

September 2008

Dear Caregivers:

The BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all Foster Parents in BC, including the Grampas, Grammas, and other extended family out there providing stable and loving homes to children and youth. You open your hearts and lives to the children and youth you care for.

Through your love and dedication these children and youth gain the power to overcome many challenges. You empower them. You help them through grief and loss and show them that they are important and valuable. You are there to guide and nurture them on their road to healthy adulthood.

You deserve all of our respect and recognition for the hard job that you undertake every day. Without your caring and nurturing many children in our communities would continue to suffer.

The Federation continues to work hard on your behalf to improve foster care in BC.

The BCFFPA wrote a letter to Minister Christensen In response to his signing an order that will disallow CLBC services to a segment of the population with more than a **70 IQ** while ignoring other factors, such as FAS and Autism.

The ability to care for our vulnerable citizens is the mark of a strong society. With the signing of this order it leaves a significant sector of our young citizens once more falling through the numerous holes in our social safety net. Many of these people who are no longer eligible for services have Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder or Autism and present with a higher IQ but still do not have the ability to function as independent adults.

The Federation has sent a follow up letter to Jane Cowell – Director for MCFD regarding **increasing the coverage for the BCFFPA Insurance Rider Program**. This resulted from discussions between the BCFFPA and MCFD in April 2008.

The maximum coverage per incident currently available under the Insurance Rider is \$300,000.00. This coverage has remained static for many years, however with the huge increase in building costs over the past several years, we feel it is urgent that MCFD re-look at the coverage available in order to protect the property of foster parents should they suffer a total loss.

Current building costs in Victoria, Vancouver, and Kelowna, for instance, have increased to approximately \$200 per square foot in the past several years, not including contents. With the larger homes needed to house these large families, total loss could add up to well over the coverage currently provided by MCFD.

As we travel around the province providing insurance training to MCFD resources and foster parents, the issue of coverage continues to be of paramount importance. We further feel that an increase in coverage will also reflect the value MCFD places on foster parents for the wellbeing of children and youth under the guardianship of the province.

We are suggesting that coverage be raised to as minimum of \$550,000.00 per occurrence.

We are also looking into the repercussions of foster parents not putting their name on the contracts due to having disability or pension income. This may have a profound effect on the coverage they can receive under the Legal Indemnity Policy should an allegation of abuse arise against them.

The Federation has also sent a letter to Minister Christensen as issues have arisen in three regions of BC regarding **relief for Regular, and Level 1** caregivers who wish to save their monthly relief allotment and take all accumulated relief at the same time, once or twice per year. Caregivers are being told that they cannot save relief, and that MCFD “does not pay for holidays”.

In addition to that, with MCFD is using modification agreements which do not accurately reflect the new CSSS. Therefore many Level 1 caregivers are expected to pay for their own relief out of the service payment as per the old CFCS policies.

In reviewing the CSS Standards, which supersedes prior policies and are **mandatory** for both MCFD and Delegated Aboriginal homes, we have discerned the following:

CSS STANDARD 16: RELIEF, RESPITE AND CHILD CARE states “The director assists the caregiver in planning and arranging for periodic relief if necessary, **on a schedule that best meets the needs of the child in care and the caregiver.**”

Relief for restricted, regular and Level 1 family care homes

Payments under a Family Care Home Agreement with restricted, regular and Level 1 family care homes do not include money for relief. The relief provider obtains reimbursement at the established relief/respite rates either by invoicing the ministry or through a contract with the ministry.

We recognize that Foster Parents of Restricted, Regular and Level 1 homes generally care for children with average needs, however many times this not the case, particularly in times such as these where there is a critical shortage of homes. In addition, many of the caregivers in this group may have up to 6 children in their homes . When the number of children with significant issues is increased, so is the stress on the caregiver and others living in the home. This can result in serious retention issues, increase protocols and burnout if caregivers are not able to take relief as they need it.

In researching current policy, which supersedes past policy and practice, there is no reference to relief having to be taken at specific times at the discretion of the ministry. The issue that needs addressing we believe, is the lack of support given to these homes in providing for suitable intervals of relief. We continue to address this issue with the Minister.

A **new project** we are beginning, which has come out of the Insurance training meetings we are currently undertaking is the need to look for foundation grants to develop training and written materials which will address the issue of Safeguarding for foster families.

Foster Parents are at huge risk fostering children in the care of the government as many children are confused, angry and harmful. Many come backgrounds which have contributed to these feelings, and some have been born to drug or alcohol addiction, creating many barriers.

Unfortunately foster parents who provide temporary care for these children and youth, are at risk of false allegations which put themselves and their families in jeopardy. Many foster parents have no idea how to protect themselves, or to safeguard themselves and their families. As it is, it is very tough to recruit foster parents, especially with all the risk they have to carry.

Providing legal education and training across the province to foster parents and potential foster parents is key to retaining foster parents as well as recruiting new ones as they learn how to safeguard themselves.

On **another matter**, we would value your input on the issue of placing pictures of children available for adoption on a provincial website. We appreciate your thoughts on this matter as there are many differing opinions around this issue. Please feel free to send us a note to bcffpa@istar.ca . We would like to hear from you.

We look forward to continuing to support foster parents and lobby for change in the system.

“This may be a networked world, but virtual trust is an illusion. Trust develops when we get to know each other. There is no substitute for spending time with people face to face.”

–James M Kouzes & Barry Z. Posner.

I hope this News letter finds you all well. From my home to your homes I wish you a Happy thanksgiving.

Warm regards,
Melanie