

SOCIAL CARE FACILITIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

2011-2012 Annual Report



Alberta 

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

This report summarizes the activities and findings of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee for the April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012 fiscal year. Every year, the committee interviews service recipients and service providers in five types of social care facilities across the province.

Both service recipients and service providers had many positive things to say about their experiences, and highlighted the great work taking place in foster homes, child and youth care programs, emergency shelters for women, day cares, and out-of-school care programs. The suggestions, comments, and concerns provided to the committee are appreciated, as they assist future policy development and practice within the Ministry of Human Services.

As part of the government's commitment to children and families, the following initiatives have been implemented this past year:

- Foster parents and kinship caregivers received increased financial support of \$ 11.4 million. This increase in foster care funding includes a 2.5 per cent increase to basic maintenance rates for all age groups, a \$1.50 per child per day increase to foster parent skill fees, and an increase of \$1.50 per hour for babysitting.
- The Alberta government announced 30 new child intervention supervisor positions across the province to strengthen support for front-line workers and contribute to better outcomes for at-risk children, youth and families in Alberta.
- Higher income thresholds have been set for child care subsidies. The household income that qualifies families to receive maximum subsidy will increase from \$35,100 to \$50,000. With these changes, approximately 9,000 families will receive new or increased funding to offset the cost of accessing quality child care.
- The Alberta government introduced new legislation to establish the Child and Youth Advocate as an independent officer of the Legislature. The legislation also established the Child and Family Services Council for Quality Assurance, a multidisciplinary body of experts who will work with the Ministry to identify effective practices and make recommendations to the Minister for improving and strengthening child intervention services. These changes create a stronger and broader system of advocacy and support for children and youth who are being served in government systems.

I would like to thank the committee members for their hard work over the 2011/2012 year. Their dedication in giving service recipients and service providers an opportunity to share their experiences make it possible to achieve a brighter and more sustainable future for Alberta's children, youth and families.

Dave Hancock, QC
Minister
Human Services

REPORT FROM THE CHAIR

It is my pleasure to introduce The Social Care Facilities Review Committee Annual Report for the 2011-2012 fiscal year. I would like to thank Art Johnston, who served as Chair of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee from November, 2004 to October, 2011. His seven years of leadership and commitment to children and families is deeply appreciated. It is on behalf of Art Johnston and the committee that I present this year's findings.

This report summarizes the information gleaned from the committee's visits to day cares, out-of-school care programs, foster homes, child and youth facilities and emergency shelters for women.

Between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2012 the committee visited 236 programs and facilities within 10 Child and Family Services Authorities. As part of the visits, committee members interviewed and/or surveyed 1,990 service recipients, foster parents, and staff members. An additional 98 children and youth who were unable to be interviewed due to age or verbal ability were observed in their placements.

Overall, service recipients reported satisfaction with the services received in their programs or facilities. Parents of children who attend day care or out-of-school care programs spoke positively about the relationships between themselves and program staff, rules, daily activities offered, and relationships between their children and program staff. Some children in the out-of-school care program stated they had experienced bullying or had been involved in bullying, but, in the majority of cases, the matters had been resolved to everyone's satisfaction. Where significant concerns were heard from children, these matters were forwarded for follow-up.

Children and youth living in foster homes or child and youth care facilities expressed satisfaction with their care, treatment, and accommodation. Highest levels of satisfaction referred to their involvement in social activities, education, meals, and their overall care and comfort in their placements. Some children indicated that they would have appreciated more support during the move into their new placements. Where significant concerns were heard from children and youth, these concerns were sent for follow-up.

Women residing in emergency shelters stated they were pleased with the programs offered in their shelters, the physical environment, and the support and assistance provided by the shelter staff. A few women indicated that the level of support and programming for children could be improved.

While interviewing service providers, foster parents and staff reported overall satisfaction with their facilities, programs, and services. Day care and out-of-school care staff highlighted several strengths in their programs, and some staff expressed the need for higher wages. Some operators indicated they are having difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. Foster parents stated they were able to access services and supports for the children in their care, and were pleased with the support they receive from caseworkers, support workers, and their agencies. Foster parents highlighted the need for better communication

between themselves and caseworkers, increased recreation allowances for children and youth involved in activities that exceed current allowance levels (e.g. music lessons, dance, organized sports), more respite homes, improved foster parent training, and increased foster care funding. Staff from emergency shelters for women expressed satisfaction with their training, programs, and relationships with residents. The staff also expressed the need for increased funding for shelters in order to address building maintenance, program needs, transitional supports (e.g. housing) for women leaving the shelters, and staff wages.

During the 2011-12 review period there were no complaints received and as a result, no investigations were conducted.

The hard work and dedication of committee members has made this report possible. I would like to thank each of them for their time and commitment to Alberta children and families. This has been another successful year!

Most importantly, thank you to every child, youth and adult who participated in the interviews, completed a survey, and provided feedback to the committee. It is your contributions that make this endeavor worthwhile. Your experiences, insights, and suggestions inform the people who are operating programs and facilities, as well as government. Together, we can help ensure the quality of services in Alberta's social care facilities.

Jason Luan
MLA, Calgary-Hawkwood
Chair, Social Care Facilities Review Committee

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jason Luan, Chair, Calgary (July 2012 – Present)

Mr. Jason Luan was elected as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Hawkwood on April 23, 2012. In addition to his role as Chair of the SCFRC, he has been appointed to the Select Special Conflicts of Interest Act Review Committee as the Deputy Chair; the Alberta Research and Innovation Authority as the Government of Alberta Liaison; the Legislative Policy Committee on Alberta's Economic Future as a member; the Standing Committee of the Privileges and Elections, Standing Orders and Printing as a member. He also served on the Standing Committee of Private Bills and the Legislative Policy Committee on Family and Community Services as a member.

Mr. Luan holds a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Calgary and has dedicated his career to public service for the last 21 years, promoting healthy families and strong communities. He is passionate about community development, collaboration, cultural diversity and social inclusion. Prior to serving as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, Mr. Luan first was a child welfare worker for Alberta Family and Social Services for seven years and then a social planner for the city of Calgary for 14 years, managing funding for nonprofit social service agencies.

This is Mr. Luan's first year as Chair of the SCFRC.

Art Johnston, Chair, Calgary (November 2004 – October 2011)

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.

Mr. Johnston served seven years as Chair of the SCFRC.

Brenda Blakey (April 2011 – December 2011)

Brenda Blakey has a Master's Degree in Business Administration and a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and Sociology from the University of Alberta. Ms. Blakey most recently instructed and was Program Chair for the Bachelor of Commerce Program at Grant McEwan University in Edmonton. Prior to post-secondary education, she practiced for many years as a professional accountant and auditor. Ms. Blakey has been involved in various community activities including the Edzimkulu organization, parents' advisory groups, community leagues and various school organizations.

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. She is currently a board member of Community Futures and the local Victim Services.

Laura Hunt, Edmonton (April 2006 – March 2012)

Laura Hunt has a Bachelor of Science 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 aqua fit instructor for the YMCA.

Sharon Johnson (April 2011 – November 2011)

Sharon Johnson has a Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Calgary. Ms. Johnson has over 22 years of experience working with children, adults, and families in many roles including as a Child Welfare Worker, Police Crisis Worker, Mental Health Therapist, and Trauma Counselor. She also enjoys being actively involved in her community and spending time with her grandchildren.

Karen Keech, Canmore (September 2010 – Present)

Karen Keech has a Bachelor of Education and a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Alberta. She has worked for the Edmonton Public School Board and the Calgary Board of Education in various positions such as a Special Education Teacher, Program Liaison Teacher and Strategist for the Developmentally Challenged. Ms. Keech is also active in her community and volunteers with various organizations including the Rotary Club of Canmore and Discovery House.

Nancy Leishman, Calgary (July 2007 – July 2011)

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.

Judy Louis (April 2011 – Present)

Judy Louis has a Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta, received her certification for Palliative Care from Red Deer College, and completed numerous post-secondary courses including investigations training, curriculum development, and counseling. Ms. Louis has worked with many children and youth in her 30-year career with the Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools system in areas of early childhood development,

special education, counselor, community school coordinator, administrative positions, and a First Nations, Métis and Inuit coordinator. She is very active in her community being involved with the Hobbema Community Cadets and with projects to reduce crime and gang involvement within the Aboriginal community.

Kelly Pizzey, Sherwood Park (September 2010 – Present)

Kelly Pizzey is the mother of five adult children with four grandchildren. She has been actively involved in her community serving on school committees and coaching basketball. Ms. Pizzey has volunteered with her church in various capacities and currently is president of a women's organization that administers to the needs of families.

Jan Prince, Edmonton (April 2009 – October 2012)

Jan Prince is the mother of three boys and an active participant in her community and church. She has roots in small-town Southern Alberta, but has lived in Edmonton for the past 22 years. Mrs. Prince helps out with the family business, volunteers with various school parent councils and is President of the Knottwood Young Women's organization.

Leslie Shaughnessy, Calgary (August 2011 – Present)

Leslie Shaughnessy has operated her own hairdressing business for over 22 years. She is a very active volunteer within her community working with children in various capacities. Ms. Shaughnessy has been a coach and coordinator of clinics and tournaments with the Calgary Minor Basketball Association, team mom for the Lord Beaverbrook High School girls' basketball team, and leader of a Young Women's group organizing volunteer opportunities with other organizations such as The Beverly Center and The Calgary Drop In Center. She is currently working with young adults including providing support to young mothers.

Tracey Smith, Calgary (April 2006 – Present)

Tracey Smith has worked 27 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.

Linda Sutton, Calgary (April 2009 – Present)

Linda Sutton has taught music to children for more than 20 years. She completed training in an Early Childhood Education program at Sault College in Sault Ste. Marie and obtained an Orff Teachers Certification from the University of Toronto. Ms. Sutton has been an active volunteer with her church serving as President of the Primary organization for children age two to 12, President of a 150 member women's group, Choir Director, as well as teaching religious studies to children and youth.

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 Human 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 Human Services; and
- 2) the premises where a child care program that is licensed under the *Child Care Licensing Act* is offered or provided.

The facilities currently reviewed by the Social Care Facilities Review Committee include: foster homes, child and youth programs, day care programs, out-of-school care programs and emergency shelters for women.

During the 2011-2012 review period, the committee consisted of one Member of the Legislative Assembly who chaired the committee, and 11 private citizens who reside 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 3,800 programs that fall under the committee's mandate. To review a sampling of the programs, the committee plans their visits so they are continually in the larger regions and rotating through the smaller regions. This year, facilities within all 10 Child and Family Services Authorities were reviewed:

- Region 1, Southwest
- Region 2, Southeast
- Region 3, Calgary and Area
- Region 4, Central
- Region 5, East Central
- Region 6, Edmonton and Area
- Region 7, North Central
- Region 8, Northwest
- Region 9, Northeast
- Region 10, Métis Settlements

Facilities were randomly selected in each of the chosen regions to ensure an unbiased, representative sample from the population of programs and individuals being served and to include a representative selection of communities in each region.

