

# Yukon Family and Children's Services

A photograph showing the silhouettes of several people, including children and adults, standing on a grassy hill. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a bright glow behind the figures. The sky transitions from a pale yellow near the horizon to a deep blue at the top.

*Child and Family Services Act*  
2014/15  
**Annual Report**



# Message from the Director

In 2014/15, under the mandate of the *Child and Family Services Act*, the Department of Health and Social Services continued to support families and extended families in caring for their children; continued to strengthen cooperative planning processes, including the Family Group Conferencing program; and continued to collaborate with families and First Nations to maintain important cultural connections for children in out-of-home care.

The department also moved forward on a number of initiatives to strengthen collaboration with First Nations. This included development of a Memorandum of Agreement with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, creation of a cultural committee in residential group homes with First Nation elder representation, and increasing family support worker funding for First Nations.

Commencing work with the Youth Transition to Adulthood Committee in May 2014 was a significant step forward in addressing one of our most pressing areas requiring improvement – supporting youth in care as they transition to adulthood. The work of this multi-stakeholder committee will continue in 2015/16 as we strengthen planning and supports for youth in care.

I would like to extend my thanks and gratitude to staff, First Nations and community partners for their professional and caring work in support of children and families across Yukon. I look forward to working with you all in the coming year.

**Lydia Fawcett**  
A/Director, Family and Children's Services  
Yukon Health and Social Services



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Yukon *Child  
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## Executive Summary

The 2014/15 *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)* Annual Report is a departure from previous iterations. In keeping with the commitment to improve performance measurement and reporting, a greater focus has been placed on quantitative measures, including results from internal audits. The Department of Health and Social Services (the department) intends to include more performance measurements in subsequent annual reports as the capacity for data collection and analysis increases.

This report contains quantitative and qualitative data on program developments, strategic initiatives, and service provision under the *CFSA*. Information is presented according to some of the important themes within the *CFSA*, such as collaboration and inclusive decision-making with First Nations and families, recognition of the importance of cultural connections for children and families, and support for families to care for their children.

In 2014/15, the department:

- developed a Memorandum of Agreement with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation, which is to be signed in 2015/16;
- increased funding agreements with First Nations to provide two additional family support workers;
- continued to work directly with families through cooperative planning processes, including the Family Group Conferencing program;
- initiated a cultural committee for youth in residential group homes to ensure that connections with cultural communities are maintained; and
- continued to develop internal cultural awareness through staff training.

Efforts to improve service delivery also continued in 2014/15, as the department:

- implemented tracking systems to monitor service standard compliance;
- launched a project to identify and plan development of a new child welfare case management system;
- worked with the multi-stakeholder Youth Transition to Adulthood Committee to address planning and supports for youth leaving government care and entering adulthood; and
- improved financial processes to ensure foster parents receive timely payments.



## Strategic Context

### Legislative

Child and family services in Yukon are provided under the mandate of the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*. The *CFSA* was proclaimed in 2010, and replaced the *Children's Act*, which had been in force since 1984. The *CFSA* signalled a new approach to child welfare services, with guiding principles for the collaborative development and delivery of services to children and families.

### Demographics and Geography

Yukon had an estimated population of 37,251 in 2014/15 (June 2014). First Nations comprised 21% of the Yukon population. For the entire Yukon population, approximately 21.5% were under the age of 20; in the First Nations population, 30.3% were under the age of 20.

For the entire Yukon population, 77% lived in the Whitehorse area, while 23% lived outside Whitehorse. By comparison, the First Nations population was much more evenly spread between urban and rural communities, with 54% living in the Whitehorse area and 46% living outside Whitehorse.

The Department of Health and Social Services (the department) employs an innovative model for delivering child and family services to a large and concentrated urban population and a smaller more sparsely-distributed rural population. In Whitehorse, child welfare services are delivered under a specialist model, with social workers specialising in child protection, family support, child-in-care services and foster home supports. Outside Whitehorse, child welfare services are delivered under a generalist model, with one regional social worker delivering all child welfare services to children, families, and extended families.

## Collaboration with First Nations

The *CFSA* provides for early and continued involvement of First Nations at key points along the continuum of service. This involvement occurs in both the planning of child welfare services and decision-making for families of a First Nation.

In 2014/15, the department and Yukon First Nations continued to strengthen relationships and increase capacity for collaboration.

- A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed in October 2012 between the department and Kwanlin Dün First Nation outlines the procedures for collaborative service provision to Kwanlin Dün members under the *CFSA*. This MOA was also intended to serve as a model for developing similar agreements with other Yukon First Nations. In 2014/15, the department and Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation drafted an MOA, which is expected to be finalised in 2015/16.
- In 2014/15 the department completed a funding agreement with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation to provide a family support worker position. This increased the number of First Nations with funding agreements for family support workers to seven. The department also increased the existing funding agreement with Kwanlin Dün First Nation to add an additional family support position.
- The department and First Nations have established a number of forums in which to foster ongoing collaboration. The department meets quarterly with First Nation health and social services directors to discuss policies and service provision under the *CFSA*. In Whitehorse, child welfare staff meet monthly with Kwanlin Dün First Nation, and as required with the Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. In most communities outside Whitehorse, interagency meetings are held regularly between First Nations representatives, social workers and other community and government partners.

First Nation family support workers partner with department of Health and Social Services staff to assist and support children and families involved in the child welfare system. Family support workers help ensure services are culturally appropriate, accompany social workers in responding to child protection concerns, and participate in planning and decision making.



