



SOCIAL CARE FACILITIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

2014-2015 Annual Report

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COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Jason Luan, Calgary (July 2012 – March 2015)

Jason Luan was a Member of Legislative Assembly of Alberta for Calgary-Hawkwood from April 2013 – March 2015. Mr. Luan holds a Master of Social Work from the University of Calgary and has dedicated his career to public service for over 20 years. Mr. Luan served as a social worker for the former Alberta Family and Social Services, and then as a social planner for the City of Calgary, managing funding for nonprofit social service agencies. His term as Chair of the SCFRC expired on March 31, 2015.

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 both Community Futures and the local Victim Services.

Chris Branch, Calgary (April 2013 – Present)

Chris Branch holds a Bachelor of Social Work, a Bachelor of Arts, and a Master of Social Work from the University of Calgary. He spent twelve years as the Director of Community and Neighbourhood Services for the City of Calgary and has ten years' experience as a Trustee and Chair for the Burns Memorial Fund for Children. His professional career includes work as a senior social planner for Calgary Family and Community Support Services, coordinator of a work activity project and several roles providing care for children at the former Calgary Children's Service Centre.

Brenda Doupe, Wetaskiwin (April 2013 – Present)

Brenda Doupe holds a Child Development diploma from Red Deer College. She has more than 20 years' experience working with young children. She has worked with the Wetaskiwin Health Authority, Wetaskiwin Regional Public School and City of Wetaskiwin providing learning opportunities in early childhood settings, program management and coordination of services for families of young children with special needs. Brenda is active in her community, volunteering with various organizations including the local community school, early childhood community programs and the local 4-H Beef Club.

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 as a special education teacher, program liaison, teacher and strategist for the developmentally challenged. Ms. Keech is active in her community and volunteers with organizations including the Rotary Club of Canmore and Discovery House.

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 counselling. 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 and special education. She has worked as a counsellor, community school

coordinator, administrator and a First Nations, Métis and Inuit coordinator. She is active in her community and is involved with the Maskwacis Community Cadets and with projects to reduce crime and gang involvement within the Indigenous community.

[Kelly Pizzey, Sherwood Park \(September 2010 – Present\)](#)

Kelly Pizzey has five children and 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 addresses the needs of families.

[Leslie Shaughnessy, Calgary \(August 2011 – January 2015\)](#)

Leslie Shaughnessy has operated her own hairdressing business for over 22 years. She is an active volunteer within her community. She was a coach 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 Centre and the Calgary Drop-In Centre.

[Tracey Smith, Calgary \(April 2006 – Present\)](#)

Tracey Smith has worked for 28 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 former playground coordinator and member of the Calgary Home and 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 and as a teacher of religious studies to children and youth.

[Bill Syme, Lethbridge \(March 2015 – June 2015\)](#)

Bill Syme has a Bachelor of Education and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the University of Lethbridge. Mr. Syme retired from a 38 year teaching career in 2014. His teaching career saw him working predominantly with special needs students, as well as Indigenous students. Mr. Syme has also been an active volunteer in his community outside of the classroom, particularly in recreational and sporting activities. He has held various coaching roles and has been involved in outdoor educational activities.

[Mindy Wong, Calgary \(March 2015 – June 2015\)](#)

Mindy Wong has a Master of Social Work and a Bachelor of Community Rehabilitation. Her work is centred around children and youth with severe emotional and behavioural disorders. She has also worked with parenting adolescents and with women recovering from substance abuse issues. Ms. Wong has been active in her church, participated in flood volunteer work and is bilingual in Cantonese.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the April 1, 2014 to March 31, 2015 review period, Social Care Facilities Review Committee (SCFRC) members visited a total of 151 facilities throughout Alberta in ten Child and Family Services areas within Human Services¹, including:

- 93 out of 1,939 foster care homes;
- 20 out of 578 day care programs;
- 18 out of 610 out-of-school care programs;
- 13 out of 219 child and youth group homes; and
- 7 out of 30 women's shelters.

As part of the reviews, committee members interviewed 254 service recipients and 188 service providers. Observations were made of 62 children and youth due to their young ages and/or inability to speak to the committee members. An additional 257 service recipients and 294 service providers completed surveys.

As in previous years, the comments made by service recipients and providers were overwhelmingly positive. The results indicate that high quality services are being provided to those in child care, foster care and group care. Suggestions for improvement have also been included in this report.

Child Care

Ninety-seven per cent of comments made during the interviews were either positive or neutral (descriptive). Parents and children attending out-of-school care programs reported high satisfaction with the daily activities; staff-child relationships; communication; parent/guardian involvement; meals and/or snacks; facilities' physical environment; rules; and overall care provided. Some parents and/or children reported incidents of bullying at out-of-school care programs; however, all cases discussed had been or were being actively resolved at the time of the interviews.

Day care and out-of-school care staff were also positive in their comments and emphasized their satisfaction with the programs offered. A few day care staff indicated a need for increased wages.

Children and Youth Living in Foster Homes and Group Homes

Ninety-three per cent of comments made by children and youth residing in foster homes and group homes were either positive or neutral (descriptive). Children and youth shared encouraging comments and stories when discussing their educational experiences, social activities, summer activities, overall care and comfort level and meals provided. The top two concerns raised by children and youth were bullying and transitions between facilities. Some children relayed being bullied in their schools and/or placements in the recent past, and some children and youth expressed concerns when talking about their transition experiences. In some circumstances, children were unable to receive advance notice or pre-placement visits. These children and youth indicated they would appreciate advance notice whenever possible and more information about

¹ The Child and Family Services Authorities were dissolved in December of 2013. New service delivery boundaries for Human Services were announced on April 1, 2014, with the advent of seven service delivery regions. The service delivery regions will be fully implemented by April 1, 2015.

their future homes. Where there were concerns, the matters were forwarded for follow-up and resolution.

Foster parents and group home staff shared their experiences in providing services and accessing resources for those in their care. Foster parents and group home staff spoke positively about the services they access on behalf of the children in their care and the pride they take in advocating for them. Suggested improvements included: better access to treatment and services (e.g. mental health services, educational supports); greater numbers of respite providers; and detailed information about a child's history at time of placement.

Women Residing in Emergency Shelters for Women

Ninety-three per cent of comments made by women interviewed in the shelters were either positive or neutral (descriptive). They spoke about receiving quality services, support and accommodation.

Shelter residents highlighted many strengths within their programs including the staff who serve in them. The need for improved staffing levels, higher wages and increased capacity to accommodate more women and children topped the concerns among shelter staff.

Formal Complaints and Investigations

The SCFRC received no formal complaints requiring investigation regarding child care programs, women's emergency shelters, foster homes and child and youth care facilities. Therefore no investigations were requested by the Minister in the 2014/2015 review period.

BACKGROUND

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee (SCFRC) 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 SCFRC include foster homes, child and youth facilities, day care programs, out-of-school care programs and emergency shelters for women. Although 'child and youth facilities' include many types of facilities, in 2014/2015 only group homes were visited.

During the 2014/2015 review period, the committee consisted of one Member of the Legislative Assembly who chaired the committee and eleven private citizens from across the province. Members serve on a part-time basis and contribute diverse perspectives to the committee 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.

OPERATING PRINCIPLES

The work of the SCFRC is guided by the operating principles below. The SCFRC works with clients and their families, service providers and government representatives to:

- facilitate open and neutral communication;
- focus on the current mandate of the SCFRC;
- 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.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The SCFRC 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 3,400 facilities that fall under the committee's mandate. To review a sample of the facilities, the committee plan their visits so they are continually in the larger regions and rotating through the smaller regions. This year, programs within all 10 Child and Family Services areas were reviewed, including:

- Southwest
- Southeast
- Calgary and Area
- Central
- East Central
- Edmonton and Area
- North Central
- Northwest
- Northeast
- Metis Settlements

Program Selection

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

Sample Size

A total of 151 programs were visited from April 2014 to March 2015, including:

- 93 out of 1,939 foster care homes;
- 20 out of 578 day care programs;
- 18 out of 610 out-of-school care programs;
- 13 out of 219 child and youth group homes; and
- 7 out of 30 women's emergency shelters.

Please note for the 2014/2015 year of reviews, the committee was unable to visit as many facilities as previous years due to delays in committee member appointments.

Interview Process

During the visits, committee members encourage participants to share their experiences with social care facilities by asking 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.

Service recipients include parents/guardians, children and youth, women and staff members. Parent/Guardian consent is required for children to participate in the interviews and while there is no age restriction, children must be 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 participated in the interview process. At out-of-school care programs, committee members spoke with parents and those children whose parents/guardians had provided consent for them to be interviewed. Within the emergency shelters for women, the women, not the children were considered the primary service recipients, and were therefore the focus of interviews.

Committee members also interviewed foster parents and staff members at the facilities to express their views on the services they provide. Observations were made of children and youth when they were too young to be interviewed or were unable to speak to the committee members.

Surveys

Written surveys are made available to adult service recipients and providers who wish to share their views, but are unable to take part in the committee's visit.

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

Data Analysis

This report provides a provincial overview of the feedback obtained during visits conducted from April 2014 to March 2015. 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 and negative to indicate dissatisfaction. Descriptive information was also coded as neutral, as were comments that indicated that a theme was not applicable.

It is important to note that each comment made by a respondent regarding a theme is coded. This means that one respondent may make more than one comment about a theme and other respondents may choose not to comment on a specific theme. For instance, a child may state that they like the food in the foster home, enjoy making meals with the foster parent and state that the foster parent is an excellent cook. These three comments would be coded as three positive comments. Another child may state that they like the food but do not help with preparation of meals. In this case, one comment is coded as positive and one as negative. Yet another child may choose to ignore the question and continue talking about social activities or the family's pet. If the child is uninterested in commenting on meals, the interviewer will move on to other themes.

Positive, neutral and negative comments were counted and grouped by theme and were reported as percentages. The results are interpreted in terms of overall comments rather than number of respondents. As fewer negative comments were received, the committee was able to provide a deeper analysis. Negative comments were examined to determine if the comments were made by one or more individuals. Where possible, this is identified in the report.

The annual report is distributed to all participating facilities.

COMMITTEE MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

During our reviews of foster homes, group homes and child care programs, we continue to be impressed by the dedication and commitment foster parents, child and youth care staff, child care staff and emergency shelter staff have towards the women and children in their care. It is an honour to be welcomed into these homes and programs to hear about experiences and observe services being provided. The most gratifying part of our role as committee members is witnessing the positive impact service providers have on women and children in Alberta.

A highlight this year was hearing the heartwarming and insightful reasons as to why foster parents became involved in fostering. We learned that many foster parents are second generation foster parents who learned the importance of and respect for fostering from their own parents who fostered children and youth. Some of the foster parents interviewed had also been foster children themselves. These foster parents wanted to assist other children and youth who were facing similar situations to ones they had encountered.

Child Intervention

Conversations with children and youth residing in foster homes and child and youth care facilities were interesting and often quite entertaining as they shared their stories, observations and opinions. Discussions with caregivers (e.g. foster parents, group homes staff) were also informative, highlighting successes and noting areas for improvement.

Promising Practices

- Touching stories told by children and youth residing in foster homes and group care facilities. Children and youth described good relationships with the foster families and staff, and reported feeling safe and well cared for.
- An increased number of foster parents reported having mentors in the last year. All of the families interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with the use of mentors.
- Foster parents appreciated the Success in School program, as it made them feel they were part of the team.
- Increased access to respite care was appreciated by foster parents.
- The quality of relationships within foster care and group care appeared to be key in assisting children and youth to move forward.
- Overall, foster parents and group care staff expressed satisfaction with the ministry and felt supported in their role. Several foster parents indicated they were able to access the services they required.
- Many foster parents indicated they were comfortable in their role as foster parents, especially in the role of advocate for the children and youth placed in their care.
- The committee observed outstanding care within foster homes. Extremely dedicated foster families were the norm in the committee's visits.
- Foster parents emphasized the positive difference a supportive foster care worker can make in assisting with all aspects of fostering.

