



Social Care Facilities Review Committee




Annual Report 2007/2008

Alberta Children and Youth Services

Alberta

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Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present the 2007-08 Social Care Facilities Review Committee's Annual Report. Children and Youth Services is mandated to work with families, communities and other partners to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and youth in Alberta. The Social Care Facilities Review Committee plays a role in helping us achieve that mandate by partnering with the ministry to collect feedback from children, youth, women, foster parents and service providers in the five types of social care facilities in Alberta.

This report is a summary of the Committee's activities and findings within the fiscal year ended March 31, 2008. The comments, suggestions, concerns and positive input gathered during these visits provide the ministry with important information to guide future policy and practice.

Overall, much of the feedback the Committee heard was positive, indicating the success of social care facilities in caring for Albertans. Some of the comments identified areas for improvement, which the ministry is addressing.

I would also like to acknowledge recent initiatives introduced by Children and Youth Services to further the quality of care provided to Alberta's children, youth and families.

The ministry has implemented a number of initiatives to assist in the recruitment and retention of people in the child care field. For instance, \$4.2 million has been invested for a marketing campaign to attract new people to the field, increase wage top-ups for day care and out-of-school care staff, enhance the equivalency model for certification and make orientation coursework available on-line. Further, Staff Attraction Incentive Grants have been introduced to attract new and returning child care staff. Staff working in licensed day care centres also receive up to \$1,000 per year to enhance their professional skills.

For 2008-09, the Province has allocated an additional \$76 million for the Creating Child Care Choices plan. Highlights include boosting wage top-ups by 60 percent for staff working in licensed day cares and approved family day homes. Additionally, a \$2,500 scholarship is being introduced for students who have completed the child care orientation course in high school and have enrolled in an early childhood program at a post-secondary institution.

The ministry also recently provided \$6 million to enhance salaries and benefits of staff working for contracted agencies, bringing our total investment for the last two years in this area to \$20 million. In May 2008, I had the opportunity to meet with representatives from various contracted agencies to discuss the pressures agencies face in delivering services on behalf of the Province. A group of ministry and agency representatives continues to work on short- and long-term solutions to these issues.

The implementation of the Casework Practice Model will result in improved communication between caseworkers, child and youth care workers and foster parents when providing supports and services to children, youth and families.

New compensation rates for foster parents, which include a 4.7 percent increase to the basic maintenance rate, as well as increases in skill fees and babysitting allowances, will help with the costs of raising a foster child. With these increases, Alberta continues to provide among the highest foster care compensation rates in Canada. The Provincial Foster Care Recruitment Campaign and ongoing recruitment efforts of the regions will result in more foster parents to provide respite.

The Alberta government has invested \$1.76 million to fund 79 more beds in women's emergency shelters across the province. The additional beds will increase shelter capacity by 15 per cent and will provide more options for people who are experiencing family violence. Over the past three years, funding to women's emergency shelters has increased from \$15 million in 2004-05 to more than \$25 million in 2008-09. In addition to this investment, a further five percent was provided for staff salaries and benefits to support women's emergency shelters contracted by the government. The Women's Shelter Leadership Bursary was also established in 2007 to support the professional development of senior staff and training for front-line workers.

In conclusion, I would like to thank those who shared their thoughts, insights and experiences with the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. I would also like to thank the Committee members for their commitment to the safety, security and development of Alberta's children and families.

Janis Tarchuk
Minister
Children and Youth Services

Report from the Chair

Each year, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee has the privilege of preparing an annual report summarizing its activities in the last fiscal year. These activities involve visits to facilities under the jurisdiction of Alberta Children and Youth Services, which includes day cares, out-of-school care centres, foster homes, child and youth facilities and women's emergency shelters.

During the April 2007 to March 2008 review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee conducted reviews of 230 facilities in five Child and Family Services Authorities. Committee members interviewed and/or surveyed just over 2,200 service recipients, foster parents and staff members. In general, service recipients reported satisfaction with services in all five types of social care facilities.

Parents of children attending day care or out-of-school care programs expressed appreciation for the care and services their children received. They were satisfied with the opportunities they were given to be involved in the programs, reported positive communication with staff, and were pleased with rules and regulations. Several parents reported they observed bullying in the facilities, but they also stated that the child care staff handled the situations appropriately.

Children and youth residing in foster homes or child and youth facilities indicated they were happy with their care, accommodations and treatment. During this review period, children and youth reported their highest levels of satisfaction with their involvement in social activities, the homes and facilities in which they live, and meals and relationships with foster parents and facility staff. Some children expressed dissatisfaction with the level of support received during a move to a new facility. Where significant concerns were heard from children and youth, these concerns were addressed and resolved satisfactorily.

Women's emergency shelter residents informed Committee members that they were pleased with the quality of service they received and appreciated the physical accommodations, meals, and rules and regulations of the facilities. Some of the women expressed concern about the difficulty they experienced accessing community services as well as the lack of affordable housing available once they left the shelters.

Within the five types of social care facilities reviewed, service providers expressed overall satisfaction with the programs and services they provided. They also shared some concerns and made recommendations for improving services. Day care and out-of-school care staff highlighted several strengths in their programs, but stated they were concerned about their wages. Additionally, some operators discussed the difficulties they experienced in

recruiting new staff. Foster parents were pleased with the access to services and the support they received from caseworkers, support workers and their agencies. Foster parents relayed concerns about accessing respite resources, regional staff turnover and the need for improvements to the foster parent training. Child and youth facility staff members spoke positively about the programs they provided to the children in their care and the training they received. They expressed the need for improved relationships with ministry staff and health care professionals as well as the need for higher wages. Staff from women's emergency shelters spoke positively about their training, programs and their relationships with residents. Of greatest concern to staff was the lack of available mental health services for residents.

During the April 2007 to March 2008 review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee received four verbal complaints. All of the complaints related to facilities that did not meet the definition of a social care facility under the *Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act*; therefore, the Committee referred the callers to the appropriate authorities. No investigations were conducted during this review period.

Without the hard work and dedication of the Committee members, none of these reviews would be possible. Members bring their expertise, insights and professionalism to the Committee. Their commitment to children, youth and families and their respect for the social care facilities review process has led to the success of this report.

Most importantly, I would like to extend my thanks to every child, youth and adult who participated in the interviews and surveys. Your comments, experiences and collective insight have been summarized in this report and provide an important message to service operators and government. Your contributions help improve the quality of services experienced by all individuals who reside in and/or receive services from social care facilities in our province.

Art Johnston
MLA, Calgary-Hays
Chair, Social Care Facilities Review Committee

Committee Members

During the April 2007 to March 2008 review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee consisted of 12 members, including the Chair and Vice-Chair. Art Johnston, Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Calgary-Hays has been chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee since November 2004.

Art Johnston, Chair, Calgary (November 2004 – Present)

Art Johnston was elected to his second term as a Member of the Legislative Assembly for the constituency of Calgary-Hays on March 3, 2008. In addition to his role as MLA, Mr. Johnston serves as Chair of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services and as a member of both the Standing Committee on Community Services and the Standing Committee on the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund.

During his first term, Mr. Johnston was involved in the development of several bills: Bill 52, *Correction Amendment Act, 2007*; Bill 212, *Safer Communities and Neighbourhoods Act*; Bill 16 *Peace Officer Act*; and Bill 49, *Traffic Safety Amendment Act, 2007*.

Mr. Johnston has served as:

- Chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee;
- Chair of the Alberta Heritage Savings Trust Fund Committee;
- Member of Public Accounts Committee;
- Member of the Private Members' Business Committee;
- Member of the Standing Committee on Community Services;
- Member of the Cabinet Policy Committee on Community Services;
- Chair of the Special Constable Review Committee;
- Member of the Standing Policy Committee on Justice and Government Services;
- Member of Private Bills Committee;
- Member of FOIP Review Committee; and
- Member of the *Select Special Personal Information Protection Act* Review Committee.

Beginning in 1970, Mr. Johnston served 11 years with the Canadian Armed Forces, obtaining the rank of sergeant. He attended the University of New Brunswick in 1979 before beginning a 25-year career serving with the Calgary Police Service, and he retired as a patrol sergeant in 2003.

Mr. Johnston is active both politically and within his community. He has served as a director with the Shawnessy Community Association from 2001 to 2002, director of the Calgary Shaw Progressive Conservative Association from 2002 to 2004, volunteered in Calgary-Buffalo during the 2001 provincial election, and ran for alderman in Calgary Ward 12 during the 2001 municipal election.

Throughout his life and career, Mr. Johnston has been honoured with several awards and distinctions including:

- United Nations Medal (Cyprus), 1972;
- United Nations Medal (Europe), 1975;
- NATO Service Medal, 1977;
- 12-year Police Service Medal;
- 20-year Police Exemplary Medal, 2000; and
- Alberta Centennial Medal.

Lori Brooks, Vice-Chair, Cardston (November 2001 – Present)

Lori Brooks is a music teacher and a member of the Royal Conservatory of Music. She previously worked in the public service and was a foster parent for five years. Ms. Brooks is active in her community as a member of a variety of committees and boards related to community awareness, children's festivals and adult education.

Wayne Doan, Red Deer (October 2003 – Present)

Wayne Doan operates a small farming business in Central Alberta. He completed an undergraduate degree in Education at the University of Saskatchewan, and began graduate studies at the University of Queensland in Brisbane, Australia. Mr. Doan brings over 17 years of experience with various children's programs to his work with the Committee.

Dawne Fowler, St. Albert (November 2001 – Present)

Dawne Fowler has worked in the public relations field for more than 18 years and is self-employed. During her academic and professional career, Ms. Fowler provided marketing expertise to CBC Communications, the Alberta Medical Association, CFRN TV News, Alberta Culture Heritage Sites, Esso Agriculture, McDonald's Restaurants and the Northern Alberta Ronald McDonald House. She has also been a member of a variety of educational and public relations committees.

Maxine Fodness, St. Paul (October 2007 – Present)

Maxine Fodness previously worked for the Servus Credit Union where she was responsible for the processing of financial transactions. In 2004, Ms. Fodness was elected as a Councillor of the County of St. Paul where she represents Division 4 ratepayers. She has also been a member of several committees and a board member of Community Futures. Ms. Fodness has participated as a member of Lafond Public Library and St. Paul Agricultural Society. She is currently a board member of her local Victim Services and Chamber of Commerce.

Lydia Graham, Cochrane (February 2004 – Present)

Lydia Graham was Mayor and Councillor of Cochrane for 15 years. She received the Community Builder Award and an Alberta Municipalities Association Award of Excellence for Civic Leadership. Ms. Graham is actively involved in many community projects and is serving on several boards and committees. Ms. Graham was a recipient of the 2005 Alberta Centennial Medal.

Laura Hunt, Edmonton (April 2006 – Present)

Laura Hunt has a Bachelor of Science degree in Household Economics from the University of Alberta. She is currently a home economist with the ATCO Blue Flame Kitchen and previously worked as a customer service agent for several airlines as well as a social worker for the City of Edmonton. Ms. Hunt is actively involved in her community working with organizations such as Kids with Cancer and the Victoria School for the Performing Arts. She also has served on the Canadian Airlines Charitable Foundation and has been a volunteer aquafit instructor for the YMCA.

Nancy Leishman, Calgary (July 2007 – Present)

Nancy Leishman is an active member in her community. Ms. Leishman has been president of the Midnapore Relief Society, Sundance Young Women and Falconridge Primary. In addition, Ms. Leishman has been a strong advocate for people with physical and mental disabilities throughout her life. She has also been involved in day home activities and has worked with children through Handcrafters Cottage. Ms. Leishman's educational background includes such subjects as book keeping and accounting as well as recreation education, focusing on the disabled.

Kathleen McCalla, Edmonton (2007 – Present)

Kathleen McCalla has a Bachelor of Education in Special Education and a Master's of Science in Family Life Education, both from the University of Alberta. She taught special education for Edmonton Public Schools for several years, including two years at the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital. She later returned to work at the Glenrose as the patient-staff education consultant. Ms. McCalla has also had the opportunity to teach as a sessional lecturer at the University of Alberta for several years and worked for the Family Life Education Council as a program planner. She was the sole proprietor of a writing company called Words Work and Images, a small business specializing in plain language, and a partner in a design company, Domestic Arts, producing floor cloths and painted furniture. Ms. McCalla has been an active member in her community, participating in the development of the Nellie McClung Girls Junior High Program, and the iHuman Gun Sculpture Project.

Kelly Sackley, Calgary (August 2004 – Present)

Kelly Sackley studied business at Rick's College and has also enjoyed taking courses online and in her community. She has spent time supporting her church, being involved in the community and working on school councils. Being happily married and staying home to raise four children were her main focus. She still enjoys being involved in her community and church and spending time with her four grandchildren.

Tracey Smith, Calgary (April 2006 – Present)

Tracey Smith has worked 19 years in a family practice medical clinic and is currently the office manager. She is an active volunteer in her community, specifically as a member of several school councils, a playground coordinator and member of the Calgary Home & School Association. Ms. Smith helped to establish a reading literacy program in her local junior high school.

Nicole VanKuppeveld, Sherwood Park (October 2003 – March 2008)

Nicole VanKuppeveld has a Bachelor of Science degree in Occupational Therapy from the University of Alberta. Ms. VanKuppeveld is an active volunteer in her community and works with agencies, such as the Junior League of Edmonton, Roots of Empathy and has served on the Boys and Girls Club of Strathcona County Board. Ms. VanKuppeveld recently completed a Master's of Business Administration program and is now working as the executive coordinator for the Vice-President of Academics at Norquest College.