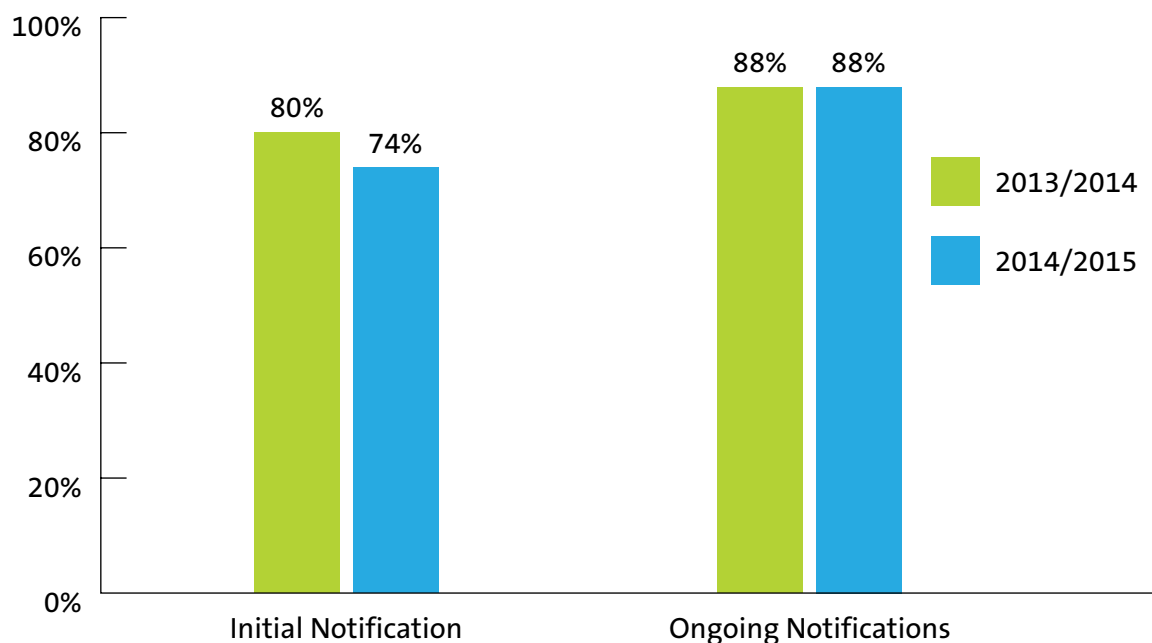
## 2014/15 Service Provision:

### *Early and ongoing involvement of First Nations*

When a First Nations child is in need of protective intervention or when a First Nations child comes into the care or custody of the Director, social workers are required to notify the child's First Nation either immediately, or as soon as practicable. Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files in 2014/15 found that in these situations, the child's First Nation was notified immediately or as soon as practicable in 74% of cases, compared to 80% in 2013/14. A similar review by the Auditor General of Canada (see page 22 of this report) found 93% compliance for this service standard on case files between 2010/11 and 2011/12. The department is committed to increasing the consistency with which social workers notify First Nations when children in their community require protective intervention.

Internal compliance audits found high rates of ongoing notification of the child's First Nation by social workers in 2014/15 (Chart 1). Ongoing notification includes providing updates at key times during a social worker's involvement with a family.

**Chart 1: Initial<sup>1</sup> and ongoing notification of a child's First Nation**



First Nations involvement in cooperative case planning, including Family Group Conferencing (see page 8 of this report), is an important element of both inclusive decision-making and collaboration with First Nations. In 2013/14 and 2014/15, First Nations representatives participated in 100% of the Family Group Conferences held for their members.

<sup>1</sup> Audit results for this measure (initial notification of a child's First Nation) in 2013/14 were based on a significantly smaller sample size (five case files) than in 2014/15 (23 case files).

## Collaborative and Inclusive Decision-Making

Collaborative and inclusive decision-making is a foundational principle within the *CFSA*. As part of case work, this is referred to as cooperative planning, where families, extended family members, First Nations representatives (where applicable), and community supports are invited to develop plans with the social worker to address protection concerns, placement options and transitions. Cooperative planning takes many forms, and is often incorporated directly into social workers' practice. This inclusive practice exemplifies the different approach to child welfare service delivery under the *CFSA*.

One type of cooperative planning process in Yukon is Family Group Conferencing. In a Family Group Conference (FGC), a neutral FGC specialist organizes and facilitates a half-day conference with the social worker, the family, extended family members, First Nations representatives (where applicable), and community supports. During an FGC, safety and other concerns are discussed between participants, and the family takes the lead in developing a plan that is presented to the social worker for agreement.

In 2014/15, the department:

- provided an update on Family Group Conferencing processes to the Council of Yukon First Nations health and social service directors in November 2014;
- provided training sessions to social workers in Whitehorse and rural communities on Family Group Conferencing processes in September and October 2014; and
- implemented a Family Group Conferencing database to better track work related to organizing conferences, as well as conference outcomes.