During the visits, 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 programs, the parents, not the children, were interviewed. Committee members spoke with parents from out-of-school care programs, 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 programs 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 2011 to March 2012. 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.

Further, 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.

Sample Size

A total of 236 facilities were visited from April 2011 to March 2012, including:

- 136 foster care homes;
- 38 day care programs;
- 33 out-of-school care programs;
- 26 child and youth facilities; and
- 3 emergency shelters for women.

Committee members spoke with a total of 878 service recipients and service providers. Ninety-eight children and youth were observed rather than interviewed due to their young ages and/or inability to speak to the committee members. An additional 659 service recipients and 453 staff members completed surveys.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

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

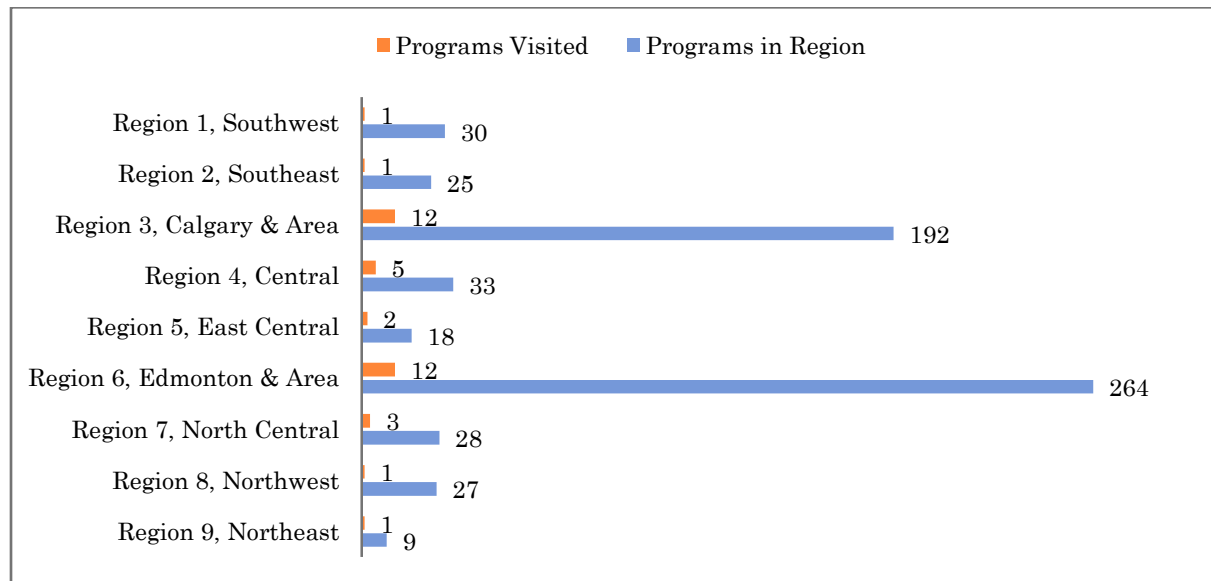
- facilitate open and neutral communication;
- focus on the current mandate of the Social Care Facilities Review Committee;
- promote awareness of the mandate;
- respect the rights and obligations of all parties;
- empower clients by providing a "voice" for them;
- be objective, open-minded and receptive 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 PROGRAMS

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 services 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 2011 to March 2012 review period, the committee visited 38 licensed day care programs. Figure 1 shows the number of day cares visited compared to the total number of programs in the region at the end of the review period.

Figure 1: Number of Visits to Day Care Programs versus Total Number of Programs



Highlights of Visits to Day Care Programs

To coincide with times when parents were at the day care programs to drop-off and pick-up their children, the committee scheduled visits in the morning or late afternoon. Ninety-seven parents were interviewed and 448 parents completed surveys. Some of the parents participated in interviews as well as completed the surveys. Due to the young ages of the children in the day care programs, children were not interviewed.

Comments made by parents were organized into eight categories: daily activities, staff-child relationships, communication with staff, opportunity for parent or guardian involvement, meals and/or snacks, physical environment, rules, and overall feedback. Service providers' comments are discussed separately.

Day Care Themes

Committee members reported 6,472 comments about the care their children receive at day care. Most of the parent's comments expressed satisfaction with services provided; 5,872

(91%) were positive, 558 (9%) were neutral, and 42 (<1%) were negative. The breakdown of parent comments, relating to the eight day care themes is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Responses – Themes at Day Care Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Daily Activities	501 (92%)	43 (8%)	1 (<1%)	545
Staff-Child Relationships	505 (93%)	38 (7%)	1 (<1%)	544
Communication with Staff	1,212 (94%)	72 (6%)	5 (<1%)	1,289
Parent or Guardian Involvement	429 (83%)	74 (14%)	16 (3%)	519
Meals and/or Snacks	1,092 (87%)	148 (12%)	11 (1%)	1,251
Physical Environment	1,023 (91%)	93 (8%)	6 (1%)	1,122
Rules and Regulations	607 (93%)	48 (7%)	2 (<1%)	657
Overall Feedback	503 (92%)	42 (8%)	—	545
TOTAL	5,872 (91%)	558 (9%)	42 (<1%)	6,472

Choice of Day Care

Parents made a total of 1,468 comments about the reasons they selected their day care program. The most popular responses were location (28%), reputation (17%), hours of operation (12%), and programs offered (12%). The remaining 31 per cent of comments referred to reasons such as accreditation, cost, and personal considerations. This information is useful in understanding the rationale employed by parents when selecting a specific day care; however, these factors cannot be considered positive or negative, therefore they were not included in the figure above.

Daily Activities

The majority of comments about daily activities offered in the day cares were highly positive (92%). Eight per cent of comments were neutral, where parents rated the daily activities as adequate. Only one negative comment (<1%) was made by a parent who thought there should be more crafts provided as an activity in the day care.

Staff-Child Relationships

Ninety-three per cent of comments about staff-child relationships were positive, where parents expressed satisfaction with the way staff interact with their children, and believed their children felt comfortable with staff. Seven per cent of comments 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. One comment (<1%) was negative, where the parent felt the pre-school room lacked structure.

Communication with Staff

Most of the feedback regarding communication with staff was positive (94%). Parents described good information sharing between parents and staff, being informed by staff of incidents or concerns occurring during the day, and feeling staff are responsive to the needs of their children, parent questions, and parent requests. Of the neutral comments (6%), parents reported that general communication was adequate and/or the information provided was adequate. Less than one per cent of comments were negative. Of the five negative comments made, four parents did not provide further information for their rating and one parent stated “staff don’t tell me much”.

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Almost all parents stated there were either good (83%) or adequate (14%) opportunities to be involved in the day care programs. Three per cent of comments were negative where 16 parents stated that the opportunity for involvement was poor (e.g. several parents stated they were not encouraged to participate, but most of these parents also stated they did not have time to be involved or were not interested in being involved due to other demands on their time).

Meals and/or Snacks

Not all day care programs in Alberta choose to offer meals and snacks. If they do not provide food, parents are required to provide meals and snacks for their children to eat while attending the program. Parents made many positive comments (87%) about the quality, quantity, and variety of meals and snacks provided by the day care programs. A few parents also stated that the day cares accommodated children’s allergies. Neutral comments, where parents described the food quality, quantity, and variety as adequate, comprised 12 per cent of statements. One per cent of comments were negative (e.g. parents suggested the need for more vegetables, less sugar, less processed food, and more variety).

Physical Environment

When given the opportunity to comment on the overall physical environments of the day care programs, over 99 per cent were either positive or neutral. In addition to being pleased with the overall space, parents expressed satisfaction with the maintenance, equipment, toys, and play space. Of the negative comments (1%), six parents expressed the need for improvements such as renovations, more windows and natural light, improved cleanliness, and larger indoor play space.

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 per cent of comments were neutral, where parents described the rules, child guidance, and security measures as adequate. Two negative comments (<1%) were made where parents felt the child guidance was not clear or strict enough.

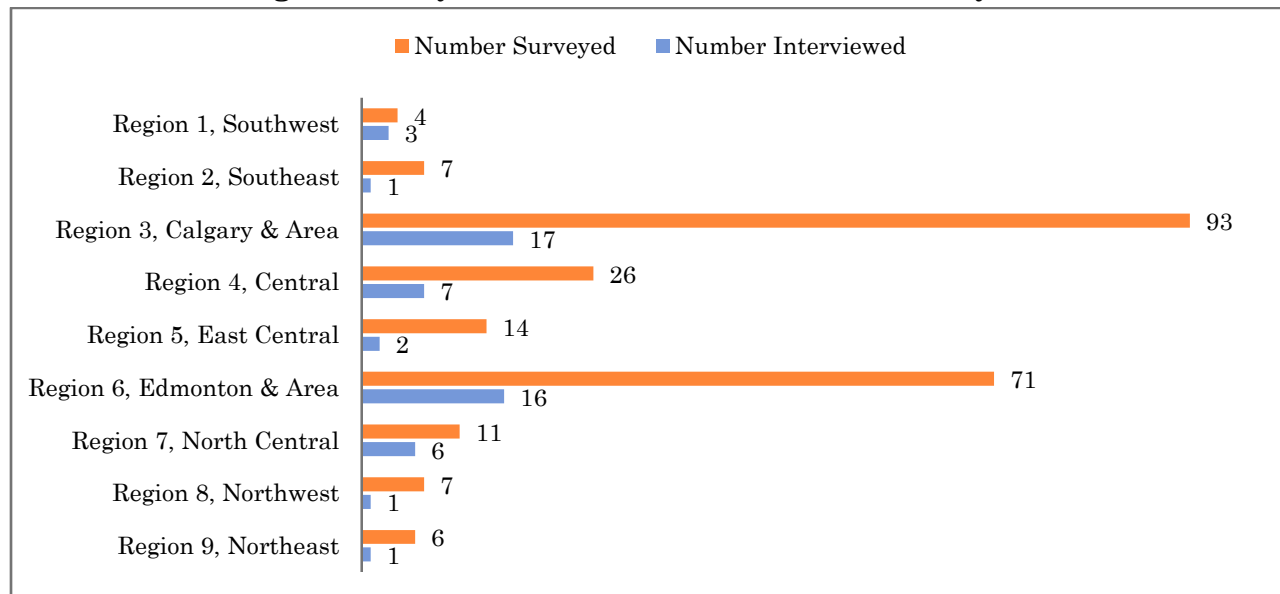
Overall Feedback

When asked about the overall quality of care their children receive at the day care programs, parents were highly positive (92%). The remaining comments were neutral (8%) as parents described being satisfied with the quality of care their children receive at day care. No negative comments were made.

Service Providers' Comments

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. The committee spoke with 54 staff in 38 day cares. In addition, 239 staff completed surveys. Day care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews; however, their feedback is provided separately 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.

Figure 3: Day Care Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



The majority of comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide. Of the 4,169 comments made by staff, 3,375 (81%) were positive, 709 (17%) were neutral, and 85 (2%) were negative. The main topics of discussion are listed below.

