

Yukon Family and Children's Services



2013/14
Annual Report



Message from the Director

The *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) came into effect on April 30, 2010. It is the culmination of extensive consultation with First Nations and community partners. The Act dramatically shifts the approach to delivering child and family services in Yukon.

The Act emphasizes: the early and continued involvement of First Nations; the value of culture and community in all matters related to children and families; support for families and extended families to care for their children; collaborative and inclusive decision-making; mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect concerns; and quality assurance and accountability requirements. These and many other provisions in the CFSA required policy and practice changes, and a different orientation for staff, stakeholders and others involved in service delivery.

Many achievements and goals have been realized in the implementation of the CFSA. I would like to convey my sincere thanks to staff, First Nations and community partners who have worked with dedication and professionalism and who continue to protect, support and care for Yukon children and families. I would also like to give a special thanks to my predecessor Elaine Schroeder, who was instrumental in setting the ground work for this leading edge legislation and then supporting the practice and policy changes required to support children and families in a different way.

Brad Bell

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Department of Health and Social Services

Inside this report

pg.	
3	1.0 Child Welfare
4	2.0 The <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>
6	2.1 The <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> : 2013/14 Highlights
6	2.1.1 Early and Continued Involvement of First Nations
7	2.1.2 Supporting Families and Extended Families
8	2.1.3 Inclusive Decision Making
9	2.1.4 Quality Assurance and Accountability <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internal Compliance Review• Auditor General's Review
	Appendix A: Programs and Services Supporting Child Welfare in Yukon
11	<i>Prevention Initiatives</i>
11	1.1 Healthy Families
13	1.2 Child Care
14	1.3 Family Supports for Children with Disabilities
15	1.4 Child Protection <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Family, Child and Youth Support Programs• Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services
17	1.5 Other Services and Supports
18	<i>Intervention Initiatives</i>
18	2.1 Children in Care
19	2.2 Out-of-Home Care <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Foster Care• Adoption

Yukon Family and Children's Services Annual Report, 2013/14



1.0

Child Welfare

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Canada is a signatory, indicates the philosophical approach Canada will take to caring for children. The Convention requires all signatory members to ensure the rights of children and youth are reflected in legislation, policy and procedures. The programs and services of the Department of Health and Social Services, Government of Yukon, demonstrate this commitment.

The Yukon child welfare system endeavours to ensure that children are safe, promotes conditions that enable children to be cared for by family, provides support and treatment services, and supports out-of-home care when needed. Social workers use a collaborative model when working with families, communities, First Nation governments, non-government organizations and other jurisdictions, within and outside Canada.

The programs and services of the Government of Yukon child welfare system are also guided by one overarching principle:

“ *All children have an absolute right to a safe, permanent, stable home which provides basic levels of nurturance and care, and is free from abuse, neglect and exploitation.* ¹ ”

¹ Rycus, J.S. & Hughes, R.C. (1998) Field Guide to Child Welfare: Foundations of Child Protective Services, p. 31 CWLA Press, Washington DC.

2.0

The Child and Family Services Act

The mandate for child welfare services in Yukon is provided by the Yukon *Child and Family Services Act*. The Act identifies guiding principles, provides considerations to determine the best interest of children, and sets out certain requirements for the provision of services for both children and families.

The *Child and Family Services Act* was proclaimed in 2010. It replaced the *Children's Act*, which had been in effect since 1984. The *Child and Family Services Act* dramatically shifted the approach to delivering child and family services in Yukon.

The *Child and Family Services Act* was developed through the combined efforts of representatives of the Government of Yukon and Yukon First Nations. Consultation with community groups and stakeholders ensured that a range of perspectives was considered in the development of the legislation. The result of the collaborative approach is progressive child welfare legislation that sets high service standards and is based on the principles of cooperation and inclusion.

