



# The Thin Front Line

**MCFD staffing crunch leaves social workers  
over-burdened, B.C. children under-protected**

October 2015



REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
CHILDREN AND YOUTH



Oct. 8, 2015

The Honourable Linda Reid  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Suite 207, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dear Ms. Speaker,

I have the honour of submitting the report *The Thin Front Line: MCFD staffing crunch leaves social workers over-burdened, B.C. children under-protected* to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia. This report is prepared in accordance with Section 6(b) of the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "meturpellafond". The signature is written in a cursive, lowercase style.

Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond  
Representative for Children and Youth

pc: Mr. Craig James, QC  
Clerk of the Legislative Assembly

Ms. Jane Thornthwaite, MLA  
Chair, Select Standing Committee on Children and Youth



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## Acknowledgements

The Representative would like to thank the many dedicated child protection social workers and team leaders who care so passionately about the children, youth and families they serve and who generously gave of their time to share their experiences, observations and insight into the child welfare system in B.C. Their willingness to honestly share their trials and tribulations – and their successes – is most appreciated. It is through the experiences of front-line staff that we begin to understand the challenges they face in ensuring the safety and well-being of B.C.'s most vulnerable children and youth. Without their contribution, this report would not have been possible.

## Executive Summary

It is an understatement to say that the work of child protection social workers is difficult and challenging. Social work is a demanding career that includes daily interaction with children in need and/or suffering from abuse and neglect. Social workers play a pivotal role in ensuring the safety of British Columbia's most vulnerable children and should be supported in their work and provided with the time, tools and work environment they need to make decisions in the best interest of children and their families.

The Representative continues to hear concerns from front-line social workers and team leaders around the province about the quality of service delivered to children and families due to on-going staffing issues. In addition, serious worker shortages, recruitment lags, and a lack of adequate supervision and mentorship in the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) have been brought to light in numerous reports by the Representative, most recently in *Lost in the Shadows: How a Lack of Help Meant a Loss of Hope for One First Nations Girl* (2014).

As a result, the Representative initiated a review of staffing levels and the ability of front-line workers to respond in a timely way when concerns about child safety are reported to MCFD. This review included an analysis of data provided by MCFD, an examination of budgeting and staffing practices in the ministry, an audit of files from four teams in three MCFD offices to determine if they were able to meet their statutory obligations under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act)*, interviews with social workers and team leaders in 16 B.C. communities and a review of available literature in this subject area.

The results of the review are alarming. The problems are systemic and have accumulated over time, worsening and not improving. While the demands and complexities of child protection work have increased, there are fewer front-line workers in B.C. now than in 2002. New child protection standards and a new computer system were introduced in 2012, which increased both the complexity of work and the demands for accountability placed on child protection workers. Since that time, there have been upgrades to the computer system, as well as numerous policy and practice changes, all of which impact the daily lives of social workers.

Social workers report that meeting ministry practice standards – standards mandated to protect vulnerable children and youth – is frequently impossible, and that not meeting mandated timelines has become routine due to heavy workloads. This is the case despite child protection standards being no more onerous in B.C. than in other jurisdictions across North America. The situation in a number of MCFD offices across the province is perilous. Workers clearly told the Representative's staff that heavy workloads, absent colleagues and increasingly demanding performance expectations are leading to a consistent failure to meet MCFD's own child protection standards. Because of these conditions, social workers must negotiate the level of services they can provide to vulnerable children.

MCFD's own documents suggest a disturbing contradiction: that while staff are "*unable to consistently complete necessary child welfare functions*" there is nonetheless "*no indication that children are at risk.*"<sup>1</sup> This is an irreconcilable inconsistency. While workers routinely cannot meet standards, the ministry claims that children are safe. The Representative believes that if the current MCFD child protection standards are necessary to ensure the safety of children, they cannot be ignored. The timelines and standards in the *CFCS Act* are legislative requirements; they are not optional.

The Representative's review found that child protection workers deal with extremely heavy workloads caused by a steady stream of incoming reports of child safety concerns. The impact of heavy workloads is made worse by a lack of coverage for vacancies, vacations, and short- and long-term leaves, problems with recruitment and retention – particularly in rural and remote areas – and problems with supervision and mentorship. In recent years, the complexity and performance expectations of child protection work have also increased dramatically. This is taking a toll on both social workers and the families they serve, ultimately resulting in a lack of adequate services and protection to the children who need it most. As this report shows, these findings are confirmed by MCFD's own data.

The B.C. government has known about these issues for years, yet has not made the necessary budgetary commitments that would see staffing matched to the increasing demands and complexity of child protection work. Child protection social worker positions remain unfilled because these vacancies have become one of the only ways managers can control budget expenditures.

Staffing numbers have fluctuated since 2001, often in response to cost-cutting cycles by the B.C. government as a whole. This report clearly demonstrates that MCFD has managed its budget pressures in part by reducing the total number of front-line child protection workers. In 2013, the number of workers fell to 1,111 – 117 fewer than were working in B.C. in 2002 when the government undertook its Core Services Review process.<sup>2</sup> Although the number of workers has risen in recent years, there are still fewer front-line social workers in B.C. than there were 13 years ago.

In the course of the Representative's audit and interviews with social workers, all of the MCFD offices selected for the review reported staffing issues. A number of offices stood out as having particularly acute challenges.

Most worryingly, social workers told the Representative's staff that chronically heavy workloads, combined with onerous responsibilities for paperwork, have undermined their ability to build the kinds of relationships with children and families that would help resolve safety concerns. These findings were consistent across all interviews and in both rural and urban locations, suggesting that a systemic problem exists with staffing shortages, recruitment and retention.

The RCY's audit of MCFD offices found that many reports of child safety concerns were not addressed within the time frames set out by ministry standards and, in some cases, no response at all could be found in the ministry's paper or electronic files. The audit also exposed instances of urgent child safety concerns that the Representative immediately reported to MCFD.

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<sup>1</sup> MCFD. (2014). *MCFD workload: Status and approach*, Nov. 6, 2014.

<sup>2</sup> In 2001 the B.C. government initiated a Core Services Review of all programs and services. See: B.C. Government. (2002). *British Columbia Government: Annual report, 2001/02: A new era update*. Available at: [http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual\\_Reports/2001\\_2002/bcgovAR.pdf](http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual_Reports/2001_2002/bcgovAR.pdf).



Troubling examples found in the audit of electronic records and interviews included:

- Six incidents that left 13 children at potential risk – findings that were immediately reported to MCFD.
- An MCFD office that had received a report that a mother and her two young children were living with a man who could have posed a credible threat to the children. The worker waited six weeks before the First Nations band social worker who was required to accompany MCFD workers onto the reserve was available to attend the home and meet with the family.
- A case in which MCFD received a report that a baby was suffering from an untreated medical condition and that the parents were not following up with medical appointments for the child. This was in addition to concerns about domestic violence in the home. Three months after the initial report was made, the baby had yet to be seen by an MCFD social worker.

Every worker interviewed by the RCY said that most of the time they were unable to meet MCFD requirements to assess, investigate and decide on the most appropriate course of action within 30 days of receiving a report of a child safety concern.

As with all of the Representative's reports, the purpose of this report is to promote improvements in the delivery of services to children, youth and their families that result in better lives for children and youth.

Improvements in services cannot be made without attention being given to the very real concerns expressed by front-line child protection workers. MCFD ministers have spoken publicly for more than a decade on the challenges of staffing, yet apparently to no effect. It is clear from the findings of this review that the B.C. government has not made the necessary budgetary commitments that would see staffing matched to the increased demands of child protection work.

As a result of the findings in this report, the Representative's recommendations include that MCFD's 2016/17 budget include a sufficient lift in funding to fully staff front-line child protection work – including full coverage for historical leave rates at MCFD. Funds allocated for staffing must be expended only for this purpose. In addition, the ministry must update its 10-year-old workload model to reflect the considerable changes made over the years to practice, and the new model should document the time spent, in actual working conditions, on all the tasks associated with child protection work.

Any real improvement in MCFD's ability to provide robust child protection services depends on government's commitment to listening to the voices of these workers, and the findings in this report, and acting immediately to address this unsafe situation.

## Methodology

Data for this report were drawn from a number of sources including a review of the literature on staffing issues in child welfare systems, an analysis of data provided by MCFD, a look at information on budgeting and staffing in the ministry, an audit of MCFD offices, and, most importantly, face-to-face interviews with 34 social workers and 17 team leaders across B.C.

Interviews were conducted between the fall of 2014 and January 2015, with child protection social workers and team leaders who are responsible for intake and investigation of reports of child safety concerns. The majority of interviews were held on-site in the offices where the interviewees worked. Six interviews were completed by telephone due to winter driving conditions.

Participants were selected to represent teams located throughout the province. All participants were members of teams that perform child protection intake and investigations. Child protection teams can consist of either specialized intake and investigation services or generalist teams that provide child protection intake and investigations as well as family service, resources and guardianship services. Each team of social workers is led by a team leader who provides supervision and is responsible for a broad range of external and internal duties. (See Appendix 1 for social worker and team leader job descriptions.)

Of the 17 teams interviewed for this review, six provided generalist services (a total of 12 workers and six team leaders), while the remaining 11 teams provided specialist intake and investigations services (a total of 22 workers and 11 team leaders). For the purposes of privacy, the names and office locations of interviewees have been kept confidential. (For more information about the interviewees, see Appendix 2.)

### What is Intake?

When a report of possible child abuse or neglect is received by MCFD, it is screened by specialized child protection intake staff. Child protection social workers investigate the initial report, gather detailed information in order to assess whether a protection- or non-protection response is required, and determine which type of response path should be taken. This is accomplished via reviews of electronic records, interviews or discussion with the person making the report and/or family members, and contact with the child/youth who is the subject of the report. If the child/youth is potentially in a life-threatening situation, reports should be assessed immediately. In all other cases, reports should be assessed within 24 hours of receiving the information. Reports that the Intake worker determines do not require a protection response may result in referral to other services.

### What are Standards?

Chapter 3 of MCFD's *Child Safety and Family Support Policies* details the procedures that child protection workers should adhere to if they are to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties under the *CFCS Act*. In this report, these procedures are described as "standards."

The questions used to guide the interviews were developed through an analysis of previous reports conducted by the Representative and by a review of other documents about staffing issues in child welfare systems, including those produced by MCFD. Interviewees were asked to answer a set of predetermined questions but were also given the opportunity to bring up different issues and to explore any new themes not covered by the interview questions.

Data were analyzed by identifying key themes that emerged across the interviews. These themes included workload, various issues related to staffing complement – including supervision, paperwork and adherence to standards – and the impacts of staffing shortages on children and families and on workers themselves.

It is important to understand that these interviews may not be representative of all MCFD front-line child protection workers in B.C., although the themes and issues identified by interviewees were remarkably similar across the interviews. The Representative has taken considerable care to analyze the interviews and extract only those themes which were identified repeatedly by the majority of interviewees. The quotations that appear in the text of this review were chosen because they reflect these key themes.

The findings of this review were supplemented by an analysis of more than 200 MCFD policies, standards and other documents related to staffing issues for child protection workers. Some of these documents were available publicly and others were obtained through formal information requests to MCFD.

As part of the overall review, the Representative's staff also conducted an audit of three MCFD offices to determine if they were able to meet their statutory obligations under the *CFCS Act*. The audit focused specifically on the handling of child protection incidents, looking at adherence to standards throughout the assessment process. Cases were examined from the initial reporting stage through to final determination of the type of response required to ensure the child or youth's safety. The audit focused on 40 child protection incidents opened during the month of August (2014) across four MCFD teams. Two of the teams were located in the same community. These particular offices were chosen because they were identified as having faced staffing issues within the six-month period prior to the audit.

## Literature Review

Staffing issues are not unique to MCFD or to this province. There is abundant research literature from North America and elsewhere devoted to the topic of staffing in child welfare systems. The research shows that statutory child protection work is one of the most demanding and high-pressure types of employment.<sup>3</sup> Driven by legislative requirements and a myriad of standards and policies, child protection work is “often characterized by continuous change, complex case dynamics and scarce resources.”<sup>4</sup> These challenges are heightened by an ongoing tension in child welfare between supporting families to stay together while ensuring that children are protected from harm.

**Child protection practice is probably the most demanding, contested and scrutinized work within the helping professions, primarily because the endeavour focuses on our society's most vulnerable children. – Signs of Safety, p. 12**

Other key findings from the literature review include:

- There are many competing definitions of workload and no specific agreement on what an appropriate or manageable workload is for child protection social workers. Individual files can vary based on complexity and levels of family engagement, among other factors. The number of cases assigned to any given worker (caseload) is generally not a good measure of workload because the needs and concerns of individual families and children vary considerably.
- Research shows that workload is increasing in many jurisdictions even as efforts are being made to take fewer children into government care, while budgets have been inadequate to allow for hiring of sufficient numbers of workers.
- Organizational issues such as staffing levels, recruitment and retention, and requirements of legislation and standards can affect workload.<sup>5</sup> Other factors include the overall unpredictability of the work (e.g., emergencies, wait times in court or unanticipated case demands). Factors external to child welfare systems, such as child population and average family income, can also affect workload.<sup>6</sup>
- Many child welfare agencies face problems with recruitment and retention. High caseloads and high workloads, lack of perceived organizational support, poor supervision, low salaries and the increasing

<sup>3</sup> Government of Western Australia, Department for Child Protection. (2011). *The signs of safety: Child protection practice framework, 2nd edition*. East Perth, WA: Department for Child Protection, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Chapman, M., & J. Field. “Strengthening our engagement with families and understanding depth of practice.” *Social Work Now*, 38, 21-38.

<sup>5</sup> Yamatani, H., Engel, R., & Spjeldnes, S. (2009). Child welfare worker caseload: What’s just right? *Social Work*, 54(4), 361-368; Wagner, D., Johnson, K., & Healy, T. (2009). *Agency workforce estimate: Simple steps for improving child safety and permanency*. Focus: Views from the Children’s Research Center, April 2009; American Humane Association. (2011). *Child welfare policy briefing: Child welfare workforce*. American Humane Association, Vol. 2, September. Available at: [http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/advocacy/caseworker\\_workload\\_paper.pdf](http://www.americanhumane.org/children/stop-child-abuse/advocacy/caseworker_workload_paper.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Yamatani, et al., 2009; Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2010). Caseload and workload management. *Issue Brief*, April. Retrieved from [https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/case\\_work\\_management.pdf](https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/case_work_management.pdf); Sharma, R. D. (2008). Selecting social indicators to forecast child welfare caseload. *Canadian Studies in Population*, 35(1), 119-132.

amount of time spent on administrative duties (e.g., entering case data, completing forms, and providing informational reports to other agencies) are associated with difficulties in retaining staff.<sup>7</sup>

- Recruitment and retention of staff is supported by reasonable workload, better salaries, supervisory support, co-worker support, opportunities for advancement and employee recognition.
- Personal factors that negatively impact staff retention include burnout, emotional exhaustion and role overload/conflict/stress. These concerns can be offset by characteristics such as professional commitment and job satisfaction.
- Availability of community-based resources has a direct impact on a social worker's satisfaction with workload management. Knowledge of available resources can help streamline social worker duties by reducing the amount of time it takes for social workers to locate services or find alternative services for clients if resources are not available in the community.<sup>8</sup>
- Quality of practice is key for employee retention. Quality practice is not just about adhering to policies or processing cases through the system, but requires reflection on issues, time for analysis, engagement with families and mobilizing of appropriate resources.<sup>9</sup> Quality of practice also relies on an organization that supports quality improvement at all levels and is willing to incorporate feedback not just from quantitative performance measures, but from everyone including front-line staff, families and children.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, research suggests that staffing issues can be addressed by organizational commitment to a sustained and coordinated effort to recruit and retain staff; improving worker effectiveness (e.g., staff training and professional development); putting in sound quality assurance and quality improvement processes; and, implementing prevention and early intervention programs to reduce the number of children and families entering the child welfare system.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010; Juby, C., & Scannapieco, M. (2007). Characteristics of workload management in public child welfare agencies. *Administration in Social Work, 31*(3), 95-109.; Mor Barak, M. E., Levin, A., Nissly, J. A., & Lane, C. J. (2006). Why do they leave? Modeling child welfare workers' turnover intentions. *Children and Youth Services Review, 28*, 548-577.; Scannapieco, M., & Connell-Carrick, K. (2007). Child welfare workplace: The state of the workforce and strategies to improve retention. *Child Welfare, 86*(6), 31-52.; Social Work Policy Institute, 2010. High caseloads: How do they impact delivery of health and human services? *Research to Practice Brief, January*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/r2p-cw-caseload-swpi-1-10.pdf>; U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2006, October). *Child welfare: Improving social service program, training, and technical assistance information would help address long-standing service-level and workforce challenges* (Publication No. GAO-07-75). Washington, DC: Author; ; DePanfilis, D., & Zlotnik, J. L. (2008). Retention of front-line staff in child welfare: A systematic review of research. *Youth Services Review, 30*, 995-1008; Strolin, J. S., McCarthy, M., & Caring, J. (2007). Causes and effects of child welfare workforce turnover: Current state of knowledge and future directions. *Journal of Public Child Welfare, 1*(2), 29-52; American Public Human Services Association. (2005). *Report from the 2004 child welfare workforce survey: State agency findings*. Washington, DC: Author

<sup>8</sup> Juby, & Scannapieco, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Chapman & Field, 2007, p. 24.

<sup>10</sup> Casey Family Programs and National Child Welfare Resource Center for Quality Improvement. (2005). *Using continuous quality improvement to improve child welfare practice: A framework for implementation*. Available at: <http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/CQIFramework.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2010.

## B.C. Child Welfare System: Background

In B.C., MCFD is responsible for the administration and delivery of child welfare services, including child safety. The *CFCS Act* is the legislation that defines when a child is in need of protection and provides the authority for social workers to intervene to protect children. Additional standards and practice directives provide social workers with more specific instructions on how to deliver these services to vulnerable children, youth and families.

The responsibility for the delivery of front-line child protection services belongs to MCFD and the delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs). The DAAs operate through delegation agreements with the Provincial Director of Child Welfare who gives authority to the DAAs and their employees to undertake administration of all or parts of the *CFCS Act*. The amount of responsibility assumed by each agency is the result of negotiations between the ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agency and the level of delegation provided by the Director.

The focus of this report is on the services offered through MCFD's Service Delivery Division (SDD). The SDD was established in 2012 by bringing together 13 Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) under a single assistant deputy minister. The day-to-day practice, human resource and operational management of the 13 SDAs are the responsibility of the 13 executive directors of service (EDS) supported by community service managers (CSMs) who manage Local Service Areas (LSAs), and team leaders who provide direct supervision of front-line staff.<sup>12</sup>

When someone suspects a child or youth is being abused or neglected, he or she has a legal duty to report these concerns to MCFD.<sup>13</sup> Professional social workers are responsible for receiving, assessing and, as required, investigating these reports. If a child is deemed in need of protection, social workers then decide the most appropriate course of action including a Child Protection Response.

All new social workers are required to have a Bachelor of Social Work, Masters in Social Work, Bachelor of Arts in Child and Youth Care or Masters in Educational Counselling/Clinical Psychology with preference given to those who have completed a practicum in family and child protection. In addition, new MCFD workers undergo a three-week training course offered by the Justice Institute of B.C. when beginning a position as a new worker.

New workers must complete six months of on-the-job training to obtain the legal delegation necessary to perform the full range of child protection duties. Only a "C6" designation allows a worker to assume full responsibility for providing child protection, family support and guardianship services under the *CFCS Act*.

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<sup>12</sup> MCFD. (2015). *Service Delivery Division: Divisional Plan, 2015/16-2017/18*, p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> S.14 of the *CFCS Act* outlines the "Duty to report need for protection... A person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection under section must promptly report the matter to a director or a person designated by a director".



