



Social Development and Housing

FOSTER CARE REVIEW REPORT



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Preface

The Foster Care Review Steering Committee (“the Committee”) has examined the Prince Edward Island Foster Care Program (“the Program”) from the perspective of the child. The work of the Committee has been directed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (“the Convention”) and a rights-based approach to program development. The primary goal of making the recommendations contained in this Review is to strengthen the Program and to improve outcomes and the wellbeing of children while in foster care.

Children have less possibility than adults to make a strong case for their own interests, so those involved in decisions affecting a child must be explicitly aware of the child’s interests. If a child’s interests are not highlighted, they tend to be overlooked.¹ Further, a child’s rights as outlined in the Convention are protected given their vulnerability and dependence.²

The Committee believes that children’s human rights apply to all children at all times, without exception. The provision and protection of children’s Convention rights is the primary responsibility of governments at all levels, and realizing the promise of the Convention is an ongoing, progressive commitment. The legal rights framework and intent of this review are based upon the best interests of the child principle, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Canadian Chart of Rights and Freedoms and the principles contained in the *Child Protection Act*.

The Committee is guided by the following principles:

1. Children have the right to protection from abuse and neglect;
2. Children have basic rights and fundamental freedoms no less than those of adults, and a right to special safeguards and assistance in the preservation of those rights and freedoms;
3. Children have the right to participate in decisions that impact them by expressing their views and respecting their ever evolving need and capacities;
4. The developmental needs of children require timely and relevant decision making consistent with their stage of development;
5. The rights of children, families and individuals are guaranteed by the rule of law and intervention into the affairs of individuals and families should be governed by law so as to protect those rights and preserve the autonomy and integrity of the family wherever possible;
6. Parents have the right and responsibility for the care and supervision of their children, and children should only be removed from that care and supervision when other measures have failed or are inappropriate;
7. Children should be provided for, as nearly as possible as if they were in the care and protection of prudent and conscientious parents, when it is necessary to remove them from the care and supervision of their parents;

¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

² Ibid.

8. The best interests of children are to be determined on a case-by-case basis considering a child's personal context, situation and needs. While flexible and adaptable, a child's best interests should not be manipulated and must comply with the child's other rights;
9. Children have less possibility than adults to make a strong case for their own interests, so those involved in decisions affecting a child must be explicitly aware of the child's interests. If a child's interests are not highlighted, they tend to be overlooked;
10. The best interests of children are to be determined on a case-by-case basis considering the child's personal context, situation and needs. While flexible and adaptable, a child's best interests should not be manipulated and must comply with the child's other rights;
11. The preservation of the cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage of a child promotes the healthy development of the child; and
12. The prevention of abuse and neglect of children is a responsibility shared by the family, community and the province.

Introduction

Foster care is defined as a planned, goal directed service in which the temporary protection and nurturing of children takes place in the homes of approved foster families.³ Foster care is part of the child welfare system, which is the system responsible for ensuring that all children are living in "safe, permanent, and stable environments that support their well-being."⁴ Foster parenting is critical to the care of certain high risk children, and high turnover rates amongst these caregivers can result in an increased risk to not only the children who are dependent on alternative caregivers for their safety, but to the entire child welfare system itself.⁵

In Prince Edward Island the *Child Protection Act* ("the *Act*"), provides the legislative framework for the provision of foster care services on Prince Edward Island and the mandate for programs and services related to the Program within the Child and Family Services Division of the Department of Social Development and Housing ("CFS").

Under the *Act*, when the Director of Child Protection concludes, after an investigation, that a child is in need of protection, the Director may enter into an agreement with a parent of a child and the parent transfers temporary custody and guardianship of the child to the Director.⁶ The Director may also apply to the court for temporary or permanent guardianship of a child.⁷ Under the *Act* the Minister may operate or make agreements for the operation of such services, programs and facilities as may be necessary to accommodate the needs of children or persons in the custody of, or receiving services from, the Director.⁸

³ Child Welfare League of America. "Family Foster Care Program" (2007). Retrieved, from CWLA Website: <http://www.cwla.org>.

⁴ Hick & Stokes, "Social Work in Canada", (2017).

⁵ Daniel, "Foster Cultural Development: Foster Parents' Perspectives" (2011).

⁶ Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, section 13.

⁷ Ibid, section 29.

⁸ Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, section 47.

Currently the Department of Social Development and Housing operates five group homes that provide 24/7 care for children deemed in need of protection from parental harm and requiring out of home care in order for the child to remain safe. All children living in Prince Edward Island group homes are in the legal custody and guardianship of the Director of Child Protection.⁹ The Program is based on the belief that parents have the right and responsibility for the care and supervision of their children, and that children should only be removed from that care and supervision when other measures have failed or are inappropriate. Children should be provided for, as nearly as possible, as if they were in the care and protection of prudent and conscientious parents, when it is necessary to remove them from the care and supervision of their parents.¹⁰ As such, a foster family is meant to be a temporary placement for a child whose birth family is unwilling or unable to assume full responsibility for the child. Foster care is intended to be a temporary solution as the goal is to return the child to their own family when it is safe to do so.

Historically, foster care in Prince Edward Island was based on a notion of family life that included a rural home, lots of children, mother at home and the father as the primary income earner typically working in fields such as farming or fishing. Before the 1970's, Prince Edward Island's foster care system operated in relative isolation, with little communication with Government workers, and little to no communication with other foster families. Often, foster families in the same community did not know that one another were providing foster care. The move from a colonial household economy to an urban economy also separated the father from the home and elevated the mother to the role of primary child raiser.

Children who were placed in foster care were typically placed with families who lived a considerable distance from their natural family. Historically in Canada, children were not viewed as persons with inherent rights, but rather as a form of property of their parents.¹¹ Children placed in foster care homes during this time, were often placed for economic benefit to their caregivers, assisting with farm work and other labour related tasks.

The Children's Rights Movement began in the early part of the last century and has been an effort by government organizations, advocacy groups, academics, lawyers, lawmakers, and judges to construct a system of laws and policies that enhance and protect the lives of children.¹² Prior to World War II child labour had been effectively eradicated in Canada but when World War II broke out children began to enter the work force once again. With millions of adults at war, the children were needed to help keep the country running.¹³

After World War II the United Nations General Assembly, in which Canada was a member, adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Its main provisions are:

- protection rights: the right to be protected against maltreatment and neglect, the right to be protected from all forms of exploitation;
- provision rights: the right to food and to health care, the right to education, the right to benefit from social security; and

⁹ Ibid, section 48.

¹⁰ Ibid, Preamble.

¹¹ Supreme Court of Canada in *Stevenson v. Florant*, S.C.R. 532 (1925).

¹² Freeman, "Whither Children: Protection Participation, Autonomy?" (1994).

¹³ Hawes, "The Children's Rights Movement: A History of Advocacy and Protection" (1991).

- participation rights: the right to act in certain circumstances and the right to be involved in decision-making.¹⁴

By the mid 1970's, the child welfare system in Prince Edward Island shifted its focus on foster care as a substitution model to a supplementary model. This shift in focus recognized the child's natural family as well as other relationships in the child's life. Foster care was seen as supplemental to the child's natural family and an extension of the child's family life, not a replacement.

The early 1980's saw the emergence of group homes in Prince Edward Island. Group homes were intended to be part of a larger model of varying levels of support for children. This model was to include foster homes at the first level; at the second level, a cooperative partnership between a group home, foster parents, children, and a third level of specialized foster care which would include a contractual relationship to provide more than the traditional family support model.

In 1983, the PEI Federation of Foster Families ("the Federation") was established as an independent non-governmental body that is run by foster parents, for foster parents, in order to serve and support each other as caregivers. The Federation provides the collective voice for foster parents throughout Prince Edward Island with the objective of maintaining a partnership and clear lines of communication between foster parents and staff of CFS, on behalf of children requiring foster care.

The Federation collaborates with the Canadian Foster Family Association ("CFFA"), whose mandate is to provide a voice for foster families across Canada and to foster collaboration amongst provincial and territorial foster family associations, as well as organizations involved with children in care in order to enhance foster care across Canada.

The 1980's also saw the development and eventual ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, a human rights treaty that sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. The Convention and the *Act* define a child as any human being under the age of eighteen. Canada ratified the treaty and is bound to it by international law.¹⁵

Ratifying states must act in the best interests of the child. All nations implementing the Convention are required to comply with child custody and guardianship laws as the Convention is premised on every child having basic rights, including the right to life, to their own name and identity, to be raised by their parents within a family or cultural grouping, and to have a relationship with both parents, even if they are separated.¹⁶

¹⁴ Declaration on the Rights of the Child, UN General Assembly, 20 November 1959.

¹⁵ Government of Canada, "Rights of children", retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/rights-children.html>.

¹⁶ Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

CFS recognizes the need for a Program that is premised on a supportive and collaborative partnership between the CFS and foster parents in order to ensure the best outcomes for Island children. CFS further recognizes that support for foster families has a direct impact on outcomes for children in care.

As part of a review of CFS programs, including the Foster Care Program, a comprehensive, inclusive and respectful consultation process be held by a Review Committee so that views and perspectives could be heard, understood and represented in a consultation report for Government's consideration and deliberation on potential improvements to the Program.

The Review is premised on a strength-based approach with the aim of strengthening the partnership between the Federation and Government. Prince Edward Island is Canada's smallest province and due to its unique Island geography, has a strong sense of community and citizens who are highly engaged in civic activism. It is within this environment that the Program has been met with great success in providing nurturing and loving homes to children in care.

This Review presents information regarding Prince Edward Island's Program and includes findings and recommendations identified and developed by the Committee pertaining to Prince Edward Island's Program. This Review is meant to serve as a guide for future enhancement and refinements to the Program and to illustrate the excellent work done to date by foster parents and CFS staff in protecting and supporting children in care.

Background

In November 2017, Government issued a Mandate Letter to the Minister requesting that the Department of Social Development and Housing undertake a review of key program areas, including the Program. In November 2017, the Committee was formed to provide overall support, oversight and leadership to guide a collaborative approach to review the Program, guided and supported by critical thinking, visionary and strategic deliberations, openness, transparency, effective communication, inclusive and respectful dialogue and the best interests of children.

Rona Smith, Director of Child and Family Services, and Wendi James Poirier, President of the PEI Federation of Foster Families, were asked to co-chair the Committee in partnership with representatives from Child and Family Services, the PEI Federation of Foster Families and the Mi'kmaq Confederacy of Prince Edward Island ("the Confederacy"). The members of the Committee included:

- Wendy James Poirier - President, PEI Federation of Foster Families
- Fred Devries - Vice-President, PEI Federation of Foster Families
- Sheila Whiteway - Secretary, PEI Federation of Foster Families
- Mary Noye - Treasurer, PEI Federation of Foster Families
- Marilyn Birch - Director of Child & Family Services, Confederacy
- Cathy Ada - Child Protection Resource Supervisor, Child and Family Services
- Alice Maund - Child Protection Resource Supervisor, Child and Family Services

- Wendy McCourt - Director of Child Protection, Child and Family Services
- Mike Gaudet - Provincial Coordinator of Residential Services, Child and Family Services
- Jeannine Carver – Provincial Manager of Child Protection Services, Child and Family Services
- Kelly Peck – Provincial Manager of Children’s Services, Child and Family Services
- Penny Woodgate - Administrative Assistant, Child and Family Services
- Michael Zimmerman – Legal and Policy Advisor, Child and Family Services
- Rona Smith – Director, Child & Family Services

The Committee was accountable to the Deputy Minister, Department of Social Development and Housing, for the work identified in this provincial Program review and the President of the PEI Federation of Foster Families was responsible for providing regular reports to the Federation’s membership. The terms of reference for the Committee are attached as (**Attachment B.**)

The Committee strived to create opportunities for input and participation by children, foster parents and employees of CFS to support the communication of information to and from the Federation and CFS as well as to facilitate inclusive opportunities for the participation of children in care and other care providers providing living arrangements for children involved with CFS.

Reason for Consultation

CFS and the Federation recognize the important work and support provided by foster families across Prince Edward Island and the Minister sought to strengthen the Foster Care Program by building upon the programs successes and to understand and action concerns raised by foster parents, children in care and by CFS staff.

During the consultation process, the Committee heard from children in care and CFS workers that foster parents provide an invaluable service to children in Prince Edward Island by providing a loving and nurturing home that supports children during some of the most traumatic experiences they will face in their lives.

CFS workers consistently referenced the fact that foster parents are dedicated to provide a safe and caring environment for children as well as to provide children with structure and opportunities to succeed in life. Children in care frequently commented that foster parents provide support and provide them with a “home” which they have never had before. Foster parents also recognized that they are providing opportunities for children and also that workers from CFS endeavored to support placements to ensure the best outcomes for children.

Expectations of foster care families, as well as the foster care system, continue to evolve. The CFFA reports, “The nature of fostering, which continues to be an integral part of child welfare services, has evolved from one of benevolent volunteerism to one of quasi-professionalism.”¹⁷

¹⁷ Canadian Foster Families Association, Strategic Plan - 2017-2020.

Foster families are increasingly being asked to become active participants in case management and in the provision of remedial treatment.

The CFFA also reports that across the country there is a view that the “foster care system” is broken.¹⁸ In reality, it is really a case of so many of our families in Canada being in crisis with no place to turn. The CFFA has recently identified common needs from its provincial/territorial members, particularly the recruitment and retention of foster families, better training for foster families, improved financial resources for foster families and improved relationships and partnerships between foster families and child welfare agencies.¹⁹

Prince Edward Island is also a member of the Child Welfare League of Canada (“CWLC”) that includes community service agencies, federal, provincial & territorial government departments, universities and child advocates representing all areas of Canada. Members play a crucial role in helping the CWLC identify and address child welfare, children’s mental health and youth justice issues in all jurisdictions across the country.²⁰ A concern consistently raised by members is recruitment and retention problems with foster parents across Canada that is placing foster care systems at risk.

A recent report conducted by the CWLC represented the largest data based review on foster parenting in Canada, providing for the first time a national picture of foster parenting. The report found that a common trend throughout Canada is that foster care exists in a state of crisis, facing diminishing resources at a time when the demand for both general foster care and more specialized resources to support children and youth in need continues to rise.²¹

This situation is problematic because research has shown that caregiver stability is important for ensuring favorable outcomes for children in care. Not only does the provision of caregiver stability require children in care to be placed with foster parents as opposed to being placed in a group setting, but it also requires that these children have placement stability within the foster care system.²²

I grew up taking care of my mother and brother and I had an abusive dad. I never knew what a healthy family dynamic was. I got that in my last foster home. I finally got to feel like a kid when I went into foster care.

We think fostering is a very rewarding experience. Where else can you have such a positive impact on today’s children? We feel that it has been a wonderful experience and that we as well as the children we have fostered have benefited from the Program.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Child Welfare League of Canada, Strategic Plan – 2013-2018.

²¹ Child Welfare League, “Rescuing a Critical Resource: A Review of the Foster Care Retention and Recruitment Literature”, (2004).

²² Nowacki & Schoelmerich, “Growing up in foster families or institutions: attachment representation and psychological adjustment of young adults,” (2010).

A Review of the *Act* began in November 2015 by the Child Protection Act Review Advisory Committee made up of 15 members who were appointed by the Minister. The review process involved collecting information from citizens across Prince Edward Island who are affected by the *Act*, including foster parents. Through the course of the review, the Child Protection Act Review Advisory Committee learned that foster care in Prince Edward Island is in need of improvement. A primary concern that the committee highlighted in their report was the disproportionately low number of foster families compared to the number of children in care.²³

The Committee also heard about the specific challenges experienced by Prince Edward Island foster parents. One area deemed to be problematic was the lack of collaboration between CFS workers and foster parents. The Committee heard that some foster parents perceived a lack of respect from the child welfare system, demonstrated by a lack of communication and consultation with foster parents. Foster parents also expressed concern about CFS workers withholding information from them (e.g., medical information about children in their care) and not being involved in plans of care for their foster children. Government has publically stated its commitment to acting on the recommendations contained in the Child Protection Act Review and developed a five-year action plan to implement the Committee's recommendations.²⁴

Commencing in 2017 and completed in 2018, Ms. Selynn Butler an honours Psychology student, drafted a thesis paper in collaboration with CFS staff titled "Facilitators and Barriers in Recruiting and Retraining Foster Parents in Prince Edward Island". This paper examined the facilitators and barriers in recruiting and retaining foster parents in Prince Edward Island. A sample of 33 regular foster parents in Prince Edward Island was completed and an analysis was conducted of both quantitative and qualitative data.

Ms. Butler identified to both CFS and the Federation that foster parents are largely satisfied with their experience of fostering on Prince Edward Island; however, there are areas in need of improvement including more autonomy support for foster parents, relationship building between CFS and foster parents and the need for additional financial support for foster parents.²⁵

Recognizing the integral role that foster families play in ensuring the best outcome for children in care and in response to the letter sent by the Federation to the Minister in September 2017 requesting a formal review of the Program as well as the recommendations of the Child Protection Act Review Advisory Committee, the Minister sought to better understand the opportunities for growth and improvement through a consultation process with those involved and affected by the Program.