The process leading to the Act signalled a new and inclusive way of developing and providing services; one that involves partners, stakeholders and interested parties in a meaningful way. To this end, First Nation Health Directors and representatives from Family and Children's Services and Regional Services meet regularly to guide ongoing implementation and address key issues related to the Act.

The key features in the *Child and Family Services Act* include:

- the early and continued involvement of First Nations in planning and decision-making for their children;
- the value of culture and community in all matters related to children and families;
- an emphasis on supporting families and extended families in caring for their children, including provisions that allow for voluntary agreements to provide support;
- inclusive decision-making where extended family, informal support persons, service providers and professionals can come together to develop plans and respond to the needs of a child and their family;
- mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect concerns; and
- quality assurance and accountability requirements such as compliance procedures, annual reports, establishment of minimum standards of service, and a review of the legislation every five years.

These and many other provisions in the *Child and Family Services Act* required policy and practice changes, and a different orientation for staff, stakeholders and others who are involved in service delivery.

2.1

The *Child and Family Services Act*: 2013/14 Highlights

2.1.1 Early and Continued Involvement of First Nations

The *Child and Family Services Act* has provisions for the involvement of First Nations in decision-making and planning for their children and families. These provisions include involving First Nations:

- as soon as practicable;
- in cooperative planning processes such as family conferences;
- as party to court proceedings;
- in developing kinship homes, extended family care arrangements and other types of foster homes within their communities; and
- in planning related to the adoption of a child who is a member of a First Nation.

Funding arrangements are in place with seven First Nations to enable them to hire family support workers. Funding for two new workers was provided in the 2013/14 fiscal year. Family support workers partner with Health and Social Services staff to:

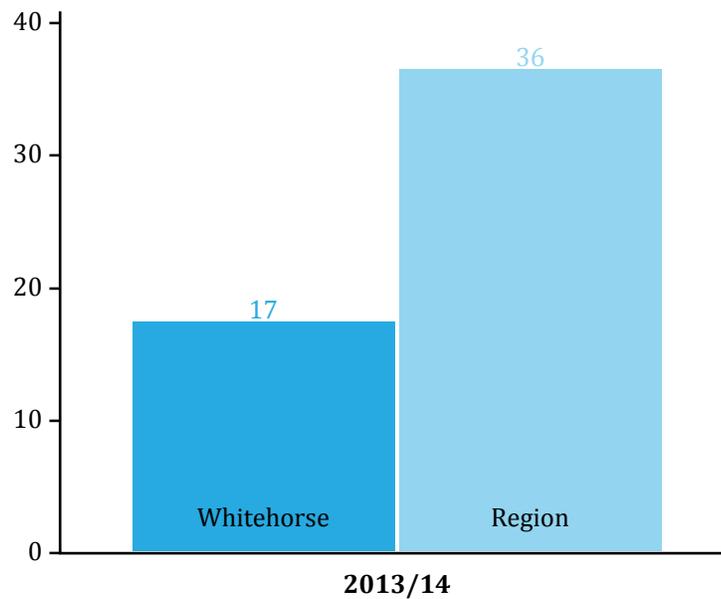
- ensure services are culturally relevant;
- assist and support children and families involved with Family and Children's Services;
- accompany social workers when responding to child protection referrals; and
- participate in planning and decision making for children, youth and families.

2.1.2 Supporting Families and Extended Families

The *Child and Family Services Act* permits the Director of Family and Children’s Services to enter into an agreement with extended family caregivers to support the care of a child who is in need of out-of-home placement. Support may include a range of services such as financial aid, counseling, respite, and other services related to the specific needs of the child.

In recognition of circumstances where reunification of a child and their parents is not possible, the extended family care program has been broadened. The program now supports extended families to care for a child until the child reaches the age of 19 years. Prior to this, extended family caregivers were supported for a maximum of two years.