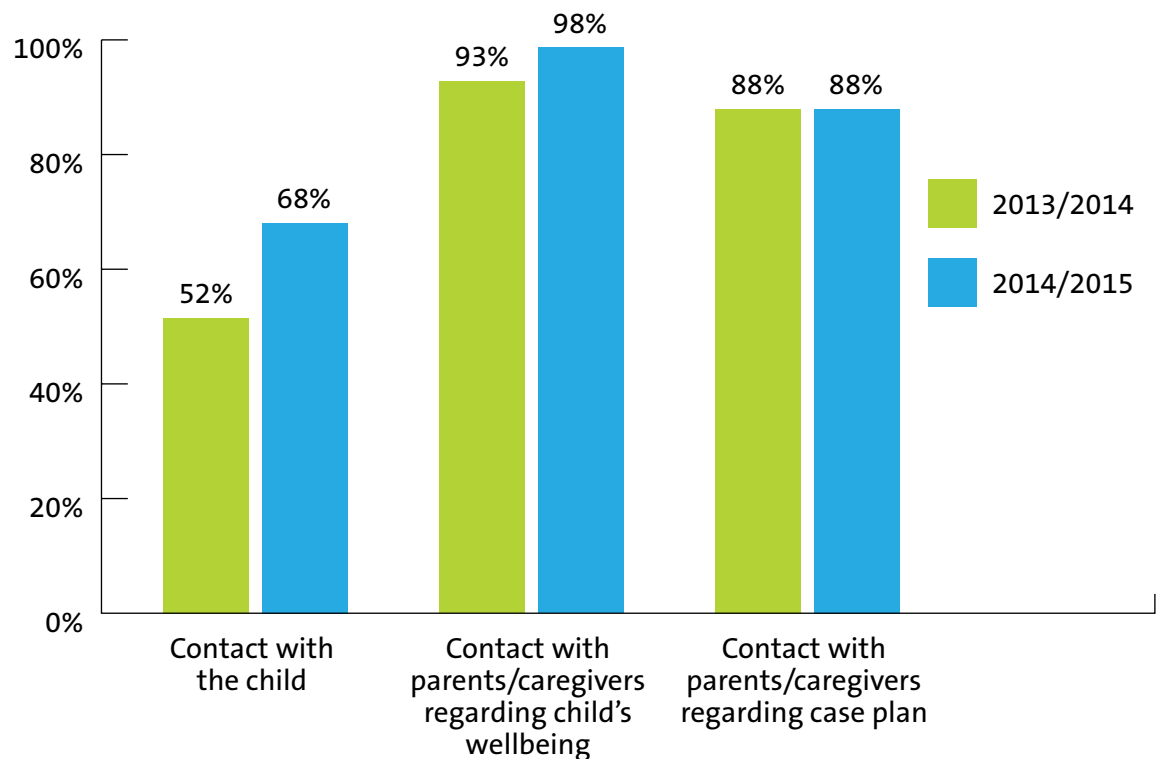
## 2014/15 Service Provision:

### *Ongoing contact with children and families*

Ongoing contact with children and families is one way that social workers incorporate collaborative and inclusive decision making into their practice. Ongoing contact with children and families also helps the social worker build trust and relationships. Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files in 2014/15 found that social workers met with the child at least once per month in 68% of cases (Chart 2). In some cases, youth refuse to meet with the social worker. In other cases, the social worker meets less frequently than once per month with the child. While compliance was higher on this standard than in 2013/14, there is room to improve when building and maintaining relationships with children.

Compliance audits found high rates of ongoing contact by social workers with the family to discuss and update them on their child's well-being and the case plan (Chart 2).

**Chart 2: Social worker contact with children and parents/caregivers as part of ongoing collaboration.**

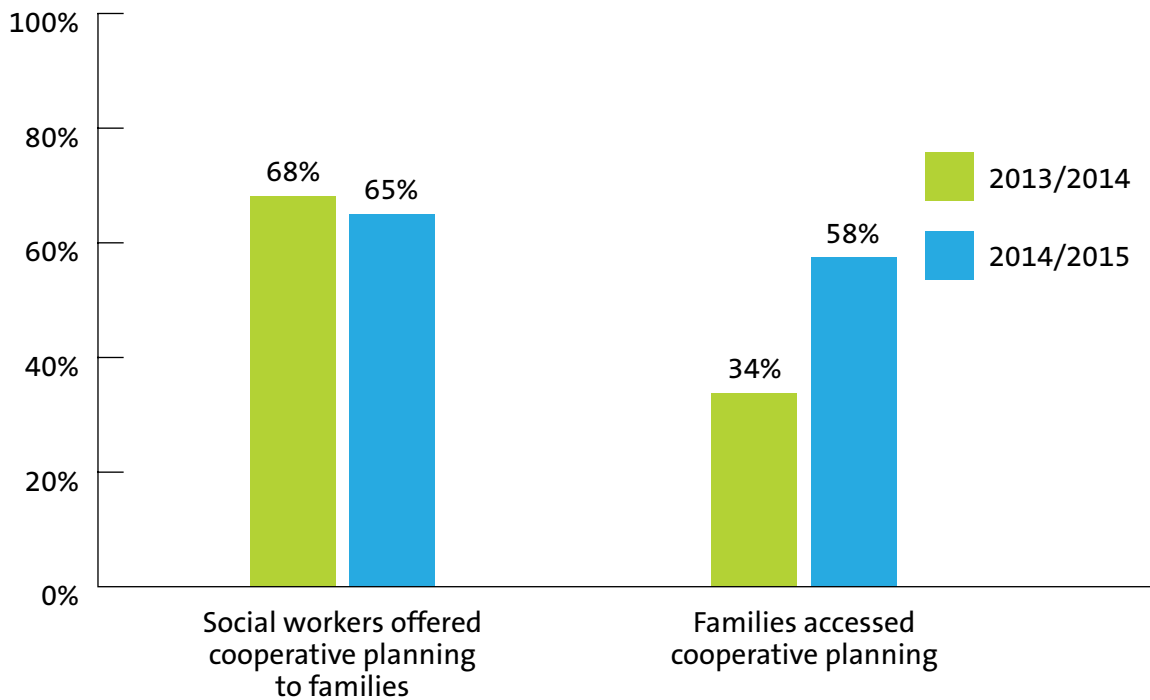


## Cooperative Planning

Cooperative planning can take a number of forms, such as Family Group Conferencing and case conferences where the family and others are invited to develop plans. Cooperative planning provides a mechanism for collaboratively developing interim and long term plans when children are in need of protective intervention.

Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files in 2014/15 showed that cooperative planning was offered to families in 65% of cases (Chart 3). However, the rates of families accessing cooperative planning increased by 24 percentage points between 2013/14 and 2014/15 (Chart 3). This suggests that while there is room for improving the rate of offering cooperative planning, the way in which cooperative planning is offered and communicated to families may have improved in 2014/15, as more families opted to access this approach when offered by the social worker.

**Chart 3: Social worker offers of cooperative planning and families accessing cooperative planning**





## *Family Group Conferencing*

A total of 12 Family Group Conferences were held in 2014/15, serving 11 different families, all of whom were members of First Nations. There was a decrease from 2013/14 in the number of Family Group Conferences held, due to turnover of FGC specialists and training a new FGC specialist.

Outcomes of Family Group Conferencing remained exceptional, with 100% of plans developed by families being agreed to by the social worker. Having plans developed by the family recognizes that families have unique strengths and insights to plan for their child's care and safety.

In addition to the positive outcomes on case planning, Family Group Conferencing has an immeasurable positive impact on families themselves – recognizing and building on their strengths, connecting them with extended family and community supports, and healing relationships, as evidenced by feedback from participants. This is the result of both conferences themselves, and the process of organizing conferences, which provide opportunities for building family strength – for example, by bringing extended family members and First Nation and community supports into the preliminary work and discussions as partners.

“ *[Our] family was able to set aside differences and clean-up misunderstandings – clearly this family wants what's best for [our child].* ”

*FGC participant (family member)* ”

“ *Family private time always works miracles. It was great to hear things were resolved between all parties.* ”

*FGC participant (First Nations representative)* ”

## Supporting Parents and Families to Care for their Children

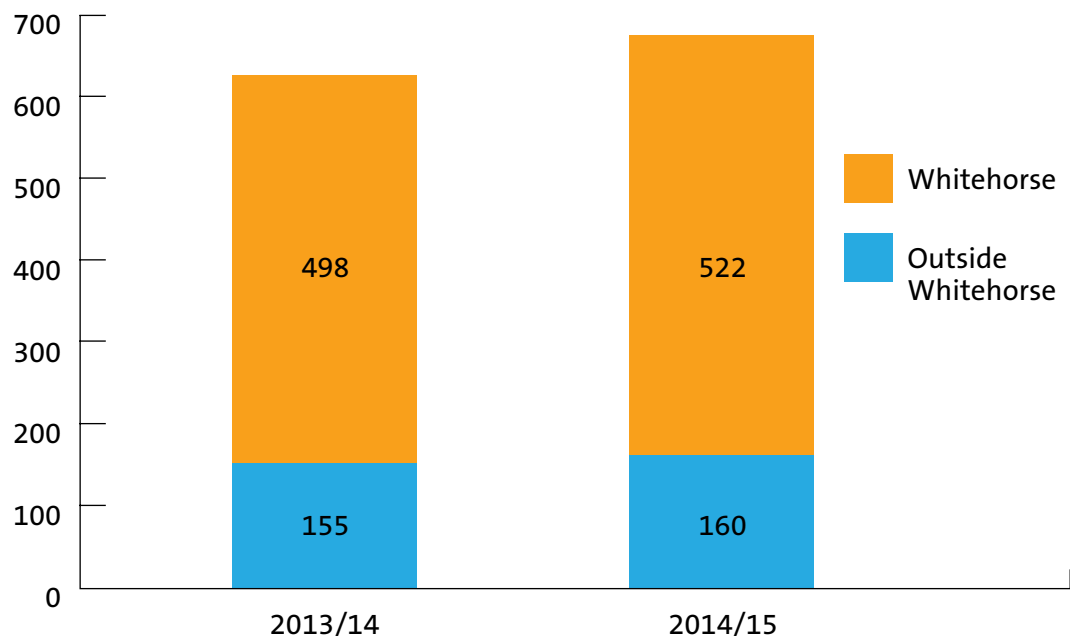
Research shows there are significantly higher positive outcomes for children when they remain with their immediate or extended family than when they are removed from their family home. Under the *CFSA*, the department provides services to reduce or prevent safety concerns, so that children can remain in their home where possible.

### 2014/15 Service Provision:

#### *Families receiving support services*

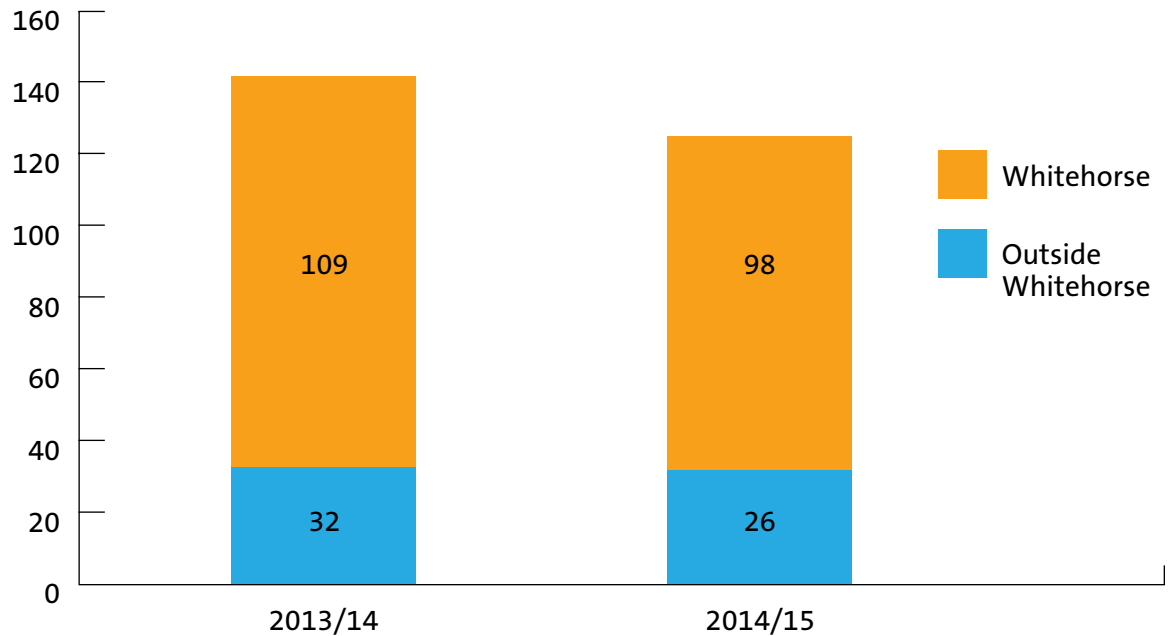
In 2014/15, there were 682 families in Yukon with identified child protection concerns (Chart 4). Whenever there are identified child protection concerns, social workers offer services to the child and/or family to reduce safety risks. A continuum of services are offered, including in-home supports and counselling, parenting programs, pro-social child and youth programs, respite, and out-of-home care. The small increase from 2013/14 may be due, in part, to the public's increasing familiarity with mandatory reporting requirements in the *CFSA* and trust in the approach to providing child protection and support services that is the result of the *Act*.