### What is Delegation?

Delegation is the process by which child welfare workers receive legal authority to carry out the duties of the Director that include the provision of child protection, family support and guardianship services under the *CFCS Act*. The Act allows the minister to designate one or more persons as directors under section 91. The directors may delegate their powers under the Act to “any person or class of person” pursuant to section 92. Primary categories of delegation include: Resources and Voluntary Services (C3); Guardianship (C4); and Child Protection (C6).

Only social workers with a C6 delegation can assume the full range of child protection responsibilities, including: receiving, assessing and, as required, investigating reports of child abuse and neglect; deciding on the most appropriate course of action if a child is deemed in need of protection; removing the child and placing the child in care, where necessary; and obtaining court orders or taking other measures to ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of the child.

## Pathways for Responding to Reports of Child Safety Concerns

During a Child Protection Response, social workers must determine whether a family requires ongoing protective services to ensure the child or youth’s safety. If screening indicates that a protection response is required, the priority of that response must then be determined. Where one or more specific high-risk categories is indicated on the screening assessment tool (e.g. severe physical abuse, severe neglect, or sexual abuse by a parent), then social workers must prioritize the response as immediate, requiring action within 24 hours of the initial report. If none of the high-risk categories is indicated, a response is required within five days of the report.

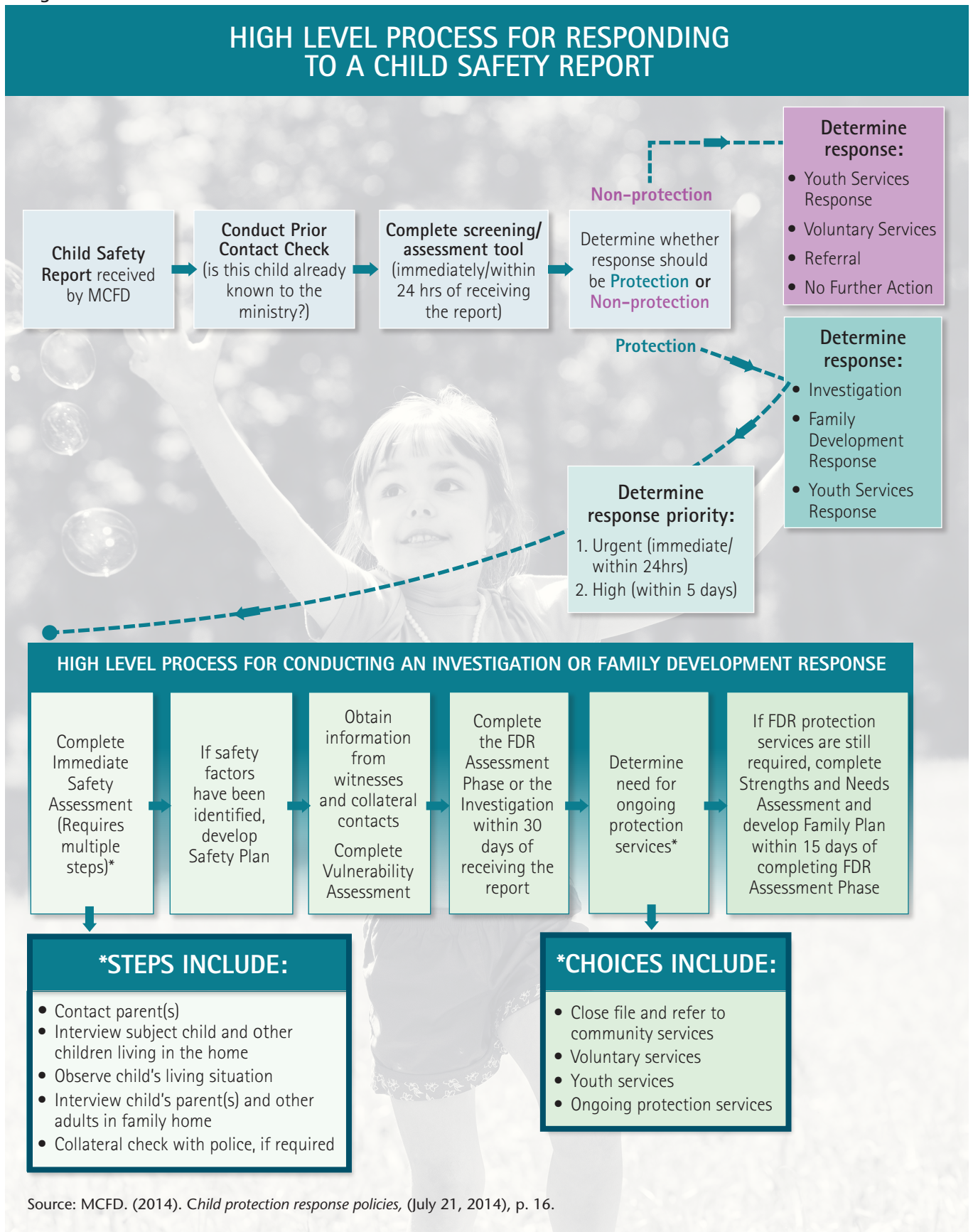
If a protection response is required, there are two main pathways social workers can take. Both responses include an assessment of current and future safety risks and may result in removal of a child from a parent. These responses must be completed within 30 to 45 days of receiving the report.<sup>14</sup>

**Family Development Response (FDR)** is the primary pathway for child protection reports that do not involve severe physical abuse or severe neglect and where the parent(s) are able and willing to participate in collaborative assessment and planning. The FDR includes interviews with children and families and assessments of current safety concerns and of future likelihood of harm.

**Investigation Response** is the pathway for responding to child protection reports involving severe abuse or neglect and where the family is unable or unwilling to participate in collaborative assessment and planning, or when there is an open case on the family and at least one child is already out of the home for protection reasons.

<sup>14</sup> MCFD. (2014). *Child protection response policies*, (July 21, 2014). MCFD’s child protection response policies also allow for a Youth Service Response pathway.

Figure 1:





## Analysis

### Social Worker Interviews

**Finding:** *Interviews with social workers and team leaders revealed serious challenges for almost all of the 51 interviewees. Social workers and team leaders reported extremely heavy workloads because of vacancies and lack of coverage for absent colleagues, ever-increasing performance expectations and complexity of work, and difficulties with the ICM computer system.<sup>15</sup> Social workers said that these circumstances have resulted in widespread failures to meet standards and to provide adequate service levels for families and children, along with high levels of work-related stress and ill health, and a lack of time to receive clinical supervision from team leaders. An audit of 40 child protection files confirms what these social workers said – that heavy workloads are gravely affecting their ability to provide adequate services to children and families.*

### Workload

Interviews with front-line child protection social workers revealed that deeply entrenched problems exist with high workload, regardless of where an office is located in the province. Workers from both rural and urban locations registered strikingly similar concerns about their work, stressing repeatedly that they “*did not have enough time*” or “*there weren’t enough hours in the day*” to complete their work. Said one worker: “*Team is not adequately staffed. We need more people. Everyone has huge caseloads and there is pushback on who can manage another case.*”

Social workers and team leaders reported that their days are filled with too much work resulting from a steady stream of incoming reports of child safety concerns. Dealing with immediate safety concerns takes priority and workers push other priorities to the background; other tasks may be delayed for months because of higher priority issues and incoming incidents. Workers reported that they move from one immediate safety plan to another, but then must drop the incident and move on to the next one. This happens despite the fact that an immediate safety plan should be only a temporary measure while social workers complete the full Child Protection Response.

**Caseload:** The actual number of active files or cases assigned to a social worker at a given point in time.

**Workload:** The amount of time that must be devoted to various tasks (visiting families, interviewing children, completing assessment tools, documenting work processes, etc.) to respond to reports of child safety concerns, regardless of the complexity of cases.

**Even workers in offices with a full staff complement reported that it was impossible to keep up with their workload.**

<sup>15</sup> ICM is a computer system that works in concert with the Child Protection Standards and is meant to assist social workers to record their work associated with the various assessments and other tools. ICM was introduced in April 2012.

But workers often reported that they have no time to follow up with the family once an initial assessment has been made or provide ongoing support to ensure that children and youth remain safe.

Even when workers can manage to complete their work according to the required timelines, they said that they often do not have the time to record the work and upload it into ICM. Without proper documentation, it is difficult for other workers to determine what has been done on a case when asked to provide coverage; while work remains undocumented, cases remain open. As workers noted, not being able to close these cases is an added workplace stressor, particularly when unclosed cases pile up over time.

The findings from the interviews clearly suggest to the Representative that many social workers are unable to assess children and their families in a timely manner. These children may be left in risky situations, or they and their families may not receive services to enhance safety within the family unit and keep children with their parents.

## Why are Workloads so High?

High workloads have become a normalized part of the daily lives of social workers. This situation can be traced to two central factors: 1. The complexity and ever-changing nature of social work including the demands of Child Welfare Standards; and 2. Overall staffing instability caused by staff shortages stemming from unfilled temporary leaves, vacancies, recruitment lags and retention problems.

### 1. Complexity of Work

One of the most striking issues identified by social workers and team leaders was the complexity of their work. Social workers repeatedly described the high degree of professional judgement required to effectively fulfill their responsibilities and the stressful situations they encounter on a daily basis. Social workers must have the experience and insight to appropriately gather and assess information within the required time frames for every child safety concern reported to the ministry. If a report is then determined to require a protection response, social workers must proceed through a series of steps that require sophisticated professional skills. These steps include visiting a child's home, conducting interviews with adults and children and other key participants in a child's life, and applying appropriate tools to assess immediate safety concerns and potential for future harm.

Social workers must be able to multi-task and to prioritize in a high stress environment. They are expected to routinely assess the protective capacities in families and communities as well as their needs and challenges. Workers must be able to document their work on an ongoing basis and must have clinical skills for working with families, often during difficult times when families do not want ministry involvement in their lives. Workers must also be able to prepare documents for court and give testimony in court when the need arises.

Social workers also reported that the complexity of their work is increased by a highly unpredictable work schedule, shaped by what happens within families. For example, a social worker can arrive at work to face a new group of reports of child safety concerns that they must address immediately. As one worker said, *"You roll as you go; there's always something that happens that throws off the plan for the day."*

The complexity of social work is also influenced by external issues – issues that are not fully accounted for in how MCFD staffs its teams and offices. Many communities in B.C. face poverty, isolation, historical

trauma or lack of employment that put more stress on families. In turn, these stressors can result in increases in reports of child safety concerns. As workers reported, these conditions lead to *“complicated cases without easy fixes.”*

Both workers and team leaders described how geography can affect workload. Teams located in rural communities often serve very remote areas of the province. Some communities can be located up to three hours’ driving distance away, only accessible by poor roads that are treacherous to navigate in winter conditions.

### Social Workers’ Voices

*“I get it that they are concerned with budgets etc., but this is about children in B.C. and we’ve had one of the highest poverty rates for kids in Canada for I don’t know how many years in a row. Let’s find a different way of doing our work and prioritize this area of work.”*

The complexity of social work is also increased for staff who provide services to First Nations communities because of the understandable mistrust on the part of these communities toward child welfare systems. The recent release of the summary report from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada illustrates the ongoing impact of paternalistic and arguably discriminatory treatment of Indigenous parents by child welfare systems and underscores the need for reconciliation and relationship-building, as well as the need to find supportive approaches to working with First Nations families that reflect First Nations community practice for child rearing and helping relationships.<sup>16</sup>

### Child Protection Response and Depth of Practice

Interviewees reported that FDR was one of the most impactful changes to occur in the last 10 to 15 years. The FDR approach requires more intensive work and was launched in 2003 without any allowances for increased caseload complexity. FDR is MCFD’s preferred approach to reports of child safety concerns where circumstances do not involve severe abuse or neglect and where families are able and willing to participate in collaborative assessment and planning. The ministry has encouraged social workers to take the FDR route when circumstances permit. As a result, social workers are using FDR to a much greater extent than they are using investigations.<sup>17</sup>

Many interviewees reported that, while FDR is an extremely valuable component of child welfare practice, it is time consuming to complete the assessment tools and effectively engage families to gain their cooperation in potentially volatile situations. Social workers also emphasized that effective FDR requires skilled workers with a depth of practice and experience who can build enough trust with families to engage them in an *“open, honest, and clear discussion”* of their challenges and needs (see Figure 1). In fact, if FDR

<sup>16</sup> The Summary Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Report found the following: “The residential school experience was followed by the ‘Sixties Scoop’ – the wide scale national apprehension of Aboriginal children by child-welfare agencies. Child welfare authorities removed thousands of Aboriginal children from their families and communities and placed them in non-Aboriginal homes without taking steps to preserve their culture and identity. Children were placed in homes across Canada, in the United States, and even overseas. This practice actually extended well beyond the 1960s, until at least the mid- to late 1980s.” Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, p. 138 Available at: [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring\\_the\\_Truth\\_Reconciling\\_for\\_the\\_Future\\_July\\_23\\_2015.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Honouring_the_Truth_Reconciling_for_the_Future_July_23_2015.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> MCFD. (2015). *MCFD 2013/14 annual service plan report*, p. 23. Available at: [http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual\\_Reports/2013\\_2014/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf](http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual_Reports/2013_2014/pdf/ministry/cfd.pdf). See also: MCFD. (2004). *British Columbia’s Family Development Response*.

is the required pathway for a child protection response, child protection standards permit another 15 days beyond the 30 days to complete a strengths and needs assessment and develop a family plan.<sup>18</sup> At this time, the Representative is unable to assess if FDR has been beneficial in terms of child safety.

### Team Leaders – Complex and Competing Responsibilities

Team leaders told the Representative's staff that they carry almost impossible workloads and that their duties consist of a broad range of complex and competing tasks, including overseeing both the functioning of individual teams and working externally with community partners. Indeed, their responsibilities range from the administrative to the clinical.

#### Social Workers' Voices

*"[Teams] feel flooded, busy and often chaotic and unpredictable."*

Similar to social workers, team leaders reported that their days start busy and stay that way. Each day, team leaders must review incoming incidents and memos, and assign work to their teams in an already busy work environment. Team leaders must match families to appropriate workers by assessing workloads, the potential complexity of a case and the suitability of workers for particular families. On a daily basis, team leaders are expected to provide support to their team members, and must be available for the numerous consultation points required by the Child Protection Response standards. Team leaders are also responsible for ensuring their staff know about and implement new practice directives and must provide sign-off on all files before they can be closed. One of the most challenging responsibilities reported by team leaders is to *"act as a buffer"* between upper MCFD management and front-line social workers to ensure that the workers fulfill management's priorities. As one team leader said, *"there's a tension between provincial and other management directives, and balancing currently existing workloads of staff."*

Many team leaders reported spending large amounts of time on mentorship tasks, particularly with new and less experienced workers. Team leaders are also responsible for assisting new workers to go through the delegation process. At the same time, they may be cleaning up a backlog of cases left by a predecessor or dealing with staff turnover, as well as other human resources issues such as planning for vacations or staff leaves. Because of workload and understaffing, some team leaders reported that they carry a caseload on top of their other responsibilities. In fact, almost one-third of the team leaders interviewed reported that they currently carry a caseload. In addition, they have a range of administrative responsibilities including budgeting and statistical monitoring.

Team leaders are also responsible for maintaining relationships with community partners, including sitting on committees with external stakeholders and in some cases working with local delegated Aboriginal Agencies (DAAs)<sup>19</sup> to build and maintain cooperative relationships. Team leaders must be willing and able to engage with First Nations leadership in their communities to maintain good working relationships, discuss solutions to complex cases and understand the support services that are needed including child mental health and special needs services. Good working relationships at this level help make social workers' duties go more smoothly when working with families living on-reserve.

In the interviews, many workers and team leaders reserved their most sceptical comments for the constantly shifting practice environment at MCFD. As they noted, the ministry has been in a constant state of flux since at least 2011, including changes in technology, standards and new practice directives. (Appendix 3 illustrates some of the policy and technological changes at MCFD that have shaped child protection work in recent years.)

<sup>18</sup> MCFD. (2014, July 21). *Child protection response policies*, p. 16.

<sup>19</sup> See Glossary, p. 14.

## Paperwork and ICM

Social workers often reported that the complexity of their work was exacerbated by onerous responsibilities for completing their paperwork in the ICM system. ICM works in concert with the Child Protection Standards and is meant to assist social workers to record the work associated with the assessments and tools.

ICM was introduced in April 2012 and, by July 2012, the Representative had released a formal safety warning about the potential risks created by flaws in the ICM system. The Representative's Office had been flooded with calls and e-mails from child welfare workers using ICM who described numerous technical issues that were placing even more demands on already burdened social workers.

MCFD has since implemented several upgrades to ICM that have improved system performance. However, interviewees repeatedly expressed concerns about this computer system. Social workers reported that completing their work required them to fill out a series of screens on ICM, often requiring duplication of work. In fact, some workers noted that cases were not closed because the cumbersome and time-consuming process could not be accommodated with all the other competing demands on their time. The Representative's safety warning remains in place.

Problems with paperwork can be exacerbated by high turnover of social workers in some offices. Some workers reported taking over files from past employees who had not had time to record their progress on cases. New workers were confronted with files where they could not determine what work had been done. Workers also noted that the requirements to record their work took away from relationship-building time with clients.

## 2. Instability in Staffing

Throughout the interviews, the Representative's staff heard that unstable staffing conditions contributed to high workloads. Staffing concerns included not only the number of workers on each team, but the availability of staff to cover leaves, to fill vacant positions and the mix of seasoned and experienced versus new or undelegated staff members. In fact, many interviewees in both rural and urban areas reported that the lack of full staffing on their teams was an on-going problem and, in some cases, had been an issue for years. As one team leader said, the *"biggest thing we need is stability, recruitment and retention."*

### Lack of Coverage for Absent Colleagues

Almost all workers in the review reported that their office was understaffed, and many reported that their offices were severely understaffed. Many workers attributed high workloads to lack of coverage for vacancies, vacations, flex days, sick days and long- and short-term leaves. The interviews found that many teams are not provided with backfill when people are on leave for vacations or short-term medical leaves and maternity leaves. Workers' comments included: *"There's always someone on leave"* and *"Your work waits for you when you are away."* Even workers in offices with a full staff complement noted that it was impossible to keep up with their workload.

#### Social Workers' Voices

*"I am meeting the standards but not recording the work."*

*"... you do the work but often the tools don't get done until later."*

*"I try to do a paper day, but I can get 15 phone calls."*

**Some team leaders reported that their offices were on the brink; while they were barely handling incoming incidents, any new vacancies would severely undermine their ability to meet child safety needs.**



Workers described how issues of staffing instability have become a vicious circle, leading to burn-out of existing staff, medical leaves or quitting, putting additional pressure on the staff who remain behind.

Team leaders echoed these concerns about lack of staff but in even blunter terms. Almost all team leaders reported that they needed additional staff to cover workers who are on leave, fill vacant positions or simply to bolster assigned staff numbers to meet demands for service. Some noted that their teams lacked appropriate administrative support and/or social worker assistants to help with paperwork, including court documents, ICM entries or organizing referrals to community agencies.

### Challenges with Recruitment and Retention

Many times during the interviews, workers reported that vacant positions remained unfilled for long periods of time and that recruitment of new staff was very slow. Several team leaders described in detail the negative impacts of the controls on hiring introduced by the B.C. government in 2012. They reported that by 2013 it was becoming increasingly difficult to gain approval from MCFD Provincial Office to fill positions left vacant by maternity and other leaves, including voluntary exits. This meant that the lag times for recruitment grew and positions remained unfilled. Numerous team leaders reported recruitment lags varying from two months to one year.

A typical situation was described by a team leader in a rural area: *“The delay to approve hire would take staffing to the panic stage and then when they could hire, they would scramble to find an auxiliary.”* Interviewees also reported that challenges created by hiring new staff are compounded in offices with high staff turnover rates, and offices that have difficulties recruiting and retaining social workers – those in some rural and remote areas, for example.

