



Social Care Facilities Review Committee








Annual Report 2008/2009

Alberta Children and Youth Services

Alberta

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Message from the Minister

I am pleased to present the 2008-09 Social Care Facilities Review Committee Annual Report.

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee interviews service recipients, caregivers and service providers in five types of facilities across the province. These include foster homes, child and youth care facilities, emergency shelters for women, day cares and out-of-school care facilities.

This report provides a summary of the Committee's activities and findings for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2009. The feedback, comments, suggestions, and concerns gathered by committee members during visits to facilities provide Children and Youth Services with important information and guide future policy and practice to ensure that facilities provide the best services possible to children, youth and families in Alberta.

Much of the feedback that Committee members received was positive, indicating the good work that social care facilities do as they care for Albertans. Some of the comments identified areas for improvement, which the Ministry is taking steps to address.

To further the quality of care provided to children, youth and families, Children and Youth Services is implementing a number of initiatives:

- The Ministry is working with social services agencies to create a new relationship, under which contracts are based on ensuring services provided are achieving the best outcomes for children, youth and families. Jurisdictions that have adopted this outcomes-based approach, have experienced a reduction in the number of moves with children's placements, decreased time children spend in care and more permanency for children and youth through adoption, private guardianship and reunification with family.
- Efforts are being made to improve access to existing programs for high-risk youth and Albertans affected by family violence. The Ministry is also actively working to expand supports for Aboriginal and immigrant children and families across the province, in accordance with the Premier's mandate for this Ministry.
- The Alberta government has expanded services for people affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) by developing five more FASD Service Networks across the province. The additional networks will work on prevention as well as helping individuals affected by FASD through lasting services and supports.

- The Ministry is continuing to recruit more foster parents, kinship caregivers and respite providers through a recruitment campaign launched in October 2008. Strategies to engage the public are being developed and successfully implemented and have resulted in the first net increase in foster homes in the province in six years.
- To help meet child care needs in our communities, the Ministry continues to support the creation of 14,000 new child care spaces in Alberta by 2011. This includes day care, family day home, and out-of-school care spaces.
- As part of the Ministry's commitment to continuous improvement, a panel led by child intervention specialists from across the country has been established to examine Alberta's child intervention system. The panel will bring forward leading practices and suggest ways to further strengthen supports for at-risk children, youth and families.

My sincerest thank you to the Committee members and all who met with the Committee over the past year. By working together and sharing experiences and insights, Committee members and those who spoke with them have contributed to achieving our goal of creating stronger and brighter futures for children, youth and families across Alberta. I also thank the Committee members for their ongoing commitment to the safety, security and development of Alberta's children and families.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yvonne Fritz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Yvonne Fritz
Minister
Children and Youth Services

Report from the Chair

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee has the privilege of preparing an annual report each year, summarizing information gathered from the Committee's visits to day cares, out-of-school care programs, foster homes, child and youth facilities and emergency shelters for women.

During the April 2008 to March 2009 fiscal year, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee conducted reviews of 227 facilities in six Child and Family Services Authorities. Committee members interviewed and/or surveyed almost 2,500 service recipients, foster parents and staff members. Overall, service recipients reported satisfaction with services in all five types of social care facilities.

Parents whose children attend day care or out-of-school care programs reported satisfaction with the care and services their children received. They were pleased with the opportunities given to be involved in the programs, the rules and regulations in place within the facilities and reported positive communication with staff. Several parents reported they had observed bullying in the facilities, but also stated the child care staff handled the situations appropriately.

Comments from 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, meals and reported feeling comfortable and well cared for in the homes and facilities in which they live. 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.

Residents at emergency shelters for women expressed satisfaction with the quality of service they received, and appreciated the meals, rules and regulations within the facilities and relationships with staff. Some of the women expressed concern about the difficulty they experienced accessing affordable housing upon leaving the shelter and lack of awareness about programs for themselves and/or their children.

Service providers within the five types of social care facilities reviewed also reported overall satisfaction with the programs and services they provided. Some suggestions for improvement were also offered. Day care and out-of-school care staff highlighted several strengths in their programs, but many expressed concern about their wages. Additionally, some operators discussed the difficulties they experienced in recruiting and retaining staff. Foster parents were pleased with the access to services and the support they received from caseworkers, support workers and their agencies. Foster parents shared

concerns about the need for improvements to the foster parent training, relationships with regional staff and access to respite resources. 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 dissatisfaction with wages, staff turnover and staffing levels within the facilities. Staff from emergency shelters for women spoke positively about their training, programs and their relationships with residents. Staff highlighted the need for improved staffing levels, wages and more clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

During the April 2008 to March 2009 review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee received two verbal complaints. The two complaints related to facilities outside of the Committee's jurisdiction as mandated by 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.

I would like to extend my deepest thanks to the Committee members for all of their hard work. Their commitment to children, youth and families, coupled with their dedication to the social care facilities review process has made this year one full of success and accomplishment.

Finally, thank you to every child, youth and adult who participated in the interviews and surveys. Your comments, experiences and insight provide an important message to service operators and government. Your contributions will be used to help ensure the quality of services in Alberta's social care facilities.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Art Johnston". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

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

Committee Members

Art Johnston, Chair, Calgary (July 2008 – 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*.

This is Mr. Johnston's fourth year as Chair of the Committee.

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 – March 2009)

Dawne Fowler has worked in the public relations field for 18 to 20 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 processing financial transactions. In 2004, Ms. Fodness was elected as a Councillor in 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 (July 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 has taught special education for Edmonton Public Schools, the Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital, and was a sessional lecturer at the University of Alberta. She was the sole proprietor of a writing company called Words Work and Images, and a partner in a design company, Domestic Arts.

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 a local junior high school.

■ ■ ■ 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 Ministry of Children and Youth Services; and
- 2) a day care facility, as defined in the *Child Care Licensing Act*.

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

During the 2008-2009 review period, the Committee consisted of one Member of the Legislative Assembly who chaired the Committee, and 10 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 varied 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 cares, out-of-school care programs and emergency shelters for women. Currently, there are approximately 4,000 facilities that fall under the Committee's mandate. In order to review a sampling of the 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 six Child and Family Services Authorities:

- Southwest Alberta (Region 1);
- Calgary and Area (Region 3);
- Central Alberta (Region 4);
- East Central Alberta (Region 5);
- Edmonton and Area (Region 6); and
- Northwest Alberta (Region 8).

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 six 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, consent was obtained from their guardians to participate in the interviews and 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, the parents, not the children, participated. Committee members spoke with parents from out-of-school care facilities, as well as children, if their parents/guardians had provided consent for the interview.

Committee members also provided an opportunity for foster parents and staff members at the facilities to express their views on the services they provide.

Additionally, 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. The information provided in this report represents only the perspectives of the people who were interviewed and/or surveyed.

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.

This Annual Report provides a provincial overview of the feedback obtained during visits conducted from April 2008 to March 2009. To develop statistics for this report, all comments were analyzed for common themes. Comments 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*

Two hundred and twenty-seven facilities were visited from April 2008 to March 2009:

- 112 foster care homes;
- 40 day care facilities;
- 41 out-of-school care facilities;
- 30 child and youth facilities; and
- 4 emergency shelters for women.

Committee members spoke with 1,395 service recipients and service providers. An additional 662 service recipients and 418 staff members completed surveys.

■■■ **Operating Principles**

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

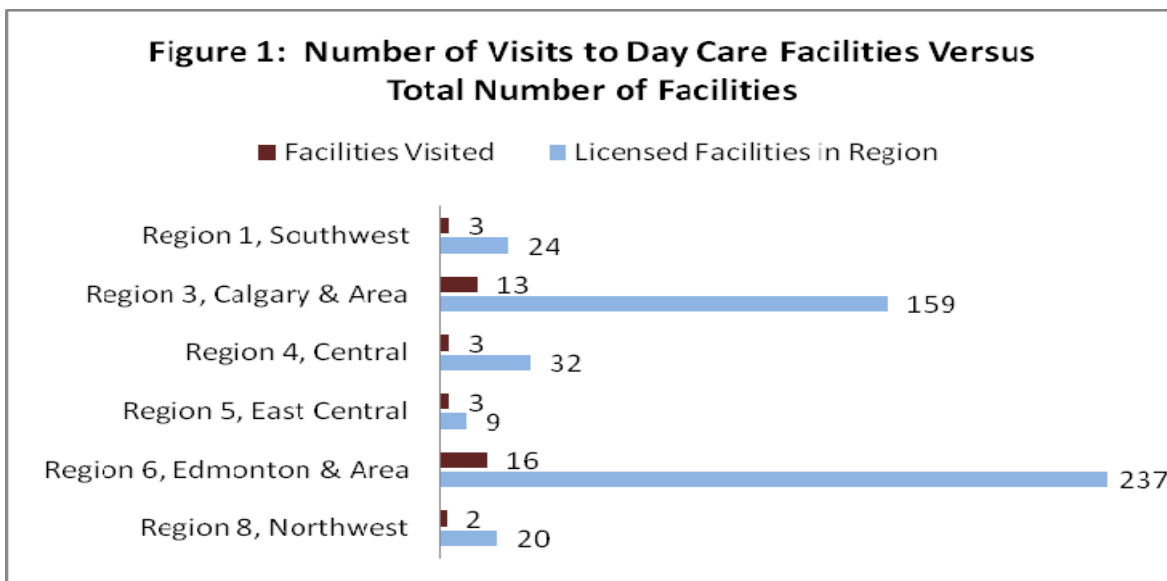
The Social Care Facilities Review Committee will work with clients and their families, service providers and government representatives to:

- 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 programs provide child care to seven or more children for four or more hours each day the program is in operation. Children enrolled in day care are under seven years of age and do not attend school, although some may attend early childhood programs for part of the day. Day care programs are licensed under the *Child Care Licensing Act* and are obligated to meet the requirements of the *Child Care Licensing Regulations*.

