

Check Against Delivery

Honourable Dave Hancock
Alberta Foster Parent Association conference – Afternoon
November 9, Jasper, AB

Thank you.

As always, it is such a pleasure to be here.

I look forward to this conference every year.

The opportunity I have to chat with all of you has made a tremendous impact on me.

I always think about the stories you have shared with me when I am considering policies regarding foster care.

Your stories have helped shape the support enhancements that were announced yesterday.

I heard you when you told me it was too difficult to take your family on a camping trip to BC because of the approvals required.

I heard you when you told me it is costly to foster an infant.

And I heard you when you told me about the struggles you faced getting mental health support for a child in your care.

I value your input because you know better than most that a child is as fragile as a seed in a garden.

A child, like a seed, needs many things from many different sources in the garden, throughout its lifespan, to help it survive and mature.

If we want a seedling to grow and mature, we need to tend to it.

Children need to be tended to by the community - not just their parents, and the guardians in their lives.

If they are to grow and mature successfully, they will require:

- Healthy, enduring relationships with family and friends
- Health care and nutrition
- Good education, training
- Positive role models
- Safety and protection
- Recreation opportunities and strong cultural connections
- And inclusion and respect from peers and adults

With those elements in place, as children grow, they will become stronger and more resilient.

They will put down deep and stable roots and develop their own identities.

As a result, they will need less and less support from the community.

They will be able to weather storms and cope with challenges, as they transition into healthy, mature adults. (Pause)

HUMAN SERVICES

This is what Human Services is about.

Creating the right circumstances for communities, agencies, businesses, non-profit organizations and individuals like you to work together.

Our goal is to help create a province that allows every Albertan to live in dignity and respect and have the opportunity to reach their potential.

When all Albertans can participate fully in our economy, everyone benefits.

Our neighbourhoods are safe and welcoming.

Business can attract the skilled employees they need to compete.

And children get the learning and recreational experiences to inspire their future success. (Pause)

CHILDREN

Our most important responsibility as a ministry is to help ensure the safety and well-being of Alberta's children and families.

There is consistently one area where Albertans share very similar views – quality of life for children.

Albertans agree that:

- every child is precious and deserves to live in dignity;
- every child needs a supportive and loving family;
- every child should be able to grow up in a nurturing home and vibrant community;
- and every child deserves opportunities to learn and develop, so they can reach for success and realize their potential.

CHILDREN AT RISK

The great majority of children in Alberta DO live in positive environments.

However, despite ongoing efforts to support families, not all young people in Alberta are living in environments that support their well-being.

Some live in situations that put their future in jeopardy.

Issues such as poverty, neglect and lack of development and learning opportunities can have long-lasting consequences for children, families and communities.

This is why what you do as foster parents is so important to children.

We all have a duty as a society to create conditions where children and their families have the best possible chance to succeed.

That's why our ministry recently announced a year-long focus to work with communities to improve outcomes for all Alberta children and families.

We started by passing the *Children First Act* in the spring.

This legislation is about breaking down barriers and encouraging collaboration to identify and meet the needs of young people.

One of the objectives of this Act is to ensure that help is there for you and the children when and how it is needed.

It emphasizes a need to improving information-sharing among law enforcement, health and other service providers and the team that is working collaboratively to enhance a child's well-being.

The principles in Alberta's Social Policy Framework guided the development of the Act.

This was the first stepping stone to launching the province-wide engagement with Albertans to identify local solutions that create better outcomes for children.

Under the banner, Together We Raise Tomorrow, conversations are informing strategies to reduce poverty, improve early childhood development and to help create a Children's Charter for Alberta.

Once created, the Children's Charter will articulate a set of principles that will guide government's work in areas that impact the lives of children.

A cross-ministry review of all programs and policies will follow ensuring we honour those principles in the work we do.

And in the relationships we have with you.

CHILD INTERVENTION PRACTICE FRAMEWORK

For 20 years, Alberta has been bringing together research, evaluation and ideas from staff to develop new and innovative ways of better serving at-risk children, youth and families.

We know many families in our province are struggling.

They need help developing positive relationships and creating safe and nurturing environments for their children.

This help comes from the child intervention workers you work with.

Their critical role supporting families has been evolving over the years to meet the changing needs and expectations of families and society.

As part of our commitment to continuous improvement, we have acknowledged your desires to be better able to connect values and beliefs, legislation and policy with daily activities.

We recognize workers need to be supported in approaching their work in a thoughtful and consistent way.

This will ultimately enable them to empower families.

The Child Intervention Practice Framework incorporates what we have heard from families — front-line workers — and service delivery partners about how to better serve children.

Front-line workers are closest to children and families.

Everyday, they are the ones who identify creative solutions to meet the unique needs of the children and families they work with.

The practice framework will ensure staff are supported in continuing to make decisions and that they have tools and approaches that will provide the right kinds of services and supports.

This will go a long way to achieving positive outcomes for kids.

The caring, compassion, concern, knowledge and commitment that child intervention workers demonstrate every day is astounding.

You all have my full support as we move forward together in helping children and families in need and building a better Alberta.

Our end goal has to be and will continue to be to provide effective support and services to children, youth and families.

I hope you enjoy the upcoming session.

I look forward to getting a chance to hear more of your stories and suggestions.

Thank you.