- Several group homes caring for older teens with significant mental health/behavioral issues indicated the need for consistency of staff and strong supervision/leadership. The committee observed that these group homes are faced with highly challenging situations and remain committed to meeting the needs of these high needs children and youth.
- Group home staff reported high satisfaction with the training provided.
- Foster parents residing in regions where online foster care courses are available stated their appreciation for flexible training options.
- Foster parents whose reimbursements were paid in a timely fashion expressed appreciation.

Areas for Improvement

- Foster parents commented on the negative stereotypes and stories about foster care and how that negatively impacts their families and their communities.
- Foster parents expressed the need to
 - Develop province-wide online foster parent training.
 - Remove redundancy in foster parent training.
 - Provide better funding for additional training, or targeted training.
 - Provide child care for mandatory training.
- To avoid placement breakdowns, both group home staff and foster parents expressed a desire to receive additional background information on the children in their care, as well as up-to-date case plans. Placement breakdowns can be avoided with better information and planning.
- Timely financial reimbursement for foster parents is essential, but is not consistent within and between regions. This places additional cumbersome burdens on foster families, and creating a more efficient system is recommended.
- Targeted respite home recruitment for high needs children was suggested by several foster parents.
- Youth and their caregivers suggested more programming to assist older teens in transitioning to adulthood. Suggestions included starting the process earlier in a youth's life; developing life-skill lessons for youth in foster care and group care; increasing awareness of the Advancing Futures Bursary; and developing a manual/reference survival guide for youth aging out of the system.
- The rules for children in care can separate them from activities enjoyed by the natural children in the home (e.g. trampoline, sleep-overs, horseback riding). Provincial leadership in this area is necessary.
- Children placed outside their home communities must travel for hours for family visits.
- Mental health services need to be enhanced to accommodate the number of children and youth who need assistance.

Child Care

Child care programs generously provided us with an opportunity to visit and observe the services children receive while attending day cares and out-of-school care programs. It is always fun to watch children enjoying themselves and to talk with them in the out-of-school care programs. Staff were gracious with their time and provided honest evaluations of their programs. Some staff appreciated receiving our facility reports and used them to improve their programs.

Promising Practices

- We were impressed with the improved awareness about bullying and the low number of bullying incidents reported in out-of-school care.
- There are many new facilities opening, even in industrial areas, to meet the needs of Alberta families.
- There is a significant range of day care models across Alberta and within regions.
- There are some exceptional centres providing very good care with highly trained and experienced staff.
- Parents with children who have special needs expressed their gratitude to child care staff for their support and care.
- Most parents did not report waiting lists for day care and out-of-school programs.
- The feedback from parents, children, staff and directors was highly positive.

Areas for Improvement

- There is quite a range of day care environments across the province and within regions. Some centres have highly stimulating environments where staff follow clear regimes of care; whereas, some centres are less stimulating, offer less activities and staff are not as well trained.
- Low-income families may not have as many choices of day care as families with more resources.
- Parents expressed concern about high staff turnover and the impact it had on their children.
- Some parents indicated their facilities could improve security measures.
- The threshold for subsidy should be increased to assist struggling families.

Emergency Shelters for Women

Emergency Shelters for Women programs warmly provided us with occasions to visit and observe the services women and children receive while temporarily residing in the shelters. It is always humbling to witness the resilience of these women as they begin to rebuild their lives. Staff were gracious with their time and provided honest evaluations of their programs.

Promising Practices

- Facilities are developing second stage housing so clients will not have to struggle with the high cost of living once the maximum amount of days that they are eligible to stay at the shelter for (21 days) are up.
- Shelters continue to provide safe and supportive environments for women and children in need.

Areas for Improvement

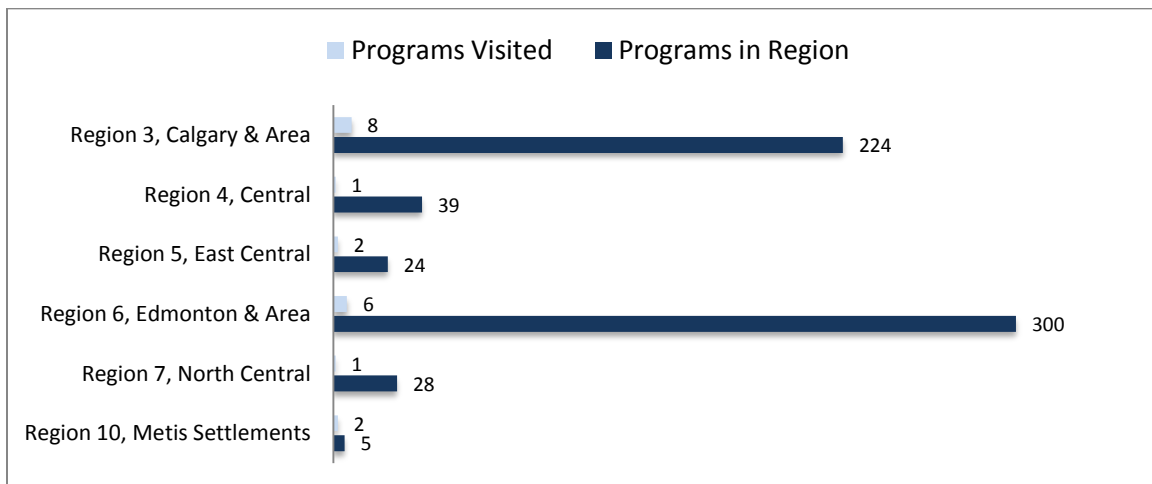
- Shelter staff expressed a lack of capacity to meet the needs of prospective clients. Many staff felt they turned away more women than they were able to help.
- Greater practical assistance is needed for women and children entering shelters.
- Internet access and telephones would assist women in locating housing, work, and social supports.

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 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 Regulation.

During the April 2014 to March 2015 review period the committee visited 20 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 facilitate interviews, committee members scheduled visits to day care programs in late afternoon or early morning to coincide with times that parents were at the programs

to pick up or drop off their children. Fifty-three parents were interviewed and 190 parents completed surveys. Some of the parents participated in both. Due to the young ages of the children in the day care programs, children were not interviewed.

Comments made by parents are 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 regulations and overall feedback. Service provider comments are discussed separately.

Day Care Themes

Parents reported 3,335 comments about the care their children receive at day care. Most of the parent’s comments expressed satisfaction with services provided; 2,451 were positive (73%), 850 were neutral (26%) and 34 were negative (1%).

Comments made by parents are organized into eight themes: daily activities, staff-child relationships, communication with staff, opportunity for parent or guardian involvement, meals and/or snacks, physical environment, rules and regulations and overall feedback. Service provider comments are discussed separately. 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	210 (87%)	30 (12%)	2 (1%)	242
Staff-Child Relationships	220 (91%)	20 (9%)	1 (<1%)	241
Communication with Staff	288 (91%)	29 (9%)	2 (<1%)	319
Parent or Guardian Involvement	208 (88%)	21 (9%)	7 (3%)	236
Meals and/or Snacks	716 (88%)	79 (10%)	14 (2%)	809
Physical Environment	326 (83%)	58 (15%)	8 (2%)	392
Rules and Regulations	260 (94%)	16 (6%)	0 (0%)	276
Overall Feedback	238 (94%)	15 (6%)	0 (0%)	238
TOTAL	2,451 (73%)	850 (26%)	34 (1%)	3,335

Choice of Day Care

When discussing the reasons why parents choose their day care, parents made a total of 474 comments. The most commonly mentioned reasons for choosing a specific program included location (35%), hours of operation (17%), reputation (9%), program offered (9%) and cost (9%). The remaining 21 per cent of comments referred to reasons such as personal considerations, accreditation and being the only option available. Choice of day care was not included in Figure 2 because the responses cannot be categorized as positive or negative.

Daily Activities

Most of the comments made about daily activities offered in day cares were positive (87%) (e.g. “it’s varied” “there are crafts, snacks, playtime and naps – and all are given everyday”). Twelve per cent of comments were neutral where parents rated the daily activities as adequate. Two negative comments (1%) were made indicating the daily activities could be improved (e.g. more time outside, no playground/field trips).

Staff-Child Relationships

Ninety-one per cent of comments about staff-child relationships were positive. Parents expressed satisfaction with the way staff interacted with their children and believed their children were well treated (e.g. “[staff are] friendly and supportive,” “my child is so happy here,” “truly caring staff”). Neutral comments comprised eight per cent of feedback, where parents described staff-child interactions as adequate. One comment was negative (1%) (“not very good English [spoken by staff]...[my] child needs more stimulation to learn to speak”).

Communication with Staff

The majority of comments about communication between parents and staff were either positive (91%) or neutral (9%). Parents stated there was good information sharing between parents and staff, described staff as responsive and indicated parents were kept informed of any incidents or concerns (e.g. “teachers provide updates,” “staff are fantastic,” “[staff] are friendly,” “[communication is] always good”). Two comments were negative, where one parent expressed staff could be more responsive to their inquiries (e.g. “[the director] is slow to return emails”).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

When asked about opportunities to be involved in the day care program, 88 per cent of comments were positive and nine per cent of comments were neutral. These parents describe ample or adequate opportunities to be involved in the program (“I always feel welcome”). Of the negative comments (3%), seven parents were either unaware of opportunities (e.g. “[opportunities are not] communicated well,” “haven’t seen [anything for parents to do],” “no opportunities”) or indicated they were too busy to participate.

Meals and/or Snacks

In Alberta, day cares are able to choose whether or not to provide meals or snacks. If they do not provide food, parents are required to provide meals and snacks for their children to eat while attending the program. For those day cares that provide meals and/or snacks, 88 per cent of comments expressed satisfaction with the quality, variety and quantity provided (e.g. “[food is] healthy and delicious,” “centre provides a variety of fresh food like veggies, fruit and meat,” “home cooked meals”). One parent spoke about how well the day care accommodated allergies.

Neutral comments (10%) included parents who described the food quality, quantity and variety as adequate. Of the negative comments recorded (2%), eight parents expressed that the meals and snacks could be improved (e.g. “too much packaged food,” “need more variety,” “my child is sometimes hungry,” “some snacks are okay, others not”).

Physical Environment

In response to questions about the overall physical environment of the day care, 98 per cent of comments were either positive or neutral. Parents described their satisfaction with the maintenance, play spaces, equipment and toys (e.g. “it is always clean,” “toys cleaned every night”). Two per cent of comments were negative. In these

comments, parents reported a need for larger play spaces, better equipment and toys and improved maintenance (e.g. “don’t like the carpet [my child has allergies],” “[needs] better organization,” “need playground equipment,” “the building is old and needs updating”).

Rules and Regulations

All parents provided either positive (94%) or neutral (6%) comments when discussing day care rules and regulations (e.g. “children are taught rules in a very respectful way,” “like the rules,” “love the security here”). Parents reported staff were consistent in enforcing the rules and applying consequences. Parents also indicated their agreement with the discipline and security measures used within the program. No negative comments were heard.

Overall Feedback

When given the opportunity to comment on the overall quality of care their children receive at their day care programs, parents expressed high levels of satisfaction. Ninety-four per cent of comments were positive and six per cent of comments were neutral. No negative comments were heard. Many parents highlighted the quality of staff and the high levels of happiness their children displayed attending the programs (e.g. “fabulous,” “good toilet training,” “very pleased with the facility”).