**Chart 4: Number of families with identified child protection concerns**



Support services are also provided to families when there are no immediate child protection concerns, but where the family is in need of assistance to manage difficult situations and to prevent child protection concerns from arising or returning. In 2014/15, 124 families in Yukon received preventative support services, such as counselling and parenting programs (Chart 5).

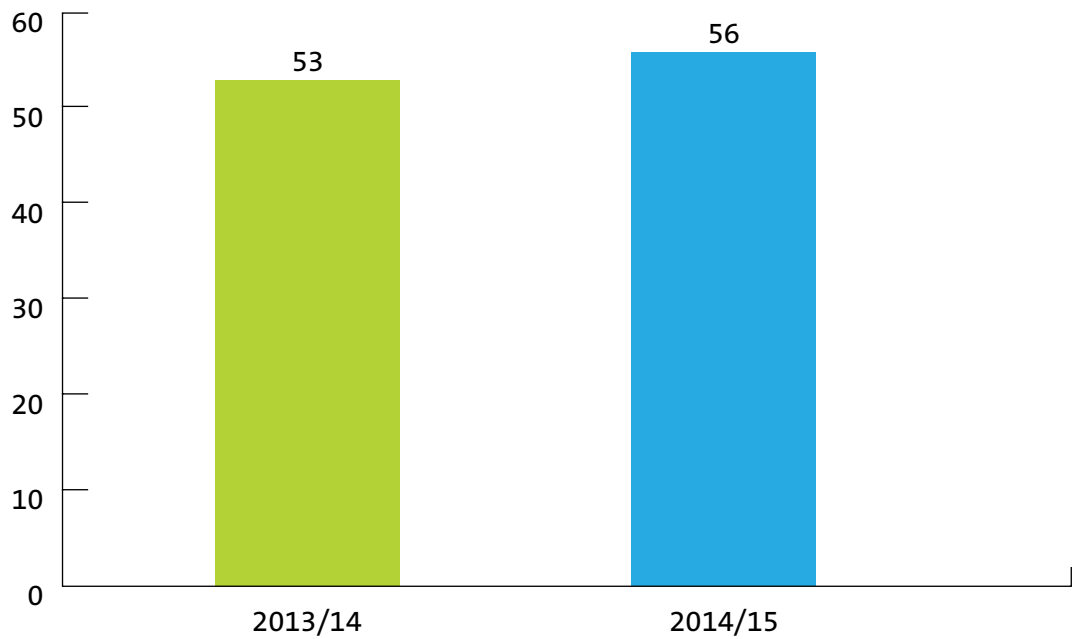
**Chart 5: Number of families receiving preventative support services**



### *Extended Family Care*

Extended Family Care Agreements enable the department to financially support extended family members in caring for their children. In these cases, children do not come into the care of the Director, but remain with extended family through an agreement with the parents. In 2013/14, Extended Family Care Agreement provisions were broadened from a short-term support to a long-term support, available until a child reaches 19 years of age. Broadening the scope of these supports, along with increased communication of this option to First Nation health and social services directors, means that more children across Yukon are able to remain with their families (Chart 6).

**Chart 6: Number of Extended Family Care Agreements**





## Recognizing the Importance of Culture for Children in Out-of-Home Care

Maintaining cultural identity and connections permeates the entire *CFSA*, from service delivery principles to early and ongoing involvement and collaboration with families and First Nations; from requirements for placing children in culturally appropriate out-of-home care to cultural planning for children in out-of-home care.

The department recognizes the importance of culture for children in the care or custody of the Director in a number of ways:

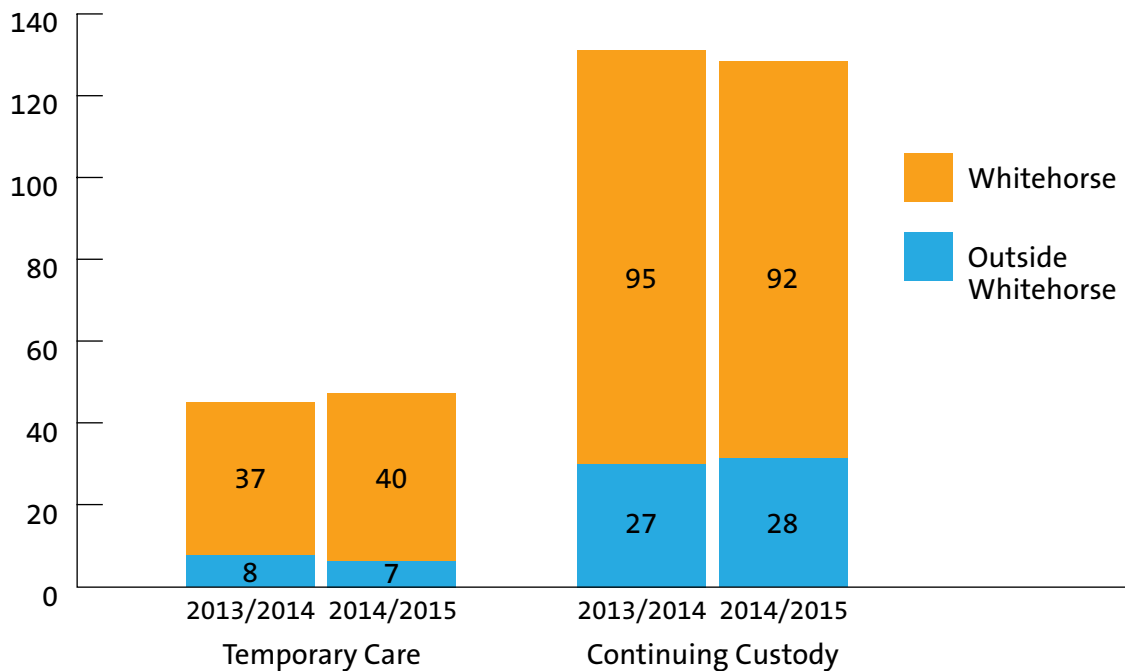
- Social workers undertake comprehensive case planning for each child, which helps ensure cultural connections are maintained. Social workers also facilitate connections with First Nations and community partners.
- Residential group homes for youth in the care or custody of the Director instituted a cultural committee in 2014/15. The committee, which includes youth as well as First Nations elders when available, meets monthly to identify and plan cultural activities for youth in the group homes.
- Residential group homes also operate annual Culture Camps in partnership with First Nations. In 2014/15, the Culture Camp took place at The Long Ago People's Place in partnership with Champagne and Aishihik First Nations.

## 2014/15 Service Provision:

### *Children in the Care or Custody of the Director*

In 2014/15, the number of Yukon children in the temporary care and continuing custody of the Director was 47 and 120, respectively, almost the same numbers as in 2013/14 (Chart 7). When a child cannot remain in their home because of safety concerns, and extended family are not available, the child enters the temporary care of the Director. Every effort is made to address the child protection concerns so that the child can return home. When this is not possible, children enter the continuing custody of the Director, and longer-term permanency planning takes place, including exploring adoption.

**Chart 7: Number of Yukon children in the care or custody of the Director**

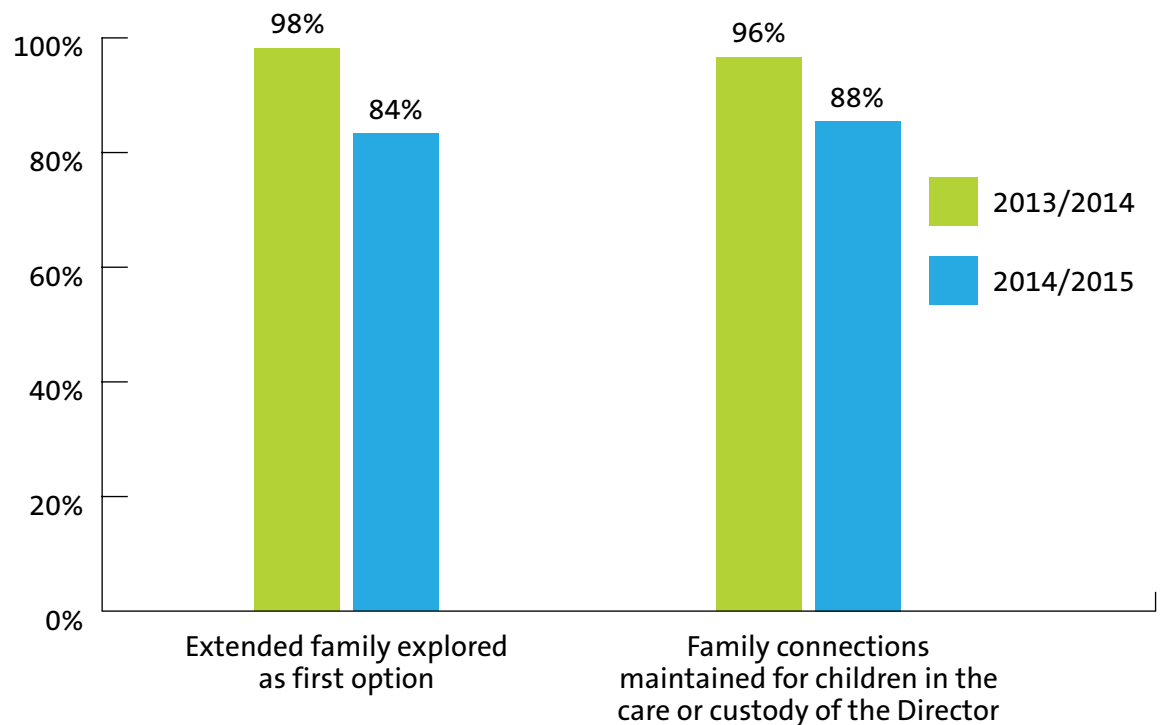


### *Maintaining Family and Cultural Connections*

When out-of-home care is required, cultural connections are best maintained when the child remains within their extended family. Internal compliance audits on a random selection of case files showed that in 2014/15, when a child required out-of-home care, rates of extended family being explored as the first choice for placements remained high at 84% (Chart 8).