Table 1: Short-term Extended Family Care Agreements in Yukon



2.1.3 Inclusive Decision-Making

Cooperative planning is a participatory and inclusive approach to working with children and families. It builds upon the strengths of the family and includes family members, First Nation representatives and other relevant stakeholders in decision-making and planning with the family. It is one of the foundational processes outlined within the *Child and Family Services Act* and a response to what we heard during the consultation leading up to this Act.

Family conferencing is one form of cooperative planning. Data from family conferences indicates that:

- In 2013/14 there were 68 referrals to the Family Conferencing program in addition to the 12 open files from the previous fiscal year.
- 23 families completed the entire conferencing process.
- Family or social workers made the decision not to proceed in 25 of the 68 new referrals.
- Five families were at some stage in the Family Conferencing process at the end of the fiscal year.
- 15 referrals remained on the waitlist at the end of the fiscal year.
- Feedback from family conference participants indicates high levels of participant satisfaction.

“*I liked the openness, the discussions and the respect all had for each other...and that family was able to be involved.*”
~ Family member

“*The family was able to come together in a respectful manner to come to an agreement on a realistic, goal-oriented plan.*”
~ First Nation representative

“*Good to see the family take control and make their own plan. Happy that both children attended. Everyone seemed open and honest and committed to the children.*”
~ Social worker



2.1.4 Quality Assurance and Accountability: Internal Compliance Review

As part of the overall commitment to quality assurance in child welfare, core child welfare standards were introduced in 2010. Since 2010, three internal compliance reviews have been completed in which child welfare files were reviewed against the following seven standards:

1. Emergency Response and Safety
2. Initial Contact with Child, Youth and Family
3. Contact with Yukon First Nations
4. Planning for Stability/Permanency
5. Caseworker Contact
6. Cultural Connectedness for Yukon First Nations/Aboriginal/Inuit and Métis Children
7. Out-of-Home Care

The results of the internal compliance reviews indicate improved compliance, particularly with respect to above standards (1) Emergency Response and Safety, and (3) Contact with Yukon First Nations. The results also highlight the need for:

- Greater emphasis on cooperative planning and family conferencing.
- Continued cultural connectedness.
- Adequate documentation.
- Ongoing contact with families to build relationships.
- Plans of Care and Cultural Plans.

The department is addressing these recommendations through the following actions:

- Implementing monthly compliance reporting requirements to ensure adequate documentation, plans of care and cultural plans.
- Implementing a new electronic Family Conferencing referral and tracking system.
- Development of a new Family Conferencing manual to support consistent practice.
- Expanding the extended family care program beyond the previous two year time frame to allow it to continue until a child reaches the age of 19.

2.1.4 Quality Assurance and Accountability: Auditor General's Report

The Auditor General of Canada conducted an audit of child welfare programs in Family and Children's Services. The audit covered the period between April 2010 when the *Child and Family Services Act* was implemented, and December 2013. The report was tabled in the Legislative Assembly in February 2014.

The audit also included two early childhood programs, Healthy Families and the Child Development Centre. Healthy Families is an early intervention program within Family and Children's Services for families with young children up to the age of five years. The Child Development Centre is a non-government organization with a board of directors that works with families and community members to provide early supports and therapeutic services to Yukon children from birth to school age.

The Auditor General's report made five recommendations to improve programs and services:

1. Increase compliance with service standards and policies, including placing greater emphasis on cooperative planning, reinforcing the need for adequate documentation, and emphasizing the importance of plans of care.
2. Ensure ongoing monitoring and implementation of our action plans for responding to internal compliance testing reports.
3. Review and develop Healthy Families outcome measures and performance measures for the Child Development Centre.
4. Acquire a case management system.
5. Review the content and timeliness of Annual Reports to the Minister.

These recommendations have been accepted by the department and a work plan has been developed to address the recommendations noted in the Auditor General's report as follows:

- Development of case tracking forms, supervisory file review forms, and monthly and quarterly reporting on compliance with service standards and policies.
- Development and implementation of action plans to address issues identified in internal compliance reviews.
- Development of outcome measures for the Healthy Families program and the Child Development Centre.
- Development of an electronic case management system.
- Improving the content and timeliness of Annual Reports to the Minister.