Physical Environment

The majority of staff reported positive comments about the physical environment of the day care programs. They described good play areas for the children and nice lay-outs for the programs offered. Some staff stated the physical space was adequate. One negative comment was made, indicating the need for a separate space for doing crafts.

Meals and/or Snacks

When asked about meals and snacks offered in the day cares, staff were very positive. Staff stated the quality, variety, and quantity of food provided was good. Some staff described the food offered in the programs as adequate. Of the few negative comments made, a

couple of staff indicated the quality of food could be improved, a few stated the variety of food could be improved, and a few stated the quantity of food could be increased.

Daily Activities

All comments about daily activities provided to children in the day care programs were either positive or neutral, with the majority of comments being highly positive. No negative comments were made.

Staff-Child Relationships

When asked about the staff-child relationships, the vast majority of staff reported positive relationships. A few staff described staff-child relationships as adequate. No negative comments were made.

Rules and Regulations

When asked about rules and regulations, almost all of the feedback was positive. Staff indicated that they were effective in assisting children to come up with solutions when differences of opinion or disagreements occurred among children. No neutral comments were made. Three negative comments were heard. Two comments were made by staff who do not have direct supervision of the children (e.g. cook and administrative staff), and therefore indicated they did not assist children in working out solutions. Only one staff suggested that greater effort was needed in assisting children to work out solutions with each other.

Overall Feedback from Staff

When staff commented on the overall service and care they provide within the day care programs, staff described safe programs, demonstrated their awareness of ratios, stated diversities were respected, medications were kept safe, and parents were encouraged to participate in the programs. No neutral comments were made. Of the negative comments reported, staff voiced dissatisfaction with parents not being encouraged to participate in the programs and expressed a need for improved wages as their two top areas of concerns.

Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operators

Almost all of the feedback from managers, owners, and operators was highly positive. Their statements mirrored those of staff, but also indicated that staff performance feedback is offered, the programs have processes for addressing concerns, the programs accept children with disabilities, information in the form of written materials are provided, and many of the day cares are involved in the pre-accreditation program. Two comments were neutral stating that staff wages were adequate. Of the few negative comments provided, a need for increased staff wages, high staff turnover, and difficulty recruiting staff were highlighted by managers and owners.

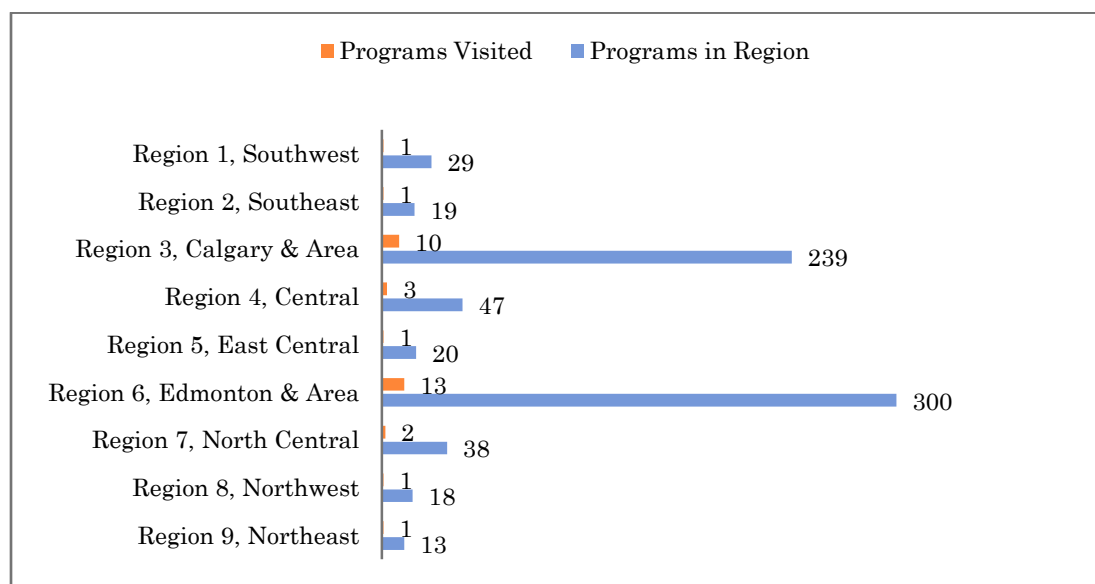
OUT-OF-SCHOOL CARE PROGRAMS

Out-of-school care provides child care before and after school or at other times schools are closed. Children enrolled in out-of-school care programs are in Kindergarten to Grade 6. Out-of-school care programs are licensed under the *Child Care Licensing Act* and are obligated to meet the requirements of the *Child Care Licensing Regulation*.

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

The committee visited 33 licensed out-of-school care programs during the April 2011 to March 2012 review period. Figure 4 shows the number of out-of-school care programs visited, compared to the total number of programs in the region at the end of the review period.

Figure 4: Number of Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs versus Total Number of Programs



Highlights of Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs

Committee members scheduled visits to out-of-school care programs in late afternoon to coincide with times that parents were at the programs to pick-up their children. Seventy-one parents were interviewed and 211 parents completed surveys. Some parents who completed surveys also participated in interviews. Children attending out-of-school care programs were invited to take part in the interviews if their parent or guardian was present or had provided a signed consent form. There were 176 children who 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 4,893 observations from parents and children about the care children receive in out-of-school care programs. Overall, parents and children expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 4,326 (88%) comments were positive, 280 (6%) were neutral, and 287 (6%) were negative. The breakdown of parents’ and children’s comments, relating to out-of-school care themes, is shown in Figure 5.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Daily Activities	580 (88%)	29 (4%)	54 (8%)	663
Staff-Child Relationships	987 (87%)	23 (2%)	129 (11%)	1,139
Communication with Staff	559 (95%)	27 (5%)	3 (<1%)	589
Parent or Guardian Involvement	193 (79%)	36 (15%)	15 (6%)	244
Meals and/or Snacks	648 (88%)	72 (10%)	12 (2%)	732
Physical Environment	384 (87%)	48 (11%)	8 (2%)	440
Rules and Regulations	615 (94%)	27 (4%)	11 (2%)	653
Overall Feedback	360 (83%)	18 (4%)	55 (13%)	433
TOTAL	4,326 (88%)	280 (6%)	287 (6%)	4,893

Choice of Out-of-School Care Program

Six hundred and eighty comments were made by parents regarding their reasons for selecting out-of-school programs. Parents highlighted location (35%), hours of operation (16%), reputation (14%), and program offered (10%) as top reasons for choosing the out-of-school care program. The remaining 25 per cent of comments referred to factors such as cost, accreditation, limited choice, transportation, supports for children with special needs, and personal considerations. This information is useful in understanding why parents choose out-of-school care; however, these factors cannot be considered positive or negative, therefore they are not included in the table above.

Daily Activities

Questions about daily activities evoked many positive comments (88%) from parents and children. Parents stated 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 the activities they were interested in. Four per cent of comments were neutral indicating the daily activities were adequate. In eight per cent of the comments, parents indicated the children were not involved in the planning of activities, and/or felt the daily activities needed improvement. Four children stated they were not able to choose the activities they wanted to participate in.

Staff-Child Relationships

A high percentage (87%) of comments about staff-child relationships were positive. Parents described highly satisfactory interactions between staff and children, and reported that their children had not been involved in a bullying incident. Children stated feeling safe and comfortable, and said that they liked attending the program. Many children stated they had not experienced bullying while attending the program. Two per cent of comments were neutral, where parents described staff-child relationships as adequate.

Eleven per cent of comments were negative, the majority of which referred to parents who reported their children had been involved in a bullying incident. Most of these parents confirmed the bullying incidents had been resolved; however, a few parents indicated the incidents had not been properly addressed. Some children reported that bullying incidents had occurred. Two parents described staff-child relationships as poor (e.g. “high turnover impacts relationships”, “they [staff] are not involved in activities”). Six children stated they did not like coming to the program (e.g. one child felt too old to be in the program, one child stated he/she did not have friends, one stated “[it’s] boring”, two children did not like another child in the program, and one child stated “the teacher is mean”), and three children did not feel safe and comfortable (e.g. these three children said they felt less safe because of other kids in the program who would bully others). Identified concerns were sent for immediate follow-up to the appropriate Child and Family Services Authority.

Communication with Staff

Almost all of the feedback regarding communication with staff was either positive (95%) or neutral (5%). Parents stated they had good rapport with staff, were informed of incidents/concerns, and felt staff were responsive to their inquiries and the needs of their children. Less than one per cent of responses were negative, where two parents felt communication could be improved, and one parent would like to be better informed of incidents and concerns (e.g. “...it’s hard to get staff’s attention during pick-up times”).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Parents described either good (79%) or adequate (15%) opportunities to be involved in the out-of-school care programs. Six per cent of comments were negative. Some parents stated they did not have time or were not interested in being involved (e.g. “I’m too busy...I need to work”, “when I am not working, my child is not in the program, “), some parents stated

that the out-of-school care program is too short for parental involvement, a few stated that the programs did not take field trips, therefore there was no need for volunteers, one parent indicated he/she was given few opportunities to be involved, and one parent did not provide further clarification.

Meals and/or Snacks

Out-of-School care programs in Alberta have the choice of providing meals and snacks or requiring the parents to provide food for their children instead. Eighty-eight per cent of comments made by parents and children about the quality, quantity, and variety of the food provided were positive. A few parents also indicated that their programs accommodated allergies. Ten per cent of comments by parents and children were neutral, describing the quality, quantity, and variety of food as adequate. Of the negative comments (2%), eight parents stated the meals and snacks were poor and they would like to see healthier options and/or larger portions (e.g. “popcorn is a poor snack choice”, “snacks seem cheap”, “the quality and quantity of snacks declined under new management”). Two children stated the quality and/or quantity of meals and snacks were poor (e.g. one child prefers to eat food from home, and another child would like bigger portions as well as more water and juice available). Identified concerns were sent for immediate follow-up to the appropriate Child and Family Services Authority.

Physical Environment

Most parents reported being pleased with the physical environment of the out-of-school care programs. Eighty-seven per cent of responses were positive, where parents expressed satisfaction with the overall environment of the play space, maintenance, equipment, and toys. Neutral comments (11%) indicated the physical environment, play space, and maintenance were adequate. The remaining two per cent of parent comments were negative and referred to the need for minor renovations, more play space, and specific changes such as providing a microwave, organizing the toys more effectively, de-cluttering the space, and managing odors.

Rules and Regulations

High satisfaction with the rules and regulations within out-of-school care programs was reported in 94 per cent of the comments made by parents and children. This included positive parent comments about child guidance policies and security measures, as well as, children who stated they knew the rules and felt they were fair. Some comments (4%) were neutral, where parents described the rules, regulations, and their application as adequate. Of the negative comments (2%), three children stated they did not know the rules, two felt the rules were not fair (e.g. one child was unsure of the rules, the other disagreed with a no touching rule), and six parents indicated they did not like the rules and/or their application (e.g. three parents stated that the rules are good but not always implemented, one parent reported “I’ve never seen any rules”, another indicated “...don’t like the use of time-out”, and one parent did not provide further clarification).