During the April 2008 to March 2009 review period, the Committee visited 40 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. Two hundred and fifty-six parents were interviewed and 418 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, and overall feedback. Service providers' comments are discussed separately.

Day Care Themes

Committee members reported 7,739 observations from parents about the care their children receive at day care. Most of the parents' comments expressed satisfaction with services provided; 6,505 comments (84%) were positive, 591 comments (8%) were neutral and 643 comments (8%) 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>	600 (90%)	63 (10%)	3 (<1%)	666
<i>Staff-Child Relationships</i>	833 (57%)	58 (4%)	575 (39%)*	1,466
<i>Communication with Staff</i>	819 (91%)	74 (8%)	9 (1%)	902
<i>Parent or Guardian Involvement</i>	634 (95%)	32 (5%)	4 (<1%)	670
<i>Meals and/or Snacks</i>	1,438 (88%)	161 (10%)	27 (2%)	1,626
<i>Physical Environment</i>	826 (87%)	108 (11%)	16 (2%)	950
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	738 (93%)	53 (7%)	7 (<1%)	798
<i>Overall Feedback</i>	617 (93%)	42 (7%)	2 (<1%)	661
TOTAL:	6,505 (84%)	591 (8%)	643 (8%)	7,739

*Please refer to page 14 for further explanation.

Choice of Day Care

Parents made 1,618 comments about the reasons why they chose their day care. Reasons most commonly mentioned were location (31%), reputation (17%), hours of operation (12%) and programs offered (11%). The remaining 29% of comments referred to factors such as cost, lack of available day care options and accreditation. This information is useful in understanding the rationale employed by parents when selecting a specific day care; but, because these factors cannot be considered positive or negative, they are not included in the graph above.

Daily Activities

Comments about daily activities were highly positive (90%). Parents indicated that they were satisfied with the activities offered in the day care. Ten percent of comments were neutral and related to situations where parents rated activities offered as adequate. In the negative comments (<1%), three parents expressed dissatisfaction with the activities (e.g. requirement that all children must have a nap, not enough field trips, more outdoor activities).

Staff - Child Relationships

When asked about the staff-child relationships at the day cares their children attend, 57% of parents' comments were positive. Parents reported 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, had been informed of any bullying behaviour that had occurred, and when bullying had happened, were aware these situations had been resolved appropriately. 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-nine percent of comments were negative. Of these, 94% were from parents who observed bullying behaviour at one time or another by children in the day care and/or from parents who had not been informed of bullying incidents. The majority of parents reported the staff handled these situations quickly and effectively. Six percent of the negative comments made by parents indicated the bullying incidents had not been resolved (e.g. parents made comments such as; one child in the facility continues to hit other children, the focus on free play within the program means it is less structured and allows for kids to act out more and bullies should be removed from the program). Three parents commented that staff interactions with children in the day cares could be improved (e.g. one parent stated some staff do not appear to interact with other staff, one parent reported that some staff yell and one parent reported not caring for two specific staff in a facility). Later follow-up with the facility confirmed all matters were dealt with appropriately.

Communication with Staff

Most of the feedback regarding communication with staff was positive (91%). Parents described good information sharing 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 comments (8%) reported, parents indicated that general communication and information sharing between parents and staff was adequate. Negative comments (1%) indicated communication between parents and staff required improvement (e.g. having communication sheets filled out more consistently, difficulty conversing over the noise level in the day care and one parent reported having a different philosophy regarding free play than the program).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Almost all parents stated there were either good or adequate opportunities to become involved in the day cares (more than 99%). Parents reported the presence of ethnic and culturally sensitive practices and described opportunities for them to participate with their children. Less than one percent of comments were negative, where four parents indicated that the opportunity for involvement was poor (e.g. parents who either stated they were not actively encouraged to participate or did not provide any further information).

Meals and/or Snacks

Day cares in Alberta have the choice of providing meals and snacks. If they choose not to provide food, day cares must require parents to provide meals and snacks for children attending the program. Eighty-eight percent of parents expressed approval of the food quality, quantity and variety of meals and snacks provided by the day care. A couple of parents commented that their respective day cares accommodate children's allergies. Ten percent of parent comments were neutral, indicating the food quality and portion sizes provided were adequate. Two percent of the comments were negative, reflecting parents' dissatisfaction with the food quality, quantity and/or variety provided. One parent indicated the facility did not accommodate allergies (follow-up indicated the concern was unfounded).

Physical Environment

Questions about the day care environments elicited positive responses. Eighty-seven percent of parents expressed satisfaction with the overall environments, play spaces, equipment, toys and maintenance. Eleven percent of the comments made were neutral, indicating the physical environment of the day cares was adequate, while the remaining 2% of comments suggested some improvements could be made to the general physical environment (e.g. need for a handrail, ice at the back door, increased play space, more toys and outdoor equipment and minor cosmetic changes).

Rules and Regulations

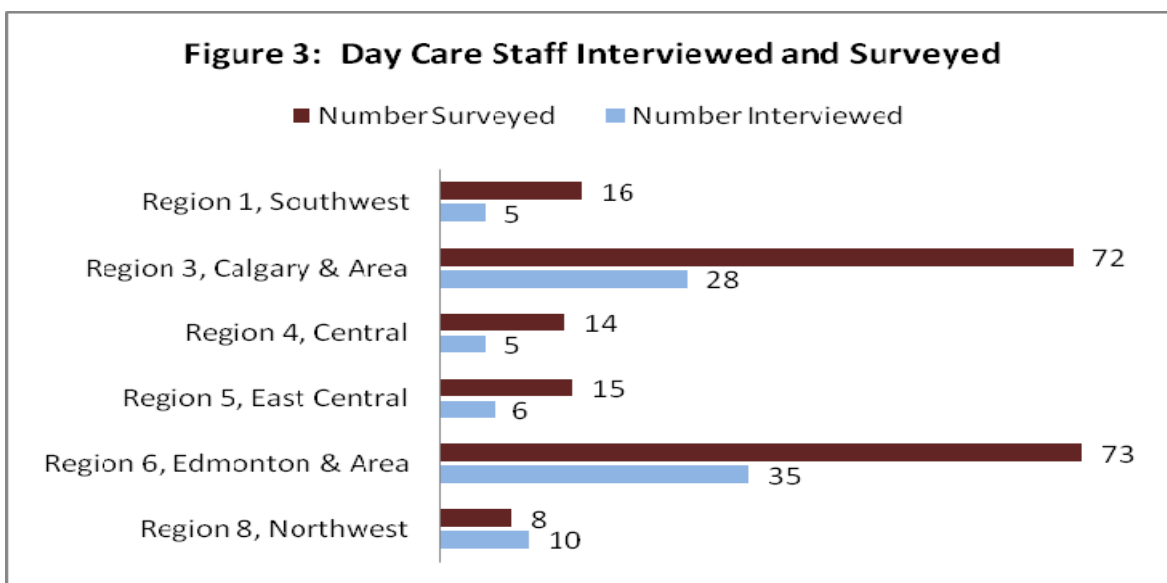
The majority of comments made regarding rules, child guidance, security measures and response to concerns within the day cares were positive (93%). Seven percent of comments were neutral, where parents described the rules, child guidance and security measures as adequate. Less than one percent of comments were negative, where parents described poor rules, a lack of consistent application of rules, and/or poor child guidance and security measures (e.g. requirement to have children at the day care by 10:00 a.m., rules not consistently enforced).

Overall Feedback

When given the opportunity to comment on the overall quality of care their children receive at day care, parents provided favourable feedback. In response, the majority of parents stated the overall quality of care their children received at day care was good (93%) and seven percent of parents rated the overall care as adequate. Two negative comments (<1%) were made (e.g. "quality of care...depends on the staff...need to improve training standards" and the program "lacks structure").

Service Providers' Comments

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. The Committee spoke with 89 staff in 40 day cares. In addition, 198 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.