Current Legal and Administrative Structure

²³ Child Protection Act Review, Advisory Committee Report, (2016).

²⁴ Gillis, D. Child protection Act review released, (2017). Retrieved from <https://www.princeedwardisland.ca/en/news/child-protection-act-review-released>.

²⁵ Butler, "Facilitators and Barriers in Recruiting and Retaining Foster Parents in Prince Edward Island", (2018).

The Foster Care Program is part of Child Protection Services in the Division of Child and Family Services, Department of Social Development and Housing of the Government of Prince Edward Island.

Child Protection Act and Mandate

The *Child Protection Act* provides the legislative framework for protecting children from parental harm due to abuse and neglect within provisions of the *Act* and with consideration to the best interests of children. In Prince Edward Island, the Minister and Department of Social Development and Housing have the responsibility for the administration of the *Act*.²⁶

The *Act* reflects a number of beliefs about children which are espoused in today's society, for example children have the right to be protected from parental harm and neglect. The purpose of the *Act* is to see that this protection is carried out. Although the actions under the *Act* are generally carried out by CFS staff, it is understood that prevention of abuse and neglect of children is a shared responsibility amongst family, community and the Province.²⁷

Under the *Act*, the Minister designates a Director of Child Protection, who in turn delegates the provision of child protection services across the province to child protection social workers.²⁸ Social workers also have the delegated authority of the Director to approve foster homes for children who come into the care of the Department. Resources such as group homes, specialized residential facilities, assessment resources and respite resources are developed to serve children and youth in care.

There are a number of situations in which children are defined as being in need of protection, such as when a child has been or is at significant risk of being physically, sexually or emotionally harmed by a parent, or where the child experienced such harm and the parent did not prevent it, or where a child requires treatment and the parent does not seek this treatment.²⁹

Child Protection Services have the responsibility and authority to assess situations and, where necessary, investigate reports of children believed to be in need of protection. When children are found to be in need of protection after an investigation is complete, child protection services are offered.³⁰ The aim of services provided is to protect and care for the child(ren) and assist families to address the identified protection concerns. These services can include, but are not limited to, parenting programs, referrals for mental health services and counseling. Investigations and in care services are provided from any of the five offices across the Province.

It is the goal of Child Protection to keep families together if it is best for the child. Children who cannot live with their parents may be able to live with other family members. If this is not

²⁶ Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, section 3.

²⁷ Ibid, Preamble.

²⁸ Ibid, section 5.

²⁹ Ibid, section 9.

³⁰ Ibid, section 13.

possible, the child may be placed in a foster home or a group home during the investigation. This is called "being in care".

Once the investigation is complete, a CFS worker will decide what should happen with the family. CFS will first ascertain whether the family has made a least intrusive plan for the placement of the child that mitigates CFS' concerns. CFS always endeavors to facilitate least intrusive plans for children as it results in better outcomes for the child. However, if there is reason to be concerned about a child's safety and it is determined that it is not safe for the child to remain in the home, a CFS worker will find a safe place for the child to stay if there are not any relatives or friends of the family who are able to safely care for the child under a least intrusive plan.

Under the *Act*, there are a variety of ways that a child's residence and custody and control of a child can change based on risk to the child, including:

1. **Least Intrusive Plan:** CFS works with parents to make a plan for the child. Parents put forward a plan of care for their children, which may be approved by if the child protection concerns are mitigated. This is an agreement between the parents and someone who is a support to them (extended family, friend, neighbour). Parents agree to have the child live with the person or for the person to help the family until it is safe for the child to live with their parents. CFS must agree that this is safe arrangement for the child. The child remains in the legal custody and guardianship of the parent.
2. **Grandparent and Care Provider Program:** When a child is found in need of protection and requires out of home care for safety reasons, the child's parent may arrange an appropriate alternate safety plan for the child to live with a grandparent, extended family member, or friend and the care provider is eligible for compensation from CFS for caring for the child. The child remains in the legal custody and guardianship of the parent.
3. **A Voluntary Agreement:** Parents may make an agreement with CFS for the child to be in care. The parents and CFS make an agreement about what the parents must do to improve the situation at home to care for the child properly. For example, the parents may need to take a course on anger management or see a counsellor. The parents must agree to have the child stay in a foster home or a group home during this time. Voluntary agreements can be temporary or permanent.
 - a) **Temporary care** happens when the parents agree to have the child stay in a foster home or group home while they get help.
 - b) **Permanent Care** happens when parents decide they cannot properly care for their child or CFS decides that the parents cannot properly care for their child. In this case, the parents may give permanent care of the child to CFS. This means social workers would make decisions about where the child lives and who will provide the child's care. This is a legal process where a judge makes a decision on the permanent guardianship of the child, or the parents may consent to a permanent plan of placement for the child.

4. **Apprehension** happens when there is a reason to be concerned about the child’s safety and the parents are unable or unwilling to make a plan for the child’s safety. The child will be taken into care immediately.

Under the *Act*, the Director has the ability to delegate the Director’s rights and responsibilities respecting a child in the custody and guardianship of the Director, subject to monitoring and direction by the Director, to an approved caregiver within or outside the province³¹, however guardianship and legal responsibility for a child remains with the Director³². In the *Act*, “caregiver” is defined as including foster parents.³³

The Foster Care Contract signed by foster parents also includes clauses that outline that legal custody and guardianship of the child does not transfer to the foster parent upon placement of the child in a foster home by the Director. The Director also retains the right to determine the placement of a child in care and may remove children from the care of a foster parent at any time and without notice.

Program Administration and Policy

Policy documentation authorized by the Deputy Minister of Social Development and Housing details protocols and processes to be used by CFS staff when carrying out their roles and duties in relation to the Program.

Foster Home Screening and Approval

In order to be considered by CFS for participation in the Program, prospective foster parents must fill out the Foster Care: A Self-assessment Questionnaire and Application Information Form, (**Attachment C**). A CFS Child Protection Resource Social Worker runs a search in the CFS Information System within Child Protection Services to determine if the applicant(s) have ever been involved with child protection. A CFS Child Protection Resource Social Worker subsequently reviews the Questionnaire and determines initial eligibility for enrollment in the Program.

The Committee notes that CFS has recently invested in the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE). SAFE is a structured home study methodology that allows child protection agencies to effectively and systematically evaluate prospective families for foster placements. Most provinces in Canada use SAFE and the Committee heard that CFS and the Federation have been consulting with one another regarding the benefits of adopting SAFE.

The Committee believes that SAFE will result in a uniformity of evaluation, which is fair to all prospective foster parents. The Committee believes this will improve the suitability of foster

³¹ Ibid, section 48.

³² Ibid, section 48.

³³ Ibid, subsection 1(g).

parents recruited to provide homes for children. SAFE also focuses on the strengths that applicants have and how those strengths can and will aid them in fostering. The Committee believes this will improve the screening process of CFS in evaluating prospective foster parents.

Program policies reviewed and authorized by the time this Review was conducted require that foster parent applicants meet the following intake criteria to be considered for the Program:

1. **Residency:** The Applicant must be a resident of Prince Edward Island for a minimum of six months and plan to reside on Prince Edward Island for at least two years;
2. **Age:** The applicant must be twenty-one years of age or older;
3. **Relationship Status:** Single applicants cannot have had a significant relationship loss for two years prior to their application and couples who apply to foster must have had at least two years of stable living together. Support individuals who will have regular proximity to the children via the applicant are also required to be screened to ensure that children are not at risk;
4. **Head of Household:** Applicants must be the head of the household in they reside;
5. **Housing/Safety Standards:** Applicants are required to have a home in safe condition and comply with legislated housing, health and safety standards. Applicants are also required to comply with CFS' requirements regarding dedicated living spaces and sleeping arrangements;
6. **Foster Home Checklist:** Applicants must agree to participate in an annual review by which a Foster Home Checklist is completed to ensure basic physical housing standards continue to be met;
7. **Substance Use:** Applicants must agree to refrain from misusing alcohol, mood altering prescription or illicit drugs as well as refrain from smoking in the vicinity of children;
8. **Health Problems:** Applicants must not be experiencing a life-threatening disease or significant health issues or serious illness;
9. **Finances:** Applicants must be able to demonstrate their capacity to manage their own financial affairs and the primary motivation for fostering must not be for financial gain;
10. **Emotional Support:** Applicants must have strong and predictable networks to call upon for social and emotional support;
11. **Relationship with the Education System:** Applicants must be able to advocate with teachers and school officials for the needs of children in their care;
12. **Confidentiality:** Applicants must agree to sign an oath of confidentiality;
13. **Death/Grieving Time:** Applicants cannot have suffered the loss of a partner or child within two years of applying;
14. **Criminal Activity:** Applicants must agree to provide an acceptable criminal record check to CFS; and
15. **Child Welfare Issues:** Applicants cannot use corporal punishment or have had a child who was found in need of protection within the last two years.

There are circumstances in which a placement may be deemed by CFS to not be appropriate, these include: the child is a poor match for the home, the child's behavior cannot be safely managed in the home, the intended placement is already depleted of necessary resources, there are two or more other children currently in care in the home and the needs of one or more of them will be jeopardized by additional placements and other factors exist that are not in the best interest of the child being placed in the home.

A foster parent also has the right to refuse a placement for similar reasons as outlined above. When determining whether a family is a good match for another child, a foster parent's past refusal of a placement cannot be used by CFS when determining whether to place a different child in that home.

Placement Preparation and Matching

Once applicants have been approved as foster parents, the placement preparation process can begin. Foster parents must sign the Foster Care Contract (**Attachment D**) which confirms the legal relationship between the Director of Child Protection and the foster parents. Children in the legal custody of the Director of Child Protection can only be placed in foster homes that have a valid and current contract.

Prior to entering into the Foster Care Contract, CFS workers are required to verify that the foster parents have completed both the Foster Home Assessment (**Attachment E**) and Foster Parent Preparation Group. A CFS worker is required to meet with the foster parents to explain the contract process and required probation period which requires completion of no less than ninety days of placement and a one year contract term based on classification level one. The level system will be explained in more detail below. CFS can extend the probationary period, terminate the foster placement or approve the foster placement. If the probationary period is successfully completed, CFS will meet with the foster parents to complete a new one-year contract and assign a level 1 classification.

It is important to note that the Federation and CFS recently worked together to advocate and change the level compensation for foster parents during the probation period. Historically, foster parents who were on their probation period did not receive a level fee and this was an economic barrier for prospective foster parents. The Federation and CFS were able to change this process and now foster parents in their probation period are able to receive level compensation.

All foster parents are provided information relevant to each child during the pre-placement meeting (this may also be conducted over the phone) held between CFS and the foster parents. Information that may be provided includes history of aggressive and/or destructive behaviors, past physical or sexual abuse, known suicidal risks or behaviors, risk of fleeing the home, use of alcohol, or drugs, criminal activities, allergies and other medical information. Foster parents are also given the Children in Care Placement Information Form (**Attachment F**). This form contains essential information on each child. There are situations in which a child may have to be placed in a home on short notice due to an emergency. If this occurs CFS endeavors to get the information to foster parents regarding the child as soon as possible.

When a child needs a foster care placement, all efforts are made to match the child with a foster home that has compatible strengths, similar race/ethnicity/religious background, is located in or near the child's home community and allows siblings to be placed together.

For planned placements, the child/youth is introduced to the caregiver through one or more pre-placement contacts such as a short visit or overnight stay in the home. Where possible, birth

parents are to be included in pre-placement activities. CFS is to meet with the child after this visit to identify the child's likes, dislikes, fears and anxieties about living with the foster parents. CFS will also debrief with foster parents after the initial contact visit via a meeting or telephone call.

Foster parents are also provided risk insurance, as well as home and care insurance through CFS. This is an example of the collaborative relationship between the Federation and CFS. For many years, foster parents were expected to obtain their own risk insurance and CFS staff would monitor and ensure that foster parents had appropriate insurance. The Federation requested that different options be explored and CFS and the Federation were able to agree that CFS would secure and provide insurance to foster parents. Prince Edward Island is one of the few jurisdictions in Canada where the Government covers risk insurance costs for foster parents.

Foster Parent Training

New Foster Parents are expected to attend a Foster Parent Preparation Group to build their knowledge and skills to start fostering. Preparation trainings are typically scheduled in the spring or fall, or as needed. The goals of this training are to introduce new foster parents to fostering issues, the circumstances in which children come into care, to outline the roles and responsibilities of foster parents, to discuss child behavior, discipline, loss and separation, family connections, and policies and protocols of the Program. CFS is currently exploring providing additional training options, including PRIDE training which is outlined in this Review.

When new foster parents receive probationary approval for a placement, they will be given the dates and location of cluster groups across PEI. A "cluster" is one of the primary means by which foster parents are provided with ongoing support, training opportunities and updates on departmental and regional issues. Foster parents are required to attend cluster meetings regularly as a condition of their Foster Care Contract.

CFS workers are assigned to each cluster group. CFS organizes several cluster meetings throughout the Province, operated by the 5 CFS offices. One of the foster parents are expected to attend a minimum of one (1) meeting per month, as outlined in the Foster Care Contract. The agenda for each meeting is to be determined by the CFS worker as well as foster parents themselves.

Continued Placement and Foster Home Monitoring

Levels and compensation in the Contract are based on factors such as the skills, experience, knowledge of child development and needs, availability for placement and the support network of the foster parents. Capabilities are measured based on a level system in which CFS evaluates the capabilities of each foster family, with Level 1 being the lowest and Level 3 being the highest. A new contract is not signed until both CFS and the foster parents have completed an annual review.

Each foster care resource family is to be reviewed at least once annually by CFS in order to verify the terms of the Foster Care Contract are being met and to conduct an assessment of work performed by the foster parents and CFS. CFS staff meet with the foster parents to discuss their fostering experiences, current fostering arrangements and future plans. During the meeting, the foster parents will update documentation for CFS including the Annual Foster Home Assessment (**Attachment E**) and Annual Foster Care Resource Review (**Attachment G**). If the necessary conditions are met, CFS will prepare a new annual contract to be signed by the foster parents.

When a Child Leaves a Foster Family

Children are usually placed in foster care on a short-term basis until they can return to their families or another permanent placement alternative such as a placement with extended family, private guardian or adoptive family can be found. The child, foster family, CFS or the court may initiate the move of a foster child. There are many reasons why a child may be moved. For example, the child may return to their biological parents or CFS may move a child so that siblings can be together.

When a child leaves a foster home placement, CFS are to complete an **Exit Interview (Attachment H)** with the child in order to determine the child's opinion regarding the placement which helps to assess the foster parents' strengths and areas for improvement. Foster Parents are also expected to complete a **Post Placement Evaluation (Attachment I)** with CFS in order to identify any successes or challenges with respect to the child's placement in the home.

Foster Care Financial Supports

In exchange for their services, foster parents receive monthly compensation for room/board and clothing as well as a level fee that is determined by the foster parents skills and abilities and in accordance with the leveling system. Maintenance fees are costs associated with caring for children in their homes. This includes a basic maintenance rate – per diem, that is meant to cover all of the child's day-to-day costs including food, personal care items, general household costs, and gifts. Foster parents also receive a level fee compensation for their level of experience in caring for a child/youth. This fee is paid according to the foster home level classification conducted by CFS and included in the Foster Care Contract. Ranges for maintenance fees are between \$838.00 to \$956.00 for children aged 0-11 and \$1,134.00 to \$1,255.00 for children aged 12-18 and level fees are paid as follows: Level 1: \$600., Level 2: \$1,000., and Level III: \$1,400.

Foster parents may also receive a "second bed fee" if they have an additional placement over and above what they have been contracted to provide. For example, if a foster family is contracted for two beds and they take a third placement, they would receive this fee when they take a third child. For foster families at Level 1, the extra bed fee is \$100 per month, for Level 2 it is \$200 per month and for Level 3 it is \$300 per month.

Foster parents may also be reimbursed for a range of other child-related expenses including a child's special allowance, recreational fees and costs associated with transporting the child to appointments. CFS also covers medical and dental costs associated with the child.

The Prince Edward Island Federation of Foster Families

The Federation is a provincial, not-for-profit association that consists of an elected president and directors. The role of the Federation is to support foster families, advocate for foster families and the rights of children, educate the community about foster care, facilitate training, social gatherings and symposiums and serve as the liaison between foster families and CFS.

The Federation represents foster families and foster children across Prince Edward Island. In addition to volunteer foster parents, a representative of CFS sits on the board. Foster parents are required to hold membership with the Federation in order to be eligible and maintain appropriate insurance coverage as outlined in the Foster Care Contract.

