SOCIAL CARE FACILITIES REVIEW COMMITTEE

2015-2016 Annual Report

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MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee (SCFRC) has served the people of Alberta since 1980. In the last decade, the SCFRC's responsibilities have included visiting, interviewing and surveying service recipients and service providers in five types of social care facilities across the province of Alberta: foster homes, group care programs, women's emergency shelters, day care and out-of-school care programs.

As part of evaluating all agencies, boards, and committees across the Government of Alberta, and looking for opportunities to streamline quality assurance mechanisms within the Ministry of Human Services, the decision was made to reconfigure existing quality assurance bodies within Human Services. To facilitate this process, the dissolution of the SCFRC will be required, and as such, this report will be the final SCFRC Annual Report.

While the reconfiguration of the SCFRC was being discussed, a few of the members graciously continued to complete interviews with service recipients and service between April 1, 2015 and March 31, 2016. As part of their activities, the committee visited 93 programs across the province within foster care, group care, out-of-school care, and day care programs.

Similar to past findings, service recipients and service providers had many positive things to say about their experiences and described outstanding work taking place across the province. I deeply appreciate the comments, insights and recommendations shared with the committee.

I would like to express my thanks to the committee members, both past and present. This committee has facilitated ongoing conversations with children and women who are receiving services, as well as with those delivering services. These voices need to be heard, as their experiences, insights, and stories are an important contribution to the work we do. Lastly, thank you to every child, youth and adult who participated in the interviews, completed a survey and provided visit feedback to the committee.

Honourable Irfan Sabir
Minister of Human Services

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Maxine Fodness, St. Paul (October 3, 2007 – June 30, 2015)

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.

Karen Keech, Canmore (September 1, 2010 – March 31, 2016)

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 1, 2011 – March 31, 2016)

Judy Louis has a Bachelor of Education from the University of Alberta, received her certification for palliative care from Red Deer College and completed numerous post-secondary courses including investigations training, curriculum development and counseling. Ms. Louis has worked with many children and youth in her 30-year career with the Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools system in areas of early childhood development, special education, counselor, community school coordinator, administrative positions and a First Nations, Métis and Inuit coordinator. She is active in her community being involved with the Hobbema Community Cadets and with projects to reduce crime and gang involvement within the Indigenous community.

Kelly Pizzey, Sherwood Park (September 1, 2010 – March 31, 2016)

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.

Tracey Smith, Calgary (April 1, 2006 – March 31, 2016)

Tracey Smith has worked 27 years in a family practice medical clinic and is currently the office manager. She is an active volunteer in her community, specifically as a member of several school councils, a 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 1, 2009 – June 30, 2016)

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 (January 1, 2015 – June 30, 2015)

Bill Syme has a Bachelor of Education and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology degrees from the University of Lethbridge. Mr. Syme retired from a 38 year teaching career in 2015 and 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 which have included various coaching roles for many years, and involvement in outdoor educational activities.

Mindy Wong, Calgary (January 1, 2015 – June 30, 2015)

Mindy Wong holds a Master of Social Work and a Bachelor of Community Rehabilitation. Her work is centered around children and youth with severe emotional and behavioral disorders. She has also worked with parenting adolescents, as well as working 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

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee (SCFRC) visits, interviews and surveys service recipients and service providers in five types of social care facilities: foster homes, group care programs, women's emergency shelters, day care and out-of-school care programs.

During the April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2016, review period, committee members visited a total of 93 facilities in seven Child and Family Services areas within Human Services, including:

- 67 out of 1,758 foster care homes;
- 5 out of 782 day care programs;
- 6 out of 898 out-of-school care programs; and
- 15 out of 216 child and youth group homes.

As part of the reviews, committee members interviewed 102 service recipients (parents, children and youth) and 123 service providers. Observations were made of 59 children and youth who were either too young and/or unable to speak to the committee members. An additional 87 service recipients and 122 service providers completed surveys.

Comments made by service recipients and service providers were overwhelmingly positive, especially given that most of the neutral comments are descriptive in nature. While the number of facilities visited this year was small, the results are consistent with previous years' findings, suggesting that outstanding services are being provided in child care, foster care and group care programs. Negative comments provide opportunities for improvement.

Summary of Responses within Child Care, Foster Homes, & Child and Youth Programs

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Day Care Programs	1,055 (74%)	373 (26%)	5 (<1%)	1,433
Out-of-School Care Programs	761 (70%)	277 (26%)	45 (4%)	1,083
Foster Homes	1,846 (76%)	370 (15%)	203 (9%)	2,419
Child and Youth Programs	1,130 (66%)	472 (27%)	122 (7%)	1,724
TOTAL	11,875 (61%)	6,476 (34%)	859 (5%)	19,210

Child Care
Comments made by recipients of day care and out-of-school care services indicated high levels of satisfaction with the programs. Ninety-eight per cent of comments were either positive or neutral. Staff-child relationships, physical environment of facilities, overall care and daily activities topped the list of positive comments in child care programs. While some parents and/or children reported incidents of bullying at out-of-school care programs, all cases had been resolved at the time of the interviews.

Day care and out-of-school care staff indicated pride in their work, described program strengths, and did not express any areas of dissatisfaction.

Children and Youth Living in Foster Homes and Group Homes

Overall, children and youth living in foster homes and group homes were highly positive in their comments. Ninety-six per cent of comments made by children and youth were classified as either positive or neutral. Children and youth shared heartening stories, talked about day-to-day activities, and described the relationships they share with their caregivers. Whether discussing school, social activities, food, or their overall care and comfort level in the homes, children and youth expressed high levels of satisfaction.

The top two areas of concern mentioned by children and youth were transitions into their placements and case plans. Some children and youth were unable to receive advance notice or pre-placement visits prior to their moves. These children and youth indicated they would appreciate advance notice whenever possible and more information about their future homes. A handful of children and youth indicated they were unaware of their case plans. In some cases, the children and youth may have not understood conversations with their case workers involved case planning.

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 for children and youth included: increased recreation funding and better access to treatment and services (e.g. mental health services, educational, and health services). Suggested improvements to foster care programs included: improvements to foster parent training (less redundancy, accessible training (e.g. on-line options) and specialized training (e.g. autism, addictions)), increased number of respite providers and timely payment. Suggested improvements to group care programs included: reduced staff turnover and improved staffing levels.

Formal Complaints and Investigations

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee received no formal complaints requiring investigation regarding child care programs, women's emergency shelters, foster homes and child and youth care facilities during the 2015/2016 review period and no requests were made by the Minister; therefore, no investigations were conducted.

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 2015/2016 only group homes were visited. No emergency shelters for women were visited in the last fiscal year due to a larger sample of shelters visited in 2014/2015.

At the beginning of the 2015/2016 review period, the committee consisted of eight private citizens from across the province. Members serve on a part-time basis and contribute diverse perspectives due to their varied backgrounds, expertise and work experience. They are appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council and are not employees of the provincial government.

At the beginning of the 2015/2016 review period, the committee consisted of eight private citizens from across the province. Due to the government's review of agencies, boards, and committees in 2015/2016, reappointments were not provided to several members, therefore, the number of active committee members was reduced at the beginning of the fiscal year and diminished over the following months. Four part-time committee members provided services to the end of the 2015/2016 fiscal year, and on March 31, 2016 all member appointments expired.

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 3,600 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 seven Child and Family Services areas were reviewed, including:

- South Region
- Calgary Region
- Central Region
- Edmonton Region

- North Central Region
- Northeast Region
- Northwest Region

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 93 programs were visited from April 2015 to March 2016, including:

- 67 out of 1,758 foster care homes;
- 5 out of 782 day care programs;
- 6 out of 898 out-of-school care programs; and
- 15 out of 216 child and youth group homes.

Please note for the 2015/2016 review period, the committee was unable to visit as many facilities as previous years due to fewer active committee members. The findings in this report provide important information, but the results cannot be generalized to all facilities in the province of Alberta.

Interview Process

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

Where service recipients were children, consent was obtained from their guardians to participate in the interviews and there were no age limitations on participation as long as children were able to understand and respond to questions. As parents were considered to be the service recipients at day care programs, the parents, not the children

participated. 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.

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 were made available to adult service recipients and providers who wished to share their views, but were 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 2015 to March 2016. To develop statistics for this report, all comments were analyzed for common themes. Comments were coded positive to indicate satisfaction, neutral to indicate descriptive information or a perception of adequate service and negative to indicate dissatisfaction.

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.

Further, where respondents provided general information and/or indicated a theme was not applicable, comments were classified as neutral. Positive, neutral and negative comments were counted and grouped by theme and reported as percentages. Therefore, the total number of comments is measured and results are interpreted in terms of overall comments rather than number of respondents. However, when negative comments were analyzed, they were examined to see whether the comments were made by one or more persons. This was more easily done as the number of responses was smaller. When it was possible to determine whether negative comments were made by the same person, the comments were identified in the report by number of persons.

The annual report is distributed to all participating facilities.