Four-Year Trend

To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last four years, the table below outlines the number of positive, neutral and negative comments shared with the committee during visits to day care programs across Alberta between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2015. As can be seen below, positive and neutral comments dominate the feedback provided by parents regarding the programs their children attend. The percentage of negative comments heard has remained consistent over the last four years. This year, more descriptive comments were captured during the interviews; therefore, the number of neutral comments has increased, reducing the percentage of positive comments.

Figure 3: Four-Year Trend of Summary Responses Within Day Care Programs

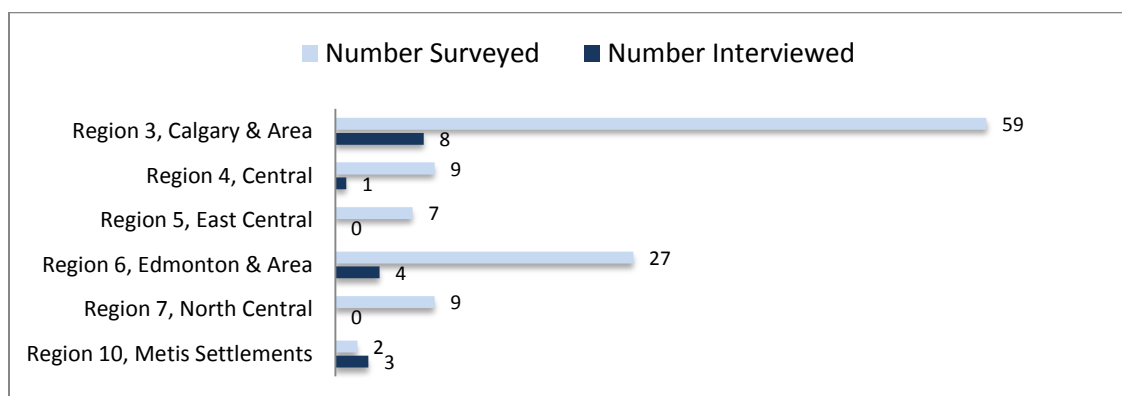
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
2011/2012	5,872 (91%)	558 (9%)	42 (<1%)	6,472
2012/2013	3,593 (90%)	350 (9%)	32 (1%)	3,975
2013/2014	6,811 (91%)	574 (8%)	59 (<1%)	7,444
2014/2015	2,451 (73%)	850 (26%)	34 (1%)	3,335
TOTAL	18,727 (88%)	2,332 (11%)	167 (<1%)	21,226

Service Providers’ Comments

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. The committee spoke with 16 staff in 20 day cares. In addition, 113 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 is illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Day Care Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



The majority of comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide. Of the 1,976 comments made by staff, 1,649 were positive (83%), 310 were neutral (16%) and 17 were negative (1%). The main topics of discussion are listed below.

Physical Environment

The majority of staff (82%) expressed satisfaction with the physical environment, stating their day cares had good play spaces and overall layouts. Seventeen per cent of staff stated the physical spaces were adequate in regards to layouts and play spaces. A few staff (1%) felt the layout and play spaces of their programs could be improved to better accommodate the children and staff.

Meals and/or Snacks

Eighty-nine per cent of staff provided positive comments when speaking about the meals and/or snacks provided at the day cares. Eleven per cent of comments reported the quality, quantity and variety of the food was adequate. One negative comment was heard, indicating the quality of meals could be improved.

Daily Activities

All staff comments regarding the daily activities provided to children in day care programs were either good (95%) or adequate (5%). No negative comments were heard.

Staff-Child Relationships

Feedback from staff regarding their relationships with the children in the programs was highly positive (94% of comments). Six per cent of comments indicated staff-child relationships were adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations

Ninety-nine per cent of staff comments regarding the rules and regulations within the day care programs were positive. Staff spoke about how they assist children to work out solutions to problems and described the necessity of being consistent in applying the

rules and consequences. No neutral comments were made. One negative comment was heard, suggesting more time be given to assisting children in problem solving.

Overall Feedback from Staff

When staff were asked to comment on the overall services and care provided to the children in their day care programs, ninety-nine per cent of comments were positive. Staff highlighted appropriate staff-child ratios, respect for cultural diversity, parents being encouraged to spend time at the program, safety and medications being kept secure. No neutral comments were made. Of the less than one per cent of negative comments heard, staff indicated improvements could be made to increase safety, staffing levels and provide greater cultural diversity.

Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operators

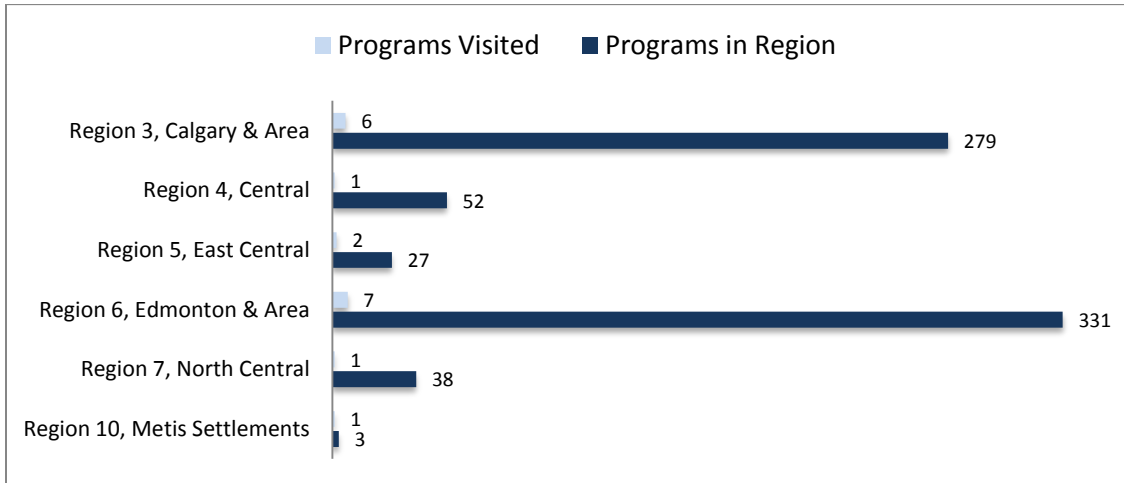
Ninety-six per cent of feedback from managers, owners and operators was positive. While discussing their programs' overall service and care, managers, owners and operators highlighted the same aspects as their staff (ratios, cultural diversity, safety, parental involvement, medications, etc.). They spoke about accepting children with disabilities, having processes for addressing concerns, providing staff with written materials and regular performance feedback and how their day cares were participating in the accreditation program. Managers, owners and operators expressed pride in their programs and services. Four per cent of comments were negative while the majority referred to difficulty in recruiting staff, staff turnover and the need for better wages.

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 committee visited 18 licensed out-of-school care programs during the April 2014 to March 2015 review period. Figure 5 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 5: Number of Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs versus Total Number of Programs



Highlights of Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs

To coincide with times when parents were at the out-of-school care programs to drop-off and pick-up their children, the committee scheduled visits in the morning or late afternoon. Twenty parents were interviewed and 67 parents completed surveys. In some cases, 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 were present or had provided a signed consent form. Sixty-seven children participated in interviews.

Out-of-School Care Themes

Committee members reported 1,789 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; 1,352 (76%) comments were positive, 340 (19%) were neutral and 97 (5%) were negative.

Parent comments were compiled into eight themes: 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. The breakdown of parents' and children's comments relating to out-of-school care themes is shown in Figure 6. Service provider comments are discussed separately.

Figure 6: Responses – Themes at Out-of-School Care Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Daily Activities	182 (84%)	15 (7%)	20 (9%)	217
Staff-Child Relationships	205 (92%)	9 (4%)	8 (4%)	222
Communication with Staff	95 (86%)	13 (12%)	2 (2%)	110
Parent or Guardian Involvement	67 (86%)	9 (11%)	2 (3%)	78
Meals and/or Snacks	218 (86%)	31 (12%)	6 (2%)	255
Physical Environment	128 (86%)	20 (14%)	0 (0%)	148
Rules and Regulations	345 (87%)	11 (3%)	42 (10%)	345
Overall Feedback	112 (80%)	11 (8%)	17 (12%)	140
TOTAL	1,352 (76%)	340 (19%)	97 (5%)	1,789

Choice of Out-of-School Care Program

Parents made 442 comments regarding their reasons for selecting out-of-school programs for their children. Parents highlighted location (32%), hours of operation (17%), reputation (10%) and transportation (10%) as their top considerations when choosing a program. The remaining 31% of comments referred to factors such as program offered, cost, accreditation, personal considerations and only option available. This information is useful in understanding why parents choose out-of-school care but, because these factors cannot be considered positive or negative, they are not included in the table above.

Daily Activities

Eighty-four per cent of comments about daily activities in the out-of-school care programs were positive. Parents stated their children were able to choose activities they wished to be part of, and were involved in the overall planning of events and program activities (e.g. “My children enjoy making plans for activities with [the provider],” “[program is] doing a great job”). Children indicated they enjoyed the activities (e.g. “I like to paint,” “making crafts is fun”). Seven per cent of comments were neutral where parents and children reported daily activities as adequate. Negative comments (9%) included 15 comments from parents that their children were not part of planning the activities (or parents were unaware if their children assisted in the planning); three comments from children who stated they were not given an opportunity to choose the activities they wished to participate in; and two suggestions from parents that daily activities be improved (e.g. “very little time outside,” “[children] don’t go to the park”).

Staff-Child Relationships

Questions about the relationships between staff and children evoked many positive (92%) and neutral (4%) comments from parents and children. Parents described highly satisfactory interactions between the staff and children (e.g. “amazing,” “awesome - [the staff] care a lot,” “my son loves it here,” “my child is comfortable to interact with any staff member here”) and children talked about their enjoyment of the program and feeling

comfortable and safe (e.g. “there is lots of stuff to do,” “I like the big kids that come here”). Four per cent of comments were neutral, where parents described the relationships between staff and children as adequate.

In the remaining four per cent of comments, three comments were from children who did not like attending out-of-school care (e.g. “I’d rather be at home playing with my own things,” “there’s not really anything for me to play with”); three comments indicated not feeling safe or comfortable while at the program (all three children noted bullies at their respective programs even though the matters were reported and being satisfactorily addressed); and two parent comments indicated the program could be improved (e.g. “turnover is high,” “only one teacher appears to have a relationship with my child”).

Communication with Staff

Almost all of the parent comments regarding communication with staff were either positive (86%) or neutral (12%). Parents stated they had good or adequate rapport with staff, were informed of incidents/concerns and felt staff were responsive to parent inquiries (e.g. “staff keep me up to date on my children,” “staff are approachable”). The remaining parent comments were negative (2%), indicating communication could be improved (“sometimes [the program] sends emails...sometimes they don’t,” “staff seem overwhelmed without time to listen”).

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Parents described either good (86%) or adequate (11%) opportunities to be involved in the out-of-school care program (e.g. “we are always welcome to volunteer for field trips,” “I am [invited to] every celebration”). Two comments were negative where parents stated they were either unaware of opportunities to participate, or did not have the time and/or interest in participating in the program.

Meals and/or Snacks

While it is mandatory for any out-of-school care program in Alberta to ensure children have meals and/or snacks, programs are able to choose whether or not to provide them. If they do not provide food, parents are required to provide meals and snacks for their children to eat while attending the program. Meals and/or snacks are an important part of child care programs. Feedback from parents and children regarding the meals and snacks provided in out-of-school care programs was very positive (86%) (e.g. “I like cheese buns,” “it is very good”). Parents and children spoke of good quality, quantity and variety. Neutral comments (12%) indicated that parents and children thought the quality and quantity of meals and snacks was adequate. Six negative comments (2%) indicated the quality of the meals or snacks could be improved (e.g. “less packaged food,” “sometimes I am still hungry...sometimes [I get] extra food,” “they don’t make what I like,” “I like the sandwiches, but I only get two,” “I don’t like the food...I am fussy”).

