



FAMILY MATTERS

YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS

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Deputy's Message

It is my pleasure to share with you our new ministry e-newsletter, *Family Matters*. This e-newsletter will be issued every two months, and is intended as a forum to highlight success stories, profile innovation and excellence among staff and service providers and communicate new program and service initiatives.



*Deputy Minister
Alison McPhail*

Open and clear communication is key to our continuing progress as we grow and evolve as a ministry. As staff and service providers, you deliver high quality services that help improve the lives of children and families across our province. Your professional successes, challenges, ideas and innovations are stories we want to hear about. This is your newsletter; a vehicle to ensure that we all stay connected as we meet challenges and celebrate success.

We are very pleased to welcome the Honourable Stan Hagen as the new Minister of Children and Family Development. A profile of the Minister is included on page 2. Other features in this month's issue include taking a look at the Family Group Conference Coordinators Summit that was held October 18th and

19th, and how family group conferencing is helping to protect vulnerable children. We examine the issue of agency accreditation and how it gives service providers added confidence in their ability to deliver high quality services to our clients. We also consider some of the creative and cost-effective ways agencies are providing residential supports for adults with developmental disabilities.

Ministry staff will automatically receive each issue by e-mail. Service providers and other parties interested in receiving the newsletter electronically can sign up on page 3. The newsletter will also be posted on our internet site. We have included a feedback loop so you can send us your story ideas, comments or concerns. We look forward to hearing from you!

Our work is valuable and brings positive results to many families. I encourage you to share this e-newsletter with your friends and associates. Staying connected as a team and communicating our professional experiences will ensure our continued progress and success. I am sure we all agree that whatever role each of us plays, Family Matters.

Family Group Conferencing: Keeping Kids at Home

Across the province, families and communities are increasingly participating in developing plans for the protection of vulnerable children.

One indication of this trend was the success of the Family Group Conference Coordinators Summit held October 18th and 19th in Vancouver. The summit was attended by 45 coordinators from across BC, and was the first such chance for coordinators to get together since the pilot projects began in 2002. Those who attended brought energy and enthusiasm to the proceedings, and left with a sense of the diversity and strength of the province-wide program.

"It's so obvious to all of us just how much family group conferencing is growing" says Holly Niebergal, a coordinator in Kelowna. "With that, we're seeing we have enough collective experience that we can help one another."

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Family Group Conferencing cont'd...

Family group conferencing is an open and collaborative process that involves family members and extended family in developing plans for the safe care of children. During a family group conference, a family meets privately with a trained facilitator, community service providers and a delegated ministry worker to develop a plan to meet the child's needs.

"Work in the regions is continuing in terms of expanding family conference and mediation options for families," says Clara Robbins, MCFD's Acting Director of Child and Family Development Service Transformation. "We're seeing out-of-care options increase, and that means an increase in family and community participation in those plans."

Niebergal attributes the growth of family group conferencing to a strong movement toward family and community responsibility in protecting children, and a growing recognition that a family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children.

Families who are involved with the process seem to agree with the approach. Informal evaluations suggest very high levels of satisfaction with the conferences and outcomes. "Parents who are otherwise defensive toward the ministry's involvement open up and take on the support and cooperation of their family members. It's a much more respectful kind of process, and the outcomes are better."

Niebergal points to a couple of cases from this past summer. In one instance, a teenage girl had been in ministry care for eight years. As a result of family group conferencing, the family was able to work

with the Ministry to address the safety issues, and it was determined that it was to her benefit to go home. In another case, the father of a young boy in the ministry's permanent care came forward to express interest in caring for the child. Together, the family and the extended family developed a plan to prepare and support the father to take on the parenting of the child. The social worker approved the plan, and agreed that if the father took certain steps then it was very likely that the child would be returned home.

"We're looking at family group conferencing as a means of keeping children out of care altogether, or getting them out of care sooner," Niebergal says. "Statistically, almost half of the children on my caseload who have been through family group conferencing have gone home or are in the process of going home. That is an amazing achievement." □

WELCOME MINISTER HAGEN!



Minister Hagen came to MCFD on September 20th from the Ministry of Human Resources. He began his political career in 1986 when he was first elected as an MLA. His experience is widespread both personally and professionally. He has led nine ministries and served with countless community organizations.

"The work we do at MCFD is of vital importance to children and families across this province," said Hagen. "I feel extremely proud to be working with such a dedicated and highly skilled team; knowing we are delivering social services that are keeping children safe in their families and extended communities, supporting high quality early childhood education and child care, providing services for children with special needs and adults with developmental disabilities and so much more."