Appendix A

Appendix A:

Programs and Services Supporting Child Welfare in Yukon

Prevention Initiatives

The *Child and Family Service Act* is interpreted and administered in accordance with a number of principles, including an emphasis on prevention activities as stated in Section 2 (j):

“prevention activities are integral to the promotion of the safety, health and well-being of a child.”

Family and Children’s Services works with other government departments and with community-based resources on prevention activities for children, youth, and families in Yukon. Prevention programs and services include Healthy Families, child care, specialized supports and services, and child protective services such as family supports and child and adolescent therapeutic services.

1.1 Healthy Families

Healthy Families is an intensive home-based family support service offered to expectant parents and to parents of young children. Access to the service is voluntary and is offered until the child is five years old. Healthy Families workers, in partnership with public health nurses, offer weekly home visits from the child’s birth until he or she is nine to twelve months old. The frequency and nature of visits over the next four years depend on the needs of the child and the family.

The goals of the Healthy Families program are to enhance family functioning by:

- assessing the strengths and needs of new parents and helping them to access community services as needed;
- enhancing family functioning by building trusting, nurturing relationships, teaching problem-solving and improving the family’s support system;
- promoting positive parent-child relationships; and
- promoting healthy childhood growth and development.

Healthy Families is affiliated with Healthy Family America and has been credentialed since 2004. It was most recently reviewed and credentialed in January, 2013.

In 2014 the Healthy Families program will expand services to two rural communities: Watson Lake and Pelly Crossing.



Healthy Families provided services to 150 families and 131 children in 2013/14.

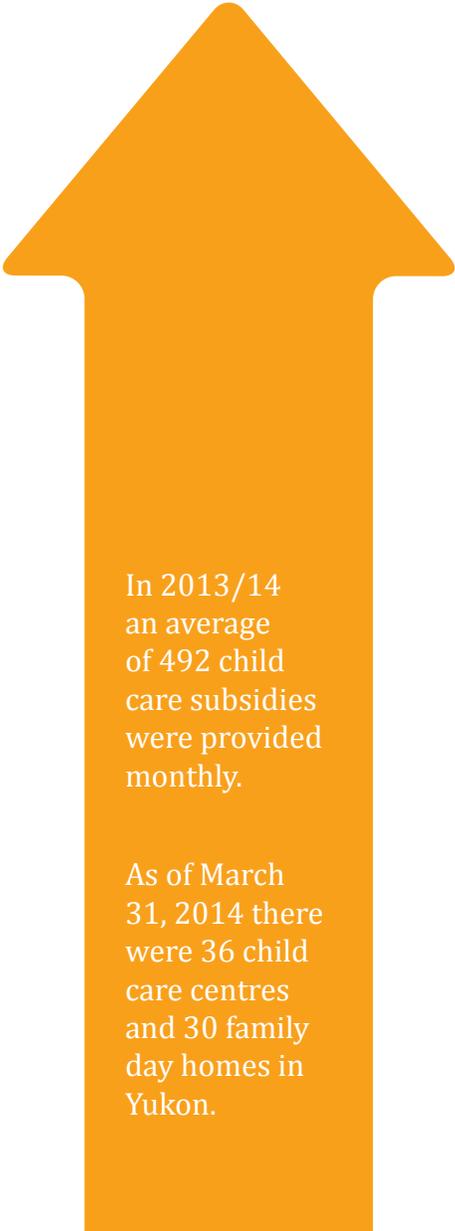
1.2 Child Care

High quality child care is considered important in promoting optimum child development. Quality child care plays a significant role in helping a child develop confidence, creativity, co-ordination, problem-solving skills, and healthy relationships with other children.