Team leaders recognized that it was impossible for senior managers to plan ahead for all potential leaves or voluntary exits, but they also reported that long recruitment lags were common for maternity leaves where sufficient advance notice had been given.

Retention of social workers was noted by many interviewees as an acute problem in both rural and urban offices. Some workers said that their colleagues took positions on rural teams for only as long as it took to obtain their delegation and get enough experience to make possible a move to a larger or more desirable community. This turnover, combined with lags in filling these positions, resulted in more work being distributed to already over-worked social workers and team leaders. *“The last five to 10 years has been a revolving door for staff,”* said one worker. *“Generally only two people stick around at any given time – for many years we’ve really just been a two-person office.”*

Like their counterparts in rural areas, urban workers described difficulties with retaining younger workers at the ministry. MCFD staff were often tempted away by better paid and less stressful positions in urban-based hospitals. Like rural workers, urban workers also noted the lack of professional development opportunities available to them, especially ones that would help them address, more fully, the needs of families with complex concerns.

Social workers also noted that in some locations there had been turnover among the team leaders, leading to instability in supervision and practice. In some offices, a team of social workers may not have enough senior workers to provide adequate mentoring. In fact, eight of the 17 team leaders interviewed for this review had been in their positions for two years or less.

When asked what they thought contributed to problems with retention, team leaders noted several key themes: chronic levels of stress combined with high levels of responsibility for child safety that result in burnout; high workloads and caseloads caused by too few staff over long periods of time; organizational change not sufficiently supported by communication and training; the overloading of skilled and experienced workers; rural areas with high numbers of complex cases; lack of commitment by staff to stay in rural areas; and, finally, lack of recognition for hard work.

### Inexperienced and Undelegated Staff

Many social workers in our review reported that their workload was routinely increased by the recruitment of inexperienced and/or undelegated staff. To be effective in their positions, new workers require mentorship and training. Workers and team leaders both reported that this training falls to experienced front-line staff who are already carrying very heavy workloads. Until a social worker receives delegation, another social worker must be responsible for their cases, essentially covering two caseloads, and putting additional pressure on social workers' already difficult jobs. This is an acute challenge for child protection social workers, because only a fully delegated worker can carry out the full child protection responsibilities required by the *CFCS Act*.

### Effects of workload on child protection work

The complexity of work and staffing instability are interrelated issues in the daily lives of social workers. When workers leave a team, their responsibilities are often redistributed among remaining staff. As more work is spread among fewer staff, heavier workloads push less urgent files to the bottom of the pile to be completed at a later date. But because of the steady stream of incoming reports of child safety concerns, it becomes increasingly difficult to close these older files, contributing to a backlog of open incidents. One team leader echoed these concerns: the “*workload is very massive; caseloads are high – workers carry about 100 incidents each. Some are old files that don't get closed because of workload and constant barrage of new incidents . . . these old cases weigh on workers' minds.*”

### Lack of Clinical Supervision

Clinical supervision is an important component of social work and can be defined as:

*. . . a series of activities purposefully conducted in the supervision of child welfare workers designed to create a supportive organizational culture promoting a learning and an outcomes-oriented approach, enhance workers' ability to think critically and make good decisions regarding the assessment of their cases and application of information gained in their intervention, and promote evidence-informed practice.*<sup>20</sup>

Research has linked effective case supervision to reduced worker burnout and stress, reduced turnover and improved retention, and to improved work practice and client outcomes.<sup>21</sup> Routine and scheduled case supervision conducted on a one-to-one basis helps workers deepen their practice, identify priorities and find ways to address the inevitable challenges of working with families in crisis. Some research also suggests that effective clinical practice and supervision is linked to employee engagement and satisfaction with their jobs.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Collins-Carmago, C. & Miller, K. (2010). The potential for a more clinical approach to child welfare supervisions to promote practice and case outcomes: A qualitative study in four states. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 29(2), p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>22</sup> Kinjerski, V. (2012). *Flourishing in child protection: Creating environments that help social workers thrive*. A Report to the Alberta College of Social Workers. Alberta.

## Analysis

In many jurisdictions, supervision in child welfare services has become increasingly focused on administrative tasks as demands for accountability have increased over time. These increasing demands make it difficult for supervisors to provide in-depth case or clinical consultation.<sup>23</sup> Team leaders and social workers alike told the Representative's staff that because of workload pressures and staffing instability, there was little time to perform adequate case supervision. When asked about the availability of case supervision, most workers reported that their team leader was available to help with prioritizing files and providing suggestions on effective ways for working with families. While these are important team leader responsibilities, social workers rarely received clinical supervision where deeper practice issues could be explored. On a few teams, workers reported that their team leader was simply not very available; as a consequence, these workers had to make crucial child protection decisions without adequate consultation.

Some team leaders accept that because of lack of time and workload pressures, they cannot realistically provide clinical supervision to their staff, although they try to have an open-door policy. Others noted that they try to schedule case consultation meetings but they often have to cancel these meetings because of more pressing matters that arise from the incoming flow of reports of child safety concerns. As one team leader reported, *"crisis takes over"* and, *"families take priority."*

Some social workers reported to the Representative's staff that they simply needed more of their team leader's time to discuss practice issues. When asked what they need to improve case supervision, social workers suggested more regular meetings with their team leaders to discuss files. One worker summed it up: *"Clinical supervision needs to happen every two weeks but it's not happening. One should be a practice review and one should be a clinical. We need good reflective practice going on."* Newer and less experienced workers were particularly emphatic about needing more clinical supervision. As one worker said, *"New hires need more regular supervision than senior workers; this might take some of the load off the senior workers."* Workers routinely reported that they relied on the support of more senior workers even when their team leader was available. In turn, this placed additional stress on more senior workers.

Many social workers also commented that they were aware that the responsibilities placed on team leaders were impossible to fulfill.

### Lack of Adherence to Standards

The purpose of child protection is to keep children safe and respond to reports of child safety concerns and situations in a timely and professional manner. Policies and standards establish a minimum level of performance for child protection workers and team leaders, and are meant to promote consistently high quality child protection interventions for children, youth and their families.

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<sup>23</sup> Strand, V.C. & Badger, L. (2007). A clinical consultation model for child welfare supervisors. *Child Welfare*, 86(1), p. 80.



Social workers reported that, because of their heavy workloads, they are unable to consistently meet MCFD standards. In fact, not a single person interviewed for this review reported that he or she could meet the required timelines most of the time. As one worker stated: *“We very seldom get the investigation done within 30 days or even 60 days. The files sit on people’s caseloads.”* Another said, *“The standards are completely unattainable. They are unrealistic. Completing the FDR/investigation within 30 days is tough.”* And finally, one worker said, *“Don’t give us something we can’t do.”*

#### Social Workers’ Voices

*“It’s the ministry leadership who makes the decisions and that’s why it’s not happening. Front-line social workers are not the ones saying, I don’t want to see that kid, I’m going to wait 45 days. It’s because they have 35 incidents sitting on their caseloads.”*

Most team leaders noted that although they could provide verbal approval for the work done by social workers, they could not always give formal sign-off within the required timeframes. Team leaders were very clear that it was impossible for their staff to meet the standards, given their workload as well as the complexity of work. Workers reported that in a *“perfect world,”* the standards would be reasonable if staffing levels were matched to the number of reports of child safety concerns. Even though workers often commented that the timelines in MCFD standards could not be met in the current environment, they also acknowledged that these timelines were necessary to ensure that families received a timely response from the ministry and that child safety concerns were addressed as quickly as possible.

Workers also reported that the time-consuming requirements for documentation take away from relationship-building with children, youth and families – a component of their work they see as essential to helping families. Some team leaders echoed these concerns, suggesting that ministry reporting requirements placed a greater importance on accountability and record-keeping, at the expense of quality practice and services.

#### Social Workers’ Voices

*“Timelines don’t mean anything here; there’s no way it’s humanly possible to meet timelines with the complexity of cases and the level of staffing [in this town].”*

These same team leaders described the tension between effective social work that requires relationship-building, and institutional demands to complete and fully document the work in prescribed ways: *“It’s a balance between seeing families and doing paperwork.”* Another team leader reported that *“it’s a constant balance between sitting and writing about the work we do as opposed to doing the work.”*

Overall, what team leaders said is that timelines and standards must be negotiated depending upon the working conditions of a given office.

### Open Incidents\* over Time

Social workers must complete an investigation or FDR within either 30 or 45 days of receipt of a report of a child safety concern. The data in the following table were provided by MCFD and show the number of incidents\* open at two points in time – August and November 2014. These dates were chosen because they coincide with the period of time in which the interviews and audit for this review were conducted. As the table shows, there were 9,937 incidents open for more than 90 days in August 2014 and 8,227 incidents open for more than 90 days in November 2014.

Days open	Aug. 31, 2014	%	Nov. 30, 2014	%
30 or fewer	2,490	15.9	2,116	15.5
31 to 90	3,199	20.5	3,324	24.3
91 to 180	3,403	21.8	2,652	19.4
181 to 365	3,436	22.0	3,045	22.3
366 to 732	2,454	15.7	1,995	14.6
More than 732	644	4.1	535	3.9
<b>Total Open Incidents</b>	<b>15,626</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>13,667</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: MCFD (ICM/MIS)

\*An incident is a report of a child safety concern. Social workers screen all reported incidents to determine whether the report requires a protection or non-protection response. If a report is deemed to require a protection response, the response must be completed within either 30 or 45 days.

## The Representative's Audit

To support the review of staffing issues, the Representative's staff undertook an audit of 40 reports of child safety concerns (potentially affecting 82 children) from four teams in three MCFD offices in B.C. These locations were chosen because the Representative had previously identified these teams as potentially struggling with staffing issues. The findings from the audit reflect the situation in four teams in three offices. The audit included a review of both the paper and the electronic files associated with these reports, to determine compliance with MCFD standards, and focused on the initial information gathering, assessment and response to reports of child safety concerns.

The findings from the audit confirmed what social workers told the Representative's staff – that heavy workloads prevented them from completing their work, which in turn was having a detrimental impact on the services they provide to vulnerable children and youth. Even though the audit's findings are not necessarily typical of the entire province, the Representative was concerned to find any gaps in child safety.

Figure 2:



### Assessing a Report and Determining the Most Appropriate Response

Of the 40 reports of child or youth safety concerns in the audit, only 31 were assessed within 24 hours of receiving the report (78 per cent). Six files were ultimately assessed as requiring a non-protection response and one file did not require any further response. In the case of four reports, the associated files contained so little information that it was impossible for the auditors to establish how a social worker should have responded. This is problematic to the Representative because it was impossible to determine if a protection response was required but not provided to children who may have been at risk. This lack of information may also affect how further reports of safety concerns about these same children are received in the future.

**Because they have to focus on responding to a never-ending stream of crises, social workers do not have the time to complete their assessments of children's ongoing safety needs.**

The remaining 29 incidents followed a Child Protection Response (24 FDR and 5 Investigations). At the time the audit was conducted, the majority of the files – 19 out of the 29 reports of child safety concerns – contained no documentation that showed that the Child Protection Response phase had been completed.

## Adherence to Timeframes

Child protection social workers are required to complete the Child Protection Response within 30 days of receiving the initial report that a child or youth may be in need of protection.<sup>24</sup> In only two of 24 files (8.3 per cent), did social workers conclude the Child Protection Response phase within the 30-day timeframe set out in standards. This finding underscores what social workers reported in their interviews – that timeframes are nearly impossible to meet given chronic understaffing in some offices and high workloads overall.

In the audit, four families were identified as requiring protective services after the FDR phase had been completed. However, in none of these cases had social workers completed required Family Plans in conjunction with families. The Family Plan is a necessary step that must be completed before social workers can put in place appropriate services that will ensure children and youth remain safe over the long-term. This finding also confirmed what social workers said – that heavy workloads prevented them from completing their work, which in turn had a detrimental impact on the services they provide to vulnerable children and youth.

### MCFD Family Service Practice Audits

The findings in this report are echoed by MCFD practice audits of five SDAs in B.C. (A summary of findings from MCFD's audits is available in Appendix 5.) Although offices within the five SDAs generally achieve timelines with regard to investigating child protection reports and making decisions about their safety, all five SDAs struggle to meet the mandated timelines associated with these tasks.<sup>25</sup>

In general, SDA child protection social workers were more likely to meet standards associated with the early stages of the child protection investigation, where actions had potentially critical impacts, than those associated with less urgent phases of the investigation/response process. However, even in offices where completion rates for structured decision-making tools were high, rates of compliance with the associated timeframes were often very low. Adherence to timelines varied from a high of 83 per cent (making an appropriate response decision within mandated timeframes) to a low of four per cent (completing a Family Plan and integrating a Safety Plan within mandated timeframes).<sup>26</sup>

The more rural SDAs had the lowest rates of compliance and the most difficulty meeting the timeframes. As the audit of one northern SDA states:

*... completion of structured decision making tools and corresponding supervisory approvals within required timeframes often had low compliance rates. The analysts found that many incidents coded as needing a protection response were open well beyond the 30-day timeframes specified in practice standards.<sup>27</sup>*

Factors impacting compliance rates in the most poorly performing SDAs may include greater travel time requirements to reach communities within the service areas, fewer staff employed within SDA local offices, difficulty accessing clients who live on-reserve or in remote locations, less reliable technologies, and fewer available services existing in rural areas compared to urban centres.

Even though these findings were based on case files from February 2013, a year-and-a-half before this review, the MCFD audits mirror the findings from interviews with social workers in the current review.

<sup>24</sup> MCFD. (2014). *Child protection response policies* (July 21, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> MCFD (2014, June). *Northeast Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD (2014, March). *North Central Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD. (2014, October). *Vancouver Richmond Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD. (2014, June). *North Vancouver Island Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*. All available at: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about\\_us/case\\_practice\\_audits.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/case_practice_audits.htm).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> MCFD, 2014, *Northeast Service Delivery Area: Family service practice audit*, p. 21.

## Are Standards Appropriate in B.C.?

B.C.'s child welfare timeline standards of up 24 hours to respond to urgent cases and five days to respond to less urgent cases are in line with those used by other Canadian and American jurisdictions, following a graduated model where response timelines differ according to the severity of the incident being assessed.

Timelines related to the completion of investigations are also comparable. Currently, 27 U.S. states require front-line workers to complete assessments or investigations within specific timeframes, usually between 30 and 60 days. In Canada, the situation is similar, with the majority of provinces and territories requiring child protection investigations to be completed within 30 to 45 days of initiation. Many authorities also allow two or three weeks after an investigation has been concluded for social workers to complete related documentation and enter information into computerized systems.

## Section 14 Concerns from the Representative's Audit

Most distressing to the Representative was the fact that, while conducting the audit, RCY staff found six incidents where children may have been left at risk. These findings left the Representative legally obligated to report these concerns to MCFD. S. 14 of the *CFCS Act* requires that anyone who knows of a situation where a child or youth is at risk must report their concerns.<sup>28</sup> The Representative notified the Provincial Director of Child Welfare by letter of these concerns in November 2014. MCFD reviewed these files and found that, in two incidents, children were in need of protection and, in both cases, a family service file was opened. In a third incident, three children were removed from their home. No child protection concerns were found in the three remaining cases.<sup>29</sup>

Again, these findings are confirmed by MCFD's practice audits. In each of the ministry's five most recent audits, the auditors found records where information suggested that children may have been left at risk of harm or were in need of protection services.<sup>30</sup>

**These incidents clearly illustrate the impact of the staffing crisis on workers' ability to provide effective services to families.**

At the time of the audit, 13 children involved in the incidents had not yet received any supports, services or a proper response from MCFD. Up to three months after the original child protection concerns were received by MCFD, there was little to no action documented beyond an initial assessment of safety. These incidents clearly illustrate the impact of the staffing crisis on workers' ability to provide effective services to families. (For more detailed information about the audit findings, see Appendices 4 and 5.)

<sup>28</sup> S. 14 outlines the "Duty to report need for protection . . . A person who has reason to believe that a child needs protection under section must promptly report the matter to a director or a person designated by a director".

<sup>29</sup> Source: Correspondence between the Representative and MCFD.

<sup>30</sup> MCFD. (2014, June). *Northeast Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD. (2014, March). *North Central Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD. (2014, October). *Vancouver Richmond Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*; MCFD. (2014, June). *North Vancouver Island Service Delivery Area: Family Service practice audit*. All available at: [http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about\\_us/case\\_practice\\_audits.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/about_us/case_practice_audits.htm).

## Impact of Workload on Children, Youth and Families

Because of heavy workloads, a steady stream of incoming reports of child safety concerns and ongoing staffing pressures, many social workers reported that they can only focus on keeping children safe in the immediate future rather than completing a full intake, investigation or follow-up with additional safety interventions according to the required standards. Workers described their day-to-day work lives as “*putting out fires*.” Social workers reported that because their work is focused on crisis situations, they do not have the time to engage with families on a deeper level: “*We can’t get below the surface stuff*,” said one worker. “*We become a triage centre – making decisions about immediate risk*,” said another.

Social workers reported that they were distressed about the negative impact of their working conditions on the people they support. In the words of one social worker,

*“Families feel that they don’t get the attention that they deserve . . . They don’t get proper service. I don’t know how many times a day I apologize to these people and I owe these people an apology because I haven’t returned their phone call on time. I haven’t done everything in the time frame I’m supposed to . . . I just can’t get it all in . . . The families, they lose trust in you, they lose faith in you. We can’t spend the extra time or money and we aren’t there for the families. It is all reactive what we do, it is not proactive.”*

Workers reported that sometimes they did not even have time to provide families with an update on their files or give an explanation for why a file had been closed.

Some of the social workers interviewed worked on generalist teams and were responsible for caseloads that included responding to reports of child safety concerns as well as guardianship responsibilities (e.g. providing services and supports to children in care of the ministry). These workers repeatedly said that because immediate safety concerns took precedence, they had little time to spend with the children and youth who were already in the care of the ministry. “*She is quiet and in a good home, but because she is not in crisis, she comes last*,” said one. “*I feel bad for our kids in care. It is not fair for them; they are not getting the support they need*,” said another. Some workers were concerned that backlogs of files led to long delays and a lack of transition planning for children and youth in care including completing a formal Plan of Care. A few workers mentioned that they thought children were staying in care longer than they should because planning did not take place in a timely manner. These findings are consistent with other reports released by the Representative. The 2012 audit of care planning for children in care of the ministry found low rates of compliance with the requirement that each child have a completed plan of care.<sup>31</sup>

Some workers reported that heavy workloads resulted in children being left in unsafe situations. Staffing shortages can affect a worker’s ability to finish all components of an investigation; these same shortages can also result in incidents sitting unattended in a queue of similar incidents. In such cases, safety concerns may go unaddressed and may come to workers’ attention later than they should have, putting children at risk. As noted by one social worker, children are “*as safe as they can be with what we have to work with*.”

**Some workers reported that heavy workloads resulted in children being left in unsafe situations.**

Across the 40 cases included in the Representative’s audit, a total of 82 children were affected by the protection responses. These children and youth ranged in age from under one year to 18 years, with the majority being between five- and 11-years-old.

<sup>31</sup> Representative for Children and Youth. (2013). *Much more than Paperwork: Proper planning essential to better lives for B.C.’s children in care: A Representative’s audit on plans of care*. Victoria, B.C.



The Representative is concerned that workers' inability to address incoming reports in a timely manner can leave children at risk of future abuse, neglect or maltreatment. Opportunities to take advantage of momentum can be lost (e.g. a family member's willingness to participate in services) as families become frustrated and angry while waiting for services. Sometimes families come back to the attention of MCFD because the first report received by the ministry was not effectively dealt with.

