

**An Update Report on
Employment and Training for Child and Family
Services Authorities (CFSAs)**

**Prepared for the
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March 2000

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A. Introduction

In June 1997, the Northern Alberta Labour Market Clearinghouse produced a report *Training for Child and Family Services* to identify preliminary training and employment implications resulting from fundamental changes in the governance and delivery of services to children and families.

Many changes have occurred since *Training for Child and Family Services* was produced. This current report, *An Update Report on Employment and Training for Child and Family Services Authorities*, discusses implications for employment now and the foreseeable future in the nine Child and Family Services Authorities (CFSAs) operating in the Northern Alberta Labour Market Clearinghouse area (Regions 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18). It also highlights key staff and board training needs identified in interviews with available CEOs and staff in the Northern Alberta CFSAs (see www.gov.ab.ca/cs/cfsa/ for a map that identifies CFSA regional boundaries).

The report is based on telephone interviews with CEOs or their designated representatives in eight of the nine regions and a variety of written and Internet sources. For the purposes of this report, this mixed group of CEOs and their designates will be known as “CFSA managers” or “managers”.

B. Background

In November 1994, following an extensive public consultation process, Alberta’s Commissioner of Services for Children announced a new children’s services initiative in a document entitled *Focus on Children*. It presented a plan for effective, integrated community services for Alberta children and families. The plan was based on four principles known as the “Four Pillars”. These principles have guided the planning of Alberta’s community-based system of child and family services from 1994 to the present. The “Four Pillars” are:

- Community-based services
- Early intervention services
- Improved services for Aboriginal children and families
- Integrated services

Seventeen planning regions were established in 1995 with the same boundaries as the Regional Health Authorities. Region 18, added later, focuses on Metis Settlements. In March 1996, Royal Assent was given to Enabling Legislation establishing the regional Child and Family Services Authorities.

By June, 1996 over 10,000 Albertans were involved in the development of Preliminary Service Plans in each of the regions. Preliminary Service Plans were submitted by each region between May 1996 and November 1997.

By the spring of 1998, Regional Services Plans had been approved by the Alberta Government and Board members were recruited to the 18 CFSA Boards. Two-day Board Orientation Workshops were held during the summer of 1998.

Throughout the remainder of 1998 and into 1999, CFSA Boards developed transitional business plans, based upon the approved Regional Service Plans. Once these transitional business plans were completed and approved, each Authority entered into an agreement with the Alberta government to transfer the service delivery responsibilities to the Authority. As well, during this same period, Boards recruited Chief Executive Officers who are responsible for carrying out Board policies and decisions, managing the day-to-day operations of the Authority, and ensuring that the regional system operates effectively.

Each Child and Family Services Authority oversees a range of programs and services to children and families, including:

- Child welfare
- Day care
- Family violence prevention services
- Services for children with disabilities
- Early intervention programs
- Court services
- Mediation

The above-named programs and services are delivered by a variety of community agencies, organizations, and individuals in each of the CFSA regions.

C. Implications for Employment

- Eight out of nine CFSA managers indicated that they were experiencing difficulties recruiting and retaining staff. Only one manager indicated his region currently had no shortages. He attributed this to the fact that his CFSA region was in close proximity to Edmonton.
- According to those interviewed, minimum entry into employment as a social worker working with CFSAs is a Diploma in Social Work. Nearly all the CFSA managers interviewed indicated that they prefer to hire Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) Degree holders into entry level positions, however, they indicated BSWs are difficult to recruit in rural Alberta.

- Those interviewed had a mixed attitude toward Social Work Diploma graduates. Two managers indicated that Social Work Diploma holders have the skills to do the work of child case workers (formerly called child welfare workers). Six others indicated their preference was to hire Bachelor of Social Work Degree holders but that they accepted Diploma holders due to a shortage of BSWs. One manager suggested that graduates of Social Work Diploma programs “range between inadequate and totally inadequate.”
- Several CFSA managers indicated that it was difficult to find qualified, competent case (child welfare) workers. Part of the reason, according to the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers, is that those newly-hired by CFSAs are being paid at rates lower than longer term employees. New graduates of BSW or Social Work Diploma Programs tend to choose better paying positions in private organizations or school boards.
- Several managers spoke about the shortage of trained Aboriginal social workers, both at the Bachelor and Diploma levels. One manager said, “Aboriginal social workers are almost impossible to find. When they become available they are quickly ‘snapped up’ by local Aboriginal bands who are able to pay them more than the Authorities can.”
- Most of the CFSA managers indicated they had sought out educational opportunities to be delivered to staff on site as a means of encouraging them to remain in the region. For this same reason, another manager indicated he is paying the tuition costs and providing time off for two staff members to take their BSW through distance delivery.
- One CFSA manager indicated there were demands for rehabilitation aides and trained child care and youth workers in her region.

