitioners have a related diploma or

degree but more and more have degrees or diplomas from CYC educational programs across Canada. In Alberta, the CYCAA developed and has administered a non-mandatory certification program since 1979. The certified CYCC demonstrates an expansive knowledge in a variety of theoretical and practice frameworks. However, anyone may identify themselves as a Child and Youth Care Counsellor, without education or experience in the field. The unqualified CYCC can be a risk to vulnerable populations. These populations deserve carers with the foundational knowledge, skills and ethics of the profession.

Recently, a number of violent assaults have occurred across Canada against CYCC's causing serious bodily injuries and even a death. We know that violence is a potential fact of our work, for both the carers and those served. Providing the best quality services to individuals and families who have been hurt, and struggle to engage in effective relationships with individuals, communities, and systems, is assisted by our education and professional development programs.

The government of Ontario recently commissioned a report on residential care services (Because Young People Matter, February 2016) and the recommendations of that report can be applied as a platform for change well outside of Ontario.

The Panel is concerned that ever-increasing demands related to the claim of greater complexity of child and youth profiles in residential services, the evidence-based interventions required, and the challenges associated with navigating systems both within larger organizations and between service providers embedded in different sectors are incongruent with the current lack of regulation in terms of pre-service educational qualifications for residential staff. The evolving context of residential care service provision in all sectors demands more highly qualified staff with an in-depth understanding of the fundamental models, approaches, theories, children's rights, cultural and system contexts of residential service provision

.... The Panel firmly believes that all individuals charged with the care of children and youth in residential services must hold specific and consistent pre-service educational qualifications, preferably in the field of child and youth care, and be supported through comprehensive in-service training. (p. 10).

We believe this evolving complexity applies not only to residential care but across the gamut of services child and youth care counsellors provide. Legislation will ensure that everyone designated as a child and youth care counsellor receives training in all the above-named areas, including crisis de-escalation and personal safety. The safety of the children and youth in our care is paramount however we also have a responsibility to the people working and studying in the field. All people working with vulnerable children, youth and families must be held to the high professional standards of a legislated profession.

The Child and Youth Care Associations of Alberta and Ontario (Ontario Association of Child and Youth Care, 2015) are both currently requesting regulation of our profession through legislation (in Alberta, this would be under the Health Professions Act) to ensure that the people given

responsibility for the day-to-day care of our most vulnerable citizens are monitored and held accountable. We are asking the Panel to ensure that all people working directly with Children's Services or in contracted services and agencies be properly trained, screened and supervised. We believe one way to support this goal is to recommend to the Minister of Health that Child and Youth Care Counsellors be legislated under the Health Professions Act to improve the safety of people receiving services under the auspices of Children's Services. CYCC's work on the front-line with children, youth and families in their homes, schools, communities, treatment facilities, that is, in their life space. This would be a very concrete step that could be taken to promote a stronger child intervention system and better outcomes for those receiving services.

We thank you for allowing us to submit to the Panel and we would be honoured to present in person and/or provide any further information. While I can be reached through our Association offices, I can also be reached directly at (780) 914-3276 or chedlin@shaw.ca.

Sincerely,

Catherine Hedlin, BA, MPM, Certified CYCC
President, Board of Directors,
Child and Youth Care Association of Alberta

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