Social Care Facilities Review Committee

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee was established in June 1980, under the *Social Care Facilities Review Committee Act*. The mandate of the Committee is to:

- 1) visit social care facilities from time to time to review the quality of services provided in the facilities and the manner in which the facilities are operated; and
- 2) conduct investigations of social care facilities upon the direction of the Minister of Children and Youth Services.

In 2002, an amendment was made to the legislation defining social care facilities as:

- 1) facilities that provide care, treatment or shelter and are funded, wholly or partly, by the Department of Children and Youth Services; and
- 2) a day care facility, as defined in the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act*.

The facilities currently reviewed by the Social Care Facilities Review Committee include: foster homes, child and youth facilities, day care facilities and women's emergency shelters. With the change in the *Child Care Regulation* to include out-of-school care centres as regulated facilities, the Committee commenced reviews of out-of-school care facilities in 2005-2006.

During the 2007-2008 review period, the Committee consisted of one Member of the Legislative Assembly who chaired the Committee, and 11 private citizens who live throughout the province. Members serve the Committee on a part-time basis and contribute a diversity of perspectives due to their backgrounds, expertise and work experience. They are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and are not employees of the provincial government.

■ *Review Process*

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee conducted reviews in foster homes, child and youth facilities, day care facilities, out-of-school care facilities and women's emergency shelters. Currently, there are approximately 4,000 facilities that fall under the Committee's mandate. In order to review all facilities, the Committee plans their visits so they are continually in the larger regions and rotating throughout the smaller regions. During this year, reviews took place in five Child and Family Services Authorities:

- Southeast Alberta (Region 2);
- Calgary and Area (Region 3);
- Central Alberta (Region 4);
- Edmonton and Area (Region 6); and
- North Central Alberta (Region 7).

Facilities were randomly selected in each of the chosen regions to ensure an unbiased, representative sample from the population of facilities and individuals being served and to include a representative selection of communities in each region. In preparation for the visits, Social Care Facilities Review Committee members met with chief executive officers and regional staff from the five Child and Family Services Authorities.

During visits to facilities, participants were encouraged to talk about their experience with the services they received. Committee members asked service recipients open-ended questions around themes relevant to the type of facility and the type of services provided. It is important to note that due to the qualitative nature of the interviews, service recipients were not required to comment on every theme.

Where service recipients were children, there were no age limitations on participation in the interviews as long as children were able to understand and respond to questions. As parents were considered to be the service recipients at day care facilities, children did not participate in those interviews. Committee members spoke with children from out-of-school care facilities if their parents/guardians had provided consent for the interview.

To obtain a balanced perspective, Committee members provided an opportunity for foster parents and staff members at the facilities to express their views on the services they provide. Survey forms were made available to service recipients and providers who wished to share their views, but were unable to take part in the Committee's visit. Individuals within the ministry were not contacted to share their views on concerns raised. The information provided in this report represents only the perspectives of the people who were interviewed.

All individuals who participated in interviews or completed surveys were advised that the Committee collects information in accordance with the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. Participants were also made aware their comments could be included in Social Care Facilities Review Committee reports.

Following each visit, Committee members wrote an individual facility report summarizing the views and comments of those who were interviewed and/or surveyed. In order to ensure confidentiality and anonymity of children in small facilities, copies of the individual facility reports were sent only to large-scale child and youth facilities (minimum 20 children) where there was less likelihood of compromising the children's confidentiality. Day care and out-of-school care facilities received a copy of the individual facility reports that parents could also access.

This Annual Report provides a provincial overview of the individual facility reports and feedback obtained during visits conducted from April 2007 to March 2008. To develop statistics for this report, individual facility reports were analyzed for common themes. All comments in the reports were coded positive to indicate satisfaction, neutral to indicate a perception of adequate service or to provide descriptive information and negative to indicate dissatisfaction. Additionally, where respondents provided general information and/or indicated a theme was not applicable, comments were classified as neutral. Positive, neutral and negative comments were counted and grouped by theme and reported as percentages. The Annual Report is distributed to all participating facilities as well as the Alberta Foster Parent Association.

■ *Sample Size*

A total of 230 facilities were visited from April 2007 to March 2008, including:

- 132 foster care homes;
- 30 day care facilities;
- 28 out-of-school care facilities;
- 35 child and youth facilities; and
- 5 women's emergency shelters.

Committee members spoke with a total of 689 service recipients and service providers. An additional 672 service recipients and 390 staff members completed surveys.

Operating Principles

The work of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee is guided by the operating principles below.

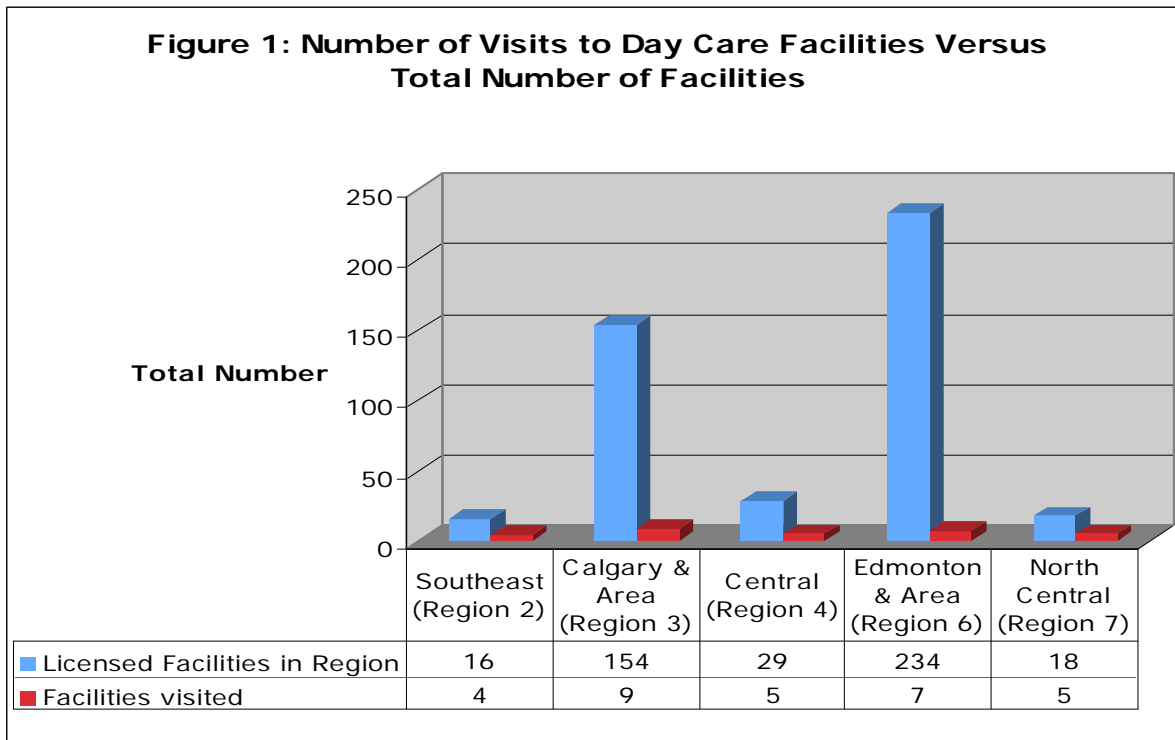
The Social Care Facilities Review Committee will work with clients and their families, service providers and government representatives to:

- facilitate open and neutral communication;
- focus on the current mandate of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee;
- promote awareness of the mandate;
- respect the rights and obligations of all parties;
- empower clients by providing a "voice" for them;
- be objective, open-minded and receptive to all parties;
- be professional in manner and appearance;
- listen to and understand the needs and concerns of clients;
- be observant of the physical and social environment;
- develop and maintain respectful, supportive relationships with government representatives and among Committee members;
- operate in a way that makes optimal use of available resources; and
- respect the right of confidentiality.

Day Care Facilities

Day care facilities provide care, development and supervision to seven or more children, for more than three, but less than 24 consecutive hours in a day. Children enrolled in day care are under seven years of age and do not attend school, although some may attend early childhood services programs for part of the day. Day care facilities are licensed under the *Social Care Facilities Licensing Act* and are obligated to meet the requirements of the *Child Care Regulation*.

During the April 2007 to March 2008 review period, the Committee visited 30 licensed day care facilities. Figure 1 shows the number of day cares visited compared to the total number of facilities in the region at the end of the review period.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VISITS TO DAY CARE FACILITIES

Committee members scheduled visits to day care facilities in the morning and late afternoon to coincide with times that parents were at the facilities to drop-off and pick-up their children. A total of 140 parents were interviewed and 454 parents completed surveys. Occasionally, some parents who completed surveys also participated in interviews. Due to the young ages of the children in the day care facilities, children were not interviewed.

Comments made by parents are organized into eight categories: daily activities, staff-child relationships, communication with staff, parent or guardian

involvement, meals and/or snacks, physical environment, rules and regulations as well as overall feedback. Service providers' comments are discussed separately.

Day Care Themes

Committee members reported 7,011 observations from parents about the care their children receive at day care. Most of the parents' comments expressed satisfaction with services provided; 5,995 comments (85%) were positive, 608 comments (9%) were neutral and 408 comments (6%) were negative. The breakdown of parents' comments, relating to day care themes, is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Responses - Themes at Day Care Facilities

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Daily Activities</i>	524 (89%)	61 (10%)	1 (1%)	586
<i>Staff-Child Relationships</i>	579 (61%)	42 (4%)	327 (35%)	948
<i>Communication with Staff</i>	937 (93%)	58 (6%)	10 (1%)	1005
<i>Parent or Guardian Involvement</i>	567 (97%)	19 (3%)	2 (<1%)	588
<i>Meals and/or Snacks</i>	1341 (87%)	189 (12%)	17 (1%)	1547
<i>Physical Environment</i>	855 (83%)	147 (14%)	32 (3%)	1034
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	651 (91%)	47 (6%)	19 (3%)	717
<i>Overall Feedback</i>	541 (92%)	45 (8%)	0 (0%)	586
TOTAL:	5995 (85%)	608 (9%)	408 (6%)	7011

Choice of Day Care

Parents discussed the rationale behind their choice of day care. While this information is useful in understanding why parents choose a specific day care, these factors cannot be considered positive or negative and therefore are not included in the above graph. In total, 1,355 comments were made regarding the choice of day care. Reasons most commonly mentioned were location (30%), reputation (21%), hours of operation (13%) and programs offered (10%). The remaining 26% of comments referred to factors such as cost, lack of available day care options and accreditation.

Daily Activities

In 89% of comments made about daily activities, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction. Parents indicated that they were satisfied with and/or felt their children enjoyed the activities offered in the day care. Ten percent of comments were neutral and related to situations where parents rated activities offered as adequate and/or said they were unsure of their children's feelings about the daily activities provided. One parent expressed dissatisfaction with

the activities offered and/or reported that his/her children do not enjoy the daily activities provided. (No further information was provided by the parent to allow for follow-up).

Staff - Child Relationships

Many parents made positive comments about the staff-child relationships at the day cares their children attend (61%). Parents commented that the manner in which staff interact with their children is good and they believed their children felt comfortable with staff. Parents further stated that they had not observed bullying within the day cares. Four percent of the comments shared were neutral, indicating parents felt staff interactions were adequate and/or their children did not have strong positive or negative feelings about the day care staff. Thirty-five percent of comments were negative. Of these, 99% were from parents who observed bullying behaviour at one time or another by children in the day care. The majority of parents further reported the staff handled these situations quickly and effectively. Four parents commented that staff interactions with children in the day cares could be improved.

Communication with Staff

When asked about communication with staff, 93% of the feedback collected was positive. Parents described good communication between parents and staff, where parents informed staff members of the child's needs and staff notified parents of incidents and/or concerns occurring in the day care setting. Of the neutral (6%) comments reported, parents indicated that general communication between parents and staff was adequate. Negative (1%) comments indicated communication between parents and staff required improvement (e.g. one parent indicated it was difficult to obtain information regarding his/her child when there was a shift change of staff).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Almost all parents expressed satisfaction with their opportunities for involvement in the day cares (97%). Parents reported the presence of ethnic and culturally sensitive practices and described opportunities for them to participate with their children. In neutral comments (3%), a few parents indicated that the opportunities for parental involvement was adequate. Less than one percent of comments were negative, where parents stated that the opportunity for involvement was poor. (No further information was provided by the parent to allow for follow-up).

Meals and/or Snacks

Day cares in Alberta must either provide or require parents to provide meals and snacks for children attending the facility. Eighty-seven percent of parents expressed approval of the food quality, quantity and variety of meals and snacks provided by the day care. A few parents commented that their respective day cares accommodate children's allergies. Twelve percent of parent comments were neutral, indicating the food quality and portion sizes provided were adequate and/or they were unsure of their children's satisfaction with the food. One percent of the comments were negative, reflecting parents' dissatisfaction with the food quality, quantity and/or variety provided.

Physical Environment

In general, parents described the day care environments positively. Eighty-three percent of parents expressed approval of the overall environments, play spaces, equipment, toys and maintenance. Fourteen percent of the comments made were neutral, indicating the physical environment of the day cares was adequate, while the remaining 3% of comments suggested some improvements could be made to the general physical environment (e.g. furnishings, toys, bathrooms, outdoor equipment).

Rules and Regulations

Ninety-one percent of comments made regarding rules, child guidance, response to concerns and security measures within the day cares were positive. Six percent of comments were neutral, where parents described the rules, child guidance and security measures as adequate. A few negative comments (3%) described a lack of consistent application of rules, poor rules and/or child guidance and security measures.