COMMITTEE MEMBER HIGHLIGHTS

It is always a privilege to visit foster homes, group homes and child care programs. It is a tremendous joy to witness the commitment demonstrated by foster parents, the child and youth care staff, and the child care staff towards the children and youth in their care. This year, as in years past, we were graciously invited into people's homes and facilities, where we were gifted with stories about personal experiences, children and adults shared their experiences and had the opportunity to have a glimpse into the services being provided. As we have stated before, witnessing the positive impact service providers have in the lives of Alberta children and youth continues to be the best part of our role.

Child Intervention

Children and youth residing in foster homes and child and youth care facilities provided encouraging stories of resilience, insight, and hope. Their wishes, opinions and suggestions are instructive for all of us. Discussions with caregivers (e.g. foster parents and group home staff) were also extremely informative, highlighting successes and noting areas for improvement.

Promising Practices

- Almost all of the children and youth described nurturing and caring relationships with the foster families and group home staff, and reported feeling safe, well cared for and a sense of belonging in the homes. The quality of relationships within foster care and group care appeared to be key in assisting children and youth to move forward.
- Foster parents appreciated the Success in School program, as it made them feel they were part of the team.
- 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.
- Group home staff reported high satisfaction with the training provided.
- Foster parents residing in regions where online foster care courses are available commented their appreciation for flexible training options.

Areas for Improvement

- Improve accessibility of training, as several foster parents expressed concern that courses were full for six months to a year.
    - Offer new delivery methods of training (e.g., on-line, DVDs) to alleviate challenges posed (e.g., child care, distance).
    - Take the foster parents' education, experience and employment/vocation into account when assessing training needs. Give credit where credit is due.

- Provide child care for mandatory training.
- The requirement to complete so much training within the first year was reported to be overwhelming for a few new foster parents.
- Remove redundancy in foster parent training across modules.
- Both group home staff and foster parents expressed a desire for additional background information on the children in their care, as well as up-to-date case plans.
- Timely financial reimbursement for foster parents is not consistent within and between regions. This places additional burdens on foster families. Creating a more efficient system is recommended.
- Targeted respite home recruitment for high needs children was suggested by several foster parents.
- The rules for children in care (and their interpretation) can separate them from activities enjoyed by other foster children and natural children in the home (e.g., trampoline, sleep-overs, horseback riding). Provincial leadership is needed to clarify provincial policy.
- Foster parents and child and youth care workers should encourage children and youth to participate in meal preparation. This is considered an opportunity to develop life skills and can help prepare children and youth for adulthood.
- Create incentives for child and youth workers to enter and remain in the child and youth care sector.
- When making decisions, staff should consider the insights and experiences foster parents and child and youth care workers have about the children and youth in their care. These caregivers know the children and youth in their care and assist them in processing issues, experiences and decisions. Their insights, awareness and experiences with children and youth are valuable when making decisions and implementing said decisions.
- Priorize communication with foster parents and child and youth care workers. Timely responses and ongoing communication improve services to children and youth.
- Understand the value in retaining foster homes, retaining relationships between caregivers and children and youth in the home, and making "big picture" gains by employing short-term investments into these homes when exceptional circumstances occur.

Child Care

Our visits to eleven child care programs provided us with an opportunity to observe and hear about the services children receive while attending day cares and out-of-school care programs. It is always enjoyable to talk with children in the out-of-school care programs, their parents and staff. Some staff expressed appreciation of receiving a facility overview of findings and indicated they use them to improve their programs.

Promising Practices
- We were impressed with improved awareness about bullying and the low number of bullying incidents reported in out-of-school care.

- 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 positive.

Areas for Improvement

- Low-income families may not have as many choices of day care as families with more resources.
- Any reductions in funding have serious consequences on programming.
- Programs take the loss when subsidies to parents are declined.
- Subsidy cut-offs for out-of-school care are reported by the child care sector as being too low.
- Service providers indicate the certification process for staff takes too long.
- Service providers report that the certification policies are too restrictive (e.g., they do not take into account education and experience that directors believe they should).

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 who 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 2015 to March 2016 review period; the committee visited five licensed day care programs in four regions across the province. Figure 1 shows the number of day cares visited compared to the total number of programs in each region at the end of the review period. As stated earlier, the number of programs visited this year was very small; therefore, results cannot be generalized to the broader program area.

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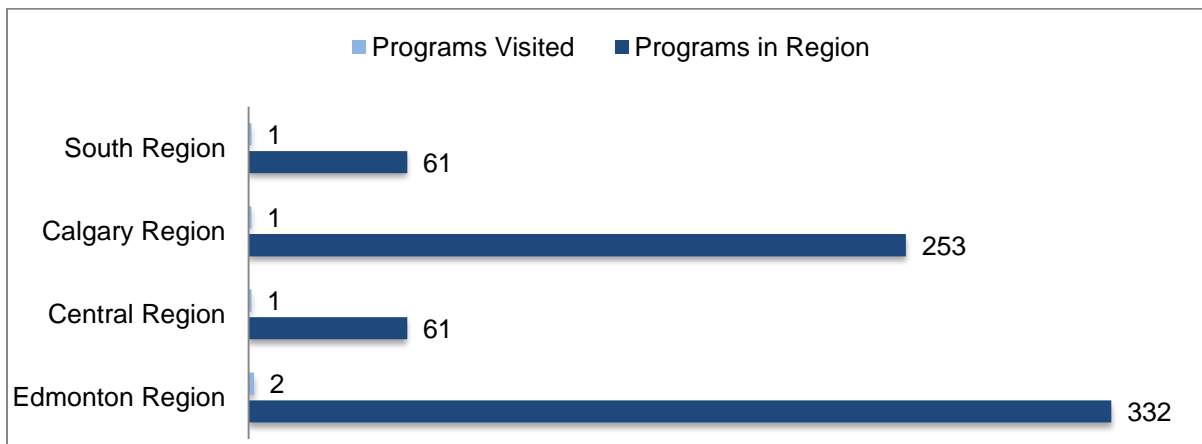
Highlights of Visits to Day Care Programs

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. Five parents were interviewed and 52 parents completed surveys. Some of the parents participated in interviews as well as completed the surveys. Due to the young ages of the children in the day care programs, children were not interviewed.

Comments made by parents 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 providers' comments are discussed separately.

Day Care Themes

Parents reported 840 comments about the care their children receive at day care. Most of the parent's comments expressed satisfaction with services provided: 567 were positive (68%), 271 were neutral (32%) and two were negative (<1%). The breakdown of parent comments relating to the eight day care themes is shown in Figure 2.

<p style="text-align: center; color: #9e3a26;">Figure 2: Parent Responses – Themes at Day Care Programs</p>

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Daily Activities	52 (91%)	5 (9%)	0 (0%)	57
Staff-Child Relationships	54 (95%)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)	57
Communication with Staff	102 (93%)	8 (7%)	0 (0%)	110
Parent or Guardian Involvement	42 (82%)	8 (16%)	1 (2%)	51
Meals and/or Snacks	119 (85%)	21 (15%)	1 (<1%)	141
Physical Environment	94 (94%)	6 (6%)	0 (0%)	100
Rules and Regulations	50 (91%)	5 (9%)	0 (0%)	55
Overall Feedback	54 (95%)	3 (5%)	0 (0%)	57
TOTAL	567 (68%)	271 (32%)	2 (<1%)	840

Choice of Day Care

Parents were asked their reasons for choosing their current day care program. Parents made a total of 157 comments when answering this question. The foremost reasons for choosing a specific program included location (27%), reputation (15%), program offered (13%), hours of operation (11%), and accreditation (9%). The remaining 25% of comments referred to reasons such as personal considerations, cost, being the only option available, transportation and support for special needs children. Choice of day care was not included in Figure 2 because the responses cannot be categorized as positive or negative.

Daily Activities

Ninety-one per cent of comments about daily activities offered in day cares were positive. Examples of positive comments included: "I like the variety of activities they have," "kids go on nature walks," "there is play time, craft time, outside time, and a few field trips per year," [I'm] impressed by what the kids do throughout the day." Nine per cent of comments were neutral where parents rated the daily activities as adequate. No negative comments were made.

Staff-Child Relationships

Parents were highly positive about the relationships between their children and the staff. Ninety-five per cent of comments about staff-child relationships were positive. Parents reported approval of the way staff interacted with their children and believed their children were treated well (e.g., "It is great to see my child excited to see the child care providers," "my [son/daughter] loves the staff," "everybody is very nice").

Five per cent of comments were neutral, where three parents described staff-child interactions as adequate. Two of these parents did not comment further, but one stated, "my child has been hurt several times and not much is done about it". No negative comments were made.

Communication with Staff

Comments about communication between parents and staff were either positive (93%) or neutral (7%). Parents indicated information sharing between parents and staff was good. They also referred to staff as responsive and reported being kept informed of any incidents or concerns (e.g., "the staff is easy to talk to," "daily information cards are useful," "[staff] keep us updated at all times," straight forward communication"). No negative comments were made.

