

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

Recommendations	Response/Action Plan
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Two Tragedies: Holding Systems Accountable Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24031</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services ensure high quality child protection casework by implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A method for evaluating the quality of case practice and decision-making (focusing on integrity/fidelity in the use of SDM tools).</li> <li>• A formal competency based certification program to develop staff competence in the use of SDM tools.</li> <li>• A method for clinical oversight for effective supervision and monitoring of casework to ensure identified needs are incorporated into the case-plan and policy standards and compliance are met.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry continues to work closely with the Children’s Research Center (CRC) to ensure enhanced knowledge and competence around the SDM tools.</li> <li>• The Ministry’s Quality Assurance Unit (QAU) also reviews the use of SDM tools by staff in the Ministry and the First Nations agencies to ensure that the tools are being utilized correctly, as well as within appropriate timeframes.</li> <li>• The Ministry has developed and implemented a standardized Supervision Tool to enhance oversight of staff casework.</li> <li>• A joint Ministry and First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) mandatory training session for supervisory staff took place on August 27, 2014 facilitated by the CRC<sup>1</sup> on the assessment and writing of Structured Decision Making® (SDM) Safety Plans.</li> </ul>
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Two Tragedies: Holding Systems Accountable Report</i>, Recommendation #1424032</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services contract with the Children’s Research Center to complete an SDM workload estimation study that establishes caseload policy standards for Saskatchewan. Once the study is completed, implement the recommended standards.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it is in progress.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services has entered into a contract with the Children's Research Center to conduct a workload estimation study in the 2015/16 fiscal year.</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The National Council on Crime and Delinquency’s Children’s Research Center (CRC) was established in the United States in 1993. The CRC works with child-serving agencies to improve direct practice and organizational operations through models, such as Structured Decision Making®, that integrate evidence-based assessments, family-centred engagement strategies and implementation science.

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Lost in the System: Jake's Story Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24048</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services complete a study that includes a review and analysis of the number of moves children and youth experience in out of home care and provide a report to the Advocate;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A random sample of children in emergency receiving homes, group homes and alternative care from the past two years,</li> <li>• The number of moves and rationale for each move a child in the sample experienced and,</li> <li>• The method of approval for the moves.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry has completed a review and analysis of the number of moves children and youth experience in out-of-home care for a two-year period.</li> <li>• The report <i>Child in Care: Placement Moves</i>, September 1, 2012 to August 31, 2014 was provided to the Advocate for Children and Youth on November 24, 2014.</li> <li>• This report found that 71% of the children reviewed had experienced one or less moves in a two year period.</li> </ul>
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Lost in the System: Jake's Story Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24049</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services fully implement the software for the Linkin Information Database to allow for data collection to monitor the number of placements for children and youth in out-of-home care provincially.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The complementary software has been implemented and the Ministry is collecting placement data for children and youth in out-of-home care.</li> </ul>
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Lost in the System: Jake's Story Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24050</b></p> <p>That the Government of Saskatchewan amend the Child and Family Services Act (or any legislation) or its regulations for the licensing of foster homes.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry has taken this recommendation under consideration.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry will be meeting with the Advocate for Children and Youth (ACY) and the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) to discuss how we can further support and strengthen our foster care system.</li> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services has undertaken a review of <i>The Child and Family Services Act</i>. The licensing of foster homes was examined as part of this review. The Ministry has conducted a review of Canadian jurisdictions, along with an analysis of the benefits and challenges that would need to be considered. We were unable to find any documented evidence to indicate that the licensing of foster homes results in improved outcomes for children in care.</li> <li>• Beginning April 2015, all out-of-home care resources are being managed through the Community Services Branch of Child and Family Programs Division, with renewed emphasis on recruitment and retention, resource development and provincial consistency in program delivery. Additionally, this</li> </ul>