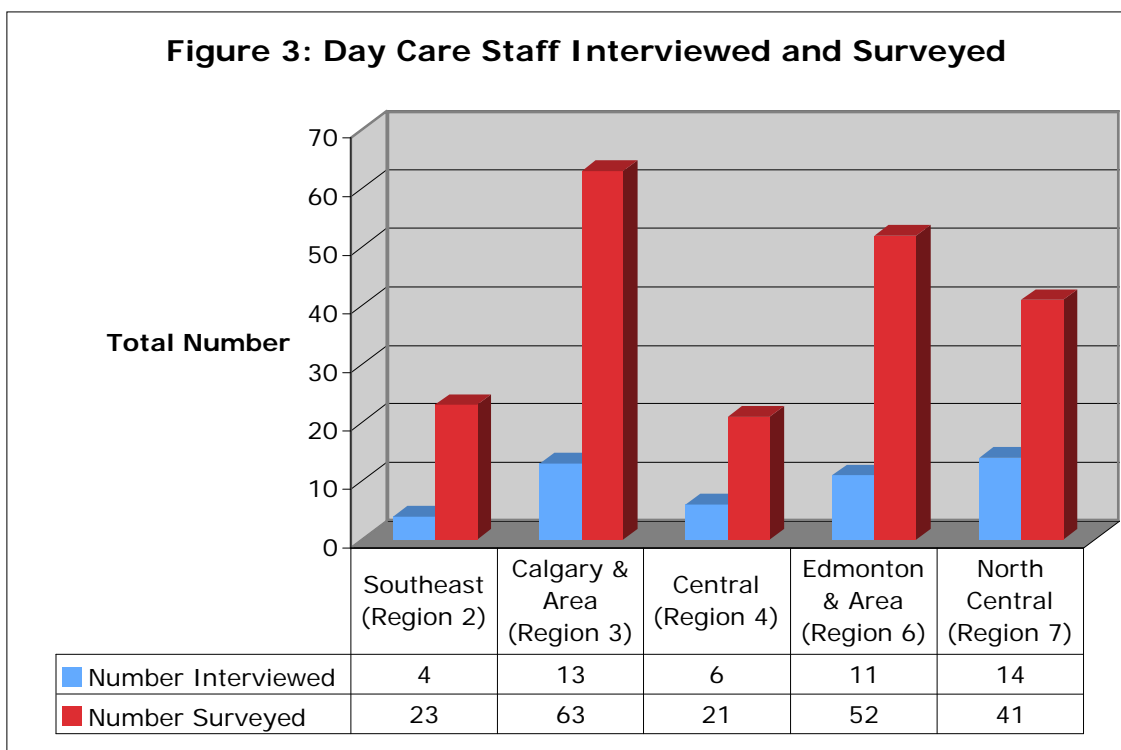
Overall Feedback

Parents were given the opportunity to comment on the overall quality of care their children receive at day care. In response, the majority of parents stated the overall quality of care their children received at day care was good (92%) and eight percent of parents rated the overall care as adequate. No negative comments were made.

Service Providers' Comments

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. The Committee spoke with 48 staff in 30 day cares. In addition, 200 staff completed surveys. Day care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews; their feedback is separate from the staff comments. The number of day care staff who were interviewed or completed surveys in each Child and Family Services Authority is illustrated in Figure 3, on the next page.

Figure 3: Day Care Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Many of the comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide. Of the 3,998 comments reported, 3,139 comments (79%) were positive, 691 comments (17%) were neutral and the remaining 168 comments (4%) were negative. The main topics of discussion are listed below.

Physical Environment

Day care staff commented on the physical environment of the day care facilities including how the environment accommodates both children and adults. The majority of comments were positive, indicating that the physical environment was good. Some staff reported the physical space as adequate. For the most part, staff described their day cares as well laid out with play areas for children and separate areas for staff to do paperwork or take breaks. Of the few negative comments made, most referred to having poor adult space in which to take a break or conduct paperwork, while a few staff commented on a need for new toys, larger play areas for group activities and more storage space.

Meals and/or Snacks

When asked about meals and snacks, almost all of the staff stated the quality, quantity and variety of the food provided was good or adequate. A few negative comments were made regarding the quality, quantity and/or the variety of food provided.

Daily Activities

High levels of satisfaction were reported by staff with regard to the daily activities provided to children at their day cares. Activities were described as age-appropriate and based on the children's interests. A couple of negative comments were reported, indicating that daily activities could be improved.

Staff - Child Relationships

The majority of comments relating to staff-child relationships were positive. Day care staff reported their day care centres as safe, secure and positive. Some staff described staff-child relationships as adequate, while a few staff stated that staff-child relationships could be enhanced in their facilities.

Rules and Regulations

Almost all of the feedback from staff regarding rules and regulations were positive. Staff stated there was consistent application of policy within the day cares and child care staff were effective in assisting children to come up with solutions. The few negative comments that were heard related to a lack of consistent application of policy and a lack of assistance to children to work out solutions.

Overall Feedback from Staff

Like parents, day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the overall service and care they provide. Of the many positive comments made, staff reported that job responsibilities are clear, diversities are respected, the centres are safe, staff are aware of appropriate staff-child ratios, medications are safely stored and parents are encouraged to spend time with their children. Of the negative comments heard, staff voiced dissatisfaction with wages as their main concern.

Overall Feedback from Managers

Most of the comments made by the managers were positive. They echoed the same positive remarks as reported by staff. Comments regarding safety, appropriate staff-child ratios, respect for diversity, safe storage of medication, the encouragement of parents to spend time with their children and clear job responsibilities were heard by Committee members. Areas of difficulty reported by managers included high staff turnover and recruitment of employees.

Overall Feedback from Owner/Operators

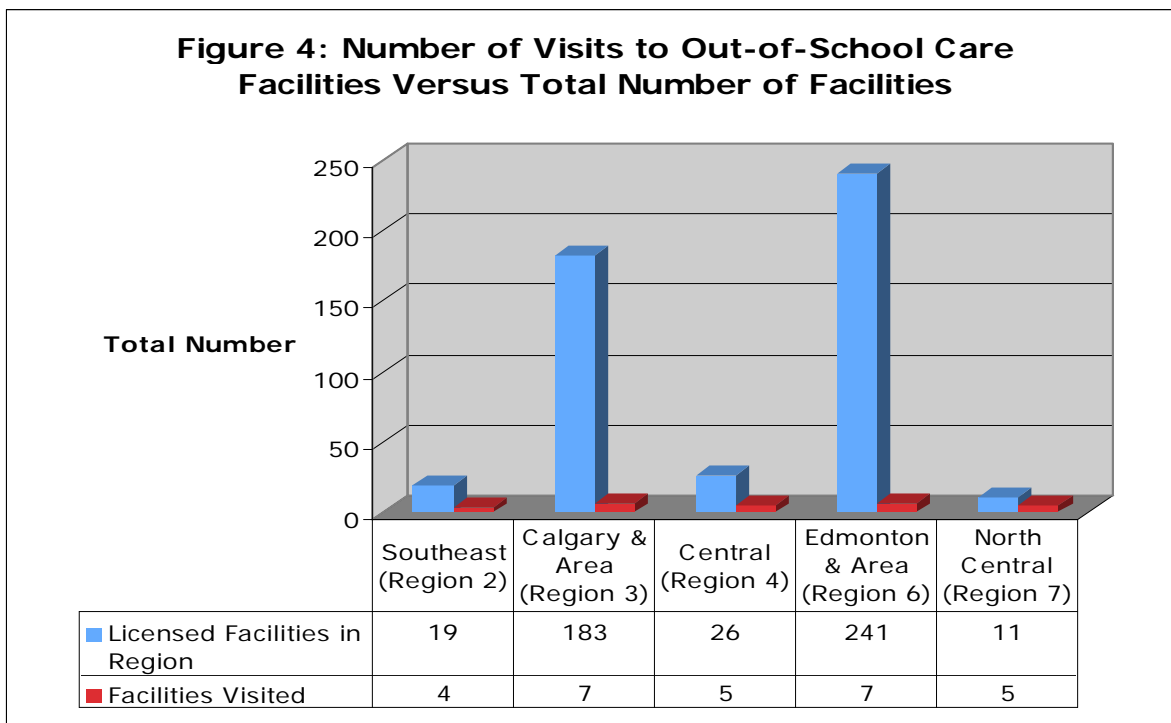
Owner/operators expressed satisfaction with their centres' performance feedback for staff, processes for addressing concerns, written materials, inclusion in the pre-accreditation program, awareness by staff of the pre-accreditation program and accommodation of children with disabilities. The main three concerns noted by owners and operators include: difficulty in recruiting employees, staff turnover and the need for higher staff wages.

Out-of-School Care Facilities

Out-of-school care facilities provide care, development and supervision for seven or more school-aged children. They operate before and after school, during lunch hour or when schools are closed. Out-of-school care facilities are intended to be operational for at least 12 consecutive weeks per year.

Some out-of-school care facilities are co-located with day cares. The majority of out-of-school care facilities visited by the Committee were co-located with a day care facility.

The Committee visited 28 licensed out-of-school care facilities during the April 2007 to March 2008 review period. Figure 4 shows the number of out-of-school care facilities visited, compared to the total number of facilities in the region at the end of the review period.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VISITS TO OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE FACILITIES

Committee members scheduled visits to out-of-school care facilities in late afternoon to coincide with times that parents were at the facilities to pick-up their children. A total of 66 parents were interviewed and 218 parents completed surveys. Some parents who completed surveys also participated in interviews. Children attending out-of-school care facilities were invited to take part in the interviews if their parent or guardian was present or had provided a signed consent form. One hundred and fifty-eight children participated in interviews.

Parents' comments were compiled in eight categories: daily activities, staff-child relationships, communication with staff, parent or guardian involvement, meals and/or snacks, physical environment, rules and regulations, as well as overall feedback. Children's comments have been included with the parent comments in the following five categories: daily activities, staff-child relationships, meals and/or snacks, rules and regulations and overall feedback. Service providers' comments are discussed separately.

Out-of-School Care Themes

Committee members reported a total of 4,846 observations from parents and children about the care children receive at out-of-school care facilities. Overall, parents' and children's comments expressed satisfaction with services provided; 4,225 comments (87%) were positive, 396 comments (8%) were neutral and 225 comments (5%) were negative. The breakdown of parents' and children's comments, relating to out-of-school care themes, is shown in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Responses – Themes at Out-of-School Care Facilities

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Daily Activities</i>	549 (83%)	89 (13%)	26 (4%)	664
<i>Staff-Child Relationships</i>	866 (84%)	29 (3%)	130 (13%)	1025
<i>Communication with Staff</i>	331 (91%)	28 (8%)	6 (1%)	365
<i>Parent or Guardian Involvement</i>	244 (92%)	19 (7%)	2 (1%)	265
<i>Meals and/or Snacks</i>	892 (88%)	117 (12%)	3 (<1%)	1012
<i>Physical Environment</i>	392 (87%)	54 (12%)	4 (1%)	450
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	591 (94%)	31 (5%)	8 (1%)	630
<i>Overall Feedback</i>	360 (83%)	29 (7%)	46 (10%)	435
TOTAL:	4225 (87%)	396 (8%)	225 (5%)	4846

Choice of Out-of-School Care Facility

Parents discussed the factors they considered when selecting an out-of-school care program for their children. While this information is useful in understanding why parents choose a specific out-of-school care program, this feedback does not lend itself to be categorized as positive or negative and it is not included in the above graph. In total, 685 comments were made by parents regarding their choice of out-of-school care. The most frequently mentioned reasons included location (34%), hours of operation (18%), reputation (15%) and programs offered (8%). The remaining 25% of comments referred to cost, transportation and not having a choice due to a lack of local out-of-school care options.

Daily Activities

Eighty-three percent of comments made about daily activities offered in the out-of-school care programs were positive. Parents and children appreciated that the children are involved in planning and are given the opportunity to choose activities. Thirteen percent of comments were neutral where parents rated activities or the planning of activities as adequate. In some cases, a neutral response referred to a parent who was unsure of their child's participation in planning activities. In four percent of the comments, parents

expressed dissatisfaction with activities, planning of activities and/or the children being unable to choose activities.

Staff - Child Relationships

Satisfaction with the relationships between staff and children in out-of-school care comprised 84% of the comments. Parents indicated that staff interactions with the children are good, children feel safe and comfortable, children like attending the program, parents have not observed bullying and children report they have not experienced bullying. Three percent of comments were neutral, as parents indicated staff interactions with children were adequate. In the remaining 13% of comments, some parents said they had observed bullying and some children reported having experienced bullying. (Any significant concerns heard were followed-up immediately, the others were followed-up shortly thereafter). Four children reported they disliked attending the out-of-school care program. (In the case of one out-of-school care program, parents reported that staff repeatedly tried to resolve issues regarding an aggressive child. Eventually, the child was asked to leave the program as the behavioural issues and bullying compromised the comfort of the other children in the program).

Communication with Staff

A high percentage of parents described communication with staff as positive (91%). Parents also stated they were informed of incidents/concerns and felt staff were responsive and aware of their children's needs. Neutral comments (8%) described communication as adequate. Of the six negative comments (1%), four described communication as poor and two stated the responsiveness of staff could be improved.

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Ninety-two percent of parents made positive comments about their opportunities for involvement in the out-of-school care centres. Parents described feeling welcome at the facilities and having opportunities to participate with their children. Seven percent of comments were neutral, reporting opportunities for involvement as adequate. Two comments (1%) indicated a lack of opportunities for parental involvement and/or parents did not feel welcome in the program. (This feedback was received in written form and the parents did not elaborate further).

Meals and/or Snacks

Out-of-school care programs in Alberta require the provision of meals and snacks. These meals and snacks can be provided by the out-of-school facility or the facility may require the parents to provide food for their children. Feedback from parents regarding the quality, quantity and variety of meals and/or snacks provided was positive (88%). Children also stated they liked the food provided and received enough to eat. Twelve percent of parents' and children's comments were neutral, indicating food quality, variety and portion sizes provided were adequate. In the three negative comments made (<1%), two children reported dissatisfaction with the quality and one parent reported dissatisfaction with the variety of meals and/or snacks provided.