## Impact of Heavy Workload on Social Workers

Staff burn-out, which can result in medical leaves or voluntary exits, was reported to be fairly commonplace due to the high-stress environment of front-line social work. Child protection social work is a demanding career that necessitates daily interaction with children in need and/or suffering from abuse and neglect. Workers reported that this work is further complicated by files that might include significant mental health concerns or domestic violence issues, large geographic areas that entail travel in winter driving conditions and difficulty completing work in ICM.

During the interviews for this review some workers appeared visibly burned out, while others expressed concerns about their colleagues' well-being. The Representative was impressed with the dedication of these social workers, some of whom put the needs of the children they served and their team ahead of their own personal well-being – in some cases cancelling holidays or working overtime (sometimes unpaid) because they said they would not be able to sleep unless they knew *"their"* children were safe. Some workers said they would feel guilty going on holidays knowing how difficult it would be for their colleagues to assume responsibility for even more cases.

### Social Workers' Voices

*"There is a lot of tension, a lot of people can't cope, want to move on."*

*"I'm burned out from bureaucracy. I'm burned out from the red tape and the bullshit. Rules keep changing and your clients don't know where you're coming from."*

## Offices in Crisis

In the late spring of 2015, the Representative was sufficiently concerned about the findings of this review that she prepared an interim report for MCFD to alert the ministry that there are offices in crisis across the province.

When working conditions become unmanageable for long periods of time, an office can descend into turmoil. Even though all offices visited during this review reported staffing issues, a number of the offices stood out as having particularly acute challenges. In some offices, social workers reported it was especially common for their colleagues to burn out and quit or move to positions in other communities. MCFD's Provincial Office has sometimes deployed a mobile response team to aid an office in crisis, however, workers said this has been a *"band aid"* approach. It helps with the backlog of cases, but does not equip teams with sufficient training and mentorship to guarantee long-term success.

The Representative believes that offices in crisis should be helped not only with their backlog of incidents, but should also be supported to become sustainable. Proper training, mentorship, and staffing levels need to be maintained, and high staff turnover rates addressed. Unless these underlying issues are resolved, the Representative is concerned that some offices will slide back into crisis once the mobile response team has been removed.

## How Staffing and Budget Policies Impact Workload

*Finding: MCFD's documents and the findings from past reports by the Representative show that the ministry has faced continuous pressures on its staffing levels since at least the early 2000s. These staffing pressures were facilitated by policy and budgeting decisions at MCFD that have resulted in incremental staffing changes at the same time as there have been significant changes in practice, performance expectations and technology. The period since the early 2000s has seen an overall decline in the number of child protection workers, a practice at MCFD of using staffing vacancies to make ends meet, higher-than-average parental leaves, historical challenges with recruitment and retention and evidence from multiple sources that front-line staff are feeling disengaged from their workplace, taking higher-than-average sick leave, and leaving the ministry.*

MCFD's documents show that the ministry has had a long-standing awareness of its staffing challenges. These challenges have been underscored by a number of developments at MCFD as well as across government, including:

- an overall government-wide program review in the early 2000s, resulting in budget reductions
- a decline in governmental revenues starting after the 2008 financial crisis in international markets
- formal and informal hiring freezes starting in 2009, and
- on-going problems with recruitment and retention of front-line social workers, particularly in hard-to-recruit geographic areas.

## Timeline of Budget and Policy Decisions at MCFD

In 2001, with the election of a new government, a core review of services was announced along with a restructuring of ministries and a new policy direction.<sup>32</sup> One of the outcomes of this review was a decline in the number of front-line social workers, precipitated by budget cut targets set by the new government. Between 2001/02 and 2005/06, the Child and Family Development (CFD) component of the ministry (responsible for child protection work) was subject to an 11.8 per cent budget decrease.<sup>33</sup> In that same time period, the ministry as a whole had its budget reduced by 6.8 per cent. By 2003, CFD had lost 12 to 15 per cent of its Full Time Equivalents (FTEs). In 2003, MCFD further reduced its CFD FTEs by another 12 to 15 per cent. Most of these losses were managed through retirement or through the voluntary departure program.<sup>34</sup>

By 2007, the ministry recognized that cuts to its staffing complement had negatively affected service delivery and initiated a process to add 100 front-line positions across the province.<sup>35</sup> Additional staffing increases were promised in Budget 2008.<sup>36</sup> In February 2009, however, MCFD documents indicate that 200 positions were to be eliminated in the ministry over the following three years, due to overall government budget pressures related to the economic downturn. These job losses were to be mainly achieved through attrition.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>32</sup> B.C. Government. (2002). *British Columbia Government: Annual report, 2001/02: A new era update*. Available at: [http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual\\_Reports/2001\\_2002/bcgovAR.pdf](http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/Annual_Reports/2001_2002/bcgovAR.pdf).

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> Perrin, D. (2006). *Child protection: Workload, training, and budget changes*. BC Children and Youth Review.

<sup>35</sup> MCFD. (2007). *Draft Advice to the Minister*. Information provided by MCFD.

<sup>36</sup> MCFD. (2008). *Draft Advice to the Minister*. Information provided by MCFD.

<sup>37</sup> MCFD. (2009). *Draft Advice to the Minister*. Information provided by MCFD. See also MCFD. (2009).

*MCFD estimates binder: 10.3 - Impact of government workforce restructuring on the ministry*; MCFD. (2010).

*MCFD estimates binder: 8.2 - Ministry staffing approach*.



The 2011 appointment of a new minister and deputy minister at MCFD began a process of rebuilding after a lengthy period of instability. Significant alterations to policy and practice were introduced, service lines were clarified, and the Provincial Director of Child Welfare position was reinstated, as per the Representative's recommendation.<sup>38</sup> In 2012, the ICM system was adopted for B.C. child protection social work at the same time as the new Child Protection Response Policies (standards) were implemented. Each of these changes contributed to significant workload pressures on staff as new work tasks and procedures were implemented across the province. (See Appendix 3 for a timeline of policy and practice changes at MCFD).

In 2012, the B.C. government enacted a Managed Staffing Strategy (MSS) as part of its efforts to balance the provincial budget. The MSS included strict salary savings targets, a hiring freeze across the B.C. Public Service, a salary freeze for all public sector excluded management staff, and spending controls on administrative and discretionary expenditures.

By 2013, the MSS required all ministries to adhere to strict salary spending targets and to seek permission from the head of the B.C. Public Service Agency to fill any new or existing positions in government. MCFD received permission to delegate authority to the deputy minister of MCFD to approve hiring for full staffing of management positions directly supervising child welfare and also up to 96 per cent of the balance of annual vacancies to maintain front-line staff.<sup>39</sup> Ministries were expected to reach these targets without layoffs and through "*normal annual voluntary exits, including retirements.*"<sup>40</sup> In 2013, all government ministries were informed that there would be no new funding available for increases that had already been negotiated through collective bargaining. Ministries were required to cover these increases from within existing budgets and were to continue to adhere to salary targets set by the government.<sup>41</sup>

Even without the limits set by the MSS, MCFD has long been forced to under-spend its staffing budget to make ends meet. Table 2 shows budgets for staffing compared to the amount of money actually spent by MCFD for the whole ministry.<sup>42</sup> The numbers in the fourth column of this table show in millions the amount of under- or over-spent staffing dollars from 2008/09 to 2014/15. In five of the seven fiscal years reported in this table, the ministry under-spent its staffing budget.

<sup>38</sup> Representative for Children and Youth. (2014). *Not fully invested: A follow-up report on the Representative's past recommendations to help vulnerable children in B.C.* Available at: [http://www.rcybc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/reports\\_publications/rcy-recreport2014-revisedfinal.pdf](http://www.rcybc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/pdf/reports_publications/rcy-recreport2014-revisedfinal.pdf). See also MCFD. (2009). *MCFD estimates binder: 10.3 - Impact of government workforce restructuring on Ministry*; MCFD (2010). *MCFD estimates binder: 8.2 - Ministry staffing approach*.

<sup>39</sup> MCFD.(2012). *Mobility strategic overview for the Ministry of Children and Family Development*, Nov. 1. See also: MCFD. (2014.) *MCFD estimates binder: 2.9 - Frontline workforce summary*: "When the hiring freeze was implemented, the ministry obtained delegated authority for the Deputy Minister to approve hiring critical frontline staff, to maintain staffing levels for critical frontline positions that provide services to vulnerable children, youth and families across the province."

<sup>40</sup> MCFD. (2013). Letter from Peter Milburn, Deputy Minister, Finance and Linda Tarras, Deputy Minister, BC Public Service Agency, to Mark Sieben, Deputy Minister, MCFD, dated Oct. 11, 2013.

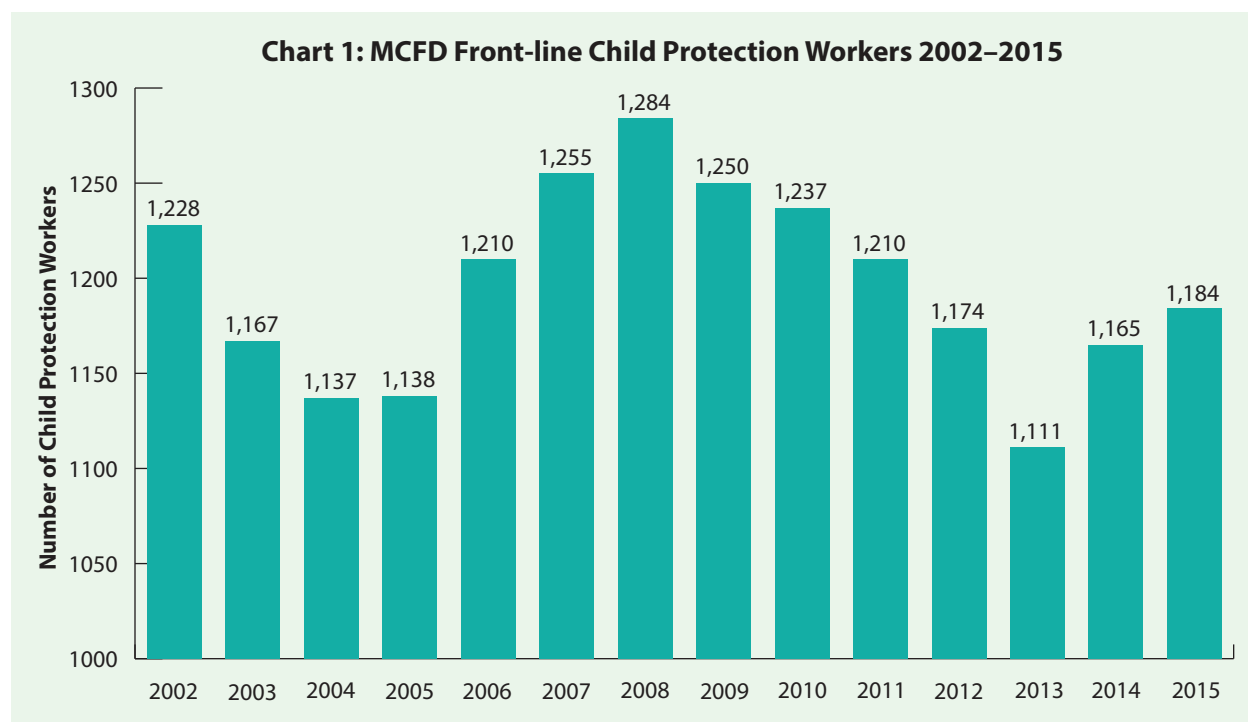
<sup>41</sup> Letter from Minister de Jong (Finance) to Minister Cadieux (MCFD), dated Aug. 12, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Source: Information provided to the Representative by MCFD, July 2015.

Year	Budgets	Actuals	Unspent \$
2008/09	\$266,435,000	\$251,454,000	\$14,981,000
2009/10	\$250,780,000	\$244,395,000	\$6,385,000
2010/11	\$251,504,000	\$248,745,000	\$2,759,000
2011/12	\$247,694,000	\$253,332,000	-\$5,638,000
2012/13	\$250,180,000	\$253,472,000	-\$3,292,000
2013/14	\$253,260,000	\$249,792,000	\$3,468,000
2014/15	\$253,649,000	\$251,862,000	\$1,787,000

Source: MCFD, 2015.

Chart 1 shows MCFD front-line child protection staffing levels between 2002 and 2015. The data presented in this chart are drawn from CHIPS, a computer system that tells us how many child protection workers are on the payroll at a given point in time. This data includes employees who are away on temporary leave for a variety of reasons (illness, parental leave, etc.). As this chart illustrates, by 2005, the full effects of the first round of staffing reductions introduced by government in the early 2000s were being felt. The number of workers performing child protection work reached a low of 1,137 in 2005, down by nearly 100 from 2002. Staffing started to increase after 2005 but, by 2009, the number of workers was again on the decline, reaching a new low of 1,111 by 2013. Although recent data suggest that the number of workers is again on the rise, the number of front-line child protection workers in 2015 is still below 2002 figures.<sup>43</sup>



<sup>43</sup> Source: MCFD. (2015). This data includes child protection workers, guardianship workers and multidiscipline workers, but not workers in adoptions, child safety family support, and children in care services, or team leaders/supervisors. As of March 31, 2015, MCFD had a total of 4,476 employees. Source: MCFD. (2015). *Performance management report*. Volume 6, March.

## Recent Developments at MCFD

In March 2014, MCFD released a *Three-Year Budget and Staffing Strategy*<sup>44</sup> that acknowledged three main issues that affect child protection staffing: on-going inequity in how budgets are distributed across the ministry's SDAs; on-going concerns with workload for front-line workers; and, lack of engagement and insufficient transparency between front-line staff and Provincial Office. To address these issues, MCFD initiated a three-year budget "equity" exercise in 2014/15 that introduced a new workload model to reallocate child protection staff between the SDAs. This model uses snapshot data about each SDA's proportion of new child protection incidents and on-going cases to calculate their proportion of the overall staffing budget for MCFD child protection workers. According to MCFD, this budgeting exercise was not intended to reduce (or increase) provincial staffing levels, but to distribute child protection staff budgets more fairly across the SDAs. MCFD has also undertaken other activities to address "critical operational issues," described as the *Building Blocks for Success*<sup>45</sup> approach (see Appendix 7 for an overview of these efforts). This approach incorporated actions in a range of areas, emphasizing involvement of staff at all levels, dialogue and joint action with the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union (BCGEU), transparency of decision-making and open communications.

Child protection staffing levels in B.C. were previously developed using models based on time measurement for specific tasks associated with child protection work, and an estimate of the number and type of tasks required for mandated child protection responsibilities. A model called "CHILDREN" was used from 1997 to 2004, and revised as the "KIDS" (Knowing Intentions and Determining Services) model in 2005.<sup>46</sup> These models were based on task type and caseload, using information about past caseloads and other factors to estimate overall front-line child protection staffing needs. With the 2012 introduction of a new computer system and the continuing redesign of procedures and practices, it is reasonable to assume that a new workload model should take into account both new tasks and new time/staff requirements to complete those tasks. But the workload model described above does not account for these changes; nor does it account for population or geographically specific factors that can affect workload.

In the spring of 2014, MCFD and the BCGEU formed a Joint Working Group (JWG) to address workload, staffing, and recruitment and retention issues. This working group was part of the ministry's response to Recommendation 6 in the Representative's 2014 report, *Lost in the Shadows*, that directed the ministry to undertake a comprehensive assessment of staffing, workload and safety challenges and to develop a plan to address identified issues.<sup>47</sup> The JWG identified workload as the "primary issue impacting service delivery to children, youth and families" and has strived to better understand the organizational and systemic factors contributing to workload pressures.<sup>48</sup> The JWG process spawned a number of other committees to address recruitment and retention, employee engagement and safety issues. In June 2015, the JWG released a final report that captures the work accomplishments of the JWG since the creation of the committee.<sup>49</sup>

In November 2014, the BCGEU released a report on workload and other issues faced by front-line staff in B.C. The report, based on surveys and focus groups undertaken with staff, found that there were severe

<sup>44</sup> MCFD. (2014). *Service Delivery Division: Three-year budget and staffing strategy for MCFD service delivery areas summary, final, March 2014*.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Perrin, 2006.

<sup>47</sup> Representative for Children and Youth. (2014). *Lost in the shadows: How a lack of help meant a loss of hope for one First Nations girl*. Victoria.

<sup>48</sup> MCFD and BCGEU. (2014). *Terms of reference: MCFD/BCGEU Joint Working Group*.

<sup>49</sup> MCFD/BCGEU Joint Working Group Committee. (2015). *Final Progress/Status Report*.

staffing shortages, excessive caseloads and occupational health and safety risks for staff at MCFD and the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation.

These problems, the report argued, were compromising services and supports for children, youth and families.<sup>50</sup> The BCGEU report called on government to establish workload measurements and caseload standards.

In response to the BCGEU report, the minister announced that MCFD would add 200 new child welfare workers by 2016.<sup>51</sup> MCFD has begun to meet this commitment by offering permanent positions to some employees already on staff in auxiliary positions and by implementing a new “hiring support model” which will see a general posting for child protection staff run year-round for hard-to-recruit locations, and another posting issued four times a year to build pools of eligible applicants for the remainder of the province. This model may reduce some of the lag time to fill vacancies because individual positions will not be posted and filled one at a time. MCFD has also developed a Preferential Lateral Transfer Policy that allows ministry staff to move to other geographic areas after working a minimum of three years in a “hard-to-retain” community.<sup>52</sup>

In the wake of the minister’s announcement, in November 2014, MCFD also acknowledged workload challenges and attributed these challenges to “*a combination of outdated business processes, recruitment lag, and the number of staff.*” It also stated: “*there is no indication that children are at risk. Staff, with support of team leaders and local managers, has done a tremendous job of effectively triaging child welfare matters.*”<sup>53</sup> Referring to the ministry analysis of workload issues, MCFD stated: “*Our analysis of workload can demonstrate that demands on staff have increased by approximately eight per cent. As a result, we will move to increase protection and guardianship staff complements by a corresponding 10 per cent.*”<sup>54</sup> No indication was given as to how these workload increases were determined.

The ministry has promised to streamline its operations, in part, by introducing a call centre to receive and screen all reports of child safety concerns from across the province at a central location in the Lower Mainland. MCFD’s new centralized screening program was partially implemented on July 6, 2015 in two SDAs – the Kootenays and the Northeast – with province-wide implementation scheduled for January 2016.

Centralized screening rolls up existing local and regional centralized screening programs with the Vancouver-based After Hours service and the Children’s Helpline into a 24-hour central office. All phone-based reports about child safety concerns will come through this central office. Callers to ministry child protection and guardianship offices can either speak to a local ministry office or make a child protection report to the central screening office. If callers are reporting a child safety issue, social workers in the centralized screening call centre will initiate the required screening tool.<sup>55</sup> Information provided by MCFD indicates that a significant portion of the new FTEs for child protection announced in the fall of 2014 will be assigned to the new centralized screening function and will not be front-line workers.

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<sup>50</sup> BCGEU. (2014). *Choose children: A case for reinvesting in child, youth and family services in British Columbia*. Burnaby, B.C.: BCGEU, p. 1. Available at: <http://choosechildren.ca/>.

<sup>51</sup> British Columbia. (2014). *New staff, streamlined services to benefit at-risk kids*. News Release dated Nov. 6, 2014. Available at: <https://news.gov.bc.ca/stories/new-staff-streamlined-services-to-benefit-at-risk-kids>.

<sup>52</sup> MCFD. (2015). *MCFD Service Delivery Division: Preferential lateral transfer policy - hard to recruit and retain communities*.

<sup>53</sup> MCFD. (2014). *MCFD Workload: status and approach*. Nov. 6, 2014.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> MCFD. (2015). *Centralized Screening rolls out in the Kootenays and NorthEast BC*. Available at: <https://gwww.blog.gov.bc.ca/mcfd/centralized-screening-rolls-out-in-the-kootenays-and-northeast-bc/>.