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Parents were asked to comment on opportunities to be involved in the day care program. In response, 82% of comments were positive, 16% of comments were neutral and two per cent were negative. Most parents talked about ample or adequate opportunities to be involved in the program (e.g., "monthly family events," "they are very welcoming and open to visits," "lots of celebrations for parents to be involved in"). One parent commented that opportunities in his/her program was poor, but did not provide further comment.

Meals and/or Snacks

While it is mandatory for day care programs to ensure children have meals and/or snacks, it is the choice of the program as to whether or not they provide meals or snacks, or require parents to provide them. Meals and/or snacks are an important part of child care programs. Eighty-five per cent of comments from parents regarding the meals and snacks provided in day cares expressed satisfaction with the quality, variety and quantity provided (e.g., "food quality is amazing, nutritious and interesting…more exciting than at home," "like quality, quantity and variety of food provided…if my child does not like something, they provide a substitute," "Friday lunches are delicious").

Neutral comments (15%) included parents who described the food quality, quantity and variety as adequate. One negative comment (<1%) was expressed, stating that meals were initially provided in the program, but had been discontinued. Coupled with an increase in fees, the parent was disappointed.

Physical Environment

All of the comments about the overall physical environment of the day care were either positive (94%) or neutral (6%). Parents were highly positive about the environments, maintenance, play space, and equipment and toys (e.g., "awesome indoor play room and gym," "brand new, and clean," "it's very clean"). No negative comments were made.

Rules and Regulations

Most of the parents provided positive (91%) responses when asked about the rules and regulations in the day care programs (e.g., "I know that they make children say sorry to others if they have done something wrong," "excellent," "I walked in on the director having to discipline my child and it was textbook respectful and firm"). One parent also commented on the consistent application of the rules and consequences. The remaining nine per cent of comments were neutral, indicating that the security and discipline measures were adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Overall Feedback

When asked to comment on the overall quality of care their children receive at their day care programs, parents were highly positive. Ninety-five per cent of comments were positive and five per cent of comments were neutral. No negative comments were heard. Parents emphasized the quality of staff and the high levels of happiness their

children displayed attending the programs (e.g., "excellent…I wouldn't switch childcare," "this centre is 100% inclusion," "love this day care," "quality of care is superior," "[staff] are very hard working persons and gentle to the children").

Five-Year Trend

To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last five 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, 2016. 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 five years. In the last two years, more descriptive comments were captured during the interviews; therefore, the number of neutral comments has increased accordingly. While this reduces the percentage of positive comments, it must be recognized that the majority of neutral comments are positive descriptors.

Figure 3: Five-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
2015-2016	567 (68%)	271 (32%)	2 (<1%)	840
TOTAL	19,294 (87%)	2,603 (12%)	169 (1%)	22,066

Service Providers' Comments

Day care staff were given the opportunity to comment on the services they provide. The committee spoke with six staff in five day cares. In addition, 38 staff completed surveys. Day care owner/operators and managers also participated in interviews, and 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
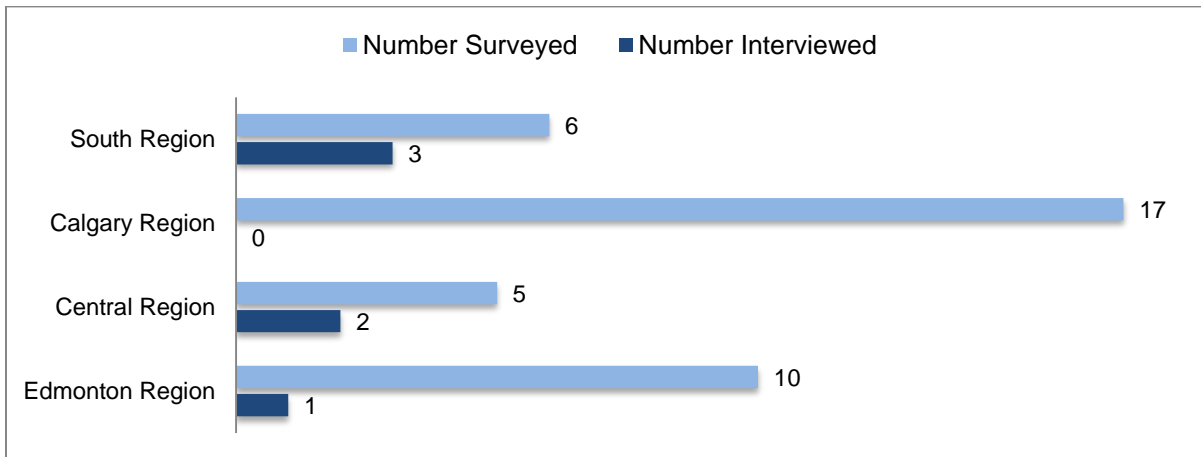
The majority of comments made by service providers reflected satisfaction with the services they provide. Of the 593 comments made by staff, 488 were positive (82%), 102 were neutral (17%) and three were negative (<1%). The main topics of discussion are listed below.

Physical Environment
All of the comments made by staff regarding the physical environments of their programs were either positive (84%) or neutral (16%). Staff indicated the programs were well designed for the children and were highly satisfied with the overall layouts. No negative comments were made.

Meals and/or Snacks
Staff had many positive things to say about the meals and/or snacks provided at their day cares. Eighty five per cent of comments described the food as being high quality, varied and of sufficient amount. 15% of comments reported the quality, quantity and variety of the food was adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Daily Activities
Staff described the daily activities provided to children in their day care programs as positive (92%) or adequate (8%). No negative comments were heard.

Staff-Child Relationships
Ninety-five per cent of staff comments regarding their relationships with the children in the programs were positive. Two staff (5% of comments) indicated staff-child relationships were adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations
One hundred per cent of staff comments about the rules and regulations within the day care programs were positive. Staff spoke about the ways in which they assist children to work out solutions to problems and disagreements. No neutral or negative comments were made.

Overall Feedback from Staff
Almost all of the feedback from staff regarding the overall services and care provided to the children in their day care programs was positive (98%). Staff talked about good staff to child ratios, respect for cultural diversity, safe facilities, parental involvement and

medications being kept secure. No neutral comments were made. Of the two per cent of negative comments heard, two comments indicated parents should be better encouraged to spend time at the program and one comment suggested improvement to the security of medications.

### *Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operators*
When managers, owners and operators were asked to comment on their programs, all responses were positive and reflected a high level of satisfaction in their programs and services. Managers, owners and operators highlighted the same aspects as their staff (e.g. ratios, cultural diversity, safety, parental involvement, medications). They also described accepting children with disabilities, having processes for addressing concerns, providing staff with written materials and regular performance feedback, how their day cares were participating in the accreditation program and the ways in which staff are informed of the accreditation program. No negative comments were made.

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 six licensed out-of-school care programs in five regions across the province during the April 2015 to March 2016 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. As the number of programs visited this year was very small, results cannot be generalized to the broader program area.

Figure 5: Total Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs versus Total # of Programs
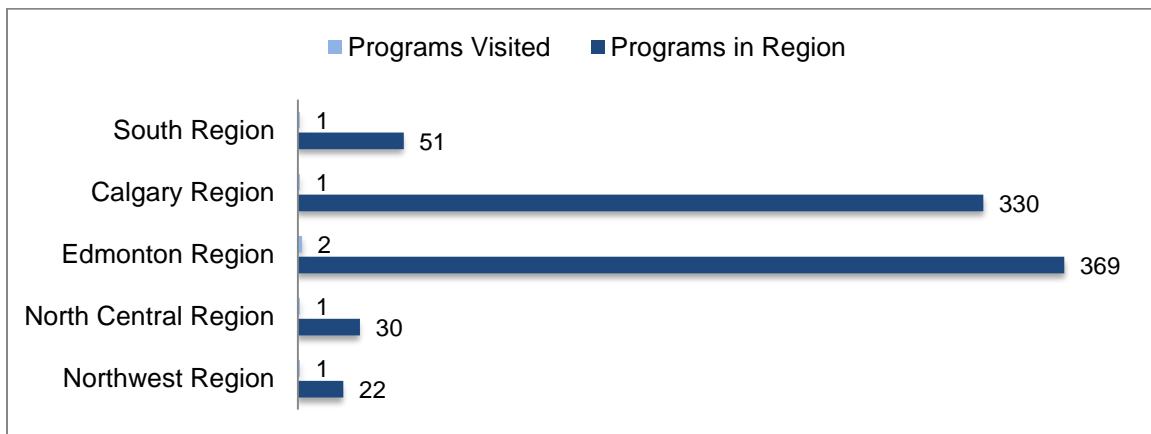
Highlights of Visits to Out-of-School Care Programs

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. Three parents were interviewed and 35 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. 19 children participated in interviews.

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

Out-of-School Care Themes
Committee members reported 759 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; 517 (68%) comments were positive, 209 (28%) were neutral, and 33 (4%) were negative. The breakdown of parents and children's comments, relating to out-of-school care themes, is shown in Figure 6.