Physical Environment

Most parents indicated being pleased with the physical environments of the out-of-school care programs. Eighty-six per cent of comments were positive where parents spoke about the overall space, maintenance of the facility and play rooms (e.g. “like the space,” “centre is clean, organized, and safe”). Neutral comments (14%) referred to comments about the adequacy of the overall environment, play space, maintenance, equipment and toys. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations

The majority of parents and children made positive comments (87%) about the rules and regulations in the out-of-school care programs. Parents stated they liked the rules, felt they were consistently applied and agreed with the forms of child guidance used. Children stated they were aware of the rules and believed the rules to be fair. Three per cent of comments were neutral and 10 per cent were negative. Two parents suggested the rules could be improved (e.g. “more structure”) and two children stated the rules in the program were unfair (e.g. “like no swearing,” “time out”).

When asked about bullying many parents reported their children had never experienced bullying within the programs and parents who said their children were bullied, felt that the matters were appropriately addressed and resolved by the out-of-school care staff. A few parent comments were neutral (3%) where parents said the rules and their application were adequate. Ten per cent of comments were negative, the majority referencing issues around bullying within the out-of-school care programs. Ten parents reported their child(ren) had been bullied and 26 children reported they had experienced bullying in out-of-school care. Two parents stated the bullying incidents had not been resolved; one parent disagreed with the program’s response to a situation where children were hiding garbage in children’s shoes, one parent did not provide further explanation.

Overall Feedback

The majority of comments regarding the overall quality of care children received at the out-of-school care programs were either positive (80%) or neutral (8%). Parents reported satisfaction with the care their children received, and children stated they liked their programs and did not want anything to change (e.g. “I get to play with lots of toys,” “I don’t think I would change anything,” “I like the drama centre”).

Neutral comments (8%) reflected parents who felt the overall quality of care was adequate. Negative comments (12%) included two parents from the same program who indicated they liked the staff, but did not like the owners of the facility, and 15 children who made suggestions for changes to their respective programs (e.g. “I would change the whole room,” “a quiet spot to read,” “take Xbox out and just have tablets,” “we could get some smelly markers,” “more clothing in the house centre,” “go outside more,” “I would like to see the end of day care”).

Four Year Trend

To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last four years, Figure 7 outlines the number of positive, neutral and negative comments shared with the committee during visits to out-of-school care programs across Alberta between April 1, 2011, and March 31, 2015. As can be seen below, positive and neutral comments dominate the feedback provided by parents regarding the programs their children attend. The percentage of negative comments heard has remained consistent over the last four years. More descriptive information was captured during the interviews this year; therefore the percentage of neutral comments has increased and the percentage of positive comments decreased.

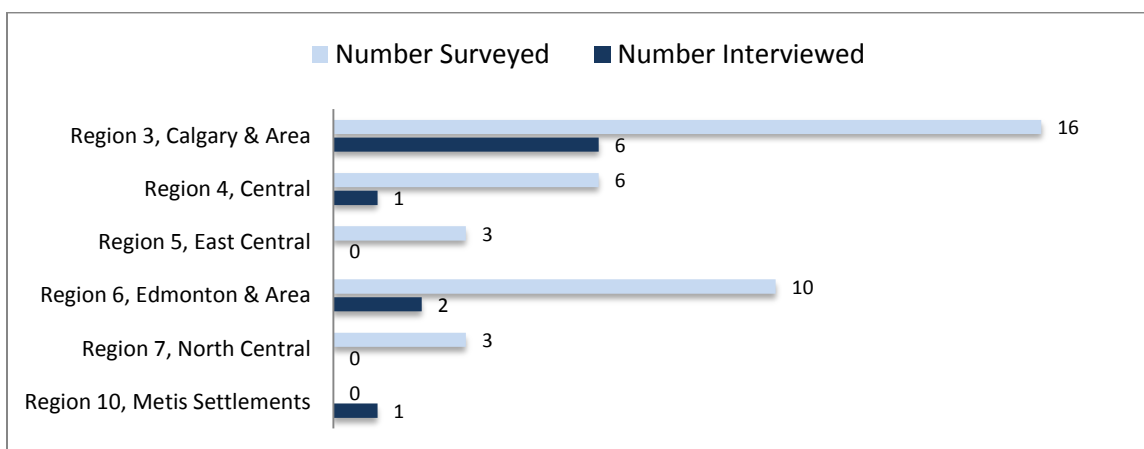
Figure 7: Four-Year Trend of Summary Responses Within Out-of-School Care Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
2011-2012	4,326 (88%)	280 (6%)	287 (6%)	4,893
2012-2013	1,146 (86%)	100 (8%)	80 (6%)	1,326
2013-2014	3,820 (90%)	242 (6%)	193 (4%)	4,255
2014-2015	1,352 (76%)	340 (19%)	97 (5%)	1,789
TOTAL	10,644 (87%)	962 (8%)	657 (5%)	12,263

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 10 staff in 18 out-of-school care programs. In addition, 38 staff completed surveys. Out-of-school care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews and 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 is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Out-of-School Care Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Service providers' comments expressed satisfaction with the services they provided: 645 comments (76%) were positive, 166 (19%) were neutral and the remaining 41 comments were negative (5%).

Physical Environment

All of the comments made by staff regarding the programs' physical environment were either positive (81%) or neutral (19%). Staff spoke about having good to adequate layouts and overall space for the children. No negative comments were heard.

Meals and/or Snacks

Staff reported satisfaction (85% of comments) with the meals and/or snacks provided by the out-of-school programs. Staff highlighted good quality, quantity and variety of food.

Some staff felt that the meals and/or snacks were adequate in variety, quality and quantity (15% of comments). No negative comments were heard.

Daily Activities

Eighty-two per cent of comments about daily activities provided in out-of-school care programs were positive. Eighteen per cent of comments were neutral, indicating that the daily activities were adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Staff-Child Relationships

Staff reported having very positive relationships with the children in their care. Neutral comments listed the types of child guidance approaches used. Approaches included redirecting the children, modelling respectful interactions and encouraging respectful interactions between children. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations

When asked about the rules and regulations in the out-of-school care programs, all staff comments were positive. Staff said they consistently applied the rules and focused on assisting children to learn to work out solutions with each other. No neutral or negative comments were heard.

Overall Feedback from Staff

Staff were given the opportunity to comment on the overall services and care they provide to the children in out-of-school care programs. Ninety-four per cent of comments were positive. Staff stated cultural diversity was respected, they were aware of appropriate staff-child ratios, medications were kept secure and there was a policy in place for children to use prescribed medication. No neutral comments were made. Six per cent of comments were negative comments. Some staff were unaware if there was a policy in place for children to self-medicate and two comments suggested wages be increased. Any concerns raised were forwarded to the appropriate Child and Family Services office for follow-up purposes.

Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operators

Managers, owners and operators were also asked to comment on the services provided within their out-of-school care programs. Eighty-one per cent of comments were positive, referring to aspects such as respecting diversities, accepting children with disabilities, ensuring medications are locked, providing staff with performance feedback, providing staff with written materials for reference, ensuring processes are in place to address concerns, conducting annual reviews and incorporating children's input into the program.

Neutral comments (7%) made by managers, owners and operators described policies on how children are allowed to leave the program (either independently or only with a guardian) and how some programs use staff from an adjoining day care program. The top three challenges raised by managers, owners and operators included obtaining parental consent for a child to leave the program's property, children not assisting with meal planning and the program not having a policy in place for children to take prescribed medication. Nevertheless, many of these managers, owners and operators reported they actually do not allow children to leave independently at any time and do not allow children to take prescribed medication without supervision; therefore, not having signed forms or policies is not problematic for these programs.

FOSTER HOMES

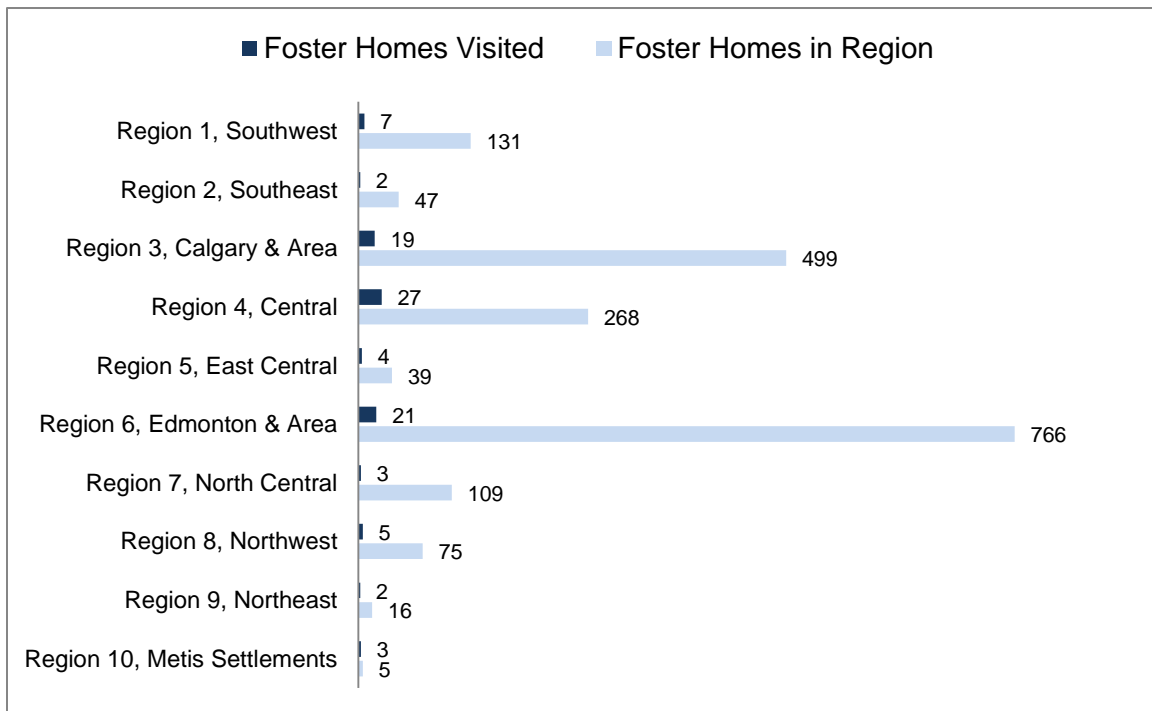
Foster homes provide temporary care to children who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to remain in their natural family home. These children are in the custody or under the guardianship of a director designated under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. Children are placed with foster parents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

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 whenever possible. Foster parents are part of the team working to achieve this goal. When a return to the natural family is not feasible, 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 includes 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 with Human Services and are assigned a foster care support worker who provides ongoing support and training.

The committee visited 93 foster homes during the April 2014 to March 2015 review period. The number of foster homes visited as well as the total number of foster homes in each region, is shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9: 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 166 children residing in the 93 foster homes visited, 82 children and youth participated in interviews (50%). In addition, committee members observed 60 children who were pre-verbal and/or non-verbal (36%). 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 1,340 comments from foster children regarding the care they receive in their foster homes. In general, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the care provided: 1,055 (79%) of comments were positive, 234 (17%) were neutral and 51 (4%) were negative. The breakdown of foster children's comments relating to care themes is shown in Figure 10.

