

Backgrounder - Social Services Response to Jury Recommendations February 9, 2011

The death of this child is a tragedy. The Ministry of Social Services acknowledges its unique relationship and obligations to children in care, and wishes to improve Ministry practices and protocols to avoid similar circumstances in the future. Some changes have been introduced since December 2009, while some changes to policies and practice will require consultation with First Nations authorities and community stakeholders.

Jury Recommendation 1: To have more and thorough checks on the homes on smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detectors, general safety on the homes, bring homes up to code on electrical, plumbing, mechanical, any issues, concerns, to fire hazards, doors, gates, handrails on all stairs. To show up unannounced to foster homes to see how it actually is. If issues arise on child safety, it should be dealt with immediately. Safety of children is a very big issue.

Ministry Response:

- Additions have been made to the Foster Home Safety Checklist that include physical condition of a home as it relates to specific safety concerns; baby gates on stairs where age appropriate for children in the home; handrails on stairs; review for outside locks on bedroom doors; and assessment of open water sources, sewage and septic sources; secure fencing, abandoned vehicles, and appliances, furniture or any other items that may create safety hazards.
- Staff completing safety checklists will enter and inspect all rooms in the foster home and may take photographs as required.

Jury Recommendation 2: To legal tender out jobs to foster homes that need fixing, to run ads to have volunteer handymen or women to do work on foster homes.

Ministry Response:

- A provincial policy is being developed regarding in-home support services for foster families, including assistance with household duties, meal preparation, and other help as required.

Jury Recommendation 3: To support families with significant issues in the rural communities as well as in urban settings to assist in dealing with their issues.

Ministry Response:

- Mandated child protection services are provided to families in rural and urban areas.
- The Child Welfare Review Panel's report recommends fundamental change, including additional support for families to safely care for their children and preventative services to address issues faced by children and families.

- The Cabinet Committee on Children and Youth is creating a Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda, as recommended by the Panel, with short, medium and long-term goals for developing new approaches to help children and families.

Jury Recommendation 4: For children who are wards of the Ministry to be closely monitored by their case workers and supervisors.

Ministry Response:

- Contact standards are in place to ensure children in care are monitored and seen by staff. Additional staff training is under way to ensure accurate documentation and reporting on observations about the child's condition and potential issues regarding the child's safety and well-being.
- The new electronic case management system will be piloted this spring. It will improve information-gathering on children in care and enhance information sharing, accuracy and availability.

Jury Recommendation 5: To establish clear obligations for workers to report to their supervisor in concise, clear language when describing any problems in the home, and that foster parents should attend age-appropriate parenting classes.

Ministry Response:

- In 2009/10, the Ministry reorganized to focus on front line service delivery, accountability and improved programs and services. The restructuring resulted in more clear and direct communication between child protection workers, foster home workers, supervisors, managers and senior management.
- The Ministry implemented a provincial policy in July 2009 that requires foster home workers to interview each child protection worker with children in the home as part of the foster home's annual review.
- The Regina office developed a formal communications protocol that requires child protection and foster home workers to review all quality of care concerns to determine if a formal investigation is required. A province-wide protocol is being developed.
- PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information Development and Education) training is provided to all new foster parents and includes parenting techniques and child development.

Jury Recommendation 6: When a high-risk child is placed in a foster home, the placement should be made in a centre where adequate medical facilities exist. If the child is transferred to another home, it should be to a foster home in a centre with adequate medical facilities. When transferred, the new foster parents should be given all pertinent medical information from the file and actions to be taken should medical problems arise.

Ministry Response:

- Medically fragile children should be placed in homes where adequate medical care is accessible. This factor is considered during placement.
- The use of a caregiver information form, provided to foster parents at the time of a child's placement in their home, is mandatory. The form contains all pertinent information about the child, including medical information.
- The Ministry will implement mandatory First Aid/CPR training for all foster parents, with the first phase focused on homes caring for high medical needs children.

Jury Recommendation 7: To increase maintenance payments, especially for care of children with special needs.

Ministry Response:

- Higher monthly rates are paid to foster parents who care for special needs children. The Ministry will review payments and policy for special needs children to ensure support is adequate.