

Alberta Association of Services for Children and Families (AASCF) Annual Conference

January 24, 2012, Edmonton

Hon. Dave Hancock, Minister, Human Services

Thank you for your kind introduction.

I am honoured to be here on behalf of Premier Alison Redford and the Government of Alberta.

I want to start by offering my congratulations to AASCF for bringing your member agencies and staff together for this conference.

You do important work that is very much valued by government.

Each and every day, you help improve the lives of Albertans and help them meet their goals.

It is so important to support your work by having opportunities for knowledge sharing, professional development, recruitment support and capacity building.

That's why I am so pleased to hear that in addition to this conference, many of you have participated in some of the joint training offered by my ministry staff and AASCF to support innovative practice approaches.

This training included events such as the ethical practice workshops presented by Bob Lonnie (LONNIE), and a session on developing communities of practice to support continual learning.

I also understand that joint work is underway to host training on Signs of Safety – yet another tool to support our work with children and families.

It is wonderful to see how joint learning supports successful collaboration.

I want to commend and thank all of you for being here to continue building on your skills and commitment to excellence in supporting collaborative practice to grow stronger children, youth and families in our province.

It is quite apt that the theme of this year's conference is "Strengthening Today Building Tomorrow."

AASCF has a vital and strong partnership with government in developing and delivering support, enhancement and intervention programs.

Over the years, we have looked to AASCF's member agencies and staff for guidance and support, as we work together to improve programs and provide them in a way that works better for families.

The joint training offered over the last few months is directly in response to hearing from you how we need to improve our practice approaches together.

I want to not only thank you for your continued work in this area – but acknowledge how it truly makes a difference for families.

Many of you have been instrumental in supporting the development and implementation of Outcomes-Based Service Delivery.

Because of your efforts in supporting this initiative, we have made great strides together in building the scope and reach of the program, to support more than 3,300 referrals to date.

I know you will be hearing from some of the speakers about their experiences with OBSD, but I want to share a story that has helped me to really understand how this way of delivering services is so innovative and exciting.

The story is from a worker from the Edmonton Crisis Unit, who says:

We had a really positive experience with the Family Centre OBSD lead agency workers on a matter we dealt with recently.

The Crisis Unit became involved when a mom needed to be hospitalized for alcohol intoxication and mental health concerns around midnight one night.

Five children under the age of 10 resided in the home.

This was a family who had just recently moved to Edmonton, with no extended family supports available to help as the step-dad was overseas and the bio dad was in the U.S.

Even if we had been able to locate family, there was no way they could get to Edmonton in a timely manner to maintain the kids in the home.

The Family Centre was able to get two support workers into the home very quickly in the middle of the night, and they remained there with the kids as we worked with them to safety plan for the rest of the weekend.

The creative and flexible work of the Family Centre staff helped keep a family together by giving the parent an opportunity to deal with some challenges while her family received critical and timely support.

For me, this story is a good example of how shared practice works in OBSD, where child intervention staff, agency partners and families work in collaboration towards shared goals, such as providing supports for children in the least disruptive manner, while parents receive the help they need.

This story also emphasizes how important it is to continue developing working and funding relationships in communities, to deliver services effectively to Albertans.

Many of you have either heard about or took part in the discussions last year around developing the Social Policy Framework.

We heard from Albertans that it is important to ensure we are investing in and taking care of families and vulnerable people.

Within the next few weeks, we will be ready to share how social policies and programs will build on the collaborative work already happening in communities to help achieve better outcomes for children and families.

Those of you who have been working in partnership with us on various program and practice initiatives will already have a sense of where we are going, both in the social sector and in our commitment to supporting children and families.

The work we have been doing together on defining the outcomes of our work is critical and timely.

Because looking at the effectiveness of programs and how people's lives are changed because of the help they received is part of the vision reflected in the Social Policy Framework.

The results-based budgeting initiative is also a key component of this work because it's about making sure we are working with communities to deliver the services Albertans need.

It's about determining if we are achieving the results we want.

If we are really making the desired difference in people's lives.

And are we making sure that we can account for every tax dollar we can.

I think agencies that work with children and families are well positioned for results-based budgeting because we have been working together for some time already on identifying key outcomes and finding good ways to measure them.

We know there are always areas we can improve, and I am committed to helping reduce the barriers which make sense, including ensuring information sharing policies and legislation that will support collaboration rather than hinder it.

We will continue to work with the contracted sector in a way that is flexible, recognizes your strengths and builds on your capacity to implement services in the most effective manner.

Building supportive relationships with families, communities and service providers is critical in offering quality programs and services for vulnerable children and families.

It's about finding the right things to support, setting some guideposts and then getting out of the way so the child and family's team can provide the support they know the child needs.

We want to be clear on the outcomes we want to see for children and families.

But we will be flexible on how the agencies who do the work can best achieve those outcomes.

I want you to know that going forward, Premier Redford and I are committed to developing a healthy, sustainable workforce within the service provider sector.

Our premier has spoken about how the world is changing very quickly in terms of our fiscal realities.

But we have heard from Albertans they want us to meet the priorities set by our Premier and our government.

As a government, we will be looking to ensure those we serve are receiving what they need in a timely and cost effective manner that maximizes their chances for success.

Agencies will continue to have a strong role in delivering these services.

That means attracting and retaining contracting agency staff continues to be key as we focus on helping children and youth reach their full potential and achieve positive outcomes for families. Budget 2012 outlined a commitment to additional agency funding in 2013/14 and 2014/15.

I want to assure you that our government aims to meet its commitments and that funding for agencies will be a priority.

Thank you again for inviting me to join you today.

I want you to know our government is open to hearing your thoughts and perspectives on how to address specific issues and seize opportunities.

We will continue to work with AASCF and its members to create opportunities for you to highlight and resolve issues that you are facing.

Logical, practical approaches that improve the quality of our support is our ultimate goal.

This is going to take team work and you are all a part of this important team.

Strong families contribute to strong communities in which all individuals can live in dignity and respect, which in turn, creates a strong future for Alberta.

Thanks to all of you for your commitment to children and families in our province. Enjoy the conference.