Figure 10: Responses – Care Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Education	151 (92%)	5 (3%)	9 (5%)	165
Summer Break	80 (88%)	11 (12%)	0 (0%)	91
Social Activities	332 (99%)	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	335
Foster Parent-Child Relationships	200 (60%)	129 (39%)	2 (<1%)	331
Rules	133 (60%)	83 (38%)	3 (2%)	219
Overall Care and Comfort Level	159 (80%)	6 (3%)	34 (17%)	199
TOTAL	1,055 (79%)	234 (17%)	51 (4%)	1,340

Education

Questions about education prompted many positive comments (92%). Children and youth talked about liking school and described the types of schools they attended (e.g. pre-school, child care programs, public, private, special needs). Ten per cent of the positive comments referred to youth who spoke about wanting to graduate high school, another five per cent reported having plans to attend post-secondary institutions and two per cent stated they were aware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program (a financial program to assist former in-care youth in pursuing education). In neutral comments (3%), four youth indicated they were employed part-time and one child or youth reported having neutral feelings about his/her school experience. The remaining five per cent of comments were negative where nine youth said they were not aware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program. Committee members provided information on the Bursary program where appropriate.

Summer Break

Children and youth enjoyed talking about their summer activities. Eighty-eight per cent of comments described vacations with their foster families, attending summer camps, going on day trips across Alberta and spending vacation time with natural family members (e.g. “we went on a holiday,” “the whole [foster] family went to the lake,” “I went camping with my [foster] family,” “I went to the pool and I went to play”). Neutral comments (12%) came from 22 children who reported they had not lived in their current foster homes during the summer months. No negative comments were heard.

Social Activities

Almost all of the children and youth interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with their social activities (99%). Participants particularly enjoyed unstructured activities (e.g. playing video games, going shopping, watching movies, “hanging out”), doing activities together as a foster family (e.g. “we play games and go swimming”), having friends to play with, getting an allowance, reading, sports activities (e.g. soccer, hockey, biking, gymnastics) and types of Indigenous cultural events/activities they enjoyed (e.g. jigging, pow-wows, singing) topped the list of positive comments. No neutral comments were made.

The remaining one per cent of comments were negative and included three children who reported not receiving a regular allowance. In these cases, committee members confirmed the foster parents were saving the children’s allowances and providing funds when appropriate.

Foster Parent-Child Relationships

Children and youth were asked about their relationships with their foster parents. In response, almost all of the comments were either positive (60%) or neutral (39%). Positive comments included children and youth who reported having good relationships with their foster mother and/or foster father (“I can talk to [my foster mother] if I have a problem,” “I would talk to whichever foster parent is home,” “it’s good here,” “my friends say they want to live here”). Neutral comments referred to two comments about having an adequate relationship/attachment to one’s foster mother/father and/or an adequate sense of belonging. The remaining 127 comments referred to the people children and youth were most comfortable talking to about their problems (e.g. foster mother, foster father, caseworker, teacher, natural family, others). Of note, speaking to one’s “foster mother” and “foster father” were the top two categories of people participants indicated they would speak to if they had a problem or needed to talk to someone.

Two negative comments (<1%) were made. One youth reported having a poor relationship with the foster parent (the youth indicated he/she had not built a relationship with anyone at the time of the committee’s visit, but stated he/she was treated very well). One youth indicated he/she had a poor sense of belonging (while the youth stated the foster parents were “trying to be kind and loving,” the youth was still missing his/her former caregivers).

Rules

Comments made by children and youth about the rules in their homes were almost all positive (60%) or neutral (38%). In the positive comments, children and youth described knowing the rules and believed the rules were fair (e.g. “rules are fair”). Neutral comments described the kinds of consequences (e.g. privileges revoked, grounding, time-outs) experienced for disobeying rules.

The remaining two per cent of comments were negative and included one child who stated he/she was unaware of the rules and two comments about the rules being unfair (e.g. “I have to clean my room...if I don’t, I don’t get to play [Nintendo] DS...that’s not really fair,” “I might lose my [Nintendo] DS for three days...this is not fair...cause I play with it every day”).

Overall Care and Level

Eighty per cent of comments made by children and youth about their overall care and comfort were positive. Children and youth reported being treated fairly, described having a good level of comfort in their foster homes and felt safe (“It’s really good,” “treated like a 10 here,” “[foster parents] really helped me through my transition [from previous placement],” “awesome”). Some children and youth who had experienced bullying incidents stated they reported the incidents and the matters were appropriately resolved. Neutral comments (3%) came from children and youth who felt their level of comfort in the foster home was adequate.

All negative comments (17%) referred to children and youth who indicated having experienced bullying at some point in time, including three youth who never reported the incidents (e.g. “I was bullied at school but I didn’t tell anyone,” “I dealt with it myself,” “I tried to resolve it and handle it myself”) and one child who reported his/her bullying issue was not fully resolved (e.g. “I told my mom and the principal and my teacher...it’s still happening a bit”). Matters that required further follow-up were forwarded for follow-up to the appropriate ministry office,

Treatment

Committee members reported 737 comments from foster children about the treatment they received in foster homes. Children made 511 (70%) positive comments, 149 (20%) neutral comments and 77 (10%) negative comments. The breakdown of foster children’s comments relating to treatment themes is shown in Figure 11.

Figure 11: Responses – Treatment Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Transition	108 (49%)	79 (36%)	33 (15%)	220
Medical/Dental Needs	239 (97%)	1 (<1%)	6 (2%)	246
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	101 (50%)	69 (34%)	32 (16%)	202
Keepsakes	63 (91%)	0 (0%)	6 (9%)	69
TOTAL	511 (70%)	149 (20%)	77 (10%)	737

Transition

When describing their experiences moving into their foster homes and recalling how they felt at the time of the moves, children and youth made many comments. They also shared their current feelings about their placements. It should be noted that not all

children and youth were asked about transitions if the topic was known to be difficult or potentially traumatic for them. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss transitions, this was respected.

Positive comments (49%) referred to children and youth who reported they were advised of their move, felt happy at the time of the move, had a pre-placement visit and/or described receiving good support. Of the 108 positive comments, 46 comments indicated children and youth were very happy in their current foster homes.

Neutral comments (36%) referred to previous living arrangements and comments by children and youth who stated they were unable to recall their transitioning experience (e.g. given age at transition, number of years past, cognitive delays). Negative comments (15%) referred to children and youth who were dissatisfied with the transition experience stating: they felt sad, scared or angry during the move. They felt they hadn't received advance notice, a pre-placement visit and/or support during the move (e.g. "I was a little bit shy...but it's good now," "they came and got me from school," "it was really frustrating not to be told where I was going").

Medical/Dental Needs

When discussing medical and dental needs, the majority of comments by children and youth were either positive (98%) or neutral (<1%). Positive comments included children and youth who reported having their medical, dental and optometry needs met and felt well cared for when ill. Neutral comments indicated the children and youth had attended all their medical appointments within the last year. Two per cent of comments were negative, where children and youth reported that their dental and/or optometry needs had not been addressed at the time of the committee's visit.

Contact with Natural Family

Children and youth were given the opportunity to talk about their relationships and contact with natural family members. It should be noted that not all children and youth were asked about natural family if the topic was known to be difficult or potentially traumatic for them. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss natural family, this was respected. These questions do not explore the reasons for, limitations on or appropriateness of contact. For reporting purposes, family contact is not classified in terms of positive or negative, as family contact and/or reunification with natural family is not always possible or desirable given individual children's circumstances.

Some children and youth indicated they were able to maintain contact with natural family members. They talked about how their foster parents helped them to stay connected with natural family and their culture and some children described being happy with their current level of contact. Many children and youth identified who they maintained contact with such as parents, grandparents and siblings as well as how frequently they saw their family members (e.g. limited, some, regular). In some cases, children reported having no contact with natural family with two children expressing they were not happy with the level of contact they currently had. One child reported being dissatisfied with the lack of assistance in staying connected with his/her culture. Matters that required follow-up were forwarded to the appropriate ministry office for resolution.

Case Plans

Questions about case plans elicited much feedback from children and youth. In positive comments (50%), children and youth stated they were aware of their case plans, were well supported and had input into the plans. A couple of youth spoke specifically about

their transition to adulthood plans. Neutral comments (34%) described the frequency of contact with their caseworkers and case plan conversations.

Children and youth made 32 negative comments (16%) about case plans; however, 17 of those comments were from children who were either too young to, and/or due to cognitive barriers were unable to, comprehend what constituted a case plan (these children and youth may not have readily recognized conversations with caseworkers as case planning). The remaining comments came from children and youth who were not aware of their case plans (outside of previously mentioned reasons) or felt they needed better support to reach their goals.

Keepsakes

The majority of comments (91%) about keepsakes made by children and youth were positive. Children and youth indicated they had items such as photographs, memory books, toys, jewelry and/or other special objects (e.g. “I have a necklace and a picture,” “I sleep with my stuffy”). There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (9%) referred to children and youth who did not report having any personal keepsakes.

Accommodation

Committee members heard 412 comments by foster children related to accommodation including meals and the physical environment of the home. Foster children and youth expressed satisfaction with their accommodation: 360 comments were positive (87%), 37 were neutral (9%) and 15 were negative (4%). The breakdown of foster children’s comments relating to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Responses – Accommodation Themes at Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Meals	239 (96%)	0 (0%)	11 (4%)	250
Physical Environment	121 (76%)	37 (21%)	4 (3%)	162
TOTAL	360 (87%)	37 (9%)	15 (4%)	412

Meals

When asked about the meals in their foster homes, children and youth had only positive things to say about the food. Ninety-six per cent of comments indicated the food was good, there was plenty to eat and it was high in quality (e.g. “I like the food,” “I like to bake cookies,” “love the food...lots to eat”). Many of the children and youth reported they assisted in preparing meals. No neutral comments were heard. Four per cent of comments were negative, as 11 children reported not participating in the cooking or preparation of 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, chores they were responsible for and whether they would make any changes to their current environment. Seventy-six per cent of comments were positive, where children and youth described their chores, their rooms and liking their homes (e.g. “I have a fish tank in my room,” “I

like it,” “I share a room with [my sibling]”). Neutral comments (21%) indicated that 34 homes had pets, one child stated he/she would not make any changes to his/her home, and two children and youth suggested that children and youth in care be allowed to have sleep-overs at their friends’ homes and be allowed to join lots of sports. Four comments were negative (3%) where children and youth reported not participating in any household chores. Chores are considered opportunities to develop life skills; as a result, a lack of participation is classified as negative.

Four-Year Trend

The table below outlines the number of positive, neutral and negative comments shared with the committee during visits to foster homes across Alberta between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2015. As can be seen below, findings have remained fairly consistent over the last four years.

Figure 13: Four-Year Trend of Summary Responses Within Foster Homes

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
2011-2012	3,563 (74%)	1,023 (21%)	216 (5%)	4,802
2012-2013	5,037 (76%)	1,360 (20%)	272 (4%)	6,669
2013-2014	2,124 (78%)	406 (15%)	196 (7%)	2,726
2014-2015	1,926 (77%)	420 (17%)	143 (6%)	2,489
TOTAL	12,650 (76%)	3,209 (19%)	827 (5%)	16,686

Foster Parents’ Comments

Committee members gave foster parents an opportunity to comment on the services they provide to the children in their care as well as the supports they receive to assist them in their role. Committee members spoke with 127 foster parents in 93 foster homes. Foster parents expressed different views depending upon their experiences, perceptions and geographic location. The majority of foster parents’ comments expressed satisfaction: 787 comments were positive (76%), 46 were neutral (5%) and the remaining 198 comments were negative (19%).

Services

The majority of foster parents expressed satisfaction (88% of comments) with access to services for the children and youth residing in their homes. Foster parents discussed having good working relationships with health, educational, dental and optometry professionals who they felt were meeting the needs of the children and youth. They spoke about the ease of accessing recreation funds and felt the recreation amounts were appropriate. Some foster parents expressed frustration with different interpretations among caseworkers on how the recreation funds may be spent and some foster parents found reimbursement to be slow. Many foster parents expressed having good access to required treatment and services. In neutral comments (2%), a few foster parents described health, mental health and educational professionals as adequate.