A child care centre is a licensed facility providing care to four or more children in a place other than a family home. A family day home provides child care in a family home environment.

Over the past six years the Yukon government has provided an additional \$4 million to address wages, training, subsidies and operational expenses of child care programs. Health and Social Services has conducted a review of recent investments that have been made in child care. Based on this review, the government has proposed three changes to the child care subsidy program to assist families with the cost of child care.

1. *Maximum amount a family can receive:* Currently the maximum amount a family can receive is \$565 per month per child or \$625 per month per infant or child with special needs who attends licensed child care on a full-time basis. The government is proposing to increase this amount by 10 per cent. Increasing the maximum subsidy amount by 10 per cent will help to offset the cost of licensed childcare among Yukon families.
2. *Threshold to receive a maximum subsidy:* This is the amount of money a family can earn up to the point where they no longer receive a full subsidy. This threshold is calculated based on a variety of factors, including family size, age of children and geographic location within Yukon. Yukon Government is proposing to increase this threshold by five per cent. By increasing the threshold where a maximum subsidy becomes available, more families will be eligible to receive a full subsidy. A greater number of Yukon families will be offered a higher level of assistance to offset the high cost of child care.
3. *Parent Contribution Rate:* This is a sliding scale. Parents contribute \$0.25 for each dollar earned past the threshold until a subsidy is no longer available. The Yukon Government is proposing to decrease the parent contribution rate from 25 to 22 per cent, thus making more families eligible for a partial subsidy. Some families who are currently ineligible for any form of subsidy will be able to receive assistance to help offset the costs of licensed child care.



In 2013/14 an average of 492 child care subsidies were provided monthly.

As of March 31, 2014 there were 36 child care centres and 30 family day homes in Yukon.

1.3 Family Supports for Children with Disabilities

The Family Supports for Children with Disabilities (FSCD) program provides services to children with disabilities and their families from birth to age 19 to:

- support Yukon families to care for their child with a disability;
- support early intervention to increase a child's lifelong learning potential;
- provide coordinated access to supports and interventions; and
- promote inclusion of children with disabilities in community life.

Health and Social Services has established funding guidelines to assist families who have children requiring specialized equipment such as ramps and lifts that fall outside of existing Health and Social Services program mandates. This meets the Government of Yukon's commitment to:

“Provide additional funding for therapies as well as money for specialized equipment, ramps and lifts to assist disabled children through an expanded FSCD program.”

Health and Social Services continues to work with other departments, as well as Yukon Housing Corporation, to examine the funding and policy options for equipment such as ramps and home renovations to accommodate caring for children with disabilities.

In 2013/14, FSCD provided services to approximately 104 families and 117 children.

The number of children and families accessing FSCD supports and services continues to grow each year.

1.4 Child Protection

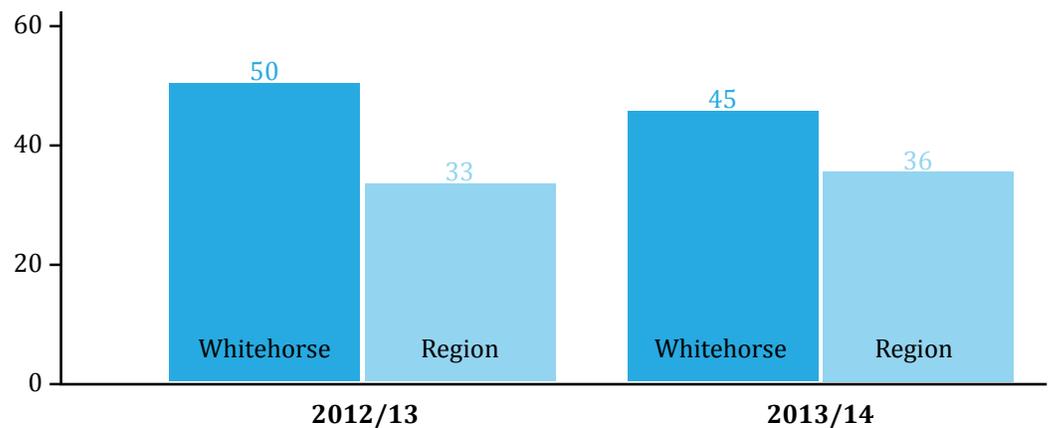
Child Protection offers a range of services, supports and programs. Parent and family support is provided, with the emphasis being on prevention and keeping children safe and in their own home. Social workers utilize family, First Nations, and community and departmental resources to coordinate and/or develop supports and services for situations that are often complex and critical.