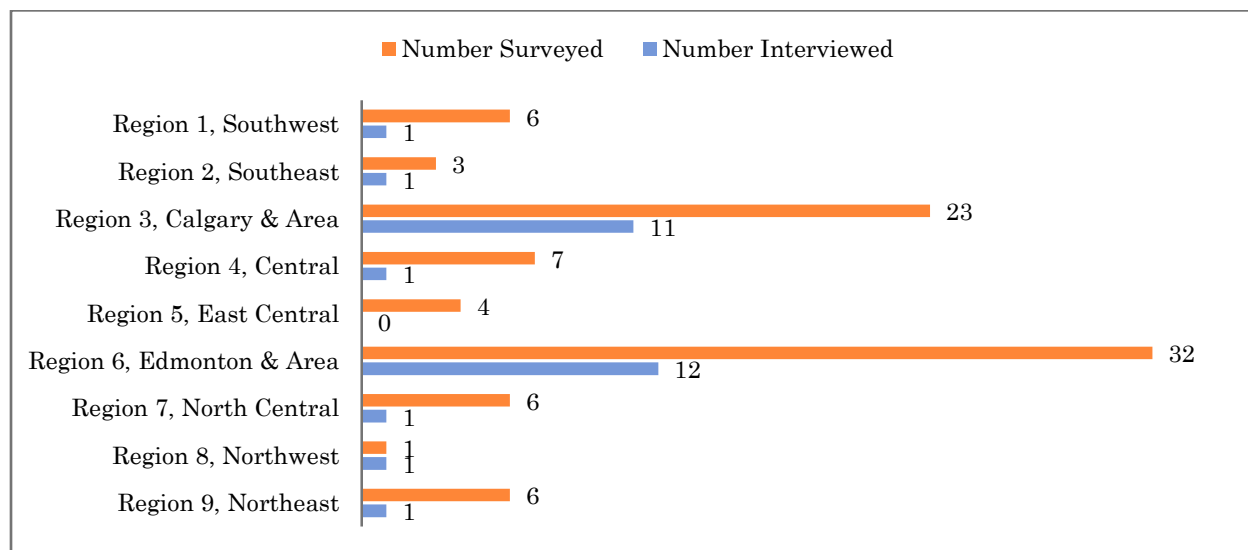
Overall Feedback

Positive comments comprised 83 per cent of responses regarding the overall quality of care received at out-of-school care programs. Many parents said they were pleased with the care their children received, and children reported liking the programs and did not want anything to change. Four per cent of parents said the overall care was adequate. The remaining 13 per cent of comments were negative and included two comments from parents (e.g. “I think that the children are looked after, but that is all that is done”, “[there is a] lack of activities”) and several comments by children who wanted changes made in their programs. The majority of child requests appeared to be less about concerns and more about desires (e.g. being able to change the kids in the program, new toys, candy, free days, pets, more floor hockey, more Lego, more puzzles and games, more friends, a Play Station, X-Box, yo-yos, “make everyone nice”, toys for older kids, being able to leave earlier, re-decorate, be allowed to walk around while eating, go outside more, be able to yell, no clean up, turn lights off, be able to move between rooms, have the teacher not yell, “watch movies whenever we want”, etc.). Identified concerns were sent for immediate follow-up to the appropriate Child and Family Services Authority.

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 29 staff in 33 out-of-school care programs. In addition, 88 staff completed surveys. Out-of-school care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews; their feedback is provided separately 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.

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



Service providers’ comments expressed satisfaction with the services they provided; 1,409 comments (79%) were positive, 315 (17%) were neutral and the remaining 67 comments (4%) were negative.

Physical Environment

The majority of staff stated they were pleased with the layout of their out-of-school care programs, indicating that the space allowed for individual, small and large group activities. Neutral comments described the physical space and layout as adequate. A few staff remarked that the physical space and/or layout of the out-of-school care program could be improved (e.g. some areas could use repair, more space, some minor renovations, new toys, and materials).

Meals and/or Snacks

Out-of-school care staff made many positive comments about the meals and snacks served in the programs. Some staff described the meals and snacks as adequate in quality, quantity, and variety. Three staff stated that the food offered in the program was poor (e.g. “quality is average”, “variety is lacking”, “the food could be healthier”).

Daily Activities

More than three-quarters of the comments about daily activities provided at out-of-school care programs were positive, with a few comments indicating the daily activities were adequate. Two negative comments were made stating that “children don’t really get to choose activities” but highlighted that efforts were underway to get children involved in planning activities.

Staff-Child Relationships

All but one of the staff comments regarding staff-child relationships were either positive or neutral. One negative comment was heard where the staff indicated that due to time constraints, one-on-one care “to ensure comfort and individual care” is not possible.

Rules and Regulations

One hundred per cent of comments about the rules and child guidance in the out-of-school care programs were positive. Staff shared that they assisted children in solving their own conflicts and ensured rules were consistently applied.

Overall Feedback from Staff

When asked about the general services and care staff provide to children attending out-of-school care programs, the vast majority of staff made positive comments. Staff were knowledgeable about staff-child ratios, diversities were respected, medications were kept secure, staff were aware of children who carried emergency medications, and knew when children self-medicated. No neutral comments were heard. Of the negative comments made, most referred to a few staff who were unaware when a child self-medicated and a few staff who were unaware of children who carried emergency medication.

Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operator

While commenting on the services they provide, managers, owners, and operators made many highly positive comments. Awareness of staff-child ratios, safe storage of medications, review of rules and consequences, performance feedback for staff, processes for addressing concerns, facilitating child input, respecting diversity, and providing parents

with written materials topped the positive comments. No neutral comments were made. Negative comments included reports that staff are not shared between the out-of-school care program and the co-located day care program, child input is not sought when planning menus, parents forget to sign consents (e.g. for children to self-medicate), and some programs are having difficulty retaining and recruiting staff.

FOSTER HOMES

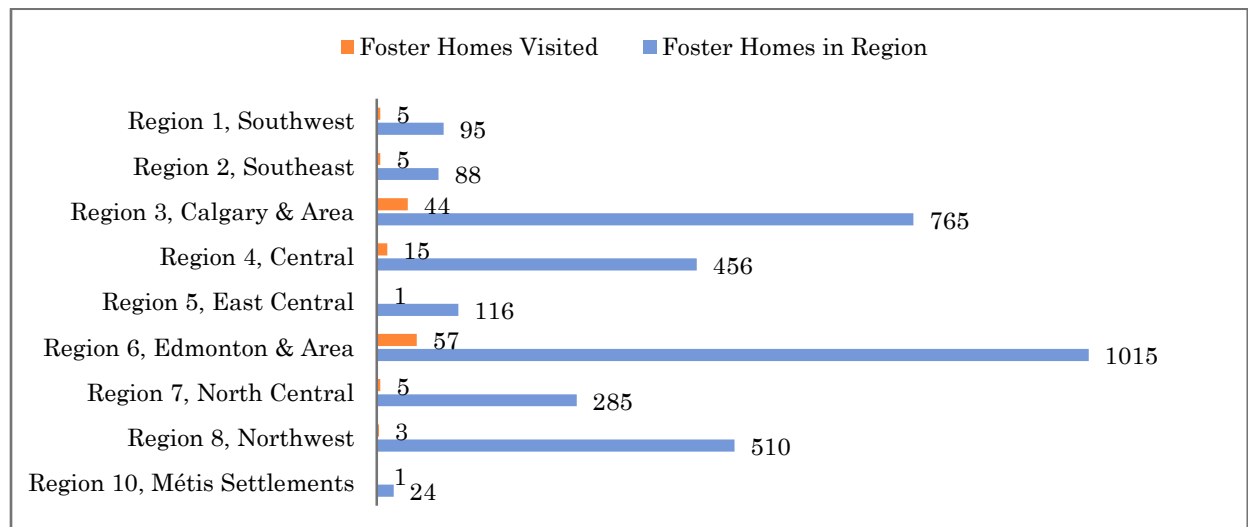
Foster homes provide temporary care to children in the custody or under the guardianship of a director designated under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act* who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to remain in their natural family home. Children are placed with foster parents who have the expertise and training required to meet the particular needs of the children in their care.

In most cases when a child in the custody or under the guardianship of the director is placed in a foster home, the goal is to return the child to his or her natural family when possible. Foster parents are part of the team working to achieve this goal. When a return to the natural family is not possible, an alternative 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 designed to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of children in the custody or under the guardianship of the director. Regulations ensure quality of care and accountability for children placed in foster homes. All foster homes must be licensed.

The committee visited 136 foster homes during the April 2011 to March 2012 review period. The number of foster homes visited, as well as the total number of foster homes in each region, is shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Number of Visits to Foster Homes versus Total Number of Foster Homes



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 302 children residing in the 136 foster homes visited, 152 children and youth (50%) participated in interviews. In addition, committee members observed 91 children (30%) 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 2,533 comments from foster children regarding the care they receive in their foster homes. In general, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the care provided; 1,984 (78%) were positive, 478 (19%) were neutral, and 71 (3%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments relating to care themes is shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Responses – Care Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Education	354 (92%)	7 (2%)	23 (6%)	384
Summer Break	181 (95%)	9 (5%)	0 (0%)	190
Social Activities	702 (100%)	0 (0%)	3 (<1%)	705
Foster Parent-Child Relationships	242 (47%)	269 (53%)	1 (<1%)	512
Rules	263 (58%)	192 (42%)	1 (<1%)	456
Overall Care and Comfort Level	242 (85%)	1 (<1%)	43 (15%)	286
TOTAL	1,984 (78%)	478 (19%)	71 (3%)	2,533

Education

Questions about education evoked many positive comments (92%). Children and youth stated they liked school, described the types of schools they attended (e.g. public, private, special needs programs), and spoke about plans for their futures. Nine per cent of the comments indicated foster children had plans to graduate from high school and another seven per cent of comments referred to plans for post-secondary education, trade work, or military service. Some youth stated they were aware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program, and were looking forward to accessing the program in the future.

Two per cent of comments were neutral, and referred to five youth who were employed full-time, one youth who was employed part-time, and one child or youth whose feelings about

school were neutral at the time of the interview. Negative comments (6%) referred to five children and youth who expressed a dislike for school, and several children and youth who were unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program,. (Committee members informed these youth interviewed about the Advancing Futures Bursary program).

Summer Break

Children and youth enjoyed talking about their summer activities. Ninety-five per cent of comments described summer vacations with foster families, summer camps, day trips, and activities with natural families. Five per cent of comments were neutral, which referred to nine children and youth who had not lived in their current foster home long enough to participate in summer activities. No negative comments were made.

Social Activities

Almost all of the children interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with their participation in social activities (100%). Activities with the foster family, unstructured activities (e.g. going to the mall, playing game systems, watching movies), having friends to hang out with, and receiving an allowance topped the list of positive things the foster children and youth talked about. There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (<1%) referred to three children and youth who reported they did not receive an allowance. In each case, 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 asked about relationships with their foster parents, almost all of the children and youth made positive (47%) or neutral (53%) comments. Positive comments referred to children and youth who described good relationships with their foster mothers and foster fathers. Neutral comments referred to the people that the children and youth were comfortable talking to if they needed someone to speak with about concerns or problems (e.g. foster mother, foster father, natural family, others, teachers, and caseworkers).