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

	provides for provincial oversight and increased accountability.
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Lost in the System: Jake's Story Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24053</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services amend policy to conduct mandatory investigations of foster home incidents involving highly vulnerable children, including documentation and gathering information from collateral sources such as staff and other children in the home.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In May 2011, the Ministry amended policy to provide greater clarification in defining under what circumstances a Foster Home Investigation is required.</li> <li>• This includes clear procedures related to the gathering of collateral information and the documentation of information from the investigation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>This recommendation has been brought forward from the <i>Lost in the System: Jake's Story Report</i>, Recommendation #14-24054</b></p> <p>That the Ministry of Social Services require a strict adherence to the "Maximum Number of Children in a Foster Home" and "Foster Home Review" policies.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ministry staff are expected to follow policies and procedures as outlined in the <i>Children's Services Manual</i>.</li> <li>• Policy exceptions to place more than four foster children in a foster home can be made under certain circumstances, such as to keep a sibling group together. Senior management must review and approve these exceptions, including the provision of adequate supports for the foster family, prior to the placement.</li> <li>• In May 2012, the Ministry completed the provincial implementation of the Linkin integrated case management system.</li> <li>• Linkin has automated work flows to ensure required approvals are in place.</li> <li>• The Ministry ensures compliance to policies and procedures by conducting regular program reviews by the Quality Assurance Unit and through supervisory and managerial oversight.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 1:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services conduct a review and amend its policies pertaining to the investigation of foster homes to ensure that investigations are conducted in a thorough and comprehensive manner, and are compliant with the principles of fairness. The following elements of the existing policy need to be amended to ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Independence in assignment of the investigation to ensure that</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it is in progress.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry is currently conducting a full review of foster home investigations and quality of care processes from January 1, 2009 to December 31, 2014, to assess the current status of Foster Home Investigations and to determine where improvements may be made. The outcome of the review will inform future policy, procedures and training plans.</li> </ul>

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

<p>the investigating officer has no relationship with the foster home or any staff associated with the home;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The inclusion of practice guidelines in the assessment and documentation of evidence;</li> <li>• The inclusion of a Structured Decision Making risk assessment tools or similar tools to assist staff in making decisions about if or when children must be removed from a foster home when an investigation is undertaken; and</li> <li>• An outline of the assessment required to determine the family's ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment for children placed in their care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In May 2011, the Ministry amended policy to provide greater clarification in defining under what circumstances a Foster Home Investigation is required including clear procedures related to the gathering of collateral information and the documentation of information from the investigation.</li> <li>• The Ministry in conjunction with the Children's Research Center (CRC) is implementing the Substitute Care Provider (SCP) Assessment for investigations of alleged abuse/neglect by a foster parent, to assist in assessing safety and risk in foster home investigations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 2:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services provide training to staff who are assigned to conduct or supervise foster home investigations related to the principles of fairness and their application to an investigation process.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it is in progress.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry is working with the Children's Research Center (CRC) to implement the Substitute Care Provider tools to guide the assessment of safety and risk during foster home investigations. Training to all staff will be included in the implementation of these tools.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 3:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services conduct a review of their foster home program, in order to determine those factors leading to a rapid decline of foster homes, and that includes a plan to address this decline.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2013, the Ministry completed a review of all foster home closures from 2009 to 2012. The report found that over that time period, foster homes closed for a variety of reasons including, but not limited to: the foster parent decided to stop fostering; the foster parent moved, retired or passed away; or the foster home was closed by the Ministry due to quality of care concerns or as a result of an investigation.</li> <li>• Saskatchewan is not alone in experiencing a decline in new foster homes. Across Canada, provinces are noting difficulty in recruiting new foster homes. The increase in two working parent households has had a negative impact on foster home recruitment.</li> <li>• Beginning April 2015, all out-of home care resources are being managed through the Community Services Branch of Child and Family Programs Division, with renewed emphasis on recruitment and retention, resource development and provincial consistency in program delivery. Additionally, this provides for provincial oversight and increased accountability.</li> <li>• As part of the Ministry's commitment to continuous improvement, we will be conducting a further</li> </ul>