Cooperative planning and family conferencing are approaches to working with families and extended families and others to determine the best means of ensuring child safety. These approaches and all of the prevention programs and services listed above are available to families involved with child protection services. Other available services include family and child support programs and Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services.

Family, Child and Youth Support Programs

The Family Support program works with families when there are child protection concerns. Workers liaise with other resource people to develop specific strategies to solve problems affecting a child's well-being within the family. Each family support worker provides intensive home-based support to a small number of families to reduce the risk to the children. The program also takes a lead role in coordinating resources to develop, deliver and promote services that enhance the functioning of the family, such as parenting information and support groups.

Table 2: Family Support Services in Yukon



The Child and Youth Support Program is a referral-based support program open to families who are involved with Family and Children's Services. The program provides support for at-risk children and youth between the ages of five and 18, in small groups and one-to-one settings. Program goals focus on assisting participants in development of self-esteem, life skills, and appropriate social interaction/boundaries.

The Child and Youth Support Program group programming is offered throughout the year. Evening groups are facilitated during the school year, and afternoon programming is offered during scheduled school breaks: Christmas break, March break and summer holidays.

Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services

Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services provides counselling, consultation and training to children and youth who have experienced maltreatment, sexual and physical abuse, neglect, or who have witnessed family violence.

Child and Adolescent Therapeutic Services offers treatment groups based on age and type of abuse experienced. Counselling and support groups also provide help to non-offending parent(s) and siblings. Individual and group treatment is available year-round. Pre-adolescents account for two-thirds of referrals to the program.

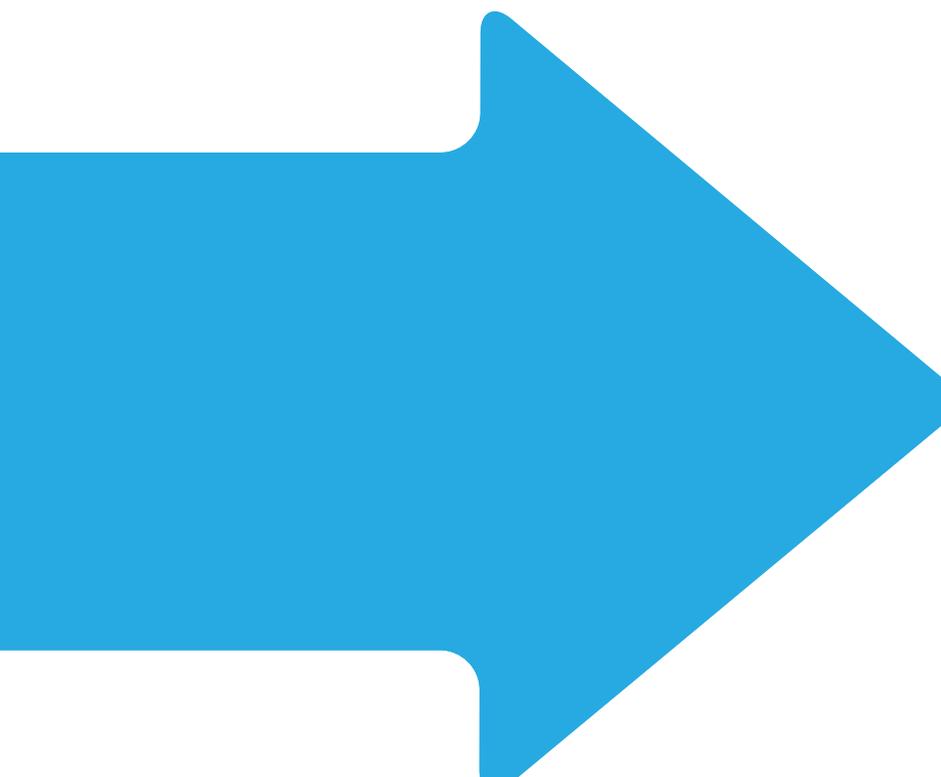
Counsellors also provide workshops and information sessions to educate and raise awareness about the impact and prevention of child maltreatment. Services are provided in Whitehorse, as well as in communities on both a scheduled and an itinerant basis.