One negative comment (<1%) was heard where a foster child or youth expressed a poor relationship with his/her foster mother, although a highly positive relationship with his/her other foster parent. (Overall, the child/youth expressed being happy and comfortable in the home.) This matter was forwarded for follow-up and resolution.

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%) described the consequences for breaking the rules, such as time-outs, being talked to, having privileges revoked, and grounding. Negative comments (<1%) referred to one child or youth who felt one rule in the foster home was unfair (e.g. not being allowed to have cell phone access at night).

Overall Care and Comfort Level

Comments made by children and youth about their overall care and level of comfort in the foster homes were positive (85%). Children and youth reported good levels of comfort, stated they were treated fairly, and felt safe in their foster home. Some of the children indicated they had experienced bullying, but they were able to report the matters, and the bullying had been addressed. One neutral comment (<1%) was made indicating a child/youth’s level of comfort was adequate.

Of the negative comments (15%), all but two comments referred to children and youth who reported having been bullied at some time in the past. One of these children did not report the bullying to anyone, and two children reported that the bullying had not been addressed. Two children and youth expressed being treated unfairly in their foster homes (e.g. one child/youth stated “[I feel I am treated] good”, but also indicated that the natural child in the home at times gets preferential treatment such as a later bedtime, the other child stated “sometimes [I feel I am treated] bad...[foster mother] puts me in a time-out”). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded to the appropriate authority for resolution.

Treatment

Committee members reported 1,333 observations from foster children about the treatment they received in foster homes. Children made 812 (61%) positive comments, 384 (29%) neutral comments, and 137 (10%) 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
Transition	147 (43%)	126 (36%)	72 (21%)	345
Medical/Dental Needs	475 (66%)	242 (33%)	7 (1%)	724
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	82 (57%)	16 (11%)	45 (32%)	143
Keepsakes	108 (89%)	0 (0%)	13 (11%)	121
TOTAL	812 (61%)	384 (29%)	137 (10%)	1,333

Transition

The transition experiences of children and youth were mixed. When describing the experiences of moving into their foster homes and recalling how they felt at the time of those moves, children and youth made many comments. They also described their current feelings about their placements. Forty-three per cent of comments were positive, where children and youth expressed satisfaction with their foster homes, recalled being advised of

their move, given pre-placement visits, and remembered feeling happy at the time of the move. Neutral comments (36%) referred to the type of placement the children and youth were living in prior to their present placement, children and youth who had no memory of their transition, and two children/youth who had no feelings at the time of the move.

Twenty-one per cent of comments were negative. Children and youth who expressed dissatisfaction with their transition said they felt sad, scared, and/or angry at the time of the move. A few children stated they had not received a pre-placement visit and/or were not advised of the move. (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.) Two children stated they were still sad or angry at present. Both of these children also indicated they were comfortable in their current foster homes, and were happy, but felt sad and angry when thinking about the transition (e.g. “I was told a week before I moved”, “there was not enough time to say good-bye”).

Medical/Dental Needs

Almost all of the responses about medical, dental, and optical care were either positive (66%) or neutral (33%). Positive comments referred to children and youth who stated their medical, dental, and optical needs were attended to and felt they were well cared for when ill. Neutral comments indicated those children and youth who had visited a doctor, dentist, or optometrist in the last year. Negative comments (1%) referred to children and youth who said they had not seen a doctor, optometrist, or were experiencing delays in getting optometry services. Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

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.

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 with whom they had contact with and/or frequency of visits with family. The level of contact described ranged from regular to limited, but regular contact was most frequently reported. In a few cases, comments were made referring to situations where a child did not have contact with natural family or where a child expressed dissatisfaction with the level of contact they had with natural family members.

Case Plans

When asked about case plans, 57 per cent of comments were positive. Children and youth stated they were aware of their case plans, and had input. Eleven per cent of comments

were neutral, where children and youth described the frequency of contact they had with their caseworkers and provided information about their plans. The majority of the negative comments (32%) referred to children and youth who said they were unaware of their case plans. Some of these children and youth were either too young and/or had difficulty comprehending what constituted a case plan. (These children and youth may not have readily recognized conversations with caseworkers as case planning.)

Keepsakes

The majority of children and youth reported having photographs, memory books, and/or keepsakes (89%). There were no neutral comments. Negative responses (11%) were made by children and youth who indicated 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 936 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; 767 (82%) comments were positive, 161 (17%) were neutral, and 8 (1%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children’s comments relating to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Responses – Accommodation Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Meals	495 (98%)	0 (0%)	8 (2%)	503
Physical Environment	272 (63%)	161 (37%)	0 (0%)	433
TOTAL	767 (82%)	161 (17%)	8 (1%)	936

Meals

Positive comments (98%) about the quality and quantity of meals provided in foster homes comprised the majority of statements. The children and youth also described helping to cook and prepare meals. No neutral comments were made. Negative comments (2%) referred to eight children and youth who reported that they did not help cook or 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

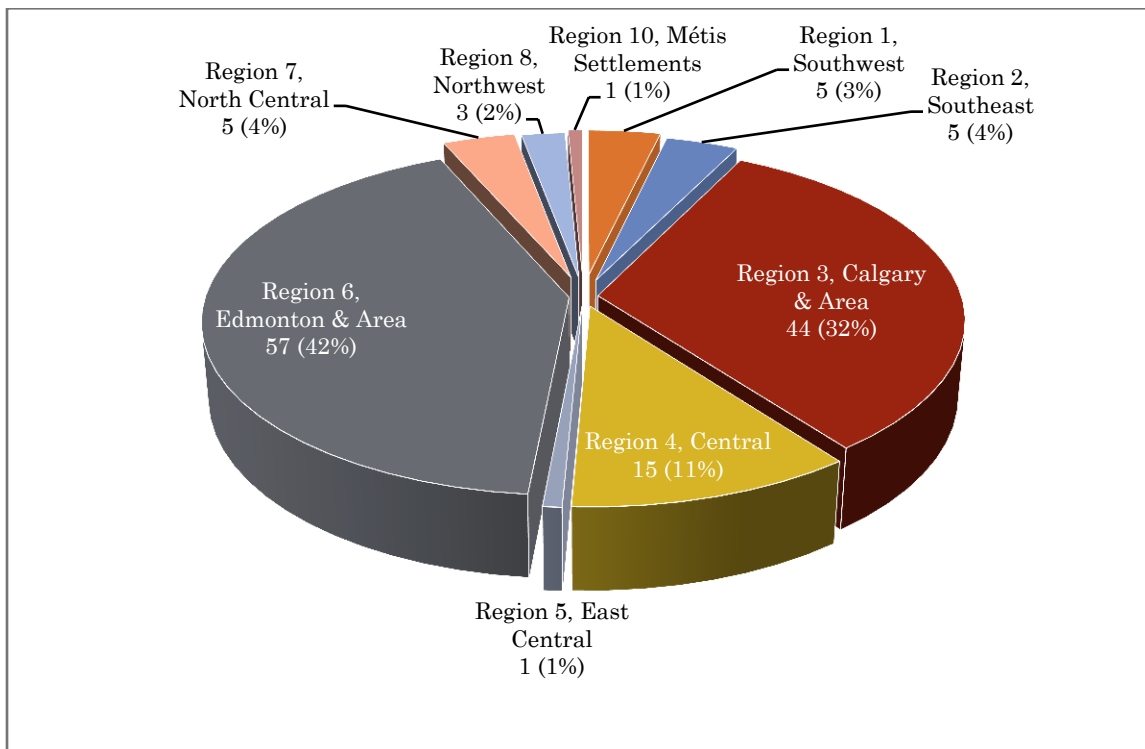
Children and youth were asked to describe their foster homes, the chores they were responsible for and what changes, if any, they would like to make. Sixty-three per cent of comments were positive, where children and youth described having chores and liking their homes. Neutral comments (37%) referred to foster children who said they did or did not have pets in their homes, and who would or would not make changes in their foster homes.

Some of the changes suggested by children and youth included the desire for trampolines, more recreation money, more family visits, more travel, trampolines without nets, more sleep overs, being adopted, being able to return to natural family, and giving every foster child a computer. No negative comments were made.

Foster Parents' Comments

Committee members gave foster parents an opportunity to comment on the services they provided to the children in their care and the supports they received to assist them in their role as foster parents. As well, foster parents had the chance to express concerns of their own. Members spoke with 189 foster parents in 136 foster homes. Foster parents expressed different views, depending upon 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.

Figure 11: Responses – Percentage of Foster Parents Interviewed



Overall, foster parents' comments expressed moderate satisfaction; 1064 comments (64%) were positive, 73 (5%) were neutral, and the remaining 520 comments (31%) were negative.

Services

The majority of foster parents expressed satisfaction with access to treatment and services for the children and youth in their care. Foster parents described having good relationships with health, education, and dental professionals. Neutral comments referred to those foster parents who described available treatment and services as adequate.

The most common area of dissatisfaction raised by foster parents was recreational funding. Foster parents indicated that the children's recreation funds did not always cover actual costs of several recreational activities (e.g. hockey, dance, music lessons). Some foster parents also indicated there is a lack of consistency in how recreation funds are dispensed between caseworkers and offices. Some foster parents stated they had difficulty accessing treatment or services, a few commented that they had difficulty getting assistance from education and health professionals. A few foster parents expressed the desire for increased funding, as the costs of living are increasing.

Agency Support

In regards to general support and services received from foster care agencies, most of the foster parents' comments were positive. Foster parents described having good relationships with their support workers, enjoyed agency foster parent training, and were satisfied with agency services and respite resources.

Of the few neutral comments heard, most described agency foster parent training as adequate. Areas of dissatisfaction with agency support highlighted the need for more respite homes, improved foster parent training, and access to foster care training (e.g. more on-line training, less redundancy in material, more specialized courses).

Support from the Ministry and Child and Family Services Authority

Comments from foster parents were almost evenly divided between positive and negative in regards to support from the Ministry and Child and Family Services Authority. In positive comments, foster parents stated they were satisfied with foster parent training, had good relationships with the children's caseworkers and foster care support workers, appreciated respite resources, and overall Ministry support. A few neutral comments were made describing Ministry support, foster parent training, and respite resources as adequate.