A few foster parents also indicated referrals and access to treatment and services was adequate.

Ten per cent of comments by foster parents highlighted areas of dissatisfaction. Some foster parents reported difficulty with treatment and services (gaining access, referrals, and/or availability of quality services), especially mental health services and educational supports. A few foster parents indicated that funds for recreation, clothing and gifts were insufficient. A few foster parents discussed experiencing gaps in the educational system for children with special needs.

Agency Support

Seventy-seven per cent of comments about the general support and services provided by foster care agencies were positive. Foster parents described having good relationships with agency foster care support workers, liked the foster parent training provided by the agency and appreciated the services available to them, including respite. A few neutral comments (4%) were made where foster parents believed the training, access to training and support services were adequate. The top concerns raised by foster parents were the lack of respite resources, poor access to training (long distance travel required, lack of on-line options), agency foster parent training (lack of additional training, relevance of content, diversity of content) and the need to improve agency support.

Support from the Ministry

Positive comments (63%) made by foster parents about ministry support highlighted good relationships they had developed with caseworkers and their appreciation for the help provided by their foster care support workers; satisfaction with foster parent training; good respite resources; strong ministerial support; and timely payment and reimbursement. Neutral comments (7%) reflected foster parents who described relationships with caseworkers, ministry support workers, foster parent training (lack of diversity and relevance) and other interactions with ministry processes as adequate. Thirty per cent of the responses were negative and highlighted concerns with access to ministry training (e.g. classes filling up quickly, limited availability of a class at a desired time, long distance travel required to attend); lack of respite; lack of background information on the children placed in their care; poor relationships with some caseworkers; lack of timely response from regional staff (e.g. various approval forms not signed, phone calls/emails returned days later); and disagreement with placement and case-related decisions made by the ministry (e.g. foster parents not consulted, input by foster parent is not sought).

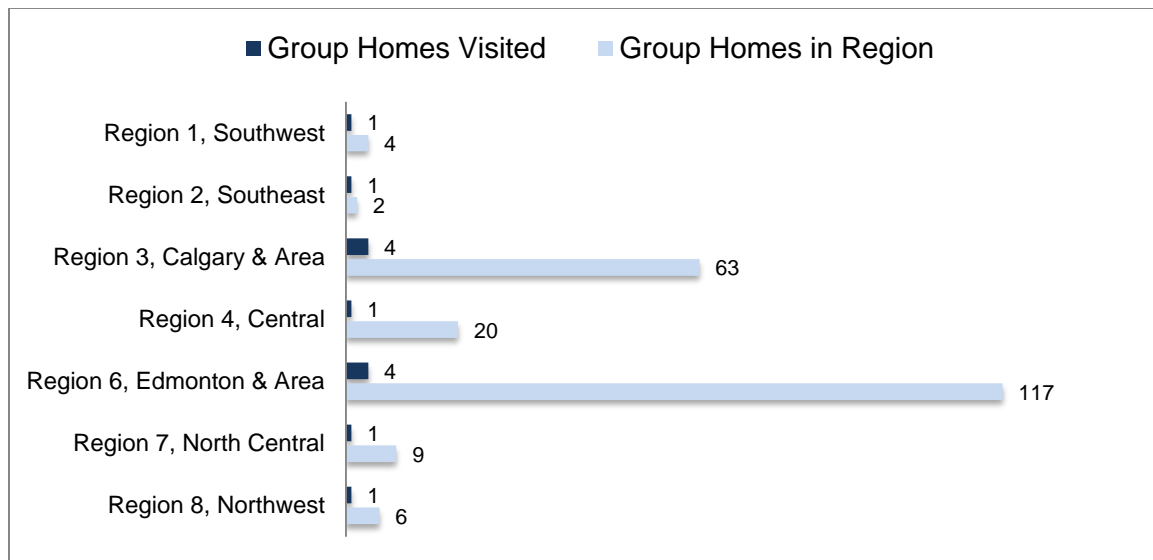


CHILD AND YOUTH GROUP HOMES

Child and youth programs provide care to children and youth under the age of 18 years who are under the guardianship of a director designated under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. A range of programs including group homes, secure services, youth emergency shelters and youth assessment centres are classified as child and youth programs and are licensed under the *Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act*. Most of these programs are operated by not-for-profit or profit organizations; however, some are government operated.

The committee visited 13 facilities between April 2014 and March 2015. Figure 14 shows the number of child and youth group homes visited as well as the total number of facilities in each region.

Figure 14: Number of Visits to Group Homes versus Total Number of Group Homes



Highlights of Visits to Child and Youth Programs

Committee members scheduled visits to child and youth programs late in the afternoon, (after school) or early in the evening to ensure as many children and youth as possible were available for interviews. Twenty children and youth from 13 group homes participated in the interviews. Another two 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 providers' comments are discussed separately.

Care

Committee members reported 314 comments from children and youth about the care they received in their programs. The majority of children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided: 242 comments (77%) were positive, 37

comments (12%) were neutral and 35 comments (11%) were negative. The breakdown of children and youth’s comments relating to care themes is shown in Figure 15.

Figure 15: Responses – Care Themes at Child and Youth Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Education	38 (76%)	4 (8%)	8 (16%)	50
Summer Break	16 (89%)	2 (11%)	0 (0%)	18
Social Activities	69 (93%)	0 (0%)	5 (7%)	74
Staff-Child/Youth Relationships	47 (67%)	18 (26%)	5 (7%)	70
Rules	32 (68%)	13 (28%)	2 (4%)	47
Overall Care and Comfort Level	40 (73%)	0 (0%)	15 (27%)	55
TOTAL	242 (77%)	37 (12%)	35 (11%)	314

Education

When asked about their educational experiences, most of the children and youth’s comments were either positive (76%) or neutral (8%). Children and youth stated they liked school, planned to graduate and/or talked about their plans for the future. Some of the children and youth described the schools they attended (e.g. public, private) and spoke about the Advancing Futures Bursary (a financial program to assist former in-care youth in pursuing education). Some children and youth expressed negative comments (16%), including one youth who disliked going to school and seven youth who reported not being aware of the Advancing Futures Bursary. Committee members provided information on the bursary program where appropriate.

Summer break

All but two of the comments made by children and youth about their summer breaks were positive (89%). Some children and youth discussed day trips with program staff or attending summer camps (e.g. “I go to [cultural] camps by myself in the summer”, “I also attended summer camp,” “I did a lot of training in the summer. I love swimming and I’m on a competitive team”). Neutral comments (11%) included children and youth who were not living in the program during the previous summer break so the question was not applicable to them. No negative comments were made.

Social Activities

Children and youth had many positive things to say about the social activities in which they participated (93% of comments). Receiving an allowance, participating in unstructured activities (e.g. watching television, hanging out with friends, playing video games), having friends, spending time with program staff and participating in sport activities were highlighted by the children and youth. No neutral comments were made. The negative comments (7%) were heard from three youth who reported having no friends (e.g. “most of my friends live super far away,” “I don’t have any friends around here but I have the other kids here to hang out with,” “I can’t have friends in a group home”) and two youth who stated they did not receive an allowance (e.g. “no, [I don’t get

an allowance] because I am from [outside the province] and they don't do it," "I have a job").

Staff-Child/Youth Relationships

In response to questions about their relationships with program staff, children and youth made many positive comments. Sixty-seven per cent of comments indicated good relationships with child and youth care staff (e.g. "I love [time spent with staff]," "the staff is nice," "things are good- 10 out of 10," "I am comfortable here," "I talk to staff if I need adult help"). In neutral comments (26%), children and youth listed the people they talked to when needing help with a problem or concern. In 17 out of the 18 comments regarding "who would you speak to if you had a problem" children and youth indicated they would speak to program staff.

Five negative comments (7%) were heard where one youth reported having a poor relationship and lack of attachment with program staff (e.g. "I hate them"). Two comments were made indicating the youth would like more time spent together with staff, and one comment indicating the youth did not feel like he/she belonged in the program (e.g. "I don't feel I belong here. I am waiting to move to Supported Independent Living. The staff makes me feel respected and supported."). Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Rules

Positive comments (68%) made by children and youth indicated they knew the rules within the programs and believed the rules to be fair. (e.g. "I think the rules are fair, I just don't like to follow them," "rules are fair," "the rules are posted over there"). Neutral comments (28%) discussed the type of consequences children and youth experienced when they broke the rules such as time-outs and having their privileges revoked. Two children and youth made negative comments (4%) indicating that the rules at their program were not always fair (e.g. "Some rules are fair, some are not," "When we have community time, they say we can be a threat to them"). Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Overall Care and Comfort Level

When given the opportunity to talk about their care and comfort within the programs, the majority of responses were positive (73%). Children and youth spoke about being treated fairly and feeling comfortable and safe. They described staff as being responsive to reports of bullying (e.g. "awesome [how I'm treated here]," "I feel I am being treated fairly well," "[I am treated] nice"). No neutral comments were heard.

Of the 15 negative comments (27%) made, 11 referred to children and youth who reported having been bullied at one time or another. The remaining eight comments included one youth who reported that bullying concerns were not resolved at his/her school but he/she quit school recently. One youth never reported a bullying incident (e.g. "[I have been bullied] my whole life. The kids here – I yell at them and tell them to stuff it"), one youth reported a poor level of comfort and felt he/she was treated unfairly (e.g. "I feel I am treated like [expletive] and unfairly"). Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Treatment

Committee members reported 183 comments from children and youth about the treatment they received in child and youth programs. Of those comments, 118 (64%)

were positive, 40 (22%) were neutral and the remaining 25 (14%) were negative. The breakdown of responses relating to treatment themes is shown in Figure 16.

Figure 16: Responses – Treatment Themes at Child and Youth Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Transition	25 (46%)	20 (37%)	9 (17%)	54
Medical/Dental Needs	56 (98%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	57
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	23 (43%)	20 (37%)	11 (20%)	54
Keepsakes	14 (78%)	0 (0%)	4 (22%)	18
TOTAL	118 (64%)	40 (22%)	25 (14%)	183

Transition

Children and youth were given the opportunity to talk about their experiences moving into their current placements. If the topic was known to be difficult or potentially troubling for a child or youth, the question was not asked. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss transitions, this was respected.

Forty-six per cent of comments were positive, where children and youth discussed how they were advised of the move, were happy at the time of the move, expressed having good support and took part in pre-placement visits to become comfortable with the transition (e.g. “I had a choice to come here,” “I got about two weeks’ notice and I had a choice of two group homes”).

Neutral comments (37%) referred to the type of placement a child/youth resided in prior to their current placement (e.g. foster home, group home, natural family). Two children could not recall the transition.

Nine children and youth expressed negative comments (17%) about their transition experiences. Five comments referred to not being advised of the move (e.g. “I didn’t know I was leaving until the police and social services came”). Three comments indicated the children or youth felt sad at the time of the move (e.g. “I cried a lot. I’m used to it now,” “I am a little bit sad,” “I was a little sad, but I am happy now”), and one youth expressed he/she still experienced feelings of sadness when recalling his/her transition (e.g. “I was in [youth detention centre], [ended up staying four months where I accrued more charges], I hate it here”). Matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Child and Family Services office for follow-up purposes.

Medical/Dental Needs

Ninety-eight per cent of comments about medical, dental and optical care were positive. Children and youth stated they had seen their doctors, dentists and opticians as needed, and reported they were well taken care of by their caregivers when ill. No neutral comments were heard. One comment (2%) was negative as a youth indicated his/her

optometry needs had not been met at the time of the committee's visit (e.g. "The eye doctor...I am due").

