

Backgrounder – Saskatchewan Child and Family Agenda

Progress to Date, March 2014

Considerable progress has been made in the Saskatchewan Child and Family Agenda (formerly the Saskatchewan Children and Youth Agenda). The Province will increase its investment in the Agenda by \$8.7 million in 2014-15, bringing the total investment to nearly \$62.5 million since 2011. This funding has allowed the Government of Saskatchewan to continue its cross-ministry approach to helping Saskatchewan children, youth and families with the complex issues they face.

Child Welfare Transformation

Government is focusing on three key areas: working differently with First Nations and Métis partners; enhancing preventative supports; and renewing the child welfare system.

- Two historic Letters of Understanding were signed in August 2011 with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations and the Métis Nation - Saskatchewan.
- New partnership agreements have been signed with Lac La Ronge Indian Children Child and Family Services Agency and Athabasca Denesuline Child and Family Services to deliver off-reserve mandated services including after-hours services for families residing off-reserve. The Ministry transitioned the full delivery of off-reserve child welfare services to the Lac La Ronge Agency on December 1, 2012.
- Social Services continues to engage with First Nation and Métis in the review of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. The next phase of the legislative review will begin on April 1, 2014 and includes face-to-face discussions regarding the legislation with First Nation and Métis stakeholders.
- The addition of 30 new front line workers in child protection in 2011-12, in addition to the 60 positions added in 2008-09, has improved our capacity and ability to provide services to children and families.
- A new approach to conducting Home Assessments for First Nations children who can be placed as non-wards has been designed. Contracts have been signed with three First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies including Yorkton, Agency Chiefs and Peter Ballantyne. This approach is freeing up front-line child protection workers to focus on case planning and management and is more effective because the First Nations agencies have existing relationships with the communities they serve, making the placement process much more efficient.
- Funding for the Saskatchewan First Nations Family and Community Institute has allowed important new projects to move forward, including examination of custom adoption, co-ordination of training for group home staff, delivery of workshops on the group home accreditation process, and support for the implementation of the Structured Decision Making model with First Nation Child and Family Service Agencies providing services on reserve.
- The Aboriginal Child Protection Courtworker program in Regina works with partners in Social Services, Justice, Legal Aid, the Courts and the community to provide services to parties appearing before the Courts on child protection matters. Many First Nations families

find the Courts intimidating and difficult to navigate. Since 2010, Courtworkers in Regina have assisted with court processes in approximately 19 per cent of child apprehension cases.

- The outcomes of *The Child and Family Services Act* and *Adoption Act* legislative review, currently underway, will be critical to supporting the transformation of the child welfare system.
- Effective May 31, 2012, the new Linkin case management information technology system was implemented across the province. This new system allows for more effective case management, improved tracking of children in care, and better quality information to inform decision-making regarding the safety of children. The Lac La Ronge Agency began using Linkin in December 2012.
- Effective June 30, 2012, the new Structured Decision Making® (SDM) Model was implemented across the province and in two First Nation child and family services agencies (Touchwood and Yorkton) as a first step towards a flexible response. These best-practise risk assessment tools will strengthen decision-making and case management practice for front-line workers and result in better outcomes for Saskatchewan children and families.

Eliminating the Education and Employment Gaps for First Nations and Métis Peoples

- A number of successes have resulted from funding to improve outcomes for First Nations and Métis apprentices:
 - As of June 30, 2012, approximately 13.2% of apprentices were First Nations or Métis. This percentage is higher than the 8.3% of First Nations and Métis people in Saskatchewan's labour force in 2011;
 - As of June 30, 2012, 1,288 First Nations and Métis apprentices were registered for this program, and in 2011-12, 658 First Nations and Métis apprentices will receive technical training; and
 - The number of First Nations and Métis registered apprentices increased from 1,243 in 2007 to 1,288 in 2012, an increase of about 4%. At the same time, the number of First Nations and Métis journeyperson certifications doubled from 61 in 2006-07 to 112 in 2011-12.
- Adult Basic Education including on-reserve programming for First Nations people and province-wide implementation of the Essential Skills for the Workplace program following the successful pilot project in 2010-11.
- Provincial Training Allowance funding distributed evenly among regional colleges, SIAST, the Dumont Technical Institute, and the Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies to support individuals taking Adult Basic Education off-reserve, the majority of whom are First Nations and Métis people.
- \$0.6 million in funding to improve outcomes for First Nations and Métis apprentices.