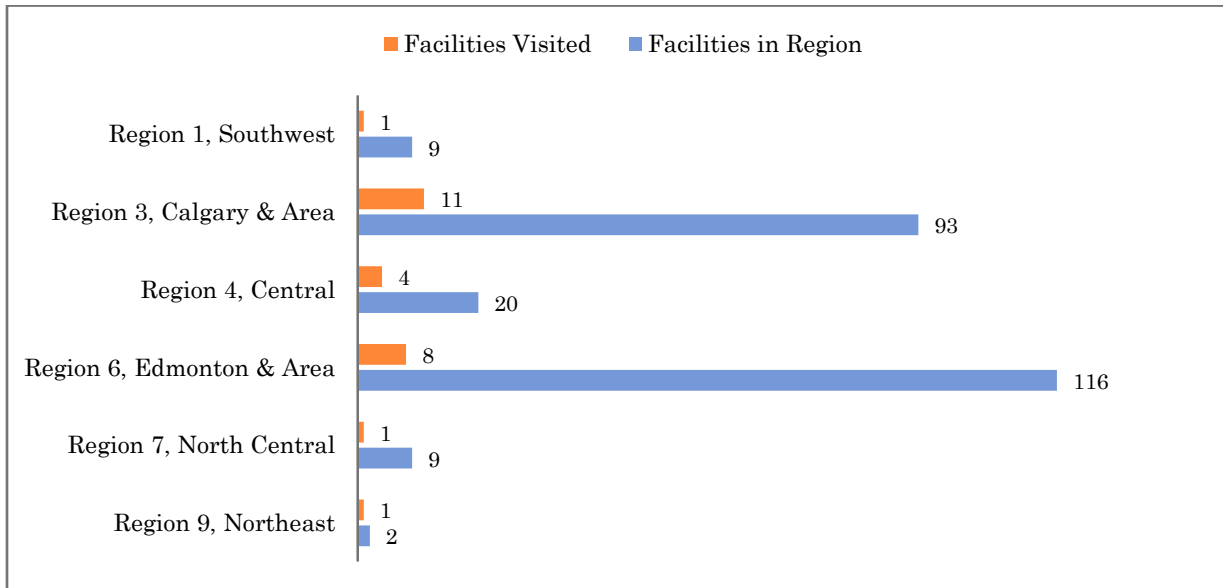
Just under half of the comments were negative, where foster parents highlighted the need for better relationships with regional staff, improved communication, and being treated as members of the team. Foster parents identified staff turnover as a factor impacting services and relationships (both for the foster parents and the children placed in their care), indicated the need for more respite homes, and the need for improved foster parent training (e.g. more on-line choices, less redundancy in material, more specialized courses, better on-line course registration processes).

CHILD AND YOUTH FACILITIES

Child and youth facilities provide care to children and youth, 18 years of age or younger, who are under the guardianship of a director designated under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. A range of facilities including group homes, secure services, youth emergency shelters, and youth assessment centres 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 26 child and youth facilities between April 2011 and March 2012. Figure 12, shows the number of child and youth facilities visited, as well as the total number of facilities in each region.

Figure 12: Number of Visits to Child and Youth Facilities versus Total Number of Facilities



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. Fifty-one children and youth, from 26 facilities, participated in the interviews. Another seven children and youth were observed during the committee's visits.

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 775 comments from children and youth about the care they received in their facilities. Overall, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 610 comments (79%) were positive, 129 comments (16%) were neutral, and 36 comments (5%) were negative. The breakdown of children and youth'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
Education	120 (93%)	1 (1%)	8 (6%)	129
Summer Break	36 (71%)	14 (27%)	1 (2%)	51
Social Activities	246 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	246
Staff-Child/Youth Relationships	49 (49%)	51 (50%)	1 (1%)	101
Rules	88 (56%)	59 (38%)	9 (6%)	156
Overall Care and Comfort Level	71 (77%)	4 (4%)	17 (19%)	92
TOTAL	610 (79%)	129 (16%)	36 (5%)	775

Education

Questions about education evoked many positive comments (93%). Children and youth stated they liked school, described the types of schools they attended (e.g. public, special needs programs, facility programs), and spoke about plans for their futures. Fifteen per cent of the comments indicated children or youth had plans to graduate from high school and another twelve per cent of comments referred to plans for post-secondary education and trade work. Some youth stated they were aware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program, and were looking forward to accessing the program in the future.

One comment (1%) was neutral, and referred to a youth who was employed part-time. Negative comments (6%) referred to two children/youth who stated they disliked school (e.g. “I don’t really like school, but I have friends and I like guitar and gym”, “I don’t really like school. I go because I need it [school].”), and six children and youth who stated they were unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program. (Committee members informed the youth interviewed about the Advancing Futures Bursary program).

Summer Break

When asked about summer activities, 71 per cent of responses were positive, describing summer camps, vacations and day trips with program staff, and holidays with natural family. Neutral comments (27%) referred to children and youth whose circumstances (e.g. short-term placements, emergency shelter placements) were not conducive to summer activities. The one negative comment (2%) heard came from a youth who stated that he/she did not participate in summer activities (e.g. “I didn’t do anything but ride my bike”). Follow-up with the youth revealed no concerns.

Social Activities

All of the children and youth made positive comments (100%) about their social activities. Activities with program staff, program-based recreation events, hanging out with friends,

participating in unstructured activities (e.g. going to the mall, playing game systems, watching movies), and unstructured sports activities topped the list of favorite things the children and youth liked to do in their spare time. Many of the children and youth also commented that they received an allowance. No neutral or negative comments were made.

Staff-Child/Youth Relationships

The majority of comments heard from children and youth about their relationships with facility staff were either positive (49%) or neutral (50%). Many children and youth described having good relationships with staff. Neutral comments referred to those persons with whom children and youth indicated they would speak to if they had a concern or problem (e.g. staff, family, caseworker, teacher); however, most of the youth indicated they would speak to staff. Two children and youth described their relationships with staff as adequate. One negative comment (1%) was heard where a youth described his/her relationship with one particular staff as poor (e.g. “[staff are] good except for one [staff], [one staff] doesn’t understand me...I don’t like [that staff person]”).

Rules

Positive comments (56%) made by children and youth demonstrated that they knew the rules of the facilities and felt the rules were fair. Neutral comments (38%) referred to the types of consequences used in their facilities (e.g. grounding, having privileges revoked). Six per cent of comments were negative, where nine children and youth felt the rules were unfair (e.g. three youth did not like having a curfew, two young children could not explain why the rules were unfair, one youth felt he/she had been unfairly charged by the RCMP, and the remaining comments referred to rules regarding laundry, no smoking on facility property, and time limits on computer and/or television). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

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 (77%). These children and youth described feeling comfortable in their placements, being treated fairly, and when bullying issues arose, they were addressed satisfactorily. Four per cent of comments were neutral, where four children and youth stated their level of comfort was adequate.

Nineteen per cent of comments were negative, the majority of which referred to 13 children and youth who reported having been bullied at some point in time. One child or youth stated that a bullying incident had not been addressed (e.g. this child/youth stated that the bullying issue had been pursued, but the youth did not want to press charges, so in his/her mind, the issue had not been addressed), one child or youth indicated having a poor level of comfort (e.g. this youth admitted to having had a disagreement with the program director prior to the committee visit, and when asked what changes he/she would like to make, this youth did not suggest any), and two children and youth stated they were treated unfairly (e.g. “Sometimes I feel it’s unfair here. They [staff] have weird chores here and they are always changing them up.”, “I don’t think I’m being treated well. They [staff] are always

saying what is best for us, but they don't even ask us. They just make the decisions.”). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

Treatment

Committee members reported 503 comments from children and youth about the treatment they received in child and youth facilities. Of those comments, 327 (65%) were positive, 120 (24%) were neutral, and the remaining 56 (11%) were negative. The breakdown of children and youth's responses, relating to treatment themes, is shown in Figure 14.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Transition	86 (58%)	46 (31%)	16 (11%)	148
Medical/Dental Needs	166 (69%)	71 (30%)	2 (1%)	239
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	42 (62%)	3 (4%)	23 (34%)	68
Keepsakes	33 (69%)	0 (0%)	15 (31%)	48
TOTAL	327 (65%)	120 (24%)	56 (11%)	503

Transition

Children and youth were asked what it was like when they moved into their current placement. Fifty-eight per cent of the responses were positive, where children and youth talked about having a pre-placement visit, described being happy at the time of the move, received advance notice before moving, and being given good support during the transition. Some of the children concluded by stating they are happy in their current placements.

Neutral comments (31%) referred mostly to the type of placement the children and youth resided in prior to their current placement (e.g. group home, foster home, natural family) and a few children and youth could not recall the transition, and one child or youth who reported not having any particular feelings during his/her transition. The remaining 16 comments (11%) were negative, where children and youth recalled feeling scared and/or sad at the time of the move, were not advised of the move, and/or had no pre-placement visit. (As previously noted, 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).

Medical/Dental Needs

Almost all (99%) of the children and youth reported positive or neutral comments about their health care. Many children and youth (69%) stated their medical, dental, and optometry needs were met and they felt well cared for in their facilities when ill. In neutral comments (30%), children and youth described having visited the dentist, doctor, and

optometrist within the last year. Two comments (1%) were negative, where two children and youth described not being well cared for when they were ill (e.g. “If you’re sick, you don’t get to stay home. That happened when I had a cough. If it’s severe, then you’d stay home”, “They [staff] make you go to school even if you’re really sick. I had a migraine for three days and couldn’t take Advil”). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

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 children and youth indicated they maintain contact with natural family members and/or mentioned that the child and youth care staff facilitate connection to family and culture. Most children identified specific family members with whom they had contact with and/or frequency of visits with family. The level of contact described ranged from “regular” to “some”, 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 and/or where a child expressed dissatisfaction with the level of contact they had with natural family members.

Case Plans

Sixty-two per cent of comments 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 creation of their plans. Four per cent of comments were neutral and referred to the frequency of visits with caseworkers, and input by program staff into the case plans. Most of the negative comments (34%) refer to children and youth who said they were unaware of their case plans. Some of the children and youth were unaware due to their young age or level of comprehension. (These children and youth may not have understood conversations with caseworkers as case planning).

Keepsakes

Many children and youth (69%) reported they had photographs, memory books, and/or keepsakes. There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (31%) were made by children who indicated they did not have memory books, photographs, and/or keepsakes. (Committee members realize that due to the manner in which some children come into care, it is not always possible to bring pictures and/or keepsakes).

Accommodation

Committee members reported 317 comments from children and youth on issues relating to accommodation in child and youth facilities. Residents expressed satisfaction with the services provided; 275 (87%) were positive, 15 (5%) were neutral, and 27 (8%) 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
Meals	183 (94%)	0 (0%)	12 (6%)	195
Physical Environment	92 (76%)	15 (12%)	15 (12%)	122
TOTAL	275 (87%)	15 (5%)	27 (8%)	317

Meals

When asked about the meals provided in their placements, children and youth made many highly positive comments (94%). Children and youth stated the quality of food was good, they had enough to eat, helped cook and prepare meals, and described their favorite foods. No neutral comments were made. Twelve negative comments (6%) were heard, five referred to children and youth who stated not having enough to eat (e.g. “sometimes there’s no food in the house”, “we have only two snacks for school”, these children and youth indicated that by the end of each week, rations would run low, and options were reduced), four comments referred to children and youth who did not help cook or prepare meals (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), two comments referred to not liking the food (“...as long as I pick the food – the food is good here”, “sometimes it’s good and sometimes it’s not”), and one comment reported the quality of food offered in the program was poor (e.g. meals are repetitive). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

Physical Environment

Many comments made about the physical environment of the facilities were positive (76%). Children and youth described the chores they participated in, and stated they liked their homes. Neutral comments (12%) referred to fifteen suggestions for change the children and youth would like to make to their facilities and environments (e.g. three requests to increase clothing funds, three requests to increase recreation funds, two requests for an increased allowance, one request to have one’s own bedroom, one request to no longer have mandatory quiet times, one request to be able to rollerblade without a helmet and safety pads, one request for more technological resources, one request for greater supervision of foster parents, one request for a pet, and one child/youth stated he/she did not wish for any changes).