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

	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Total
Daily Activities	73 (86%)	8 (9%)	4 (5%)	85
Staff-Child Relationships	71 (94%)	4 (5%)	1 (1%)	76
Communication with Staff	54 (89%)	7 (11%)	0 (0%)	61
Parent or Guardian Involvement	21 (60%)	8 (23%)	6 (17%)	35
Meals and/or Snacks	85 (75%)	26 (23%)	2 (2%)	113
Physical Environment	57 (90%)	6 (10%)	0 (0%)	63
Rules and Regulations	108 (84%)	5 (4%)	16 (12%)	129
Overall Feedback	48 (86%)	4 (7%)	4 (7%)	56
TOTAL	517 (68%)	209 (28%)	33 (4%)	759

Choice of Out-of-School Care Program
When asked what reasons parents use in selecting out-of-school programs for their children, parents reported location (23%), hours of operation (17%), personal considerations (11%), transportation (11%), program offered (10%) and reputation (10%) as their top considerations when choosing a program. The remaining 18% of comments referred to factors such as accreditation, cost, only option available and supports for special needs children. 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
Questions about daily activities in the out-of-school care programs evoked many positive comments (86%). Parents stated they were pleased with the activities provided, their children were involved in the overall planning of events and program activities, and their children were able to choose the activities they wished to be part of (e.g. "my child loves the activities here," "the kids enjoy helping out," "I like to play with the Barbie's," "I like Lego and army guys and dinosaurs," "yes, we can choose activities we want to do"). Nine per cent of comments reported daily activities as adequate.

Negative comments (5%) included three comments from parents that their children were not part of planning the activities (or parents were unaware if their children assisted in the planning) and one comment from a child who stated he/she was not given an opportunity to choose an activity ("we can't choose crafts and sometimes we can't do any because they have to follow through on their planning").

Staff-Child Relationships

All but one comment regarding the relationships between staff and children were either positive (94%) or neutral (5%). Parents expressed satisfaction with the types of interactions between the staff and children (e.g., "excellent," "the entire staff is caring," "good," "my child loves to talk to me about his/her teachers and the activities they did during the day"). Children said they liked coming to the program and described feeling safe and comfortable (e.g., "I like the teachers," "I hate missing school because I like coming here"). One negative comment (1%) suggested that staff seemed disengaged and sometimes disregarded his/her child. Any matter that required follow-up was forwarded to the appropriate office for resolution.

Communication with Staff

While discussing communication with staff, parents made only positive (89%) and neutral (11%) comments. 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., "amazing ladies, very approachable," "excellent," "even if it is late…[the staff] will always have time if you need to chat with them or ask them questions"). No negative comments were made.

Opportunity for Parent or Guardian Involvement

Most parents reported they had either good (60%) or adequate (23%) opportunities to be involved in the out-of-school care program (e.g., "yes, frequently [there is opportunity for parental involvement]," "parent volunteer poster visible"). Six comments were negative (17%), 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 (e.g., "I work full-time so can't be involved," "I am usually working," "not sure," "not that I remember hearing about," "have not been notified").

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, it is the choice of the program to provide meals or snacks or to require parents to provide them. When asked about meals and snacks provided in out-of-school care programs, the majority of parents and children were positive (75%) or adequate (23%). Comments included: "I like the food and get enough," "I like oatmeal," "very healthy and good variety"). Parents and children spoke of good quality, quantity and variety. Neutral comments (23%) indicated that parents and children thought the quality and quantity of meals and snacks was adequate. Two negative comments (2%) were made. One parent recommended, "less sugar based snacks," and suggested when sugar was served one day, it wasn't followed by a sugary snack the next day.

Physical Environment

Ninety per cent of parents reported being pleased with the physical environments of the out-of-school care programs. Parents highlighted the overall space, play areas, equipment, toys and maintenance of the facility (e.g., "my child loves the gym and being able to go outside too," "new paint, floors, toys," "lots of room for different activities"). Neutral comments (10%) referred to comments about the adequacy of the overall environment and play areas. No negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations

Positive comments (84%) were heard from parents and children when asked about the rules and regulations in the out-of-school care programs. Children stated they knew the rules and believed they were fair (e.g., "The rules are fair," "no throwing toys," "if you

bully someone, you don't just get to walk away"). Parents reported being in agreement with the forms of child guidance used (e.g., "the kids are disciplined and well behaved"). Four per cent of comments were neutral and 12% were negative, where parents said the rules and their application were adequate. One comment suggested the rules could be better enforced ("a few children I feel get away with being quite rude and physical").

In addition to talking about rules, children and parents were also asked about bullying. Many parents reported their children had never experienced bullying within the programs and seven parents who said their children were bullied, felt that the matters were appropriately addressed and resolved by the program staff. Negative comments comprised 12% of comments. One comment suggested the rules could be better enforced ("a few children I feel get away with being quite rude and physical"). The rest of the negative comments included eight parents who stated their child had experienced bullying and seven parent comments that their child had somehow been involved in a bullying incident.

Overall Feedback
When given the opportunity to comment on the overall quality of care children receive at the out-of-school care programs, 86 per cent of responses were positive. Parents expressed pleasure with the care their children received, and children reported they liked their programs and did not want anything to change (e.g. "I'd give this place 10 out of 10," "it's fun," "the teacher is the best and no I wouldn't change anything," "I like that I have lots of friends and play with them"). Four parents made neutral comments (7%) and described the overall quality of care as adequate. Negative comments (7%) included one parent who stated staff seem to struggle handling some of the kids, and three children who made suggestions for changes to their respective programs (e.g. "I would like more arts and crafts," "I wish the kinders would quit wrecking stuff, especially the Barbie's," "I would change some of the centres into writing and reading centres").

Five Year Trend
To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last five 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, 2016. Positive and neutral comments dominate the feedback provided by parents regarding the programs their children attend.
In the last two years, more descriptive comments were heard during the interviews, increasing the number of neutral comments captured.

Figure 7: Five-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
2015-2016	517 (68%)	209 (28%)	33 (4%)	759

TOTAL	11,161 (86%)	1,171 (9%)	690 (5%)	13,022

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 two staff in six out-of-school care programs. In addition, 16 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
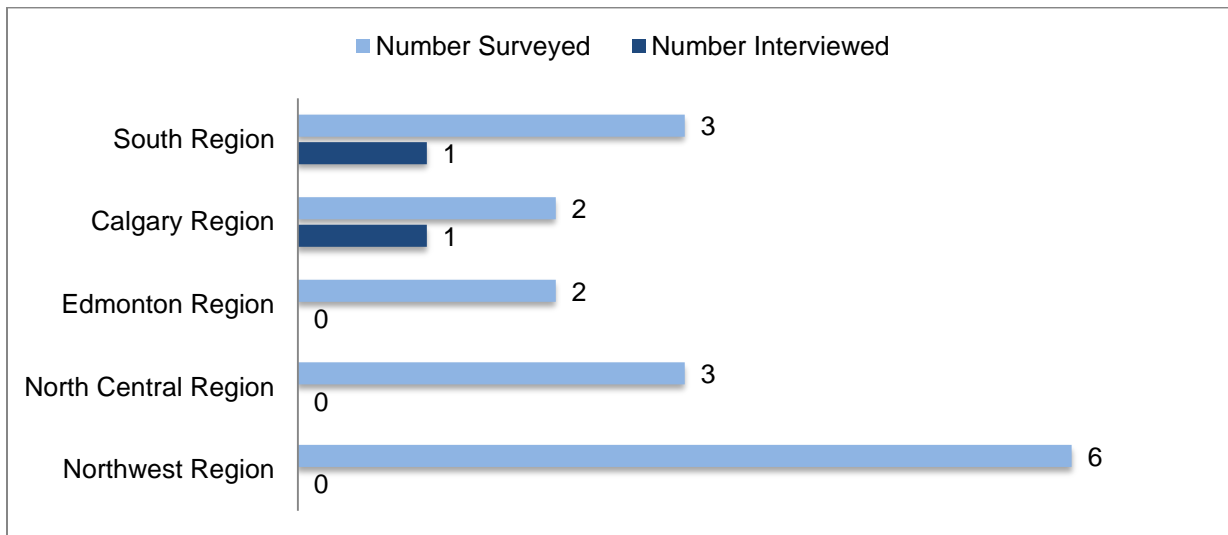
Service providers' comments expressed satisfaction with the services they provided: 517 comments (68%) were positive, 209 (28%) were neutral and the remaining 33 comments were negative (4%).

Physical Environment
Eighty-four per cent of comments about the physical layout and children's play spaces in out-of-school care programs were positive. Sixteen per cent of staff comments were neutral, indicating that the layout and design of the space were adequate. No negative comments were heard.

Meals and/or Snacks
Questions about meals and snacks evoked many positive comments (92%) from staff. Staff indicated they liked the meals and/or snacks provided by the out-of-school programs and highlighted the quality, variety and quantity of food. Some staff felt that the meals and/or snacks were adequate in quality and quantity (8% of comments). No negative comments were heard.

