



**Ministry of Children's Services Response to the
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
"19-Year-Old Ernie: An Investigative Review"**

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Alberta
Children's Services

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Background

In 2014, a 19-year old passed away in hospital with his former foster mother by his side. As noted in the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate's (OCYA) report, Ernie died from medical causes. The young man was not receiving services at the time of his death, but had received services within the previous two years. Our thoughts are with this young man's family, caregivers, and community as they continue to mourn his loss.

As described in the Advocate's report, Ernie had severe disabilities; he lived with his foster mother from infancy until he was 17-years-old. Ernie surpassed developmental expectations in foster care and when he turned 18-years-old, he transitioned to a group home for adults with disabilities. Ernie's foster mother maintained a relationship with him including visits and holidays.

On February 7, 2017, the Advocate released a report entitled *19-Year-Old Ernie: An Investigative Review* ("the report"). This report makes two recommendations aimed at improving transitioning services and ensuring that the voice of young people is included in case planning.

The ministry's response includes information gathered from the following sources:

- A review of existing policies in comparison to issues identified in the report;
- A review of current ministry initiatives, practice, and program directions related to issues identified in the report; and
- Engagement with our ministry partners, including other divisions, regional service delivery partners, and other ministries.

We welcome the recommendations from the Advocate to help us improve the way we support vulnerable youth and their caregivers.

Response to Recommendations

Recommendation #1:

The Ministry of Human Services should develop processes to ensure that consistent services and supports are in place when young people transition from Child Intervention Services to the adult disability system.

Ministry Response: The ministry accepts this recommendation.

The ministry, along with the Ministry of Community and Social Services, is currently developing and implementing a Child Intervention and Disabilities Protocol to assist staff in working together to support children with disabilities and their parents, ensuring they have the services they need (including transitions).

Provincial implementation of the Child Intervention Practice Framework outlines practice principles and strategies to assist frontline staff to collaborate and support children, youth, and families. The Child Intervention Practice Framework principles drive practice

strategies such as Lifelong Connections, a tool for frontline service delivery staff that will enable them to support children and youth through transitions, including between placements, and to increase caregiver awareness of the unique needs of each child placed in their care.

Recommendation #2:

The Ministry of Human Services should ensure that the voice of the young person is included in case planning. If a young person is unable to voice an opinion, caseworkers need to access all avenues to ensure that the young person's rights, interests and viewpoints are considered.

Ministry Response: This recommendation is not directed at the Ministry of Children's Services. The Ministry of Community and Social Services, recently created with the dissolution of Human Services, is responsible for the provision of disability services. The OCYA has connected with Community and Social Services regarding this recommendation and their response.

Conclusion

Children's Services thanks the Advocate for his review and recommendations. We will continue to implement evidence-informed practice strategies and collaborative and innovative solutions to meet the needs of vulnerable Albertans, including those with disabilities who require ongoing supports into adulthood. Through our ongoing evolution, we are striving for the development and sustainment of a system responsive to the needs of children, youth, and families, now and in the future. We recognize that we have a shared responsibility, along with our cross-ministry and service delivery partners, communities, and families, to do everything we can to learn from these losses and prevent future tragedies.

It is encouraging to hear, and important to note, as the Advocate did in the report, that this young person was supported by a foster parent who truly loved and cared for him. Parents who devote their lives to caring for a child in need as if they were their own show all of us what it means to be part of a strong community that cares for every one of its members. We must continue to support these important relationships, so that we can better understand what the young people we care for need. This is an important part of our ongoing, cross-ministry work to support the safety and wellbeing of Alberta's vulnerable children and youth.