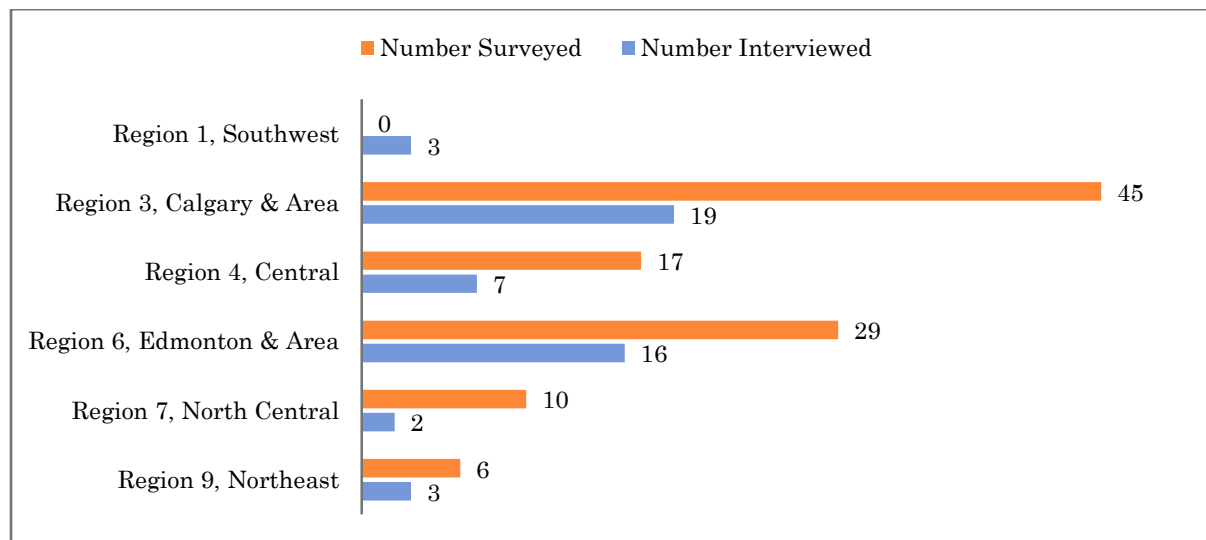
Twelve per cent of comments about the physical environment of the facilities were negative. Most of the negative comments referred to facilities that did not have pets. Two children or youth stated they did not like their physical environments (e.g. “It’s really cold in the

bedroom”, “I [have gotten] allergy reactions since I got here”). Matters that required follow-up were forwarded for resolution.

Staff Member Comments

Committee members talked to 50 staff members within 26 facilities to give them 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. An additional 107 staff completed surveys. Comments made by staff differed depending on their experiences, perceptions, and location (e.g. travel time, access to resources and services). The number of child and youth staff who were interviewed or completed surveys in each Child and Family Services Authority is illustrated in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Child and Youth Facilities Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Just over half of the responses from service providers expressed satisfaction; 873 comments (57%) of comments were positive, 518 comments (33%) were neutral, and 150 (10%) were negative.

Education and Training

Almost all staff expressed they had sufficient training to deal with the situations they encounter, and also reported that their facilities provide opportunities for additional training and education. Neutral comments included a few staff who indicated the training they received was adequate, and staff described the number of years of experience they have in the child and youth care field. Negative comments were heard from one staff person who stated that the training could be improved, and six other staff reported not having additional training available (e.g. staff reported that although opportunities exist, funding for training is not always available).

Staffing/Facility

Many positive comments were made by staff regarding several aspects of the facilities in which they work. Staff highlighted their positive relationships with the children and youth

in their facilities, as well as their relationships with fellow staff members, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, appropriate staffing levels, low staff turnover, and strong teamwork. Among neutral comments, staff identified further strengths within the facilities such as the dedication of staff, and some staff described staffing levels and staff turnover as adequate. The biggest challenges reported by staff were high facility staff turnover, followed by the need to create more clearly defined roles and responsibilities.

Supports from the Ministry, Agencies and Community

Over half of the comments about the assistance received from the Ministry, agencies, and community were positive. Staff expressed satisfaction with regional offices, caseworkers, Ministry, and community support. There were no neutral comments. Concerns raised by staff highlighted the need for improved access to mental health services, greater teamwork between Ministry and facility staff in making placement decisions, and more referrals to treatment and services.

Director's Comments

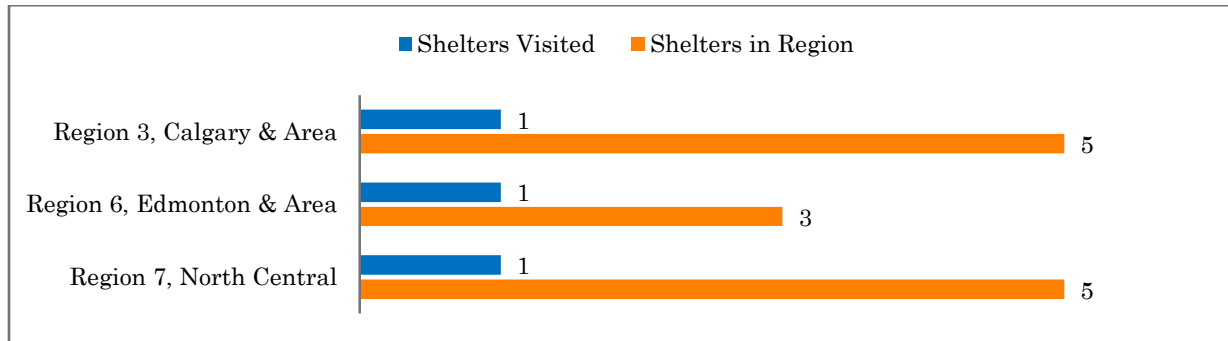
Approximately two-thirds of the comments made by directors identified the reasons their facilities provide a valuable contribution to the lives of children and youth. Directors spoke about the dedication of staff, educational resources for residents, program supports, strong community support, training, and teamwork with natural parents. The main concerns raised by directors were high staff turnover, a need for improved staff wages, and the need for better teamwork with Ministry staff when making placement decisions.

EMERGENCY SHELTERS FOR WOMEN

The goal of the emergency shelters for women program is to support positive, stable, long-term outcomes for victims of family violence. The Ministry of Human Services provides funding to 29 emergency shelters for women, as well as maintains fee-for-service agreements with four on-reserve shelters for women and families who are ordinarily off-reserve but come on-reserve to access emergency services. The Ministry provides funding for programming in two second-stage shelters and funds 33 outreach programs throughout the province. 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 and child care services.

The committee visited three emergency shelters for women during the April 2011 to March 2012 review period. (Fewer shelters were visited this year to accommodate an increase in visits to foster homes and child and youth care facilities. Additionally, in 2008/2009 the committee visited the majority of shelters in the province and now gradually rotating through them again.) Figure 17 shows the number of shelters visited in comparison to the total number of funded programs in those regions.

Figure 17: Number of Visits to Emergency Shelters for Women versus Total Number of Shelters



Highlights of Visits to Emergency Shelters for Women

Committee members make every effort to schedule visits to women's emergency shelters at times of the day when it is most convenient for residents and staff to be interviewed. This year three shelters were visited and three out of 56 residents participated in interviews (one resident per shelter). Because of the unique situation of these women, participation rates can be low. Residents are often searching for jobs, accommodations, attending counseling appointments, or attending to their children. Given the low response rate, the findings within this section cannot be generalized to the larger shelter population; rather they provide insight into the experiences of these three women.

Six staff participated in interviews and 19 staff completed surveys. Children residing in the shelters did not participate in interviews. Residents' comments are organized into two main categories: care/treatment and accommodation. Staff comments are discussed separately.

Care and Treatment

Committee members heard 31 comments from residents regarding their care and treatment at the emergency shelters for women. Twenty-seven comments (87%) were positive, one comment (3%) was neutral, and three comments (10%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to care and treatment themes is shown in Figure 18.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Program Awareness	8 (100%)	—	—	8
Staff-Resident Relationships	12 (86%)	—	2 (14%)	14
Quality of Services Received	7 (78%)	1(11%)	1(11%)	9
TOTAL	27 (87%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	31

Program Awareness

All residents (100%) stated they were aware of the programs offered by their shelters, both for themselves and their children. The women also indicated they received referrals to community services. No neutral or negative comments were made.

Staff-Resident Relationships

In 86 per cent of comments, residents described positive staff-resident relationships. Teamwork, facilitating positive relationships among residents, and staff assistance were highlighted by the women interviewed. Two negative comments (14%) indicated the need for staff to be more understanding, and for staff to facilitate positive relationships among residents.

Quality of Services Received

Most of the comments made about the quality of services received were positive (78%). Residents stated the services were helpful, programs for children were good, and information was provided in a timely manner. One neutral comment (11%) was made stating that the children's program was adequate, and one negative comment (11%) was made stating the children's program was poor.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 44 comments from residents about the accommodations provided at emergency shelters for women. Overall, residents expressed satisfaction with their accommodations; 29 comments (66%) were positive, 11 comments (25%) were neutral, and four comments (9%) were negative. The breakdown of the residents' comments, relating to accommodation themes, is shown in Figure 19.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Physical Environment	8 (89%)	1 (11%)	—	9
Meals	8 (73%)	3 (27%)	—	11
Rules	8 (62%)	3 (23%)	2 (15%)	13
Support Services	5 (46%)	4 (36%)	2 (18%)	11
TOTAL	29 (66%)	11 (25%)	4 (9%)	44

Physical Environment

When asked about the physical environment of the shelters, 89 per cent of comments were positive. Residents talked about feeling safe and secure. The women also stated the program accommodated their needs, and they appreciated the size and cleanliness of the shelters. One neutral comment was made indicating the size of the shelter was adequate. No negative comments were made.

Meals

All of the feedback regarding the quality, quantity, and variety of food provided in the shelters was either positive (73%) or neutral (27%). No negative comments were made.

Rules and Regulations

Eighty-five per cent of the comments about the rules in the shelter were either positive (62%) or neutral (23%). Women stated that regulations in the shelters were enforced, the rules were fair and reasonable, and they were informed of the rules. Neutral comments referred to women who reported participating in chores. Two negative comments (15%) were made where one resident reported not being informed of the rules and feeling some of the rules were unfair (e.g. “some rules are good...no TV until four p.m., “with kids not in school...it would be nice if they could watch TV”).