Current Canadian Context: Foster Care Programs

Foster care programs are developed and operate in each province and territory and reflect each jurisdictions' unique demographics and geography. Although there are distinctions in the delivery of foster care programs throughout Canada, many of the processes and requirements throughout Canada are similar. In comparing and contrasting Prince Edward Island's Program with other provinces and territories in Canada, the Committee had two main areas of focus: 1). Compensation Rates Provided to Foster Parents and 2). Methods used to Recruit and Retain Foster Parents

Compensation Rates Provided to Foster Parents

There is considerable variation in the amount and types of financial support provided to foster parents across Canada. Comparing the provinces and territories in Canada is challenging due to variances in what different jurisdictions include in their compensation rates. CFS and the Federation believe Prince Edward Island's model based on maintenance rates and a leveling system is easy to understand in comparison to other Provinces who have a variety of payment types issued to foster payments. Attached, as (**Attachment J**) is a table that outlines basic information summarized as an estimate based on an overview of foster care rates compiled in September 2015, in different Canadian jurisdictions.

Some jurisdictions reported a basic foster care rate with additional funds provided for other purposes (such as clothing and allowances) which may limit comparability. Due to different or additional age and/or location categories for rates in other jurisdictions, a range is provided with calculations based on the minimum amount that a child in the noted age range would receive to the maximum amount. Those provinces and territories that use different or additional age and location categories are noted, as well as those where a per diem rate was adjusted to a monthly rate.

Information contained in the table is based on information provided by provincial and territorial officials and is subject to change. Information contained in the table indicates that, based on basic maintenance comparison, Prince Edward Island places second overall in maintenance

amounts. As noted above, ranking foster parent maintenance rates is challenging given that these figures do not take into account the complexity of service payments that are included and excluded by different provinces and territories based on program policies when calculating overall payment rates. For example, some provinces/territories provide additional compensation for infant care costs, additional allowance for those living in northern/remote areas, skill development fees, special needs funding and distinctions based on specialized/treatment foster care placements.

Methods Used to Recruit and Retain Foster Parents

The factors inherent in the recruitment and retention process within the foster system of Canada are numerous and complex. The Committee noted that demographics and societal structures are constantly in flux and as such, the needs of prospective foster parents as well as the needs of children in care continue to evolve and this affects the recruitment and retention of foster parents. A report issued by the CWLC with respect to recruitment and retention issues with foster parents, posed solutions to address this problem.³⁴

First, the CWLC found that addressing the barriers to becoming a foster parent is important for recruiting and further retaining foster parents. The primary barrier identified from the research was the fear of having to say goodbye to a child with whom foster parents had developed an emotional attachment. Informing and assuring prospective foster parents early that there are many different ways to foster (emergency, short-term, long-term, adoption, etc.) may help parents to seek the form that fits best and addresses this barrier.³⁵

Second, highlighting the strengths and positive impacts that fostering can have on a child tended to compel Canadians most. Focusing on these positive aspects such as making a difference/change in a child's life, providing a stable and safe home and giving children hope for the future tended to be most important.³⁶

In Prince Edward Island, the most influential reasons to become a foster parent were based on personal knowledge of a family or situation. This included knowing other foster families or growing up with parents who had fostered. Advertisements had little influence on the decision to become a foster parent. The CWLC found that most of these foster parents were moderately satisfied in their role. However, two thirds of these foster parents had considered quitting at some point. The most frequent reasons identified involved dealing with a child's difficult behaviour, agency red tape, and a lack of support services such as respite care.³⁷

During this review process, the Committee contacted provincial and territorial officials to determine how they addressed issues with recruitment and retention in their respective jurisdictions. Each jurisdiction that responded had very creative approaches to recruitment of

³⁴ Child Welfare League, "Rescuing a Critical Resource: A Review of the Foster Care Retention and Recruitment Literature", (2004).

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

foster parents through public campaigning. The Committee has grouped common themes/strategies used by the provinces and territories in Canada.

In all jurisdictions, with the exception of Ontario, officials indicated that they specifically seek the participation of foster parents in their recruitment and retention strategy. Jurisdictions invited foster parents to attend and participate in recruitment events and display photos, interviews and video clips throughout their public recruitment campaigns.

It is important to note that due to Ontario's provincial structure, their Ministry does not participate in the recruitment of foster parents and therefore cannot speak to the practices within the province. In Ontario, the Children's Aid Societies are responsible for overseeing the recruitment of foster parents within their own regions.

Media

There was a wide variety of platforms and multimedia tools used across jurisdictions for recruitment as highlighted below:

- Local community events- set up booths (ex. Trade shows, farmers market etc.)
- Targeted events hosted by the Department, Foster Parent Federation and Indigenous agencies/societies
- Website and online ads
- TV, radio and Newspaper ads
- Brochures, booklets, postcards, banners and posters
- Billboard ads
- Proclamations in the Legislative Assembly for Foster Family Week
- Movie theatre adds during previews
- Toll free enquiry phone number
- Social media (facebook/ twitter)
- Volunteer agencies

Prince Edward Island, in partnership with the Confederacy and Federation recently released a promotional video to support the recruitment of new foster parents. The video can be found at: <https://youtu.be/COLndpcqb3M>

Celebration/Service Awards:

Some provinces and territories also use recognition awards to celebrate foster parents for their dedication to serving children. The Committee heard that some of the types of recognition strategies included:

- Long service awards- recognizing foster parents that have actively fostered for 5, 10, 15 + years
- Hosting a formal dinner and/or presenting foster parents with pins or plaques
- Having a provincial/territorial foster parent week or month
- Seasonal recognition events with foster parents and staff; spring BBQ, Christmas Party etc.

The Committee also heard that a variety of support initiatives to support foster parents are also used as part of their respective recruitment and retention strategy which included:

Direct supports for Foster Families:

- Provincial mentorship program, supporting new foster parents during their first year of fostering
- Caregiver allegation support team that assists caregivers and their families through the difficult process of having an allegation of neglect, physical, sexual, emotional abuse made against them
- Foster Outreach Therapeutic Support, intensive 3-6 month support services that are provided in partnership with the foster family's regular social worker
- Support line for foster parents

Training Support:

- Cultural training, that ensures caregivers have an understanding of the cultural connection and are willing to work with the child's community in a meaningful way to support the child experiencing and learning about their culture, heritage and history
- Specific training related to the individual need of the child, FASD, medical, behavioral etc.
- 1-3 day conferences for additional training
- Developing joint training with foster parents and social workers to further enhance their relationship.

Additional supports:

- Between all jurisdictions, there is a very lengthy list of additional supports provided to foster parents to support the care of children placed in their home. Some notable initiatives include: daycare, respite, 1 on 1, cleaning services, mileage, clothing allowances, counseling, extra-curricular costs, and travel costs

Collaboration:

- A theme that presented throughout the responses were opportunities that provinces and territories took advantage of having social workers and foster parents working together. Whether it be by collaborating on events/projects, joint training or strategy sessions to enhance recruitment and retention, it was clear that developing relationships was a priority

Kinship:

- It was noted through the responses that there are jurisdictions that have changed their Foster Care Program to be inclusive of kinship placements. For example, Alberta's program is now called the AFKA; Alberta Foster and Kinship Association. It was also identified in the leveling rates of some jurisdictions that the leveling process and rates of pay are now either comparable or equally recognized for foster parents and kinships caregivers

Additional commonalities across jurisdictions:

- The use of leveling systems (with the exception of Yukon)
- The lack of matching tools used to match children with their foster homes
- The SAFE home assessment was the most prevalent foster home assessment tool used throughout the jurisdictions and most jurisdictions used the PRIDE pre-training/training program.

Methodology

The Committee sought to develop an approach to consultation which provided an opportunity to strengthen child-centered services on behalf of children in the legal custody and guardianship of the province and who are living in foster care homes.

An overarching principle for the Committee was that the consultation process and the subsequent Report accurately capture and reflect the voices of those who stepped forward and shared their stories so that Committee members could relay their intensely personal experiences and perspectives to the Minister and government administration.

The Committee worked together to draft questions to guide the consultation process. The Committee discussed at great lengths the importance of having broad questions to facilitate applicability to a continuum of audiences, recognizing the importance of being able to theme feedback to the questions and form recommendations for the final Report while also ensuring focus on foster parents, children in care and working relationships between foster parents and CFS staff. The Committee also agreed that consistent communication and flexibility were crucially important.

Participants chose one or more of the various methods of responding offered by the Committee that were most suitable to a person's specific situation or level of comfort. The method chosen depended upon whether the participant was a foster parent, a child who was presently or had been in care (including Indigenous children) or a member of CFS.

The purpose outlined to stakeholders was for audiences to express their views on facilitated guiding questions to inform recommendations for a final report to be submitted to the Minister. The Chairs of the Committee sent email communication to CPS staff and foster parents to advise them that a Review of the Program had commenced.

The Federation was tasked with contacting its members and inquired how they would best like to be engaged for the review process. The Federation reported to the Committee that most foster parents preferred to have a questionnaire emailed to them or to answer a questionnaire at a cluster meeting.

Foster parents were then provided opportunities to participate in the review through written submissions, private sessions and facilitated engagement sessions at the Spring Symposium (2018). The deadline for all foster parent submissions was April 30, 2018.

Kelly Peck, Manager of Children's Services was the contact person for all submissions and/or questions and foster parents were provided with both her email and phone number.

Mike Gaudet, Residential Services Coordinator provided leadership in planning two events for children in care, to elicit their opinions and feedback for the consultation process. One event was held in Summerside and one was held in Charlottetown for children in foster care ages 8 – 18 years.

Feedback was elicited from staff who provided services to children in group homes and/or foster care. The Residential Services Coordinator also coordinated with staff of Residential Services for each group home to host an opportunity for Youth Worker led engagement sessions.

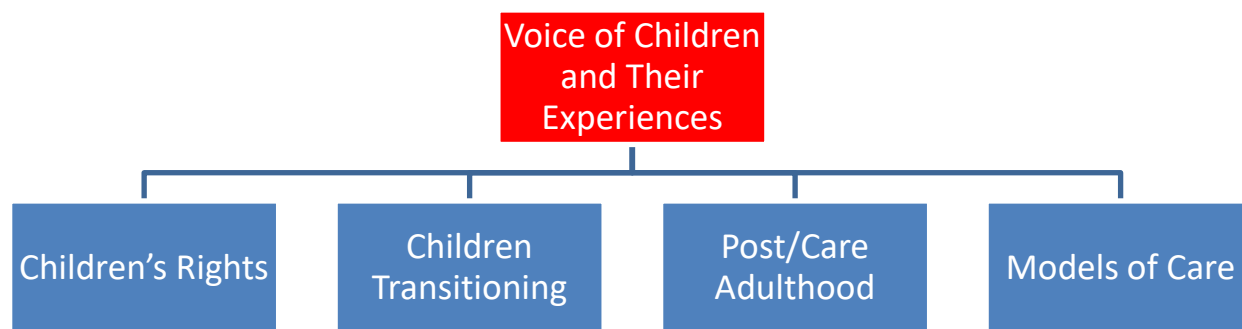
The Residential Services Coordinator drafted age appropriate guiding questions building on questions used for child engagement throughout the Child Protection Act Review.

Facilitators of the small group sessions were guided by a Foster Care Facilitator's Small Group Guide that included information on how sessions are to be conducted as well as the guiding questions to be used to facilitate conversation. Small group sessions were held with children who were presently or had been in care (including Indigenous children), foster parents, and CFS staff.

Key Themes and Considerations

During the consultation process, there were many personal experiences shared from a diverse range of perspectives on the Program, from children who are in or who were in care, foster parents and staff of CFS. Emerging from the data, the Committee developed major themes to help guide this Review. Major themes are broken down into subthemes based on an organizing framework agreed upon by the Committee.

Theme 1: Voice of Children and their Experiences



Comments related to this theme reflect the desire of children in care, foster parents and staff of CFS to ensure that children are consulted and heard when decisions are made that affect them and that children are given the opportunity to flourish in a nurturing and caring environment that supports them as they transition to adulthood. An overarching theme within all forms of data collection for this consultation process was the need to ensure that the Program was child focused and modeled based on the rights, needs and perspectives of children.

The Convention enshrines the right of children to be involved in all decisions that affect their lives.³⁸ In Prince Edward Island, the *Act's* preamble explicitly states that children are entitled, no less than adults, based on their developmental capacity, to be heard in the course of, and to participate in processes that lead to decisions that affect them.³⁹ Data clearly indicates that a child's voice is often not heard and effectively represented in CFS' cases. Research shows that both professionals and children themselves think that the meaningful engagement of children in the decision making process would lead to improved outcomes for children at risk.⁴⁰

Under the Convention, children have the right to a supportive and nurturing environment that supports their development and it is the duty of Government and society to ensure that a child's best interests are paramount in any decision that impacts them.⁴¹ The benefits of foster care are almost endless for children, they are able to live in a safe environment, gain access to opportunities they would never have had otherwise and they are able to grow and to reach their potential. A positive experience in the Program has a direct correlation to a child's sense of normalcy and an identity as part of the family unit. A foster care home, whether with a single parent or couple, affords a child the opportunity to develop healthy emotional intimacy, trust, self-esteem and the opportunity to learn valuable life skills.

Each child or youth residing in a foster home in Prince Edward Island has unique needs depending on a range of factors including age, cultural background, mental, emotional and physical stage of development. Some children and youth require specialized supports to address specific medical, psychological or developmental conditions. Recognizing that the needs of each child and youth are unique, the foster care service delivery system must be based on a 'child-centred' approach that is designed to support foster parents to meet the specific needs of children

³⁸ Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

³⁹ Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, Preamble.

⁴⁰ La Valle & Jelicic, "Voice of the Child in the Child Protection System, (2012).

⁴¹ Convention on the Rights of the Child, General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989.

and youth in their care. This includes providing supports and training to foster families to effectively meet these specific needs.

Rights of children need to be balanced within the requirement of protecting a child's privacy and their safety and security. The Director of Child Protection and Government have a legal responsibility to protect children in care as the public guardian for these children and there is a high onus of responsibility and expectation of the Director and Government to provide safe and nurturing environments for some of Prince Edward Island's children.

Children's Rights

Voice of the Child: The Committee heard from children in care, foster parents and staff of CFS that children should have more active participation ("a voice") in the placement and case planning process and further that care plans need to be child focused.

Children are not being included in the decisions that affect them regarding placements, case conferences and moving.

Parent's rights trump what is right for kids.

Data from consultations indicated that when children are appropriately matched with a foster home that has compatible strengths to the needs of the child, it allows the child to thrive. The Committee heard from all parties in the consultation process that children have a right to a loving family, right to spirituality, health, education, to make complaints and provide input into their care.

Many foster parents also indicated that there needs to be an independent party that reviews Charter and Convention rights with a child upon request, like a Child Advisory Committee or an independent position dedicated to providing rights based supports to children in care. Other suggestions included childcare mentors for children as well as cluster meetings for children on their rights and responsibilities.

Children in care frequently indicated that they are not involved in the case planning process and that their preferences and dislikes are not respected by CFS or foster parents. Children who were consulted for this Review and who had their interests acknowledged and respected, frequently referenced how positive it made their experience in a foster home.

My foster parents asked me how I wanted to be introduced, I really liked that.

Foster parents raised some concerns that we need to be careful when involving children in the planning process to ensure that we balance the need for a child to know what is going on with language that can be scary and traumatizing to them.

All parties consistently referenced the need to mandate and involve children in post placement reviews. The Committee heard that children have valuable insight and input into the successes and failures of a foster care placement and they should be given the opportunity to share their

thoughts and experiences. Interviewing children and youth when they leave a foster home, whether planned or not, could provide an opportunity for the child/youth to voice his or her opinion. It is important that this information be provided to the CFS worker providing resource support to the foster family and child so that they have a greater understanding of the foster parents' strength and challenges. Additional supports can be provided to the foster family as needed.

Respect, Support and Normalcy: Children repeatedly expressed the desire to be treated like “normal” children and because of strict rules and policies; they feel stigmatized and unable to have a regular childhood. The Committee heard that children did not feel as though they were respected, appropriately supported and that they do not have the opportunity to be and act like children.

Biological kids and foster kids have different rules – you don't feel like part of their family or accepted. Feel like as a foster kid you don't get to do normal basic teenage activities, you're always just trying to find normal.

Respect: The Committee heard that children often feel that they are not respected or heard by CFS or by their foster parents. Some children stated that they felt isolated and not party to the decisions made by CFS or by foster parents.

Lack of belief by social worker. They don't believe kids in care. It is really bad some of the things my foster parent called me and my social worker didn't believe me and wouldn't do anything about it.

Foster parents can have anyone in their home without any regard for how comfortable the foster child is, but the same respect does not go the other way for a foster child to bring someone into their home.

A consistent theme raised for resolving this issue was a better recognition of a child's likes and dislikes. Suggestions were provided by the parties that a remedy to this problem would be having interviews with the child by CFS and providing information/documentation to the foster family so that they can prepare for the arrival of a child and ensure that their interests are respected. CFS commented that it can be challenging to provide detailed information to prospective foster parents as sometimes, during emergency placements, there is little information in the possession of CFS to forward to the foster parents and often biological parents refuse to give information to CFS workers to forward to foster parents.