Contact with Natural Family

Many of the children and youth were asked about their contact with natural family members; however, not all children and youth were asked about natural family if the topic was known to be difficult or potentially traumatic for them. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss natural family, as the topic may be difficult or traumatic, this was respected. These questions do not explore the reasons for, limitations on or appropriateness of contact. For reporting purposes, family contact is not classified in terms of positive or negative, as family contact and/or reunification with natural family is not always possible or optimal given individual children's circumstances. The majority of children and youth indicated they maintained contact with natural family members. Some children and youth specifically identified the members they visit such as siblings, parents and extended family. In four cases, children and youth reported not having contact with natural family members. Four comments were heard where the children and youth wished they had more contact with their natural family members.

Case Plans

When asked about case plans, 43 per cent of comments were positive. Children and youth said they were aware of their case plans and felt they had good relationships with their caseworkers with whom they could talk about their future. Neutral comments (37%) captured comments made by children and youth about the frequency of visits (e.g. weekly, monthly, quarterly) and types of contact (e.g. email, phone, texts) they had with their caseworkers. Negative comments (20%) included children and youth who were not aware of their case plans, and a few children who stated they would like to have more contact with their caseworkers. In a few situations, it appeared that the children and youth were unaware of their case plans due to a low level of comprehension and may not have been aware that conversations with their caseworker involved case planning.

Keepsakes

The majority of children and youth reported they had keepsakes. Seventy-eight per cent of comments were positive, where children and youth stated they had photographs, memory books and/or special items they considered keepsakes (e.g. "I have a photo album," "I have a stuffy," "I have some pictures of my family in my room"). There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (22%) were made by four children or youth who indicated they did not have memory books, photographs and/or keepsakes.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 90 comments from children and youth on issues relating to accommodation in child and youth programs. Children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided: 74 (82%) were positive, 4 (4%) were neutral and 12 (14%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' responses, relating to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 17.

Figure 17: Responses – Accommodation Themes at Child and Youth Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Meals	52 (84%)	1 (2%)	9 (14%)	62
Physical Environment	22 (78%)	3 (11%)	3 (11%)	28
TOTAL	74 (82%)	4 (4%)	12 (14%)	90

Meals

Overall, children and youth stated they liked the food provided in the programs. Positive comments (84%) highlighted food quality, enjoying the food provided, having enough to eat and assisting with meal preparations (e.g. “The food is good,” “I like the chicken,” “I make my special famous brownies,” “I like the food here”). One neutral comment (2%) indicated the food was adequate. Nine negative comments (14%) were made about meals in the program. Five youth reported they do not help with meal preparation. Participation in meal preparation is considered an opportunity to develop life skills; therefore, a lack of participation is classified as negative. Two youth said there was not enough to eat (e.g. “sometimes they don’t really cook enough,” “I would like more to eat”), and two comments were made by one youth indicating the food provided in the program could be improved (e.g. “[the food] is awful and disgusting,” “makes me feel like I’m on welfare”). The negative opinion of the food in this program was not shared by the other youth interviewed at the facility. Matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Child and Family Services office for follow-up purposes.

Physical Environment

Positive comments about the physical space and environments of the child and youth programs comprised 78% of responses (e.g. “I have my own room,” “my room is small, but we are allowed to decorate it however we want”). Children and youth talked about the types of chores they participated in and stated they liked their homes. Neutral comments (11%) referred to suggested changes children and youth would like to implement in their program. One youth said he/she wouldn’t change a thing, one youth would prefer a different location closer to family and one youth would change the level of supervision in his/her placement.

Three comments were negative (11%). Two children and youth stated their programs did not have pets and one youth reported not liking his/her current placement (e.g. “we can’t have hangers to hang stuff because someone once killed themselves with one”). Matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Four-Year Trend

Figure 18 outlines the number of positive, neutral and negative comments shared with the committee during visits to child and youth care programs across Alberta between April 1, 2011 and March 31, 2015. As can be seen, findings have remained fairly consistent over the last four years.

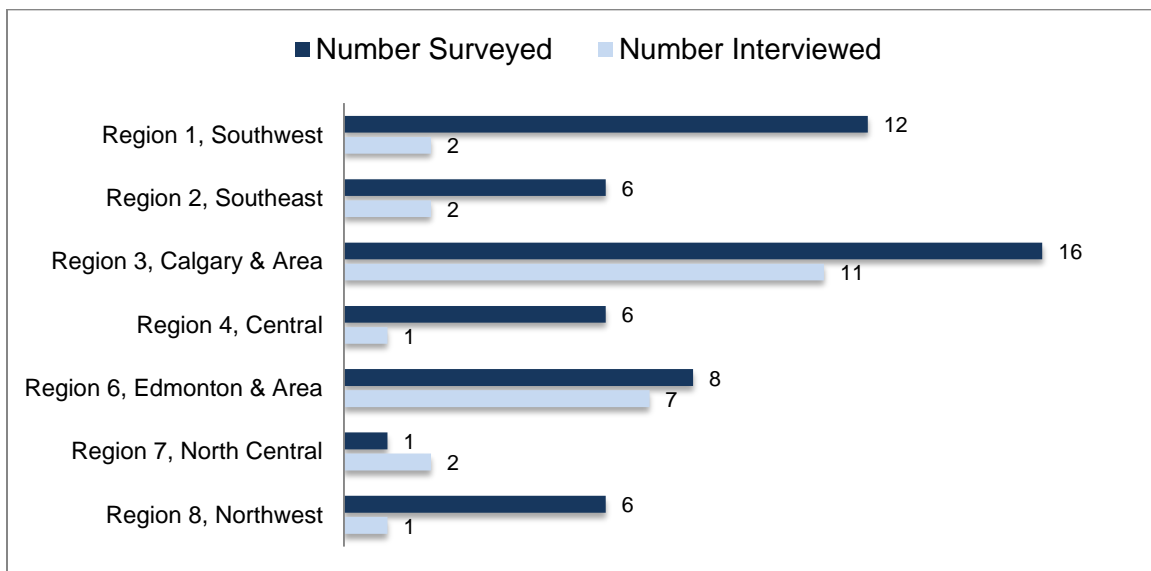
Figure 18: Four-Year Trend of Summary Responses Within Child and Youth Care Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
2011-2012	1,212 (76%)	264 (10%)	119 (4%)	1,595
2012-2013	1,246 (72%)	355 (20%)	137 (8%)	1,738
2013-2014	953 (73%)	270 (21%)	74 (6%)	1,297
2014-2015	434 (74%)	81 (14%)	72 (12%)	587
TOTAL	3,845 (74%)	970 (18%)	402 (8%)	5,217

Staff Member Comments

Committee members talked to 26 staff members within 13 programs 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 55 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 service delivery region is illustrated in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Child and Youth Programs Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Four hundred and twenty-nine comments (64%) from service providers expressed satisfaction, 219 comments (32%) were neutral and 26 (4%) were negative.

Education and Training

The majority of staff (75%) reported being satisfied with the training provided and felt it assisted them in dealing with most situations they face within their programs.

Staff reported their programs provided opportunities for additional education and training. Neutral comments (25%) noted the years of staff experience in the child and youth field. Some staff members reported training was adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Staffing/Facility Programs

Ninety-six per cent of comments made by staff about the operational aspects of their programs were either positive (60%) or neutral (36%). Staff highlighted their length of employment, good staff relationships, clearly defined roles and responsibilities, good relationships with the children and youth in their care and low to adequate staff turnover. Staff identified many strengths within their programs and expressed pride in the services they provide. Staff turnover, staffing levels, wages and difficulty recruiting new staff topped the concerns expressed by some of the child and youth care staff.

Supports from the Ministry, Agencies and Community

When asked to comment on the overall support the facilities received, 74 per cent of responses were positive. Staff described having good relationships with caseworkers, ministry and regional staff. No neutral comments were heard. Five negative comments (26%) were heard. Two comments suggested case planning could be improved, two comments suggested the need for better support between the facility and the region and one comment stated staff turnover within the ministry was a concern.

Director's Comments

Directors were given an opportunity to provide additional comments regarding their programs. Caution must be taken when interpreting the results as a total of only three comments were made. Two directors spoke positively about the program and community supports in place for the children and youth in their care. One director indicated the need for better communication and decision-making with the region regarding placements.

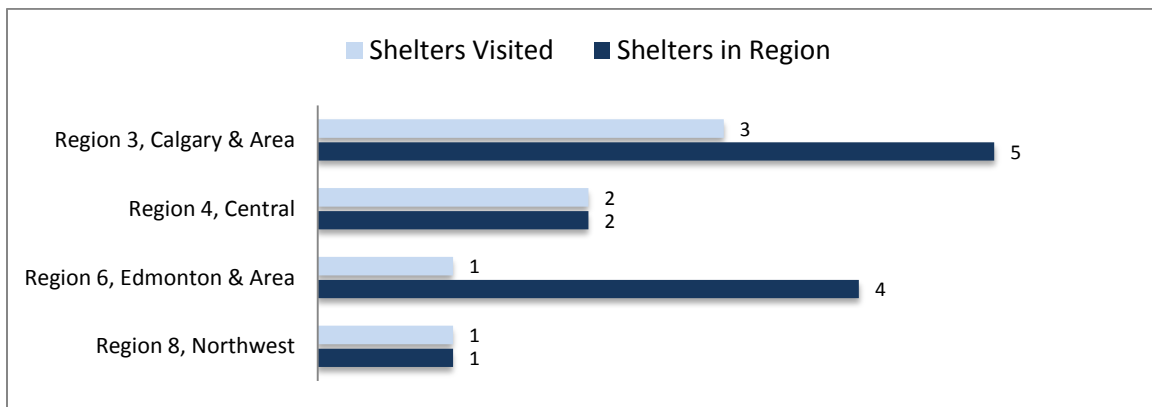


EMERGENCY SHELTERS FOR WOMEN

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 for 30 emergency shelters for women, as well as maintains fee-for-service agreements with five 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. The province also funds child care programs in 26 shelters, including programming specific to children exposed to domestic violence.

The committee visited seven emergency shelters for women during the April 2014 to March 2015 review period. Figure 20 shows the number of shelters visited in comparison to the total number of funded programs in those regions.

Figure 20: Number of Visits to Emergency Shelters for Women versus Total Number of Emergency Shelters for Women



Highlights of Visits to Emergency shelters for women

Committee members make every effort to schedule visits to emergency shelters for women at times of the day when it is most convenient for residents and staff to be interviewed. A total of 12 residents and 9 staff participated in interviews while 88 staff completed surveys. The total interview response rate of the 156 residents living in the seven facilities visited was 8 per cent. The low participation rate is likely related to the unique situation of these residents who typically spend time away from the facility to search for jobs, permanent accommodations or to attend counselling appointments. Children residing at emergency shelters for women did not participate in interviews. Residents' comments are organized into two main categories: care/treatment and accommodation. Staff comments are discussed separately.

Care and Treatment

Committee members reported 111 comments from residents about the care and treatment they received at emergency shelters for women. Ninety-nine comments (89%)

were positive, one comment was neutral (1%) and the remaining 11 comments (11%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments relating to care/treatment themes, is shown in Figure 21.

Figure 21: Responses – Care and Treatment at Emergency Shelters for Women

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Program Awareness	22 (69%)	0 (0%)	10 (31%)	32
Staff-Resident Relationships	57 (98%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	58
Quality of Services	20 (95%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	21
TOTAL	99 (89%)	1 (1%)	11 (10%)	111

Program Awareness

Just over two-thirds of the residents' comments (69%) about program awareness were positive. Residents demonstrated knowledge of the types of programs offered by their shelters (for children, themselves and their spouse/partner) and stated they received information and referrals to community services. Among the negative comments (31%), four residents described not being aware of programs (for children, themselves and their spouse/partner), three residents indicated they did not receive necessary services (e.g. "need clothes...we came with nothing," "I have to drive to [another city] every day [to look for housing] and I am having trouble paying for gas," "they don't have long distance calling cards here"), two residents stated they were having difficulty accessing affordable housing upon leaving the shelter and one resident commented she did not receive referral(s) for outside services.