For children who cannot remain in their parental home or with extended family, and who are in the care or custody of the Director, maintaining connections with their family is important for their cultural identity. Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files found a high rate of family connections being maintained as part of case plans (Chart 8). This includes ensuring that family visits take place while the child is in the care or custody of the Director.

**Chart 8: Maintaining family connections**

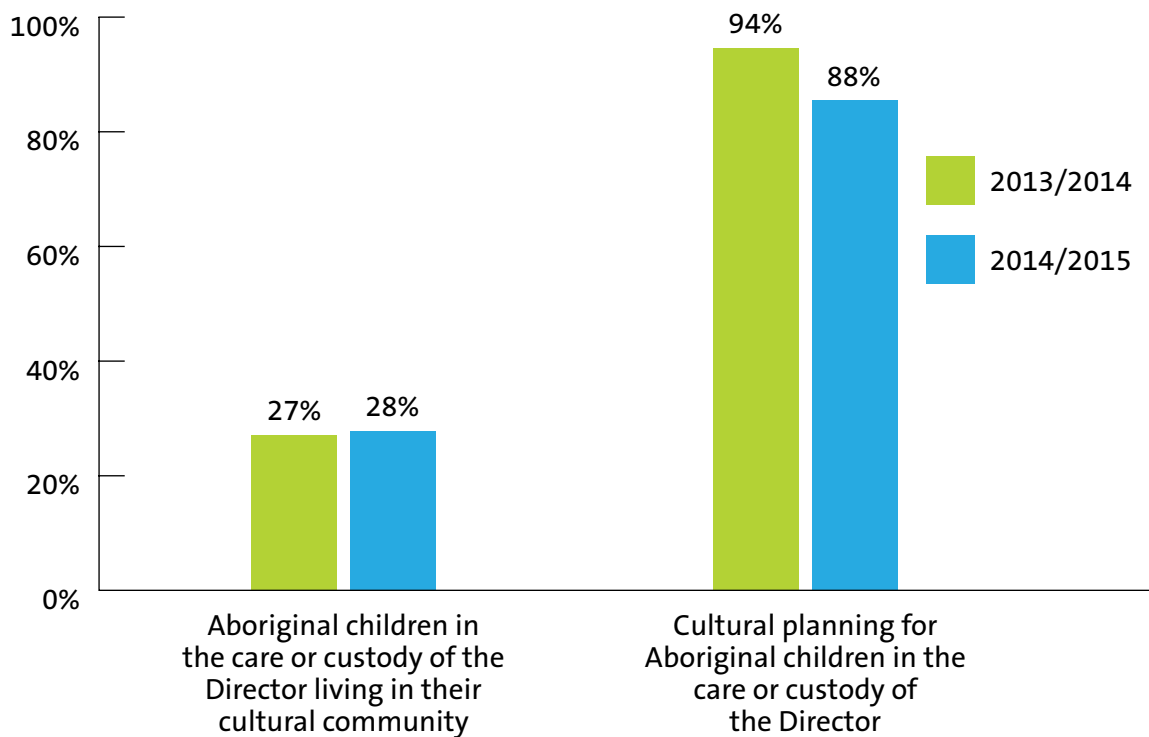


Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files showed that in 2014/15, Aboriginal children in the care or custody of the Director were living with extended family or within their cultural community in 28% of cases (Chart 9).

The intent is for all children, and particularly Aboriginal children<sup>2</sup>, to live within their cultural community. This is not always possible, however. While extended family, for example, is explored as the first option for placement in most cases, families sometimes live far away from their home communities; in many of these cases, it is deemed not in the child's best interests to be placed far away from their immediate family. In other cases, there are also no available foster homes within the child's cultural community, which means the social worker and family will have to look elsewhere for caregivers.

Internal compliance audits showed, however, that when children were in the care or custody of the Director, there were high rates of planning to ensure connections were maintained with the child's cultural community (Chart 9). Cultural planning may include involvement of elders in the child's life, participation in traditional activities, or facilitating other significant relationships with members of the child's cultural community.

**Chart 9: Cultural placements and planning for Aboriginal children<sup>2</sup> in the care or custody of the Director**



<sup>2</sup> For this measure, Aboriginal children refers to children of Yukon First Nations, other First Nations outside Yukon, and Inuit or Métis children.



## Supporting Children and Youth at Key Transition Points

Transition points represent difficult times for children and youth – whether entering out-home-care, moving back to their parental home, or transitioning to adulthood in the case of youth who have been in the care or custody of the Director. For older youth in particular who are transitioning from government care into adulthood, there is an increased risk of ‘falling through the cracks’ and falling into vulnerable situations.

Most youth in Canada reach adulthood after years of preparation from their family, and continue to receive substantial family support after leaving home (such as financial assistance for post-secondary education, emotional support in challenging times, or advice about budgeting, cooking, and other life skills). Youth in government care often reach adulthood without these same supports, and research shows that without adequate transition support, youth leaving care are less likely to finish high school or post-secondary education, and more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system, receive social assistance, or experience homelessness or substance abuse.

In order to better support these youth, and as part of its response to recommendations made by the Auditor General of Canada in February 2014, the department struck a Youth Transition to Adulthood Committee in May 2014. Committee members include representatives from several First Nations, the Yukon Foster Parent Association, and social workers involved in supporting youth transitions.

The Committee met in November 2014, December 2014 and February 2015. At the February 2015 full-day meeting, the Committee identified strengths and weaknesses in the current approach to youth transitions, and set a plan for information gathering to inform policy and program updates to be made in 2015/16.