Need to focus more on the emotional needs of each child – to understand that there are different needs for children and youth. Foster parents don't take the time learn about the individual needs and interests of each child.

Foster parents should have more information that tells them about the child/youth going into their home to help with the introduction process.

There should be a mandatory child in care information form that is given to Foster Parents ASAP!

I felt very fortunate that my foster parents took the time to get to know me and helped me feel like I was part of their family.

Foster parents and children frequently referenced the need for the child's connection to their biological parents be maintained and respected. Foster parents also expressed the need to provide more supports to biological parents so that they can resume caring for their children, particularly for parents in poverty situations.

Foster parents that are dedicated are able to separate their personal feelings and have a positive relationship with biological families, they sometimes even have the opportunity to support and mentor those parents. I've witnessed workers questioning the SW as to why they allowed communication and interaction between the biological and foster family which I think was totally wrong.

CFS staff commented that this is an issue that is continuously raised by all stakeholders and that CFS has struggled with balancing this over the years because of the potential of allegations against foster parents, particularly with some birth parents. CFS workers often limit ongoing contact with a child's biological parents to safeguard the foster parents, as foster parents would no longer be covered by the Department's insurance. CFS staff noted that during the placement process they encourage contact with the birth family (with exceptions due to safety concerns).

Some children also expressed a lack of respect for their emotions and the traumatic events in their lives.

Foster parents need to know personal boundaries. I was abused and I don't like to be touched but my foster parent didn't respect my boundaries and would constantly try to hug me.

Hearing foster parents talking about previous foster children negatively in the home in front of me. Now I feel like after I leave they will talk about me like that to the next foster child. I knew the kids that the foster parents were talking about so that made it really awkward. "Knowing that I could be in the next story automatically lowered my self esteem.

Respite was hard for me, I automatically thought that when I went to respite I was going to be moved soon, I felt it was the first sign that my foster parents were trying to move me out. My foster parent ended up stopping respite because they knew that. They said that they don't need respite for their biological children, so they don't need it for me either.

Support: A lack of support systems for children in care was frequently cited by all parties as a central issue needing improvement. Children, in particular, identified a lack of support when being introduced and transitioned into a new foster home. Children expressed that it is overwhelming to be placed in a new environment where the first moments of introductions involved an in-depth conversation regarding rules of the household. CFS workers also referenced the need to reevaluate the introduction process to ensure that it was based upon a child centred entry into care model.

Foster parents can be so rushed to flood kids with rules right away when entering the house, it is very overwhelming and makes for a very uncomfortable transition.

I feel like the introduction and meet and greet and transition should take longer. Transition into a new home is too quick and they always start too serious, negative all about rules.

CFS staff and program materials indicate that conversations about rules in the household are not meant to be discussed with the child when they first enter into a new foster placement. The Committee noted that this could indicate that there is a lack of consistency of practice or possibly understanding by foster parents of how child introductions are to be handled.

The Committee noted that there are two interrelated components at issue, the need to balance the safety and security of a child in foster care (as well as other children residing in a foster parents home), with the need to have child friendly introductions. The Committee also heard that some children want to know the “rules of the game” when they are first introduced to new foster parents, particularly older children. The Committee further noted that introductions and the explanation of roles depends on the particular needs of the child which will change based on their age and stage of development and that it is important to remain trauma informed when explaining guidelines and boundaries.

The Committee also heard that there is a lack of available services in the community to support children. All parties to the consultation referenced a lack of mental health and counselling support for children.

We need outside mental health support for the child as well as the foster parent.

A particular support that children referenced resulting in a positive experience for them was maintaining connections with other children in care. Children stated that they felt connected to these peers and that it provided them with a valuable outlet to share their successes, challenges and emotions.

I like group activities with other foster kids. When you are a kid in care you have an “instant connection” to other foster kids, they are the only other kids that understand. Sometimes they are the only lasting connection you have – foster care has created lasting connections for me.

Normalcy: The desire to be treated and feel like a “normal” child was arguably the most consistent message that children expressed when speaking with the Committee.

Biological kids and foster kids have different rules – you don’t feel like part of their family or accepted. Feel like as a foster kid you don’t get to do normal basic teenage activities, you’re always just trying to find normal.

Not being able to babysit the younger biological kids was frustrating, as it was something that a normal kid would do.

The Committee heard from some children that they felt stigmatized and that they are not treated like normal children.

I don't like it when the foster parents introduce them as, "oh here's the foster child" I don't like the label.

I think the public needs more information about foster care. It has such a negative reputation and foster kids have a negative reputation, we are always being judged because we are foster kids.

Statements were also made to the Committee about a lack of respect for privacy and rules applying to foster children that do not apply to biological children living in the same household. Foster parents did reference the need to balance privacy with safety concerns.

I don't think foster parents understand that what we have in our rooms are our only true belongings and its normal to want to keep that safe and be able to keep some things private, it doesn't mean we are doing anything bad.

Children frequently stated that because of all of the rules and administrative red tape, they frequently are unable to participate in activities that bring them joy and often miss out on opportunities due to an inability to obtain authorization from CFS. Foster children found it particularly difficult when they compared the quality of life of biological children living in their foster home, in contrast with themselves. Foster parents consistently commented that a primary concern is transportation and that CFS needs to provide additional resources to support children in being transported to extracurricular activities.

Standard of care for children in care is different, differences in rules and opportunities between bio children and foster children within the same house.

Driver's ED- this is a problem because I'm going to school and working part time and I couldn't afford to pay for half of Driver's ed, but yet I'm not allowed to drive my foster parents car so how am I supposed to get my license.

I missed football and skating activities because my foster parents couldn't drive me. I got left out of various activities like a trampoline park in Moncton and a Hockey Tournament, because it was planned last minute and the social worker couldn't be contacted on the weekend to give permission.

Children Transitioning

Voice of the Child: Children frequently expressed how traumatic moving from one household/bed to another is and as referenced above, children in care have little opportunity to be informed and involved in their movements. Some children even expressed a fear of reprisal if they express their feelings about whether they are happy and thriving in a given environment.

The hard part is if you have a bad experience in a foster home, you are afraid to tell your worker or anyone because you always know that the next one could be worse. You're always afraid if you say something you will get switched somewhere worse.

A child in care can experience a variety of transitions that negatively impacts both their morale and outcomes. Children in care transition out of the care of their biological parents and into foster homes, group homes, back into the care of their biological parents, some children are adopted and others transfer out of the care of the Province when they reach 18 years of age when they enter post care/adulthood.

Both children and foster parents expressed a desire to be able to have the chance to say goodbye when a placement is ending. The Committee heard from all parties that there are not enough opportunities for the child to have input into their transitions and that there is a lack of support for children as they transition from one home to another.

Another overarching theme expressed by all parties is that we need to prepare children in advance for transitions whether it be from one care placement to another.

Supports for Children Transitioning: Foster parents frequently commented that the court system is ill equipped to deal with the needs of a child or their families and that court delays, constant litigation and resulting changes in residence for the child, are traumatic.

Children are in care far too long, the court system is too slow.

Children coming back into care and not returning to a familiar Foster Home is a problem. CFS staff referenced the need for greater understanding of the number of times a child experiences a transition, to understand the impacts it has on their wellbeing.

We need more training on transitions from one placement to another, the system is causing undue trauma to children because of these breakdowns in transitioning placements

Some suggestions heard by the Committee included better advance case planning and a detailed and consistent tracking record in a child's file on the number of times they are moved, as well as a process to engage community partners to ensure that the child experiences as little disruption in their lives as possible.

Post Care/Adulthood

One of the most consistently raised issues by children, foster parents and CFS staff was the lack of preparation and supports for children who are aging out of care. Children frequently expressed great anxiety and fear of reaching the age of 18, a milestone typically met with much celebration and excitement. The Committee heard that additional education and training for children aging out of care, such as an independent living course, would improve outcomes for children as they transition to adulthood.

Children who transition to post care/adulthood may continue to receive extended services from CFS or they may be “on their own” once they reach the age of 18. A child may receive additional compensation and support from CFS the Act⁴² in order to prepare the child for independent living where:

- the person is a student or a participant in an approved educational, training or rehabilitative program; or
- the Director considers that there are unusual circumstances which necessitate special transitional support.

This arrangement can only continue until the person reaches the age of 21 years or until the Director considers that there is no longer a need for services under this provision, whichever occurs earlier.⁴³

For children who do not attend an approved educational, training or rehabilitative program when they reach the age of 18, they are no longer eligible for any support or services from CFS.

It is bad that you don't get anything past age 18, if you're not permanent. I'm 17.5 and I find myself dreading turning 18.

The Committee heard that placements are not preparing children to be successful as they transition from foster care back to their biological family home. All parties referenced a need for better development of a child's life skills before they turn 18 as well as more training for all parties on how they can support a child as they reach the stage of permanency.

More emphasis on job training for 16-18 year olds coming out of care.

There is not enough relationship building for transitioning out of foster care when they turn 18, at 16 we should be facilitating connections, they need to be prepared for independence. Some group homes have a very institutional feel and they are so structured that it doesn't support youth to learn how to make their own decisions. They have to learn how to make their own decisions in life and I don't feel that group homes support this or prepare them for this.

The Committee also heard that support and training opportunities need to be provided to children so that they are equipped with life skills that allows them to feel confident as they transition out of care and also that they thrive as productive young adults. The Committee believes that CFS should explore options for allowing children to continue to receive services on a voluntary basis beyond the age of 18.

Foster parents frequently stated that many of the children in their care are not developed by the age of 18 and they expressed great concern, given the emotional and cognitive development of a child, that we are sending them out in the community to fail. Many foster parents expressed the desire to keep these children past the age of 18 to help support them; however, given the lack of

⁴² Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, section 46.

⁴³ Ibid.

compensation and financial assistance they are often not in a position to do so despite wanting to help and support the child.

Foster families have to make a difficult choice between keeping a child in their home , as they will lose their pay if the child turns 18

Children who are attending post-secondary education are able to access extended services from CFS, many children stated that this was extremely helpful in assisting them as they prepare themselves for their lives as adults.

I like the extended care program. The Foster Care Program supports you to go to school (post-secondary), you get a clothing allowance, they pay for you to live in residency while going to school and for groceries, these are really good things

Children also expressed a desire to stay with their foster families while they attended post-secondary education.

Permanent wards should be able to stay in their foster home until they finish school and they should be teaching life skills (budgets, banking)

Children also stated that this is limited to only a small group of children who are able to enter post-secondary education and that services should be provided to children, depending on their needs past the age of 18.

Everyone in care should be allowed to have extended services.

Another theme consistently raised by foster parents and children was the lack of affordable and supportive living arrangements for children who have transitioned to adulthood. The Committee was asked to explore whether transitional housing could be explored to support children in gaining independence and learning life skills when they reach 18 years of age.

Some foster parents also referenced the need to improve the process for a child aging out of care and subsequently accessing disability support services. The Committee heard that foster parents and children are confused on the process to obtain access to funding once they age out of care. Many children transfer out of care and subsequently receive supports from the Public Guardian Office, an office structured to assist persons who have reached adulthood who require assistance in making decisions that fall under the authority of the *Mental Health Act*, such as residential and education decisions. The Committee heard that streamlining this transfer and the development of a protocol between CFS, the Public Guardian Office and the AccessAbility Support Program (formerly known as the Disability Support Program) would streamline the provision of services to children who are transitioning to adulthood.

The transitioning of children from foster care to disability services is problematic and needs to be reviewed so that the children's needs continue to be met and so the child doesn't feel that they are abandoned. Some children would benefit from an extended stay in the foster home where they have started to feel like they are family. Just because a child reaches 18

years of age doesn't mean they are an adult on an emotional level and ready to move on to independent living.

It would be great to have a DSP (Disability Support Program) worker assigned to children in care with disabilities to help with services and transitions.

Models of Care

The Committee heard from all parties that the current model of care provided by the Program should be reevaluated to ensure that it is child focused and leveraging resources available to ensure the best outcomes for children. Children and foster parents frequently commented that we need to move from a reactionary model to a proactive model where foster parents are able to actively assist children before a crisis occurs. Some solutions posed by foster parents and children included a child centered respite program, therapeutic foster homes as well as a care model based on a holistic family model that includes more active participation by the biological family as well as larger community engagement in supporting children. Some participants recommended that a family group conferencing model be explored for use by the Program.

What we need is a family home, staffed, but with a family model. Where the children and youth are still supported like a family

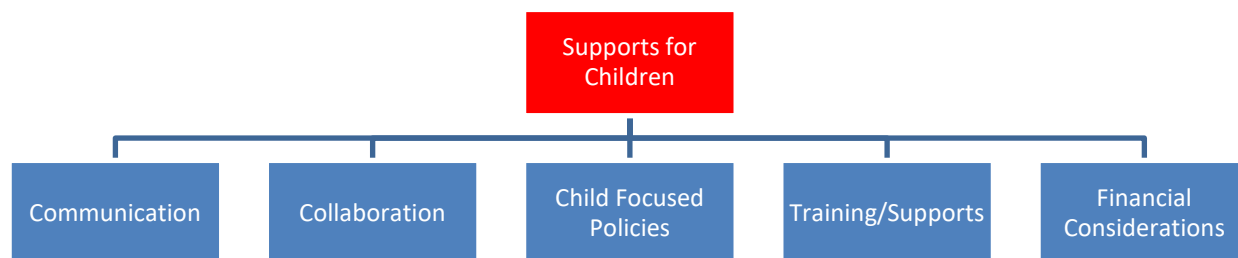
Children also commented that there are differences in rules and rights between foster homes as well as between Group Homes.

Some group homes allow pets, so it feels more like a family setting and others do not, why is there a discrepancy?

The Committee heard from all parties that there needs to be additional supports for children with special needs. Some considerations posed to the Committee included a youth worker in each regional office tasked with providing supports to both the foster family and to children with special needs.

Another reoccurring theme was the need to reevaluate the current assessment model used by the Program. Participants commented that the SAFE model and PRIDE model should be adopted by the Program in order to determine which model would best support children in ensuring they are placed in family settings that will best support their care and development.

Theme 2: Supports for Children



Comments related to this theme reflect the degree of trauma experienced by children in care as a result of abuse and neglect and the need for a collaborative and concerted partnership between CFS and foster families in order to provide services and supports that children require to meet their developmental needs. A theme within all forms of data collection for this consultation process was a feeling that CFS and foster parents could improve working relationships and that foster parents’ sense a lack of recognition for the work that they do and desire role clarity and greater consistency with CFS staff.

Foster parents reported deficiencies in the quality, timeliness and delivery of information from CFS to foster parents and a lack of inclusion in the case planning process. Foster parents stated that this impedes foster parents from effectively fulfilling their roles that affects the level of support that they can provide a child. Many foster parents indicated that their relationship with CFS and its supervisors needs to be improved and that they do not feel recognized as having a legitimate and valuable role on the team.

Relationship building and improved supports for foster parents will invariably improve the care provided to children who are in a foster home. The Committee believes that if foster children, foster parents and CFS are grounded in a common vision, philosophy and objectives for the Program, they will be able to apply consistent practices and provide consistent information regarding a fostering experience.

The Committee believes that consistently engaging children and foster families in the case planning process for children and youth in foster care placements is acknowledged as an important component of solid child welfare practice. In order for Prince Edward Island’s foster care system to succeed in the long term, policies and procedures must be grounded in a recognition that children are more likely to thrive and foster parents are more likely to continue fostering when they are provided regular opportunities for input into program administration and case planning decisions.

Communication

The Committee heard from all stakeholders that communication is critical in the provision of care and support services for children.

If everyone could work together and be on the same page, it would be much more beneficial. It does happen sometimes but not always. Communication is important and a real issue.

Foster parents felt that there were significant deficiencies in the quality, timeliness and delivery of information from social workers to foster parents and that this impedes foster parents from effectively fulfilling their roles. Foster parents felt that the lack of communication creates issues in consistency in caring for children as foster parents are often left on their own to make decisions only to have CFS override decisions made once communication occurs. For example, in the signing for extracurricular activities.

Other issues consistently raised include lack of communication with respect to program expectations, roles and responsibilities and lack of regular planning meetings. Foster parents also raised issues with not receiving notice when appointments for children have changed. Some participants cited a tension between foster parents and CFS, with the latter often stating that they are unable to share information due to privacy concerns.

Foster parents don't get enough information and history on the child to be able to properly care for the child due to what the social worker says are privacy concerns. A foster parent could unknowingly trigger a child or re-traumatize them without even knowing it without these details

The Committee heard that a lack of communication has a significant impact on the overall quality of care children receive and that the goal should be to provide coordinated and effective parenting. Children are also an excellent source of information for both CFS and foster families and communicate using both verbal and non-verbal modes of communication. As previously referenced, a central issue raised by foster parents is the lack of information they receive about a child when a child is placed in their home.