## Other Staffing Issues at MCFD

MCFD also faces other staffing pressures. A recent ministry report indicates that approximately 70 per cent of its staff are social workers, with women accounting for more than 80 per cent of this workforce. This means that the ministry's fiscal responsibility for covering parental leaves is higher than any other ministry in the B.C. government. In addition, the entire workforce at MCFD is getting older. A recent MCFD report on voluntary exits states, "Over the past eight fiscal years, the length of service among front-line workers has shifted from a blend of new and experienced employees in 2006/07, to a workforce that is almost entirely comprised of veteran workers in 2013/14."<sup>56</sup> Despite this finding, younger workers were interviewed for this report. And as the Representative noted previously, these workers were often relying on the mentorship of an increasingly aging cohort of senior workers.

Cuts in staffing over time at MCFD, as well as workload and other staffing pressures, are reflected in MCFD's Work Environment Survey (WES) scores<sup>57</sup> and its Short-term Injury and Illness (STIIP) statistics. STIIP levels are also quite high at MCFD relative to government as a whole. MCFD's own documents report that the four-year average for STIIP usage across government is 8.9 days as of 2015, compared to MCFD at 12.8 days for 2014/15 and 13.3 in 2013/2014.<sup>58</sup>

Among other things, WES measures overall employee engagement. WES data shows MCFD's scores are lower than government as a whole, and were in decline up to 2013. In 2013, the average overall engagement score for all MCFD employees was 60 (out of a possible 100 points). The average score for the B.C. Public Service as a whole was 64. MCFD workers in front-line units showed higher than average scores for "job suitability" but lower than average scores on key issues such as stress and workload, professional development and organization satisfaction. In fact, the scores for individual front-line units vary significantly from one part of the province to another, suggesting that dissatisfaction with the workplace environment is not evenly distributed. WES also asks employees whether they believe that the previous WES results led to improvements in their current workplace. MCFD employees were particularly pessimistic, with just 13 per cent of respondents believing that workplace improvements had resulted from the WES and 60 per cent seeing no improvements at all.<sup>59</sup> Table 3 illustrates these trends.

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012 <sup>60</sup>	2013
<b>MCFD WES scores</b>	63	65	62	65	n/a	60
<b>BC Public Service WES scores</b>	66	68	64	65	n/a	64
<b>Average # of MCFD STIIP days used</b>	12	12.5	12.8	12.5	13.3	12.8

Source: BC Stats, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> MCFD. (2014). *Voluntary exits of frontline staff: Four key factors*. Victoria: MCFD, Strategic Human Resources, Workforce Planning and Analysis.

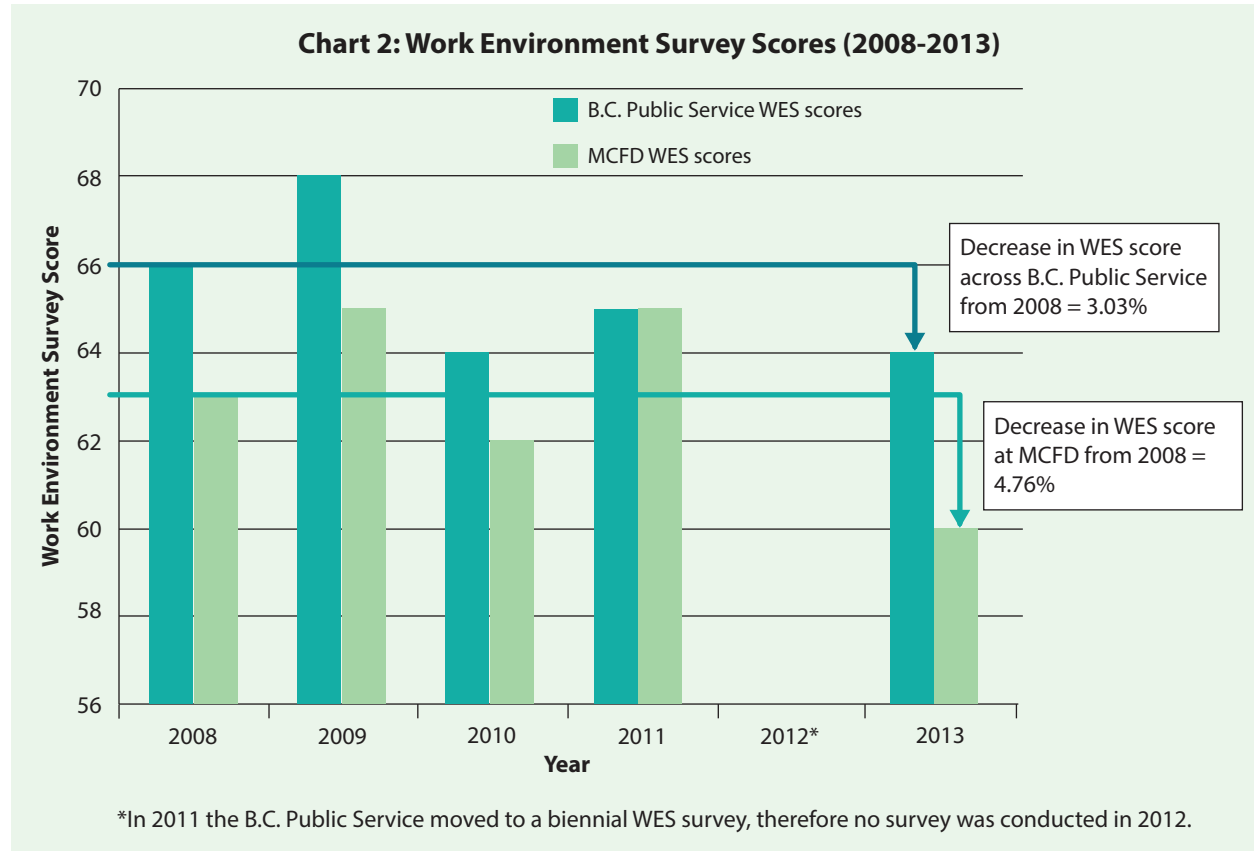
<sup>57</sup> The BC Public Service Work Environment Survey (WES) is carried out annually and is administered to all consenting Public Service employees across every department and ministry. WES is meant to measure employee engagement in the workplace and to identify areas for improvement.

<sup>58</sup> MCFD. (2015). *MCFD estimates binder, 3.11: Short-term injury and illness (STIIP) breakdown*. Note: Figures for government wide STIIP were reported for 2015 only.

<sup>59</sup> BC Stats. (2013). *Work environment survey: Exploring employee engagement in your organization (Children and Family Development)*.

<sup>60</sup> WES data is now collected every two years so no data is available for 2012.

Chart 2 shows how MCFD’s WES scores compare over time to the B.C. Public Service as a whole. The dip in scores in 2013 shows the effects of the MSS which slowed down the recruitment of new staff<sup>61</sup> to vacant positions, placing additional workload burdens on remaining staff.



### The Representative's Analysis of MCFD Staffing Data

To better understand how many social worker positions are filled at MCFD, an analysis was conducted on a set of ministry data about staff in Child Protection, Adoptions, Guardianship, Resources, and Team Leader/Supervisory positions – positions that provide direct services to children and families, as well as requiring delegation under the *CFCS Act* or *Adoption Act*. This analysis used MCFD’s “Macro” dataset, which holds staffing information on all ministry positions across the province. The database is updated monthly following discussions with managers about current staffing levels in their offices.

The Representative’s analysis identified that, as of June 2014, there were 1,495 social worker funded positions in child protection, guardianship, adoption, resources and supervisory/team Leader roles. Half of these positions were classified as child protection social workers, with supervisor/team leader positions

<sup>61</sup> BC Stats, 2013.



accounting for 14 per cent of the workforce.<sup>62</sup> Almost two-thirds of positions required the highest level of delegation (C6) under the *CFCS Act*. More than 90 per cent of these positions were full-time.

Results indicated that 154 front-line social worker positions were vacant, with 58 of these positions flagged to indicate that they might be filled in the future. In the remaining 96 cases, there was no indication that backfill would be provided. The majority of existing vacancies resulted from parental leave, short-term illness, long-term disability, temporary assignments, or staff secondment to a special project as illustrated by Table 4.

Leave Reason	Number of positions	% of total leaves
Maternal/Parental/ECC leave	28	29.2%
Temporary Assignment	16	16.7%
Special Project: ICM	12	12.5%
Short-Term Illness leave	11	11.4%
Long-Term Disability	11	11.4%
Secondment	6	6.3%
Other	12	12.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: RCY analysis of MCFD staffing data.

The Representative found that although 90 per cent of front-line social worker positions were filled as of June 2014, 10 per cent of positions remained unfilled.

Even when staff are absent from their positions because they are on leave, they often continue to draw a portion of their salary. Therefore, the ministry will never have enough funds in its existing budget to have all positions filled, even without issues of recruitment and retention. (For more information about the Representative's analysis of MCFD staffing data, see Appendix 8.)

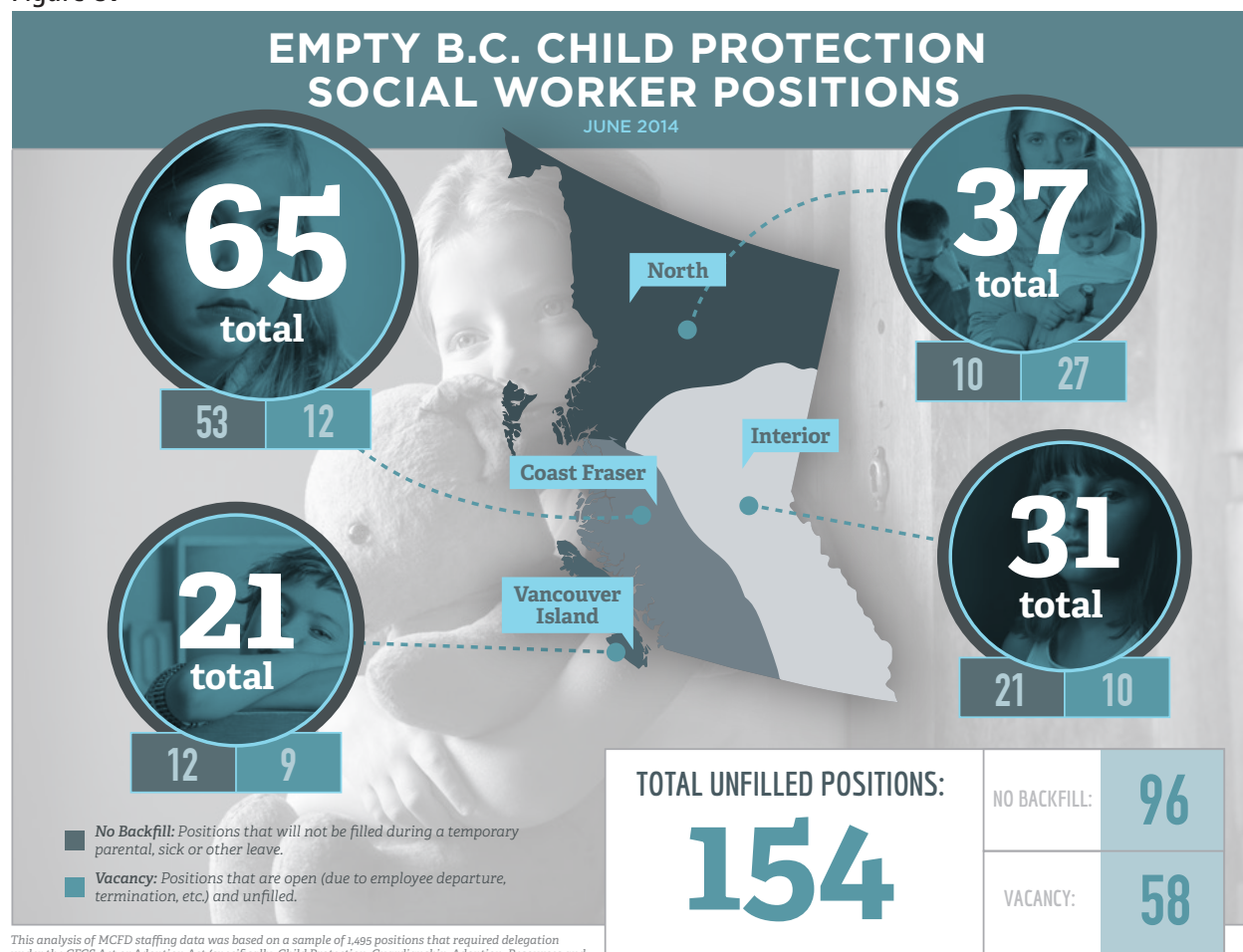
## Other Recruitment and Retention Issues at MCFD

Ministry documents show that MCFD has had a long-standing awareness of its recruitment problems. As far back as the early 2000s, the ministry was unable to fully fill all child protection positions.<sup>63</sup> MCFD documents from 2010 and 2011 note ongoing recruitment and retention problems particularly in rural and remote areas of the province. And in 2011, ministry documents announced a "planned staffing

<sup>62</sup> Please note that the total number of social workers in the Representative's analysis differs from the information provided by MCFD and reported on p. 28 of this report. MCFD data includes child protection, guardianship and multi-discipline workers but not adoptions, resource workers or team leaders/supervisors. The Representative's analysis of MCFD staffing data was based on sample of 1,495 positions that required delegation under the *CFCS Act* or *Adoption Act* and included a broader range of positions (Child Protection, Guardianship, Adoption, Resources and Team Leader/Supervisor positions).

<sup>63</sup> MCFD. (2010). *MCFD estimates binder 4.5 - Service pressures*. See also MCFD. (2011). *MCFD estimates binder 14.3: Recruitment child protection workers*; see also MCFD. (2014). *MCFD estimates binder: 2.11 - ministry recruitment*; MCFD. (2015). *MCFD estimates binder: 3.8 - ministry recruitment*; see also Perrin, 2006.

Figure 3:



strategy” to address recruitment and retention of front-line social workers. Despite these efforts, the number of front-line social workers dropped from 1,210 in 2011 to 1,111 in 2013.<sup>64</sup>

Recruiting for existing vacancies is essential in order to address the problem of understaffing; however, hiring new staff requires sustained attention to retaining those staff in the long-term. Failing to consider retention issues is akin to filling a bucket with water while ignoring a hole in the bottom. This issue is highlighted by MCFD’s own workforce reports. Despite hiring 310 auxiliary workers and 169 regular staff during the 2014/15 fiscal year, the resulting net increase in staff amounted to just 12 employees. Although workforce projections predicted that 297 exits would occur in 2014/15, the actual number was 333 and the majority of exits were in front-line social work and mental health positions. With many staff in front-line social work positions now becoming eligible for retirement, these numbers are unlikely to decline significantly over the next few years.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> MCFD. (2013). *MCFD estimates binder: 14.3 - recruitment child protection workers*.

<sup>65</sup> MCFD. (2015). *HR metrics: MCFD workforce reporting 2014/15 - fourth quarter*; MCFD (2014). *Voluntary exits of frontline staff - four key factors*.



A recent review of voluntary exits at the ministry found three important dynamics. First, younger employees are more likely to leave. In fact, the report found that employees with two to seven years of service are most likely to leave the ministry. Second, the longer a person has been with the ministry, the less likely he or she is to leave. The high rate of departures among younger workers at MCFD could potentially result in a lack of successor cohorts for the current group of staff, who tend on the whole to have many years of experience.

Third, offices in rural and remote areas are more likely to see voluntary employee exits. Employees in rural offices were 1.6 times more likely to voluntarily leave their positions than workers in urban offices. This means that SDAs with the highest number of rural offices have the most difficulty with retention of employees.<sup>66</sup>

As the MCFD report on voluntary exits notes, *“Regional attrition challenges will be felt even more acutely at the community level, as rural offices are typically small and geographically spread out. As a result, the departure of even a single staff member can have a considerable impact on the remaining team, as generally the work is redistributed amongst an already small group of staff members.”*<sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately, MCFD’s analysis of voluntary exits does not include data from exit interviews with departing staff, nor is it correlated with other measures such as WES scores from the relevant offices. The ministry’s initiative in creating the JWG committee with the BCGEU on recruitment and retention may address these concerns, but a fulsome strategy has yet to emerge from this group.

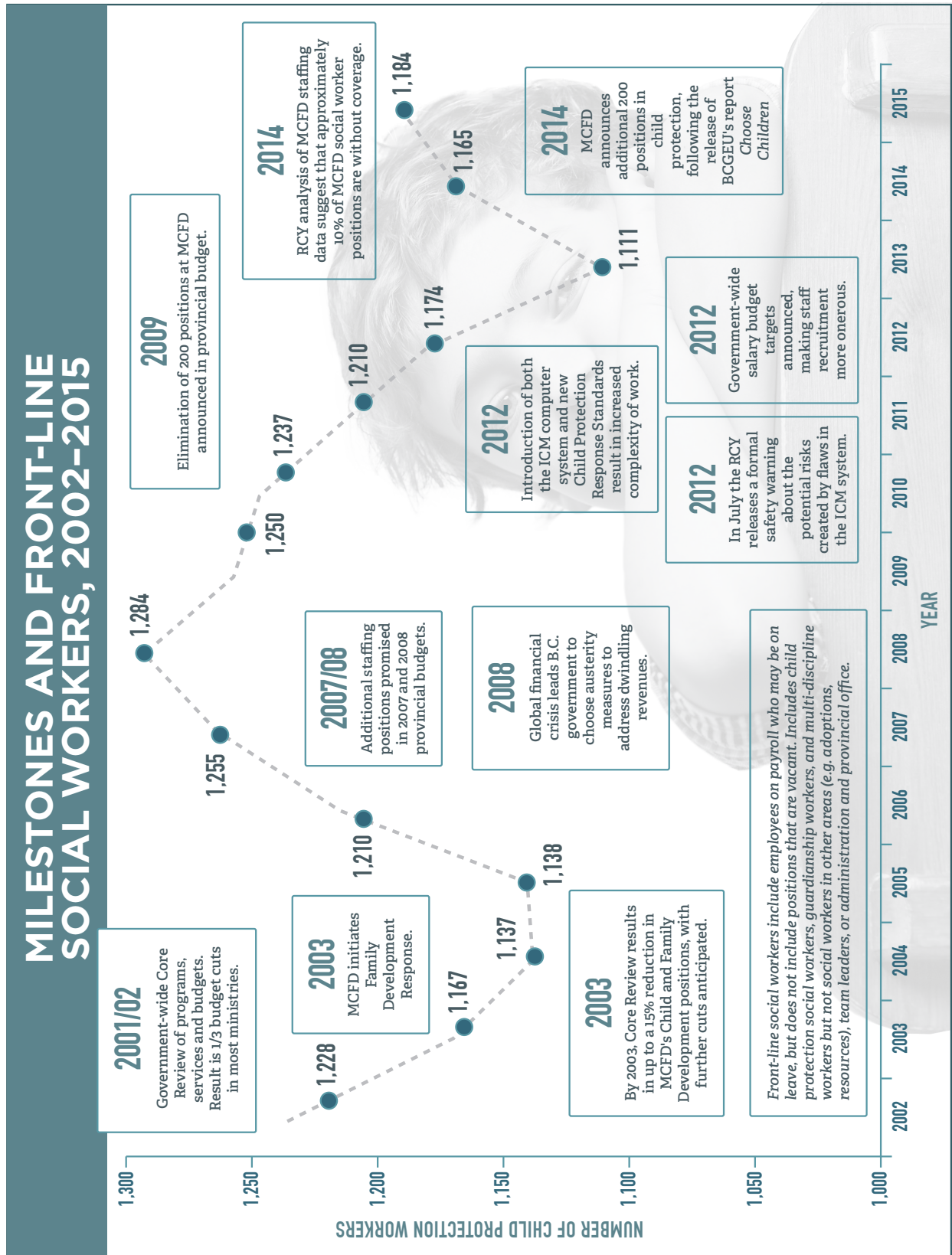
The ministry is working on building leadership capacity amongst its supervisors through involvement in monthly conference calls with senior leadership and a leadership development program. MCFD’s staff training and development team, which has focused on ICM training for the past number of years, will now offer a wider range of professional development and training opportunities. But given the ministry’s intention to re-design some of its business processes in child protection (see Appendix 7: *Building Blocks for Success*), it may be difficult to develop a clear picture of the immediate and future needs for supervisory and advanced practice skills. However, this should be a priority as the basis for developing the in-house learning/development strategy and liaison with educational institutions.