Some of his political portfolios have included Minister of Education, Minister of Advanced Education, Job Training, Science and Technology, Minister of Regional and Economic Development, and Minister of State for the Vancouver Island/Coast Region. He has been a member of six cabinet committees and chaired the Canadian Council of Ministers of



Minister Stan Hagen

Education. Minister Hagen was presented with an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Simon Fraser University and was instrumental in the creation of Science World.

He has also been very active within the community, volunteering with a variety of organizations. These include serving as a coordinator for Big Brothers and as a board member and fundraiser for the Courtenay Youth Music Council. As well, Minister Hagen served as a school trustee for six years and is founding president of the Comox Valley Community Foundation. The Foundation funds more than 45 community organizations including the Comox Air Force Museum, the Comox Valley Boys and Girls Club and Comox Valley Community Arts Council.

"Volunteering within our communities is a good way to demonstrate care and concern for the young people and children of our province," said Hagen. "I hope in some small way the community work I have done over the years has helped to improve the lives of young people. Social service organizations, whether they are government or non-profit, play a vital role in our communities."

Minister Hagen is the father of five children and lives with his wife Judy in Courtenay, British Columbia.

Putting a Face on Mental Illness

Three documentaries. Three mental illnesses. One big impact.

That's the message of a new series currently airing on The Knowledge Network. The three one-hour documentaries focus on depression, anxiety and early psychosis.

The series is the result of a collaboration between MCFD Child and Youth Mental Health, the Mental Health Evaluation and Community Consultation Unit (MHECCU) at UBC and The Knowledge Network.

The documentaries are part of the first phase of MCFD's five-year Child and Youth Mental Health Plan. One focus of the first phase is public awareness and education. The second phase will involve narrowing the gap between need and capacity.

Young people living with each of the three illnesses share their stories in the documentaries. Seeing people who have endured and grown stronger in their struggles with mental illness makes for inspiring viewing, says Gayle Read. She's a mental health consultant with MCFD Child and Youth Mental Health.

"I think these documentaries may go on to win awards," says Read. "They are so moving, it's absolutely incredible."

One scene that stands out in Read's mind is from the depression documentary. It features a 15-year-old young woman with bipolar disorder who, in a manic phase, was able to get a 300-pound policeman onto the ground. But most of the drama of the documentaries comes from the fact that people are able to overcome mental illness to live positive, productive lives.

"We're getting the reality of the illness, but also the hope associated with it," Read says. "I've worked in mental health for over 20 years, and I've been a front-line clinician for most of that time. I've sat and heard people's stories over and over again, but having them presented in this format is very powerful."



*Marley, age 11, tells her story in **Fighting Their Fears: Child and Youth Anxiety**.*

The documentaries were informed by leading experts in the mental health field, including child psychiatrists, academics, clinicians, and MCFD staff. The three mental illnesses were chosen for their prevalence (in the case of anxiety and depression) or their impact (early psychosis.)

A key aim of the series is to help families recognize the signs and symptoms of mental illness. Hopefully, this will encourage them to seek help. Also, the series aims to reduce the stigma of seeking help, and to increase public awareness about mental health issues.

Each documentary is supported by a series of web-based tools, which are available on the Knowledge Network's [website](#). The site also contains information, resources and additional stories on the people featured in the documentaries.

The series began airing in early October and continues through January. The documentaries will then be made available through BC public libraries and MCFD Child and Youth Mental Health offices, and can be purchased through the National Film Board of Canada.

CYMH clinicians will utilize them as teaching tools for clients and their families; they will also be used by MCFD staff, physicians, and other community professionals.

More Information on Child and Youth Mental Health:

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/index.htm

Remaining Airtimes on Knowledge Network:

BEYOND THE BLUES: CHILD AND YOUTH DEPRESSION – Jan. 5, at 11 a.m.

FIGHTING THEIR FEARS: CHILD AND YOUTH ANXIETY – Dec. 1 at 11 a.m.
Repeats Jan. 12 at 11 a.m.

A MAP OF THE MIND FIELDS: MANAGING ADOLESCENT PSYCHOSIS – Dec. 8 at 11 a.m.
Repeats Jan. 19, at 11 a.m.

SIGN ME UP



Please add me to [your electronic distribution list](#).

Accreditation Update

Many service providers are saying the accreditation process has given them increased confidence in their ability to provide ever-higher quality of services to clients.