## **2014/15 Service Provision:**

### *Youth Transitions*

There were 27 youth aged 16 to 18 years in the care or custody of the Director on March 31, 2015. This represents a significant cohort that will require effective and early transition planning to ensure that all youth leaving the care or custody of the Director can achieve positive outcomes as they transition to adulthood.

Early planning is key to ensuring supports and connections are in place to help youth transition to adulthood. Internal compliance audits on a random sample of case files found that in 2014/15, there continued to be a high rate of transition planning for youth 16 years of age and older, with five of six case files showing transition planning. This was similar to audit results in 2013/14, when all seven case files were in compliance with this standard.

One way youth are supported in their transitions to adulthood under the *CFSA* is through formal Transitional Support Service Agreements, which can last until the youth reaches 24 years of age. Depending on the youth's goals and needs, the department may provide counselling supports, independent living skills training, and financial or other supports for educational programs. Throughout 2014/15, 19 Transitional Support Service Agreements were signed with young persons aged 19 to 23 years.

## Ongoing Staff Development and Organizational Capacity-Building

An engaged, skilled and well-equipped workforce is a key factor in achieving service excellence. Supporting staff education and training, and maintaining effective information management technologies will help drive continual improvements in service delivery under the *CFSA*.

In 2014/15, the department:

- Provided Yukon First Nations History and Culture training to 11 child welfare workers. This is in addition to the 23 child welfare workers who received the same training in 2013/14. In this cultural competency training course, staff are guided through a timeline that reflects the history of Yukon First Nations from pre-contact through to present day, as well topics such as self-government, culture and values, residential school experiences, and some recent contemporary issues.

The course was developed in partnership between the Council of Yukon First Nations, the department of Health and Social Services, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Northern Institute of Social Justice, and Yukon College's First Nations Initiatives. The department intends to have all child welfare staff take this training by the end of 2016/17.

- Provided trauma-informed care training to 23 staff members who provide treatment, care, or support services to children and families under the *CFSA*.

Trauma-informed care training helps staff understand and address underlying trauma that may be affecting children and families, including substance abuse, physical abuse, and residential school experiences.

- Implemented a Family Group Conferencing database to better track work related to organizing conferences, as well as conference outcomes.
- Conducted a comprehensive review of foster parent payment systems to ensure this community of caregivers receive timely payments. During the review, a tracking system was implemented to ensure accuracy and timeliness of payments. In 2015/16, the department will implement further changes to streamline financial payments to foster parents.
- Issued a Request for Expression of Interest following completion of Phase Three (Procurement Market Research and Initial Solution Planning) of the Continuing Improvement Case Management project. This project will identify and plan development of a new child welfare case management system, which will increase the capacity for data collection, performance measurement and reporting, and more comprehensive tracking of outcomes for clients.

## Quality Assurance and Accountability — Auditor General's Report

The Auditor General of Canada conducted an audit of child welfare programs delivered in Yukon between April 2010 and December 2013. The Auditor General's report was tabled in the Yukon Legislative Assembly in February 2014. The department was found to be meeting the majority of the commitments under the *CFSA*, particularly with respect to collaboration with First Nations.

The report also identified several areas in which the department was not meeting its commitments, and made recommendations for improving programs and services. The department accepted all of the Auditor General's recommendations, and made significant progress in 2014/15 to address them.

- Recommendation: increase efforts to comply with service standards and policies related to case plans, transitional plans, foster homes and medical/dental examinations for children in the care or custody of the Director, as well as monitoring effectiveness of those efforts.
  - The department implemented an internal reporting system to track compliance with these service standards and policies. Early reports from this system in the first two quarters of 2014/15 indicated increased compliance. Reporting will continue in order to determine further efforts that may be required, such as social worker training or policy changes.
  - The department established a multi-partner committee to address transitional planning for youth in the care or custody of the Director (see page 19 of this report).
- Recommendation: acquire a case management system capable of effectively tracking compliance with legislative and policy requirements.
  - The department launched the Continuing Improvement Case Management (CICM) project in January 2014 to identify and plan development of a new child welfare case management system.
  - Phase Three (Procurement Market Research and Initial Solution Planning) was completed in 2014/15, and a Request for Expression of Interest was posted in February 2015.
- Recommendation: deliver annual reports as required under the *CFSA* in a timely manner that include more quantitative information and measures, explanations of how these measures differ from expectations, and plans for addressing any shortcomings.
  - The 2014/15 Annual Report includes performance measures not previously reported. Subsequent Annual Reports will include more performance measures as the department increases capacity for more reliable and comprehensive information tracking.





## Looking Ahead

The year 2014/15 marks an important milestone for the *CFSA*, as the *Act* will have been in force for five years. As part of its commitment to accountability and transparency, and as required by the *Act* itself, in 2015/16 the department will begin preparation for a five-year review of the *CFSA*. This review will be conducted by a committee appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Services. Membership of the committee is prescribed the *CFSA*, and includes First Nations representation.

As part of its ongoing work, the department will continue to work with First Nations on planning and policy, as well as case work, to ensure services are delivered collaboratively and in culturally-sensitive ways. This will include already established forums, as well as new mechanisms for collaboration, such as the Memorandum of Agreement that is to be signed with Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in First Nation in 2015/16.

And as part of its commitment to service excellence, the department will continue to improve compliance with service standards and policy when working with and supporting families, communities and their children. This will include working with social workers and stakeholders to clarify and amend policies where appropriate, identifying targeted training to support social workers in meeting service standards, and moving forward with identifying case management solutions to support social work practice as well as measurement of child welfare outcomes. This will also include efforts to increase the number of out-of-home care options, such as foster homes within First Nations communities.

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December 2015