Taken together, this analysis of MCFD documents and data, much of which is publicly available, confirms that MCFD has a number of well-documented and long-standing staffing and budgeting issues including a decline in the number of child protection workers over time, long-term use of staffing vacancies to make ends meet, historical challenges with recruitment and retention and evidence from multiple sources that front-line staff are feeling disengaged from their workplace, taking higher than average sick leave, and quitting. These findings confirm what social workers told the Representative’s staff – that staffing resources at MCFD are not adequately matched to the demands of child protection work, nor are they adequate to meet the needs of vulnerable children.

<sup>66</sup> MCFD, 2014, *Voluntary exits of frontline staff - four key factors*.

<sup>67</sup> MCFD, 2014, *Northeast Service Delivery Area*, p. 13.

Figure 4:



Source: Staffing Numbers, MCFD. Dates as of Dec. 31st of each year with the exception 2015 — June 30. Text: MCFD documents requested and received by the RCY.

## Recommendations

### Recommendation 1

That the budget of the Ministry of Children and Family Development for fiscal year 2016/17 include a sufficient lift in funding to fully staff front-line child protection work, including full coverage for historical leave rates at MCFD.

MCFD operates as an essential service with regard to child welfare and safety and, therefore, understaffing is not a workable approach. In line with other essential, protective services, such as policing, and given this report's findings on staff turnover and leaves, the following should be implemented to ensure that front-line staff are fully available:

#### Details:

- MCFD's 2016/17 budget to reflect a staffing model of 120 per cent to ensure that front-line staff are fully available at all times.
- Staffing funds allocated in MCFD's budget are only expended for this purpose and not used to fund shortfalls in other areas.
- Budget lift for front-line child protection work to be sustained over time.

### Recommendation 2

That MCFD update its 10-year-old workload model to create a task-based model that reflects the considerable changes made over the years to practice, including practice standards and the introduction of the Integrated Case Management (ICM) system.

Workload models document the time spent, in actual working conditions, on all the tasks associated with child protection work. The most recent task-based workload model was developed in 2005. Given that workload is a continuing issue of concern for staff and management, the updated workload model should include:

- A zero-based workload model that looks at the actual tasks as currently performed.
- Tools and processes associated with practice standards to be reviewed as part of the workload model to ensure that a minimum number of processes are mandated to provide the best outcomes for children.
- Guidelines to be established about what constitutes appropriate clinical supervision, and time and task analysis of clinical supervision to be included in the workload model.
- Regular monitoring and updating of the workload model to be completed as required.
- MCFD to continue to meet with the B.C. Government and Service Employees' Union in the Joint Working Group in the spirit of co-operation.

Baseline to be established by June 30, 2016 and new workload model to be provided to the Representative by Dec. 31, 2016.

### Recommendation 3

That MCFD develop better tracking of Local Service Area and team performance and outcomes related to quality and timeliness of services to children and youth.

Many of the efforts made by MCFD in the area of quality assurance and quality improvements have focused on process improvements. Staff expressed concerns about the lack of equal attention to the quality of service delivered to children and families, including time for follow-up with families and effective clinical supervision and support.

#### Details:

- MCFD to continue to prioritize efforts to draw together the various sources of quality assurance data in the ministry.
- These efforts to be supplemented with data from ICM and other sources to identify problems with quality of services as well as key successes and to share these findings broadly within the ministry to encourage a climate of quality improvement.
- Guidelines to be established for clinical supervision and mentorship for social workers, not currently included in practice standards. As per Recommendation 2, time for clinical supervision to be included in the workload model.

MCFD to provide a report to the Representative on progress made on this recommendation by June 30, 2016.

### Recommendation 4

That MCFD take further steps to address recruitment and retention concerns by developing a regular, semi-annual report on the overall well-being of staff in each office, combining data on the ministry's Work Environment Survey (WES), Short-term Injury and Illness (STIIP) utilization, turnover and other measures that are available in the ministry.

Recruitment and retention is a serious issue in all child protection work, in all jurisdictions. Northern, isolated locations, Aboriginal and other populations, all add additional pressures to the need to attract and retain skilled staff. MCFD recognized the challenges and has taken steps to explore and address the concerns, including joint work with the BCGEU. However, additional work must be done.

#### Details:

- This data to be used to identify teams and offices with challenges, and appropriate supports to be put in place to increase staff capacity for these teams and offices.

First semi-annual report to be released by June 30, 2016.

## Recommendation 5

That MCFD and the B.C. Public Service Agency make the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff at MCFD a priority and set specific targets to reach this goal.

The child welfare system needs the unique insights and perspectives that Aboriginal social workers can bring to their practice, and, as the number of children in care of Aboriginal background is a majority, this imperative to diversify is clear.

### Details:

- Targeted efforts to increase Aboriginal representation of MCFD child protection social workers to a minimum of 15 per cent. A formal plan for recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff to be created with clear principles, goals, milestones and timelines for implementation. This plan should:
  - promote social work as a career choice, by supporting educational institutions to remove barriers to education through access programs and other initiatives
  - identify MCFD initiatives that can support and retain Aboriginal staff, particularly social workers, and that include clearly defined career paths
  - work with the B.C. Public Service Agency to promote the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal senior executive members at MCFD. As previously recommended in RCY's November 2014 report, *When Talk Trumped Service*, "At least one person on the senior executive team must be an Aboriginal person . . ."

MCFD to provide this plan to the Representative by April 30, 2016.

## Conclusion

It is clear that there is a mismatch between available staffing resources and the performance expectations placed on child protection social workers. Nearly nine years after the Hughes Review<sup>68</sup> identified staffing shortages as an issue for B.C.'s child protection system, the Representative is troubled to find that these same issues continue to have a direct impact on the safety and well-being of B.C.'s most vulnerable children and youth. The Office of the Representative for Children and Youth was created in 2007 following the Hughes Review and the Representative's reports since that time have shown that staffing issues at MCFD continue to be a concern. The Representative's 2014 *Lost in the Shadows* report described how chronic staffing shortages in one ministry office contributed to a tragedy for a vulnerable youth left without the supports she needed. This report again shines a spotlight on these concerns and shows that staffing issues remain widespread throughout the province.

The Representative is concerned about the current state of MCFD's front-line workforce and the impacts high workload and lack of staff are having on direct client service. Many families are not getting the services they need; nor are these services provided in a timely manner. With government's overall direction to balance the budget, the ministry has used workforce vacancies and recruitment lag as cost-saving

**The ministry has used workforce vacancies and recruitment lag as a cost-saving mechanism at the expense of services to vulnerable children, youth and families.**

mechanisms at the expense of services to vulnerable children, youth and families. This review illustrates how budget decisions over a long period of time, accompanied by a constantly changing technological and social work practice environment, have contributed to current staffing conditions in child protection work.

One of the exacerbating factors that accounts for high workloads is the long-term practice of not filling vacancies and leaves. For many years, regional managers at MCFD have been faced with a difficult reality; to ensure they stay within their allocated budgets they have "underburned" on salaries – meaning they cannot hire as many workers as they are allocated.

Child protection work is challenging and relies on highly trained and experienced professionals, working under difficult conditions. Low morale and relatively high rates of turnover exacerbate gaps in staffing – and this is particularly acute in remote and rural locations where offices are small, geographic coverage is large, and the temporary or permanent loss of a staff member has a major impact on colleagues' workloads. Any level of staffing will continue to be inadequate if turnover is high.

Findings from this review echo insights from the research literature on staffing in child welfare systems. Similar to other jurisdictions, B.C. social workers are faced with an overwhelming number of cases at the same time as there has been a tightening of provincial budgets. Social workers at the front line of child safety are feeling the pressure. Daily they experience the effects of constant staff turnover, lack of appropriate supervisory support, lack of perceived organizational support and increasing amounts of time spent on administrative duties. One of the most striking findings is the consistency with which social workers reported these concerns to the Representative's staff. Some social workers, particularly those located in rural areas, are carrying even greater burdens due to the combination of geography, high workloads and high staff turnover. Data from work environment surveys and analysis of sick leaves

<sup>68</sup> Hughes, E.N. (2006). *BC Children and Youth Review: An Independent Review of B.C.'s Child Protection System*. April 7, 2006. Ministry of Children and Family Development.



confirms what workers said – these conditions are having a detrimental effect on the morale and health of these workers.

But government has yet to reconcile this reality with its budgeting processes to ensure that leaves are adequately resourced. The Representative's analysis suggests that, because of leaves, vacancies and sick time, at any given time approximately 90 per cent of the allocated workforce, at most, is on the job. Some offices have historically operated with even fewer staff. To ensure that all positions are covered, MCFD would need to adopt a practice of over-hiring staff to ensure it can maintain required levels of coverage.

The Representative acknowledges that during the last year, MCFD has moved forward with initiatives to address staffing issues on the front lines, including a commitment to add 200 staff. As of July 2015, MCFD indicated that of these 200 positions, approximately 130 will be assigned to child protection duties and the remainder will be allocated to a new province-wide centralized screening call centre that began its first phase of operations in July 2015. MCFD has also undertaken a process to more equitably allocate resources amongst SDAs to ensure that services are equivalent across the province. However, the Representative remains concerned that 200 positions will not adequately address all challenges. As illustrated earlier in this report, MCFD experiences difficulties recruiting and retaining staff for its current positions, which can undercut efforts to hire more child protection workers.

It is clear from research evidence that careful methods must be used to assess how much time it actually takes to deliver quality services. While recent changes at MCFD are certainly a move in the right direction, the allocation of staffing resources is based on currently existing workloads and business practices, all of which are undergoing constant change and have not been fully analyzed. Nor has the potential negative impact on children and families been addressed by these efforts.

Tremendous changes in performance expectations and systems to support these expectations have occurred since the ministry's last workload model was originally developed in 1994 and updated in 2005. Over the past decade, staffing changes and adjustments have been largely incremental, based on the need to reduce, add or re-deploy staff in response to budget concerns. While recent efforts to address staffing levels shows that MCFD understands workload as a significant issue, the Representative is concerned that there is no transparent analysis of workload that accounts for all tasks to be completed across all elements of case management. Nor does the current MCFD workload model account for the time needed to build relationships with families and children, or the time it takes to complete tasks (in real work conditions); and the likely distribution of tasks in response to different external issues such as poverty, and geographical differences. A model that accounts for these issues would establish a reference against which workload grievances, staff performance and staffing requirements could be developed. Such a workload model could be used as baseline against which to effectively measure the impact of business process changes such as centralization of services, and from which a picture of staffing adequacy could be developed.

The Representative also acknowledges that MCFD has worked with the BCGEU to improve its hiring processes, and has renewed its focus on recruitment as well as employee engagement. But as the introduction to this report illustrates, high workloads and lack of staffing stem from longer-term systemic issues at the ministry, including significant underfunding of child protection responsibilities. This reality is evident in the fact that, while the number of ministry child protection workers has fluctuated over the last 13 years, there has not been a meaningful increase in staff that could realistically meet child safety needs in B.C. In fact, as of June 2015, there are fewer front-line child protection social workers than there were in 2002.

## Conclusion

Perhaps the most concerning finding of this review is the lack of adherence to MCFD's standards by front-line social workers. MCFD's current child protection policies and standards are meant to ensure reports of child safety concerns are addressed in a thorough and timely manner and in such a way that the safety needs of children are addressed. But social workers and team leaders repeatedly reported that deadlines for completion of work set by the ministry routinely fall away in the face of overwhelming workloads.

Across all offices represented in this review, workers told us that it is simply impossible to finish all the required assessments and paperwork when faced with an incoming stream of new reports of child safety concerns. This finding cannot be attributed to just a few social workers. The number of child safety incidents still open at six months and even at a year confirms what workers told the Representative's staff, as do the publicly available audits conducted by MCFD. Workers also repeatedly said that child protection standards, while very necessary and sensible, increase the complexity of their work.

The role of child protection standards is to support social workers in providing excellent service and to ensure that child safety concerns are resolved in a timely manner. From what workers have told the Representative's staff, it appears that standards are doing the opposite of what they are meant to accomplish.

Workers repeatedly told the Representative's staff that the standards get in the way of one of the cornerstones of effective social work – constructive relationships with family members and with other professionals. Constructive relationships take time to build, but the demands of workloads often undermine the ability of staff to develop these relationships.

A child protection complaint is potentially a signal that earlier systems of intervention and support have failed. The child welfare system as a whole includes services in areas such as health, education and social assistance, as well as the economic contexts set by fiscal policy. These areas, too, need to be aware of the impact that policy and program changes will have on child welfare. For example, cuts to family support programs take away a potential early intervention that might reduce the likelihood of later, more severe, problems for a family. However, policy making and budgeting tend to be done on a ministry-by-ministry basis, even for issues which cut across many mandates.

The B.C. government has not made the necessary budgetary commitments that would see staffing matched to the increasing demands of child protection work. In fact, workers said that, between lack of staff and the increasing demands of child protection work, they have less time to spend with children and families – time where families, together with social workers, could address the deeper issues that lead to child safety concerns. As many workers said, families do not get what they need. In turn, the overwhelming range of responsibilities carried by team leaders means they do not have the time to provide important clinical supervision that would help workers improve and deepen their practice with children and families.

The ministry is careful to note that the number of children in care has decreased since 2001, while at the same time suggesting that fewer social workers are needed. The findings of this review show that efforts by MCFD to clearly identify child protection standards and to focus the work of child protection social workers on a Family Development Response results in more work as professionals endeavour to engage and assist families who are already in distress.

MCFD's own documents suggest a disturbing contradiction: While workers routinely cannot meet standards, the ministry continues to express the view that children are still safe. The constant impact of understaffing, lack of coverage for leaves, and increases in complexity of work without appropriate systemic adjustment and management of workload has had a direct impact on child safety and the ability to meet legislative and policy timelines. Intakes do not get a timely response; files are "open" beyond timelines and the statutory timelines in the *CFCS Act* are more disregarded than observed.

The Guiding Principles and the Best Interests of the Child spelled out in the *CFCS Act* (specifically S.2(g) and 4(g)) commit government to making timely decisions related to children. The findings of this review clearly confirm that these commitments to children are not being met.

How does this impact children when abuse and neglect issues have been reported to MCFD? It means a slower response, a sporadic response, and many instances where the work is not being done according to standards and localized "sub-standard" practices have taken hold. This is a child safety system in crisis, and a workforce poorly coordinated and not expected to accommodate standards as a matter of course.

The ministry describes its workload and staffing issues as a problem of inequity in the distribution of child protection staffing resources across its SDAs, leading to unequal levels of service across the province. The findings of the Representative's review suggest, however, that this is just one piece of the picture. Without additional resources overall to address staffing levels, deeper systemic issues with recruitment, retention and overall staffing levels will not be resolved.

The Representative will continue to monitor MCFD's new staffing initiatives, including the addition of new front-line workers, the centralized screening project and the ministry's efforts to address recruitment and retention issues.

As of yet, the ministry has not received any new funding to hire social workers, and has instead found the funds to hire additional workers within its existing budget. Without additional funds, the ministry has limited capacity to make the child-serving system more responsive to the needs of the children and families it serves. Government as a whole must make a much more sustained and deeper commitment to improve MCFD's staffing situation and thereby ensure adequate child safety services are available.

The Representative calls upon government to quickly, effectively and efficiently address the problems identified in this review, and to report publicly on how this will be accomplished. Immediate steps are necessary to keep children and youth safe by supporting the front-line staff who are currently overwhelmed by a lack of adequate staffing to address their workload.

Sustained efforts are also required to improve the recruitment and retention of social workers. Only with attention to these issues will social workers be able to adequately address the safety of B.C.'s most vulnerable children and youth.

## Glossary

**After Hours Service:** A service provided outside of normal business hours where social workers respond to emergency calls involving child protection, services to children in care, services to youth and families, community living and other MCFD programs.

**C5 Delegation:** Social workers with a C5 delegation (Partial Child Protection) are able to provide support services for families, facilitate voluntary care and special needs agreements, and establish residential resources for children in care. In addition, they have the authority to carry out guardianship responsibilities for children and youth in continuing custody and have limited child protection authority. C5 workers usually act under the supervision of fully delegated (C6) practitioners until they display the required competence to assume full child protection duties.

**C6 Delegation:** Only social workers with a C6 delegation can assume the full range of child protection responsibilities, including: receiving, assessing and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect; deciding on the most appropriate course of action if a child is deemed in need of protection; removing the child and placing the child in care if necessary; obtaining court orders or taking other measures to ensure the ongoing safety and well-being of the child.

**Caseload:** The actual number of active files or cases assigned to a social worker at a given point in time.

**Child, Family and Community Service Act (CFCS Act):** Legislation enacted in 1996 governing child protection in British Columbia.

**Child Protection Social Worker:** A child protection social worker collects information, responds to child protection reports, conducts FDRs and investigations, removes children if needed, attends court, works with families, and plans for the return of children or for continuing custody.

**Child or Youth in Care:** A child or youth who is in the custody, care or guardianship of a Director (*CFCS Act*) or the Director of Adoption (*Adoption Act*).

**Collateral Check:** In determining the best approach to addressing the safety and well-being of a child or youth, and in ensuring families receive the services they need to care safely for their children, child protection workers establish and maintain contact with collateral sources of information who have significant knowledge about the child, youth and/or family.

**Delegated Aboriginal Agency (DAA):** Through delegation agreements, the Provincial Director of Child Welfare gives authority to Aboriginal agencies, and their employees, to undertake administration of all or parts of the *CFCS Act*. The amount of responsibility assumed by each agency is the result of negotiations between the ministry and the Aboriginal community served by the agency, and the level of delegation provided by the Director.

**Family Development Response (FDR):** The preferred approach when the alleged incident involving the child/youth is of lower severity and when parents are able and willing to participate in collaborative assessment and planning. FDR involves family members in the response process and builds on their strengths in order to safely care for the child/youth.

**Family Plan:** Participants in the Family Plan process work to develop a plan that will address the identified needs of the child. The family identifies solutions to the issues presented and documents their proposed approach. The plan may include provision of services to support and assist the family and to make the family safe for the child.