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

	review of the Foster Home Program in fall 2015.
<b>Recommendation 4:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services amend its policy to require that an In-Home support contract and required staff are in place prior to the placement of a child, when it is assessed that a foster home requires In-Home Support services.	<p><b>The Ministry has taken this recommendation under consideration.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In July 2013, the Ministry amended policy regarding Payments for Foster Home Supports, significantly enhancing the support provided to foster parents.</li> <li>• The Ministry’s current policy supports assisting foster parents through the provision of a variety of supports including babysitting, respite, expenses related to training, and in-home supports.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 5:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services evaluate the recent changes made to the structure of its placement process and provide a report to the Advocate for Children and Youth in six months that outlines the impact of those changes on the ability of staff to match a child to an out-of-home resource.	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry will complete a review of the placement process in six months and provide a report to the Advocate for Children and Youth.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 6:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services include the use of the Structured Decision Making placement matching tool, or similar tool to guide placement matching decisions.	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it is in progress.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry is working with the Children’s Research Center (CRC) to implement the Substitute Care Provider tools. During this process, the Ministry is reviewing tools designed for placement matching to guide placement matching decisions.</li> </ul>
<b>Recommendation 7:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services develop internal procedures to ensure that issues requiring immediate attention, as identified through a Quality Assurance Unit review, are addressed in a timely effective manner and the actions are reported back centrally.	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation and it is in progress.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Effectiveness Consultants work closely with Area Service Directors and the QAU Manager to ensure action and follow-up occurs with immediate concerns. They will continue to assist Service Area Managers in preparing responses and action plans when reviews are completed.</li> <li>• These issues will be documented and responding actions tracked in the QAU recommendation database. The Ministry is developing a response process to ensure oversight and accountability.</li> </ul>

**ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH INVESTIGATION REPORT, MAY 2015**  
**NO TIME FOR MARK: THE GAP BETWEEN POLICY AND PRACTICE**  
**MINISTRY RESPONSE/ACTION PLAN - MAY 2015**

<p><b>Recommendation 8:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services create and implement procedures in their current policies related to a critical incident or child death that include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immediate notification to the natural family by a Ministry of Social Services supervisor or manager that includes all pertinent information available;</li> <li>• Immediate offers of support services and regular follow up with family members to address issues of grieving and loss; and</li> <li>• Immediate notification to the First Nations bands or agency by a Ministry of Social Services manager that includes all pertinent information.</li> </ul>	<p><b>The Ministry accepted this recommendation and it has been implemented.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In September 2014, the Ministry’s Serious Occurrence Reporting and Review Policy (formerly called the Serious Case Incident, Critical Injury and Death of a Child/ Youth Review Policy) was revised. The revised policy clearly outlines the responsibilities and timelines for staff.</li> <li>• The Ministry’s Quality Assurance Unit is currently developing a process flow chart to complement the policy.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Recommendation 9:</b> That the Ministry of Social Services offer an immediate formal letter of apology to Mark’s parents for not acting in Mark’s best interests during the time of his last foster home placement. The apology must acknowledge that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services did not make a proper assessment at the time Mark was placed into this foster home;</li> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services did not act quickly in its approval process for another resource for Mark;</li> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services failed to take opportunities to review Mark’s case when notified there were deficiencies; and</li> <li>• The Ministry of Social Services did not take appropriate steps to immediately notify Mark’s parents of his death, prepare them for how he died, or continue to outreach to them after he died.</li> </ul> <p>The letter of apology should also include an offer to each parent of any resources that they may still need in dealing with their grief in the loss of their child.</p>	<p><b>The Ministry accepts this recommendation.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Ministry will provide a letter of apology to Mark’s parents, including an offer of any supports they may require to assist them with their ongoing grief in the loss of their child.</li> </ul>