Comprehensive Services: Supports for Individuals with ASD and FASD, and FASD Prevention

Funding directed towards autism-related Community Supports and Interventions has resulted in:

- The hiring of additional therapy positions in all health regions. These positions include occupational therapists, speech language therapists, social workers and support workers. This investment has supported the development of enhanced therapeutic programming, including Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA), for pre-school children. The Saskatoon Health Region recently opened their centre-based ABA intensive therapy program, Little Tots.
- One thousand four hundred and eight (1,408) children and youth have received Autism Spectrum Disorder services as of May 2013.
- To date, a total of 59 students have completed the Autism Intervention Program offered in conjunction with the University of New Brunswick. A new cohort of 16 students started in November 2013. Students include autism consultants, autism support workers, special education teachers and education assistants.

In order to tackle issues related to FASD, a number of initiatives were undertaken over the past few years:

- Annually, workshops and youth-focused prevention campaigns were held across the province to help educate people about FASD.
- The Regina Community Clinic Life Skills and Addictions Program provided ongoing programming to 45 adults with FASD.
- Children in the FASD Family Support Program improved their school attendance and none have dropped out. This program works with 26 families in the Saskatoon area. 61.5% of families have Child and Family Services involvement so the program is providing support to families at risk of separation.
- An additional mentor position at Central Urban Metis Federation Incorporated has allowed them to accept eight new female clients who have children in their care or are working toward getting their children back.
- Three model projects to provide intensive FASD prevention programming to pregnant women at high risk for having a child with FASD have recently been implemented in Prince Albert, Saskatoon and Regina. Health regions are offering a range of comprehensive services including: outreach, prenatal and postnatal care, social support, addictions and mental health services, early childhood development, and pediatric rehabilitative therapies to support vulnerable women and their children.
- During 2013-14 the Ministry of Health initiated work on the development of a comprehensive FASD prevention strategy in collaboration with the Provincial FASD Coordinating Committee, which is chaired by the Saskatchewan Prevention Institute. The FASD prevention strategy will be released during 2014-15.
- The Ministry of Health is currently completing a comprehensive evaluation of the ASD and FASD initiatives that have been implemented over the last few years. A cross-ministerial

team made up of representatives from the Ministries of Health, Education, Social Services and Justice is overseeing the evaluation.

In April 2013, the Children and Youth Agenda was renamed the Child and Family Agenda to reflect the importance of the family as a whole and to focus efforts on education, health and family supports. Initiatives to date under the Child and Family Agenda are listed below:

Strategy: Children get a good start through school readiness, literacy and parenting.

- Since 2011-12, 70 Prekindergarten programs have been supported in 27 communities, including 15 new programs for vulnerable three and four year olds early learners developed in 2013-14. This brings the total to 301 Prekindergarten programs.

Strategy: Youth are prepared for the future with improved educational attainment among Aboriginal groups.

Government is focusing on both shorter and longer term actions as well as engagement with First Nations and Métis people and organizations. Actions to date include:

- The Joint Task Force for Improving Employment and Education Outcomes for First Nations and Métis released its final report and recommendations in April 2013. Government response to the Joint Task Force will be ongoing in nature, as Government continues to work with partners.
- In 2013-14, Government implemented the following actions in response to the Joint Task Force:
 - On January 7, 2014, the Ministry of Education announced a \$3 million investment to improve education outcomes for First Nations and Métis students. The funding is being directed toward two initiatives:
 - \$1.5 million to expand the use of Help Me Tell My Story, which aligns with Joint Task Force participants' requests for programming that supports parents to be "teachers in their own homes."
 - \$1.5 million for an Invitational Shared Services Initiative to provide students living on reserve with the same supports to students and teachers that are available in provincial schools. The initiative brings together the provincial education system and First Nations education organizations to support students living on First Nations in the areas of reading, literacy, early learning, teen parent supports, supports for graduation, speech language pathology, addictions counseling and educational psychology.
 - On April 16, 2013, the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN) and the Government of Saskatchewan jointly announced support valued at \$1.7 million for Driver Training in First Nations schools.
 - In 2013-14, Government provided support to enhance the engagement of First Nation students in the provincial education system by providing First Nation schools with access to the provincial PreK-12 Microsoft Licensing Agreement.