D. Implications for Training

- Those currently working as social workers in Alberta are required to register as a Registered Social Worker (RSW) with the Alberta Association of Registered Social Workers, the designated regulatory body for the Province of Alberta. Those social workers who have not graduated from a recognized social work program can be ‘grandparented’ into RSW status until September 1, 2000. In doing so, applicants will be required to complete two courses within two years: *Social Work Ethics* and *Standards of Practice*. They are also required to complete 40 hours per year of professional development.

- Social workers who are employed by CFSA's have been exempt from registering as an RSW. This exemption was implemented only as a temporary measure. Under the new *Health Professions Act* (which has been passed but not yet received Royal Assent), there is no provision for exemptions. By the Fall of 2000, the RSW designation will be required for all social workers working in Alberta.
- The current shortage of Bachelor of Social Work graduates in Northern Alberta may be addressed by the University of Calgary's *BSW Access Program*. Offered by distance delivery in such Northern Alberta communities as High Prairie and Slave Lake, the *BSW Access Program* currently has 62 students enrolled from across Alberta. This will be increased to 100 students per year for the next several years.
- Three CFSA managers indicated that what is needed at the local community level are staff who are positive, collaborative in style, solutions-oriented and have good networks and good networking skills. These managers indicated that the traditional training of social workers creates skepticism and an emphasis on following rules. They encouraged the colleges' social work programs to emphasize more solutions-focused approaches to assisting children and families.
- Several specific suggestions were made by individual CFSA managers for the enhancement of college programs that train social workers and related occupations employed by the CFSA's in the Clearinghouse Region. These included:
 - Youth and child care program graduates need knowledge and skills in administration, program development, project management, financial management, and human resources planning.
 - One-year diploma programs are insufficient to prepare students for work with children and families. Said one manager, "They need an extra year to gain additional practical experience and greater knowledge."
 - There is a lack of on-the-job skills, problem solving skills and writing skills by recent graduates of Administrative Support Diploma programs.
 - There is a need for some type of standard computer training for all those in Social Work Diploma programs.
 - Social Work Diploma students require a better understanding of prevention and early intervention.

Other suggestions by CFSA managers for new programs or short courses that could benefit children and families in their region included:

- Address the continual shortage of speech therapists by establishing a Speech Therapy Diploma program.

- Offer short courses on fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) to interested parents and adoptive parents whose children have FAS.
- Provide training to boards in conflict resolution, governance training, policy development, board and staff relations, and cross-cultural training.

CFSAs will require on-going staff training for social workers and other staff members. The following short courses were identified by several CFSA managers for consideration by local colleges:

- written communication – proposals, memos, letters, etc.
(identified by three CFSA managers)
- diversity training/cross-cultural training (identified by two CFSA managers)
- group facilitation skills (identified by two CFSA managers)
- research skills
- oral presentation skills
- negotiating skills
- administrative skills
- project management
- financial management
- human resources planning
- mediation skills
- conflict resolution skills
- addictions abuse
- problem solving skills
- computer literacy skills
- community development skills

E. Conclusion

- Employment demand for qualified social workers, child care workers, and youth workers is likely to continue to grow in Northern Alberta. As this report suggests, however, there are enhancements that are necessary for colleges to consider if diplomas are to remain the minimum entry requirement for CFSA employees.
- Colleges in Northern Alberta appear to have an opportunity to deliver a wider range of programs and short courses to Child and Family Services Authorities in the Clearinghouse Region. CFSA managers are already encouraging local education and training to help retain staff in the region.

- Through the use of distance delivery, Clearinghouse area colleges could deliver professional development training directly to those CFSA staff who must undertake 40 hours of professional development annually.
- Indications are that CFSA Boards have and continue to receive board development training. However, there are still a great deal of short courses that could assist these boards in their continued growth and development.

Sources

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