

Progress Update on Building Stronger Families

Mr. Speaker, in October 2014, I tabled in this House, Building Stronger Families: An Action Plan to Transform Child and Family Services. I am pleased to provide an update on our accomplishments on the action plan.

The goal of Building Stronger Families is to improve the quality of child and family services offered by our government, with a view to achieving better outcomes for children and families when they receive services under the Child and Family Services Act.

On April 1, 2016, new amendments to the Child and Family Services Act came into force. These legislative changes include a new definition of Youth, and allow for youth protection hearings and transition plans. In addition, we are now able to extend services for any young adult in permanent care and custody by entering into an agreement for services until age 23 to support independent living.

Mr. Speaker, we have also evolved our delivery of mandatory training for Child Protection Workers over the years in response to changes in legislation, leading practices, and recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. One important change in the training was the inclusion of an Indigenous Traditional Knowledge holder and survivor of residential school to educate Child Protection Workers on the impacts of the residential school system in the NWT, and provide broad cultural oversight for the duration of the training. Our training for Child Protection Workers also includes trauma informed practice, focusing on strengths, permanency planning, and the importance of nurturing relationships, cultural identity, and connection to community.

The Child and Family Services Standards and Procedures Manual has also been completely revised to improve and enhance the child and family services system, and to reflect the changes to the Child and Family Services Act. The manual clearly states that Child Protection Workers are to make every effort to work with the family to safely return the child to their care and reunify the family.

To support case management in child protection and prevention services, we also began implementing Structured Decision Making tools. With the efforts of our front-line and department staff, these tools were adapted to be responsive to the cultural context of the Northwest Territories. These tools help to support the complex clinical decisions Child Protection Workers make every day including:

- How urgently do I need to respond to this report of concern?
- What are these child's immediate safety needs and do I need to apprehend this child to protect them?
- What is the nature and magnitude of a child's risk of abuse or neglect and what types of services does this family need?
- How will this family's strengths play a part in their care plan, and help alleviate any safety risks and reduce risks of future harm?

Mr. Speaker, we have also recently launched a new information system for child and family services. The new Matrix system went live in October 2017, replacing the old Child and Family Information System that had been in use since 2001. This new information system will allow for increased support for complex work done by child and family services staff at all levels, improved data collection, and quality assurance.

One of the action items from Building Stronger Families was to create an Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services. I am pleased to share that later today I will be tabling the Director's 2016-2017 Annual Report, which will also include the years 2007-2008 to 2016-2017.

While positive trends have emerged from the Director's Report, we are still in the early days of transforming our child and family services system and we recognize that we still have significant work ahead of us to better meet the needs of children and their families.

Through changes in legislation, training, standards, support tools, and our information system, our government has been strengthening our foundation for the delivery in child and family services in the Northwest Territories. We know that there is more work to do which is why we continue to advance our mandate commitments in this area.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.