Many of the comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide. Of the 4,683 comments reported, 3,740 comments (80%) were positive, 782 comments (17%) were neutral and the remaining 161 comments (3%) were negative. The main topics of discussion are listed below.

Physical Environment

The majority of day care staff made positive comments about the physical environment of the day care facilities, including the workable lay-out for children and adults. Staff described good play areas for children and separate work areas for staff to take breaks and complete paperwork. Some staff reported the physical space as adequate. Of the few negative comments made, most referred to having poor adult space (e.g. room for breaks and conducting paperwork), while a few staff commented on a need for new toys and larger indoor and outdoor play areas.

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, variety and/or quantity of food provided (e.g. "sometimes" portions could be larger).

Daily Activities

Very 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 few negative comments were reported, indicating that daily activities could be improved.

Staff - Child Relationships

The vast 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 (no additional information was provided).

Rules and Regulations

When asked about rules and regulations, almost all of the feedback from staff was 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 suggested assistance be given to children to help them learn how to work out solutions with each other.

Overall Feedback from Staff

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the overall service and care they provide within the day cares. Most of the comments made were positive. Staff indicated that they were aware of appropriate staff-child ratios, the centres are safe, job responsibilities are clear, diversities are respected, 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/Owners/Operators

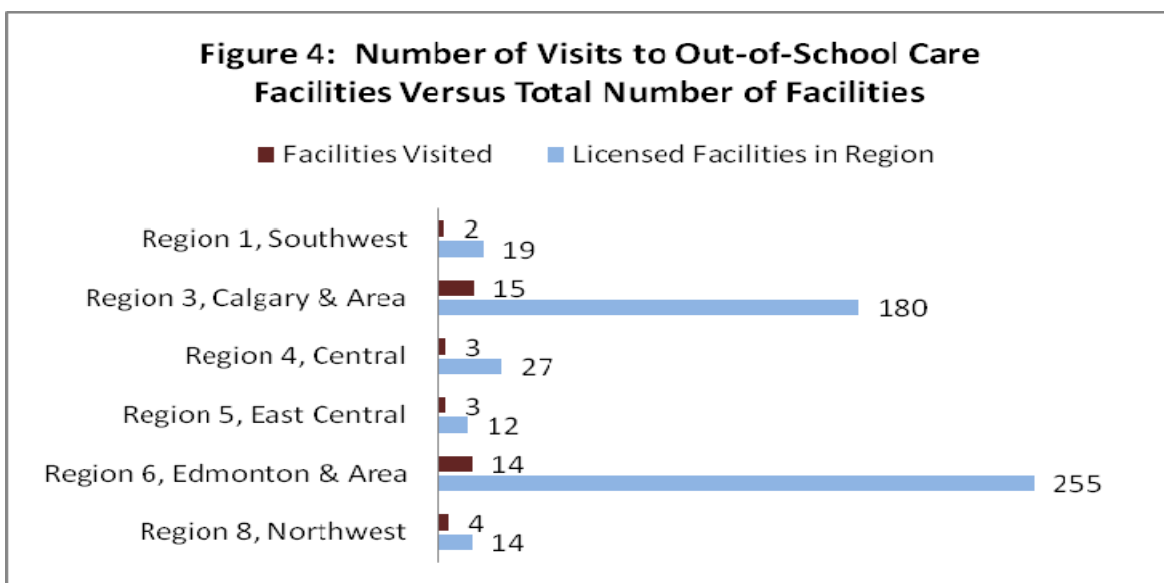
Feedback from the managers and owners was highly positive. Their responses mirrored those of staff. Comments regarding safety, appropriate staff-child ratios, respect for diversity, safe storage of medication, the encouragement of parents to spend time with their children, clear job responsibilities, and a good process for addressing concerns were heard by Committee members. Areas of difficulty reported by managers included recruitment of new staff, staff turnover and wages.

Out-of-School Care Facilities

Out-of-school care programs provide care before and after school or at other times schools are closed.

Some out-of-school care facilities are co-located with day cares. The majority of out-of-school care facilities visited by the Committee during this review period were independent programs.

The Committee visited 41 licensed out-of-school care facilities during the April 2008 to March 2009 review period. Figure 4, on the next page, 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. One hundred and eighty-four parents were interviewed and 244 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. Three hundred and thirteen 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, and overall feedback. Children's comments have been included with the parents' 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 7,596 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; 6,612 comments (87%) were positive, 485 comments (6%) were neutral and 499 comments (7%) were negative. The breakdown of parents' and children's comments, relating to out-of-school care themes, is shown in Figure 5 on the next page.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Daily Activities</i>	824 (83%)	112 (11%)	59 (6%)	995
<i>Staff-Child Relationships</i>	1,622 (85%)	39 (2%)	237 (13%)	1,898
<i>Communication with Staff</i>	490 (93%)	32 (6%)	7 (1%)	529
<i>Parent or Guardian Involvement</i>	392 (93%)	24 (6%)	5 (1%)	421
<i>Meals and/or Snacks</i>	1,282 (91%)	107 (8%)	21 (1%)	1,410
<i>Physical Environment</i>	470 (81%)	88 (15%)	21 (4%)	579
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	963 (92%)	49 (5%)	34 (3%)	1,046
<i>Overall Feedback</i>	569 (79%)	34 (5%)	115 (16%)	718
TOTAL:	6,612 (87%)	485 (6%)	499 (7%)	7,596

Choice of Out-of-School Care Facility

One thousand and seventy-three comments were made by parents regarding their reasons for choosing out-of-school care programs. The most frequently mentioned reasons were location (34%), hours of operation (16%), reputation (13%) and programs offered (10%). The remaining 27% of comments referred to factors such as cost, transportation, supports for children with special needs, and limited choice of local out-of-school care options. This information is useful in understanding the rationale employed by parents when selecting a specific program; but, because these factors cannot be considered positive or negative, they are not included in the graph above.

Daily Activities

Satisfaction with the daily activities offered in the out-of-school care programs was expressed in 83% of comments. Parents appreciated that the children are involved in planning and are given the opportunity to choose activities. The majority of children reported satisfaction with the opportunity to choose activities they wanted to participate in. Eleven percent of comments were neutral where parents rated the daily activities and 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 six percent of the comments, parents expressed dissatisfaction with daily activities, reported that children are not given the opportunity to choose activities and/or assist in the planning of activities. A few children reported they were unable to choose activities. In addition, one parent commented that at times, planned activities do not occur and another parent reported staff turnover sometimes impacts previously planned activities.

Staff - Child Relationships

When asked about the relationships between staff and children in out-of-school care, parents and children made many positive comments (85%). Parents indicated that staff interactions with the children are good and parents have not observed bullying. Children reported they feel safe and comfortable, enjoy attending the program and have not experienced bullying. Two 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, some children reported having experienced bullying, a few children reported they did not like attending the program and/or did not feel safe and comfortable (e.g. one child was not sure why he/she felt unsafe, one child, who had been bullied in the past, still felt uneasy, even though the other child was removed from the program, one child described the program as “kind of boring” and several children stated they would prefer to be at home). Any significant concerns heard were followed-up on.

Communication with Staff

Ninety-three percent of comments described communication with staff as positive. Parents stated they were informed of incidents/concerns and felt staff were responsive and aware of their children’s needs. Neutral comments (6%) described communication as adequate. Seven negative comments (1%) were made, stating communication with staff could be improved (e.g. language barriers, lack of time to talk, “staff don’t speak to me or my spouse”).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

A high percentage of parents made positive comments (93%) 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. Six percent of comments were neutral, reporting opportunities for involvement as adequate. Five comments (1%) indicated a lack of opportunities for parental involvement and/or parents did not feel welcome in the program (e.g. parents either did not feel encouraged to participate or did not provide further feedback).

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 by the facility was positive (91%). The majority of children also stated they liked the food provided and received enough to eat. Eight percent of parents’ and children’s comments were neutral, indicating food quality, variety and portion sizes provided were adequate. In the 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

Satisfaction with the physical environment of the out-of-school centres comprised 81% of the comments. Parents described the overall environment

as good and reported satisfaction with the play space, equipment and toys. Neutral comments (15%) described the physical environment of the out-of-school care facility as adequate. The remaining 4% of comments were negative and related to a few concerns parents expressed about the general physical environment (e.g. furnishings, toys, more indoor and outdoor play space and having to share space with the school).

