



REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH

**Update:**  
**System of Services for Children  
and Youth with Special Needs**

**November 26, 2008**



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### **Introduction**

All children deserve equal access to the same programs, supports, opportunities and hopeful futures. A measure of a strong society is the support it provides for children and youth who are vulnerable, whether by virtue of their circumstances of birth, or where or how they are raised. Equal opportunities must especially be a reality for children and youth with special needs, and their families.

Whether the term 'special needs' refers to the limitations that a child may be experiencing, complex health needs, cognitive or developmental disabilities, or the services or care that a child needs to support his or her development, one fact remains – the term embraces a diverse set of individuals that have rights to education, health, safety and well-being and to be equal and respected members of society.

Ongoing reviews of the services and supports provided to these children, youth and their families is part of the Representative for Children and Youth's mandate. This includes a focus on supporting and encouraging government and service providers to continue to work toward developing the best possible system of support for children and youth with special needs. Monitoring the effectiveness of programs and services and their responsiveness to current circumstances, and examining if these services provide positive developmental opportunities for children and youth with special needs are matters of ongoing concern. As well, ongoing evaluation of the system itself will help ensure it is constantly improving, and that supports for these children and youth are being strengthened.

### **Background**

On February 26, 2008 the Representative for Children and Youth (RCY) released a report looking at the support system for children and youth with special needs. The report was called "*Monitoring Brief: System of Services for Children and Youth with Special Needs.*" It examined how the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and Community Living BC (CLBC) delivered services to children and youth with special needs. The report identified a number of areas of concern. Of particular concern was that services were complex and fragmented, that some children were excluded from services due to eligibility criteria not based on children's functional needs, and that wait times were problematic. The report provided 12 recommendations to strengthen the responsiveness and accountability of the system.



On June 12, 2008, MCFD and CLBC provided a report to the Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth on activities achieved and planned for improving services to children and youth with special needs. On June 23, 2008, the B.C. government announced changes in ministry responsibilities and a transfer of services for children and youth with special needs and/or disabilities, from CLBC to MCFD.

Because the Representative's previous report looked at responsiveness and accountability of services between MCFD and CLBC, some recommendations of that earlier report will be addressed by the transfer of services to MCFD. Recommendations relating to other areas of concern will have to be re-assessed once the transfer is complete.

## Current Status

The Representative recognizes MCFD's commitment to some of the recommendations and the work done to move forward on a number of short-term and longer-term objectives. It is positive to note that MCFD did accept the recommendations and commit to them, but work has progressed slowly. Of particular concern is the length of time for the transfer of children's services from CLBC to MCFD, which has recently been pushed back to October 2009.

While this transfer holds promise for improving services to children and youth with special needs by reducing fragmentation of services, the framework for the transfer to MCFD was not in place at the time of government's announcement of the move. The Representative advocated a process of external evaluation of CLBC prior to a decision being taken, and is concerned that returning these services to MCFD will not improve service responsiveness and effectiveness in the areas of concern identified in February 2008, as an evaluation of effectiveness and responsiveness has not been conducted.

During the summer of 2008, eligibility for services within CLBC was changed through an order-in-council, which limited the definition of eligible individuals under the *Community Living Authority Act*. This was to be a temporary measure until a better definition could be developed, or a functional assessment framework completed. Eight months since the last report, these issues remain outstanding.

The Representative respectfully suggests to MCFD that the RCY recommendations in her February 2008 report be a building block on which to base their transition planning so these matters will not be lost in transition.

In addition, the ministry had committed to make short-term improvements by September 2008 on some recommendations. On those, a ministry progress update will be requested by January 1, 2009 (in conjunction with the validation and approval of regional transition plans), to enable the Representative to evaluate progress further in Summer 2009.



MCFD and CLBC have stated that their top priority is to ensure the smooth transition of children and youth with special needs services to MCFD. Activities identified by MCFD and CLBC to address the issues raised by the Representative's earlier report have either been subsumed into transition activities, or halted completely pending finalization of the service delivery design. MCFD and CLBC are taking a "phased approach" to the transfer with the intent of moving responsibility for decision-making, service delivery and financial matters to MCFD by October 2009. During the transition stage, services remain status quo to minimize impacts to children, youth and their families. Eligibility decisions will continue to be based on the current criteria during this process.

The Representative notes that MCFD is working on new plans for children and youth, as articulated in their *Strong, Safe and Supported* document, and in a cross-ministry Framework for Action relating to special needs. These planning activities present some important positive developments. However, it is not clear to the Representative if they are supported by appropriate resources, research and planning for realistic implementation in the near future. In the meantime, work must continue to improve the system of supports for children and youth with special needs in British Columbia.

While there has been no apparent disruption in service during the planning process, the uncertainty is causing anxiety and confusion. This is generating numerous information requests to all agencies involved, and may present a barrier to service. For example, information documents on MCFD's website for parents and caregivers state they should expect waits. How those waits are being currently managed or what planning is underway to improve access is not clear since the RCY's February 2008 report.

Eligibility for services remains a concern for children and youth, particularly during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. The Representative brought a significant number of files to the attention of the Ministry for Housing and Social Development where adolescents served under the child-serving system had their services discontinued in adulthood. The Representative is particularly concerned for adolescents out of the parental home who lose eligibility for supports and do not have the capacity or support to apply for "voluntary" adult services. The Representative has suggested that special outreach efforts be made to connect these young adults to supports. She has received assurance that these efforts will be made but cannot provide any further update at this time.

## **Outstanding Action Items**

The Representative's February 2008 report made recommendations on a number of items, as requiring short- or long-term action. Their progress is evaluated in the following table. The Representative will continue to monitor these recommendations and provide future updates.



