

Caught in the Middle

RCY Annual Review Year 3

Summary: Key improvements are required both within British Columbia and at the national level to ensure that vulnerable children who move between provinces and territories are kept safe and receive appropriate services. *Caught in the Middle* is an investigative report examining the factors that led to the overdose death of a 17-year-old boy with complex needs who spent time in the child-serving systems of both B.C. and Alberta and was moved more than 40 times while in government care. The report recommends that B.C.'s Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) take a leadership role in bringing about changes to the Interprovincial Protocol that guides the provision of services and supports to children moving between provinces and territories. It also recommends that MCFD strengthen its own oversight of such "interprovincial children" to ensure they receive timely and suitable services.

The Representative notes that three of the six recommendations made in this report have been completed by the third update and acknowledges the efforts MCFD has made in bringing forward recommended changes to the Interprovincial Protocol on placements, funding an Interprovincial Coordinator position within MCFD, creating provincial practice guidelines and implementing a comprehensive online training model to support these changes.

The Representative acknowledges that MCFD has continued to show progress in the development and implementation of Trauma Informed Practice (TIP) resources, in the ongoing development of the Specialized Homes and Support Services (SHSS) Transformation, and in its preliminary cross-ministry collaboration on designing and implementing consistency in data standards. In keeping with the findings from *Advocating for Change*, delays in these recommendations appear to be associated with delays with the ministry's strategic frameworks implementation and limited or partial response to the Representative's recommendations. Given the lack of progress in resourcing and data stewardship, well beyond the timelines called for by the Representative, the office will continue monitoring MCFD's progress toward meeting the recommendations in this report, beyond the three-year monitoring period.

RCY Assessment Definitions:

- **Complete** = All activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete
- **Substantial Progress** = Most of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete
- **Some Progress** = Some of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete
- **No Progress** = None of the activities that directly support the implementation of the recommendation are complete (pre-planning may be underway but there has been no progress in formal planning or implementation).

Date Published: March 11, 2024

Recommendation	
#1	That the Ministry of Children and Family Development bring forward to the next review of the Protocol by the Directors of Child Welfare recommendations to address shortcomings. These include the addition of cultural planning to the Protocol; clarification that when a child arrives from another province or territory without notice, the dispute resolution process may be triggered; clarification about delegation of guardianship responsibilities; and an amendment to Interprovincial Agreement forms to allow for detail regarding financial expenditures and payment mechanisms.
Ministry's Response	RCY Assessment
Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020	Year 1 Assessment
<p>MCFD to initiate a request to the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare to review and amend the Protocol.</p> <p>MCFD to formally recommend that the Protocol be reviewed and amended to address the concerns from the report.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>In January 2020, the Deputy Director of Child Welfare wrote a letter to the Director of Child and Youth Services in New Brunswick requesting that the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare Committee review the report, consider the recommendation, and revise the Protocol as necessary to address the concerns in the report.</p> <p>Update in February 2024: Although MCFD initiated the request in accordance with the recommendation, the Provincial and Territorial Directors of Child Welfare have yet to revise the protocol as was intended.</p>
Year 2 Evidence – N/A	Year 2 Assessment
No new evidence. Assessed as complete in year 1.	<p>Complete</p> <p>Assessed as complete in year 1.</p>
Year 3 Evidence – N/A	Year 3 Assessment
No new evidence. Assessed as complete in year 1.	<p>Complete</p> <p>Assessed as complete in year 1.</p>

Recommendation	
#2	<p>That the Ministry of Children and Family Development fully dedicate an Interprovincial Coordinator who will work together with an adequately resourced network of regional analysts to support, track and monitor interprovincial cases.</p> <p>MCFD to put this network in place by December 2020.</p>
Ministry's Response	RCY Assessment
Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020	Year 1 Assessment
<p>MCFD anticipated this recommendation and hired an Interprovincial Corrdinator in September 2019.</p> <p>MCFD is dedicated to developing a tracking system for all Interprovincial Agreements.</p> <p>MCFD plans to establish monthly Interprovincial Community of Practice meetings in order to foster collaboration with the Interprovincial Coordinator and Provincial Practice Consultants and Practice Analysts to support, track and monitor interprovincial cases.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD has created and filled the Interprovincial Coordinator position.</p> <p>MCFD has established monthly Interprovincial Community of Practice meetings.</p> <p>To be completed: MCFD continues to work on creating a tracking system for all Interprovincial Agreement.</p>
Year 2 Evidence – Received June 2022	Year 2 Assessment
<p>MCFD has created and launched an Interprovincial Agreement Applet where all Interprovincial Agreements are tracked.</p> <p>In addition to tracking via the Integrated Care Management system, in the short term the Interprovincial Coordinator will continue to track interprovincial cases manually through the change management process.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>Assessed as complete.</p>

