



CIAFV's Submission to Child Intervention Panel
June 11, 2017

Community Initiative Against Family Violence (CIAFV) is a network of close to forty not-for-profit agencies and both Provincial and Municipal government departments. CIAFV is committed to strengthening community's capacity to take constructive action against family violence and bullying by using innovative strategies that support the creation of a collaborative, coordinated, community response to family violence and bullying.

The following is CIAFV's submission to the Child Intervention panel for consideration. Members of the Leadership Team would be pleased to meet with the Panel to further discuss the contents of their submission.

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What leads a child or family to become involved in the child intervention system?

Children or families may become involved in the child intervention system if their primary caregiver is experiencing mental health concerns, addiction issues, extreme poverty or family violence. In many cases, the presence of several of the issues for primary caregivers exist. Human Services reports the main reasons for child intervention involvement are neglect and exposure to family violence (Child Intervention System Fact Sheet, 2014).

Family violence encompasses physical, emotional, financial and sexual abuse and occurs across all demographics (Statistics Canada, 2015). Although difficult to measure, incidences are monitored using both police reported statistics and victimization surveys. In self-report data collected between 2004 and 2009, 6% of the Canadian adult population reported having been a victim of family violence (2011). In 2015, there were over 86, 000 victims of violence, accounting for 26% of all victims of police-reported violent crime (Statistics Canada, 2015).

Females continue to account for the majority of victims and in many cases are unlikely to report the abuse to police (Statistics Canada, 2015). In 2015, 53, 500 child and youth victims were reported in Canada. The majority of these victims (58%) were victimized by a parent (2015). The need for safety and security for the victimized spouse and their children is essential. Children or adolescents exposed to incidences of violence, threatening behaviour or abuse between adults who are, or have been family members or intimate partners is a form of child maltreatment, and is associated with various negative behavioural problems and psychological, social and emotional risks (Wathen & MacMillan 2013).

In addition to issues related to violence, close to 70% of children and youth who received services in Care are Indigenous (2016). In contrast, Indigenous children make up approximately 10% of the child population in Alberta, speaking to the

overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care (Child Intervention Information and Statistics Summary Update, 2016). More troubling is that First nations children are 30 times more likely to be involved with the Child Intervention system and they come into care more often, stay longer and are less likely to be returned to their family members (OCYA, 2016). The increased representation of Indigenous children and families involved are often larger systemic issues stemming from history of residential schooling, loss of culture and identity and more current issues related to poverty, substance use and family violence (OCYA, 2016). The issues and their related results of overrepresentation demonstrate the gross lack of effective supports for Indigenous families by the Child Intervention system (OCYA, 2016).

What can be done so that families do not need to become involved in the child intervention system?

Improve Levels of Funding for Prevention and Early Intervention:

Short-term early intervention services and community services such as counselling and parenting classes can help to create a stable home environment. In March 2016, there were almost 5,000 families accessing supports for Permanency (SFP) programs, which is a 6% increase from 2014/2015 (Child Intervention Information and Statistics Summary Update, 2016). Supports for Permanency programs help to build capacity in caregivers to return to providing permanent care for their children.

Community programs help to address challenges and barriers that may contribute to an unstable home environment. Community programs help to prevent involvement with the child intervention system. Approximately 85% of situations that come to the attention of Human Services can be assisted without the need of opening a child intervention file; that is, through early intervention and prevention (Child Intervention System Fact Sheet, 2014). By providing long term and free assistance in essential areas such as housing, transportation, counselling, advocacy, employment and safety planning, CIAFV member agencies provide critical services to families experiencing family violence. The provision of services greatly increases the opportunities for families experiencing abuse to move forward into safer, healthier lives.

Promote a Collaborative Service Delivery Model

Promoting collaborative service delivery allows for greater family input and better communication among and between service providers. This ultimately provides a higher quality service that is more comprehensive and better tailored to the individual family needs. Bringing all relevant service providers, stakeholders and experts together in-Service Team Meetings with the family results in comprehensive and effective supports to assist families in crisis. In particular, collaboration with Indigenous and newcomer communities would help to strengthen relationships and likely decrease the incidences of interaction with the Child Intervention system.

As a CIAFV member recognizes, “collaborative Service Delivery is allowing for greater family input and communication among service providers. Families are seen as

experts of their own experiences which is a positive shift.”

Funding is needed for Not-for-Profit organizations to attend collaborative meetings.

Enhance Communication and Strengthen Connections

In some instances of crisis, there can be a lack of communication between important parties involved with families. For instance, criminal court and family law may provide differing information to families, such as when an Emergency Protection Order conflicts with a Parenting Order.

Assumptions may be made by some that if the courts are involved, Children Services does not need to be, or if Children Services are involved, the courts do not need to be. When Children Services and the courts work collaboratively to ensure supports are available for the children and families, then no one “falls through the cracks” and are supported by both Children Services or the courts in their crisis situation.