Physical Environment

Comments about the physical environment of the out-of-school centres were positive (87%). Parents described the overall environment as good and reported satisfaction with the play space, equipment and toys. Neutral comments (12%) described the physical environment of the out-of-school care facility as adequate. The remaining 1% of comments were negative and related to a few concerns parents expressed about the general physical environment (e.g. furnishings, toys, play space, minor repairs).

Rules and Regulations

When asked about the rules and regulations, the majority of parents and children reported high satisfaction (94%) with the rules, child guidance policies and security measures. Children stated that they were aware of the rules and considered the rules fair. Some comments (5%) were neutral and related to situations where parents described the rules, child guidance, application of rules and security measures as adequate. In the remaining one percent of comments, four parents indicated they were not satisfied with the child guidance, two parents reported the rules were not consistently applied and two children felt the rules at their out-of-school care programs were unfair (e.g. consequences for breaking the rules).

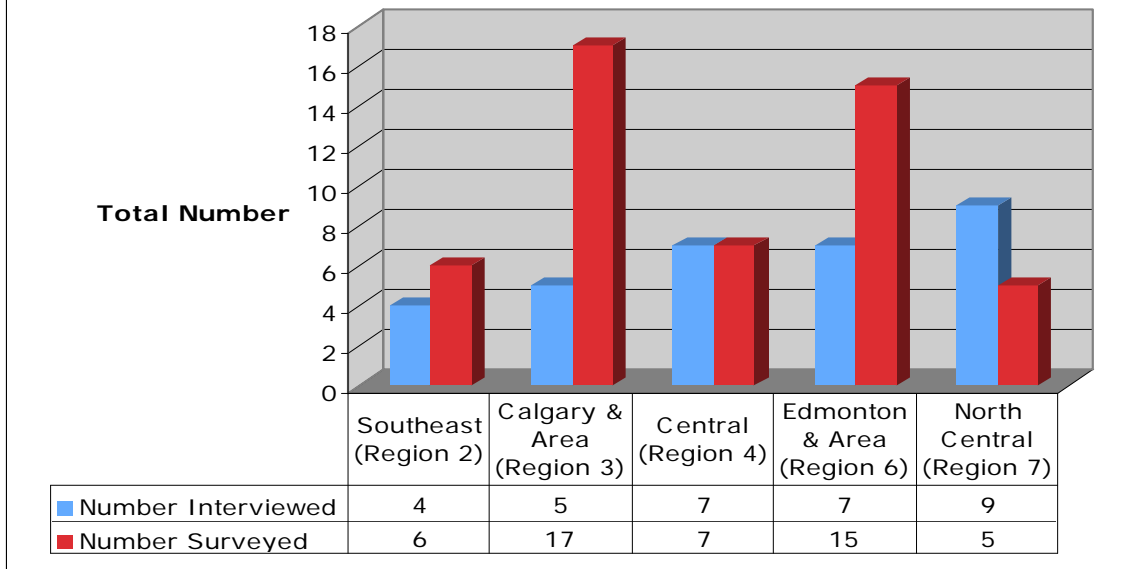
Overall Feedback

Parents and children expressed satisfaction with the overall quality of care received at out-of-school care centres (83%). Parents were pleased with the care their children received at out-of-school care facilities. Children reported liking the facilities and stated they did not want anything to change. Seven percent of the parents said the overall quality of care was adequate. The remaining 10% of comments were negative and included three parents who felt the overall quality of care was poor and several children who reported wanting changes made in their facilities (e.g. more time spent playing in the gym, "getting to pick what we want to do", new toys).

Service Provider Comments

Committee members gave out-of-school care staff the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. Overall, the Committee spoke with 32 staff in 28 out-of-school care programs. In addition, 50 staff completed surveys. Out-of-school care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews; their feedback is separate from the staff comments. The number of out-of-school care staff who were interviewed or completed surveys in each Child and Family Services Authority is illustrated in Figure 6, on the next page.

Figure 6: Out-of-School Care Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Service providers' comments expressed satisfaction with the services they provided; 1,180 comments (78%) were positive, 227 comments (15%) were neutral and the remaining 105 comments (7%) were negative.

Physical Environment

Staff expressed high satisfaction with the layout of their out-of-school care centres stating the physical environment allowed for individual, small and large group activities. Some neutral statements were reported indicating the physical space was adequate. One staff commented adult space was inadequate (e.g. space for breaks, conducting paperwork).

Meals and/or Snacks

The majority of staff spoke highly about the food provided to children in the out-of-school care centres. Some staff commented that the food quality, quantity and/or variety was adequate. Only one negative comment was heard from staff regarding the variety of food provided.

Daily Activities

More than three-quarters of the comments about daily activities provided at out-of-school care facilities were positive. Staff stated children have opportunities to participate in the planning, development and implementation of activities and that activities are based on the children's interests. Some of the comments were neutral, where staff described the daily activities as adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Staff - Child Relationships

All of the staff comments referring to staff-child relationships were either positive or neutral. Staff talked about methods of redirecting behaviour, modelling respectful relationships and encouraging positive relationships with others. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations

Staff made only positive comments about the rules and regulations at out-of-school care centres. Staff indicated they help children to solve their own conflicts when appropriate and ensure rules are consistently applied.

Overall Feedback from Staff

When staff commented on the general services and care they provide to children attending out-of-school care facilities, the vast majority made positive comments. Staff reported that job responsibilities were clear, staff were knowledgeable about staff-child ratios, diversities were respected, staff were aware of children who carried emergency medication and knew when children self-medicated. Of the negative comments heard, a couple of staff were unaware when a child self-medicated and/or were unaware of children who carried emergency medication.

Overall Feedback from Managers

Feedback from out-of-school care managers mirrored that of the out-of-school care staff. Managers reported that medications were kept in secure locations, staff were made aware of the appropriate staff-child ratios, job responsibilities were clear, diversities were respected, staff were aware of children who carried emergency medication and knew when a child self-medicated. Of the negative comments received, managers highlighted a need for higher staff wages and difficulty with staff turnover and recruitment of new staff.

Overall Feedback from Owner/Operators

Owner/operators were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. Many owner/operators made positive comments about their process for addressing concerns, the performance feedback given to staff, their process of reviewing rules and consequences with staff, awareness of children who self-medicate, awareness of the amended child care regulations, the provision of before school services, allowing children input into the program and the accommodation of children with disabilities.

Only one neutral comment was heard stating staff turnover was adequate. Negative comments included owner/operators who reported that children do not assist with planning the menus, staff are not shared between the out-of-school care program and the co-located day care program, need for higher staff wages and difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff.

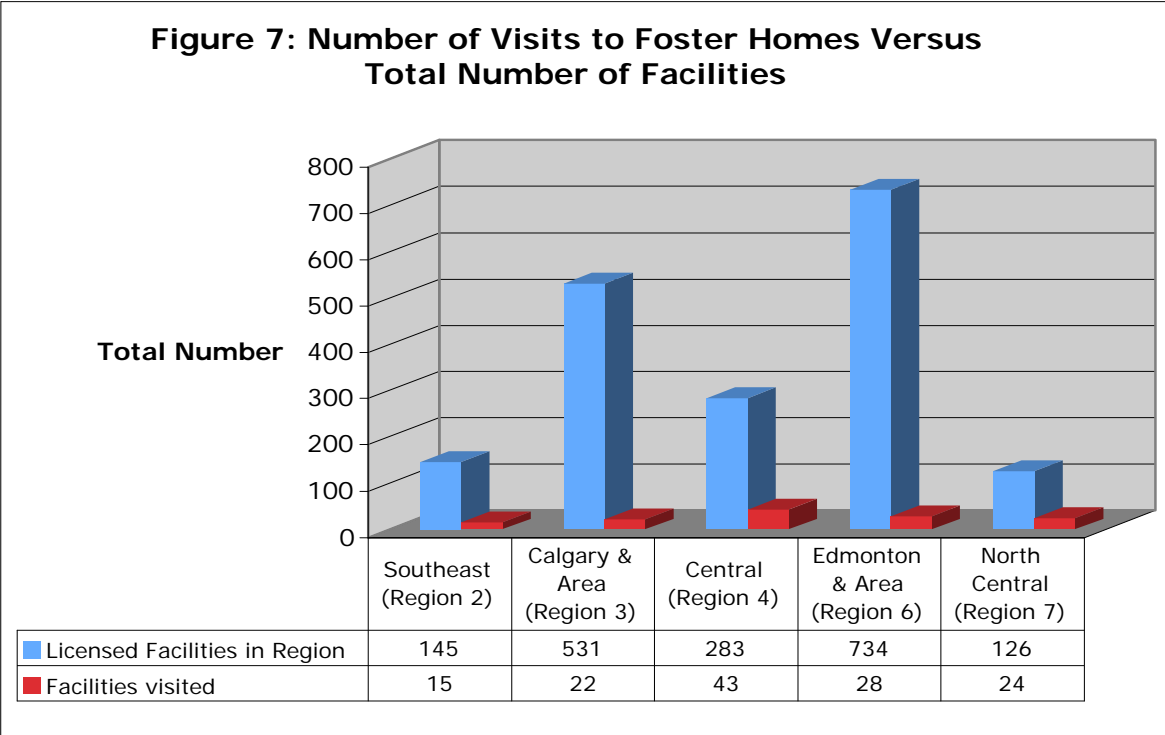
Foster Homes

Foster homes provide temporary care to children under the care of Alberta Children and Youth Services who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to remain in their natural family home. Children are placed with foster parents who have the expertise and training required to meet the particular needs of the children in their care.

Whenever a child comes into care, the goal is to return the child to his or her natural family as soon as possible when it is safe to do so. Foster parents are part of the team working to achieve this goal. When a return to the natural family is not feasible, an alternate permanency plan is made for the child. This may include adoption, private guardianship, or kinship care.

The *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* contains a licensing provision that ensures quality of care and accountability for children in the custody or guardianship of the director. All foster homes must be licensed.

The Committee visited 132 foster homes during the April 2007 to March 2008 review period. The number of foster homes visited, as well as the total number of facilities in each region is shown in Figure 7.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VISITS TO FOSTER HOMES

Committee members scheduled visits to foster homes around the families' schedules to ensure as many foster children as possible were available for interviews. Of the 376 children residing in the 132 foster homes visited, 228 children and youth (61%) participated in interviews. In addition, Committee members observed 90 children (24%) who were pre-verbal and/or non-verbal.

Foster children's comments are organized into three main categories: care, treatment and accommodation. Foster parents' comments are discussed separately.

Care

In the course of interviews, Committee members gathered 3,653 comments from foster children regarding the care they receive in their foster homes. In general, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the care provided; 2,880 comments (79%) were positive, 697 comments (19%) were neutral and 76 comments (2%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments, relating to care themes, is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Responses - Care Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Education</i>	511 (92%)	12 (2%)	32 (6%)	555
<i>Vacation</i>	243 (91%)	17 (7%)	6 (2%)	266
<i>Social Activities</i>	947 (98%)	0 (0%)	15 (2%)	962
<i>Foster Parent-Child Relationships</i>	397 (54%)	337 (46%)	5 (<1%)	739
<i>Rules</i>	394 (55%)	326 (45%)	3 (<1%)	723
<i>Overall Care and Comfort Level</i>	388 (94%)	5 (1%)	15 (5%)	408
TOTAL:	2880 (79%)	697 (19%)	76 (2%)	3653

Education

The majority (92%) of the children's comments about education were positive. Foster children spoke about the types of schools they attended (e.g. public, private, special needs programs and early childhood services), how much they liked school and their plans for the future. Some youth commented positively on the Advancing Futures Bursary, stating they looked forward to accessing this program in the future. Nineteen percent of the comments indicated foster children had plans to graduate from high school and 14% referred to plans for post-secondary education.

Neutral comments (2%) referred to youth who were employed full-time and part-time and to youth whose feelings about school were neutral. Negative comments (6%) referred to children who said they disliked school and/or youth who were unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary. (Committee members informed the youth interviewed about the Advancing Futures Bursary program).

Vacation

Children and youth made numerous positive comments about vacations (91%), describing holidays and day trips they have taken and/or were planning to take with their foster or natural families. Some children spoke about attending summer camps. Neutral comments (7%) referred to foster children who have not lived at their current home long enough to go on vacation. Six negative comments (2%) came from children who said they have not yet had a vacation (e.g. four children indicated they did not travel for a vacation, but had an active summer at the foster home swimming, riding horses, riding bikes and playing).

Social Activities

Almost all of the foster children interviewed expressed high satisfaction with their participation in social activities (98%). The majority of those interviewed reported having friends and participating in a wide range of leisure activities. Unstructured entertainment (e.g. hanging out with friends, playing game systems), sports and activities with the foster family topped the list of fun things foster children and youth talked about. Some of the children reported they received an allowance. There were no neutral comments.

Of the negative comments (2%), one indicated the child did not have any friends, another indicated the child was only involved in limited activity and a few children and youth reported they did not receive an allowance. (The child who stated he/she did not “really have any friends” was involved in multiple activities and organized sports, employed part-time and described having a close relationship with the foster family. The child/youth who stated he/she was involved in limited activity said he/she did not like participating in activities, but was comfortable in the foster home and had good relationships with his/her natural family. In each case where a child/youth reported they did not receive an allowance, follow-up revealed there were extenuating circumstances that caused the child/youth to not physically receive an allowance at a particular time for example behaviour, ability to manage money, etc).

