

## Check Against Delivery

### **Alberta Foster Parent Association Banquet November 8, 2014, Jasper Honourable Heather Klimchuk, Minister, Human Services**

Good evening.

Thank you Norm (Norm Brownell, President) for the kind introduction...and thank you to your colleagues on the Board of Directors for inviting me to join you this weekend.

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

Let me start by offering my congratulations to the 26 recipients of the foster family and Human Services worker of the year awards.

You are amazing...not only do you open your homes to children who are unable to be in their own homes...you also open your hearts...and your minds.

You nurture...care for...guide...and provide structure...to children and youth who are vulnerable.

This dedication is an inspiration to me...and to all my colleagues in the legislature.

It is unfortunate that we don't have awards for everyone...so please accept my sincere appreciation for your work.

Thank you for being ready to welcome a child into your homes...to assist a child who is in need of a safe place...when they have had to leave their homes and families...for whatever reason.

Thank you for caring for children who may have experienced trauma...for loving...caring for and understanding them as members of your families... no matter if they are with you for a short time or for longer placements.

And thanks for supporting the children and youth so they are ready to return to their families and communities.

As foster parents...you are there for some of the toughest moments in the children's lives... when they don't have their own parents or family.

You bring joy and hope into their lives so that they will have memories of times when they were supported.

Providing that consistency and stability to a child is a huge benefit to their emotional well-being and development...and helps reduce the trauma from the volatile situation they were taken away from.

While it is no doubt scary and stressful for these vulnerable children...I know that it can be equally challenging for you as foster parents.

And we...as a government...know that you can't do it all on your own...we are here to support you.

You've asked us to listen to you about the kinds of supports that make a difference.

And we have listened.

You have identified the importance of a rate increase.

I know this was an outstanding item over the summer and into the fall...I appreciate your patience as I navigated this through the system.

I was pleased to be able to publicly release the government's commitment to this increase earlier this week...retroactive to April 1.

And perhaps more immediately valuable than the rate increase...you've told government that respite or relief care helps manage the stress and challenges of being a foster parent...when you are more rested... and have time to take care of the tasks that all too often fall to the bottom of your to-do list...you are better prepared for the stress and challenges that you face.

I am pleased that beginning earlier this week on November 1<sup>st</sup>... all foster parents are now able to access this support.

This makes you better foster parents in the long run.

I hope these additional resources will help you to continue your valuable work...and complement the existing training and resources available to you.

In my short time at Human Services...I have come to learn how these additional resources can make a difference...and from our conversations this evening...I am keen to visit more with foster families and learn even more about your work and commitment.

Very recently, I've learned of some of the positive influence foster parents have. Our North Central CFS office recently interviewed a number of former children in care about where they are now.

I'd like to share a couple of short stories with you...I know this evening's awards presentation will provide so many more heart-warming experiences for us to share with each other.

Brian came into foster care...his foster mother says she had never met such an angry little boy... but with their love and support... he thrived.

Brian is now a journeyman... recently made a donation to his high school football program... and attributes his successes to his foster parents and coaches who stood by him.

What a transformation.

As a child, Yvonne experienced abuse.

She was the first foster child of Brian and Joyce Golding... who I understand are here tonight.

Brian and Joyce's foster parenting approach included finding ways for children to create bonds in non-threatening ways... by learning to nurture and care for animals and the land on their rural ranch.

This slow and methodical approach worked for Yvonne and has worked for other children in their care.

This approach has been successful for the Goldings, who were recently named North Central Foster Family of the Year.

And it has worked well for Yvonne too...who recently opened her own licensed group home... using her foster parents' approach with animals as well.

I encourage you to visit the Human Services website to see their videos.

There are many stories to tell...in each corner of this province...you have each had an immeasurable impact on each child that has come into your care.

Sincerely...thank you.

And while I appreciate your dedication...I also know that the additional scrutiny placed on the child intervention system has had an emotional toll on some of you.

There has been significant discussion about accountability and transparency of the child intervention system...and this will continue.

The good news is that work continues to improve the child intervention system and outcomes for children...and to share that good news widely.

Recently the Government of Alberta had an opportunity to announce a \$2 million partnership with Bell Canada to improve mental health support services for children and youth throughout the province.

This online gateway will provide a non-threatening way for children and youth to explore their mental health and addictions issues whenever and however they choose.

A partnership was also formalized with Western Australia to offer Signs of Safety training to share knowledge and research and improve child intervention practice.

And we're focusing on tackling the root causes that contribute to children coming into care...issues like the importance of healthy relationships... prevention of family violence...homelessness and poverty reduction.

I look forward to sharing more in the coming months.

You are an important part of this work and I'm very excited to work with you and to discuss ideas for further improvements to the system.

Please continue to share your ideas with me because they are making a difference.

Enjoy the rest of the evening.