A CIAFV Leadership Team Member offers the following:

“Work with victims, often we hear CFS workers tell the victims to get an EPO or parenting order or they will become more intrusive with the family. No supporting documents are given to the victims from the CFS worker to help the victims/mother support her claims of children abuse/protection concerns. These child abuse/protection concerns are shared concerns from the CFS worker and the reasons why a file was originally opened with CFS. CFS will often cite that they do not get involved in custody battles and their supervisor will not allow them to provide such documentation, but if a parenting order or EPO does not go in favour of the victim/mother CFS will state that she is not protecting her children.”

Another CIAFV leadership team member stated that:

“When Children’s Services works collaboratively with Domestic Violence providers especially Second Stage Shelters who really understand how the whole family is functioning, safety and the impacts of violence on the woman and children. This causes less confusion for the family.” And, “Some individual Caseworkers and Managers have been very open and willing to hear concerns related to family violence and safety. Willing to work with community agencies.”

Similarly, there should be increased communication and sensitivity to developing relationships with Indigenous communities to address the overrepresentation of Indigenous families involved with the system (OCYA, 2016). Strengthened community relationships would help to address the systemic issues involved in the overrepresentation of Indigenous Children in care and would allow for children to be reunited with their families with increased frequency and confidence.

What other programs or services could make a difference or help children and families that are involved with the child intervention system?

Enhanced Training for Child Intervention Workers:

When child intervention workers understand the dynamics of family violence, and have deeper comprehension and training in dealing with cases that involve violence, a better, more comprehensive “wrap around” support is available to the victims and families. Child intervention workers and contract workers all need enhanced training in domestic violence.

A CIAFV member notes,

“On the rare occasion that we have worked with a CI worker that understands the dynamics of domestic violence, we are able to provide exceptional wrap around support to the person and their family. Some Signs of Safety staff, working collaboratively with all people involved in a case to assess and plan for increasing safety and reducing risk and danger by focusing on a family’s strengths, resources and networks intersect with the community.”

In addition to training related to violence, training for child intervention workers should also focus on Indigenous issues. Part of starting to improve the system is to increase awareness and training opportunities for staff to understand the complex trauma and historical lack of supports that have led to the current state of overrepresentation, increased length of stay and reduced reunification with families as a result of being of Indigenous heritage.

As a CIAFV member states, *“Indigenous Domestic Violence requires a unique intervention that speaks to complex trauma and intergenerational trauma. Support needs to be provided to programs that focus on these areas.”*

If there are things you can suggest to improve the child intervention system, what would that be?

Offer longer term follow up and more comprehensive supports

Children Services can enhance their follow up with cases involving family violence. When a family is receiving services and supports through Community Services, Children Services may close the file. It is CIAFV’s belief that the file should remain open as to not leave the children unsupported and unchecked by the system, and to provide any long-term or ongoing services.

A CIAFV member notes:

“CS is closing files with FV concerns too quickly; they see the victim get help through community services, so close the file rather than remain involved. Children could be left unsupported and unchecked by the system.”

More comprehensive supports in special circumstances are also required. When a case involving family violence also involves custody, such as in custody disputes, Children Services has a role to play in reaching out and supporting the children involved. In addition, there should be a quicker response time that is ensured for newcomers to Canada or refugee families who are experiencing family violence. Being in a new country, experiencing a crisis situation only amplifies the feelings of isolation and loneliness amongst families. By providing comprehensive supports to specialty groups who require it, Children's Services would fill a current gap. In addition, focused long-term supports that assist Indigenous children and their families would mutually benefit the system and the family unit. In particular, supports that are focused on understanding the effects of trauma, awareness of the gaps in the Child Intervention system for Indigenous families and the staunch overrepresentation of Indigenous children in care would help to create supports that would decrease the frequency to which Indigenous families access the system, reduce their length of stay in the system and return children to their family units.

Do you have any final advice for the panel as they work to develop recommendations?

CIAFV recommends the panel to consider the following:

- ❖ Offer enhanced education and training on domestic violence for front-line Child Intervention and contract workers; including a specific focus surrounding domestic violence in Indigenous families and communities;
- ❖ Appoint additional internal Domestic Violence Liaison Workers to support Child Intervention workers and the community;
- ❖ Allocate additional funding for Not-for-Profit organizations to attend collaborative meetings;
- ❖ Match Children Services boundaries with Edmonton Police Services boundaries;
- ❖ When there are protection concerns, help the parent with the applications. Keep the file open when the Emergency Protection Order is issued and as long as there are protection orders;
- ❖ Work to improve communication with families throughout their experience with Children Services;
- ❖ Enhance collaboration protocols between criminal court and family law, as well as between Children Services and the court system; and,
- ❖ Include longer term follow up from Children Services when supporting children of family violence.

References

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