Foster Parent-Child Relationships

When examining the positive (54%) and neutral (46%) comments made by the children and youth about the relationships they have with their foster parents, it is evident that most of the responses are highly positive. Many of the foster children conveyed contentment with the relationships they shared with their foster parents, and several commented that they were comfortable talking with their foster parents if they needed someone to speak to about concerns or problems.

In addition, children and youth spoke of having other people in their lives with whom they would confide in (e.g. teacher, caseworker, school counsellor, etc). As well, a few foster children discussed how their foster parents keep them connected to their culture. Negative comments (<1%) related to children who said they experienced difficulties in their relationships with foster parents. (Efforts to improve the children’s relationships with their caregivers were being made e.g. although a child would prefer to be living with natural family, efforts to make the child more comfortable in the foster home is occurring. When difficulties are ongoing with no resolution, practice is to match a child with a different care provider).

Rules

Foster children made positive comments about the rules in the foster homes. Fifty-five percent of the positive remarks made referred to knowing the rules and viewing the rules as fair. Neutral comments (45%) outlined the consequences for breaking the rules, such as having privileges revoked, time-out or grounding. Negative comments (<1%) related to children who said the

rules were unfair. (Upon follow-up, the rules described by the children were deemed appropriate).

Overall Care and Comfort Level

In response to questions about their overall care and comfort in the foster home, 94% of comments heard were positive. Children reported a good level of comfort, stated they were treated fairly and felt safe in their foster homes. One percent of comments were neutral responses in which children rated their comfort level as adequate. Negative comments (5%) were heard from foster children who said they had a poor level of comfort or believed they were treated unfairly (e.g. one child stated he/she did not get along with his/her foster parent, two children stated they were treated differently, but liked living in the foster home).

Treatment

Committee members reported 1,813 observations from foster children about the treatment they received in foster homes. Children made 1,183 (65%) positive comments, 400 (22%) neutral comments and 230 (13%) negative comments. The breakdown of foster children's comments, relating to treatment themes, is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: Responses - Treatment Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Transition</i>	194 (45%)	107 (25%)	130 (30%)	431
<i>Medical/Dental Needs</i>	592 (69%)	259 (30%)	7 (1%)	858
<i>Contact with Natural Family</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Case Plans</i>	198 (62%)	34 (11%)	85 (27%)	317
<i>Memory Books</i>	199 (96%)	0 (0%)	8 (4%)	207
TOTAL:	1183 (65%)	400 (22%)	230 (13%)	1813

Transition

Foster children were given the opportunity to talk about their experience of moving into their foster homes and recount how they felt at the time of the transition. They also commented on their present feelings toward their placements. Forty-five percent of the comments relating to transition were positive. Children who were satisfied with their transition experience indicated that they were given a pre-placement visit and/or had been advised in advance of the move. Twenty-five percent of the comments about transition were neutral. The majority of neutral comments referred to having no memory of or being unable to recall the transition.

The remaining 30% of comments about transition were negative. Children who expressed dissatisfaction said they felt scared at the time of the move, were not provided with a pre-placement visit, or felt sad at the prospect of moving. (It is not always possible to provide advance notice or a pre-placement visit in

circumstances where children are apprehended from their home). Although a few children said they were happy at the time of their move, many more declared they were happy now.

Medical/Dental Needs

Sixty-nine percent of the comments about medical, dental and optical care were positive. Children stated their dental, medical and optical needs were attended to and felt they were well cared for when ill. Neutral comments (30%) described having visited a doctor, dentist or optometrist within the past year. Negative comments (1%) referred to situations where children said they had not yet seen a doctor or dentist. (These children had recently come into care and their foster parents were working to obtain medical and dental appointments).

Contact with Natural Family

Children were asked about their contact with natural family members to determine whether or not contact was occurring. Committee members do not explore the reasons for limitations on, or the appropriateness of contact. For reporting purposes, family contact is not classified in the positive or negative, as family contact and/or reunification with natural family members is not always possible or desirable given individual children's circumstances.

In response to questions about contact with natural family, some of the children indicated they maintain contact with natural family members and/or mentioned they were happy with the level of contact they have with their natural family members. Most children identified specific family members they had contact with and/or the frequency of visits with family. The level of contact described ranged from regular to limited, but regular contact was most frequently reported. In a few cases, comments were made referring to situations where a child did not have contact with natural family or where a child expressed dissatisfaction with the level of contact they had with natural family members.

Case Plans

When asked about case plans, 62 percent of comments were positive. These comments indicated children were aware they had a case plan and/or had input into the plan's development.

Neutral comments (11%) offered by children and youth referred to how often they had contact with their caseworker and when they last discussed their case plan with their caseworker.

Twenty-seven percent of comments regarding case plans were negative, the majority of which referred to children who were unaware of a case plan. (Very young children or children with comprehension difficulties may not have readily recognized conversations with caseworkers as case planning).

Memory Books

Ninety-six percent of the comments made by children and youth related to having photographs, memory books and/or keepsakes. There were no neutral comments. Negative responses (4%) were made by children who indicated that

they did not have a memory book or photographs. (Committee members realize that due to the manner in which some children and youth come into care, it is not always possible to bring pictures and/or keepsakes).

Accommodation

Committee members heard 1,182 comments by foster children related to accommodation, including meals and the physical environment of the home. Foster children and youth expressed high levels of satisfaction with their accommodation; 1,039 comments (88%) were positive, 123 comments (10%) were neutral and 20 comments (2%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments related to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Responses - Accommodation Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Meals</i>	669 (97%)	0 (0%)	20 (3%)	689
<i>Physical Environment</i>	370 (75%)	123 (25%)	0 (0%)	493
TOTAL:	1039 (88%)	123 (10%)	20 (2%)	1182

Meals

The vast majority of comments made about meals were positive (97%). Children remarked that not only the quality and quantity of food provided was good, but they liked the food, and could list favourite meals. Many children also mentioned that they helped with meal preparation.

No neutral comments were made. The negative comments (3%) referred only to children who reported that they did not help prepare meals. (Participation in meal preparation is considered an opportunity to develop life skills; as a result, a lack of participation is classified as negative).

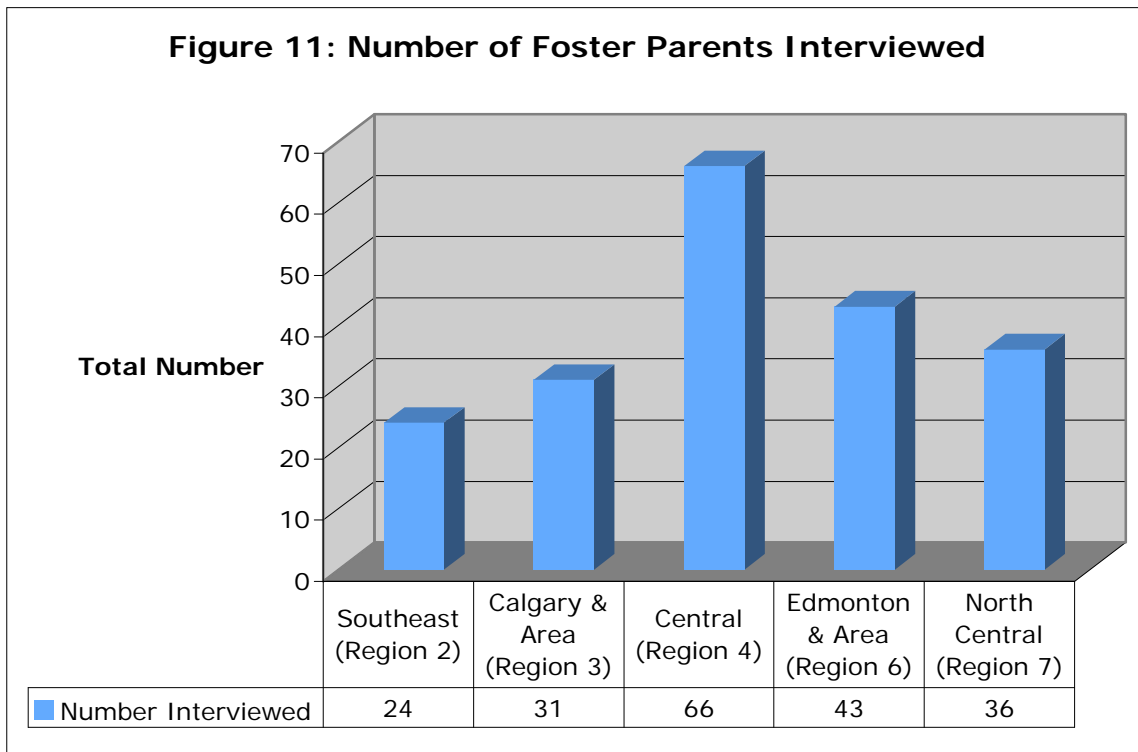
Physical Environment

Children and youth described their foster homes, the chores they were responsible for and what changes, if any, they would like to make. All comments were either positive (75%) or neutral (25%). Children and youth indicated they liked their homes and participated in chores. The majority of neutral comments refer to foster children who mentioned they lived in foster homes that had pets and/or said they wouldn't change anything in their current foster home. No negative comments were made.

Foster Parents' Comments

Committee members gave foster parents an opportunity to comment on the services they provided to the children in their care and the supports they received to assist them in their role as foster parents. As well, foster parents had the chance to express concerns of their own. Members spoke with 200 foster parents in 132 foster homes. Foster parents expressed different views, depending on their experiences, perceptions and geographic location. The number of foster parents who participated in interviews, broken down by Child and Family Services Authority, is shown in Figure 11, on the next page.

Figure 11: Number of Foster Parents Interviewed



In general, foster parents' comments expressed moderate satisfaction; 59% of the total comments were positive, 11% of comments were neutral and 30% of the total comments were negative.

Services

Many foster parents expressed satisfaction with the access to treatment and services for the children and youth in their care. Foster parents spoke about having good communication and assistance from educational, health and dental professionals.

Some areas of dissatisfaction were highlighted in the interviews. A few foster parents remarked that the children's recreation funds did not cover the actual cost of some recreational activities. A few commented they had difficulty getting assistance from educational professionals, did not receive referrals for requested treatment and/or experienced a lack of accessible services. (Upon follow-up, regional staff assisted the foster parents in acquiring the necessary services).

Agency Support

With regard to general support and services received from foster care agencies, most of the foster parents' comments were positive. Foster parents highlighted their satisfaction with agencies' services, support workers and training. Of the few negative comments made, foster parents identified a need for increased respite resources and changes to their training (e.g. courses provided online, an increase of advanced level courses for experienced foster parents and greater variety of material).

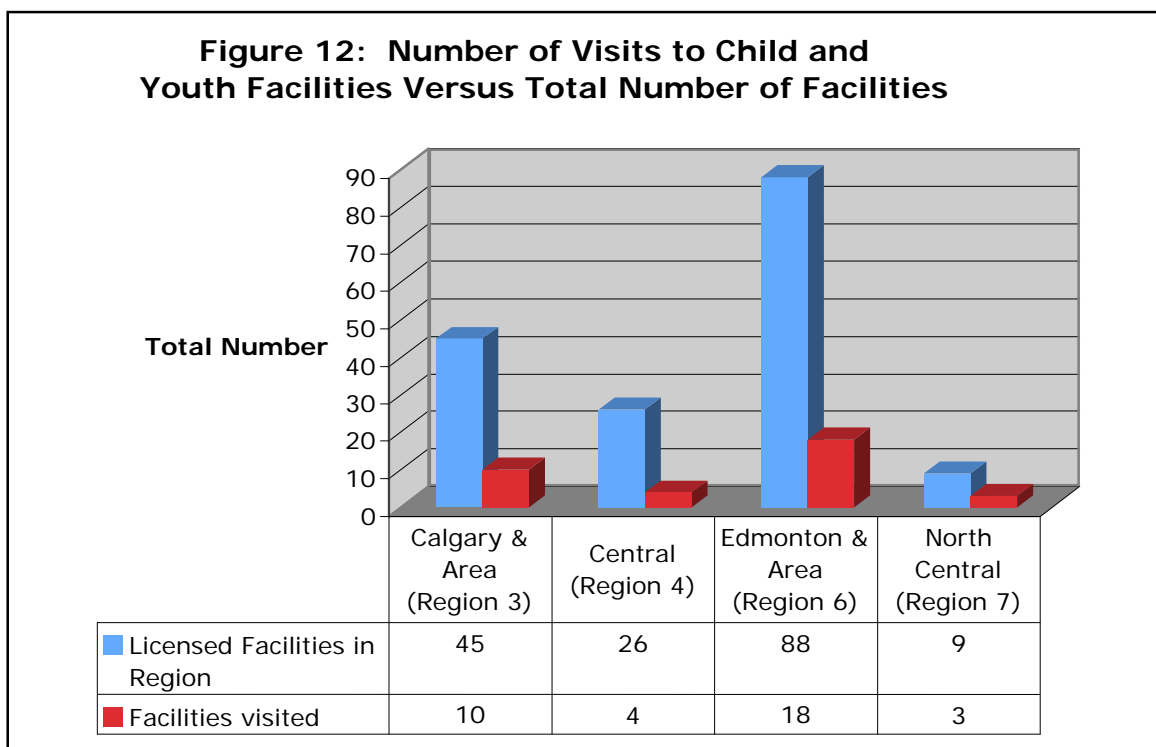
Support from the Ministry and Child and Family Services Authority

Comments from foster parents were almost evenly divided between positive and negative. In positive comments, foster parents said they received good support from regional staff (e.g. caseworkers, foster care support workers) and the ministry. They further indicated that they received good foster parent training. Negative comments indicated foster parents' dissatisfaction with accessing respite resources, staff turnover (e.g. caseworkers) and a desire for improvements to foster parent training (e.g. online or distance-friendly courses, an increase of advanced level courses for experienced foster parents). Some foster parents commented on a need for improved communication with regional staff (e.g. caseworkers).