1.5 Other Family Services and Supports

There are a number of additional family services and supports, including:

- Handle with Care, a group program for parents of young children being offered through the Child Development Centre;
- the Imagination Library, a partnership between the Department of Health and Social Services, , the Rotary Club and Yukon Literacy Coalition to provide free monthly books to children under five years of age;
- the Teen Parent Centre, which supports pregnant youth, by providing child care, school support and healthy lifestyle support in Whitehorse; and
- the Kids Recreation Fund, which provides funding to low-income parents to offset the cost of recreational activities and equipment.



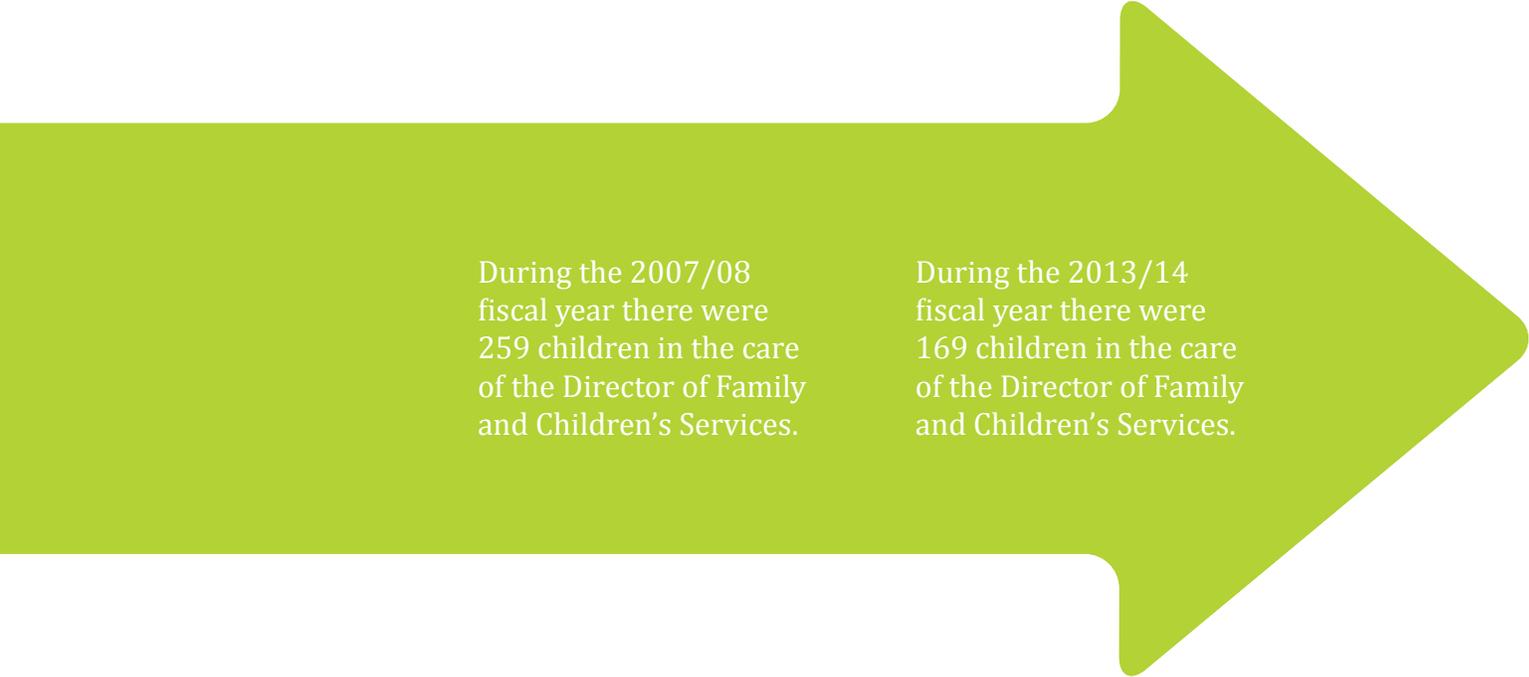
Intervention Initiatives

2.1 Children in Care

Supports under the *Child and Family Services Act* focus on maintaining the child within the family. If out- of-home care is required, extended family is the first choice for placement. This reduces the need to place children in the care of the Director. Since 2007, the number of children in the care and/or custody of the Director of Family and Children's Services has been decreasing.

Transition planning is very important for children in care and is required for youth aged 16 and older. Transition planning for youth has been identified as a priority within the department, and by the Auditor General.

A transition planning working group was established with membership including First Nations, foster parents, former children in care and representatives from the department. The purpose is to create best practice guidelines and standards for transitioning youth in care to adulthood and to establish a youth-in-care network.



During the 2007/08 fiscal year there were 259 children in the care of the Director of Family and Children's Services.

During the 2013/14 fiscal year there were 169 children in the care of the Director of Family and Children's Services.

2.2 Out-of-Home Care

When a child cannot remain in their home, social workers work with First Nation communities and/or other community partners to find the most appropriate care option. Placement with extended family is always the priority. When this is not possible, placement is with a foster family, independent living or residential treatment option that can best maintain the child's connection to family, culture, education, community, and spiritual roots. If the child is First Nation, the priority for placement, if family is not available, is with a member of the child's First Nation.