Daily Activities
All of the comments made by staff regarding daily activities were positive. Staff expressed satisfaction in the quality and variety of activities and events within the programs. No neutral or negative comments were heard.

Staff-Child Relationships
Staff reported having very positive relationships with the children in their care. Only one comment indicated the staff-child relationships were adequate. Staff listed the types of child guidance approaches used, including redirecting the children, modeling respectful interactions and encouraging respectful interactions between children. There was one neutral comment and no negative comments were heard.

Rules and Regulations
One hundred per cent of staff comments about the rules and regulations in the out-of-school care programs were positive. Staff described the ways they assist children in working out solutions with each other and how rules are consistently applied. No neutral or negative comments were heard.

Overall Feedback from Staff
When asked about the overall services and care they provide to the children in out-of-school care programs, 95 per cent of comments were positive. Staff reported the staff-child ratios were appropriate, medications were kept secure, cultural diversities were respected, and there was a policy in place for children to use prescribed medication. No neutral comments were heard. Three negative comments were made, indicating the staff was unaware if there was a policy in place for children to self-medicate.

Overall Feedback from Managers/Owners/Operator
Feedback from managers, owners and operators about the services provided within their out-of-school care programs reflected pride in their programs. Eighty-two per cent of comments were positive, referring to aspects such as respecting diversity; 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; appropriate staff-child ratios; review of rules and regulations; and keeping staff informed of the pre-accreditation program. Neutral comments (8%) 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 whether some programs use staff from an adjoining day care program.

The top two challenges raised among mangers, owners and operators included the failure to obtain parental consent for a child to leave the program 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 actually problematic for these programs.
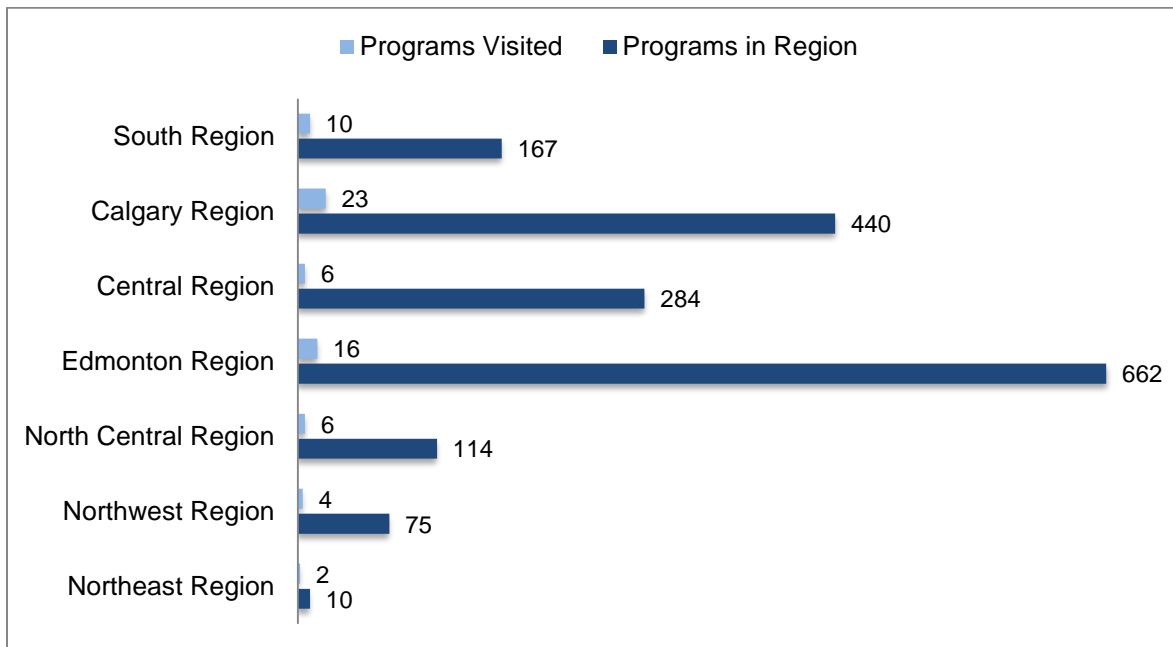
FOSTER HOMES

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 67 foster homes in all seven regions across the province during the April 2015 to March 2016 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: Total 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 123 children residing in the 67 foster homes visited, 52 children and youth participated in interviews (42%). In addition, committee members observed 55 children who were pre-verbal and/or non-verbal (45%).   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 816 comments from foster children regarding the care they receive in their foster homes. In general, children and youth expressed satisfaction with the care provided: 648 (79%) were positive, 155 (19%) were neutral and 13 (2%) 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	104 (97%)	1 (1%)	2 (2%)	107
Summer Break	40 (75%)	13 (25%)	0 (0%)	53
Social Activities	213 (98%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)	217
Foster Parent-Child Relationships	127 (61%)	77 (37%)	3 (2%)	207
Rules	88 (58%)	64 (42%)	0 (0%)	152
Overall Care and Comfort Level	76 (95%)	0 (0%)	4 (5%)	80
TOTAL	648 (79%)	155 (19%)	13 (2%)	816

Education

When children and youth were asked about school and educational pursuits, 97 per cent of their comments were positive. They talked about the types of schools they attended, indicated they liked school, had plans for post-secondary education and graduating high school. There was one neutral comment (1%) from a youth who stated he/she was employed part-time. Two negative comments (2%) were made. One youth reported "not really" liking school and one youth stated he/she was unaware of the Advancing Futures Bursary program (a financial program to assist former in-care youth in pursuing education). Committee members provided information on the Bursary program.

Summer Break

All of the children and youth who had been in their current placement over the summer months described vacations with their foster families, spending time with natural family members, attending summer camps and going on day trips (e.g., "I went on a lot of camping trips," "we went to the big mall, with my real mom and dad," "we went to a big BBQ party," "we went camping"). Neutral comments (25%) came from children who

reported they had not lived in their current foster homes during the summer months. No negative comments were heard.

Social Activities

The children and youth interviewed expressed high levels of satisfaction with their social activities (98%). Participating in unstructured activities (e.g., playing, going shopping, watching movies, "hanging out"); doing activities together as a foster family (e.g., "we swim and bike ride together to the parks," "our family goes for dinner," "we play games, watch a family movie and go to the lake"); receiving an allowance; having friends to play with; unstructured and structured sports activities (e.g., diving, swimming, biking, basketball); reading; and Indigenous cultural events/activities (e.g., dancing, pow-wows, singing) topped the list of things they enjoyed. No neutral comments were made.

The remaining two per cent of comments were negative and included three children who reported not receiving a regular allowance and one child who stated he/she did not have any friends. While the child or youth stated he/she had no friends, the child or youth described being very active with his/her foster family members and siblings. Committee members confirmed the foster parents were saving the children's allowances and providing funds when appropriate.

Foster Parent-Child Relationships

Children and youth enjoyed talking about their relationships with their foster parents. Sixty-one per cent of comments referred to having good relationships with foster mothers and foster fathers and feeling attached to them as family. Other comments described having good amounts of time together with foster parents, reporting a strong sense of belonging in the home, trusting one's foster parents and feeling respected.

Among neutral comments (37%), children and youth referred to the people in their lives they could speak to if they had a problem (e.g., foster mother, foster father, caseworker, teacher, school counsellor, natural family, others). Of note, speaking to one's "foster mother" and "foster father" were the top two categories of people children and youth indicated they would speak to if they had a problem or needed to talk to someone (73% of responses in this category).

Two per cent of comments were negative. One youth reported having a poor relationship with the foster mother and father and indicated a poor sense of belonging (the youth indicated he/she had recently lost a natural parent and also said "[if I could live anywhere I wanted] I would like to stay here").

Rules

All of the comments about the rules in the homes of the children and youth were positive (58%) or neutral (42%). Children and youth described knowing the rules and believed the rules were fair. Neutral comments described the kinds of consequences (e.g., privileges revoked, having a talk, time-outs) experienced for disobeying rules. No negative comments were made.

Overall Care and Comfort Level

When given the opportunity to talk about their overall care and comfort level in their foster homes, 95% of comments were highly positive. Children and youth reported high levels of comfort, said they were treated fairly and felt safe (e.g. "I am treated good," "I am treated with respect," "10 out of 10").   A few children and youth who had experienced bullying incidents (either in the home or at school) stated they reported the

incidents and/or indicated the matters were appropriately resolved. No neutral comments were made.

Four negative comments (5%) were made, and 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 got bullied at school and I didn't tell anyone," "I've been bullied…I didn't tell anyone, but it stopped," "I was bullied at school, but didn't tell anyone. It stopped when the bully moved away"). None of these matters required follow-up.