Foster parents should have more information that tells them about the child/youth going into their home to help with the introduction process

Foster Parents also expressed frustration at the high turnover of staff in CFS. With changing workers assigned to a child, foster parents found there was a lack of consistency and lack of continuity in support services provided by CFS. Some participants suggested that having a central line of communication would help to fix this problem.

Staff turnover makes it really difficult for foster parents, and well everyone, it's like they are starting from scratch each time

Communication is so important to ensure continuity for the child when they are returning home, a communication log for the child while in care is helpful for the biological family and the foster family and it supports continuity

There should be one point of contact for everyone involved, rather than a number of different workers

Having someone take calls and pass on messages to CFS would be extremely helpful and reduce frustration, taking time away from administration would help with caseloads

We need a “Foster Parents Administrator” The administration would work for CFS under the Resource section. Foster Parents are not employees but we need someone responsible for us besides our worker. The main purpose of this position would be to facilitate communication between CFS and Foster Parents

The need to include and inform children on aspects of their care was also consistently raised by the parties to the consultation. Foster parents and CFS staff commented on the need to report information to children while ensuring that we communicate with children in a way that conveys hope, by using inclusive rather than exclusive language.

One innovative suggestion posed was a panel of youth at the Foster Parent Symposium to provide a collective voice for children on the care services provided to them. Another suggestion included building relationships between the parties by having regular group meetings between CFS staff and foster parents, as well as the development of an information sharing protocol. The Committee believes that, where age appropriate, youth should be informed and understand their role as an integral members of a team and that their opinions and desires should be heard and respected.

Foster parents and social workers need more information on what can be shared with foster parents

Collaboration

Many foster parents reported that they do not feel recognized by CFS workers as having a legitimate and valuable role on the team. Foster parents commented that they often feel that their opinions and concerns are not taken into consideration, that they do not have any input in decision making and that their commitment and skills in providing foster care are not recognized or appreciated.

*Overall it is important to strengthen the relationship between all the parties
Foster parents are not respected or recognized*

We are not consulted when case plans are being written even though we have had the child for a long time and know the child well

Foster parents do not feel involved, such as being invited to case conferences, schools, hospitals, both foster homes and group homes do not have the opportunity to participate and need to have a voice in these meetings

The Committee also heard that stakeholders believe that the Program requires each party, including biological parents, to serve as a member of a collaborative team with the aim of ensuring the necessary supports and services are provided to children to help them feel safe and for them to reach their full potential.

I don't feel the relationship between the foster parents and biological parents is supported when a lot of biological families would feel more comfortable knowing who their child is living with, this could be a real positive

If the foster parents and biological parents are together for visits, it gives the biological parents the opportunity to learn from the foster parents

Some suggestions posed involved case planning and consistent tracking with direct involvement of foster parents and allowing foster parents to make certain decisions with respect to the care of a foster child.

Have everyone be part of case conferences for the child/youth

CFS should be in the home seeing the foster parent and child every 30 days at a minimum. How else do you know that things are going well for the child?

The Committee believes it is critical that foster parents understand their role as an integral part of a collaborative team and that they have positive relationships with CFS. This can be facilitated by ensuring that the roles and responsibilities of all parties in the Program are clearly defined, communicated, understood and respected.

We need to explore more coordination between homes, staff and supports, e.g if one child is in care going to an appointment connect with another home going in the same direction

The Committee also heard from stakeholders that there should be more collaboration with respect to program development. Foster parents commented that they would be excellent and willing partners to support the recruitment and retention of foster parents, some suggestions included a joint/collaborative foster parent and CFS Recruitment and Retention Committee. Another recommendation heard by the Committee was the need to have joint program reviews with annual reviews given to the Minister in partnership with CFS and the Federation.

Child Focus Policies

Foster parents frequently raised concerns with the lack of clarity with respect to policies and procedures of the Program. Foster parents identified a lack of consistent practice to update and implement policies and that many policies and procedures used by the Program are antiquated or cumbersome and overly complex.

Policies and procedures for foster parents are very restrictive and controlling

Policies make it restrictive for kids to do normal kid activities

Lack of clarity on the decisions foster parents can make and what they can't

The Committee heard that there was a need to update policies in line with modern Program realities and the need to streamline and simplify the language used in policies to make them

easier to comprehend. Many participants commented on the fact that the assessment tools used by CFS are outdated and do not reflect changes in society and Program expectations.

Assessment tool is archaic

We screen people out because of transportation. If we had additional resources to support day-to-day transportation; we would have more foster parents

A suggestion posed to the Committee included the use of inclusive rather than exclusive language when drafting Program policies.

The Committee also heard suggestions that policies should be developed collaboratively between CFS and foster parents, suggestions included a need to streamline documentation and administrative paper work required by the Program, the need to have policies to document and monitor the number of times a child is moved in care, a need for an allegation policy, a conflict resolution policy, as well as a placement preparation policy.

Streamline the application, assessment and contracting process. The need for a clear list of what needs to be accomplished by potential foster parents and some direction on how to carry through with the bureaucratic parts would be helpful

Foster parents suggested that the Federation and CFS should collaborate with one another to ensure that policies are drafted in a way that is child focused.

Some foster parents also questioned why Prince Edward Island was the only Province that does not have a foster to adopt program.

PEI is the only province that doesn't foster to adopt

Foster parents also expressed the desire for updated resource and information material that would help them in the provision of foster care for children. All parties consistently raised the need for the clarification of roles and responsibilities of each party. Suggestions for improving knowledge of everyone's roles included drafting a handbook for foster parents as well as ensuring that all policy and resource material is posted online and updated frequently.

There should be a new resource manual to explain all resources, contract, guidelines

Forms should be online

Training/Supports

The Foster Care Contract and level system require that foster parents complete certain training requirements; these include: Non-Violence Crisis Intervention, CPR/First Aid, Aboriginal cultural sensitivity training, Period of Purple Crying (depending on child's age) and other educational needs as directed by CFS. Trainings are organized at the monthly cluster meetings.

Foster parents commented on the need for additional ongoing training and supports beyond pre-service orientation training. Foster parents stated that children coming into their homes are increasingly having needs that are more complex and they do not feel supported in managing some children's behaviors. All participants agreed that training is critically important given the varied experiences and backgrounds of children in care and that children have ever evolving needs as they mature and grow. The Committee heard that societal changes necessitate the need for ongoing and up-to-date training opportunities.

Foster parents do not feel supported in managing their child/youth's individual needs and behaviors. They need specific training to the needs of their child/youth

Higher needs children are really draining on foster parents; they need additional supports for those children

Foster parents also commented on how stressful having an allegation made against them can be, such as abusing a child in their care. Foster parents requested additional supports (policy and training) from CFS, particularly in how to navigate an allegation against them.

More supports for foster parents when allegations are made against a foster home, it is a very reactive and traumatizing process

Foster parents would benefit from TIC - Allegations Training, then they won't be shocked and they will be well informed

The Committee also heard that specific topics should be covered with all foster parents, including sessions on the roles and responsibilities of each party in the Program. Consultation participants comment on the need for CFS to consider providing additional compensation to foster parents so that they can attend training sessions.

We need more options to provide financial compensation to foster parents for specialized training

Foster parents frequently stated that they need more supports for providing care for children, including supports that allow foster parents to ensure that they are psychologically healthy and supported in fostering children.

It is difficult for Foster Parents to get respite

*There should be a program to allow Foster Parents to access counselling at anytime
We need more options for foster parents. I feel that going to the Boys and Girls Club when you are 14-15 is inappropriate because they can't get approved for childcare. You stick out like a sore thumb because everyone knows you're there because you are in foster care
Getting respite is not easy*

Foster parents need an unbiased person to talk to without fear of asking the wrong questions or being reprimanded for thinking outside the box

We need a formal support program, i.e new homes assigned to mentor home

The mandatory meetings are difficult to attend, we don't get compensated for taking time off work

The Committee heard that there is a desire to see more specialized training opportunities made available to foster parents, including how to prepare children for permanency, trauma informed care, complex needs, mental health and addictions, Triple P, evidenced based child development models and individual trainings tailored to the needs of each child.

All foster parents need training in Trauma Informed Care

Foster parents don't have enough training with mental health and special needs. There was a little boy with autism placed in my foster home and I don't feel that they responded to him appropriately. They would leave him there for hours crying because that was the rule in the house "let him cry alone rule"

Foster parents could use more training in neglect, there was a boy that would rock back and forth and bang his head to calm down in my foster home and they didn't have a clue what to do with him

Financial Considerations

Many foster parents expressed concerns that inadequate financial resources affect their ability to continue to foster children.

The Committee noted that some children require 24/7 care because they have complex needs. In these instances, it is not feasible, nor would a placement be authorized, if the foster parent(s) worked outside of the home. Further, least intrusive measures are often not available for children with complex needs and without foster parents able to support the child on a 24/7 basis, the child would be placed in a group home. Research clearly indicates that children have better outcomes when they are in a foster placement as opposed to a group home setting.

We strongly feel that compensation received by Foster Parents does not reflect the amount of work, training and time invested in raising the foster children of PEI, how can we expect new foster parents if they are not fairly compensated. We receive no benefit package (dental/health). Fostering has changed significantly and compensation rates need to reflect that

The Committee also heard concerns from foster parents for the need for an improved reimbursement process that is clearer, timelier and less burdensome. They identified that the present remuneration processes is cumbersome, time wasting and puts additional stress on foster families.

Foster parents stated that financial processes are not child focused and when receipts are required, or permissions delayed for routine activities, children are impacted. Many foster

parents stated that they are spending an inordinate amount of time on administrative tasks related to finances and when many financial policies and processes are not clear, this detracts from higher value pursuits for both foster parents and social workers, such as spending time with the children and case planning.

Financial breakdowns are not detailed enough; there is no explanation

Payments are too slow

Paper work takes too much time

Some suggestions put forward to the Committee included improved documentation on monies being provided to foster parents, having CFS keep track of special allowance and clothing receipts and requiring CFS to make regular contact with foster families to provide for flexibility in payment process.

Foster parents also requested that compensation levels be reevaluated as many are based on rates that are quite dated and no longer reflect modern program realities. The Committee heard that foster parents would like to be recognized for their skill level and experience and that compensation, respite and babysitting rates are inadequate and foster parents do not receive gas or mileage for attending mandatory cluster meetings.

Respite pay is insufficient

Lack of money for school supplies, incidentals, respite, Canada pension

More babysitting resources

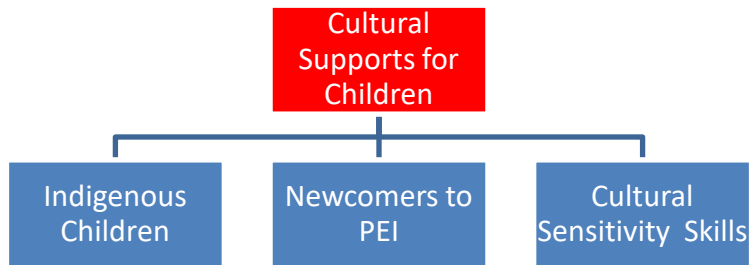
The compensation rate of respite is abysmal

Its tough for foster parents to always fund outings, especially if they are only getting \$125.00 in special allowances.

The Committee also heard that many foster parents are spending their own personal money on things like haircuts, transportation for the child, back to school supplies and gifts for children on their birthdays and at Christmas, activities that make a child feel valued.

Made me feel special knowing that my foster parents would spend some of their own money on me at Christmas, buy gifts in line with my interests. It created memories and these were special times. It made me feel cared about

Theme 3: Cultural Supports for Children



Comments related to this theme reflect the need to provide the best quality care for children and youth that reflects each child’s unique cultural heritage. Children in care in Prince Edward Island come from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Given this diversity, it is necessary to have a pool of resource families reflective of the culture of children in care, including their linguistic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. The Committee believes that where a linguistic, ethnic or cultural match cannot be made between the foster child or youth and their foster family, it is important that the foster home be provided with the supports required to ensure that the quality of care provided is culturally competent.

Given the increased number of children from racialized groups requiring foster care and the low number of foster parents from racialized groups, transcultural foster placements are on the rise. Addressing racial and cultural diversity within the context of transcultural foster care placements is one of the most pressing dilemmas of contemporary child protection practice.

Children and youth have a legal right to feel connected to their culture and to be supported to participate in cultural activities; this will have a direct impact on their successful transition to adulthood. It is necessary for foster parents, as well as staff of CFS to receive the training and supports required to develop cultural competence and meet the cultural needs of the children in their care. Children from racialized groups, coming into foster care, have specific needs related to cultural development that foster parents and CFS must support. Under the *Act*, children have a right to have their cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage respected and Indigenous children have a right to preserve their cultural identity.⁴⁴

Understanding how cultural values, beliefs and traditions of foster parents are related to promoting cultural development is critical because a substantial proportion of children in foster care are from racialized groups, particularly of Indigenous heritage. Foster parents fostering children and youth from racialized groups have unique needs and may require assistance to address the cultural differences within their home and communities.⁴⁵

Without a family and community that is sensitive to these issues and able to facilitate a healthy transition, a racialized child could become confused about their identity. It stands to reason that the need to provide adequate training and support for foster parents increases, as the needs of children entering the foster care system becomes more culturally specific. Culturally appropriate supports for children reduce or avoid placement breakdowns, which can lead to increased retention rates and decreased attrition rates.

⁴⁴ Child Protection Act, RSPEI 1988, c C-5.1, Preamble.

⁴⁵ Daniel, “Foster Cultural Development: Foster Parents’ Perspectives”, (2011).

Indigenous Children

All stakeholders commented that children have a right to maintain linkages with their culture and that it is the responsibility of CFS and foster parents to ensure that children make cultural connections with their communities. The Committee also heard that increased training and knowledge of the Indigenous experience for both CFS workers and foster parents would improve outcomes for Indigenous children in care.

The Committee notes that the Indigenous Children in Care Committee would be a good resource to assist in identifying trainings for foster parents in relation to increasing their understanding of the needs and experiences of Indigenous children in care. The Committee meets every (4) four months and consists of Indigenous Elders, staff of residential services, Confederacy staff, staff of the Native Council, CFS and foster parents.

Indigenous children in care need more support and involvement from the indigenous community

The Committee heard that a continued and expanded collaborative partnership with the Confederacy would be helpful in fostering connections with the Indigenous community (Elders) and foster parents. Ideas posed to the Committee included a partnership on placements for Indigenous children including mandatory cultural plans and assessment models for foster care that are based on an Indigenous worldview.

Current home assessments are a barrier for First Nation families being approved. Looking for perfection isn't ok. We have to be flexible without minimizing safety. Workers need to help families meet requirements

There are no foster homes on reserve, so if a child is removed they have to leave their community

This expanded relationship would build upon the successes of the Protocol between the Confederacy and CFS under the *Act* and the Child Protection Protocol, which helps ensure that Child Protection Services provided to Prince Edward Island's First Nation children and families are delivered in a manner that preserves and promotes the Indigenous cultural identity of children and families.

The Committee also heard that expanded relationships with the Confederacy, Native Council of Prince Edward Island and Aboriginal Women's Association could be fostered in order to improve outcomes for Indigenous children residing off reserve in traditional Mi'kmaq territory. These groups provide cultural supports to Indigenous children and families who do not normally reside on one of Prince Edward Island's First Nation communities.

Many stakeholders also believed that there should be mandatory program policies requiring all parties to support family and cultural connections. The Committee also heard that current staffing levels in CFS makes it difficult for the parties to facilitate access to cultural events for Indigenous children in care.

There doesn't seem to be staff that ensure a child/youth is able to attend culturally supportive events. (Transportation/Supervision)

Tired of hearing that a child/youth cannot attend an event because of staffing. It can be a battle and it should not be a fight for children/youth to access events that are part of their culture

Newcomers to PEI

While rates remain low for children in care from backgrounds other than the Prince Edward Island's Indigenous and Caucasian community, the Committee is cognizant of the fact that many other provinces and territories are experiencing more and more children coming into care with diverse religious and ethnic backgrounds. The Committee heard from some participants that the Program should consider collaborating with the Newcomers Association of Prince Edward Island to ensure that children in care have access to foster homes that are culturally appropriate for them.

Many participants also expressed the need for foster parents and CFS staff to have increased cultural competency training and increased training on the impacts of poverty on a family situation.

The Committee agrees that children have the right to maintain connections to their religious and cultural community and that options should be explored for providing additional training to Program partners, as well as solutions for recruiting and retraining foster parents from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds.

Cultural Sensitivity Skills

The Committee heard of the need for specific skill building in relation to cultural sensitivity skills for both foster parents and for CFS staff in order to help participants understand children's development while preparing them for anticipated cultural difficulties that may occur during their foster care placement. Opportunities for foster parents to attend additional training to enhance the wellbeing of racialized foster children is limited. For example, ongoing training for foster parents is often hampered by many factors such as lack of resources, scheduling problems, transportation issues, access to respite care in order to attend training and a lack of priority given to training by the foster care system.