Rules and Regulations

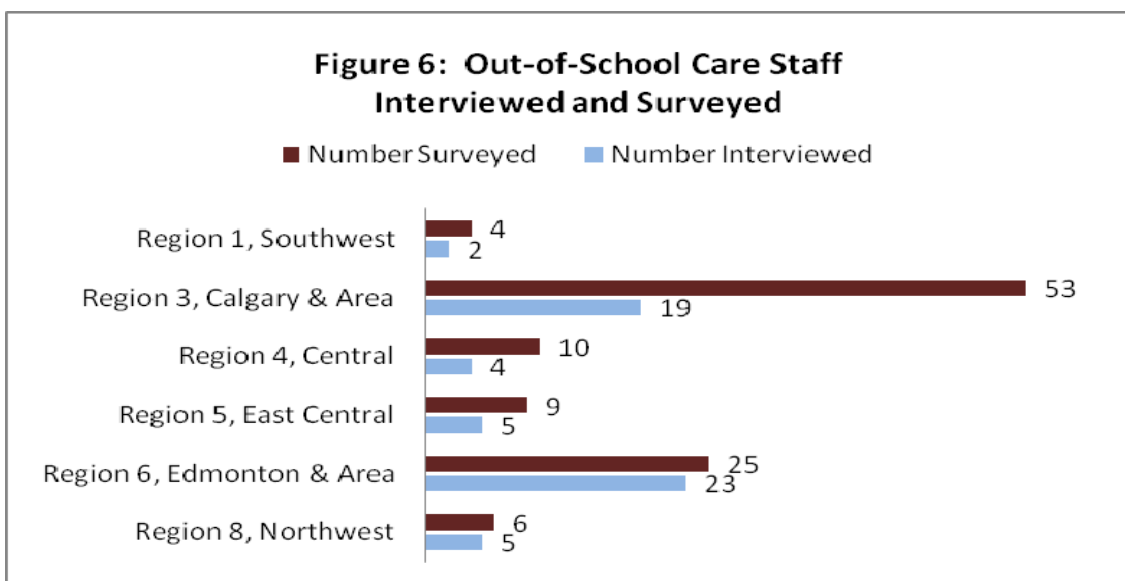
The majority of parents and children reported high satisfaction with the rules and regulations within out-of-school care facilities (92%). This included comments about child guidance policies and security measures and comments by children stating they were aware of the rules and considered the rules 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 three percent of comments, parents indicated they were not satisfied with the rules and/or the lack of consistent application of the rules (e.g. parents having to complete time sheets each week, lack of consistency of rules during staff shift changes, lack of consistency of rules due to staff turnover). A few children indicated they were not aware of the rules and some children felt the rules at their out-of-school care programs were unfair (e.g. can't bring various items to the program such as Pokemon cards, swords and electronic games and having to "eat and drink at the table").

Overall Feedback

When asked about the overall quality of care received at out-of-school care centres, parents and children expressed satisfaction (79%). Many parents said they 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. Five percent of the parents said the overall quality of care was adequate. The remaining 16% of comments were negative and included three parents who felt the overall quality of care was poor (e.g. fees increase each year but service remains the same, staff turnover and poor summer program) and several children who reported wanting changes made in their facilities. The requested changes made by the children appeared to be less about concerns and more about desires (e.g. more games, more art projects, "getting to do what we want to do," "picking snacks" and "eating gummi bears all day").

Service Providers' Comments

Committee members gave out-of-school care staff the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. Overall, the Committee spoke with 58 staff in 41 out-of-school care programs. In addition, 107 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.



Service providers' comments expressed satisfaction with the services they provided; 2,311 comments (82%) were positive, 386 comments (14%) were neutral and the remaining 123 comments (4%) were negative.

Physical Environment

Staff expressed high satisfaction with the layout of their out-of-school care centres, stating that the physical environment allowed for individual, small and large group activities. Some neutral statements were reported indicating the physical space was adequate. A few staff commented that the layout, play areas and adult space were inadequate (e.g. having to share space with the school, need for more activity space for children, need for adult space to conduct paperwork and take breaks).

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. A few staff stated the quality, variety and quantity of food could be improved.

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. Two negative comments were made (e.g. one staff stated there was not enough child involvement in the planning of activities and the other staff did not elaborate further).

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, medications were kept secure, 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. A few staff commented that wages were adequate. Of the negative comments heard, a need for improved wages was the greatest concern, followed by a few staff who were unaware when a child self-medicated.

Overall Feedback from Manager/Owner/Operators

Manager/owner/operators were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. Many manager/owner/operators made positive comments about the respect their programs have for diversity, clear job responsibilities, awareness of staff-child ratios and that medications are kept safely stored. Four neutral comments were heard stating staff turnover, recruitment and wages were 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.

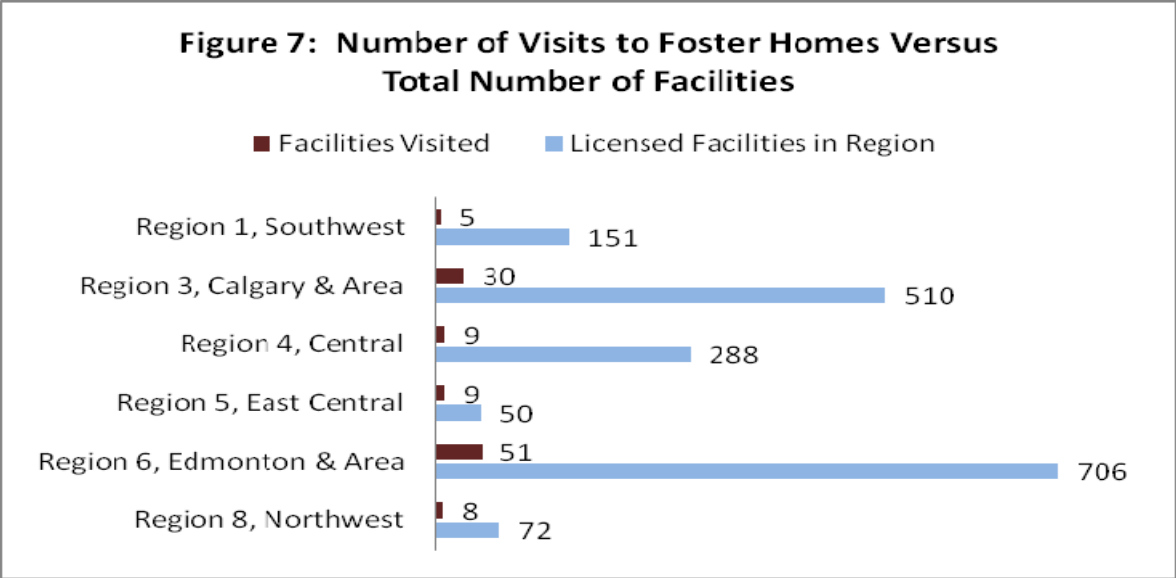
Foster Homes

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 provincial government. All foster homes must be licensed.

The Committee visited 112 foster homes during the April 2008 to March 2009 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 303 children residing in the 112 foster homes visited, 181 children and youth (60%) participated in interviews. In addition, Committee members observed 84 children (28%) 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 2,899 comments from foster children regarding the care they receive in their foster homes. In general, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the care provided; 2,341 comments (81%) were positive, 511 comments (17%) were neutral and 47 comments (2%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments, relating to care themes, is shown in Figure 8 on the next page.

Figure 8: Responses - Care Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Education</i>	406 (91%)	8 (2%)	30 (7%)	444
<i>Summer Activities</i>	181 (94%)	12 (6%)	0 (0%)	193
<i>Social Activities</i>	797 (99%)	0 (0%)	5 (1%)	802
<i>Foster Parent-Child Relationships</i>	291 (53%)	254 (47%)	1 (<1%)	546
<i>Rules</i>	331 (58%)	237 (42%)	1 (<1%)	569
<i>Overall Care and Comfort Level</i>	335 (97%)	0 (0%)	10 (3%)	345
TOTAL:	2,341 (81%)	511 (17%)	47 (2%)	2,899

Education

When asked about education, the majority (91%) of children's comments were positive. Foster children talked about how much they liked school, their plans for their futures and spoke about the types of schools they attended (e.g. public, private and special needs programs). Twenty-one percent of the comments indicated foster children had plans to graduate from high school and 12% referred to plans for post-secondary education. Some youth commented positively on the Advancing Futures Bursary, stating they looked forward to accessing this program in the future.

Neutral comments (2%) referred to youth who were employed part-time and to youth whose feelings about school were neutral. Negative comments (7%) 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).

Summer Activities

The topic of summer activities elicited a number of positive comments from children and youth (94%) who described holidays and day trips they had taken and/or were planning to take with their foster or natural families. Some children spoke about attending summer camps. Neutral comments (6%) referred to foster children who have not lived at their current home long enough to participate in summer activities. No negative comments were made.

Social Activities

Almost all of the foster children interviewed expressed great satisfaction with their participation in social activities (99%). 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), activities with the foster family and sports topped the list of fun things foster children and youth talked about. Many of the children reported they received an allowance. There were no neutral comments.

Of the negative comments (1%), one child/youth indicated he/she was only involved in limited activity and four children and youth reported they did not receive an allowance. (The child/youth who stated he/she was involved in limited activity indicated he/she chose not to participate in many activities, but was comfortable in the foster home.) In each case where a child/youth reported they did not receive an allowance, follow-up revealed the children were unaware (e.g. due to age, cognitive ability or how the foster parents dispensed the allowance) that the monies they were receiving were actually allowances.