Treatment

Committee members reported 552 comments from foster children about the treatment they received in foster homes. Children made 348 (63%) positive comments, 169 (31%) neutral comments and 35 (6%) 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	75 (58%)	39 (30%)	15 (12%)	129
Medical/Dental Needs	150 (71%)	59 (28%)	1 (1%)	210
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	88 (51%)	71 (42%)	12 (7%)	171
Keepsakes	35 (83%)	0 (0%)	7 (17%)	42
TOTAL	348 (63%)	169 (31%)	35 (6%)	552

Transition

Children and youth were asked about their experiences moving into their current foster homes and were given an opportunity to share their current feelings about their placements. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss transitions as it may be difficult or troubling for the child or youth, this was respected.

Fifty-eight per cent of comments were positive where children and youth indicated 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 75 positive comments, 37 comments indicated children and youth were very happy in their current foster homes (e.g., "I am happy and I feel awesome living here").

Neutral comments (30%) referred to references to previous living arrangements and three 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 (12%) were made by children and youth who reported they felt scared at the time of the move, hadn't received advance notice or a pre-placement visit, were not supported during the move or felt sad (e.g., "I was very scared and emotional…I don't like being put in different situations," "I wasn't told," "was kicked out [of SIL] and homeless for a week or two," "there was a car crash [when travelling to the foster home]" "the driver told us we were moving here. I was shy"). One participant stated that although happy in the foster home, and despite twice a week visits, he/she still misses his/her siblings.

Medical/Dental Needs
Questions about medical and dental needs evoked many positive (71%) and neutral (28%) comments. Positive comments referred to 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. One comment was negative (1%), where a youth stated "I look after myself when I am sick". This youth also stated that he/she was comfortable in the home, needs were being met and he/she enjoyed living there.

Contact with Natural Family
Children and youth were given the opportunity to talk about their relationships and contact with natural family members. When caseworkers and/or caregivers advised not to discuss natural family because it might be a potentially difficult or traumatic for the child or youth, this was respected. 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 appropriate given individual circumstances.

Most 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 described being happy with their current level of contact. Many children and youth identified that they maintained contact with parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts/uncles and cousins. Children also commented on how frequently they saw their family members (e.g., daily, weekly, bi-weekly and monthly). In two cases, children reported having no contact with natural family. 13 comments were heard where children reported they would like to have more contact with specific family members. Any matters that required follow-up were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for resolution.

Case Plans
Discussions about case plans provided children and youth an opportunity to talk about plans for their futures. Most of the comments were positive (51%) or neutral (42%). Several children and youth stated they were aware of their case plans, were well supported, and had input into the plans. Neutral comments described the frequency of contact with their caseworkers and case plan conversations.

Children and youth made 12 negative comments (7%). At least five of those comments were from children who were either too young and/or had cognitive barriers that prevented them from comprehending 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) and one child or youth commented that he/she needed better support to reach intended goals.

Keepsakes

When asked whether children and youth had keepsakes, 83 per cent of comments were positive. Children and youth stated they had items such as photographs, toys, jewelry and/or other special objects (e.g., "I have stuffies," "I have a doll, that my [natural] mom gave me," "photo album"). There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (17%) referred to seven children and youth who did not report having any keepsakes.

Accommodation

Committee members heard 284 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: 255 comments were positive (90%), 25 were neutral (9%) and four were negative (1%). 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	160 (98%)	0 (0%)	4 (2%)	164
Physical Environment	95 (79%)	25 (21 %)	0 (0%)	120
TOTAL	255 (90%)	25 (9%)	4 (1%)	284

Meals

Almost all of the feedback about meals in the foster homes was positive (98%). Children reported they really liked the food, it was of good quality, and there was plenty to eat (e.g., "I like the food 'cause it's good, I get lots to eat and I get snacks after school and bedtime," "awesome," "I cook with my [foster] mom. We make granola and banana bread"). Thirty of the children and youth reported they assisted in preparing meals. No neutral comments were heard. Two per cent of comments were negative, as four 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

When asked about their rooms, chores they were responsible for, and whether they would make any changes to their current environment, 79 per cent of comments were positive. Children and youth indicated they liked their rooms, their homes and participated in chores (e.g., "I share a bunk bed. I like that it is not too big or not too small," "I'm gonna get my own room," "we have a bedroom upstairs and have lots of room"). Neutral comments (21%) indicated that 19 homes had pets, two children and youth wanted more familial visits, two children and youth said they wanted like their siblings to live in their foster homes and the others stated, "I would like a pet" and "I would like to play my game more". No negative comments were heard.

Five-Year Trend

To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last five years, 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, 2016.   Findings have remained fairly consistent over the last five years.

Figure 13: Five-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
2015-2016	1,251 (76%)	349 (21%)	52 (3%)	1,652
TOTAL	13,901 (76%)	3,558 (19%)	879 (5%)	18,338

Foster Parents' Comments

As part of the Committee's visits, foster parents were also interviewed and given 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. Members spoke with 90 foster parents in 67 foster homes. Overall, the majority of foster parents' comments expressed satisfaction: 595 comments were positive (77%), 21 were neutral (3%) and the remaining 151 comments were negative (20%).

Services

Eighty-nine per cent of comments from foster parents regarding access to services for the children and youth residing in their homes were positive. In addition to good access to services, foster parents described good working relationships with health, educational, dental, optometry and mental health professionals who were treating the children and youth. They spoke about the ease of accessing recreation funds and felt the amounts were appropriate. Some foster parents reported referrals for treatment services were provided when necessary, and six foster parents indicated access to mental health services was good.

In neutral comments (2%), a few foster parents stated that recreation amounts were adequate. Comments also described health, mental health, and educational professionals as adequate. Areas for improvement were suggested in 10% of comments. Some foster parents reported recreation funds did not cover actual costs for some of the activities the children and youth enjoyed. A few foster parents discussed experiencing gaps in the educational system for children with special needs. Some parents reported difficulty accessing family doctors and mental health services for the children and youth in their care.

Agency Support

When asked about the support and services provided by foster care agencies, 85 per cent of comments were positive. Good relationships with support workers, satisfaction

with the foster parent training, accessibility to training, good overall service and respite resources were areas of high satisfaction among foster parents. Four neutral comments (8%) were made where two parents indicated their relationships with their support workers were adequate; one comment was made indicating the foster parent training was adequate; and one comment stated respite resources were adequate. Three negative comments (6%) referred to the lack of timely payment by the agencies and the need to improve foster parent training (remove redundancy).

Support from the Ministry

Foster parents had many positive things to say about Ministry support. Positive comments (65%) highlighted good relationships with support workers, satisfaction with foster parent training, and appreciation for the caseworkers overseeing the care of children and youth in their homes. Respite resources, overall ministerial support, access to training and timely responses to questions and requests were also mentioned by foster parents as being positive. In neutral comments (3%), foster parents described relationships with caseworkers, ministry support workers, timely payment, foster parent training and "feeling part of the team" as adequate.

Thirty-two per cent of foster parent responses were negative and highlighted dissatisfaction with: lack of respite; ministry training (e.g., redundant content, lack of relevancy for specialized foster parents, lack of specialized training, delivery of training is dull); 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 on-line options); poor relationships with some caseworkers; lack of timely payment, not feeling part of the team; lack of background information on the children placed in their care; and lack of consistency in interpreting and applying regional/provincial policies.

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 15 facilities between April 2015 and March 2016. 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
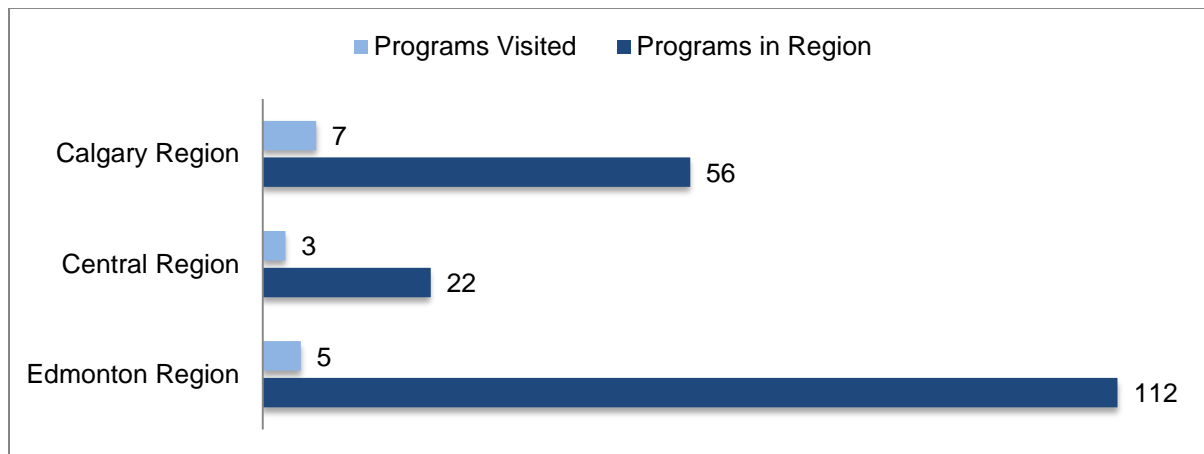
Highlights of Visits to Child and Youth Programs

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. Interviews were conducted with 23 children and youth from 15 programs. Another four children and youth were observed during the committee's visits.