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<b>Short-Term:</b> Recommended completion September 2008	<b>Long-Term:</b> Recommended completion March 2010	<b>November 2008 Status Update</b>
<p>Families and caregivers can readily obtain information on any aspect of the service delivery system for children and youth with special needs, regardless of point of contact.</p>	<p>Families and caregivers can readily understand and navigate the system of services.</p>	<p><b>Planning underway for a new system, no improvements to current system</b></p> <p>Due to the transfer of services from CLBC to MCFD, a cross-ministry website that was ready for release in late Summer 2008 was halted. A new interactive website for families to help navigate the service delivery system is currently being planned.</p> <p>MCFD is currently working with the Ministry of Health and government to align their needs for a toll-free line with other health and government information requirements.</p> <p>MCFD has also contracted with the BC Association for Child Development and Intervention to map all services available for children and youth with special needs. This mapping project will help inform the website and toll-free line. It may also include some modelling of more effective approaches.</p>
<p>Aboriginal communities are aware of and involved in the planning and delivery of services to Aboriginal children and youth with special needs.</p>	<p>Aboriginal children and youth have access to the same range and level of services as other children in B.C.</p>	<p><b>Limited progress</b></p> <p>MCFD continues to support Aboriginal Infant Development and Aboriginal Supported Child Development service delivery capacity via professional development funding.</p> <p>A symposium was held in April 2008 that focused on Aboriginal children and youth with special needs and included service providers from all over the province.</p> <p>The regions will involve Aboriginal Planning Tables, which consist of representatives from the Aboriginal child-serving communities, as a component of regional transition planning to ensure Aboriginal perspectives are included in the development of regional service delivery structures for Aboriginal children and youth with special needs.</p>
<p>Families and caregivers receive support when needed to plan, implement and manage services and supports to their children over time.</p>		<p><b>Limited progress</b></p> <p>CLBC has further defined the role of Facilitator as a case manager, when needed, to support parents in managing the array of services available to their children and youth with special needs.</p>



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<p>Services to children and youth with special needs serves children and youth from birth to age 24.</p>		<p><b>Planning underway</b></p> <p>Government has convened a group of experts and members from the disability community to consider how to best provide services for adults who do not meet the existing CLBC criteria. The outcome of this process will affect service eligibility for youth with special needs who are transitioning to adulthood.</p> <p>MCFD and CLBC are in the process of creating a Youth Transition Protocol to ensure that effective planning takes place to support youth with special needs to transition to adulthood. The protocol will clarify scope, identify principles, describe services to be provided and identify the obligations of each party. The protocol is expected to be completed prior to October 2009.</p>
<p>Eligibility for children and youth services is child development centred and based on functioning.</p>		<p><b>Initial planning underway</b></p> <p>MCFD has stated that eligibility for services to children and youth with special needs will not be based solely on a diagnosis and that a functional approach will be implemented once a comprehensive approach is finalized. MCFD is currently undertaking the following activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Compiling an inventory of all program areas and current eligibility criteria and assessing the various functional needs of child, youth and families throughout the continuum of services.</li> <li>• Conducting jurisdictional review and best practice research regarding different methods to functional needs assessment.</li> <li>• Working in collaboration with other organizations to ensure MCFD's functional approach to eligibility will be consistent with all special needs serving ministries.</li> </ul> <p>There is no indicated timeline for when a new eligibility model will be announced.</p>
	<p>Collection and measurement of wait-time data is consistent and standardized across MCFD and CLBC services and supports.</p>	<p><b>No progress</b></p> <p>MCFD has identified that it will make a determination on the policy and use of tools to support wait-list management as part of the transfer process. In anticipation of the implementation of the Integrated Case Management system for spring 2010, MCFD will continue to refine and utilize existing tools to support the collection and measurement of wait-time data.</p> <p>The RCY's February 2008 report identified a lack of data regarding wait times in the province and concerns around existing wait times. Since June 2008, there has been no evidence of new activity by MCFD to address these.</p>



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	Wait times for services are consistent with evidence-based wait times for services to children and youth with special needs.	<b>Limited progress</b>  As part of the Children and Youth with Special Needs (CYSN) Framework for Action, a review of wait times in other jurisdictions was conducted. A consultation with service providers with respect to common definitions and approaches has been identified as a next step.
Access to services is not delayed or disrupted by disputes regarding mandates or jurisdictions.		<b>Implementation underway</b>  CLBC and MCFD have updated their Children's Field Service Protocol to implement the inclusion of a Child First principle to ensure that when the two organizations do not agree, the immediate needs of the child are met while the two agencies resolve issues of roles and responsibilities.
Strategic and operational roles, responsibilities, relationships and accountabilities for services for children and youth with special needs are clearly articulated and documented publicly.	Services for children and youth with special needs have a strong quality assurance process that includes auditing against standards, ongoing monitoring and evaluation.	<b>No progress</b>  While many service providers are accredited, there is no ongoing evaluation of the services delivered or monitoring of specific outcomes for children, youth and their caregivers receiving those services. Evaluation of services and programs does not occur in a consistent way.
	Public accountability and reporting include number of children served, how they are served, at what cost, and with what outcome.	<b>Planning underway</b>  As part of the development of a new CYSN Framework for Action, a cross-jurisdictional review of outcomes and indicators across all sectors (i.e. health, education, children and youth with special needs) has been completed, but not released to the public or put into active policy.  A two-day workshop is scheduled for the end of November / beginning of December to identify a short-list of indicators and outcomes for the province that would take into consideration the data currently collected by the different sectors.
	Integrated decision support tools enable case coordination across organizations and capture CYSN data to support contract management, service utilization, effectiveness and wait-times management.	<b>Planning underway</b>  MCFD is developing new integrated decision support tools and intends to have an Integrated Case Management system operational for Spring 2010.



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