- Family Case Planning Conference (FCPC):** A strengths-based, solution-focused process to provide families with input into planning for their children. These are effective in creating interim or short-term plans and in generating an understanding of next steps. The process is used for planning at the initial stages of ministry involvement, while waiting for a Family Group Conference and in situations of family or parent/teen conflict.
- Full Time Equivalent (FTE):** Standardized unit used to indicate the workload of someone who is employed in the workforce. 1.0 FTE equates to full-time employment, while 0.5 FTE is the equivalent of a half-time position.
- Generalist Teams:** Teams of social workers who investigate child welfare reports, are involved with ongoing family services and guardianship services, and may assist with residential resources or adoptions.
- Hughes Review:** In 2006, the Honourable Ted Hughes conducted an independent review of B.C.'s child protection system. The review contained 62 recommendations for changes to the child welfare system, including the creation of the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth.
- Incident:** An incident is a report of a child safety concern. Social workers screen all reported incidents to determine whether the report requires a protection or non-protection response. Social workers conduct an assessment of the report immediately if the child/youth appears to be in a life-threatening or dangerous situation. In all other cases, an assessment takes place within 24 hours of receiving the report.
- Integrated Case Management System (ICM):** Computerized system designed to assist social workers to record assessments and other tools completed in the course of a child protection investigation.
- Intake:** A process by which child protection reports and requests for service are introduced into a ministry office. Child Protection Response standards provide guidelines for how these reports are to be handled.
- Investigation Response:** Child protection workers use investigations to respond to screened-in child protection reports that meet the following criteria: the circumstances involve severe physical abuse or severe neglect; the parent(s) are unable or unwilling to participate in collaborative assessment and planning; or there is an open case on the family and at least one child/youth is out of the home due to protection reasons.
- Managed Staffing Strategy (MSS):** A plan introduced by the B.C. government in 2012 to curtail spending on staffing. In the case of MCFD, since November 2013, all internal and external hiring must be approved by MCFD executive and only positions that deliver critical front-line services, protect the health and safety of citizens or meet an urgent government priority are filled.
- Mobile Response Team:** A roster of MCFD staff that can be deployed to social worker offices in communities that find themselves under-staffed (due to issues such as staff illness, vacations or recruitment/delegation lag times).
- Non-Protection Response:** When a report/incident of child safety concerns is screened by a social worker as requiring one of the following responses: no further action, referral to community support services, voluntary services or youth service response.
- Protection Response:** This may involve an FDR, a youth service response or an investigation. This determination must be made within five calendar days after receiving the child safety report.
- Prior Contact Check:** Carried out in the initial stages of a Child Protection Response to help identify immediate family members and highlight any past involvement in child protection services.

**Representative for Children and Youth:** In May 2006, B.C. passed the *Representative for Children and Youth Act*, establishing the Legislative Assembly's authority to appoint a new officer of the Legislature as the Representative for Children and Youth. The RCY supports young people and their families in dealing with the provincial child welfare system, provides oversight to this system and makes recommendations to improve it. The Representative is a non-partisan, independent officer of the Legislature, reporting directly to the Legislative Assembly.

**Safety Assessment/Safety Plan:** The purpose of the safety assessment is to assess whether a child is likely to be in immediate danger of serious harm/maltreatment and to determine what interventions should be initiated or maintained to provide appropriate protection. A safety plan is required to systematically describe interventions and facilitate follow-through.

**Structured Decision Making (SDM) Screening:** The process by which social workers responding to child protection reports assess areas of concern systematically and in a standardized manner.

**Service Delivery Areas (SDAs):** Child welfare services are delivered by MCFD in B.C. across 13 Service Delivery Areas. Each SDA is further divided into Local Services Areas (LSAs). There are 47 LSAs in total.

**Strengths and Needs Assessment:** A clinical instrument that assists the child protection worker to identify the presence of parent and child strengths and resources, as well as to identify the needs of family members. This allows the worker to consistently and systematically collect information in an objective format and supports the development of a family plan.

**Team Leader:** A supervisor of a team of social workers.

**Triage:** A system where child protection staff gather and document initial information pertinent to an incident report, assess the safety of the child/youth who is the subject of the report, and determine whether further action is warranted to ensure their well-being.

**Voluntary Services:** Preventive and support services offered to children/youth and their families on a voluntary basis, including: mental health, education and ancillary services; residential resources, support to assist in the resolution of family disputes; voluntary care agreements; and special needs agreements.

**Vulnerability Assessment:** The process by which a child protection worker determines the likelihood of future child maltreatment within a family setting. This involves the use of clinical skills to engage the family, relying on the worker's judgment to analyze the information collected from the family, collaterals and previous child welfare history.

**Workload:** The amount of time that must be devoted to various tasks (visiting families, interviewing children, completing assessment tools, documenting work processes, etc.) to respond to reports of child safety concerns regardless of the complexity of cases.

**Youth:** A person is considered a youth under the *CFCS Act* if he or she is 16 years of age or older but younger than 19 years of age.

**Youth Service Response:** A differential response to youth in need of assistance that involves screening, assessment, short-term planning and utilization of youth support services, such as youth-family mediation, mentorship, safe housing and outreach services. A youth services response may also provide comprehensive longer-term service planning for a youth receiving services for mental health issues, or receiving services through a youth agreement.



## Appendix 1: Child Protection Worker/ Social Worker and Team Leader Job Descriptions<sup>69</sup>

Title: CHILD PROTECTION WORKER

Classification: SOCIAL PROGRAM OFFICER 24 (Child Protection) Growth Series

### Job Overview

*To provide child protection services to children and families in a community.*

### Accountabilities

Required:

- Receives, assesses and responds to concerns of child abuse and neglect by interviewing parents, children and youth, assessing strengths and needs, inquiring with appropriate agencies developing safety plans, and determining if children or youth are in need of protection. Subsequent actions may include referrals to community services, offering voluntary support services, providing ongoing support services or more intrusive actions that involve moving the child to an in care or out of care placement and/or court processes.
- Works respectfully and collaboratively with Aboriginal communities and other cultural communities to support children, youth and families.
- Collaboratively develops and implements plans by identifying client needs, establishing long and short term goals and resources to support the children and families.
- Ensures the ongoing management of cases by monitoring progress towards goals, coordinating services, consulting with other service providers, examining the terms of the contract and making referrals to other agencies.
- Prepares documentation for court, files documents and ensures legislative requirements are addressed and timelines for serving notice follow the Rules of Court.
- Prepares clients for court by explaining the purpose, ensuring client has access to legal counsel, informing the clients of other witnesses and explaining expected court behaviour and appearance.
- Prepares and presents evidence for Family Court, determines admissible evidence, instructs legal counsel regarding the type of court order sought, prepares for hearing, negotiates times and witnesses for hearing and presents testimony.
- Facilitates alternative processes for dispute resolution. Collaboratively engages families in determining appropriate processes (e.g. family group conference, mediation etc) then arrange, implement and participate in the selected process; assess and ensure that the resulting plan addresses child safety.
- Acts as the legal guardian of children in care by assessing the child's strengths and needs regarding permanency, identity, placement, health, legal, education/social recreational activities and self-care/independence skills.
- Develops Family Plans with the purpose of reuniting the child with the family, and/or develops an alternate permanency plan for the child/youth. Coordinates and monitors any community service for the family.

<sup>69</sup> B.C. Public Service Agency job descriptions.

## Appendices

- Provides services to the family such as assistance with parenting skills or preparing parents for adoption placement.
- Authorizes expenditures for support services to families.
- Work with/support families facing challenges which may occasionally involve exposure to unpleasant dealings with angry, abusive, or abused clients; exposure to hazards from frequently working around volatile parents and/or children in crisis.

## Job Requirements

Education and related experience:

- Bachelors of Social Work, or Masters in Social Work, or Bachelors of Art in Child and Youth Care, or Masters in Educational Counselling/Masters Clinical Psychology with completion of a practicum in family and child welfare.
- Preference may be given to applicants with previous recent work experience (within last 5 years) in Child Protection.
- Preference may be given to applicants with the Child Welfare Specialization from an accredited British Columbia university and who have completed their practicum in a child welfare setting.

Note:

- Completion of a practicum in family and child welfare occurs in an agency/organization where a student had the opportunity to practice assessing the needs of children and families in order to develop and provide intervention services to the children and/or families.
- If your degree was obtained outside of Canada, you need to confirm it has been assessed for equivalency through the International Credential Evaluation Services. Confirmation for equivalency of your degree is required for you to be considered. Please indicate in your resume if you have this equivalency, proof of equivalency must be attached to your application. If you are in the process of equivalency review, proof must be provided on or by the closing date of the competition.

Required:

Successful completion of security screening requirements of the BC Public Service; which includes a Criminal Record Check and a *Criminal Records Review Act (CRRA)* check.

Knowledge, skills and abilities:

- Strong understanding of social, economic, political and historical concerns in aboriginal communities.
- Knowledge of issues and challenges of working in a child safety environment.
- Knowledge of key issues affecting delivery of services in multicultural environment.
- Knowledge of Aboriginal issues as they relate to child welfare.
- Ability to provide high level of care, guidance and support to children, youth, caregivers and families.
- Ability to handle crisis and crisis intervention.
- Ability to handle unpleasant and emotionally charged situations.
- Ability to work under stress/pressure.

- Ability to communicate in an appropriate manner orally and in writing.
- Ability to effectively use standard computer applications.

Willingness statements:

- Must possess and maintain a valid BC class 5 driver's licence.
- May be required to use own vehicle on an expense account basis.
- Travel is a requirement, must be willing to travel regularly, this may include travelling in winter road conditions to remote locations.
- May be required to work evening/weekends.
- May be exposed to unpleasant dealings in emotionally charged situations.

Competencies:

- **Listening, Understanding and Responding** is the desire and ability to understand and respond effectively to other people from diverse backgrounds. It includes the ability to understand accurately and respond effectively to spoken and unspoken or partly expressed thoughts, feelings and concerns of others. People who demonstrate high levels of this competency show a deep and complex understanding of others, including cross-cultural sensitivity.
- **Information Seeking** is driven by a desire to know more about things, people or issues. It implies going beyond the questions that are routine or required in the job. It may include “digging” or pressing for exact information; resolution of discrepancies by asking a series of questions; or less-focused environmental “scanning” for potential opportunities or miscellaneous information that may be of future use.
- **Planning, Organizing and Coordinating** involves proactively planning, establishing priorities and allocating resources. It is expressed by developing and implementing increasingly complex plans. It also involves monitoring and adjusting work to accomplish goals and deliver to the organization's mandate.
- **Self Control** is the ability to keep one's emotions under control and restrain negative actions when provoked, faced with opposition or hostility from others, or when working under stress. It also includes the ability to maintain stamina under continuing stress.
- **Conflict Management (Reduces and Resolves Conflict in a Proactive Manner)** involves working to resolve conflict when the conflict directly impacts on the achievement of work objectives. Anticipates and takes action to mitigate/reduce potential conflict management and to reduce and resolve conflict at the outset, by encouraging continued, open, two-way communications.
- **Analytical Thinking** is the ability to comprehend a situation by breaking it down into its components and identifying key or underlying complex issues. It implies the ability to systematically organize and compare the various aspects of a problem or situation, and determine cause-and-effect relationships (“if...then...”) to resolve problems in a sound, decisive manner. Checks to ensure the validity or accuracy of all information.
- **Cultural Agility (Aboriginal Relations Competency)** is the ability to work respectfully, knowledgeable and effectively with Aboriginal people. It is noticing and readily adapting to cultural uniqueness in order to create a sense of safety for all. It is the capacity to relate to or allow for differing cultural perspectives and being willing to experience a personal shift in perspective.

## Team Leader

JOB TITLE: Team Leader, Integrated	CURRENT CLASSIFICATION/GRID: SPO 28	CHIPS #: various
JOB TITLE OF IMMEDIATE SUPERVISOR: Community Services Manager	SUPERVISOR'S CLASS/GRID: Business Leadership Role	CHIPS #: various
BRANCH: Child, Family & Community Services	DIVISION: various	LOCATION: various

### Purpose of unit:

The family and child team leader is directly accountable for the quality of service to clients accessing their team and for setting and monitoring standards on interdisciplinary practice.

### Purpose of job:

The family and child team leader reports to the community services manager. This position has authority, accountability and responsibility to plan, develop, manage, coordinate and evaluate the delivery of integrated initiatives and services within the context of an interdisciplinary service team.

The team leader has broad responsibilities to work with diverse community partners with respect to the delivery of a range of services within each district, and is pivotal in establishing and implementing the multidisciplinary approach in service delivery. This position will provide direction, leadership and support to staff within these teams, including youth justice program for professional and integrated services delivery, and must ensure adequate clinical support is provided as well as a broad range of staff training and development.

The team leader must take direct responsibility for ensuring case management practices are current and meet required service levels and standards. The position is also responsible for managing all contracts in the district, as designated by the community services manager.

### Job duties and tasks:

1. Directs and monitors the integration and delivery of all ministry services within an assigned district by:
  - providing leadership which will create a well motivated interdisciplinary team capable of providing and developing high standards of performance;
  - ensuring the delivery of ministry services is coordinated, comprehensive and in keeping with regional goals of a multidisciplinary approach;
  - planning, implementing and managing the delivery of a multidisciplinary team approach to ministry programs and services in accordance with legislation and regulations, regional and central agency directives and ministry policy;
  - establishing and/or implementing systems to monitor, review and evaluate standards of practice and effectiveness, efficiency and economy of programs and services within the context of the service delivery team;
  - preparing, allocating and controlling budgets assigned to the team level to ensure the most effective use of resources, and negotiates and/or approves case specific contracts;

- providing and ensuring the complaint process is followed when clients are in disagreement with ministry decisions; and
  - having formal accountability for a local budget, spending authority.
2. Supervises, trains and recruits staff by:
- relaying interpretations and instructions to team members on the intent of policy, ministry mandate, philosophy, Acts, regulations and procedures;
  - identifying training needs to ensure team members acquire the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to work effectively within the multidisciplinary delivery teams;
  - directing/coordinating the provision of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary case management process;
  - establishing and communicating performance expectations to team members and evaluating these expectations annually or as indicated by performance;
  - modeling expected behaviors and attitudes; and
  - will sit in on counselling sessions with clients either by:
    - carrying a caseload on high risk cases;
    - sitting with and assisting subordinate Social Workers on difficult cases.
3. Oversees the operation of the Team by:
- assisting/directing the supervision of administrative support to the Team;
  - coordinating administrative details among all service employer groups, e.g. leave management, backfill support, hours operation, work schedules, etc.
4. Participates in area and regional planning and management by:
- interfacing with other personnel to ensure integration and coordination of overall services to clients;
  - identifying trends, needs and issues, developing plans or recommendations for initiative to address them, and in conjunction with any and all Advisory Committees, monitors and evaluates the effectiveness, appropriateness and adequacy of programs and policies at the local level;
  - preparing, presenting and defending budgetary needs, and makes recommendations to the Community Services Manager or the Associate Community Services Manager in the development of long-range goals for the region,
  - attending and contributing to area and regional planning and management committees;
  - providing input or recommending changes to existing or proposed programs, policies, procedures and systems.
5. Promotes public awareness and involvement in ministry service delivery by:
- assisting in the establishment of a community advisory/consultative process to provide meaningful input into the evaluation, development and conduct of ministry services by members of the community both individual and institutional;
  - liaises with other provincial, federal and municipal agencies, and special interest groups in local area;

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- conducting public speaking engagements to enhance the profile of the ministry within the community;
- establishing relationships with community partners, provincial, federal and nongovernmental agencies to enhance the delivery of services to children and families seeking service through their respective ministry of Children and Families Development office;
- assisting the community to build on its inherent strengths to better service the needs of its members.

### 6. Other related duties:

In smaller offices, the Team Leader may be required to:

- assume responsibility for and perform casework
- do on-call after hours work

### 7. Performs other duties as designated by the Manager.

## Staffing Criteria

### Education and Related Experience:

- Minimum of Bachelor's Degree in Social Work or BA in Child and Youth Care (4 years related experience) or equivalent Bachelor or Masters degree (3 years related experience) in the social sciences (e.g., Masters of Counselling or Masters of Ed. Counselling and a practicum in child welfare is required with these Masters/ MA Clinical Psychology.)

**NOTE:** If your degree was obtained outside of Canada, you need to confirm it has been assessed for equivalency through the International Credential Evaluation Services. Confirmation for equivalency for your degree is required for you to be considered. Please indicate in your resume (cut and paste a copy of the approval. If in progress proof must be provided on or by the closing date of the competition).

**NOTE:** As the duties of this position meet the requirements of a *Criminal Record and Criminal Record Review Act (CRRRA)*, and a police checks must be completed with a satisfactory outcome.

- Internal applicants must have C6 Child Welfare Delegation
- External applicants must be eligible for full Child Welfare Delegation (if you are in another province you must be immediately eligible for registration).
- Three (3) years (Bachelor 4 years) previous work experience in child protection and/or protective family services.
- Two (2) years previous supervisory experience is required; preference may be given to applicants with recent (within the last 3 years) supervisory experience of Child Protection workers.
- Preference may be given to applicants with experience working Aboriginal people.

### Proviso:

- Must have full delegation (C6) or eligible to obtain full Child Welfare Delegation



### Skills and Abilities:

- Leadership and supervisory skills and ability to coordinate a multi-disciplinary team.
- Organizational and planning skills.
- Interpersonal and communication skills.
- Ability to manage staff, budget, contracts and allocation of resources.
- The successful applicant will have exemplary leadership skills, as well as demonstrated ability to mentor/orient Child Protection Workers (existing and new).
- Demonstrated ability to effectively manage the areas of personnel and work performance.
- The position requires proven demonstrated abilities to develop team cohesion and the ability to implement specialized child and youth mental health programs.
- Applicants must be able to demonstrate their ability to successfully engage in community development activities with contracted agencies, service partners, schools and other MCFD teams.

### Knowledge:

- in-depth knowledge of policies, procedures, social work principles and practices
- knowledge of relevant legislation, policies, ministry programs and standards of practice

### Behavioral Competencies:

**Cultural Agility** is the ability to work respectfully, knowledgeably and effectively with Aboriginal people. It is noticing and readily adapting to cultural uniqueness in order to create a sense of safety for all. It is openness to unfamiliar experiences, transforming feelings of nervousness or anxiety into curiosity and appreciation. It is examining one's own culture and worldview and the culture of the BC Public Service, and to notice their commonalities and distinctions with Aboriginal cultures and worldviews. It is recognition of the ways that personal and professional values may conflict or align with those of Aboriginal people. It is the capacity to relate to or allow for differing cultural perspectives and being willing to experience a personal shift in perspective.

**Self-Discovery and Awareness** means understanding one's thoughts, feelings, values and background and how they impact the success of the interaction and relationship, or how they may influence one's work. It is recognizing one's own biases by tracing them to their origins, through reflection and by noticing one's own behaviour – and then intentionally seeking a way forward that positively impacts the interaction and relationship. It means maintaining new ways of thinking and acting when situations become difficult or uncertain, or in times of urgency.

**Self-Control** is the ability to keep one's emotions under control and restrain negative actions when provoked, faced with opposition or hostility from others, or when working under stress. It also includes the ability to maintain stamina under continuing stress.

**Information Seeking** is driven by a desire to know more about things, people or issues. It implies going beyond the questions that are routine or required in the job. It may include “digging” or pressing for exact information; resolution of discrepancies by asking a series of questions; or less-focused environmental “scanning” for potential opportunities or miscellaneous information that may be of future use.

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**Leadership** implies a desire to lead others, including diverse teams. Leadership is generally, but not always, demonstrated from a position of formal authority. The “team” here should be understood broadly as any group with which the person interacts regularly.

**Planning, Organizing and Coordinating** involves proactively planning, establishing priorities and allocating resources. It is expressed by developing and implementing increasingly complex plans. It also involves monitoring and adjusting work to accomplish goals and deliver to the organization’s mandate.

**Expertise** includes the motivation to expand and use technical knowledge or to distribute work-related knowledge to others.

### Willingness Statements:

- You must possess and maintain a valid B.C. Class 5 driver’s licence (note - if you currently have valid driver’s in Canada, and if you are the successful applicant you must acquire a valid B.C. driver’s Class 5 driver’s licence immediately). May be required to use own vehicle on an expense account basis.
- May be required to use own vehicle (with appropriate insurance coverage) on an expense account basis.
- May be required to work flexible hours including evenings/weekends.
- May be required to travel to remote communities in (reasonable) weather conditions.

## Appendix 2: Demographic Information About Social Worker/Team Leader Interviewees

Position	Number	Delegation level C6	Average years of service as team lead	Average years on current team	Average years with C6 delegation
Team Leaders	17	17	6 (Median = 5)	4 (Median = 2)	6*

\*One team leader did not reply

Position	Number	Delegation level C6	Average years of service at MCFD	Average years with C6 delegation
Social Workers	34	32*	5 (Median = 3)	7** (Median = 5)

\*Two social workers reported having a C5 delegation.

\*\*Range = 1 month to 17.5 years; 8 social workers had been fully delegated for less than a year (approximately 25% of the sample).