Foster Parent-Child Relationships

When examining the positive (53%) and neutral (47%) 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 satisfaction 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. A few foster children discussed how their foster parents keep them connected to their culture.

Children and youth also spoke of having other people in their lives with whom they would confide in (e.g. natural family, teacher, caseworker, school counsellor, etc). Negative comments (<1%) related to one child who said he/she experienced difficulties in his/her relationship with a foster parent. (Follow-up revealed the child had already been moved into a new placement when efforts to improve the relationship between the child and foster parent were unsuccessful).

Rules

Children and youth made positive remarks (58%) about the rules in the foster homes. These comments referred to knowing the rules and believing the rules to be fair. Neutral comments (42%) outlined the consequences for breaking the rules, such as having privileges revoked, time-out or grounding. Negative comments (<1%) related to one child who said the rules were unfair. (The child did not provide an explanation to the Committee regarding why the rules were unfair, but indicated he/she liked the foster home and had no concerns).

Overall Care and Comfort Level

When asked about their overall care and comfort in the foster home, 97% of comments received were positive. Children reported a good level of comfort, stated they were treated fairly and felt safe in their foster homes. There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (3%) were heard from foster children who said they had a poor level of comfort, believed they were treated unfairly or had been bullied at some time (e.g. one child stated he/she did not get along with his/her foster parent and was moved to a new placement, one child stated he/she was treated unfairly, which was followed up by the caseworker and eight children and youth stated they had been bullied at one time or another, but all incidents had been addressed).

Treatment

Committee members reported 1,448 observations from foster children about the treatment they received in foster homes. Children made 980 (68%) positive comments, 290 (20%) neutral comments and 178 (12%) 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>	180 (50%)	81 (23%)	97 (27%)	358
<i>Medical/Dental Needs</i>	540 (74%)	182 (25%)	6 (1%)	728
<i>Contact with Natural Family</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Case Plans</i>	110 (54%)	27 (13%)	68 (33%)	205
<i>Memory Books</i>	150 (96%)	0 (0%)	7 (4%)	157
TOTAL:	980 (68%)	290 (20%)	178 (12%)	1,448

Transition

Foster children were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences 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. Fifty 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-three 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 27% 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 on an emergency basis). Although a few children said they were happy at the time of their move, many more declared they were happy now.

Medical/Dental Needs

Seventy-four 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 (25%) 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, optometrist or Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) had declined treatment (e.g. braces). (These children had recently come into care and their foster parents and caseworkers were working to obtain the necessary medical and optical appointments and orthodontic treatment).

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

In response to questions about case plans, 54 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 (13%) 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.

Thirty-three 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 and/or children with comprehension difficulties may not have readily recognized conversations with caseworkers as case planning).

Memory Books

The majority of children and youth indicated they had photographs, memory books and/or keepsakes (96% of comments). There were no neutral comments. Negative responses (4%) were made by children who indicated that they did not have a memory book, photographs or keepsakes. (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 1,048 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; 895 comments (85%) were positive, 136 comments (13%) were neutral and 17 comments (2%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments related to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 10 on the next page.

Figure 10: Responses - Accommodation Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Meals</i>	589 (97%)	3 (<1%)	16 (3%)	608
<i>Physical Environment</i>	306 (70%)	133 (30%)	1 (<1%)	440
TOTAL:	895 (85%)	136 (13%)	17 (2%)	1,048

Meals

Children and youth were positive in their remarks about meals (97%). Children stated that not only the quality and quantity of food provided was good, but they liked the food, and could list favourite meals. Several children also mentioned that they helped with meal preparation.

Three (<1%) neutral comments were made stating that meals were of adequate quality. 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).

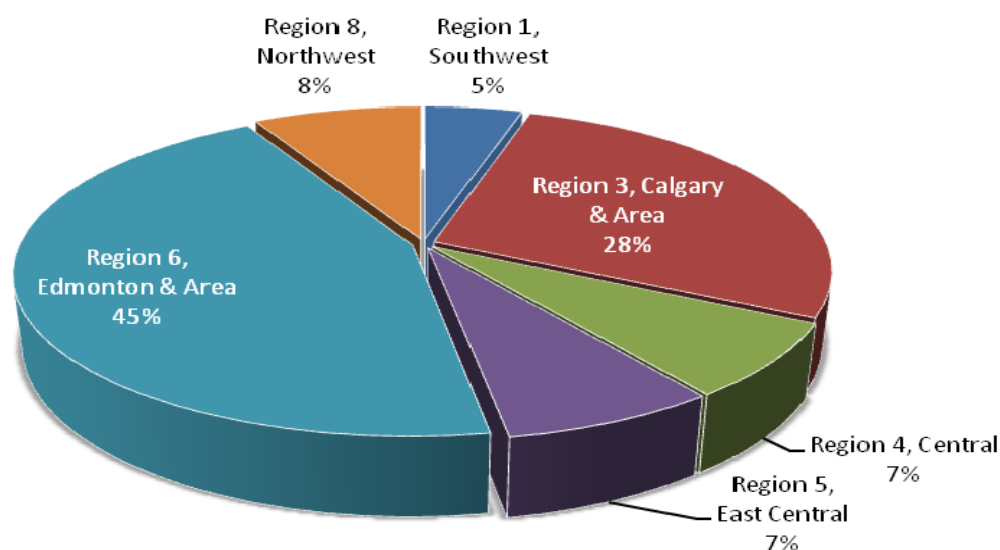
Physical Environment

Children and youth were asked to describe their foster homes, the chores they were responsible for and what changes, if any, they would like to make. Seventy percent of comments were positive, where children and youth indicated they liked their homes and participated in chores. Neutral comments (30%) referred to foster children who said they wouldn't change anything in the home, lived in homes that had pets and/or said they would like to make changes (e.g. not sharing a bedroom, changing the colour of the bedroom walls, fixing a window, not having siblings, having more time with the foster mother and not having to hear the sound of a sump pump). One negative comment (<1%) was made where a child indicated he/she did not participate in chores (chores are considered opportunities to develop life skills; as a result, a lack of participation is classified as negative).

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 148 foster parents in 112 foster homes. Foster parents expressed different views, depending on their experiences, perceptions and geographic location. The percentage 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: Percentage of Foster Parents Interviewed



In general, foster parents' comments expressed moderate satisfaction; 65% of the total comments were positive, 11% of comments were neutral and 24% 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 health, educational, 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, experienced a lack of accessible services and/or indicated overall funding for children in care could be improved. (Upon follow-up, regional staff assisted the foster parents in acquiring the necessary services).

Agency Support

In regards to general support and services received from foster care agencies, most of the foster parents' comments were positive. Foster parents highlighted their satisfaction with support workers, training, and agencies' services. Of the few negative comments made, foster parents identified a need for increased respite resources and/or 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

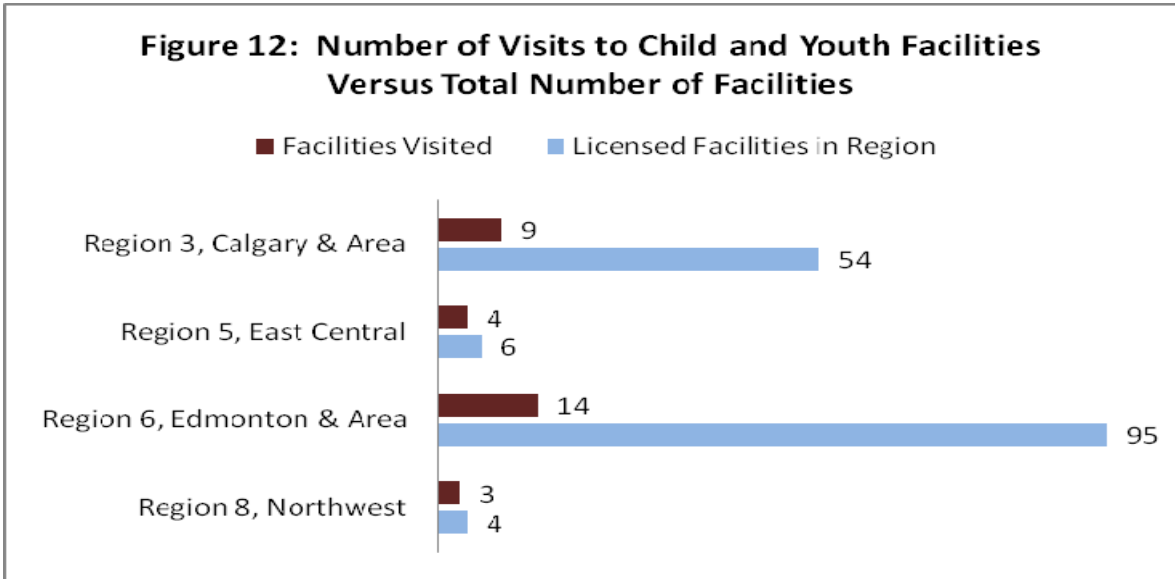
Comments from foster parents were almost evenly divided between positive and negative. In positive comments, foster parents said they received good support from regional staff (e.g. caseworkers, foster care support workers) and

the Ministry. They further indicated that they received good foster parent training. The few neutral comments described Ministry supports as adequate. Negative comments included statements regarding the need for improved communication with regional staff (e.g. caseworkers) and foster parent training (e.g. need for more flexibility, online or distance friendly courses, less redundancy and specialized training). Foster parents also cited the lack of background information provided to them upon placement of children and youth in their care, staff turnover (e.g. caseworkers, support workers) and respite resources as areas requiring improvement.

