



**Ministry of Human Services' Response to the
Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
*"Two-Year-Old Teanna: Serious Injury"***

February 2016

Table of Contents

Background3

Specific Recommendations and Ministry Response4

 Recommendation #1.....4

 Recommendation #2.....5

Conclusion5

Background

In 2013, a two-year-old child in foster care sustained a serious injury, the matter was investigated by police and the foster parent was charged. Teanna appears to have no life-long physical impairments as a result of the injury.

This young child was placed in care following her birth as her parents were unable to provide for her safety and well-being. Teanna required ongoing medical attention following her discharge from the hospital and was placed in a group home able to meet her immediate needs and support ongoing appointments.

As Teanna had ongoing medical needs and developmental delays, she was matched and moved to a family-based placement where she received services to meet her needs and maintained contact with her parents and siblings. A support plan was developed with the caregiver based on Teanna's medical needs and the number of children in the home. Her caseworker and her placement provider supported Teanna's medical needs and attendance at regular medical appointments.

Following the birth of a younger sibling, arrangements were made for Teanna to return to her home community and reside in the same home as her younger sibling. The placement provider provided regular updates on Teanna and supported medical appointments, physiotherapy and visits with the parents and siblings.

Seven months into the placement, the caseworker learned that the RCMP and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) had been to the home due to an allegation of physical abuse. The RCMP and EMS determined that Teanna's injuries were consistent with falling as reported by the placement provider. The caseworker attended the home and directed the placement provider to attend the hospital with Teanna for further medical assessment. This assessment concluded that her injuries were unlikely to have been caused by a fall.

The *Child and Youth Advocate Act* provides the Advocate with the authority to investigate systemic issues arising from a serious injury or death of a child who was receiving Child Intervention services at the time of injury or death. Receiving services includes intake/screening and assessment at the front end of service delivery through to voluntary and court order services and a child being in the care and/or guardianship of the Director under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. On December 8, 2015, the Advocate released an investigative review entitled *Two-year-old Teanna: Serious Injury* ("the report"). The report makes two recommendations regarding case planning for placement and transitions, and ongoing assessment of capacity for caregivers.

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.

Child Intervention practice in Alberta continues to evolve. The ministry strives for continuous improvement through the incorporation of new learnings, feedback and inputs from a variety of sources, including external reviews; research into leading practices; experiences of service delivery staff; and analysis of outcomes for children, youth and families receiving services.

When a serious incident occurs, we examine the circumstances and our practice, and we identify areas of strength and opportunities for improvement. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate plays a role in identifying systemic issues for vulnerable children and youth through the course of day-to-day service provision or through the investigation of a single case. We welcome the recommendations from the Advocate to support the improvement of outcomes for vulnerable Albertans.

Response to Recommendations

Recommendation #1:

The Ministry of Human Services should ensure:

- a) Documented case planning for children that includes both immediate attachment and long-term relationship needs, in addition to the considerations identified in the *Enhancement Act*.
- b) Case planning reflects clear transition strategies that mitigate the impact of multiple placement moves for children.

Ministry response: The ministry accepts the recommendation. Child and Family Services is committed to the ongoing implementation of the Child Intervention Practice Framework (CIPF) and associated practice strategies to support critical thinking and decision-making. The strength-based and collaboration principles and tools of the CIPF are being used to guide staff in working with families to plan in ways that reflect their goals, connect with community sooner, bring family and their supports together, focus on building a support network and include the voice of the child.

Case planning is a fundamental element of casework. It sets out, in concrete terms, what the ministry, the family, the caregivers and the other service providers need to do to address unmet needs. Case planning identifies the services and supports to the family, placement options and decisions including moves, engagement of extended family, natural supports and community for relational continuity, and long-term goals to support the child and family into the future with or without our involvement.

Full implementation and integration of the CIPF is anticipated over the next three to five years.

Recommendation #2:

The Ministry of Human Services should ensure:

- a) That when a child has substantial medical and/or behavioural needs, the specific needs of the child are identified and documented, then matched to a care provider's capacity and potential support requirements, which is also documented, before the child is placed.
- b) That there is regular and ongoing assessment of a care provider's capacity to meet a child's needs. If there are indicators that the child's placement is in jeopardy, a timely re-assessment of the child's needs and their care provider's capacities must be completed and appropriate action taken.

Ministry response: The ministry accepts the recommendation. Policy and practice requirements are clear and specific regarding the screening of potential caregivers (foster and kinship) and expectations for ongoing support, monitoring and review of placements.

Child and Family Services provides ongoing opportunities for topical training for frontline service delivery and placement resources staff. The ministry works with our agency service providers to support continuous improvement and collaboration in quality improvements to the child intervention system. As we move forward with the implementation of supports for caregivers grounded in an understanding of trauma, grief and loss (referred to as Foundation of Caregiver Support), information related to the support and ongoing evaluation and assessment of the capacity of family-based caregivers will be integrated as a fundamental requirement.

Conclusion

We thank the Advocate for his review and recommendations. Human Services will continue to implement evidence-informed practice strategies and collaborative and innovative solutions to meet the needs of vulnerable Albertans. Through our ongoing evolution, we strive for a sustainable system responsive to the needs of children, youth, families and their communities.