

Child and Family Services Update

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report to this House and residents of the NWT on the progress we are making to transform the child and family services system to better serve children, youth, families, and communities. We want to create a system that provides services that are culturally safe and anti-racist.

Initiatives under the 2019-2021 Quality Improvement Plan are helping us reach that goal. I want to share a few details from the annual report of the Director of Child and Family Services, which I will table later today. Prevention services now account for 50 percent of all the services delivered. The Family Preservation Program has continued to expand throughout the NWT and now supports 86 families. A total of 75 percent of children who receive services remain in their home while a further 17 percent remain in their home community. Foster placements are being replaced with family placements, primarily extended family.

Mr. Speaker, that doesn't mean that our job is done. Indigenous children continue to be overrepresented for both prevention and protection. Much of the need in this area is driven by poverty and housing insecurity. Access to safe housing, mental wellness supports, recreational opportunities and pre and post-natal care are the building blocks to support families and communities.

Another area of concern flagged in the Director's report is youth in the permanent care who age out of the Extended Support Services Agreement stream. In the last fiscal year only 23 percent of youth chose to continue services that would help them transition to adulthood following their 19th birthday.

Mr. Speaker, these changes are possible because of our robust Quality Improvement Plan. A few of the plan's highlights include:

- 56 new positions focused on frontline capacity, family preservation, placement services, supervisory support, as well as training and cultural safety;
- Creating and filling two positions to support the integration of principles of cultural safety and anti-racism as part of the Child and Family Services reform;
- Developing and implementing the Family Preservation Program I just referred to. This program provides families with wraparound support and promotes family unity and wellbeing. It also includes new funding to hire family preservation workers in every region of the NWT;
- Finally, expanding prevention support offered to expectant parents throughout the pre- and post-natal periods.

Mr. Speaker, the need for system reform has long been needed to begin addressing the impacts of colonization within Child and Family Services policies and practices. The Department, and the health and social services authorities, recognize that Indigenous voices must guide the process of reconciliation within Child and Family Services. Our goal is to acknowledge their experiences and answer their calls for a more culturally safe and anti-racist approach to the delivery of Child and Family Services. We will also continue to work with Indigenous governments and communities by sharing information, keeping an open dialogue about service delivery, and supporting Indigenous governments in planning for children and youth.

The Standing Committee on Social Development's Report on the Child and Family Services Act, called on all of us to work together to provide a broader continuum of care to meet the needs of children, youth, and families in the Northwest Territories. That is a goal I wholeheartedly share.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.