
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Children and Family
Development
Representative for Children and Youth

Ministry adoption program finding more forever families

VANCOUVER – Children and Family Development Minister Stephanie Cadieux and Representative for Children and Youth Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond appealed to British Columbians to consider supporting children and teens in care, not only through adoption but also through other avenues that provide lasting social connections and a forever home.

Numbers released today in the Representative's latest *B.C. Adoption Update* show improvement in some areas of B.C.'s provincial adoption process. For example, the number of approved adoptive homes increased from about 31 homes per month in 2013/14 to 39 homes per month today, and the number of available Aboriginal adoptive homes has increased from 34 at the end of March 2014 to 56 today.

The need to improve the approval process for adoptive homes was one area identified by the Representative in her June 2014 report *Finding Forever Families: A Review of the Provincial Adoption System*. Another priority identified was to increase the number of Aboriginal children with an Adoption Plan in place. That number has risen from 663 at the end of March 2014 to 725 today.

Adoption is considered as the first alternative when a child or youth cannot be safely returned to parental custody. That's why, in partnership with the Representative and the Adoptive Families Association of B.C., the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) has focused its efforts on increasing the number of adoptions, and launched the 1000FamiliesBC campaign to encourage British Columbians to consider adopting one of the more than 1,000 waiting children and teens.

MCFD has set a goal to place 600 children and youth in adoptive homes over the two-year period ending March 31, 2016. To date, 451 children have found forever families through adoption as part of that effort.

MCFD has made investments in each of the last two years to increase the number of children and teens finding forever homes through adoption, guardianship and other means. This includes an added focus on the development of pre-placement and transition plans to help prepare young people in care to move into permanent home environments.

It is important to note that adoption is not the only alternative available to help waiting children and youth. Depending on each young person's situation and preference, other forms of guardianship may present better permanency options. Some older teens in care are not looking for new parents, but rather for an adult whom they can trust and who can help guide, mentor and assist them to become independent adults themselves. A guardianship arrangement can offer support without all of the legal and relational ties of a full adoption. Likewise, rather than

a formal adoption through MCFD, in some Aboriginal communities a legal transfer of custody or custom/traditional adoption may provide a means of giving children and youth a permanent home while maintaining vital family, community and cultural connections.

If you have a place in your heart and home for a child or teen in need, please consider whether becoming an adoptive parent or guardian might be right for you.

To find out more about adoption in B.C., call 1-877-ADOPT-07. For more information on guardianship and other options for permanency, contact your local MCFD office:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/sda/contacts.htm

Quotes:

Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development –

“We’re making headway on the adoptions front and I want to thank all the parents who have stepped forward to take in a waiting child.

“As we focus this year on finding permanent homes for older children and teens, we want people to know that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. Adoption may not be right for every caregiver, just as it may not be right for every child or youth. But there are other alternatives available that can build on and draw from a child or youth’s existing social, family or cultural connections. No matter their personal path, every young person deserves the comfort of a home they can call their own and the support of a caring adult they can trust.”

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond, Representative for Children and Youth –

“Today’s *Adoption Update* shows a modest gain in approving adoptive homes for waiting young people, which is a positive step but we still have a long way to go. All of B.C.’s waiting children and youth deserve someone to love, who can help guide them into young adulthood.

“I am hopeful the ministry will meet its two-year target of 600 adoptions, although the need extends well beyond that goal, with hundreds more children waiting for their forever families. A forever family is vital to everyone’s development and well-being.”

Karen Madeiros, Executive Director, Adoptive Families Association of BC –

“We’re encouraged by the progress reported in today’s *Adoption Update*, and by the Minister’s and the Representative’s individual commitments to supporting permanency for B.C. children and youth. Permanency and adoption mean our waiting children and youth know that they are loved and supported no matter what. But once we find a permanent home for a child, the real work begins.

“Adoption is hard work, both for the new parents and especially for the children and youth who have been asked, sometimes several times in their young lives, to make a leap of faith and trust. Thank you to the families who take this brave journey together.”

Quick Facts:

- Adoption is when a family or an individual assumes legal responsibility for the care of a child and raises the child as their own (i.e., the child legally becomes part of the family caring for them).

- Guardianship is when family or an individual assumes legal responsibility for the care of a child, but the legal relationship ends at age 19.
- Permanency happens when a child or youth in care is placed in an arrangement outside of care, and from which they will not be moved until they become an adult.
- Over the past 10 years, an annual average of approximately 270 children and youth in the care of the ministry have been adopted in British Columbia.
- In 2014-15, there was an increase in the number of available adoptive homes, the number of children and youth with adoption plans and the number of Aboriginal children and youth being placed for adoption.

Learn More:

- Adopting through the Ministry of Children and Family Development: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/
- 1000FamiliesBC campaign: www.1000familiesbc.com
- Adoptive Families Association of BC: www.bcadoption.com
- Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks: fbcyicn.ca
- B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations: www.bcfosterparents.ca/
- Contact the Adoption Reunion Registry toll-free at 1 877 387-3660 or visit: www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/adoption/reunion/index.htm

A backgrounder follows.