Child and Youth Facilities

Child and youth facilities provide care to children and youth, 18 years of age or younger, who are under the care or protection of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. A range of facilities including receiving and assessment homes, group homes, secure services, youth shelters and emergency shelters are classified as child and youth facilities and are licensed under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. Most of these facilities are operated by not-for-profit or profit organizations, however, some are government operated.

The Committee visited 35 child and youth facilities between April 2007 and March 2008. Figure 12 shows the number of child and youth facilities visited, as well as the total number of facilities in each region.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VISITS TO CHILD AND YOUTH FACILITIES

Committee members scheduled visits to child and youth facilities late in the afternoon, after school hours or early in the evening to ensure as many children and youth as possible were available for interviews. A total of 83 children and youth, from 35 facilities, participated in the interviews.

Children and youth comments are organized into three main categories: care, treatment and accommodation. Service provider's comments are discussed separately.

Care

Committee members reported 1,207 comments from children and youth about the care they received at their facilities. Overall, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 899 comments (75%) were positive, 245 comments (20%) were neutral and 63 comments (5%) were negative. The breakdown of children's comments, relating to care themes, is shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13: Responses – Care Themes at Child and Youth Facilities

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Education</i>	176 (82%)	7 (3%)	31 (15%)	214
<i>Vacation</i>	43 (52%)	35 (43%)	4 (5%)	82
<i>Social Activities</i>	345 (99%)	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	348
<i>Staff-Child/Youth Relationships</i>	75 (48%)	72 (46%)	9 (6%)	156
<i>Rules</i>	144 (52%)	129 (47%)	4 (1%)	277
<i>Overall Care and Comfort Level</i>	116 (89%)	2 (2%)	12 (9%)	130
TOTAL:	899 (75%)	245 (20%)	63 (5%)	1207

Education

Most of the comments about education were positive (82%), with children and youth indicating they attended public school, facility programs or a special needs program. Some of the children indicated they liked school (23%), planned to graduate (23%) and a few said they intended to pursue post-secondary education (14%). In neutral comments (3%), youth mentioned having part-time jobs and/or had neutral feelings about school. The negative comments (15%) included children who said they were unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary and/or children and youth who disliked school. (Committee members informed the youth interviewed about the Advancing Futures Bursary program).

Vacation

About half (52%) of the children and youth responses about vacation were positive, describing holidays with facility staff and/or natural family members, summer camp and day trips. Comments made by children living in placements not conducive to vacations (e.g. short-term, emergency shelter placements) were classified as neutral (43%). Negative comments (5%) referred to situations where children and youth reported not yet having had a vacation.

Social Activities

Ninety-nine percent of the children and youth expressed satisfaction with their social activities. The most popular comments included participating in unstructured activities (e.g. hanging out with friends, playing game systems), having friends, activities with facility staff, sports activities and facility recreation programs. Many children and youth commented that they received an allowance. Negative comments (1%) were heard from three youth who indicated they did not have friends (e.g. "I don't really like the kids here", "I don't really have friends here"). When questioned further, these youth had friends, but did not consider the other youth in their placement friends.

Staff - Child/Youth Relationships

Children and youth made a variety of statements about their relationships with staff. Most of the positive comments (48%) referred to having good relationships with staff. A few reported that staff helped them keep connected to their families and culture. Forty-six percent of comments were neutral. Children and youth described who they talked to when they have a concern (e.g. staff, caseworker, teacher). Two youth described their relationships with staff as adequate. In a few negative comments (6%), children expressed dissatisfaction with the staff-child relationships. In these cases, the children's caseworkers addressed the issues and confirmed they were resolved.

Rules

In 52% of comments, children and youth indicated knowing the rules and consequences at their respective facilities and described them as fair. Forty-seven percent of the comments were neutral in nature and referred to the types of consequences used in their facilities (e.g. having privileges revoked, grounding, time-out). In one percent of the comments, four children reported the rules to be unfair (e.g. "no ketchup except with fries", "it's not fair because I like to get my own way"). (Upon follow-up, the rules described by the children were deemed appropriate).

Overall Care and Comfort Level

When asked about their overall care and comfort in their facilities, most of the children and youth made positive remarks. Eighty-nine percent of children and youth stated that their level of comfort was good, they felt safe and were treated fairly. Two percent of the comments were neutral and referred to those who stated their level of comfort was adequate. The remaining nine percent of comments were negative. Four youth expressed a poor level of comfort as they did not like the idea of living in a group home (e.g. youth preferred to return home with natural parents or reside in a foster home), two stated they had experienced bullying (both youth said they spoke with staff who are handling

the situation appropriately) and two youth indicated they did not feel safe (both youth indicated staff were dealing with the situations effectively).

Treatment

Committee members reported 590 comments from children and youth about the treatment they received at child and youth facilities. Of those comments, 386 (65%) were positive, 141 (24%) were neutral and the remaining 63 (11%) were negative. The breakdown of children and youths' comments, relating to treatment themes, is shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14: Responses - Treatment Themes at Child and Youth Facilities

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Transition</i>	88 (52%)	46 (27%)	36 (21%)	170
<i>Case Plans</i>	100 (75%)	14 (11%)	19 (14%)	133
<i>Contact with Natural Family</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Medical/Dental Needs</i>	198 (69%)	81 (28%)	8 (3%)	287
TOTAL:	386 (65%)	141 (24%)	63 (11%)	590

Transition

When asked what their experience was like when they moved into their current placement, 52 percent of comments were positive. Children and youth described being informed of the move in advance, having a pre-placement visit, being happy at the time of the move and receiving good support. Several children and youth reported they are currently happy with their placement. Twenty-seven percent of the comments were neutral, and referred to the type of placement the children and youth resided in prior to entering their current placement.

The remaining 21 percent of the comments were negative. Some children and youth indicated they were not provided with a pre-placement visit, some recalled feeling sad or angry about the move and some stated they were not notified in advance of the move. (As previously noted, in specific situations it is not always possible to provide advance notice or a pre-placement visit in circumstances where children are apprehended from their home). Three children and youth reported they were still angry at the time of the interview with Committee members (e.g. dealing with feelings of anger about having to leave a foster home, wanting to return home with natural parent(s)). In these cases, the caseworkers confirmed they were aware of the situation and were attending to the needs of the children/youth.

Case Plans

The positive comments (75%) made regarding case plans refer to children and youth who said they were aware they had a case plan and/or had input into the development of their plans. Eleven percent of comments were neutral and referred to the frequency of updates to case plans and those who contributed to the plans (e.g. facility staff, caseworker). Children and youth also offered information on how often they see their caseworker and how long they have

had their current caseworker. Most of the negative comments (14%) refer to children and youth who said they were not aware of their case plans. (As previously noted, very young children or children with comprehension difficulties may not have readily recognized conversations with caseworkers as case planning and/or did not have much input into the case plan).

Contact with Natural Family

Questions about children and youth contact with natural family members were designed to determine whether or not contact occurs. These questions do not explore the reasons for, limitations on, or appropriateness of contact. For reporting purposes, family contact is not classified in the positive or negative as family contact and/or reunification with natural family is not always possible or desirable given individual children's circumstances.

The vast majority of comments made by children and youth indicated they have contact with natural family and possessed memorabilia and keepsakes such as photographs or memory books. Many children described who they had contact with (e.g. natural parents, siblings) and how often they had contact (e.g. regular, occasional). A few children and youth stated they did not have contact with natural family members, did not have keepsakes and/or were dissatisfied with the level of contact. (Committee members realize that due to the manner in which some children and youth come into care, it is not always possible to bring pictures and/or keepsakes).

Medical/Dental Needs

Ninety-seven percent of the children and youth reported positive or neutral comments about their health care. The majority of children and youth (69%) stated that their medical, dental and optical needs are met and that they felt they were well cared for in the facility when they were ill. In the neutral comments (28%), children and youth reported whether or not they had seen a doctor, dentist or optometrist in the last year. Three percent of comments were negative, where children and youth indicated they had not yet seen a doctor, dentist and/or optometrist (e.g. youth must book their own appointments).

Accommodation

Committee members reported 365 comments from children and youth on issues relating to accommodation at child and youth facilities. Residents expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 330 comments (91%) were positive, 12 comments (3%) were neutral and 23 comments (6%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' responses, relating to accommodation themes, is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Responses - Accommodation Themes at Child and Youth Facilities

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Meals</i>	203 (90%)	5 (2%)	19 (8%)	227
<i>Physical Environment</i>	127 (92%)	7 (5%)	4 (3%)	138
TOTAL:	330 (91%)	12 (3%)	23 (6%)	365

Meals

When asked about the meals served in their facilities, most of the children and youth responses were positive. Ninety percent of comments indicated children were pleased with the quality and quantity of food. Respondents also reported that they helped with meal preparation. In neutral comments (2%), children and youth reported that the quality of meals was adequate. The remaining 8% of comments were negative. The negative comments referred to children who reported they did not help prepare meals, wanted more to eat and/or felt the food quality was poor. (As previously mentioned, participation in meal preparation is considered an opportunity to develop life skills, and as a result, a lack of participation is classified as negative).

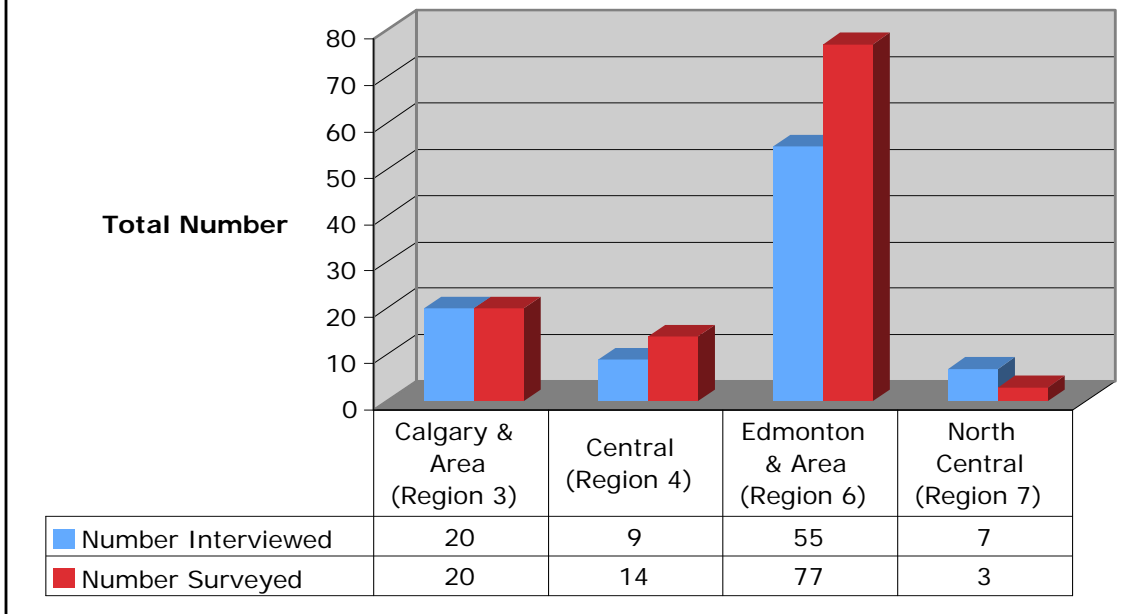
Physical Environment

Ninety-two percent of comments about the physical environment were positive. Children and youth stated they liked their facilities, participated in daily or weekly chores, and/or had pets in their facility. Neutral comments (5%) referenced aspects of the facilities that children and youth would like to see changed (e.g. having own room). Negative comments (3%) referred to aspects of the facility that four children and youth felt were poor (e.g. youth who wanted their curfew extended). In each of these cases, the rules within the facilities were deemed appropriate and ensured the children and youth's safety.

Staff Member Comments

Committee members talked to 91 staff members at 35 child and youth facilities to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide and to raise any concerns. An additional 114 staff completed surveys. Those interviewed expressed differing views depending on their experiences, perceptions and location (e.g. travel time, access to resources and services). More than half of the responses in the interviews and surveys expressed satisfaction; 56% of comments were positive, 24% were neutral and the remaining 20% were negative. Figure 16, on the next page, shows a breakdown of staff who participated in interviews or completed surveys.

Figure 16: Child and Youth Facilities Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Education and Training

High levels of satisfaction were reported by child and youth facility staff when asked whether they felt they had sufficient training to deal with the situations they encounter. Staff also commented on how their facilities provide opportunities to access additional training. A few staff described the training received as adequate. Of the few negative comments reported, staff felt training could be enhanced by providing refresher courses and debriefing sessions. It was also reported that more specialized training regarding behavioural issues would be helpful.

Staffing/Facility Programs

Staff spoke positively about the programs offered in their facilities. They highlighted areas of satisfaction including clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good relationships with other staff, positive relationships between staff and children/youth, teamwork, good supports for residents and strong communication. Some respondents reported that staffing levels were adequate. Staff highlighted the ongoing challenges with facility staff turnover and trying to retain or recruit staff. Some staff expressed a need for higher staff wages.

Supports from the Ministry, Agencies and Community

The majority of comments made about supports were either neutral or negative. Staff noted the positive assistance received from the Child and Youth Advocate, caseworkers, communities and health professionals. Of the negative comments heard, staff indicated relationships with the ministry to be poor (e.g. communication, provision of background information, consistency between regions and caseworkers) and a lack of available mental health resources. They

further stated relationships with health and educational professionals could be improved (e.g. understanding the circumstances of children in care).