As of this month, 82 of the 200 agencies that require accreditation have completed the process. Several dozen more are nearly done.

Accreditation is required for service providers that have \$500,000 or more in annual contracts with the ministry. The deadline for a site review/survey by an accrediting body is September 30, 2005.

Diane Osoko, Manager of Accreditation for MCFD, says the vast majority of agencies are well along in the 12 to 18 month process of getting accredited with one of the two accrediting bodies, Council on Accreditation (COA) and the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF.)

"Right now, it's really exciting," she says. "I think that we're seeing momentum, because of people who have been through the process and have been positive about it."

Osoko says a great part of the process has been the interaction between mentors and agencies, and the sharing of

ideas and experiences that has resulted. Mentors are from agencies that have already achieved accreditation.

One of the agencies already accredited is the Powell River Association for Community Living. They were accredited by CARF in April, earning a distinction only three percent of agencies achieve: the accrediting body had no recommendations. This means the surveyors did not identify any areas of nonconformance to the standards.

"...We've learned how to work as an agency as opposed to a series of programs."

Lilla Tipton, the agency's Executive Director, was confident they had done well, but was surprised there were no recommendations. Of course, the staff were thrilled. The agency is now better able to assess where they are in terms of service delivery, and how to get where they want to go.

"I think getting your systems cleaned up and providing good info, for us that was a huge bonus," Tipton says. "We never had a good database system that you could

use for planning to the same extent that we can now."

Options Services to Community, in Surrey, was accredited by COA. Bruce Hardy, Executive Director, says his agency handles data much better now.

"The reality is, we do far better file work now," Hardy says. "We are much clearer on our annual evaluations of workers and we've learned how to work as an agency as opposed to a series of programs."

Hardy had previously taken West Coast Family Resources Society through the accreditation process. He says it is always a lot of work, but the agency ends up in a better position to serve clients. Accreditation is about improving your standards, which is the job of management anyway, he says.

Most importantly, clients noticed the difference.

"They really enjoyed the focus on the goals and how much voice they had in determining where they were going and what they were doing," Hardy says. "That was a very positive side of it."

For more information on accreditation: <http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/accreditation/index.htm>

New Resource Provides Caregivers with Easier Access to Services

A new on-line resource, *inyourgrasp*, provides information about support services available to foster and adoptive families across BC.

The development of *inyourgrasp* arose out of the recognized need for caregivers to have direct and immediate access

to information on community and special needs services. The database, which is organized by region and service type, provides caregivers with the information they need in minutes.

inyourgrasp is a joint project between the BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations, the Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents and the Adoptive Families Association of British Columbia.

In addition to serving the foster and adoption community, *inyourgrasp* serves as a resource to MCFD, service agencies and the general public.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK



Send comments or content ideas to:
MCF.NewsletterFeedback@gems7.gov.bc.ca

Innovative Alternatives in Residential Care

Service providers continue to develop creative and cost-effective ways to support adults with developmental disabilities within the residential care network. In the process, they are better meeting the unique needs of clients and better utilizing resources. But the ministry and service providers are also looking at alternatives to typical models of care.

"We're at a point now where innovation is more important than ever," says Paula Grant, Director of Adult Community Living with MCFD. "We have to look at new ways of supporting families to adapt to changing needs."

Carol Goozh says such changes are part of a wider effort to adapt to changing times and better serve the needs of clients. She's MCFD's Acting Director of Regional Operations for Community Living. "All of the agencies are trying to be flexible and rise to the occasion, and meet the needs around individual circumstances."

Spectrum Society, in the Vancouver Coastal Region, is one such agency. Spectrum supports more than 50 adults with developmental disabilities. About a dozen of those clients are supported in their own apartments, the most of any agency in the region.

Spectrum provides free room and board to a roommate who lives with the client. That way, paid staff are required only during the day. The roommate is there from late evening until morning. This cuts down on costs, as compared to a licensed home with 24/7 staffing. This situation is provided for clients who desire

independent living and who can be safe in such a setting.

Ernie Baatz, the agency's Executive Director, emphasizes that Spectrum is individual-centered, not program-centered. They try to meet the particular needs of each client. And how they meet those needs continues to change.

"I think there's always the drive to find different, better ways to meet people's needs," says Baatz. His agency has helped several people move to family care, where they were much happier, he says.

"We did it as a result of needing to restructure and find savings, but we also identified people who really weren't happy in their staffed resources and wanted more of a seamless, family care kind of home."

