

Check Against Delivery

Child Development Professional Awards of Excellence May 2, 2014, Calgary Honourable Manmeet S. Bhullar, Minister, Human Services

Good evening everyone.

On behalf of Premier Hancock and my government colleagues, I am honoured to be here this evening to celebrate excellence in childhood development.

For the past 9 years, we've highlighted the tremendous contributions early childhood development practitioners make in the lives of children, their families and the communities they serve.

For all the child development practitioners attending this evening, you can be proud of what you do.

You have dedicated your life to a very important career that gives back to the community.

We also need to remember the leaders in this field.

We will never forget Dr. Brown's legacy in the field of early childhood development, including early learning and child care.

I know there's nothing more important than supporting the development and well-being of children, youth and families.

Your skill, dedication and innovative thinking lay a foundation that helps children thrive and reach their full potential.

You help children experience successes and build self-confidence and positive relationships.

All of which helps develop their brains in the early years.

You all already know that the foundation for strong and healthy children is set in the early years.

That's why we are using a cross-ministry approach between Human Services, Health and Education to ensure that those first critical six years provide the right start for every child in Alberta.

My aim is to ensure that every child starts off on a firm footing in life.

We are working together by continually building on our successes and committing to continuous improvement.

We are also testing new approaches to early childhood development.

We are focused on ensuring that children realize their full developmental potential when they enter school and;

Ensure that parents can provide nurturing and stable environments for their young children.

This is so that children can grow and thrive in safe and supportive communities.

We are the only province that has a Child Care Accreditation program.

Recently, we consulted with the child care sector to ensure the actual accreditation standards, the criteria and the indicators reflect current research and leading practices.

Based on your feedback, we now have one set of quality standards.

And the processes have been streamlined to make the paperwork less cumbersome for you.

We need to continue to take these kinds of steps.

For those who know me, you will know I am someone that's focused on action and change – to make a difference.

I want to see a “Made in Alberta” early years approach that will provide parents with responsive early learning and care options.

Options that will optimize children’s developmental potential and lay the foundation for future success.

The early childhood sector will play a significant role in this work.

Approximately 70 per cent of parents with a young child work outside the home.

Many of these families bring their children to a child care program.

Right now, about 80,000 children attend our licensed and approved child care programs.

And more than 100,000 parents and children accessed support through their local Parent Link Centre.

That’s why a highly skilled early childhood development workforce has never been more important than now.

We’ve made a lot of progress in a short time.

My ministry has invested more than \$500,000 to support the development of Alberta’s evidence-based Early Learning and Child Care Curriculum Framework.

The Framework shifts practice from “doing what has always been done” to helping children be “mighty learners.”

This Framework also reinforces that intentional interaction with children has an amazing impact on their development.

I have also announced four new Parent Link Centres that will open in Edmonton, Calgary and High Prairie.

Two new satellite locations will also open in Grande Cache and Fox Creek.

My mission is focused on doing everything I can to ensure children are cared for in safe environments.

To accomplish this we have:

- signed an agreement with the Calgary Police Service to fast-track police checks and share more information to expedite kinship care applications;
- invested an additional \$5 million toward mental health supports for vulnerable children and families;
- committed to working with our partners to increase services for young adults receiving services from the child intervention system by two years; and
- begun work on a provincial challenge to ensure every vulnerable child who needs a mentor and positive influence in their life has access to somebody.

My work is not done. I have a few more things on my current action list.

I want every child and youth in care to have access to a mentor.

I plan on encouraging Albertans to get training and connect with a mentoring organization in their community.

I also plan on making sure Alberta has the gold standard when sharing information about the child intervention system.

I remain committed to ensuring children are safe and Albertans have access to quality programs and services.

However, I cannot do this alone.

I need you. You work with many of the families my ministry needs to reach out to and support.

Families trust you.

You could be the link between the parent or child and the support they need to keep their family strong.

Tonight, we're here to celebrate individuals, teams and programs, who have gone above and beyond what's required to support children and families.

On behalf of Premier Hancock and my elected colleagues, I personally thank each and every nominee and recipient for a job well done.

Thank you.