Year 3 Evidence – N/A	Year 3 Assessment
No new evidence. Assessed as complete in year 2.	<p>Complete</p> <p>Assessed as complete in year 2.</p>

Recommendation	
#3	<p>That the Ministry of Children and Family Development create provincial practice guidelines or policies for interprovincial cases and develop an online training course that is required for staff who work on interprovincial cases.</p> <p>MCFD to complete this work by December 2020.</p>
Ministry’s Response	RCY Assessment
Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020	Year 1 Assessment
<p>Rather than create new practice guidelines or policies, MCFD plans to enhance and adapt their current guidelines for interprovincial and interterritorial case practice.</p> <p>MCFD is in the process of creating a series of training materials and resources that focus on Interprovincial Placement Agreements (IPPA). They are also in the process of creating training and information about the Interprovincial Coordinator (IPC) role. There is no indication that any of this training would be required for staff.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD has created two information sheets on the Interprovincial Coordinator role – one for Service Delivery Area team leaders and staff, and one for Indigenous Child and Family Service Agency (ICFSA) (formerly Delegated Aboriginal Agency) team leaders and staff. The information states that completed and signed IPPAs will be forwarded to the IPC for tracking purposes.</p> <p>To be completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MCFD is working on a proactive tracking system for Interprovincial Placement Agreements. • It is not clear how MCFD plans to enhance and adapt the current guidelines. • It is not clear how the creation of their training material is proceeding.

Year 2 Evidence – Received June 2022	Year 2 Assessment
<p>MCFD has developed new resources and training materials for Interprovincial Placement Agreements (IPPA) including a resource guide, protocol guide, and an on-demand training approach implemented in February 2022.</p> <p>MCFD has also established a monthly Interprovincial Community of Practice meetings.</p>	<p>Substantial Progress</p> <p>In February 2022 MCFD launched the new Interprovincial Practice iConnect page and Interprovincial Placement Agreement Interactive Resource Guide.</p> <p>Policy to ensure that this training is required for staff who work on interprovincial cases has not been provided.</p>
Year 3 Evidence – Received February 2023	Year 3 Assessment
<p>Interprovincial Practice Protocol has been embedded into Child Welfare (CW) Foundations in 2022, which is a required course in CW Training Program for new hires.</p> <p>Executive Directors of Service (EDSs), Directors of Operations (DOOs) and Directors of Practice (DOPs) have been advised to inform current staff to refer to the Interprovincial Placement Agreement Interactive Resource Guide (now embedded in policy).</p> <p>MCFD have made links to all resources and training guides available via the Interprovincial Practice iConnect page and Interprovincial Placement Agreement Interactive Resource Guide.</p>	<p>Complete</p> <p>MCFD have provided evidence of activities directly supporting the implementation of new resources and training materials for Interprovincial Placement Agreements (IPPA) as a requirement for all MCFD social workers who work on inter-provincial matters.</p>

Recommendation	
#4	<p>That the Ministry of Children and Family Development direct staff to speak with children in care about their ethnicity and desired cultural supports/connections and record the child's self-identified ethnicity in the ministry's case management system.</p> <p>MCFD to complete this step by June 2020.</p>