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 30 child and youth facilities between April 2008 and March 2009. 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. Eighty children and youth, from 30 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 1,203 comments from children and youth about the care they received at their facilities. Overall, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 941 comments (78%) were positive, 216 comments (18%) were neutral and 46 comments (4%) 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>	173 (88%)	3 (2%)	20 (10%)	196
<i>Summer Activities</i>	54 (69%)	24 (31%)	0 (0%)	78
<i>Social Activities</i>	364 (>99%)	0 (0%)	1 (<1%)	365
<i>Staff-Child/Youth Relationships</i>	96 (55%)	76 (44%)	2 (1%)	174
<i>Rules</i>	133 (52%)	111 (44%)	10 (4%)	254
<i>Overall Care and Comfort Level</i>	121 (89%)	2 (1%)	13 (10%)	136
TOTAL:	941 (78%)	216 (18%)	46 (4%)	1,203

Education

Eighty-eight percent of the comments about education were positive, with children and youth indicating they attended public school, facility programs or a special needs program. Some of the children indicated they liked school (31%), planned to graduate (25%) and a few said they intended to pursue post-secondary education (7%). In neutral comments (2%), youth mentioned having part-time jobs. The negative comments (10%) included children who said they were unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program and/or children and youth who disliked school. (Committee members informed the youth interviewed about the Advancing Futures Bursary program).

Summer Activities

When asked about summer activities, 69% of the responses 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 summer activities (e.g. short-term, emergency shelter placements) were classified as neutral (31%). No negative comments were made.

Social Activities

Almost all (more than 99%) 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, facility recreation programs and sports activities. Many children and youth commented that they received an allowance. One negative comment (<1%) was heard where a youth stated he/she did not receive an allowance (upon follow-up it was confirmed the youth was receiving an allowance).

Staff - Child/Youth Relationships

A variety of comments were heard from children and youth about their relationships with staff. Most of the positive comments (55%) referred to having good relationships with staff. A few reported that staff helped them keep connected to their families and culture. Forty-four percent of comments were neutral, where children and youth described who they talked to when they have a concern (e.g. staff, caseworker, teacher) and four youth described their relationships with staff as adequate. In the two negative comments (1%) made, youth expressed dissatisfaction with the staff-child relationships. (In these cases, the children's caseworkers addressed the issues and confirmed they were resolved).

Rules

In just over half of the comments (52%), children and youth indicated knowing the rules and consequences at their respective facilities and described them as fair. Forty-four 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 four percent of the comments, 10 children and youth reported the rules to be unfair (e.g. eight youth complained about constraints placed on cell phone usage, one stated he/she could not use the computer and telephone when he/she wanted to and another youth was upset he/she was not allowed to play with toys during a time-out. Upon follow-up, all the rules described by the children and youth were deemed appropriate).

Overall Care and Comfort Level

In response to questions about their overall care and comfort in the facilities, most of the children and youth made positive remarks. Eighty-nine percent of children and youth stated their level of comfort was good, they were treated fairly and felt safe. One percent of the comments were neutral and referred to two children and youth who stated their level of comfort was adequate. The remaining ten percent of comments were negative. Seven youth stated they had experienced bullying and the incidents were dealt with appropriately, three youth stated they were treated unfairly (e.g. not being allowed sleepovers due to "things I did a few months ago," one youth stated the treatment he/she received with his/her natural parents was less structured from the treatment received in a group home setting), one youth reported a bullying issue had not been addressed and he/she did not feel safe (upon follow-up, the youth's caseworkers confirmed the bullying issue was addressed immediately and the youth was safe), and one youth expressed a poor level of comfort as he/she did not like living in a group home.

Treatment

Committee members reported 685 comments from children and youth about the treatment they received at child and youth facilities. Of those comments, 445 (65%) were positive, 135 (20%) were neutral and the remaining 105 (15%) 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>	95 (45%)	45 (22%)	69 (33%)	209
<i>Case Plans</i>	91 (69%)	11 (8%)	31 (23%)	133
<i>Contact with Natural Family</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
<i>Medical/Dental Needs</i>	259 (76%)	79 (23%)	5 (1%)	343
TOTAL:	445 (65%)	135 (20%)	105 (15%)	685

Transition

Children and youth were asked what their experience was like when they moved into their current placement. In response to this question, 45 percent of comments were positive, where children and youth described 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-two 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 33 percent of the comments were negative. Some children and youth indicated they were not provided with a pre-placement visit, advised in advance of the move and some recalled feeling scared, sad or angry about the transition. (As previously noted, in specific situations, Committee members realize that it is not always possible to provide advance notice or a pre-placement visit in circumstances where children are apprehended from their home on an emergency basis). Three children and youth reported they were still angry and one youth stated he/she was still sad at the time of the interview with Committee members (e.g. sad about having to leave a foster home, wanting to return home with natural parent(s), dealing with anger about the abrupt transition process and not wanting to be placed in group care.) In these cases, the caseworkers confirmed they were aware of the situations and were attending to the needs of the children and youth.

Case Plans

The positive comments (69%) 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. Eight 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). Most of the negative comments (23%) 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 the contact children and youth have 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 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, were dissatisfied with the level of contact and/or did not have keepsakes. (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

Almost all (99%) of the children and youth reported positive or neutral comments about their health care. The majority of children and youth (76%) stated that their medical, dental and optical needs were met and that they felt they were well cared for in the facility when they were ill. In the neutral comments (23%), children and youth described having visited a doctor, dentist or optometrist within the past year. One percent of comments were negative, where two children and youth indicated their optometry needs had not been met, one youth stated his/her medical needs had not been met and one youth reported he/she was not well cared for when ill. (In these cases, follow-up occurred by the youths' caseworkers to ensure the matters were dealt with appropriately).

Accommodation

Committee members reported 442 comments from children and youth on issues relating to accommodation at child and youth facilities. Residents expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 391 comments (88%) were positive, 39 comments (9%) were neutral and 12 comments (3%) 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>	247 (95%)	4 (1%)	10 (4%)	261
<i>Physical Environment</i>	144 (80%)	35 (19%)	2 (1%)	181
TOTAL:	391 (88%)	39 (9%)	12 (3%)	442

Meals

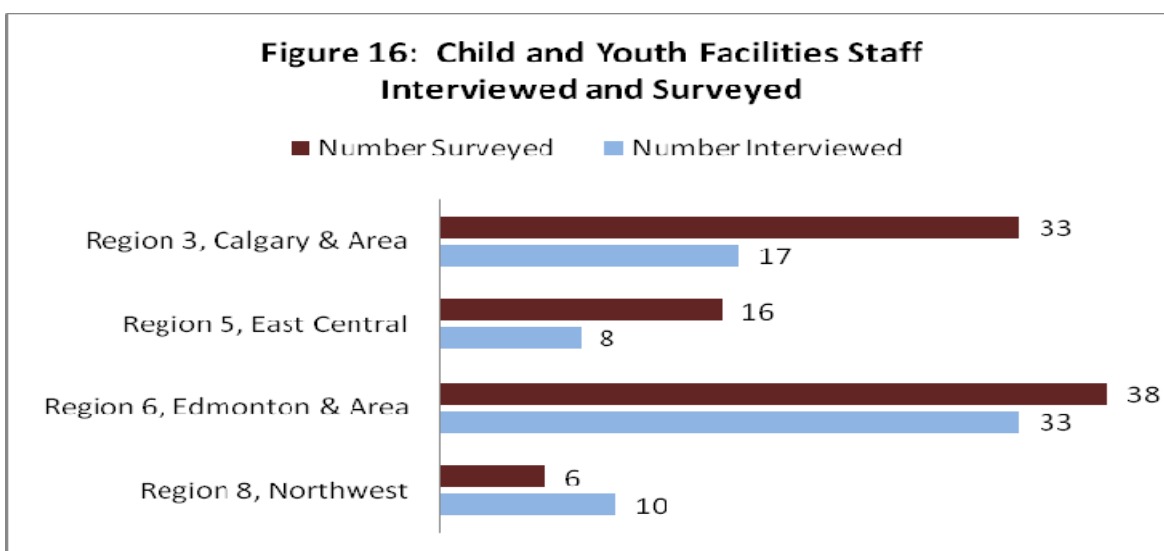
Children and youth expressed satisfaction with the meals served in their facilities. Ninety-five percent of comments indicated children were pleased with the quality and quantity of food. Respondents also reported that they helped with meal preparation. In neutral comments (1%), children and youth reported that the quality of meals was adequate. The remaining 4% 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

Most of the comments made about the physical environment of the facilities were positive (80%). Children and youth stated they liked their facilities, participated in daily or weekly chores and/or had pets. Neutral comments (19%) included children and youth who would not make any changes to their facilities as well as those who would make some changes (e.g. having own room, change location or size of facility). Negative comments (1%) referred to aspects of the facility that two children and youth were unhappy with (e.g. wanting a later bedtime, wanting the freedom to do as he/she pleases.) In each of these cases, the rules within the facilities were deemed appropriate and ensured the children and youths' safety.