There doesn't seem to be staff that ensure a child/youth is able to attend culturally supportive events. (Transportation/Supervision)

Tired of hearing that a child/youth cannot attend an event because of staffing. It can be a battle and it should not be a fight for children/youth to access events that are part of their culture

In Nova Scotia, foster parents are required to attend the Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education Program (PRIDE). This program includes a six-hour module on

cultural competence. Similarly, in British Columbia foster parents are required to attend the Foster Care Education Program, which includes a three-hour module on cultural awareness. Prince Edward Island does not have any comparable programs for its foster parents.

Foster parents expressed concern about their knowledge, practice and comfort in meeting the unique needs of foster children who come from racialized groups. Particularly, among families that are visibly different from many other families, foster parents benefit from becoming more aware of how racism and discrimination affect their family and racialized foster children as well as strategies to mitigate the effects.

The unique needs of racialized foster children involved in these types of placements are compromised because their foster parents are not able to attend programs or there is lack of commitment to provide adequate training and resources to foster parents. The Committee heard that specific training should be provided on the socio-economic and historical disadvantage that some marginalized groups have faced.

Some ideas posited by consultation participants included annual training to be developed in partnership with the Federation, CFS and the Confederacy in order to ensure that foster parents are provided with information about a foster child's cultural background when they are placed in a foster home with a specific emphasis on foster parents acquiring knowledge about the language and cultural customs of foster children in their care.

Indigenous children in care need more support and involvement from indigenous community

Committee Observations

The Committee heard from each of the parties involved with the Program, foster parents, and children in care and workers in CFS. As outlined in this Report, comments and representations made by the parties in relation to the Program varied significantly between and amongst the parties.

During the consultation process, it was clear to the Committee that the parties firmly believe in the value and utility of the Program and that CFS and foster parents are dedicated professionals who provide critically important supports to children in care. It was also clear to the Committee that the parties believe that the Program is functional, but there is room for improvement. An overarching theme during the consultation process was the need to modernize and update the Program in line with modern realities of society.

A key observation made by the Committee was the critical importance of the Program in providing support and a nurturing environment for children in care. All parties commented on the benefits of the Program in ensuring that children have the opportunity to flourish and are provided access to supports and resources that ensure that when children age out of care, they are prepared to live independently.

The Committee noted that given the complex nature of family dynamics and the varying and individual needs of the parties involved with the Program, that each case is unique and individualized. The variability of experiences in relation to the Program makes it difficult to draw generalizations with respect to the Program's operations. The Committee notes that the realization of the complexity of any new program and policy direction taken by CFS administration on a go forward basis must include the Federation in order to ensure that the diverse and personal perspectives shared with the Committee are heard and actioned.

The Committee also found that during the consultation process most participants found that the current Program is functional and meets acceptable standards. However, the parties did identify areas for improvement particularly in ensuring that policy and procedure components are modernized and regularly accessed and updated, that experienced foster parents are recruited and retained and provided with child specific training opportunities, and strengthening the collaborative relationship between foster parents and CFS.

The Committee believes that CFS must carefully and critically analyze Program operations and ensure that any changes to Program policy or procedures must carefully consider how any changes affects CFS, foster parents and children in care. With any changes to program, policy and procedures CFS will need to ensure appropriate human, financial and technological resources are in place to support the change management processes. The Committee also believes that data should be collected and analyzed to ensure that any changes to the Program are actually meeting their intended objectives.

Recommendations

Based on the review of program information, policies, cross-jurisdictional research and consultations conducted by the Committee, the Committee believes that the Prince Edward Island Program is functional and is providing a critically important service to Island children and families.

However, the Committee did identify that there were areas for improvement. The Committee noted that program, policy and practice components, with respect to the provision of foster care, could be clarified and strengthened to ensure that foster parents and CFS continue to provide the highest quality of care to foster children as possible.

The recommendations of the Committee are grouped based on the following framework:

1. Foster Families;
2. Children in Care; and
3. Working Relationships.

The recommendations posed by the Committee draw upon the organizing framework used throughout this Report: "Voice of Children and their Experiences", "Supports for Children", and "Cultural Support for Children." The recommendations outlined below form the basis of

recommendations for consideration and implementation by the Minister for enhancements to the Program.

Foster Families

Recruiting and Retaining New Foster Parents

The Committee noted that society has changed substantially over the past decade and that the motivators to become foster parents have changed, particularly the historical practice of fostering in order to fulfill a moral and religious obligation. As such, recruitment and retention strategies need to be reevaluated in order to ensure a steady stream of qualified and dedicated foster parents to provide a loving and nurturing home for children in care.

1) Mentoring and Support for Foster Parents

The Committee believes that mentorship is critically important to both recruiting and retaining new foster parents, as well as improving the capacity of new foster parents to provide supports to children with complex needs.

The Committee recommends that new foster parents be provided with one-to-one peer support by a mentor coupled with additional support groups. Regular meetings between foster parents mentors and support groups and new foster parents is essential for new foster parents to feel connected and supported with other foster parents. The Committee found that foster parent mentoring programs are available throughout the United States, and CFS should conduct research on the parameters and success and challenges of foster mentoring programs used in other jurisdictions.

The purpose of these mentorship programs is twofold: to support and encourage new foster parents and to keep experienced foster parents engaged and active. New foster parents dealing with a challenging child, an angry biological parent or a CFS worker can easily become overwhelmed and decide that fostering is not for them. When that happens, the child in their care could be moved to another home as a result of placement failure. This upheaval, especially after being removed from their biological family, negatively affects the wellbeing of children in care.

The Committee believes that parent mentors can offer novice foster parents guidance and emotional support they need to continue to foster despite challenging circumstances. By sharing their experiences and coping strategies, mentors can help their mentees feel less alone and better equipped to handle the unique challenges that come with fostering children. With someone to connect with and problem solve when a child acts out or a caseworker does not return their calls, new foster parents will become less likely to request that a child be moved or to close their home to subsequent placements. The Committee believes that by establishing a mentorship program the Federation and CFS will have better outcomes in recruiting and retaining foster parents.

The Committee recommends that CFS establish a foster mentoring program in partnership with the Federation. CFS should consider providing compensation to experienced foster parents to

promote experienced foster parents mentoring novice foster parents. The Committee further recommends that the Federation ensure that if its members agree to become mentors, they must endeavor to make themselves available and accountable as leaders and role models who represent the Federation and its members.

2) Invest in Pride for Foster Families

Many Canadian provinces offer Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) training. This training focuses on five essential categories for foster parents: protecting and nurturing children, meeting children's developmental needs and addressing developmental delays, supporting relationships between children and their families, connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime and working as a member of a professional team.

PRIDE is designed to strengthen the quality of foster care by providing a standardized, structured framework for recruiting; preparing and selecting foster parents and adoptive parents. It also provides foster parent in-service training and ongoing professional development. The Committee believes that PRIDE helps prepare prospective foster parents with important information on how trauma affects a child's growth and development. PRIDE also helps families know what will be expected of them as foster and adoptive parents.

The Committee recommends that PRIDE be adopted as it would better prepare foster parents to work with other team members to ensure a child's safety, wellbeing, and permanency for each child in the foster care system as well as promote the recruitment of new foster parents. The Committee also believes that a follow-up with CFS/mentors after training (six months) to discuss what was learned and any practical questions new foster parents may have, would improve uptake and retention of knowledge learned.

3) Develop a Foster Parent Handbook

Many provinces in Canada have collaborated with their respective Foster Parent Associations to develop a handbook to explain how all parties can work together to care for and help meet the needs of children who require foster care.

The Committee believes that CFS and the Federation should partner to develop a Handbook that provides a framework for foster parenting, with CFS taking the lead on drafting and administering the handbook with feedback and support from the Federation. The Committee believes that teamwork is a key method of helping children in care. It starts with planning for a placement of the child in the home and continues until after the child leaves.

The handbook should provide essential information about the Program including but not limited to:

- what is expected of foster parents, including copies of all policies and forms applicable to the Program;
- what support and assistance foster parents can receive to help care for children, and

- how CFS and the Federation can work together to plan for and provide the best care possible for children.

The Committee further recommends that the Handbook be posted publicly online so that all foster parents have access to the most recent and up-to-date version of the Handbook and policies contained in the Handbook, as well as to facilitate the recruitment of new foster parents as they will have access to information that will show them how the Program works and what would be expected of them if they decide to become foster parents.

4) Joint Recruitment and Retention Committee

The Federation is well versed in the needs of its members. As such, the Federation has an intimate knowledge of the motivators to become foster parents. The Committee recommends that CFS' Recruitment and Retention Committee be expanded and invite more members of the Federation to sit on the Committee. This partnership will ensure that recruitment and retention strategies reflect both the needs of children in care and the motivators for individuals to become foster parents. The Committee believes that improved communication regarding the needs of foster children and associated skillsets required of foster parents to address those needs, will result in improved outcomes for children.

The Committee further recommends that the Committee formalize its operations by drafting terms of reference and working towards long-term goals through a strategic plan.

The Committee also recommends that the Committee focus on recruiting and retaining foster parents from diverse cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Prince Edward Island is significantly more diverse than it was a decade ago. Addressing racial and cultural diversity within the context of foster care placements will result in better outcomes for children of diverse backgrounds. The Committee firmly believes that children have the right to have their cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds celebrated and respected.

Supports and Approval Process

1) Conduct a Review of the Compensation System

The Committee believes that fostering children is a demanding job and appropriate compensation will help to both recruit and retain foster parents. Current compensation rates often do not cover all of the costs associated with caring for a child and there are no paid benefits or holidays for foster parents. Compensation rates for respite and babysitting were also identified as a particular area requiring urgent focus and analysis.

The Committee believes more foster parents could be recruited and retained if their role was recognized and compensated in level with a paid professional and further, the Committee notes that the Program needs more foster parents who stay home with children who have complex needs throughout the day (instead of working outside the home). Without appropriate

compensation, many prospective foster parents will not be able to provide 24/7 foster care without working outside the home.

If compensation for care is competitive with other types of compensation, CFS and the Federation will be able to recruit and retain more foster parents who can provide dedicated 24/7 care. The Committee notes that some provinces have looked at paying foster parents in line with minimum wage levels.

The Committee recommends that CFS look at age categories of children in relation to maintenance fees. Often foster parents end up having to pay substantial sums of money out of pocket for special expenses. Many foster parents commented that startup costs, school pictures, haircuts, school supplies, clothing (particularly winter clothing) and Christmas often require foster parents to use their own money to ensure that children in care do not go without. Startup costs in particular can be prohibitively expensive. The Committee noted that costs associated with caring for a child continue to rise across the board and compensation levels have not.

The Committee also recommends that the costs associated with special expenses be revaluated for example school supplies, clothing and special amounts (Christmas, haircuts). The Committee recommends that the allowance in this category be flexible based on the needs of an individual child, as some children will incur greater costs at different points in their lives (clothing during growth spurts for example). This will ensure that a child in care are not penalized if a foster parent does not have enough maintenance dollars/personal funds to cover the expense of something that they need, such as a new winter coat.

The Committee believes that these costs could be removed from maintenance payments and that a flexible compensation model based on the actual expenses of each child should be adopted.

The Committee further recommends that compensation for care and level system be reevaluated by CFS; this is an emergent issue for foster families as paying out of pocket for these types of expenses can be prohibitively expensive.

The Committee also noted that unlike public service employees and external contractors who deal with Government, foster parents do not receive annual increases in their compensation rates. The Committee recommends that when CFS revaluated the compensation model, that a new compensation model be considered that is based on inflation rates and the consumer price index. The Committee believes that a better use of foster parents' time is providing support to children, rather than having to advocate for increased compensation rates that reflect the actual cost of caring for a child.

2) Therapeutic Foster Homes

The Committee noted that some jurisdictions, particularly in the United States, use therapeutic or treatment foster care systems to provide clinical interventions for children.

Therapeutic foster homes involve the placement of a child with severe mental, emotional or behavioral health challenges in specifically trained foster parent homes. This includes medically

fragile or developmentally delayed children whose physical and emotional health needs require more intensive clinical and medical intervention than can be accommodated in traditional foster care placements.

Therapeutic foster homes can provide and facilitate medically necessary treatment, where foster parents and licensed clinical staff oversee a child's individualized treatment plan and provide therapeutic services such as individual and family therapy, crisis intervention, case coordination and medication support.

Foster parents typically receive at least two times the initial training of traditional foster parents, as well as required continuing education training throughout the year.

The Committee recommends that the Province implement therapeutic foster homes that are available to children in care for 24/7 support, treatment intervention, crisis stabilization and connection to community and school. These foster parents could be considered to be professional participants of the clinical treatment team. Their role could include conducting specific life skills and social skills training, daily interventions and recording those interventions in the child's treatment notes. Foster parents providing this service should receive specialized training in various mental health and trauma disorders as well as in cultural sensitivity as is appropriate for each child. Compensation for these foster parents should reflect the increased training and experience expectations.

In order to facilitate the establishment of therapeutic foster homes, the Committee recommends that CFS establish a committee to evaluate and propose what this alternative care model would look like, including scope of practice, policies and procedures and the increased accountability that will be required of foster parents providing therapeutic foster homes.

Role of Foster Parents

1) Reevaluate the Role of Foster Parents

The Committee believes that foster parents need to be respected and seen as part of a professional team who are providing professional services to children. This extends beyond simply involving foster parents in the decision-making process and in the development of case plans and includes other factors such as displaying regard for their home and family values, priorities, skills and expertise. The Committee heard that many foster parents noted that they were professionals within their own fields and had accumulated vast experience working with children; however, they felt that this was often overlooked by CFS.

The Committee recommends that CFS think creatively and reevaluate the role of foster parents to recognize the changing needs of the children coming into care and the need to provide children with the best possible quality of care. Often this requires foster parents with skills and expertise that go beyond 'parenting' in the traditional sense of the word.

The Committee also believes that treating foster parents, as skilled professionals will attract competent foster parents and keep them in the system. All too often, role confusion and other factors such as a lack of recognition within the system and in society generally contribute to the loss of competent foster parents. Role confusion affects and leads to an excessive turnover rate, and further role confusing impacts the accountabilities of each party. Improving role clarity will result in each party understanding what their roles and accountabilities are.

The Committee firmly believes that foster parents need to be committed to fostering in order to provide the best care for children. A way to promote commitment to the Program would be to ensure that compensation rates reflect the important work that foster parents do. Appropriate compensation will ensure that skilled foster parents are attracted and retained.

Foster parents should also be brought into the decision-making process regarding children in their care to a much greater degree. While foster parents have practical insight based on everyday contact with children, their input is often relegated to the margins of decision-making.

The Committee recommends that CFS ensure that foster parents' roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clarified. The Committee further recommends that CFS analyze compensation rates in relation to foster parents' qualifications and practical and educational experience in fields related to work with children. This would recognize that the qualifications required for foster parents are increasing. The current leveling system and assessment tool used by CFS to evaluate prospective foster parents is outdated and does not allow for level assessment that reflects the actual education and professional experience of foster parents.

The Committee notes that improving the fostering system is an upstream investment that will result in better outcomes for children in care and a corresponding reduction in downstream financial and social capital costs to Government.

Research

1) *Research Gap*

The Committee reviewed considerable research that examined the motivating factors for becoming a foster parent, including both the internal and external motivators for parents to enter fostering as well as analyzing how foster care programs are operated in different jurisdictions. The Committee noted that one area lacking was research that focused primarily on the experiences of foster parents while fostering as opposed to the motivations for doing so.

The Committee believes that CFS and the Federation should collaborate to conduct research into the experiences of foster parents who are fostering in other provinces in Canada, with particular focus on access to supports for foster parents and how compensation is provided. This will help to inform work in relation to reevaluating the role of foster parents on Prince Edward Island.

Children in Care

Transitions

1) Track Child Movements

Placement stability is essential for children to develop secure attachments and a sense of belonging and identity as they cope with separation from their families. Some placement changes can be beneficial, for example, a poor match between a child and foster parents resulting in placement changes that may reflect CFS mandates. However, multiple placements in out-of-home care are associated with both immediate and long-term negative outcomes for children, including behavioral and emotional difficulties.

The Committee recommends that CFS start collecting, tracking and analyzing data in relation to the number of times a child is transitioned while in care (including placement times), in order to monitor the number of times a child is moved while in care and to develop case plans that try to minimize the total number of times a child is moved while in care.

2). Establish Partnerships with Residential Services

The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation establish better linkages with Residential Services to plan and support children. Improved communication between Residential Services and foster families will help to improve the identification of foster children who are able and ready to move out of group home settings and into foster placements. The Committee recommends that a formal process be established between CFS and the Federation to discuss and plan for children who are able to be placed in a foster home, rather than continue to reside in a group home.

The Committee also believes that providing additional supports in foster homes will result in placement stability. The Committee heard, during the consultation process, that foster children previously had 1-1 youth workers from Residential Services who supported children and foster parents. The Committee believes that this model would minimize children moving from placement to placement. Foster parents commented that having the support of Residential Services provided much needed respite for foster parents.