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

Care
Committee members reported 418 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: 332 comments (79%) were positive, 70 comments (17%) were neutral and 16 comments (4%) 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	41 (96%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	43
Summer Break	19 (79%)	5 (21%)	0 (0%)	24
Social Activities	119 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	119
Staff-Child/Youth Relationships	74 (66%)	35 (31%)	3 (3%)	112
Rules	39 (57%)	27 (39%)	3 (4%)	69
Overall Care and Comfort Level	40 (78%)	2 (4%)	9 (18%)	51
TOTAL	332 (79%)	70 (17%)	16 (4%)	418

Education
All but two comments about children and youth's educational experiences were positive (96%). Children and youth described the schools they attended (e.g., public, private), indicated they liked school, and talked about their plans for the future (e.g. trade work, post-secondary schooling, military enrollment). One neutral comment (2%) referred to a child or youth who was awaiting an educational assessment/placement. One negative comment (2%) referred to a child or youth who had been expelled.

Summer Break
The majority of children and youth made positive comments (79%) about their summer breaks and activities. Some children and youth described vacations with their facilities, day trips with program staff, attending summer camps (e.g., "I went camping with the workers from here", "we went to a pow-wow and a Sundance ceremony with our whole family [siblings]," "I went to summer camps," "I play basketball or soccer with my friends or sometimes we go to the movies" and vacationing with natural family. Neutral comments (21%) included five 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
One hundred per cent of comments about social activities were positive. In addition to talking about receiving allowances and having friends, children and youth listed a number of social activities in which they participated. Involvement in unstructured activities (e.g., hanging out with friends, playing on the computer, watching television), activities with facility staff (e.g., shopping, eating out, sports outings, library visits), facility recreation programs (e.g., zoo, parks, swimming, movies), indigenous or cultural activities/events and playing sports were highlighted by the children and youth. No neutral or negative comments were made.

Staff-Child/Youth Relationships
Children and youth were given an opportunity to talk about their relationships with program staff. In response, children and youth made many positive (66%) and neutral (31%) comments. Positive comments indicated good relationships with child and youth care staff, where children and youth describe feeling comfortable approaching staff for

support and feeling respected, attached to and trusting of staff members. Children and youth also stated they enjoy spending time with staff and are personally invested in the relationships Comments included: "I feel respected. We all get along and feel safe," "I kind of feel I belong here," "I trust [staff]," " staff are good, " "staff treats us well," "the staff is really good."

In neutral comments, four children and youth indicated their relationships with staff were adequate, two additional comments were made that the children/youth's attachment to staff was adequate. In other neutral comments, children and youth listed the people they talked to when needing help with a problem or concern. When asked "who would you speak to if you had a problem?" 15 out of 29 comments indicated children and youth would speak to program staff.   Children and youth identified teachers, school counsellors, caseworkers, family members and others they could also speak to if they had a concern.

Three negative comments (3%) were heard. Two youth reported having a poor relationship with staff, and one these youth indicated a lack of attachment with program staff (e.g., "I don't like staff, the reason is because they're staff," "we all get bullied by one staff member"). It should be noted that the other children and youth in these programs did not express the same negative experiences or perspectives. Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Rules
The majority of comments made by children and youth about the rules and consequences of breaking them were either positive (57%) or neutral (39%). Positive comments referred to children and youth who reported they knew the rules within the programs and believed the rules to be fair (e.g., "yeah, the rules are pretty fair," "the rules are okay, I do what I have to," "the rules are posted over there"). Neutral comments discussed the type of consequences children and youth experienced when they broke the rules such as being grounded or having time-outs.

Negative comments (4%) referred to three children and youth who stated that the rules at their program were not fair (e.g., "[I] don't like the point system," "unfair that we can only spend 15 minutes/day on the computer," "we have to shower once a day, do chores and obey curfew").

Overall Care and Comfort Level
When talking about their care and comfort within the programs, the majority of child and youth responses were positive (78%). Children and youth spoke about feeling comfortable, being treated fairly, feeling safe and described staff as responsive to reports of bullying (e.g., "I am treated good," "[staff] are good and respectful…are fun to be around…I'm treated good," "I like the staff," ["if I had a problem, I would talk to] staff here"). Two children and youth (4%) reported their level of comfort in the program was adequate.

Eighteen per cent of comments were negative. Of the nine negative comments made, seven referred to children and youth who reported bullying issues. Four children and youth indicated bullying issues have not yet been resolved (three youth within one program indicated bullying was occurring in the program and was not being adequately addressed, another youth stated, "I get bullied almost every day…I told someone but it wasn't resolved"), two youth reported having been bullied at one time or another, and

one youth stated he/she did not report a bullying incident ("[happened] at school, I didn't tell"). Two other negative comments include one youth who reported a poor level of comfort ("It's horrible. The foods all locked up. Everyone is just in a bad mood. No one is in a good mood") and another felt he/she was treated unfairly ("One staff bugs me, rest are cool"). Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Treatment

Committee members reported 279 comments from children and youth about the treatment they received in child and youth programs. Of those comments, 171 (61%) were positive, 80 (29%) were neutral and the remaining 28 (10%) 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	47 (61%)	21 (27%)	9 (12%)	77
Medical/Dental Needs	67 (69%)	29 (30%)	1 (1%)	97
Contact with Natural Family	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Case Plans	41 (49%)	30 (36%)	13 (15%)	84
Keepsakes	16 (76%)	0 (0%)	5 (24%)	18
TOTAL	171 (61%)	80 (29%)	28 (10%)	279

Transition

In response to questions about moving into their programs and recalling how they felt at the time of the moves, children and youth made many comments. 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. In addition to 17 comments about being happy now in their placements, positive comments (61%) referred to children and youth who described being advised of the move, were happy at the time of the move, had pre-placement visits and expressed having good support during the transition (e.g., "my [natural parent] told me I was coming here…it is good and I feel good about it," "I was really excited and happy," "had dinner and stayed over one night…discussed with my caseworker and together chose for me to come here").

Neutral comments (27%) referred to the type of placement a child/youth resided in prior to their current placement (e.g., natural family, group home, other). Nine children and youth expressed negative comments (12%) about their transition experiences. Three comments indicated not being advised of the move; three comments referred to being angry at the time of the move (e.g., "I liked living with [natural family member]…I could do whatever I wanted, even not going to school," "[transition] was horrible," "I was told [about the transition], I didn't want to come here"); two comments reported not having pre-placement visits; and one comment indicated the children or youth felt scared at the time of the move ("I was really nervous about the move"). One youth is still not content

with living in a group home. Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Medical/Dental Needs

All but one comment about medical, dental, and optical care were positive (69%) or neutral (30%). 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. Neutral comments referred to children and youth who had reported seeing their health care professionals within the last year. One comment (1%) was negative where a youth indicated his/her optometry needs had not been met at the time of the committee's visit ("I need glasses to see far. I broke my glasses the second day that I got them... now I have to wait a year to get another pair"). Any matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Contact with Natural Family

Children and youth were asked about their contact with natural family members. It should be noted that a few children and youth were not 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 advantageous given individual children's circumstances.

All but two of the children and youth interviewed 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. Two comments were heard where the children and youth wished they had more contact with specific natural family members.

Case Plans

The majority of comments about case plans were either positive (49%) or neutral (36%). Positive comments referred to children and youth who said they had good relationships and/or frequent visits with their caseworkers, were aware of their case plans and had input in putting the plans together. Neutral comments defined frequency of visits (e.g., weekly, monthly, quarterly) and types of contact (e.g., email, phone, texts) children and youth had with their caseworkers.

Negative comments (15%) made by children and youth indicated they would like to have more contact with their caseworkers, were not aware of their case plans, and would like improvements to caseworker-child relationships. In one situation, it appeared that the child or youth was unaware of his/her case plan due to a low level of comprehension and may not have been aware that conversations with their caseworker involved case planning.

Keepsakes

Children and youth were given the opportunity to talk about keepsakes or physical reminders of their natural families or special memories. The majority of children and youth (76%) stated they had keepsakes in their possession such as photographs, jewelry, toys (e.g., "I have photos and stuff," "I have a stuffies from my [natural parent]," "I have a painting"). There were no neutral comments. Negative comments (24%) were

made by five children or youth who indicated they did not have keepsakes in their possession.

Accommodation

Committee members reported 122 comments from children and youth on issues relating to accommodation in child and youth programs. Children and youth expressed satisfaction with the services provided: 109 (89%) were positive, eight (7%) were neutral and five (4%) 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	64 (92%)	1 (1%)	5 (7%)	70
Physical Environment	45 (87%)	7 (13%)	0 (0%)	52
TOTAL	109 (89%)	8 (7%)	5 (4%)	122

Meals
Talking about meals evoked many positive comments by the children and youth. Positive comments (92%) included statements about liking the food, having enough to eat, quality ingredients, and helping to cook or prepare meals (e.g., "It's very good," "I get enough to eat and I really like vegetables," "I'm very good at making tacos and Shepherd's pie," " I like baking"). One neutral comment (1%) indicated the quality of ingredients for meals was adequate.