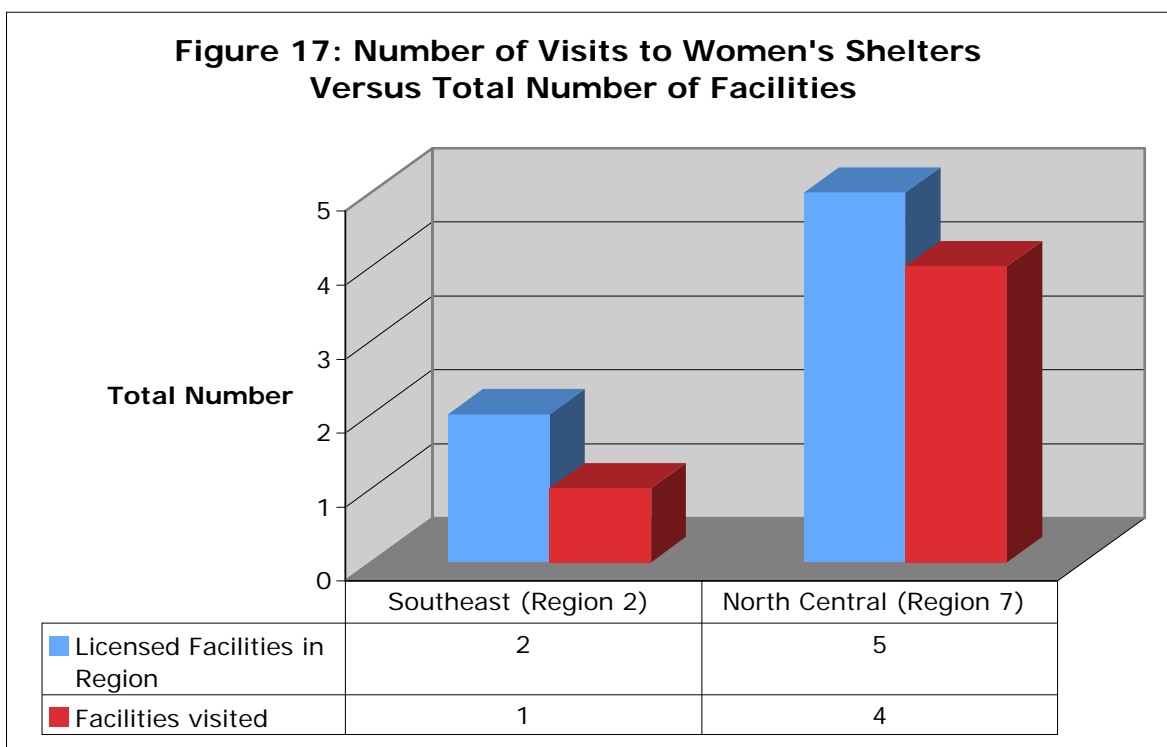
Director's Comments

Directors were given the opportunity to comment on the services their facilities provide to the children in their care. Teamwork with natural families, good program supports for residents and strong supports for youth transitioning to adulthood topped the list of positive comments made by directors. Many directors indicated their dissatisfaction with the wages paid to facility staff and discussed the challenges of staff turnover.

Women's Emergency Shelters

The goal of the women's shelter program is to support positive, stable, long-term outcomes for victims of family violence. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services funds basic emergency services for abused women with and without children in 31 women's shelters across the province. Shelters provide safe short-term accommodation for up to 21 days. Basic emergency services include crisis intervention, emotional support, information, referral and advocacy. Shelters also provide child support services for the children who are admitted with their mothers.

The Committee visited five women's emergency shelters during the April 2007 to March 2008 review period. Figure 17 shows the number of shelters visited in comparison to the total number of funded facilities per region.



HIGHLIGHTS OF VISITS TO WOMEN'S EMERGENCY SHELTERS

Committee members make every effort to schedule visits to women's emergency shelters at times of the day when it is most convenient for residents and staff to be interviewed. A total of 14 residents and 19 staff participated in interviews while 33 staff completed surveys.

The total interview response rate of the 52 residents living in the five facilities visited was 27%. The low participation rate is likely related to the unique situation of these residents who typically spend time away from the facility to search for jobs, permanent accommodations or attend counseling appointments. Children residing at women's emergency shelters did not participate in interviews.

Residents' comments are organized into two main categories: care/treatment and accommodation. Staff comments are discussed separately.

Care and Treatment

Committee members reported 88 comments from residents about the care and treatment they receive at women's emergency shelters. Fifty-six comments (64%) were positive and the remaining 32 comments (36%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to care/treatment themes, is shown in Figure 18.

Figure 18: Responses - Care and Treatment Themes at Women's Emergency Shelters

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Program Awareness</i>	18 (46%)	0 (0%)	21 (54%)	39
<i>Staff-Resident Relationships</i>	20 (65%)	0 (0%)	11 (35%)	31
<i>Quality of Services Received</i>	18 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	18
TOTAL	56 (64%)	0 (0%)	32 (36%)	88

Program Awareness

In 46% of comments, residents described being aware of the types of programs offered by their shelters. Respondents mentioned receiving information, services (e.g. locating community resources) and stated they were provided access to community services. They further stated they were aware of resources available (e.g. in-house, community) for themselves and their children. Among the negative comments (54%), residents described having difficulty accessing community resources due to the location of the shelter(s) and spoke of the difficulties accessing affordable housing after they leave.

Staff-Resident Relationships

In the positive comments (65%), residents expressed appreciation for staff members' assistance, support, understanding, resourcefulness and knowledge. A few women reported that staff facilitated positive relationships among residents. Negative comments (35%) referred to a need for improved staffing levels and three comments indicated staff needed to be more supportive, understanding and resourceful.

Quality of Services Received

All of the comments about the overall quality of services received were positive (100%). Residents expressed satisfaction with the services and activities provided for both themselves and their children.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 157 comments from residents about the accommodations provided at women's emergency shelters. Overall, residents expressed satisfaction with their accommodations; 112 comments (71%) were positive, 36 comments (23%) were neutral and the remaining nine comments (6%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to accommodation themes, is shown in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Responses - Accommodation Themes at Women's Emergency Shelters

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Physical Environment</i>	25 (70%)	8 (22%)	3 (8%)	36
<i>Meals</i>	31 (74%)	11 (26%)	0 (0%)	42
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	34 (79%)	9 (21%)	0 (0%)	43
<i>Support Services</i>	22 (61%)	8 (22%)	6 (17%)	36
TOTAL	112 (71%)	36 (23%)	9 (6%)	157

Physical Environment

Ninety-two percent of comments about the physical environment of the shelters were either positive or neutral. Residents talked about feeling safe and secure. They also expressed satisfaction with the privacy, size, comfort and design of the facilities. A total of three negative comments (8%) were made, stating the privacy, safety and security of the facilities could be improved (e.g. need for a private room to make phone calls, two women in one facility stated everyone in their community knew where the shelter was located which made them feel unsafe).

Meals

Positive comments about the quality, quantity and variety of the meals provided in the shelters comprised 74% of the statements about food. The remaining responses were neutral (26%) where residents said they participated in preparing meals and/or described the food as adequate.

Rules and Regulations

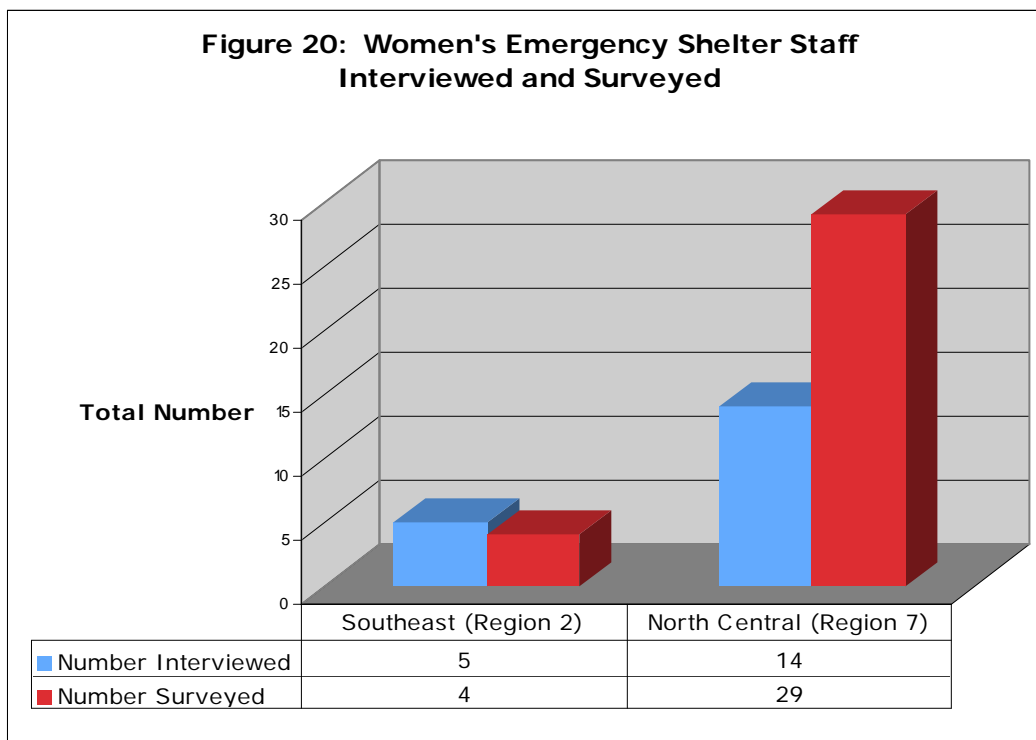
Satisfaction with the rules was reported in 79% of the comments. Women reported knowing the rules, described the rules as fair and stated the regulations were enforced in their respective shelters. Neutral comments (21%) referred to residents who reported they were responsible for chores at the shelters. No negative comments were made.

Support Services

When asked about the support services provided at their facilities, residents made positive remarks (61%). Women said they were impressed with the services received and would recommend the facility to others. Twenty-two percent of comments were neutral describing how residents came to know about the facilities (e.g. community, media, police and social services). Of the six negative comments (17%) reported, women stated they were not aware of community support services and one resident suggested improvements to the programs available for residents (e.g. need for more therapy for residents).

Staff Members' Comments

Committee members talked to 19 staff in five women's emergency shelters to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide and to raise any concerns they might have. An additional 33 staff completed surveys. A breakdown of staff who participated in the interviews or completed surveys is shown in Figure 20.



Staff feedback was mostly positive (69%), 18% were neutral and the remaining 13% were negative.

Facility - Staffing

Many staff expressed positive feedback about staffing. Staff felt they had sufficient training to provide services to women and children served by the

shelters. They further stated that staff roles and responsibilities were clearly defined by facility policies and procedures and relationships with colleagues and management were good. Some staff described training and staff relationships as adequate. About a quarter of staff responses were negative. Areas of dissatisfaction highlighted a need for improved staffing levels and wages.

Facility – Building/Services Provided

Most of those interviewed and surveyed reported satisfaction with the services provided to women and children in the shelters. Staff described positive relationships with residents, a variety of high quality meals and a safe, secure facility. They further reported having good programs for the women and children residing in the shelters. A few described the services provided as adequate. The lack of available mental health services was identified by shelter staff as problematic.

Overall Feedback

Staff highlighted several strengths of the women's emergency shelters in which they are employed. Many stated that culture and ethnicity were well reflected in their services. Service providers further indicated that staff were pillars to the programs as were the communities that supported them. A need for improved funding for services provided to residents topped the list of negative comments made by staff.

Feedback on Visits

As part of the Committee's evaluation process, service providers (e.g. foster parents, facility staff, facility owner/operators) were invited to provide feedback on the Committee's visits. Visit feedback forms were mailed to each of the facilities with the pre-visit package. Of 230 visits, 44 individuals responded. Because of the low response rate, the results and opinions expressed cannot be generalized to all service providers who participated in reviews. However, the information gathered is useful to the Committee in assessing their preparation for interviews and visits in general. It also provides respondents with the opportunity to suggest areas for improvement.

The results from the feedback forms are summarized in Figure 21, located on page 46. Responses were provided on a five-point scale, with one indicating very dissatisfied and five indicating very satisfied.

The majority of respondents appreciated the visits and commented on how pleased they were with how the visits were conducted. Many commented that Committee members were respectful, professional, willing to listen, and able to engage the children in interviews. Service providers also indicated that the visits were informative and they appreciated being able to share their experiences and concerns. Several stated they believed their feedback would be used to improve services to children and families. A few respondents stated that the usefulness of visits would be measured by the degree of positive change in government policy.

When asked whether anything could have been done differently with the Committee's visits, three quarters of respondents marked "no". It appears that most respondents were satisfied with the visits in general. Some day care parents commented they were unable to participate in the interview process as the Committee members completed interviews prior to their arrival. One respondent stated that surveys would be sufficient to gather all necessary information in place of interviews.

Service providers reported they had been sufficiently informed about the purpose of the visit and received enough information in the pre-visit packages to understand what the Committee's visit would involve. A couple of respondents indicated that a detailed questionnaire provided before the visits would assist respondents in preparing for the interviews more effectively.

Most respondents stated they had adequate time to speak with Committee members and felt Committee members were well informed of their jobs. A few respondents indicated they would have liked more time for the interviews for themselves or their colleagues.