3). Child Protection Act and Alternative Court Models

The Committee recommends that alternative court models be explored to improve the time for CFS to obtain court orders in relation to children in care. The Committee noted that this was a central recommendation of the Child Protection Act Review Advisory Committee Report.⁴⁶ The Committee notes that multiple placements for children often happen because there are delays in the court process and constant litigation within the adversarial court system. This results in foster placements that are meant to be temporary and of short duration, having to be continuously extended due to court delays.

⁴⁶ CPA Review recommendation 26

The Committee believes that alternatives to resolving child protection matters that are not grounded in adversarial processes will improve outcomes for children in care and expedite children moving towards permanency. There are identifiable problems with resolving child protection matters in an adversarial forum, including: the furthering of hostility between the parties in already tense situations following apprehension, a deep rooted perception on the part of birth families of the courts' support of child protection authorities, a perception of child protection authorities having endless powers to affect their preferred outcomes, unrealistic expectations being placed on biological parents during temporary guardianship orders and insufficient resources being made available to meet those expectations.

When practiced within the criminal justice context, restorative justice puts the stakeholders – the victim, the offender and the relevant community at the center of the decision-making process that empowers them to take an active role in repairing the harm that resulted from the crime. In the child protection field where disempowered families and typically marginalized children are the main parties, new restorative justice frameworks may offer particular advantages because of their emphasis on informality, flexibility, inclusiveness and the re-distribution of power.

The Committee further recommends that CFS explore creating alternative dispute resolution processes as well as alternative court models based on restorative justice principles, to replace the adversarial court system. CFS should explore and implement alternative dispute resolution processes including family group conferencing and mediation services into its practice. These alternatives to court have been shown to increase the participation of birth families and foster families in the care and planning for their child, increase satisfaction with outcomes and process, increase settlement rates, promote child safety and placement stability and save the “system” time and money.

Supports for Children

1). Afterhours Support

The Committee heard throughout the consultation process that fostering is a challenging task and many foster parents need to be available to the children in their care 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Committee noted that foster parents may need assistance and advice outside of office hours from someone who understands the issues but this is not always available.

Foster families currently have access to CFS afterhours, on an emergency basis only; the Committee believes that there is a need to explore further afterhours assistance. The Committee notes that creating a mentoring system for foster parents may mitigate this issue.

2). Reimbursements

The Committee believes that it is critically important for CFS give permission for children to attend extracurricular activities on a timely basis. The Committee heard during the consultation

process that delays in getting approvals often results in children missing opportunities and activities that would benefit them. The Committee recommends that CFS evaluate the process in which permissions and payment authorizations are made. The Committee notes that there have been improvements in obtaining permissions, however the Committee believes that there is still work to be done in ensuring that the process for obtaining permissions for children to attend extracurricular is obtained on a timely basis from CFS.

The Committee also heard that the timeliness in receiving reimbursement for out of pocket payments for expenses related to children could be improved. Some foster parents indicated that it can take over a month to obtain reimbursement for out of pocket expenses incurred in relation to a child. The Committee recommends that the timeliness in payments being remitted to foster parents be explored and improved.

3). Compensation and Respite Rates

The Committee also recommends that compensation rates for respite care be reviewed based on practices in other Canadian provinces/territories and recommends an increase to current payment levels. Respite is a much-needed service to foster families as it allows foster parents to take a break, which helps prevent burn out. Respite also offers birth children of the foster home quality time with their parents, and it gives foster children a break.

The Committee heard during the consultation process that it is challenging to find respite care and that current levels of compensation are too low to recruit and retain potential respite care providers. The Committee believes that having foster parents who are rested and supported in caring for children, will result in better outcomes for children.

4). Transportation

Children in care as well as foster parents frequently commented on the fact that a lack of transportation options negatively affects a child's ability to attend extracurricular activities and culturally important events.

Foster parents often have more than one child in their care, and are not always available to transport foster children to visitations with their biological families or to extracurricular activities. The Committee noted that the distances between foster parents and biological families' homes can result in foster families spending large amounts of time transporting a child.

The Committee also noted that some extracurricular activities, for example hockey, require foster parents to spend a significant amount of time transporting children. Further, under the *Act* CFS and foster families are required to ensure that Indigenous foster children maintain connections to their community, which results in additional transportation demands on foster families.

The Committee recommends that CFS analyze instituting a new program to help provide transportation supports to foster children and foster parents. This could take the form of a

volunteer driver program, a private transportation company or through the school board's existing transportation resources, contracted to provide a vehicle and driver to transport a child. The Committee notes that foster parents who do not currently have a foster child residing with them, could be leveraged to provide transport support to foster families, with appropriate compensation.

Individualized Support and Assistance

1). Child-Centred Support

Each child residing in a foster home in Prince Edward Island has unique needs depending on a range of factors including age, cultural background, mental, emotional and physical stage of development. Some children also require specialized supports to address specific medical, psychological or developmental conditions.

The Committee believes that the needs of each child and youth are unique and that the foster care service delivery system must be based on a 'child-centred' approach that is designed to support foster parents to meet the specific needs of children and youth in their care. This includes providing supports and training to foster families to effectively meet these specific needs.

The Committee recommends that the foster care program continue and expand upon the program's child centered approach by ascertaining children's wishes and feelings by communicating appropriately in terms of age, language, ethnicity and ability. CFS should strive to maximize children's participation in discussions about their welfare and include them in decision making, taking account of their strengths and their unique knowledge of their own situation and facilitating access to independent advice or advocacy, especially where a CFS' workers views conflict with those of a child. A child's views and wishes should be assessed by CFS based on the child's age and capacity.

The Committee further recommends that CFS develop policies that promote a child maintaining a connection with their biological family, where it is deemed safe and appropriate by CFS. A child has a legal right to maintain maximum contact with their parents, if it is in their best interests, and CFS and the Federation should analyze how better linkages can be established with birth families while a child is in the care of foster parents.

2). Proactive Care Plans

The Committee recommends care plans be reviewed by CFS to ensure that when children come into care, an assessment is undertaken by CFS to determine what supports the foster family could help provide to a child in order to ensure that the child is able to help transition back into their natural home environment easily. For example, the Committee recommends making an individualized plan for each child in partnership with foster parents to determine what milestones foster parents should work on to help improve outcomes for a given child. Bedtime routines, cooking and other skills that would promote and improve self-sufficiency are some examples.

The Committee further recommends that foster parents play a more active role in permanency planning in collaboration with CFS. The Committee believes that permanency planning for a child in care should begin the moment they enter the child protection system. As such, the Committee believes regular and proactive care plan meetings should be occurring between foster families and CFS to plan for a child while they are in the care of the Director.

The Committee also recommends that CFS involve foster parents in care planning for a child. For example, the Committee heard that there are times where a child is placed in a foster home and then foster parents are told that they must transport and ensure that the child attends all of the appointments that CFS has booked for the child. Often foster parents have other children and commitments that make it difficult for them to facilitate transportation and attendance at a child's appointments.

Collaborative care planning would address many transport issues currently facing CFS and foster families, particularly for children with complex needs.. The Committee believes that involving foster parents in scheduling times and appointments will improve relationships between CFS and foster parents as well as promote foster parents involvement in planning and providing care for children living with them.

3). Residential Services Support

The Committee also recommends that CFS look at innovative ways to provide supports to children. One particular area identified by the Committee was better utilization of Residential Services' staff expertise in helping to support foster parents who are fostering a youth with complex needs. This could take the form of Residential Services staff assisting in the provision of 1-1 support to a foster child with complex needs, by providing respite services or individualized coaching and intervention services. The Committee believes that providing additional supports to children with complex needs and their foster parents will result in less placement breakdown and less reoccurrence of children going into group homes. The Committee believes that these additional supports will reduce overall system costs, as caring for a child in a group home setting, is much more costly than a foster family caring for a child in their home.

Voice of the Child

1). Involve Children in Care Planning

Children have a right under the Convention to have their voices heard and respected. Children's participation is more than just asking them for their ideas and views, it is about sharing information with children and enabling them to make real choices that are taken seriously, which will result in children being more likely to support outcomes and decisions if they have been involved in developing them.

The Committee recommends that the CFS and the Federation implement a process that promotes the effective participation of children in care planning and their participation and development of programs and services created for children. The Committee believes that finding opportunities for children's involvement begins with reflecting on the types of decisions that are made and assessing the appropriate method for involvement.

Policy or toolkits could be developed that guide foster parents as well as CFS workers on how to involve children in care planning and program and policy development. The Committee recognizes that each child over the age of 12, who comes into care, are given a pamphlet to explain what they should expect when they come into care. The Committee believes that CFS should explore additional processes and resources to promote the participation of children in their care planning.

The Committee believes that children are perceptive and can sense when information is being withheld from them. This results in unnecessary anxiety and fear being placed upon the child. The Committee recommends that where appropriate, child friendly language should be used to keep a child informed of what is happening with their care plan, regardless of their age. Children who have experienced abuse and neglect would benefit from being involved in their care and recovery; this will promote healing, self-respect and dignity.

During the consultation process, the Committee heard a recommendation that a panel of youth at the Foster Parent Symposium hosted by the Federation would be one avenue to involve children in program and policy development. The Committee recommends that the Federation and CFS analyze how to provide a forum for children to provide input into how the Program functions. The Committee believes that children are well equipped to recommend changes to the Program that promote child centered practices.

2). Recognize and Promote Child's Interests

The Committee heard throughout the consultation process that respecting a child's individual interests helps to promote positive relationships between foster parents and foster children. CFS endeavors to collect information about a child's needs, likes and dislikes, as expressed by the child directly, and provide them to foster parents before a placement commences, but this does not always occur. Further, CFS is to conduct an exit interview with children in care to learn what they liked and disliked about their placement, however there is inconsistency in this interview taking place.

The Committee recommends that foster children have the opportunity to have a period of introduction with prospective foster parents wherever possible, where the child has an opportunity to share their interests with the proposed foster parents. The Committee recognizes that in emergency placements, this may be impractical but both children and foster parent should be provided with as much information as possible and their views considered before a match is confirmed. The Committee recommends that policy documentation be drafted to ensure that recognizing and promoting a child's interests becomes a paramount concern in all prospective placements.

The Committee believes that better recording and sharing of a child's needs will lead to successful placement outcomes, and children feeling supported and heard during a stressful time in their lives.

Supports for Children Aging out of Care

1). *Training and Life Skills*

The Committee heard throughout the consultation process that children involved with CFS have experienced trauma, and are often not prepared to live independently once they reach the age of 18. The Committee recommends that the *Act* be reviewed with a focus on allowing for more services to be provided to children after they reach the age of 18. Many children in the child protection system are not prepared to attend fulltime post-secondary education once they reach 18 years of age. They find themselves unable to receive support from CFS or foster parents through the Program and they often find themselves alone and isolated.

The Committee recommends that CFS explore providing additional supports to foster parents allow children to remain with their foster parents beyond the age of 18. Once children reach the age of 18 they are eligible for extended services, however the level fee that foster parents were receiving ends once the child reaches the age of 18 as they are no longer in the legal custody of the Director under the *Act*. Foster parents are often put in a situation of having to choose between keeping their foster child in their home once they reach age 18 and losing their foster parent status.

Many foster parents commented that they would like to provide a nurturing home for children in their care after the reach 18 years of age, however due to financial constraints many foster parents are not in a position to do so. The Committee believes that maintain connections between foster parents and children as they transition out of care will improve outcomes for children aging out of care.

The Committee further recommends that CFS and the Federation collaborate to identify training and life skills coaching that would support children in care as they transition to adulthood. This could involve establishing a working group to identify specific training for foster parents that would help them support children as they transition to adulthood, for example providing foster parents with training in budgeting, taxes, services available to children when they age out of care and general life skills so that they can assist in planning for a child ageing out of care. The Committee believes that a training/life skills Program should be formalized by CFS in partnership with the Federation to prepare children to live independently.

2). *Transitional Housing*

Children exiting the child protection system often do not have healthy family members that they can return to after having been protected in foster/group care for many years. Without support,

too often children in care frequently exit the child protection system to find themselves trying to survive on the street with little to no supports e.g. housing, life skills, etc.

The Committee noted that work is underway to establish transitional housing in Charlottetown, for children aging out of care. The Committee recommends that CFS assess the uptake of this initiative and explore whether there is a need to establish transitional housing in other regions of Prince Edward Island. Children ageing out of care may not want to move to Charlottetown and away from their home community, and further the 10 housing units planned in Charlottetown are likely not enough to meet demand.

Access to transitional housing for children exiting the child protection system will ease anxiety as children approach their 18th birthday and will address a gap in services for children/youth.

3). Streamlined Connection to Supports

Children ageing out of child protection often require additional supports to help them live independently. The Committee heard that foster parents and children in care are unclear on the process to obtain access to funding and supports once the child ages out of care. The Committee recommends that policies and procedures be adopted as well as information materials for foster parents and children that serves as a guide and resource inventory for the various support programs that children aging out of care may access, for example the Public Guardian and Public Trustee Office and the AccessAbility Support Program.

Connecting children to supports prior to ageing out of care will ease anxieties of both foster parents and children in care and it will help to promote the child's success at living independently. Difficult transitions from care often result in a range of negative outcomes, such as homelessness, unemployment, lack of educational engagement and achievement, involvement in corrections, lack of skills and potentially a life of poverty. Many young people who leave care fail to make the transition to independent living because of underdeveloped living skills, inadequate education, lower levels of physical and emotional well-being and lack of supports and resources that most young people rely on when moving into adulthood.

The Committee firmly believes that CFS must ensure that all transition plans are coordinated and integrated and information is shared with parents (where relevant) and across sectors.

Prevention and Early Intervention

1). Proactive Rather than Reactive Interventions

The Committee believes that increased access to prevention and early intervention services to children and their families can assist with giving children a good start in life and can reduce or avoid the need for other services in the longer term such as mental health treatment and/or the need for protective action or involvement with the child protection or justice systems. This could take the form of activities, programs and initiatives designed to support children who show signs

of an identified problem or who exhibit risk factors or vulnerabilities of an identified problem by providing the resources and skills necessary to combat the identified risks. The Committee also noted that accessing publically funded services is currently an issue on Prince Edward Island with wait times to receive mental health services often taking over a year to access.

The Committee firmly believes that providing appropriate, targeted and child specific resources to support children in care will result in placement stability and less placement breakdown. Having supports specialized based on the needs of each individual child will improve outcomes for both children in care and foster parents.

Foster parents are in an excellent position to recommend and support these interventions as they have intimate knowledge of a child's needs, given the fact that they are with children more than any other care provider involved with the child. The Committee believes that it is critically important to involve foster parents and listen to their opinions in planning upstream interventions for children in their care.

2). Review and Expand Child Protection Act

The Committee recommends that the *Act* be reviewed with specific focus on allowing for child protection (in collaboration with foster parents) to offer services to children and their families before a crises occurs. Currently the *Act* only allows child protection to offer services to a child/family if a child has been found in need of protection.

The Committee noted that prior to legislative amendments that were introduced in 2003, CFS had a program "Families Helping Families" where children who were not in the care of the Director, could receive supports from foster parents. Foster parents were assisting a child's biological family by providing respite and assisting with other life skills to try to provide supports to a family so that their children do not need to come into care. The Committee recommends that CFS explore amending legislation to provide services for children and families before they reach a point of crises and a child needs to come into care, with a specific focus on prevention and early intervention, as well as extended services.

The Committee recommends that legislation be researched and potential amendments introduced that grant wader latitude to CFS in offering services to children and their families who might be experiencing hardship but do not fit the requirements of the *Act* for a child to be found in need of protection.

Working Relationships

Communication and Information Exchange

1). Regular Planning Meetings

Foster parents receive supports from their assigned CFS worker, as does a child in their care. The current model is premised on there being regular contact with children in care as well as foster parents in order to ensure that both parties are supported and have the supports they require. The Committee believes that it is critical that where appropriate, information required to make informed decisions regarding the care of children in foster placements is consistently shared with foster parents in a timely manner. There is an expectation in the Foster Care Contract that regular planning meetings are to occur between foster parents and CFS, however, there is inconsistency in this practice and it depends on the practice of the individual CFS worker.

The Committee also believes that active involvement of other professionals who provide services to a child/family should be included in planning meetings, for example medical practitioners and therapists. This will ensure that all parties share and plan in a coordinated and collaborative manner that will help to ensure the best outcomes for children in care. On July 1, 2017, the *Health Information Act* came into force, which allows a custodian of health information to disclose information to other health care providers involved in someone's care. This piece of legislation facilitates information sharing, however many health care providers have yet to fully utilize the information sharing provisions of this piece of legislation.

The Committee recommends that CFS ensure that regular planning meetings are occurring between CFS and foster parents as this will both improve outcomes and relationships between CFS and foster parents.