Ministry's Response	RCY Assessment
<p>Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020</p> <p>MCFD is exploring having a cross-divisional working group to explore options for aggregating data on the ethnicities of the children and youth in care.</p> <p>The BC Human Rights Commissioner released a report in 2020 entitled <i>Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The Grandmother Perspective</i>. In this report, the Commission recommended the immediate collection of disaggregated demographic data in areas such as MCFD. This recommendation mirrors Recommendation #4 in RCY's <i>Caught in the Middle</i> report.</p> <p>MCFD's target date was March 31, 2021.</p>	<p>Year 1 Assessment</p> <p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD's <i>Children and Youth in Care Policy 5.7 "Identity – Respecting and Cultivating a Child/Youth's Culture,"</i> pp. 40-42 directs MCFD staff to support children and youth in care in identifying, understanding and cultivating their cultural heritage and identity.</p> <p>It is the opinion of the Representative that MCFD's current policy is not sufficient to meet this recommendation. Although MCFD currently directs staff to record a child/youth's identity and heritage in their care plan, this method does not make it possible to easily extract ethnicity-based data.</p> <p>Information on self-identified ethnicity remains to be recorded in the ministry's case management system.</p>
<p>Year 2 Evidence – Received June 2022</p> <p>MCFD has halted the progress of the cross division working group responsible for this Recommendation in November 2021 as they determined that standards for data on ethnicity was required as a first step. MCFD has reported they will wait for the Ministry of Citizens Services and Parliamentary Secretary on Anti-Racism to establish the legislation and data standards before reviewing options for enhancing information systems.</p>	<p>Year 2 Assessment</p> <p>No Progress (reassessed)</p> <p>Given MCFD has halted their work and that information on self-identified ethnicity remains to be recorded in the ministry's case management system in a manner that allows for aggregate assessment to inform specialized training, planning, service delivery, community engagement and to enhance capacity for culturally responsive care, the Representative has reassessed this recommendations as no progress towards implementation.</p>
<p>Year 3 Evidence – Received February 2023</p> <p>MCFD has acknowledged the need for consistency in data standards across ministries and they are engaged in cross-ministry collaboration on designing and implementing standards across multiple population-based information systems.</p>	<p>Year 3 Assessment</p> <p>No Progress</p> <p>As of May 2023, MCFD advised RCY that ethnicity data collected by their office, should be used with abundant caution as it has found the aggregate information to be of low quality. At the time of request, 30% of children in care, 73% of youth agreements, 59% of interim or temporary care</p>

<p>MCFD is initiating a project to identify improvements it can make to its existing ethnicity/race data collection in its case management information systems and improvements it can make to the use of ethnicity/race information in its practice and data collection.</p>	<p>and 74% of extended family placements had no ethnicity selected in ICM. This has led the Representative to conclude that despite the acknowledgement from the ministry that improvements are needed, and evidence provided in their Year 3 update that they are in the initiation stages of gathering a working group to address, ethnicity data for children remains unreliable and inaccessible for review, and therefore no progress has been made.</p>
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Recommendation	
#5	<p>That the Ministry of Children and Family Development ensure a trauma-informed method is implemented in resourcing decisions for children in its care who have experienced multiple adversities in their lives.</p> <p>MCFD to have this trauma-informed method to resourcing in place by June 2021.</p>
Ministry's Response	RCY Assessment
Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020	Year 1 Assessment
<p>MCFD is committed to this recommendation through its plan to develop and implement the Trauma-Informed Guide (ongoing).</p> <p>MCFD had plans to have this trauma-informed method to resourcing in place by Fall 2020.</p>	<p>Substantial Progress</p> <p>In August 2020, MCFD released its Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) orientation webinars, materials and resources for its staff. These materials are to go along with MCFD's Trauma-Informed Practice Guide. MCFD notes that the Trauma-Informed Practice support will be ongoing with the goal of integrating key concepts of trauma-informed approaches in its work.</p> <p>This work is ongoing, and implementation is well underway.</p>
Year 2 Evidence – Received June 2022	Year 2 Assessment
<p>MCFD has continued the implementation of TIP awareness sessions, in person training and provided 14,000 hard copy guides to staff.</p>	<p>Some Progress (reassessed)</p> <p>MCFD made significant progress in the development and implementation of TIP resources, awareness sessions and training for staff.</p>

<p>MCFD has also reported they are delayed in the implementation of their trauma-informed method to resourcing, originally scheduled to launch in March 2020 and now set to launch in two service delivery areas sometime in 2022 with no timeline for provincial roll out thereafter.</p>	<p>However, no progress has been reported as to how the ministry will ensure a trauma-informed method is implemented in current resourcing decisions for children in its care who have experienced multiple adversities in their lives.</p> <p>No timeline has been provided for provincial roll out of MCFD’s new trauma-informed method to resourcing.</p> <p>Given the significant delay and lack of implementation progress, the Representative has reassessed this recommendation as some progress.</p>
<p>Year 3 Evidence – Received February 2023</p>	<p>Year 3 Assessment</p>
<p>MCFD’s Implementation of the Specialized Homes and Support Services¹ (SHSS) Transformation includes trauma informed care planning and improvements to resourcing decisions for children/youth in its care. SHSS Resources will be required to provide a plan for providing services to a child or youth that includes meeting their needs from a trauma informed approach.</p> <p>Under the new model, SHSS Resources will have financial support to secure external clinical consultation and/or intervention that may be needed to assist in the formation of a trauma informed services plan.</p> <p>Early Implementation of the four new SHSS services were delayed in early 2023.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>The ministry has continued to show progress in the development and implementation of TIP resources and has provided evidence to illustrate this progress. The evidence to date falls short of policy changes that will ensure trauma-informed approaches are implemented in resourcing decisions for children in its care who have experienced multiple adversities in their lives.</p> <p>While the ministry has included trauma informed care planning and improvements to resourcing decisions for children/youth in its care as part of the Specialized Homes and Support Services (SHSS) Transformation, significant delays in implementation have resulted in this work not meeting the Representative’s timeline of June 2021.</p>