Staff's Comments

Committee members talked to 68 staff members within 30 child and youth facilities to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide and to voice any concerns. An additional 93 staff completed surveys. Comments made by staff differed 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; 61% of comments were positive, 29% were neutral and the remaining 10% were negative. Figure 16 shows a breakdown of staff who participated in interviews or completed surveys.



Education and Training

Almost all staff expressed high levels of satisfaction when asked whether 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. One negative comment was reported indicating that additional training was not available within his/her facility.

Staffing/Facility Programs

Positive comments were made by staff regarding several aspects of the programs in their facilities. Staff highlighted their satisfaction with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good relationships with other staff, positive relationships between staff and youth, staff turnover, staffing levels, teamwork and management. Among neutral comments, staff identified further strengths within the programs and some staff described staffing levels and staff turnover within their facilities as adequate. The main challenges identified by staff within their facilities included the difficulty in retaining, recruiting staff and the need for higher wages.

Supports from the Ministry, Agencies and Community

Staff members made positive comments regarding the assistance received from the Child and Youth Advocate, health professionals, educational professionals and the Ministry. Of the negative comments heard, staff indicated some relationships with the Ministry to be poor (e.g. communication, provision of background information, consistency between regions and caseworkers, cooperation with and timely response from the regions). No neutral comments were made.

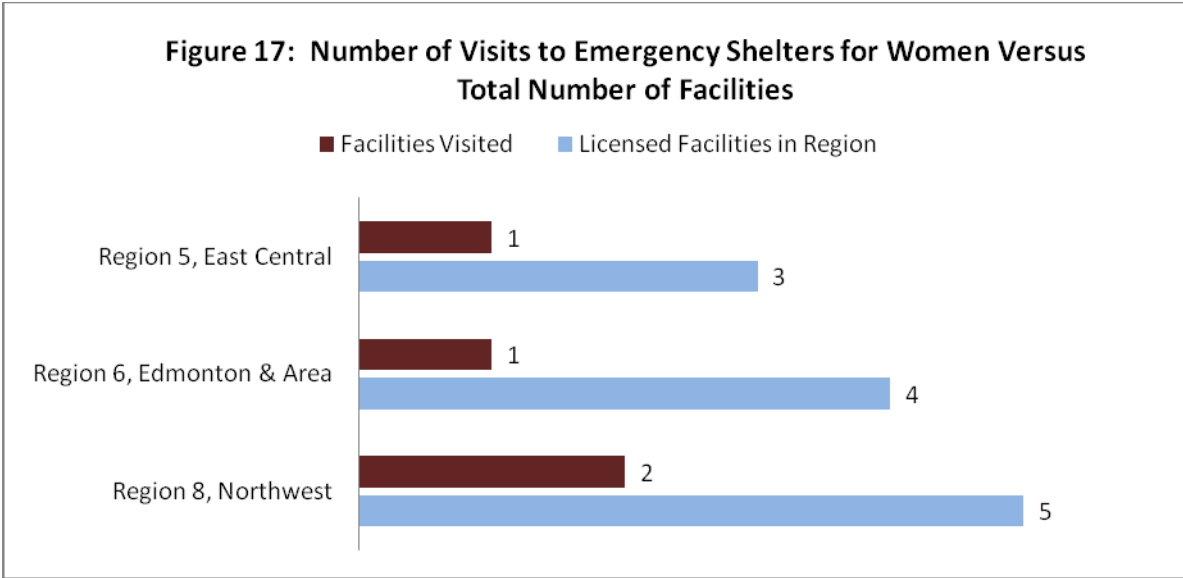
Director's Comments

Directors were given the opportunity to comment on the services their facilities provide to the children in their care. Good community support, educational resources, facility programming and teamwork with natural families topped the list of positive comments made by directors. Dissatisfaction with the wages paid to facility staff and staff turnover within the facility were identified as the key challenges facing many directors.

Emergency Shelters for Women

The purpose of the emergency shelters for women program is to provide a short term, safe and supportive environment for abused women and their children. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services provides funding to 29 emergency shelters for women, fee-for-service agreements with three on-reserve shelters and funding for programming in two second-stage shelters. Basic emergency services include crisis intervention, emotional support, information, referral and advocacy to assist women to make informed decisions about their future. Shelters also provide programming for children residing with their mothers, including programming specific to children exposed to domestic violence.

The Committee visited four emergency shelters for women during the April 2008 to March 2009 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 EMERGENCY SHELTERS FOR WOMEN

Committee members make every effort to schedule visits to emergency shelters for women at times of the day when it is most convenient for residents and staff to be interviewed. Eight residents and 10 staff participated in interviews, while 20 staff completed surveys.

The total interview response rate of the 47 residents living in the four facilities visited was 17%. 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 emergency shelters for women 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 38 comments from residents about the care and treatment they receive at emergency shelters for women. Thirty comments (79%) were positive, one comment was neutral (3%), and the remaining seven comments (18%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to care/treatment themes, is shown in Figure 18, on the next page.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Program Awareness</i>	4 (44%)	0 (0%)	5 (56%)	9
<i>Staff-Resident Relationships</i>	16 (94%)	0 (0%)	1 (6%)	17
<i>Quality of Services Received</i>	10 (84%)	1 (8%)	1 (8%)	12
TOTAL	30 (79%)	1 (3%)	7 (18%)	38

Program Awareness

In 44% of comments, residents described being aware of the types of programs offered by their shelters. Respondents mentioned receiving information and referrals to community services. Among the negative comments (56%), two residents described having difficulty accessing affordable housing upon leaving the shelter, one resident stated she was unaware of programs for herself, one resident was unaware of programs for her children, and one resident reported she did not receive service(s) such as mental health or addictions treatment that she felt was important.

Staff-Resident Relationships

Almost all the comments made about staff-resident relationships were positive (94%), where residents expressed appreciation for staff members' support, assistance, understanding, resourcefulness and knowledge. A few women also reported that staff facilitated positive relationships among residents, staff worked as a team to address the needs of the residents, and cultural diversity was respected within the facilities. One negative comment (6%) indicated the need for more assistance from staff.

Quality of Services Received

Eighty-four percent of comments were positive, where residents stated services were helpful and they received information and services in a timely manner. One neutral comment (8%) was made indicating the children's program was adequate. One negative comment (8%) was made stating the children's program was poor.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 89 comments from residents about the accommodations provided at emergency shelters for women. Overall, residents expressed satisfaction with their accommodations; 70 comments (79%) were positive, 14 comments (16%) were neutral and the remaining five comments (5%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to accommodation themes, is shown in Figure 19, on the next page.

Figure 19: Responses - Accommodation Themes at Emergency Shelters for Women

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
<i>Physical Environment</i>	16 (84%)	1 (5%)	2 (11%)	19
<i>Meals</i>	17 (85%)	3 (15%)	0 (0%)	20
<i>Rules and Regulations</i>	21 (91%)	1 (4.5%)	1 (4.5%)	23
<i>Support Services</i>	16 (59%)	9 (33%)	2 (8%)	27
TOTAL	70 (79%)	14 (16%)	5 (5%)	89

Physical Environment

When asked about the physical environment of the shelters, 89% of comments were either positive or neutral. Residents talked about feeling safe and secure. They also expressed satisfaction with the privacy, comfort, design, and size of the facilities. Two negative comments (11%) were made, stating the privacy of the facility could be improved (e.g. one woman reported her shelter was closely located to an apartment building, which felt intrusive).

Meals

Satisfaction with the quality, quantity and variety of the food provided in the shelters comprised 85% of the statements about meals. The remaining three responses were neutral (15%) where residents said they participated in preparing meals. No negative comments were made.

