

# Saskatchewan

## CHILD WELFARE REVIEW

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The Honourable June Draude, Minister  
Saskatchewan Social Services  
Room 346, Legislative Building  
2405 Legislative Drive, Regina, SK  
S4S 0B3

July 27, 2010

Dear Minister Draude:

As requested, I am writing to provide you with a status report on the Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review.

A great deal of time and personal effort was devoted to preparing and presenting the submissions made to the Panel. Much of the content was personal, sometimes tragic, and often troubling to both the presenters and the Panel. We admire the courage and strength that was shown by all who participated in the stakeholder meetings over the past three months.

### **Information Gathering Process**

During March and April of 2010, the Review Panel engaged in five days of orientation, which provided us with background on the Ministry and Child Welfare issues.

From April 21 to July 12, 2010, the Panel held 25 days of hearings and met with 85 stakeholder groups. Meetings were held in 11 communities:

- Kindersley
- Meadow Lake
- North Battleford
- Prince Albert
- Regina
- Saskatoon
- Stony Rapids
- Sturgeon Lake First Nation
- Swift Current
- Tisdale
- Yorkton

The Panel gathered important information from a large number of stakeholder organizations:

- First Nations: Ten meetings were held with First Nations Chiefs, Elders, and Family Services Agencies.
- Métis: Métis Nation of Saskatchewan
- Most groups represented regions of the province, but a number represented provincial associations including: Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations Women's Commission, Provincial Association of Transition Houses, University of Regina Faculty of Social Work, Court of Queen's Bench Judges, Children's Advocate Office,

Youth in Care and Custody Network, Kids First Programs, Adoption Support Centre of Saskatchewan, Saskatchewan FASD Network, Ranch Ehrlo Society, Saskatchewan Legal Aid Commission, Saskatchewan Aboriginal Affairs Coalition, Office of the Treaty Commissioner, Saskatchewan Association of Social Workers, Saskatchewan Prevention Institute and the Children's Partnership.

In total, more than 400 individuals attended the stakeholder meetings with the Panel.

Some provincial organizations also engaged in separate processes of information gathering. Input was then summarized and presented to the Panel. Summary presentations included:

- **Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN).** FSIN organized meetings with Chiefs, Elders and agencies, attended by approximately 200 people. A full report and recommendations were provided to the Panel on June 24<sup>th</sup>.
- **Métis Nation of Saskatchewan (MNS).** The MNS organized 13 consultations with Métis locals, attended by 154 people. A full report with recommendations was presented to the panel on June 22<sup>nd</sup>.
- **Regional Intersectoral Committees (RICs).** The nine RICs organized meetings with human services organizations and agencies in their communities. Approximately 140 individuals and organizations participated. Most areas provided written reports directly to the Panel, and the nine RIC Coordinators met with the Panel on July 12<sup>th</sup>.
- **Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA).** The SFFA scheduled a half-day workshop at their annual meeting in June to provide input into the review process. The Panel chair attended this workshop. The SFFA presented their report to the Panel on July 12<sup>th</sup>.
- **Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network (SYICCN)** The SYICCN met with its membership and prepared a set of recommendations for government action which were presented to the Panel on June 8<sup>th</sup>.
- **Social Services Staff and Supervisors.** A total of 10 sessions held in April and May were attended by 244 front-line and 89 supervisory (in-scope) staff. A report was presented to the Panel on June 8<sup>th</sup>.
- **Social Services Managers.** Two half-day sessions, attended by 25 managers (out-of-scope), were held in Regina. Their representatives presented a summary report to the Panel on June 16<sup>th</sup>.

Approximately 80 written submissions from agencies and individuals have been received and 57 website "e-consultations" were completed online.

The Panel continues to consult with a number of individuals with interprovincial, national, or international experience including:

- Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Family and Caring Society;
- Senator Raynell Andreychuk, Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Human Rights (2007 Report: Children: The Silenced Citizens); and

- Judge Ted Hughes, Chair of the 2006 Children and Youth Review in BC. The Panel will also be attending an Aboriginal culture and family workshop.

### Themes and Issues

Although information is still being considered and discussed by the Panel, some issues emerged repeatedly. Several of these themes are noted below:

- **Prevention and Diversion Services.** The majority of stakeholders believe that early intervention and social supports have been underemphasized and are frequently unavailable in Canada and Saskatchewan, especially on First Nations and in poor neighborhoods. Panel members heard that strong, accessible, culturally appropriate supports to families would prevent the need for child welfare intervention in many cases.
- **Causes of Neglect.** A recurring theme was that neglect is a far more common form of child maltreatment than abuse, and that inadequate income, lack of affordable housing, and substance abuse or mental health problems are usually the primary risk factors for children and families.
- **Aboriginal Clientele and an Anglo-American Delivery System.** A commonly expressed view was that a large majority of child welfare clients are Aboriginal, but are served by an individually oriented, often adversarial, system—mostly staffed by non-Aboriginal people. Many problems are seen as relating to this imbalance.
- **Commitment to Principles.** Many presenters felt that Saskatchewan needs to build its child welfare service on the basis of renewed principles. The UN Convention on the Rights of Children, Jordan's Principle, the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Children and Youth First Principles, and Touchstones of Hope were noted as valuable documents.
- **Commonality of views.** There is broad consensus that the child welfare system and the factors that drive it are in need of a new direction and plan for fundamental change. Aboriginal groups, Ministry staff and managers, foster parents, community-based agencies and many others have strikingly similar observations, in particular with respect to how the current system falls short in serving its majority Aboriginal client group.

These points represent a small sample of what the Panel has heard, and will continue to review in the weeks ahead.

We are grateful for the thoughtful contributions of the more than 1,200 individuals who have had input into our process up to now. The Panel appreciates the opportunity to be part of this challenging task, and we look forward to concluding our work and presenting you with a Final Report this fall.

Sincerely yours,



Bob Pringle, Chair  
Saskatchewan Child Welfare Review Panel