Seven per cent of comments were negative. Three youth reported they do not help with meal preparation and two children or youth would like better meals (e.g., the food is horrible, the meats are good, everything else is horrible. I like the meat lots," "the food isn't really good"). Participation in meal preparation is considered an opportunity to develop life skills; therefore, a lack of participation is classified as negative. Matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Physical Environment
A large portion of children and youth reported that they liked their homes, including their rooms and overall physical space. In addition to liking their facilities, positive comments (87%) also included children and youth reporting that they participate in chores and/or their programs had pets. Neutral comments (13%) referred to suggested changes children and youth would like to implement in their program. Six youth indicated they would not like to make any changes, and one youth said he/she would like a lock on his/her door. No negative comments were made.

Five-Year Trend

To provide the reader with a comparison of findings over the last five years, the table below 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, 2016. Findings have remained fairly consistent over the last five years.

Figure 18: Five-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
2015-2016	612 (75%)	158 (19%)	49 (6%)	819
TOTAL	4,457 (74%)	1,128 (19%)	451 (7%)	6,036

Staff Member Comments

Committee members talked to 25 staff members within 15 programs to give them an opportunity to comment on the services they provide to the children in their care and the supports they receive to assist them in their role. An additional 68 staff completed surveys. The number of child and youth staff who were interviewed or completed surveys in each Child and Family Services is illustrated in Figure 19.

Figure 19: Child and Youth Programs Staff Interviewed and Surveyed
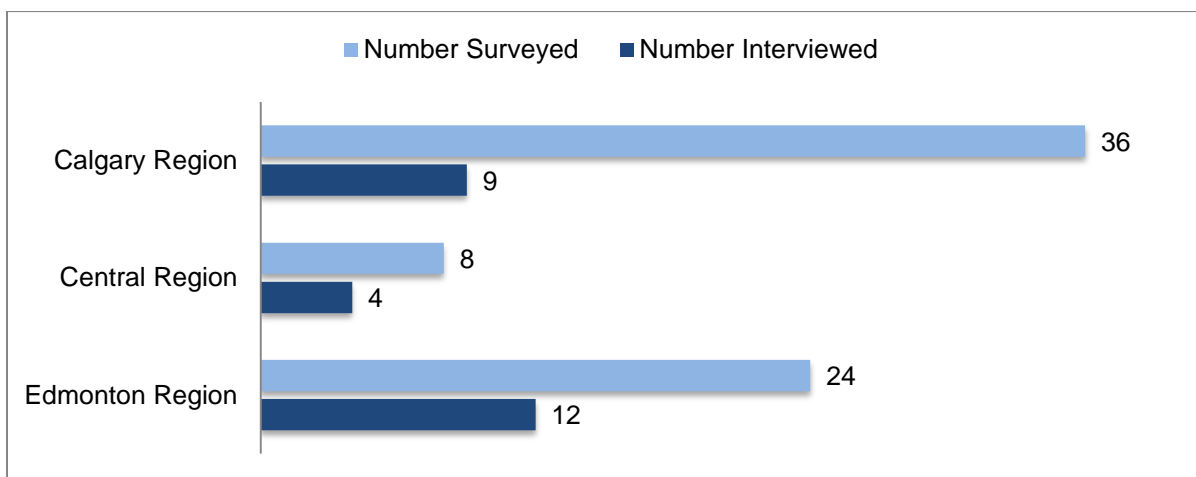
905 comments were made by service providers: 518 comment (57%) expressed satisfaction, 314 comments (35%) were neutral and 73 comments (8%) were negative.

Education and Training

Almost all of the comments made by service providers about the training provided in the programs were positive (59%) or neutral (40%). Positive comments referred to liking the training and feeling equipped to deal with most situations occurring in the programs.   As well, staff reported their programs provided opportunities for additional education and training. Neutral comments noted the years of staff experience in the child and youth

field. Some staff members reported training was adequate. One negative comment suggested training could be improved.

Staffing/Facility Programs
 Most comments made by staff about the operational aspects of their programs were positive (66%) or neutral (24%). Staff highlighted satisfaction with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, relationships with the children and youth in their care, staff camaraderie, supports for children and youth, the amount of staff turnover, communication within the program, the overall program, teamwork and staffing levels.

Neutral comments (24%) referred to comments about staffing levels, staff turn-over, staff relationships, staff-child relationships and workload as adequate. Neutral comments also included programs strengths identified by staff, such as program focus, staff, and unique supports. High staff turnover and low staffing levels topped the negative comments (10%) expressed by some of the child and youth care staff.

Supports from the Ministry, Agencies and Community
Responses to questions about the overall support the facilities received highlighted several areas for improvement. Positive comments (30%) indicated good relationships with children and youth caseworkers. One neutral comment (5%) described an adequate relationship with caseworkers.

Thirteen negative comments (65%) were heard. Four comments expressed concern with lack of mental health supports, three comments referred to disagreement with how placement decisions were made/implemented by the ministry and two comments suggested regions could be timelier in responding to requests. The remaining four comments referred to lack of background information being provided on the children and youth placed in the facility, lack of consistency in interpreting/applying regional and provincial policy, the need for better access to treatment services and one suggestion to improve relationships with a specific caseworker. Matters for resolution were forwarded to the appropriate Ministry office for follow-up purposes.

Director's Comments
Only one director was interviewed, and he/she indicated concern regarding the increasing workloads expected of staff in his/her program. Because only one director was interviewed, this comment refers to only one program.

FEEDBACK ON VISITS

Each year, the committee invites service providers (e.g. foster parents, program staff, facility owner/operators) 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 will often leave feedback questionnaires after a visit. This feedback is an important method of the committee's evaluation process and assists their preparation for future interviews and visits.

Of the 93 visits completed, only 14 service providers responded to the questionnaire. Because of the low response rate (15%), 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.

In general, feedback provided by service providers was positive. Respondents indicated that they were very satisfied (50%), satisfied (43%), or were unsure of how to respond (7%) when asked "How satisfied were you with the visit process?" They commented that members were friendly, relaxed and easy to speak with. When asked if they found the visits useful, respondents' comments varied from very satisfied (21%) satisfied (29%), neutral (36%) to dissatisfied (7%) and very dissatisfied (7%). Dissatisfied comments indicated respondents were waiting to see whether the ministry would use their feedback and/or were doubtful that decision makers would use the information. Despite this, respondents reported being appreciative of the opportunity to share their experiences.

Service providers were asked if there was anything committee members could have done differently during the visits and 79% responded "no". The three respondents who stated "yes" suggested sending out questionnaires ahead of the interview and one foster parent wished that they would have been provided with the opportunity to speak to committee members privately without the child being present.

Eighty-six per cent of respondents reported being very satisfied (43%) or satisfied (50%) 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. One respondent indicated a neutral response but did not provide further comment.

When asked if they had sufficient time to speak with the committee members, service providers were very satisfied (57%), satisfied (29%), undecided (7%), or dissatisfied (7%) 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 "a little rushed." Respondents also reported being very satisfied (86%) or satisfied (7%) 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, stating that the members were informed of their roles, but not as informed about the foster care system.

Typical Comments:
- "The visit was relaxed and filled with laughter"
- "They allotted more than enough time to talk to me and the children"
- "[Committee process is] important to maintain quality care"
- "Very professional"
- "Thank you"

COMPLAINT INVESTIGATIONS

The Social Care Facilities 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 2015 to March 2016 review period.

EXPENDITURES

Committee expenditures for the April 1, 2015, to March 31, 2016, review period were $115,643. This total includes: honoraria, travel, accommodations, printing, courier, long distance and internet expenses for the Social Care Facilities Review Committee. Each facility visit requires between two to four hours planning and conducting each facility visit as well as an additional two to six hours to summarize feedback.

COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

During the April 2015 to March 2016 review period, the committee held meetings on May 20 and 21, 2015. The Committee also met with the Minister of Human Services on March 15, 2016, to learn that re-appointments to the committee would not be occurring.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Social Care Facilities Review Committee would like to extend their gratitude for the opportunity to serve the people of Alberta for over 35 years. The chance to meet children, youth and adults living in social care facilities across the province, listen to their stories, learn about their experiences and share their feedback was a great privilege. The important work that the service providers conduct every day and the extraordinary resilience of the individuals receiving services has impacted each committee member, as well as all members who have served before us.

Thank you to each child, youth and adult who provided information through interviews, surveys, visits and report feedback. Your participation and willingness to share your stories, thoughts and suggestions is deeply appreciated. The committee would also like to thank the Regional Directors and all staff in the various Ministry offices who provided their time and assistance over the years to help make facility visits a success.