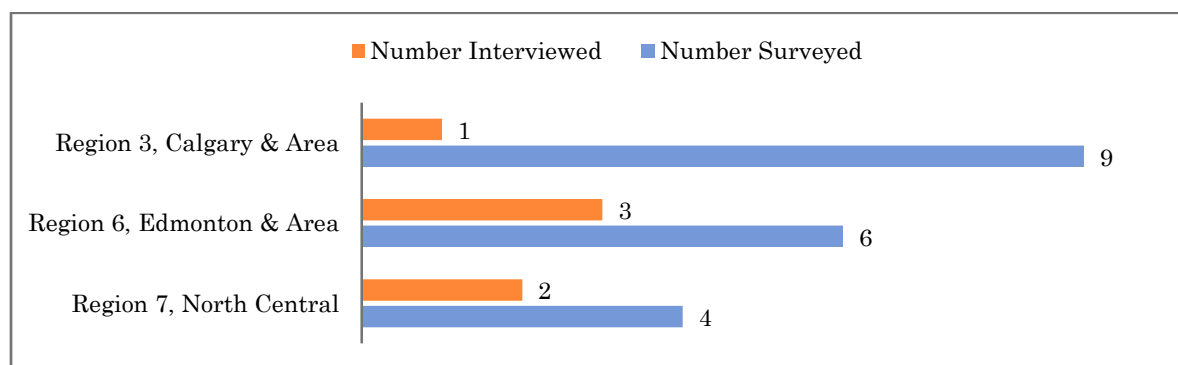
Support Services

Questions about support services elicited positive remarks in 46 per cent of responses. The women stated they would recommend the program to others, were satisfied with the staff delivering the services, and appreciated the referrals made by the shelter. Thirty-six per cent of comments were neutral describing how residents came to know about the shelters (e.g. social services) and one resident indicated the services received were adequate. Of the two negative comments (18%) reported, women suggested more activities/programs for children and a need for second stage housing.

Staff Members' Comments

Committee members talked to six staff in three emergency shelters for women to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide. An additional 19 staff completed surveys. A breakdown of staff who participated in the interviews or completed surveys is shown in Figure 20.

Figure 20: Emergency Shelters for Women Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide; 271 comments (68%) were positive, 75 comments (18%) were neutral and the remaining 66 comments (16%) were negative.

Facility - Staffing

Staff reported having sufficient training to provide services to women and children served by the shelters. They further stated their relationships with colleagues were positive and roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. Of the neutral comments, staff indicated additional training was available and one staff member reported relationships with colleagues were adequate. Workload and wages were highlighted by staff as areas for improvement.

Facility – Building/Services Provided

The vast majority of comments indicated satisfaction with the services provided to women and children in the shelters. Staff reported a safe facility, good in-house children’s programs and services, counseling, and the many programs available for women and their partners. No neutral comments were made. Of the negative comments made, nine referred to poor building maintenance, and six referred to a lack of access to mental health services.

Overall Feedback

Just over half of the feedback by staff was positive, highlighting the reflection of culture and ethnicity in their services, the commitment and expertise of staff, and the strength of programs provided in the shelters. No neutral comments were made. The remaining comments highlighted the need for improved funding for the shelters (e.g. for building maintenance and programs), and improved transitional supports (e.g. housing) for women leaving the shelters.

FEEDBACK ON VISITS

Service providers (e.g. foster parents, facility staff, and facility owner/operators) were invited to provide feedback on the committee's visits. Visit feedback forms were sent to each of the programs, along with the pre-placement package. This feedback is an important method of evaluation for committee members. From the 236 visits, 42 individuals responded. Because the response rate is low, the results and opinions expressed cannot be generalized to all service providers who participated in reviews. Nevertheless, 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. Responses were provided on a five-point scale, with one indicating very dissatisfied and five indicating very satisfied. The feedback provided was highly positive. Most of the respondents (93%) appreciated the visits and commented on how pleased they were with how the visits were conducted. Many commented that committee members were easy to talk to, respectful, professional, and good listeners. Service providers also indicated that the visits were informative and they appreciated the opportunity to share their experiences and concerns. When asked whether the visit was useful, 79% indicated they were satisfied or highly satisfied. Several stated they hoped their feedback would be used to improve services to children and families.

When asked whether anything could have been done differently with the committee's visits, 86 per cent of respondents marked "no". These responses suggest that most respondents were satisfied with the visits in general. Several service providers stated that it was a pleasure to speak with the committee. One respondent suggested that on-line surveys as well as paper surveys may improve the response rate. Ninety-five per cent of 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. Two respondents indicated that the phone calls and information received prior to the visits were helpful and appreciated.

In response to being asked if they had adequate time to speak with committee members, and whether committee members were well informed of their jobs, 93% indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied. One individual found the visit "somewhat rushed", as he/she found the questions "too broad" to answer in the time allotted, but he/she could not extend the time of the interview due to personal commitments.

Typical comments:

- "The committee was a pleasure to talk with, and very informative."
- "The visit gave me encouragement, it shows that someone cares and is listening."
- "Committee members are extremely knowledgeable."
- "Members of the committee were very professional, and accommodating."

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 Satisfied	34	81%
	Satisfied	5	12%
	Neutral	3	7%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
		42	100%
2. Was the visit useful?	Very Satisfied	23	55%
	Satisfied	10	24%
	Neutral	5	12%
	Dissatisfied	2	5%
	Very Dissatisfied	2	4%
		42	100%
3. Is there anything that we could have done differently?	No	36	86%
	Yes	6	14%
		42	100%
4. Did you understand and receive enough information about the purpose of the visit?	Very Satisfied	33	78%
	Satisfied	7	17%
	Neutral	2	5%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
		42	100%
5. Did you have enough time to speak to the committee members?	Very Satisfied	33	79%
	Satisfied	6	14%
	Neutral	1	2%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Very Dissatisfied	2	5%
		42	100%
6. Did you feel the committee members were well informed about their job?	Very Satisfied	35	83%
	Satisfied	4	10%
	Neutral	3	7%
	Dissatisfied	0	0%
	Very Dissatisfied	0	0%
		42	100%

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATIONS

The Social Care Programs 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 2011 to March 2012 review period.

EXPENDITURES

Committee expenditures for the April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012 review period were \$222,806.08. 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.

COMMITTEE MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

As a committee, we consider it a great privilege to visit with service recipients and service providers within foster homes, child and youth facilities (e.g. group homes), emergency shelters for women, day cares, and out-of-school care programs. While observing and interviewing both service recipients and service providers we have witnessed the dedication, commitment, and support provided to vulnerable Albertans across the province. It is our greatest pleasure to see the difference these services are having on the children and families being served by these programs and facilities.

Children and youth residing in foster homes and group care settings were overwhelmingly positive about the care and support they receive in their placements. Conversations with children and youth residing in foster homes, child and youth facilities, as well as their caregivers (e.g. foster parents, group homes staff) highlighted the following:

- Many foster parents and group care staff demonstrate high levels of dedication and commitment to the safety, stability and well-being of the children and youth in their care. In addition to being strong advocates for the children in their care, some foster parents and group care facilities:
 - work with natural families and act as mentors to them in order to assist in the child or youth's successful transition back to their families of origin.
 - work hard to provide cultural activities, teaching, and language for First Nations and Métis children and youth.
- Several foster parents have and continue to pursue the adoption of children and youth placed in their care who are unable to be returned to their families.
- Children and youth stated they felt safe, loved and respected by their caregivers. Many children described feeling like they belonged within their placements. Several group home staff and foster parents said they were well supported in their roles.

- The anti-bullying programs implemented across Alberta are having a strong impact, as interviews with children and youth demonstrate that they are able to recognize bullying, take steps to protect themselves from bullying, and know how to confront and resolve bullying.

It is always humbling to visit women in emergency shelters who, in the midst of crisis and upheaval, are willing to share their experiences. Not only was it gracious of them to share their stories, but we were so privileged to witness their courage and resilience. These women said they felt safe in the shelters and appreciated the supports and information provided to them and their children during a difficult time in their lives.

While visiting day cares and out-of-school care programs, committee members were informed about the quality of care provided in these programs. Areas of satisfaction shared with the committee included:

- Wage enhancements as part of accreditation.
- The development of unique strategies to engage the children in programming (e.g. creating a “Kid’s Council”).
- Creating an inclusive environment through cultural presentations, arts/crafts, food, and games.
- Children and youth stated they enjoyed their day care and out-of-school care programs. Parents reported their satisfaction with the relationships that have developed between their children and the staff.
- Staff and operators spoke with pride about their programs and the ability to impact the lives of children.

In closing, it has been another gratifying year for the committee. Despite significant challenges and difficult experiences, children and youth demonstrate resilience and hope for their futures. Foster parents and group home staff who care for and advocate for these children and youth make their success possible. Women served in emergency shelters demonstrate this same courage and hope. The services these women receive in the shelters help provide the safety and support they need to assist them in making the necessary transition for the future of both themselves and their children. Finally, we were impressed with the programs provided in Alberta’s day cares and out-of-school care programs. So much is being done within the Ministry of Human Services to improve the lives of Alberta’s families.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

Over the April 2011 to March 2012 review period, several changes, new initiatives and achievements took place for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Three new members joined the committee effective April 1, 2011; Brenda Blakey, Judy Louis, and Sharon Johnson. A fourth member, Leslie Shaughnessy, joined the committee on August 1, 2011. The committee was pleased to welcome Jason Luan, Member of the Legislative Assembly for Calgary-Hawkwood as the new Chair of the committee in July 2012.

The committee said farewell to five members of the committee this year. Nancy Leishman ended her term July 31, 2011, and Sharon Johnson and Brenda Blakey ended their involvement on November 30, 2011 and December 5, 2011 respectively. Long standing member, Laura Hunt, completed her term March 31, 2012. The committee would like to thank each of these members for their contribution and wish them the best in their future endeavors.

The committee would like to say a special thank you to Art Johnston whose role as Chair of the committee ended on October 21, 2011. Mr. Johnston served as Chair for the last seven years and his leadership, experience, and participation will be deeply missed. It should be noted that prior to becoming an MLA, Mr. Johnston also served as a member on the committee as part of his commitment to children and families in the province of Alberta.

The committee held two meetings this past year in October, 2011 and February, 2012. As part of their ongoing learning and development, committee members completed one training module; Interviewing Children and Youth in Care. They also heard presentations on:

- The Social Policy Framework; and
- Foster Care Overview.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report would not be possible without the willingness of each child, youth and adult who participated in the interviews, surveys, and report feedback. By sharing your experiences and suggestions, the Ministry is better able to make decisions and plan for the future. The Social Care Facilities Review Committee would like to thank you for taking the time to provide this invaluable information.

Committee members would also like to extend their gratitude to the Chief Executive Officers and staff in the Child and Family Services Authorities who helped co-ordinate the visits. Their assistance within the regions makes the interviews with children and families possible.

The committee would like to acknowledge the contribution of staff from the Ministry of Human Services who provided training and information sessions to support the committee's ongoing professional development, as well as the staff who provide services and support to the committee throughout the year.

Thanks again to each of you!