Cascadia Society, another agency in the region, has established family care

homes that see two or more individuals with a developmental disability living together in a family setting. Graham Oslund, Cascadia's Executive Director, says it is often a more fulfilling situation when two or more companions share a residence, though it ultimately depends on the individual.

"If you have just one individual in a home, say in a family home, that might not be as satisfying as a home where you have three or even four companions where they can really develop a peer relationship," says Oslund.

Cascadia has five individuals in two family care homes, which they refer to as their "life sharing community." The agency hopes to eventually expand its number of homes providing family care from two to a total

of five. This would allow for more social interaction and a more stable community, in case a family care provider moved on.

We'd like to hear from you about innovative programs and services that your agency is offering. Email us at mcf.newsletterfeedback@gems7.gov.bc.ca

EVENTS

November is Adoption Awareness Month.

Visit MCFD's [Adoption web pages](#) for more info or [click here](#) to view a list of licensed adoption agencies in BC.

Child & Youth Mental Health - Recruitment Campaign -

November through January
The Ministry of Children and Family Development will be hiring more than 80 mental health professionals for Spring 2005 in the area of Child and Youth Mental Health. Positions will be available across the province. For more details, [click here](#).

November 20th is Universal Children's Day.

More info is available on the [United Nations web site](#).

November 21st through 27th is National Addiction Awareness Week.

[Click here](#) to visit the Ministry of Health web page on addiction services.

Strengthening Youth Justice Partnerships in BC Conference.

Vancouver - November 22nd to November 24th . For more information visit www.parca.ca



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Cooperation Crosses All Boundaries

'Boundary' might be an unlikely name for a region leading the way in collaboration and integration, but that's the case. The rural, dispersed area has been the site of a community-initiated pilot project that provides a possible model for other rural areas around the province.

The Boundary Child and Youth Committee started discussions in 2001 to integrate the delivery of services, in response to the move to regionalized services and decision-making. The service providers comprising the resulting Boundary Integrated Service Model are Boundary Family Individual Services Society (BFISS), Public Health, Boundary Child Care Resource and Referral and MCFD.

The goal was to build a service delivery system that was innovative, comprehensive, consolidated and community-based. By all accounts, the plan is on track and clients are benefiting from the changes.

"It's the service delivery, the one-stop shopping, the ability for staff to create really good teams around individuals to create services and to really maximize on services that are available to families," says Nancy McComb, Director of Operations for the Interior Region.

Staff from MCFD and the three agencies were integrated into two "hub" locations in Grand Forks. One location is a Selkirk College building while the other adjoins Perley Elementary School. A rapidly declining school population has made significant space available in every school in the district.

The school district has been a key partner. Six family centre sites are also located in district schools. The School Board values

this partnership with community agencies which assists in keeping schools open in smaller communities. Schools in such locations often serve as the heart of the community, as the site of activities that bind the community together.

"The thing that is most powerful for me is when we hear from the people who use our services that it makes sense for them," says Leda Leander, Executive Director of BFISS. "Now that we've been co-located it's a much more community-based atmosphere... and people are much more willing to come in and access help."

Leander says the biggest difference that clients notice is that change in atmosphere. Clients now have a sense

"...We are all invested in creating a healthier community in which children and families can grow, be nurtured and prosper."

of "ownership, that this is their place too."

In September, the committee met for a visioning day to look at the next phase of the project, which will further integrate

the services from the various agencies.

"There is a keen desire to further our integration process; we know that we have lots of work ahead of us and challenges to work through, but we are all invested in creating a healthier community in which children and families can grow, be nurtured and prosper."

Leander says a key lesson the project has offered is how collaboration can help agencies deal with uncertainty.

We've learned that, "[by] working together, we can provide better service to the citizens of our communities and how strong we can be as a whole," Leander says.

"There's that feeling that there's strength in us working together."

More info on the Boundary Integrated Services Model:
<http://www.boundaryschools.com/integrat/service/press/rele.pdf>

RELATED LINKS



Learn more about the service providers profiled in this issue:

Spectrum Society for Community Living

The Cascadia Society

Powell River Association for Community Living

Options Services to Communities Society

Boundary Family and Individual Services Society: Leda Leander (250) 442-2267

Other links of interest:

Adoptive Families Association (AFA)

BC Association for Community Living

BC Federation of Foster Parents

Centre for Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs

Community Living Restructuring Fund

Federation of Child and Family Services

Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

Interim Authority for Community Living BC

Research Alliance for Children with Special Needs: Enhancing Participation

Youth In Care Network