Rules and Regulations

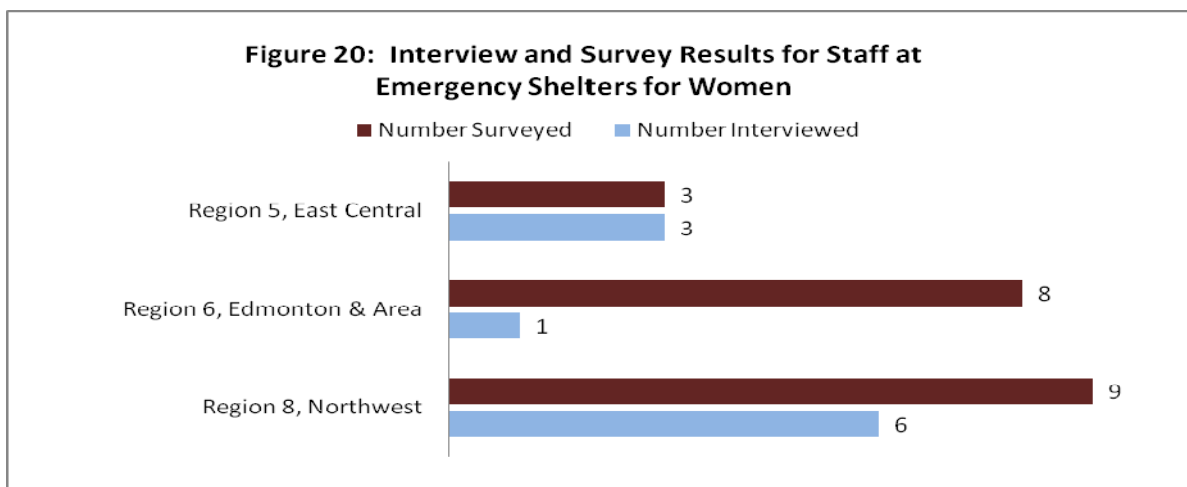
The majority of comments about rules were positive (91%) where women stated they were informed of the rules, described the rules as fair and reasonable, and indicated the regulations were enforced in their respective shelters. One neutral comment (4.5%) referred to a resident who reported she was responsible for chores at the shelter. One negative comment (4.5%) was made regarding the lack of enforcement of rules in the facility.

Support Services

Questions about support services elicited positive remarks in 59% of responses. Women said they were impressed with the services received, the staff delivering services, and would recommend the facility to others. Thirty-three percent of comments were neutral describing how residents came to know about the facilities (e.g. community, media, police and social services) and one comment described services as adequate. Of the two negative comments (8%) reported, women suggested improvements to the programs available for residents (e.g. daily support group meetings) and the physical environment (e.g. new paint, larger selection of books and play areas for children).

Staff's Comments

Committee members talked to 10 staff in four emergency shelters for women to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide. An additional 20 staff completed surveys. A breakdown of staff who participated in the interviews or completed surveys is shown in Figure 20.



Fifty-seven percent of staff feedback was positive, 16% was neutral and the remaining 27% was negative.

Facility - Staffing

Staff reported having sufficient training to provide services to women and children served by the shelters. They further stated that staffing levels, relationships with colleagues, and staff turnover were good. Roles and responsibilities were described as clearly defined. Of the neutral comments, staff described relationships with colleagues as adequate and indicated additional training would be helpful. About one-third of staff responses were negative. Areas of dissatisfaction highlighted a need for improved staffing levels, wages, and more clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Facility – Building/Services Provided

Most of the staff 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, a safe, secure facility and good programs for residents and their children. A few described the services provided as adequate. The lack of services for spouses, community support, and outreach services were identified by staff as areas for improvement.

Overall Feedback

Staff highlighted several strengths of the emergency shelters for women in which they are employed. Many stated that culture and ethnicity were well reflected in their services. Service providers further indicated that staff and their focus on clients made the programs successful. A need for improved funding for services provided to residents, access (e.g. transportation) to services away from the shelter and transitional supports for 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, along with the pre-visit package. Of 227 visits, 25 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, on the next page. 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, 88 percent 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:

- *[Committee members] were very informative and were helpful in different areas of the field. [The visit] was a sharing of information.*
- *We felt listened to. We were able to give our ideas and opinions.*
- *Committee members were relaxed, kind, respectful and great with the children. We could have had more time.*
- *I hope the information gathered will be useful.*

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	0	0%
	Dissatisfied	1	4%
	Neutral	0	0%
	Satisfied	7	28%
	Very Satisfied	17	68%
			25
2. Was the visit useful?	Very Dissatisfied	1	4%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Neutral	8	32%
	Satisfied	6	24%
	Very Satisfied	10	40%
			25
3. Is there anything that we could have done differently?	Yes	3	12%
	No	22	88%
			25
4. Did you understand and receive enough information about the purpose of the visit?	Very Dissatisfied	2	8%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Neutral	1	4%
	Satisfied	4	16%
	Very Satisfied	18	72%
			25
5. Did you have enough time to speak to the Committee Members?	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Dissatisfied	1	4%
	Neutral	1	4%
	Satisfied	3	12%
	Very Satisfied	20	80%
			25
6. Did you feel the Committee members were well informed about their job?	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Neutral	1	4%
	Satisfied	1	4%
	Very Satisfied	23	92%
			25

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 2008 to March 2009 review period.

During this review period, the Social Care Facilities Review Committee received two 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, 2008 to March 31, 2009 review period were \$211,010.72. 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 summarizing feedback. The average cost per visit was \$929.56.

Committee Member Highlights

We have had the opportunity over the past year to visit various facilities including foster homes, child and youth facilities (e.g. group homes), emergency shelters for women, day care centres, and out-of-school care programs. We feel privileged to interview those dedicated and committed individuals (service providers) who steadfastly care for children and youth in this great province, however, perhaps more importantly, we are able to see the impact that is being made as these children and youth briefly share their lives.

As Committee members, it has been deeply gratifying to visit the diverse settings where children are in care across this province. For a brief moment, we have been allowed to observe environments where these children are finding pathways to prosperous futures. Highlights from conversations with children and youth residing in foster homes, and child and youth facilities, as well as their caregivers (e.g. foster parents, group homes staff) included:

- The Advancing Futures bursary is becoming more widely known as many youth and service providers spoke of the opportunities this program provides for youth transitioning to independence. Many youth commented on the difference it has made in developing their future plans.

- Many foster parents talked positively about their relationships with support workers whom they said were supportive and effective in their roles.
- Many children and youth stated how much they love their caregivers and several youth in group homes said they felt safe in a more structured environment.
- Staff in a reunification home quoted a success rate of 85% for Aboriginal parents reuniting with their children and integrating them as families into society.
- Several group home staff said they were well trained to deal with the situations they faced, felt supported in their roles and spoke of decreases in their staff turnover.

The opportunity to visit women in emergency shelters who have experienced crisis is truly humbling. As we listened to their stories, we were impressed with their resilience and were struck by the important roles these shelters play in their lives.

We have a greater insight concerning the quality of care that children are receiving in day cares and out-of-school care programs. Parents, child care staff, and operators commented on their satisfaction including:

- The benefits of accreditation. Staff and operators spoke of the program providing an infusion of funding that significantly made positive differences including the ability to provide more competitive wages, reductions to staff turnover, and encouraging staff to achieve further learning and training. Parents noted positive aspects of having their children attend accredited day cares.
- Many parents expressed confidence in the staff at their child care facilities.

Overall, we have been impressed by the resilience of the children and youth who have had such difficulties in their lives, but have become stronger and more determined because of the committed caregivers who keep the needs of these children and youth at the forefront. Additionally, we have a deep appreciation and respect for the work that is being done within the Ministry to improve the lives of Alberta's families.

Committee Activities

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

The Committee bid farewell to one long-standing member, Dawne Fowler, on March 31, 2009. The Committee would like to thank Ms. Fowler for her contribution and wish her success in her future endeavours.

The Honourable Janis Tarchuk met with the Committee in October 2008 where Committee members provided a presentation, discussed their work with the Minister and learned more about current Ministry initiatives.

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

- Emergency Shelters for Women, Dynamics of Abuse
- Information on the Agency Governance Secretariat and the Alberta Public Agencies Framework
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Initiatives
- Update on Children's Mental Health Plan
- Information on the Foster Care Review Report and Foster Care Rate Increases
- Bullying Initiatives
- Update on Child Care Initiatives
- Information on Kinship Care
- Aboriginal Children in Care

Acknowledgements

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee acknowledge the contribution of each child, youth and adult who provided information through interviews, surveys, visits and report feedback. Without their participation and willingness to share their experiences, this report would not be possible. Thank you for taking the time to meet with Committee members, fill out a survey and/or provide written material.

Committee members also extend their sincere gratitude to the chief executive officers and staff in the Southwest, Calgary and Area, Central, East Central, Edmonton and Area and Northwest Child and Family Services Authorities. Their assistance in co-ordinating visits within their regions is greatly appreciated.

Further, the Committee members wish to thank all those who provided training and information sessions to support the Committee's ongoing professional development. Lastly, the Committee would be remiss if it did not thank the staff from the Ministry of Children and Youth Services for their service, dedication and support.