Foster parents frequently commented that staff turnover affects the dissemination of information to foster parents and that there are concerns with the sharing and exchange of information between CFS and foster parents. The Committee recommends that CFS should explore how to enhance processes for sharing, coordinating and integrating information between foster parents, other professionals dealing with the child/biological family and CFS.

2). Liaisons

The Committee also recommends that CFS consider formalizing liaisons between foster families and CFS. The liaison could be the main point of contact between foster parents and CFS, this will help to reduce issues when a CFS worker leaves a position/goes on vacation and foster parents wonder who to contact to receive information/authorizations for children in their care. The Committee believes it is critically important to ensure clear lines of communication exist between foster families and CFS.

The Committee heard from foster parents that previously there was a CFS worker whose dedicated role was to serve as a bridge between CFS and foster parents, however due to staffing changes over the years and the addition of job duties, workers in similar positions are now balancing multiple demands and are unable to provide dedicated support to foster parents. Ensuring that information flows from foster parents to CFS and vice versa in a seamless and timely manner will both improve relationships between CFS and foster families as well as improve outcomes for children.

A further and related recommendation is for CFS staff to have regular meetings with the Federation to advise on staffing changes so that the Federation can report back to its members. Being proactive in sharing information and planning for unexpected staffing changes will improve working relationships between CFS and foster parents.

Operational Review

1). Shared Vision

CFS and the Federation should strive to promote an understanding amongst foster parents and CFS regarding the vision and objectives of foster care in Prince Edward Island. A clear understanding and respect for the roles and responsibilities of the parties to the foster care system will contribute to positive relationship development and promote the wellbeing of children in care. The Committee notes that promoting a shared vision and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of foster parents and CFS can be facilitated by a collaborative partnership in relation to program, policy and procedure review.

2). Modernize and Update Program Policies and Procedures

The Committee heard that the annual operating contract between CFS and the Federation has not been updated for a number of years and the language and terms of the contract are outdated. The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation explore updating and modernizing the operating contract for the Federation. This contract forms the foundation for relationships between CFS and the Federation and it is critically important to modernize and update the contract in order to promote shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of CFS and the Federation.

The Committee believes that the Program's policies and procedures must be consistently understood, interpreted and applied across the Province, and that this in turn will contribute to a common standard of quality care for children in foster placements. The Committee further considers it crucially important to ensure that policies and procedures are child focused, use inclusive rather than exclusive language and that policy is flexible and adaptable in order to promote normalcy and meet individual needs of children.

The Committee heard that the policies and procedures of the Program are dated and difficult to understand and to apply in real life. The Committee recommends that a joint committee be struck, with representatives from CFS and the Federation, to analyze and modernize the policies and procedures of the Program. For example, the Committee heard that the intake process of onboarding new foster parents could be streamlined. The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation first focus on updating procedures and ensure that they are consistently applied across the Province. Procedures can be streamlined faster than policies can be updated and approved.

The Committee also recommends that CFS explore hiring a Project Manager to lead the development and renewal of the policies and procedures related to the Program, including the Foster Parent Handbook referenced above. The Federation is well posed to provide insight and guidance to CFS on the needs of its members. A joint policy and planning committee would ensure that policies and procedures reflect modern program realities and that language is uniform and consistent which will promote a shared understanding of the Program's objectives and requirements. One such example put forward by foster parents was that policies and procedures were not updated when the starting age for children entering public school was lowered from six to five.

The Committee further recommends that the joint committee review forms used by the Program. The Committee heard that many of the forms used by the Program are complex and cumbersome, an example being the amount of paper work required to receive reimbursement for expenses or the volume of paperwork when a child is initially placed in a foster home.

Given the fact that the Program has not had a full review for a number of years, the Committee also recommends that a process be established for a joint program review to be conducted every five years by the Federation and CFS, with the review being submitted to the Minister. This will ensure that the Program adapts to the ever-changing needs of children in care and changing needs of society.

The Committee further recommends that a working group be established with representatives from CFS and the Federation, in order to ensure that recommendations that flow from this Review are actioned and implemented in a timely manner. The Committee firmly believes that without an accountability measure to ensure that the Program is reformed based on recommendations contained in this Review that little will change with the Program.

Training and Supports Collaboration

1). Joint Committee - Training and Supports

The Committee heard from all parties that training and supports for foster parents are critically important in ensuring appropriate care is provided to children in care. The Committee believes that Prince Edward Island's foster parents require individualized support and training assistance to best meet the needs of children in their home. The needs of children in care are ever changing, along with demographic and societal values. As such, trainings that may be relevant at one point in time may no longer be relevant in the next.

The Committee recommends that a joint committee be established with representatives from CFS and the Federation to identify and organize trainings that would best support foster parents providing care to children with varying needs. The Committee notes that this committee could be merged into the recruitment and retention committee referenced in this Review.

The Committee noted that many foster parents commented that they would like additional training and supports to assist in the development of cultural competence and culturally diverse

representation to ensure appropriate support to children in foster care placements. The Committee also heard of the need for PRIDE training, as well as training in trauma informed care.

The Committee also believes that CFS could collaborate more with the Federation by assisting in planning Annual General Meetings of the Federation and providing input into the strategic plans of the Federation. Foster parents frequently commented that they are often told that the needs of children are changing but they are not entirely clear on what the needs are or how to meet them. The Committee agrees that training must be provided in a timely manner that is specific to the needs of the child being placed in a foster home and further that individual training opportunities for foster parents must be based on the needs of children in care. The Committee also noted that communication and joint planning between the Federation and CFS will ensure that trainings and information sessions facilitated by the Federation are relevant and reflect the needs of children in care.

The Committee notes that Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness offer a variety of trainings and recommend that CFS explore opportunities to collaborate with Health PEI and the Department of Health and Wellness to allow for foster parents to attend relevant trainings. Further, the Committee notes that CFS must support foster parents in attending training, for example, by covering mileage, providing respite (in addition to their regularly monthly quotate) and sponsoring a certain number of spaces for foster parents.

The Committee further recommends that where possible and relevant, foster parents and CFS staff (including staff of Residential Services) take trainings together. CFS staff frequently hosts trainings that would be beneficial to foster parents. The Committee believes that allowing foster parents to attend these trainings and having CFS collaborate with the Federation to allow trainings to be provided to CFS and foster parents will improve the knowledge and skill base of foster parents and improve working relationships between CFS and foster parents. CFS should also consider reimbursing foster parents for transportation costs to attend training sessions as well as consider the need for respite/babysitting support if foster parents are going to be available to attend trainings.

A forum to share and plan for training opportunities that support foster parents in caring for children, will invariably lead to better outcomes for children in care.

2). Allegation Support

The Committee further recommends that CFS research and adopt support models centred on helping foster parents cope and navigate an allegation of neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse made against them.

One such example is Alberta's C.A.S.T (Caregiver Allegation and Support Team) which uses volunteer representatives from Alberta's Foster and Kinship Association to advocate for foster parents and to promote measures that prevent allegations from arising. These representatives are familiar with investigation policies as well as procedures related to investigation and they liaise and assist foster parents as they work with child protection investigators.

The Committee heard from foster parents that allegations made against them are stressful and complicated. A resource to support foster parents in navigating an allegation made against them will help to ensure that the negative impacts of an allegation do not affect a foster family's ability to care for a child in their care.

3). Improved Collaboration and Involvement with the Confederacy

CFS and the Federation strive to support Indigenous children throughout their involvement with the child protection system. The Committee believes it is critically important to involve the Confederacy in the development of all policies, procedures, strategies trainings and assessment tools to ensure that they incorporate an Indigenous worldview.

The Committee recommends a continued and expanded collaborative partnership with the Confederacy in order to promote connections with the Indigenous community (Elders) and foster parents so that Indigenous children in care have their unique identities respected and promoted. The Committee further recommends a formal partnership on placements for Indigenous children including mandatory cultural plans and assessment models for foster care that are based on an Indigenous worldview.

Finally, the Committee recommends that more programming and cultural resources for foster parents should be a top priority. CFS must ensure that foster parents are supported to make sure they are connected to Indigenous practices and history and children's cultural and spiritual goals. Foster parents need to learn about Indigenous history, practices and communities. Foster parents have a role in supporting children's connection to language and culture. CFS can support foster parents by promoting and providing training and ensuring that there are transportation supports to facilitate children attending cultural programs, services and events.

Conclusion

The Advisory Committee acknowledges the complexity of the subject matter with which the committee was tasked with reviewing, namely to facilitate engagement from the parties to the Program on opportunities to strengthen child-centred services on behalf of children in the legal custody and guardianship of the province living in foster homes. Given that foster parents, CFS and children in care may have common and divergent needs and interests in relation to the Program, the Committee heard multiple perspectives that both competed and complimented one another.

The Government of Prince Edward is under a duty to protect the interests of children in care and to ensure that any changes to the Program do no harm or mitigate harm to children in care while balancing the need to modernize and update Program policies and procedures.

The Committee submits that Government should carefully consider the recommendations of the Committee, which are based on the needs and desires of the parties to the Program, and ensure

that appropriate resources, human, financial and technological are in place to support changes to Program operations.

The consultation process and this Report are only one aspect of the work required to inform administrative decisions in relation to the Program going forward. The Committee recommends that Government develop a work plan based off the recommendations contained in this Report, to ensure that updates to the Program are actioned and to ensure that the voices of the parties to this consultation process are heard.

The Committee noted that given the complex nature of family dynamics and the varying and individual needs of the parties involved with the Program, that each case is unique and individualized. The variability of experiences in relation to the Program makes it difficult to draw generalizations with respect to the Program's operations.

Summary of Recommendations

In order to address issues heard during the consultation process as well as other issues of concern identified by the Committee with respect to the operation and administration of the Foster Care Program, the Committee prepared recommendations under the categories of Foster Families, Children in Care and Working Relationships. The Committee recommends that a working group be established to action the recommendations of this Review, with representation from both CFS and the Federation. A summary of the recommendations is contained below:

Foster Families

1. The Committee recommends that a new mentorship program be developed by CFS in partnership with the Federation in order to support and encourage new foster parents and to keep experienced foster parents engaged and active.
2. The Committee recommends that CFS adopt and provide Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE) training to prepare foster parents to work with other team members to ensure a child's safety, wellbeing, and permanency for each child in the foster care system.
3. The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation partner to develop a Handbook that provides a framework for foster parenting. This will help ensure that foster parents have access to the most recent and up-to-date information with respect to the policies and procedures of the Program.
4. The Committee recommends that CFS' Recruitment and Retention Committee be expanded and invite more members of the Federation to sit on the Committee and that the Committee formalize its operations by drafting terms of reference and working towards long term goals through a strategic plan.

5. The Committee recommends that CFS reevaluate the compensation model of the Program and in particular evaluate age categories of children in relation to maintenance fees and special expense categories.
6. The Committee recommends that CFS implement therapeutic foster homes that are available to children in care for 24/7 support, treatment intervention, crisis stabilization and connection to the community and school. The Committee further recommends that the working group evaluate and propose what alternative care models could look like on Prince Edward Island.
7. The Committee recommends that CFS reevaluate the scope and role of foster parents, given the changing needs of children coming into care. The Committee recommends that specific focus be placed on role clarity and the scope of foster parents and involve foster parents in the decision making process in relation to foster children in their care.
8. The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation conduct research into the experiences of foster parents who are fostering in other provinces in Canada, with particular focus on access to supports for foster parents and how compensation is provided.
9. The Committee recommends that CFS explore providing additional afterhours support to foster families, who may need assistance and advice outside of office hours. The Committee notes that creating a mentoring system outlined in recommendation 1 above, may address this recommendation.
10. The Committee recommends that CFS evaluate the process in which payment authorizations are made to ensure that foster parents receive reimbursements in a timely manner.
11. The Committee recommends that compensation rates for respite care be reviewed based on practices in other Canadian provinces/territories and further recommends that compensation for respite be increased.
12. The Committee recommends that CFS explore an arrangement through a volunteer driver program, a private transportation company or through the school board's existing transportation resources, contracted to provide a vehicle and transportation services, to assist foster parents in transporting foster children. The Committee notes that there are times when foster parents may have multiple children living in their home and there can be conflicts with children's' medical appointments and extracurricular activities.

Children in Care

13. The Committee recommends that Government start collecting, tracking and analyzing data in relation to the number of times a child is transitioned while in care (including placement times), in order to monitor the number of times a child is moved while in care

and to develop case plans that try to minimize the total number of times a child is moved while in care.

14. The Committee recommends that partnerships should be strengthened between child protection staff, foster parents and residential services, with specific focus on establishing a formal process between CFS and the Federation to discuss, at the earliest opportunity, a plan for children who are able to be placed in a foster home, rather than continue to reside in a group home.
15. The Committee recommends that CFS evaluate the process in which payment authorizations are made to ensure that children receive authorizations to attend extracurricular in a timely manner.
16. The Committee recommends that CFS conduct research into establishing a new program (as outlined in recommendation 12) to help provide transportation supports to foster children to ensure that they are able to attend extracurricular activities and cultural events that promote linkages with their ethnic/cultural background (for example Powwows).
17. The Committee recommends that the Program continue and expand upon the Program's child centered approach by ascertaining children's wishes and feelings by communicating appropriately in terms of age, language, ethnicity and ability and ensuring that children maintain a connection with their birth family, if it is in the child's best interests.
18. The Committee recommends that CFS institute proactive care plans for children in collaboration with foster parents in order to determine what supports the foster family could help provide to a child in order to ensure that the child is able to help transition back into their natural home environment smoothly.
19. The Committee recommends that CFS explore innovative ways to provide supports to children, such as Residential Services staff assisting in the provision of 1-1 support to a foster child with complex needs, by providing respite services or individualized coaching and intervention services.
20. The Committee recommends that CFS and the Federation implement a process for the effective participation of children in care planning and their participation and development of programs and services created for children, in order to ensure that children's voices are heard and respected.
21. The Committee recommends that CFS ensure that all children coming into care have the opportunity to have a period of introduction with prospective foster parents wherever possible, where the child has an opportunity to share their interests with the proposed foster parents. CFS should endeavor to collect information about a child's needs, likes and dislikes, as expressed by the child directly, and provide them to foster parents before a placement commences.

22. The Committee recommends that CFS explore providing additional supports to foster parents to allow children to remain with their foster parents beyond the age of 18 even though they may not be attending postsecondary education, as many children in care are unable to live independently once they reach the age of 18. The Committee further recommends CFS and the Federation collaborate to identify training and life skills coaching that would support children in care as they transition to adulthood.
23. The Committee recommends that CFS assess the uptake of the new transitional housing planned for construction in Charlottetown, and explore whether there is a need to establish transitional housing in other regions of Prince Edward Island.
24. The Committee recommends that policies and procedures be adopted as well as information materials for foster parents and children that serve as a guide and resource inventory for the various support programs that children aging out of care may access.
25. The Committee recommends that CFS explore the provision of prevention and early intervention services by providing appropriate, targeted and child specific resources to support children in care.
26. The Committee recommends that the *Child Protection Act* be researched and potential amendments introduced that grant wider latitude to CFS in offering services to children and their families who might be experiencing hardship but do not fit the requirements of the *Act* for a child to be found in need of protection, with a specific focus on prevention, early intervention and extended services.

Working Relationships

27. The Committee recommends that CFS ensure that regular planning meetings are occurring between CFS, foster parents and where appropriate, other professionals who provide services to children in care.
28. The Committee recommends that CFS consider formalizing liaisons between foster families and CFS and that CFS staff have regular meetings with the Federation to advise on staffing changes, and to share information regarding changes in programming, policy and trainings so that the Federation can report back to its members.
29. The Committee recommends that CFS modernize and update program policies by, including the annual operating contract between CFS and the Federation. The Committee further recommends that CFS explore hiring a dedicated resource to lead the development and renewal of the policies and procedures related to the Program and that a process be established for a joint program review to be conducted every five years by the Federation and CFS, with the review being submitted to the Minister.
30. The Committee recommends that the working group explore identifying and organizing trainings that would best support foster parents providing care to children with varying

and specific needs. This could be facilitated by CFS collecting data from children in care to identify the needs of its children and then facilitating training that meets identified needs, as well as foster parents identifying trainings that they believe would assist them in providing care to foster children. The Committee believes that this could assist foster parents in obtaining supports that would allow them to accept placements of children with varying and complex needs. The Committee notes that where possible and relevant, foster parents and CFS staff (including staff of Residential Services) should take trainings together.

31. The Committee recommends that CFS research and adopt support models centred on helping foster parents cope and navigate an allegation of neglect, physical, sexual and emotional abuse made against them, for example the Caregiver Allegations Support Team (CAST) model used in Alberta.
32. The Committee recommends a continued and expanded collaborative partnership with the Indigenous community (including Elders) and foster parents. Indigenous children in care have their unique identities respected and promoted, with a focus on establishing a formal partnership on placements for Indigenous children including mandatory cultural plans and assessment models for foster care that are based on an Indigenous worldview and ensuring that more programming and cultural resources for foster parents are developed.