BACKGROUNDER

Permanency planning for children and youth in care

- A permanent connection to a significant person or persons gives children the stability and continuity they need to develop into healthy, secure adults.
- Permanency planning is an approach used to describe a number of services and programs delivered by social workers in all areas of child welfare practice with the goal of securing a safe, caring, legally recognized and continuous family outside of government or Delegated Aboriginal Agency care for children and youth who are either at risk of being removed from their families or who are in care.
- MCFD works to achieve permanency by preserving, wherever possible, kinship ties and a child or youth's attachment to extended family.
- When permanency is being planned for Aboriginal children or youth, the child or youth's Aboriginal community must be involved. The priority is always for an Aboriginal child or youth to be placed with family, extended family or clan, or a family that is part of the same community or nation.
- There are four domains of permanency that must be considered in planning for any child or youth in care:
 - Legal permanency is achieved through legally binding custodial arrangements, such as family reunification, guardianship or adoption.
 - Relational permanency is a strong, long-lasting connection between a child or youth and a biological family member or siblings, school staff, foster caregiver, social worker, youth worker, community member, or an organization such as the Adoptive Families Association of BC.
 - Physical permanency is achieved by creating a safe, stable, healthy and long-term living arrangement.
 - Cultural permanency is a continued, constant connection to culture and heritage regardless of what else is changing in a child or youth's life.

Options for permanency

Family reunification:

- The ministry's goal is always to return a child to his or her family – but only when and if it is safe to do so.
- A parent of a child in the continuing care of the Director of Child Welfare may apply to a court to rescind the order. MCFD would complete an assessment to determine if it is safe to return the child to parental care. The parent may then file in court for the return of the child and the ministry would advise whether or not they have any objection.

Adoption:

- Adoption is considered as the first alternative when a child or youth cannot be safely returned to parental custody.

- Adoption is when a family or an individual assumes legal responsibility for the care of a child and raises the child as their own (i.e., the child legally becomes part of the family caring for them).
- Options potentially available to children and youth include:
 - Formalizing an existing foster care relationship into an adoption;
 - Open adoptions allow for both a permanent legal family for the youth and continued connections with birth parents, siblings or other relatives.
- Children between the ages of seven and 11 who are being considered for adoption must have their feelings about the adoption plan and any name change documented for the court. Children 12 and over must consent to the adoption and name change.

Transfer of custody (Permanent Kinship Care):

- When a child is unable to return to parental care, custody can be legally transferred to extended family or other individuals who have a significant relationship with, or cultural or traditional responsibility to the child.
- The safety, well-being and best interests of the child remain the primary consideration throughout the decision-making process, and MCFD would conduct a home assessment of the prospective guardian.
- The transfer of custody and guardianship is done only with the consents of the proposed guardian, the child, if they are 12 years of age or older, and the parents (when an out of care Extended Family Program agreement is in place).
- Proposed guardians, children 12 years of age and older and parents are advised to consult with independent legal counsel, prior to consenting to permanent kinship care. Others who are served with notice and appear at the hearing, such as a child's Aboriginal representative(s), are entitled to participate at the hearing.
- Monthly transfer of custody payments are available until the child or youth reaches age 19. The guardian assumes responsibility for the child's medical, dental and optical coverage and care. All other supports and decisions for the child become the responsibility of the guardian.

Guardianship under the Family Law Act:

- Legal guardianship offers extended family or other caring, committed adults an opportunity to take on responsibility for the child, without severing (ending) parental rights.
- A prospective guardian can apply to the court for guardianship of a child or youth. The Director of Child Welfare may or may not take a position.
- When guardianship is granted, the legal guardian becomes responsible for the health and well-being of the child which includes, but is not limited to, making sure they are safe, emotionally secure, fed, receive medical care, are clothed, sent to school etc.
- The guardian is also responsible for the child's cultural and spiritual upbringing and, as guardian of the child's estate, protects the legal and financial interests of the child.
- In general, the guardian has "parental responsibilities" and is expected to care for and raise the child in the way that is expected of all responsible parents.
- No funding is available to support the guardianship arrangement. The guardians assume all financial and other responsibilities for the child's care up to the age of 19.
- The Family Law Act (FLA) replaced the Family Relations Act (FRA) in March, 2013.

Custom/Traditional Adoption:

- Custom Adoption enables Aboriginal families, organizations and communities to care for and raise a child who has been in continuing government care according to the custom of the First Nations and/or Aboriginal community of the child.
- This is a permanent version of custom care (which provides temporary or alternate care for Aboriginal children whose parents are not able to care for them) and helps Aboriginal children maintain their cultural, linguistic and spiritual identity.
- The province of B.C. recognizes custom adoption in legislation.
- MCFD can provide Post Adoption Assistance for custom adoptions that also complete a ministry adoption, but does not provide funding to undertake the custom adoption process.

Contacts:

Government Communications and Public
Engagement
Ministry of Children and Family
Development
250 356-1639

Jeff Rud
Executive Director, Communications
Representative for Children and Youth
250 216-4725
Jeff.rud@rcybc.ca

Andrea Driedger
Communications Coordinator
Adoptive Families Association of BC
604 320-7330 ext. 108
adriedger@bcadoption.com

Connect with the Province of B.C. at: www.gov.bc.ca/connect