Typical Comments:

- *Every effort was used to make everyone comfortable.*
- *[Committee members] were very gracious, polite, understanding and professional. They made their visit a very smooth process.*
- *We felt confident that our opinions mattered.*
- *[The visit] was informative and useful.*
- *We could have had more time.*
- *[The visit] was a sharing of information.*
- *I can have input into the "process".*
- *[I cannot tell] if [the visit] was useful until we start seeing changes in the system.*

Figure 21: Service Provider Feedback

Question	Tone	Number of Responses	Percentage
1. How was the visit? How satisfied were you with the visit process?	Very Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Neutral	6	14%
	Satisfied	14	32%
	Very Satisfied	23	52%
			44
2. Was the visit useful?	Very Dissatisfied	4	9%
	Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Neutral	10	23%
	Satisfied	11	25%
	Very Satisfied	18	41%
			44
3. Is there anything that we could have done differently?	Yes	11	25%
	No	33	75%
		44	100%
4. Did you understand and receive enough information about the purpose of the visit?	Very Dissatisfied	2	5%
	Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Neutral	4	9%
	Satisfied	16	36%
	Very Satisfied	21	48%
			44
5. Did you have enough time to speak to the Committee Members?	Very Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Neutral	4	9%
	Satisfied	18	41%
	Very Satisfied	20	46%
			44
6. Did you feel the Committee members were well informed about their job?	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Dissatisfied	1	2%
	Neutral	6	14%
	Satisfied	11	25%
	Very Satisfied	26	59%
			44

Complaint Investigations

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee conducts investigations into matters relating to a facility, as specified by the Minister. The Minister did not request any investigations in the April 2007 to March 2008 review period.

During this review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee received four verbal complaints. These complaints were regarding facilities outside the Committee's jurisdiction and were referred to the appropriate authorities. Thus, the Committee did not conduct or complete any investigations.

Expenditures

Total expenditures for the April 1, 2007 to March 31, 2008 review period were \$248,207. This total includes: honoraria, travel, accommodations, printing, courier, long distance and internet expenses for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee.

Each team of two Committee members spent between one and three hours planning and conducting each facility visit and an additional two to four hours writing each report. The average cost per visit was \$1,079.

What Committee Members Heard

Lori Brooks

Having the opportunity to visit a tremendous variety of settings where children are in care has given the Committee greater insight into the diverse communities across our province. It has been my privilege over the past year to visit four types of social care facilities including foster homes, group homes, day cares, and out-of-school care programs. We have had the unique and remarkable experience of interviewing those who provide care to children and youth and most importantly listening to those who receive services. We have been able to observe the caring capacity of those dedicated individuals who continue to advocate and dedicate resources and time to the lives of children and youth.

Foster parents spoke of the challenges associated with the high turnover in caseworkers and the need for more respite homes. A consistent theme introduced by foster parents relates to the foster children's natural families. While there was little complaint regarding facilitation of contact between the foster children and their families there was nevertheless concern expressed about the environmental conditions inside the natural families' homes. There are also many foster parents who continue to advocate for the adoption of First Nations Children. Many foster parents spoke positively about the access they

have to educational resources citing the individualized programming and supports available to children and youth.

Group home service providers commented on how they continue to face the challenge of attracting and retaining qualified staff. We have heard consistently of a greater need to access mental health services and supports for children and youth. Offering competitive wages also reportedly remains a challenge for these facilities. Day cares and out-of-school programs report continuing difficulty in attracting and retaining qualified staff and being able to offer competitive wages. In the past year, the Committee has observed a general resilience and hope from these children and youth in care because of the nurturing and dedicated individuals who are committed to responding to their needs and offering improved pathways for their futures.

Wayne Doan

This Committee member observed that foster parents continue to be committed and effective. The members' experience indicated that children and youth in care are generally positive in their comments about their care. The Advancing Futures Bursary program is becoming more widely known in the foster homes we visited and comments from youth and foster parents were genuinely positive for the opportunity this program provides for foster children transitioning to adulthood. Foster parents spoke in glowing terms of their relationship with Family Support Workers, whom they see, almost universally, as being supportive and effective in their roles. Although there were some examples of positive experiences with foster children in schools, we continue to hear that there appears to be a poor attitude among many teachers and principals about the specific and special needs of foster children in their schools. Additionally, there appears to be a need to provide clarity and improved communication between foster parents, Child and Family Services Authorities and Delegated First Nation Agencies. As Delegated First Nation Agencies are funded differently than Child and Family Services Authorities and each Child and Family Services Authorities and Delegated First Nation Agencies experiences regarding foster care may be different, this can lead to confusion and frustration for many foster parents. Foster parents also spoke of an ongoing urgent need for more respite care workers. Several innovative ideas were broached to Committee members by foster parents that the ministry may wish to explore in its efforts to provide necessary services to foster parents. Foster parents commented on their challenges to provide adequate care given current rates of remuneration from the Ministry and Agencies. Several foster parents indicated, in specific terms, that they are often spending their own monies to adequately provide services such as recreational activities to foster children.

Maxine Fodness

A nurturing, secure environment is being provided for the children in care within foster homes. Several foster parents have initiated adoptions with many of the children that are in their care. Availability of respite providers and the observations of heavy workloads on caseworkers resulting in frequent changes in assignments remain a challenge to foster parents.

Effective communication skills and positive interaction between youth and staff of group homes provide stability and structure to the recipients of the program.

Committee members heard that increased resources and improved coordination and cooperation with mental health services would provide more comprehensive care for youth within group homes. Staff of group homes recognize that availability of labour within a competitive market is an underlying cause of high staff turnover.

Most parents expressed a high level of satisfaction concerning the care their children receive at day cares and out-of-school care programs. Low staff wages and split shifts at out-of-school care programs appear to create difficulty with the retention and recruitment of staff.

Overall, the service providers of these facilities are endeavoring to give a high quality of care to children and youth. Committee members heard remarkable success stories of children. These outcomes were a direct result of the dedication and commitment of the providers, education and medical professionals, communities and ministry staff that sincerely desire the best for the children and youth in care.

Dawne Fowler

The level of care provided to Alberta's children and youth who are unable to remain in their homes, continues to be very high. Foster parents, emergency shelter workers and group home service providers are to be commended for their ongoing care and attention. For the most part, Committee members heard that things are running smoothly in all areas. Concerns continue regarding low wages for staff in day care centres and out-of-school care programs. However, the accreditation process appears to be making a positive difference. Staff in women's emergency shelters said that they have noticed an increase in the numbers of women who are homeless and/or deal with mental health issues. As well, second stage housing continues to be in short supply. Foster parents noted that the numbers of children with high special needs seems to be increasing. Several made positive comments about the new Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder facilities that speed up the assessment and treatment process. It continues to amaze me that so many ordinary people live extraordinary lives by opening their hearts and homes to provide loving care to those who need it most.

Lydia Graham

During my visits last year, I encountered dedicated and committed foster care, group home and day care workers. These workers are focused on the needs and welfare of the children in their care. Foster parents were supportive of the caseworkers but were concerned that at times the level of service they received was compromised by the heavy case loads and a high turnover of the staff assigned to the children's plans. Foster parents also expressed concern over the stress resulting from a lack of respite services. Wages and availability of staff remain an issue for group home managers. Day care and out-of-school care facility managers appreciated the changes in funding for staff equipment and operations that came through the accreditation program, however, Committee members were told that finding trained staff still remains an issue.

Laura Hunt

During the past year on the Committee, I have been amazed at the number of both foster parents and group home staff that are providing care to medically fragile children. Many of these caregivers have stated their intention to provide long-term care to these very compromised children, who often require round-the-clock attention. It has also been encouraging to hear that many foster parents are staying in contact with former foster children and providing ongoing support and family connections. I have had the opportunity to visit several group homes that concentrate on Aboriginal youth and provide strong resources for this segment of our population.

Nancy Leishman

As a Committee member, I heard many positive comments and saw warm interactions between foster parents and children and youth. I have a great appreciation for the team of caring individuals who lead or support and provide individual children with caring home environments. Foster parents praised their support workers, spoke of the struggle to find respite services, stated they advocated for the wellbeing and needs of these children and want to be heard in planning discussions. Maintaining connections with natural families, when possible, is an important piece of children's lives and is evident in their tone of voice and change of mannerisms when they speak of it. When appropriate, those contacts appear to be supported. Many children also expressed tender attachments for the foster families who treat them with care and respect. Frequent changes of caseworkers continue to surface as stressful times for children. Parents of children in day care and out-of-school care are enthusiastic when they find a facility with caring, long-term, well-trained staff. Even with facilities challenged to find and retain staff, parents expressed they are pleased with the care their children are receiving. Overall, the men and women entrusted to provide safe, caring and comfortable places for Alberta children appear to genuinely strive to work to benefit the lives of children in care.

Kathleen McCalla

As a Committee member, I have learned that there are many heroes in our province. From the brave children, many of whom have had to struggle to survive trauma, to the foster parents and other caregivers who support and love them, the day care and out-of-school care staff who provide stimulating and safe environments for developing children, and the parents who are loving and rearing their children, often under difficult circumstances, the heroes are amongst us. The concerns I have heard expressed are largely directed towards the means to improve the circumstances of children. The strengths I have observed are in the very real commitment most of these caregivers have for the children in their care. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to meet and speak with so many extraordinary people.

Kelly Sackley

As we visited with children and youth in care, they reported feeling safe and comfortable. We met with foster parents that feel things are going well in their homes but some expressed a desire to be more acknowledged by their foster child's worker. Group home staff find turnover in their field to be high and feel better pay would help to retain more people. Day care managers and staff also feel that more pay is required to help retain good staff. Parents were generally

satisfied with the services they receive for their children at day care and in out-of-school programs. Women in emergency shelters were grateful for the services they received there but we heard they wanted more information on outside services and support.

Tracey Smith

As in the past, it has been an honour to be a part of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. During the past year I have had the opportunity to visit foster homes, group homes, day cares and out-of-school programs. My experience has largely been to meet foster parents who are concerned and dedicated to providing care to the children and youth in their homes. Expressed concerns have included the lack of accessible respite care and the length of time some Aboriginal children are in care before becoming eligible for adoption. With respect to group homes, the majority of workers are confident and keen about their ability to provide care and to advocate for the youth. Concerns are mostly centered around wages, specifically the worker's ability to cover for the rising costs of daily living. Children and youth in both foster homes and group homes seem happy with their living arrangements and their ability to continue to see their natural families. Day care and out-of-school care is accessible by the majority of families who require it. Parents are concerned regarding the cost of care; employers/employees are concerned regarding the ability to find and retain quality staff and provide them with competitive wages.

Nicole VanKuppeveld

Foster parents continue to provide loving care in safe family homes. They, however, expressed concern about the ever increasing policies, practices and procedures that can make their vocations more cumbersome. Some foster parents reported access to caseworkers and high turnover of caseworkers impacts case planning for the children in their homes. Those that expressed a desire to adopt First Nations children spoke of the challenges and frustrations of being unable to do so.

Day care and out-of-school care owners and operators reported they are finding it increasingly more difficult to recruit staff. Several staff working in the child care field report that access to training courses is often difficult (e.g. travel). They expressed a desire for more self-paced online access to courses or use of conferencing technology to bring the instructors virtually into their communities instead of having to travel. Innovative training solutions will help meet the immediate goal of qualified and credentialed staff.

Women's emergency shelter staff described challenges in recruiting staff and note that sustainable funding needs to be in place. Staff in group homes indicated that staff turnover and an inability to recruit staff creates challenges in meeting their child/staff ratios. They report increasing difficulty accessing mental health services, even in urban settings. Staff stated that the need to coordinate services amongst ministries for children's mental health funding is critical. It has been a pleasure to serve on the Committee and meet with children, youth and those who serve them in social care agencies across the province.

Committee Activities

Over the last year several changes, new initiatives and achievements took place for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee.

Two new members joined the Committee in July 2007; Nancy Leishman from Calgary and Kathleen McCalla from Edmonton. Mr. Don Lavoy briefly joined the Committee from April 2007 to July 2007, but was unable to continue due to other commitments. A third member was welcomed to the Committee in October 2007, Maxine Fodness from St. Paul.

The Committee bid farewell to two longstanding members, Jean Wilkinson and Delina James in May 2007. Ms. Wilkinson and Ms. James graciously agreed to extend their terms into this fiscal year to provide a smooth transition for the Committee. These women provided mentorship, training and a passion for children and youth that will be greatly missed. In March 2008, Nicole Van Kuppeveld ended her term with the Committee in order to pursue career aspirations. The Committee would like to thank Ms. VanKuppeveld for her contribution and wish her the very best in her future endeavours.

In May 2007, the Committee developed competency profiles for Social Care Facilities Review Committee members. These competencies outline the knowledge, skills and attributes of an experienced Committee member.

Additionally, the Honourable Janis Tarchuk attended the Committee's meeting in May 2007 where Committee members provided a presentation and discussed their work with the Minister.

In October 2007, the Committee consulted with staff from Child Development Branch regarding the new *Child Care Licensing Act*.

As part of their ongoing training, Committee members heard presentations on:

- the Adoption of First Nations children;
- an update on child care programs within the province; and
- information on Alberta's Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder program.

Lastly, the Committee developed a training plan and to date have completed the following modules:

- Introductions to Interviewing Skills (how to conduct effective interviews);
- Interviewing Children and Youth in Care;
- Observing and Recording Information; and
- Writing Descriptive Reports.

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to acknowledge that without the children, youth and adults who contributed information through interviews, surveys, visits and feedback, this report would not be possible. Sincerest thanks are extended to each person who took the time to meet with Committee members, fill out a survey and/or provide written material. All those who shared their experiences, insights and concerns about services have contributed to the success of this report.

The Committee would also like to thank the chief executive officers and staff in the Southeast Alberta, Calgary and Area, Central Alberta, Edmonton and Area and North Central Alberta Child and Family Services Authorities. Their gracious assistance in coordinating visits within their regions is greatly appreciated.

The effectiveness of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee process has been enhanced by the training and information provided to the members this year. Thanks to all those who shared their time and expertise as they have assisted Committee members in performing their duties. In closing, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee would like to acknowledge the staff from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. Their support, dedication and service to the Committee's work cannot be overstated.