Gender	Social Workers		Team Leaders	
	Number	%	Number	%
Women	26	76%	13	76%
Men	8	24%	4	24%

Education Level/Type – Social Workers	
Education	N
BA	3
BSW	19
BSc	1
MA	1
MSW	1
BA Child and Youth Care	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>

Education Level/Type – Team Leaders	
Education	N
BA	2
BSW	11
MA	1
MSW	1
BA Child and Youth Care	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>

## Appendix 3: Timeline of Policy and Practice Changes at MCFD 2003 to 2015

- **2003:** MCFD initiates Family Development Response policy
- **2008, April:** MCFD releases Strong, Safe and Supported: A Commitment to B.C.'s Children and Youth
- **2009:** Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI) implemented
- **2011:** New Deputy Minister and new Minister appointed to MCFD; beginning of revamping of policies and ministry re-organization
- **2012, January:** Practice Directive released – Clinical Consultation and Support in Complex High Risk Protection Cases
- **2012, April:** ICM implemented for Child Protection work
- **2012, April:** Child Protection Response Model implemented. Ministry social workers are expected to switch from using the former BC Risk Assessment Model and Management Information system to using the new SDA tools and ICM system
- **2012, April:** Policy – Collaborative Practice between Children and Youth with Special Needs and Child Welfare Workers released
- **2012, September:** Release of ICM 2.2 – included 300 enhancements and updates to April 2012 version based on feedback from ministry staff
- **2012, September:** Practice Directive released – Clinical consultation and support in complex high-risk child protection cases
- **2012, April:** Practice Directive released – Case Transfer and joint case management under the *CFCS Act*
- **2012, November:** Practice Directive released – Working with Expectant Parents with High Risk Behaviours
- **2013:** Creation and embedding of a “Helping Relationship Framework” and policy
- **2013:** Practice Directive released – Complex, High-Risk Child Protection Cases
- **2013, March:** Practice Directive released – Additional Responsibilities when a Protection Order Under S.28 or 98 of the *CFCS Act* is Made Ex Parte.
- **2013, June:** Aboriginal Equity and Inclusion Policy Lens
- **2013, May:** Practice Directive released – Addressing Unsafe Sleeping Practices with Infants
- **2014:** MCFD moves from regional service delivery model to 13 Service Delivery Areas entailing changes in SDA and Local Service Area (LSA) leadership structure.
- **2014, March:** MCFD Service Delivery Division launches new approach to budgeting and staffing in the Service Delivery Areas
- **2014, June:** Practice Guidelines for using child protection structured decision-making tools updated

- **2014, July:** Launch of new Delegation Assessment and Readiness Tool (Training tool for child protection social workers)
- **2014, July:** Child Protection Response Policies (Standards) revised
- **2014:** ICM phase 4 update
- **2015, Spring:** New Hiring Process introduced for child protection social workers in hard-to-recruit areas
- **2015, June:** Policy released – Reportable Circumstances
- **2015, July:** Centralized Screening introduced in the Kootenays and the North East with full implementation province-wide expected by January 2016.

## Appendix 4: RCY Audit Summary Report

The purpose of the audit was to determine whether selected MCFD offices across the province were able to meet their statutory obligations under the *CFCS Act*. The audit focused specifically on the handling of child protection incidents, tracking case files from the initial reporting stage through to final determination of the type of response required in order to ensure children's safety.

The audit was conducted in the fall of 2014 and was comprised of a sample of 40 child protection incidents from four MCFD teams. The four teams had previously been identified as experiencing staffing issues in the six months prior to the audit; two of the teams were located in the same community.

Incidents were audited for compliance with the following standards in Chapter 3: *Child Protection Response Policies*, July 21, 2014:

- Assessing a Report and Determining the Most Appropriate Response (*Policy 3.1*)
- Family Development Response (FDR) (*Policy 3.2*)
- Investigations (*Policy 3.3*)

### Assessing a Report and Determining the Most Appropriate Response (Policy 3.1)

Of the 40 incident files audited:

- A total of 31 incidents were screened within 24 hours of receiving the child safety concern.
- Ten incidents were initially assessed as requiring an immediate response, with 24 incidents requiring a response within five days.
- Twenty-two Screening Assessments were completed within the appropriate 24-hour five-day windows.
- Twenty-nine cases were ultimately identified as requiring an FDR or Investigation Response; eight of these 29 files did not contain any documentation beyond the Screening Assessment.
- Four incident files were blank or did not indicate a final protection response; two of these files contained no further documentation beyond the initial Screening Assessment.
- One file did not contain a Screening Assessment or any other documentation.
- Six files were initially assessed as requiring a non-protection response.



### **Family Development Response (Policy 3.2) and Investigations (Policy 3.3)**

Of the 24 incident files that initiated an FDR or Investigation response and contained some level of documentation beyond the Screening Assessment:

- Twenty Safety Assessments were completed.
- Twelve Vulnerability Assessments were completed.
- Two files met standards by completing the FDR/Investigation Phase within 30 days.
- Eight additional files completed the FDR/Investigation Phase but failed to meet the 30-day standard.
- Of the 10 incident files where the FDR/Investigation Phase was completed, four files identified a need for FDR Protection Services.
- Of these four FDR Protection Services files, only two contained completed Strengths and Needs Assessments and none contained completed Family Plans or Family Case Planning Conferences.

### **Section 14 reports**

As a result of the audit, the RCY submitted six Section 14 reports to MCFD in November 2014 highlighting incidents where children may have been left at risk. These six cases involved situations where children were exposed to parental substance abuse, domestic violence, lack of supervision or neglect and where the children's safety had not been confirmed by MCFD staff. As of Aug. 1, 2015, the RCY was still waiting to hear back from MCFD regarding the outcome of one of these cases.

## Appendix 5: Selected RCY Audit Results of 40 Child Protection Files

Tables 1-4: Assessing a Report and Determining the Most Appropriate Response

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
Number of audited files	16	15	9	40
<b>Q1. Was the incident report initially assessed within 24 hrs of receiving the report?</b>				
Yes	13	12	6	31
No	3	3	3	9
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
<b>Q3. What was the Initial Response Priority?</b>				
Immediately or within 24 hours	4	5	1	10
Within 5 days	12	6	6	24
Non-Protection Response		3	1	4
Cannot Locate			1	1
Not Applicable		1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
<b>Q4. What was the final protection response?</b>				
FDR	10	8	6	24
Investigation	3	1	1	5
Youth Services				
Non-Protection Response	1	3	2	6
Blank/Unchecked	2	2		4
Not Applicable		1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>40</b>

**Table 5: FDR and Investigations Phase**

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
<b>Q18. Is the Safety Assessment completed and documented?</b>				
Yes, located in ICM	6	7	7	20
Yes, located in physical file	0	0	0	0
No	3	1		4
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>Q25. Is there a Vulnerability Assessment documented in ICM?</b>				
Yes	4	2	7	13
No	5	6		11
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>Q31. Was the Vulnerability Assessment form completed in its entirety?</b>				
Yes	4	1	7	12
No/Incomplete		2		2
No VA form found	5	4		9
Not Applicable		1		1
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>

<b>Q34. Was the FDR/Investigation Response Assessment phase completed within 30 days in its entirety (from incident start date)?</b>				
Yes, within 30 days	1		1	2
Completed, but not within 30 days	2		6	8
No/Incomplete	6	8		14
<b>Total</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>24</b>

**Table 6: FDR and Investigations Assessment Completed**

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
<b>Q39. Was there a decision to initiate FDR Protection Services based on the FDR Assessment?</b>				
Yes, protection services	1		3	4
No further action	1		2	3
Referrals to community services with no open case			2	2
Voluntary support services under an open case				
Offer Youth service				
Did not indicate/No consult found	1			1
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>10</b>

**Table 7: Determining FDR Protection Services**

Teams	A1 & A2	B	C	Total
<b>Q41. Is there a Strengths &amp; Needs Assessment form attached in ICM?</b>				
Yes			2	2
No	1		1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

<b>Q45. Was the Strengths &amp; Needs completed in its entirety?</b>				
Yes			2	2
No				
N/A	1		1	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

<b>Q47. Is there a Family Plan/FCPC attached in ICM?</b>				
Yes				
No	1		3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

**Table 8: Age of all Children Involved**

Age of all Children in the Home	Total
0-4 years	25
5-11 years	37
12-19 years	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>82</b>

## Appendix 6: MCFD Family Service Practice Audits<sup>70</sup>

MCFD's Family Services (FS) practice audits are intended to assess the extent to which Service Delivery Areas (SDAs) are achieving key components of the Child Protection Response Model set out in Chapter 3 of the *Child Safety and Family Support Policies*. Chapter 3 details the standards that Child Protection Workers should adhere to if they are to effectively and efficiently carry out their duties under the *CFCS Act*.

The FS audits are based on reviews of MCFD records, comprising non-protection incidents, protection incidents (including investigations and FDRs) and cases. Records were randomly sampled from the ICM and rated for compliance with standards by two practice analysts, using the FS Practice Audit Tool. This tool rates the achievement of key components of the Child Protection Response model using the options of *Achieved* or *Not Achieved*, with *Not Applicable* being a further option in later measures. Analysts focused on practice that occurred in the 12 months before the audits were conducted.

### Service Delivery Areas – Demographics

The Vancouver/Richmond SDA contains the largest number of urban communities and the greatest number of children under 19 years of age. Despite its size, it has fewer FTE staff than both North Vancouver Island and Okanagan. These two SDAs cover more rural/remote communities than Vancouver/Richmond and have a higher proportion of Aboriginal children and youth in their client population. The North Central region has the next highest number of FTE staff, largely because of the remoteness of its communities and the difficulty in accessing clients, large numbers of whom are Aboriginal and live on-reserve. Finally, the North East SDA has relatively few FTE staff and serves the smallest number of children/youth, although a large proportion is Aboriginal and/or lives in rural communities.

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<sup>70</sup> See footnote 25 for sources.

Table 1: Service Delivery Areas included in the Audits

	Vancouver Richmond	Okanagan	North Van Island	North Central	North East
<b>SDA Record status and type</b>					
Closed non-protection incidents	64	60	62	54	52
Closed protection incidents	61	59	61	59	52
Open and closed FS cases	64	88	63	64	54
<b>Demographic Information</b>					
Population	793,260	359,051	322,493	145,543	72,068
Children under 19	135,035	65,732	57,317	32,190	19,003
<b>Staffing and workload</b>					
Total full time equivalents (FTE)	203.65	217.95	241.95	147	63.5
Total cases during Audit period	3,078	1,501	2,406	1,717	727

## Results of the Audit

### Reports and Screening Assessments

Measures under this section pertain to obtaining and assessing an initial child protection report, and include both non-protection and protection incidents. Across all five SDAs, staff were highly compliant with standards when obtaining a full report about a child or youth's need for protection, with rates ranging from 96% to 83%. However, with the exception of the Vancouver/Richmond SDA, staff were unable to meet the timelines associated with these reports the majority of the time (35% - 47%).

### Response Decisions

Measures of compliance in this section relate to assigning a response priority and making a response decision, and include both non-protection and protection incidents. The Vancouver/Richmond SDA achieved the highest compliance rate of the five SDAs with respect to assigning an appropriate response priority, with a rate of 84%. However, the four remaining SDAs could only achieve compliance rates of between 38% and 53%. These rates are reflected again in terms of timeframe, where between 22% and 39% compliance with standards was seen for four SDAs and a rate of 75% was recorded for Vancouver/Richmond. Compliance with standards around appropriate response decisions, as well as the timeframe for making such decisions, varied across SDAs from 92% to 55%.



### **Safety Assessments and Safety Plans**

These measures pertain to completion of safety assessments, making safety decisions, and developing a safety plan. Only protection incidents or incidents that the practice analysts felt required a protection response were included. Compliance with standards around completion of safety assessments ranged from 81% to 43%. There was wide variation in compliance when involving the family in the development of the safety plan, with the most compliant SDA achieving a rate of 77% and the least compliant 26%.

### **Vulnerability Assessments**

This section addressed the completion of a vulnerability assessment and determination of the child or youth's vulnerability level. As with safety assessments, only protection incidents or incidents that the practice analysts felt required a protection response were included. Although staff were generally able to complete the vulnerability assessment where required, with compliance rates ranging from 83% to 48%, they were unable to meet associated timelines. The most compliant SDA met timeline standards only 31% of the time, with the least compliant SDA achieving a 14% compliance rate.

### **Strengths and Needs Assessments**

Measures under this section are associated with completing a family and child Strengths & Needs Assessment and obtaining supervisory approval for that assessment. Open and closed FS cases were included, as well as closed protection incidents that involved both a Family Development Response and protection phases. None of the SDAs were able to meet standards around completion of the Strengths & Needs Assessment more than half of the time, with compliance rates ranging from 50% to 9%.

### **Family Plans**

Records were assessed for compliance with standards around developing a Family Plan, integrating the Safety Plan into the Family Plan, and obtaining supervisory approval. Two SDAs had an extremely low compliance rate with respect to developing family plans (8% and 14%) with the most compliant SDA managing a 58% rate of compliance with standards. However, rates of adherence to timeframes were even lower, with the least compliant SDA achieving a 4% rate and the most compliant achieving 36%.

**Table 2: Compliance Rates for SDAs in Audit Sample**

<b>Report and Screening Assessment</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Obtaining a Full and Detailed Report about a Child or Youth’s Need for Protection	96%	96%	89%	86%	83%
Assessing the Report about a Child or Youth’s Need for Protection	89%	58%	57%	46%	43%
Timeframe for Assessing the Report about a Child or Youth’s Need for Protection	75%	35%	47%	38%	36%
<b>Response Decision</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Assigning an Appropriate Response Priority	84%	53%	53%	38%	49%
Timeframe for Assigning an Appropriate Response Priority	75%	39%	31%	22%	38%
Making a Response Decision Consistent with the Assessment of the Report	85%	92%	69%	60%	55%
Timeframe for Making an Appropriate Response Decision	83%	56%	72%	57%	61%
Supervisory Approval of the Response Decision	69%	21%	78%	60%	50%
<b>Safety Assessment and Safety Plan</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Completing the Safety Assessment Process	81%	43%	60%	52%	48%
Making a Safety Decision Consistent with the Safety Assessment	87%	62%	73%	63%	64%
Involving the Family in the Development of a Safety Plan	57%	26%	77%	59%	39%
<b>Vulnerability Assessment</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Completing the Vulnerability Assessment Form	83%	70%	62%	57%	48%
Timeframe for Completing the Vulnerability Assessment Form	24%	19%	31%	14%	18%
Determining the Final Vulnerability Level	80%	71%	68%	58%	55%
Making an Appropriate Decision on the Need for Protection Services	82%	74%	83%	75%	55%
<b>Strengths and Needs Assessment</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Completing a Family and Child Strengths and Needs Assessment	50%	49%	24%	9%	16%
Supervisory Approval of the Family and Child Strengths and Needs Assessment	54%	44%	22%	4%	16%
<b>Family Plan</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
Developing a Family Plan with the Family	44%	58%	31%	8%	14%
Integrating the Safety Plan into the Family Plan	40%	59%	29%	8%	7%
Timeframe for Completing the Family Plan and Integrating the Safety Plan	35%	36%	25%	4%	14%
<b>Overall Compliance</b>	Van/Richmond % Achieved	Okanagan % Achieved	North Van Island % Achieved	North Central % Achieved	North East % Achieved
	71%	55%	59%	50%	32%

## Appendix 7: Building Blocks for Success

The Service Delivery Division is focusing on the key building blocks for success in delivering the best possible services and supports for children, youth and families. These building blocks fall into the following categories:

### Engagement

- Phase 1: gather information and address urgent issues
- Phase 2: connect with employees and build action plans, while continuing to address urgent issues wherever possible
- Phase 3: implement

### Internal Communications

- Focus on clarity and transparency in decision-making
- Ensure employees are advised of important issues, projects, and initiatives that will affect them
- Provide direct connection between executive and employees, e.g. through newsletters, teleconferences and office tours

### Business Process Improvement

- Engage employees to identify both short- and long-term business process improvement opportunities (where are we focusing efforts in areas which do not substantially add value)
- Use Lean to address individual business process challenges
- Develop a collaboration framework so we work more effectively across the ministry

### Service Mix/Service Delivery/ Service Standards

- Ensure consistency in terms of service offerings and standards
- Clarify where consistency is required in how services are delivered
- Ensure standards are effective and appropriate for achieving our vision and mission

### Recruitment/Retention/Succession

- Understand the SDD demographics, including trends
- Work with employees to better understand challenges associated with recruitment, retention and succession
- Build and implement strategies to address challenges

### Equity in Budget and Staffing

- Develop approach to ensure equity in budget across Service Delivery Areas (preliminary methodology complete and budget targets identified)
- Confirm methodology and approach (underway; completion expected end fiscal 13/14)
- Implementation over three years with continuous evaluation

From: MCFD. (2014). *MCFD Workload: Status and Approach*. Nov. 6, 2014.

## Appendix 8: RCY Analysis of MCFD's Staffing Data

The staffing information used for this analysis is based on an MCFD dataset created in 2013 called the “Macro” which collects staffing information for all MCFD positions in the province. The dataset was originally developed from a data extract from the B.C. Public Service’s CHIPS Human Resources database.

The ministry’s purpose for the dataset was to create a management tool that provides information to be used for financial and staff planning. The tool is being used by Executive Directors of Service to determine current and future salary expenditures. It is also intended to ensure consistency in how staffing positions are established and maintained across service delivery.

The Representative requested and received three data files from MCFD containing information about staffing levels for front-line social workers (May 2013, April 2014 and June 2014). Subsequent to receiving this data, the Representative conducted a thorough cleaning and analysis of this data. Below are the key findings from an analysis of the June 2014 staffing data.

### Funded Staffing Positions

- This analysis of MCFD staffing data was based on a sample of 1,495 positions that required delegation under the *CFCS Act* or *Adoption Act* (specifically: Child Protection, Guardianship, Adoption, Resources and Team Leader/Supervisor positions).
- Including both full- and part-time positions, this equates to around 1,453 full time equivalent employees (FTEs).
- Approximately 50% of these positions are classified as Child Protection Social Workers, with 12.5% classified as General Social Workers, 11.6% as Resource Social Workers, 4.5% as Adoption Social Workers, 7.1% as Guardianship Social Workers and 0.3% as After Hours Social Workers.
- Supervisor/Team Leader positions accounted for 14% of the workforce.
- As of June 2014, two Social Worker positions reported to the Provincial Mobile Response Team (PMRT), although MCFD had indicated ultimately hiring up to 10 workers for this team.
- Almost 63% of funded positions were coded as requiring C6 delegation, which allows Social Workers to investigate a child’s need for protection fully under all levels of the *CFCS Act*.

## Staffing Coverage for Funded Positions

- As of June 2014, almost 90% of positions that became vacant had been filled, either by a regular employee (76.4%), by backfill (8.6%) or through temporary assignment (4.7%).
- The majority of the 154 positions that were unfilled were vacant because of parental leave, short-term illness, long-term disability, temporary assignments, or because of staff secondment to a special project.
- The Northern region had the highest proportion of positions that were unfilled across all regions, at 15.7%. In terms of Service Delivery Areas, the Coast/North Shore SDA had the highest rate of position vacancies at 24.2%, followed by North Central at 16.7%, the Northeast at 15.4% and the Northwest at 14.3%.
- After Hours services in the Lower Mainland had a vacancy rate of 17.2%.
- Approximately 74% of active Social Workers were coded as having C6 delegation; 87% of all workers were delegated at a level equal to or higher than that required by their job title.

## Vacant Funded Positions

- Of the 154 vacant positions as of June 2014, 58 were flagged by MCFD as vacancies with some indication that these openings would be filled.
- For the remaining 96 positions, no indication was given that backfill will be made available.

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