¹ MCFD is actively moving away from the use of the word residential in its documentation. This includes references to staffed models of contracted care. It is well understood that this word carries a heavy and damaging historical meaning. Moving forward, MCFD will refer to contracted staffed care homes and services as Specialized Homes and Support Services. The Network of Care (formerly referred to as in-care network) is undergoing systemic transformation to contribute to the Ministry's approach to strengthening prevention, early intervention, and family preservation.

Recommendation	
#6	<p>As part of the Ministry of Children and Family Development’s overhaul of residential services, MCFD to assess the need for residential care and treatment resources across the province to accommodate children with complex needs and to create sufficient resources to meet the assessed need in a timely way.</p> <p>MCFD to complete this work by September 2021.</p>
Ministry’s Response	RCY Assessment
Year 1 Evidence – Received December 2020	Year 1 Assessment
<p>In June 2019 MCFD created a draft plan on building a responsive network of services and supports for children and youth. One of its objectives is to ensure all children are placed in homes that are resourced to suit their individual needs, rather than in homes that are simply available. The other objective is to create specialized, treatment-focused residential care where a traditional foster home is unable to meet a child’s complex needs.</p> <p>The in-care network of services will include trauma-informed care planning and a re-examination of the role of Contracted Residential Agencies.</p> <p>In developing its care options, MCFD will develop a number of care options including out-of-care placements with extended family or community members, foster caregivers, short term residential stabilization, respite, emergency placements and long-term specialized care.</p> <p>Overall, MCFD’s goal is to ensure the child’s needs, safety and well-being drive placement and supports, should they come into care.</p> <p>MCFD plans to develop this framework by fall 2020 and implement it by October 2021.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD appears committed to improving its ability to provide residential services to children and youth with complex needs.</p> <p>As of November 2020, MCFD started a phased implementation of the in-care service framework. This included a transformation of the role of Contracted Residential Agencies. It also started implementing other aspects of the network that support its goals of improving out-of-care arrangement options.</p>

Year 2 Evidence – Received June 2022	Year 2 Assessment
<p>MCFD’s Year 2 Report indicated that the implementation of a new residential service systems has not yet begun and is now scheduled for a limited roll out in two service delivery areas some time in 2022. No timeline for provincial roll out has been provided.</p> <p>MCFD reports that the new residential system will provide trauma informed care, but has not provided evidence of how they have assessed the needs in residential care and treatment resources across the province to accommodate children with complex needs. MCFD has also not provided information for how they will create sufficient resources to meet the assessed need in a timely way.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD has made some progress towards the activities that directly support the implementation of the new residential service model including the development of a new model informed by research and public reports and are now completing engagement activities.</p> <p>The Representative awaits evidence of how MCFD completed their needs assessment, model design and resourcing for the new system of care.</p>
Year 3 Evidence – Received February 2023	Year 3 Assessment
<p>Implementation of the SHSS Transformation is underway.</p> <p>MCFD is currently implementing SHSS Transformation through transitioning of existing contracts in two early implementation areas (North Fraser and Okanagan Service Deliver Areas) to the new SHSS contracts and a province-wide solicitation for new SHSS providers.</p> <p>The ministry is also continuing its work with Indigenous Partners and Rights Holders, including ICFSAs to co-develop improvements to the Network of Care and bed-based specialized services.</p> <p>Progress towards implementation of MCFD’s contracts continues.</p>	<p>Some Progress</p> <p>MCFD has continued to show progress in the development of their new residential SHSS model and are now piloting the new services in two communities. MCFD have provided evidence of activities that directly support its continued implementation including, but not limited to new contract templates, new IM/IT systems and new Procurement and Contract Management System, alongside a new Operational Policy for Service Providers and MCFD Staff.</p> <p>However, given the ongoing delay in provincial roll out and delay in the two early implementation sites of the SHSS transformation, the Representative does not yet see evidence to determine if SHSS will meet the need for residential care and treatment resources across the province to accommodate children with complex needs and to create sufficient resources to meet the assessed need in a timely way and continues to rate this recommendation as some progress.</p>