- The First Nations and Métis Education Achievement Fund provides funding to 25 school divisions that targets increased educational achievement for First Nations and Métis students.
 - School divisions have utilized the funds to engage students and elders about residential schools and the effects on the individual and/or community.
 - School divisions have entered into partnerships with First Nation education authorities so that professional staff can attend curriculum and other professional development opportunities.
- Funding for First Nations and Métis Achievement Fund and Individual Achievement Grants and Summer Literacy Camps in 23 communities.
- The Saskatchewan Community Literacy Fund provided a total of \$127,200 that supported Day Star, Fishing Lake, George Gordon and Muskowekwan First Nations, in partnership with the Horizon School Division, to provide Family Literacy programs on-reserve; Witchehan Lake developed and delivered Family Literacy also on-reserve, and Muskeg Lake provided financial literacy programming for on-reserve adults. Family Literacy programming opportunities for young First Nations and/or Métis parents were supported through an investment of \$55,800, at the Balfour and Scott Collegiate Child Care Centers in Regina and through the Core Neighbourhood Youth Co-operative in Saskatoon focusing on programming in support of young Aboriginal fathers.

Strategy: Families are strong through improvements to supports for mental health, addictions and parenting.

- The Mental Health and Addictions Action Plan is being led by the Ministry of Health to review how the Province responds to the needs of individuals with mental health and addictions issues. A Commissioner was appointed in June of 2013 and public consultations commenced in August. Over 3,000 submissions were received from clients, family members, service providers, and concerned citizens. In addition, over 300 individuals participated in focus groups and individual interviews in 18 communities. The Commissioner has also met with over 125 stakeholders. The Commissioner's final report is expected to be complete in the fall of 2014.
- In order to help keep families together and prevent children from coming into care, three new CBOs (601 Outreach in Saskatoon, Society for the Involvement of Good Neighbours in Yorkton and Fox Valley Counseling Services in Regina) have been contracted to provide intensive family supports and after-hours services to families. Further expansion in Prince Albert and another location to be determined is planned for 2014-15.
- The Ministry is planning an expansion of Triple P (Positive Parenting Program). The program is education and support that aims to give parents the skills and confidence they need to parent well, by engaging, encouraging and empowering families to address common child and adolescent social, emotional, and behavioural problems.
- Effective October 2013, the Ministry began a pilot for a Flexible Response program. This program is providing alternative interventions to cases that would normally trigger the traditional child protection response and investigation.

Strategy: Communities are safe through building partnerships to reduce crime.

- On September 7, 2011, *Building Partnerships to Reduce Crime (BPRC)* was released to government Ministries, police and community stakeholders. The initiative represents a new way for government, police and community to work together to help children, youth and vulnerable people through information-sharing between agencies supporting at-risk individuals.
- The flagship program under Building Partnerships to reduce Crime is the Hub and Centre of Responsibility (COR) model, adopted and expanded from the Prince Albert community mobilization program. The Hub is a multi-disciplinary group of front-line workers that provides immediate intervention and short-term solutions. The COR is dedicated to human service professionals who collaborate on longer-term solutions to crime reduction and victimization.
- BPRC programs are intended to reduce crime, with an extended mandate to increase community wellness. Community Mobilization Prince Albert (CMPA) and the resulting additional Hubs involve police, Ministry officials from Social Services, Justice, Education, Health, Advanced Education and Economy, as well as other community partners.
- To date, the CMPA has been tracking and reporting its progress and successes in a number of areas, including crime and violence levels, emergency room admissions, prosecution files, and child and family protective files.
- Although a full and reliable measurement regime is being developed, the following outcome highlights were recorded over the first year of CMPA's operation:
 - Crime – down 14.7%;
 - Crimes against persons/victimization – down 15.6%;
 - Public Prosecutions – down 12%;
 - Emergency Room admissions – down 10%;
 - Child and family files – from 2011 to August 2012, a total of 130 cases were diverted.
- As of March 2014, Hubs have been implemented in the following 10 communities: Prince Albert, Yorkton, La Ronge, North Battleford, Moose Jaw, Estevan/Weyburn, Nipawin, Saskatoon, Lloydminster and Swift Current. Each model has been adapted to local variations and needs.
- There are several other communities (Meadow Lake, Onion Lake, Fort Qu'Appelle, Regina and Melfort) that are interested in implementing the Hub model this year.
- Two additional Centres of Responsibility (CORs) will be implemented in 2014.

Complementary Initiative:

- The Ministry of Justice is supporting a program to expand access to legal representation for children in child protection matters through the creation of a Counsel for Children Office. The program will roll out in 2014-15.