2.2.1 Foster Care

Fostering involves a family opening its home and sharing its love, nurturing and caring for children who temporarily cannot live with their own families. It is a valuable community service that has rewards for

both the family and the foster children. Foster families help children maintain contact with their own family and culture, return to their own home or move to a permanent home. Yukon is fortunate to have very committed foster families.



In 2013/14 there were 54 approved foster homes in Whitehorse and 23 approved foster homes in the communities.

2.2.2 Adoption

Adopting a child is one of the biggest decisions in life, and it can also be one of the most rewarding. In Yukon, Adoption Services is involved with inter-country adoptions, direct and relative adoptive placements and adoptions arranged by Family and Children's Services. Adoption Services also assist adult adoptees and birth parents seeking disclosure, reunion information or counselling.

The *Child and Family Services Act* includes significant changes to how the Department of Health and Social Services deals with adoption disclosures. The new legislation allows for more openness around adoption-related records, making it easier for birth parents and people who were adopted to find each other. However, in situations where they do not wish to be contacted, birth parents and children involved in adoptions can maintain confidentiality. As of April 30, 2010, adopted people aged 19 or over and birth parents can access their individual information if there is no disclosure veto in place.

Adoption Services provide pre- and post-adoption services to children and families. Pre-adoption services include assistance with the adoption application process, information, assessment, and training and support. The unit works closely with First Nations during assessment and placement processes to place First Nations children in culturally appropriate homes. Post-adoption services include placement, counselling and support for the family.

Yukon Family and Children's Services Annual Report, 2013/14



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