Staff-Resident Relationships

Ninety-eight per cent of responses about staff-resident relationships were highly positive. Appreciation for the support, understanding and assistance provided by staff was expressed by residents during interviews. Residents also highlighted the staff's respect for cultural diversity, fostering positive relationships among residents and teamwork as strengths of their facilities. One negative comment indicated the resident's desire for more available staff.

Quality of Services Received

All of the comments about the quality of service provided were either positive (95%) or neutral (5%). Positive comments indicated services were helpful, information and services were provided in a timely manner and children's programming was good. One neutral comment was made indicating the children's program was adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 168 comments from residents about the accommodations provided at women's emergency shelters. One hundred and twenty-four comments (74%) were positive, 35 comments were neutral (21%) and the remaining nine comments (5%) were negative. The breakdown of residents' comments, relating to accommodation themes is shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Responses – Accommodation Themes at Emergency Shelters for Women

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Physical Environment	34 (89%)	1 (3%)	3 (8%)	38
Meals	30 (81%)	7 (19%)	0 (0%)	37
Rules and Regulations	24 (67%)	9 (25%)	3 (8%)	36
Support Services	36 (63%)	18 (32%)	3 (5%)	57
TOTAL	124 (74%)	35 (21%)	9 (5%)	168

Physical Environment

Questions about the physical environment of the shelters evoked many positive comments (89%). Residents stated they felt secure and safe; they also described the facilities as comfortable, roomy, clean and accommodating. One neutral comment (3%) was made, indicating the size of the shelter was adequate. Three negative comments (8%) were heard, suggesting the size and privacy within two different facilities could be improved (e.g. “the bedroom should be bigger especially when we have children,” “the area is small,” “privacy is hard to come by”).

Meals

When given the opportunity to comment on the food within the shelters, all responses were either positive (81%) or neutral (19%). Residents indicated their satisfaction with the quality, quantity and variety of the food provided in the shelters. Neutral comments included two residents who said they participated in preparing meals, two residents who stated they do not prepare meals and three comments stating the quality, quantity and/or variety of food in the shelter was adequate. No negative comments were made.

Rules and Regulations

Sixty-seven per cent of comments about rules were positive. The women described the rules as fair and reasonable, indicated the regulations were enforced in their respective shelters and stated they were informed of the rules. Neutral comments (25%) referred to whether residents participated in chores at the shelter. Three negative comments (8%) were made indicating two residents were not informed of the rules, and one resident stated the rules were not enforced in her facility (e.g. “I didn’t hear the rules when I got here,” “some mothers don’t follow the rules and are messy and don’t clean up after themselves”).

Support Services

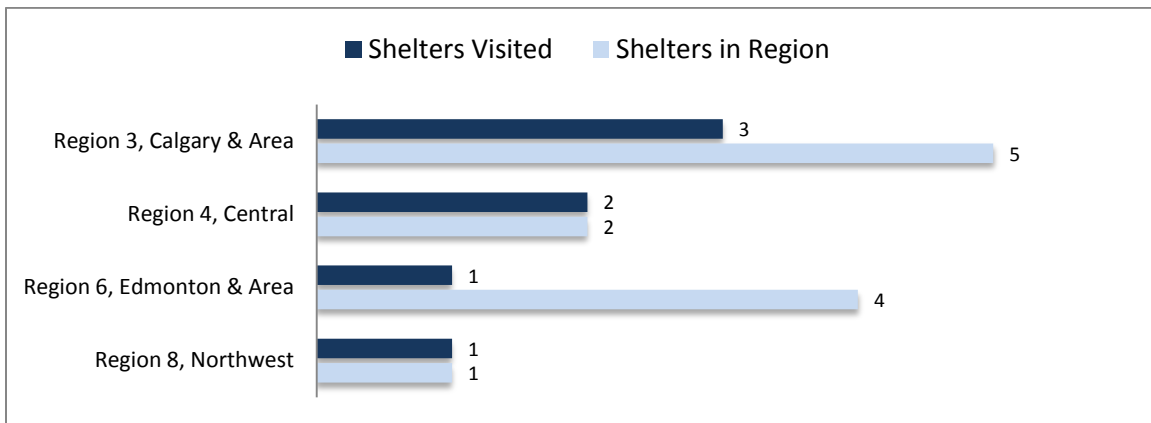
Overall, feedback regarding shelter support services was positive. Sixty-three per cent of responses indicated residents were impressed with the services received, would recommend the facility to others and identified many strengths within the programs – most of all, shelter staff. Neutral comments (32%) referred to how residents came to know about the facilities in which they were staying. The top three responses given to the question of how these women became aware of shelter services were: police/victim services, media and community services. Of the three negative comments (5%) reported, women suggested improvements to the programs available for residents (e.g. “it would be nice if they had parenting programs”), the physical environment (e.g. “work

at making [the shelter] bigger and keeping it cleaner”) and staff (e.g. “[the counsellors] need to come out of their office and talk to the clients more”).

Staff Member Comments

Committee members talked to nine staff members in seven emergency shelters for women to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide. An additional 88 staff completed surveys. A breakdown of staff who participated in the interviews or completed surveys is shown in Figure 23.

Figure 23: Number of Emergency Shelter Staff Interviewed and Surveyed



Sixty-seven per cent of staff feedback was positive (846 comments), 26 per cent was neutral (335 comments) and the remaining 7 per cent was negative (89 comments).

Facility - Staffing

Sixty-nine per cent of responses regarding staffing were positive. Staff reported having clearly defined roles and responsibilities in which to serve the women and children residing in the shelters. They further stated that sufficient training was provided, staffing levels were good and the workload was manageable. In neutral comments (21%), staff indicated whether additional training was provided by the programs, and described relationships with colleagues, workload and staff turnover as adequate. Ten per cent of responses were negative. The top four areas of dissatisfaction included a need for improved staffing levels, wages, more clearly defined roles and responsibilities and better relationships with other staff.

Facility – Building/Services Provided

Most of the staff interviewed and surveyed reported satisfaction (85%) with the services provided to women and children in the shelters. Staff described a safe and secure facility, positive relationships with residents and quality programs for residents, their children and their spouses/partners. Ten per cent of comments were neutral, where staff described the services provided as adequate. Negative comments comprised five per cent of responses. Lack of services and support for spouses/partners and the need to improve relationships between staff were the top two concerns heard by the committee. Suggestions for improving facility security/safety, relationships with residents, facility programs and access to second-stage housing were also identified by staff.

Overall Feedback

When asked to reflect on the facilities in which they are employed, staff identified several strengths in the women's emergency shelters (85% of comments). Many stated that culture and ethnicity were well reflected in their services. They also reported that the abilities and approaches used by staff, as well as community support, enhanced the quality programs provided in their facilities.

Two per cent of responses were neutral and stated that overall funding to the shelters and cultural diversity within the programs was adequate. Thirteen per cent of comments about the shelters were negative. Staff made several suggestions for improving services within the facilities such as increased funding, more staff, more programs, letting clients stay at the shelters longer, providing more practical forms of assistance to residents, bigger shelters to accommodate the needs and less paperwork so staff have more time with clients ("we are bursting at the seams" "more mental health supports," "we are turning away too many people," "more cultural diversity").

FEEDBACK ON VISITS

As part of the committee's evaluation process, service providers (e.g. foster parents, program staff, facility owner/operators) were invited to provide feedback on the committee's visits. A feedback form (with a self-addressed stamped envelope) is included in the package of information that programs receive prior to the committee's visit. As well, committee members remind service providers of the feedback opportunity and often leave feedback questionnaires after a visit. This feedback is an important method of evaluation for committee members in assessing their preparation for interviews and visits in general. It also gives service providers a chance to suggest areas for improvement.

Of the 151 visits completed, only 24 service providers responded to the questionnaire. Because of the low response rate (16%), the results and opinions expressed cannot be generalized to all service providers who participated in the reviews. Responses were provided on a five-point scale, with one indicating very dissatisfied and five indicating very satisfied.

Overall, the feedback provided by service providers was positive. Respondents indicated that they were very satisfied (71%), satisfied (25%) or were unsure of how to respond (4%) when asked "How satisfied were you with the visit process?" They commented that members were friendly, professional and lovely to speak with. When asked if they found the visits useful, respondents' comments varied from very satisfied (54%), satisfied (13%), neutral (29%) to dissatisfied (4%). All of the neutral and dissatisfied comments indicated they were waiting to see whether the ministry would use their feedback. Several respondents reported appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences.

Service providers were asked if there was anything committee members could have done differently during the visits and 88 per cent responded "no". The three respondents who stated "yes," provided the following suggestions: send out questionnaires ahead of the interview; email surveys to parents of children in day care and out-of-school care programs; and schedule longer visits. Eighty-four per cent of respondents reported being very satisfied (71%) or satisfied (13%) with the information they received prior to

the committee's visit. These individuals indicated it helped them understand the purpose of the committee and what was involved in the visit. Two respondents indicated a neutral response but did not provide further information and two stated they were dissatisfied. Both of the dissatisfied respondents reported that they did not receive information packages prior to the committee's visits.

When asked if they had sufficient time to speak with the committee members, service providers were very satisfied (71%), satisfied (17%), undecided (8%) or dissatisfied (4%) with the time allotted. Many service providers commented that they felt comfortable, listened to and enjoyed participating in the interviews. The one respondent who was dissatisfied stated that the visit was helpful and the committee members were very informative, but the respondent would like to have talked with them longer. Ninety-six per cent of respondents also reported being very satisfied (92%) or satisfied (4%) with how informed committee members were of their jobs. They used terms such as professional and knowledgeable when describing committee members. One respondent indicated a neutral response, with no further comment.

Typical Comments:

- "They were a delight to speak with."
- "We would have loved if they were able to stay longer."
- "[Committee members] were wonderful."
- "I appreciated being a part of this process."
- "They know their roles well."
- "I felt heard and understood."

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATIONS

The Social Care Programs Review Committee conducts investigations into matters relating to a facility, as specified by the Minister of Human Services. The Minister did not request any investigations in the April 2014 to March 2015 review period.

EXPENDITURES

Committee expenditures for the April 1, 2014, to March 31, 2015, review period were \$211,403. This total includes honoraria, travel, accommodations, printing, courier, long distance and internet expenses for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Each team of committee members spent between two and four hours planning and conducting each facility visit and an additional two to six hours summarizing feedback.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

During the April 2014 to March 2015 review period, the committee held three meetings. As part of their ongoing learning and development, committee members completed Indigenous Awareness Training. As well, ministry staff provided presentations on Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and research and evaluation. A presentation on missing persons was provided by the RCMP.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee would like to acknowledge the contribution of each child, youth and adult who provided information through interviews, surveys, visits and report feedback. Without their participation and willingness to share their stories, experiences, thoughts and ideas this report would not be possible. Thank you for taking the time to meet with committee members, fill out a survey and/or provide written material. This information is helpful in assisting the ministry to improve services and the lives of the people it serves.

The Committee would also like to thank the Child and Family Services regional directors and staff in the Child and Family Services offices who graciously provided their time, resources and knowledge to help make the facility visits a success. Their assistance in establishing and coordinating reviews within their regions is greatly appreciated. Further, the committee extends its gratitude to all those who provided training and information sessions to support the committee's ongoing professional development. And lastly, the committee would like to thank the staff from the ministry for their service, dedication and support.