

Yukon

*Child and Family
Services Act*
2017-19 Annual Report

Yukon Family and Children's Services

April 2020



Message from the director

Minister of Health and Social Services Pauline Frost

Government of Yukon

Dear Minister Frost,

I am pleased to present to you the most recent report on the provision of child welfare services under the *Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)*, as required by s. 187 of the legislation.

In Yukon and across Canada, child welfare practices have shifted significantly over the past few years. National-level reports, such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's final report (*Honouring the Truth, Reconciling the Future*) and recommendations from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (*Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*), have called on governments to re-evaluate their approach to child welfare, and we have responded accordingly. The Government of Yukon and First Nation governments have identified child welfare as a priority, and we have made significant headway in improving the system that serves Yukon children, youth and families. In the coming year, Yukon's child welfare system is expected to continue evolving as we consider and implement the recommendations from the review of the *CFSA (Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow)* and gain certainty in working alongside Canada's *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, which came into force on January 1, 2020. Our continued work with our First Nations partners, including the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN), on shared priorities and goals will contribute significantly to these ongoing systemic changes.

In the past, reports on the provision of child welfare services to the Minister of Health and Social Services (HSS) were closely tied to the fiscal year, and as such our reports identified past achievements. For this report, we are embarking in a new direction and reporting on service provision from April 2017 to the end of 2019 to provide a more

comprehensive picture of our readiness to take on the challenges of 2020. It will highlight our major accomplishments over the last year and a half, and identify areas in which Yukon is innovating in child welfare.

Family and Children's Services (FCS) recognizes that effective change for all children and youth requires a broad, interconnected and coordinated approach with community involvement. Change must extend beyond any one person, policy, program, branch or government. Instead, it must include communities and First Nations in progressive roles to bring about true systemic change that will ultimately result in healthier outcomes for children, youth and families.

Over the last few years, we have undergone a philosophical shift in our child welfare practice. We are moving from a focus on intervention, which emphasized bringing children into the safety of the director's care, to a stronger focus on prevention that prioritizes safety within families and communities. One of our significant preventative initiatives is the Extended Family Care program, which ensures that children who require out-of-home care remain with their families. Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to match the supports and services for extended family caregivers to those provided to foster caregivers. Most recently, we re-aligned staff positions to create the Placement Resource unit to provide dedicated support workers and supports for all caregivers, including foster caregivers, extended family caregivers, and adoptive parents.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's first Call to Action asks that all levels of government commit to reducing the number of Indigenous children in care. Yukon continues to make significant strides toward reconciliation through strong government-to-government relationships. The department recognizes that to create change, Yukon First Nations must be actively involved in making decisions that affect their children, youth, and communities. Yukon has taken steps to ensure that child welfare practice remains a priority at all levels of government by establishing the Trilateral Table on the Wellbeing of Yukon First Nations Children and Families (Trilateral Table) in 2018. The Trilateral Table sets strategic priorities for child welfare activities and guides the development of capacity within First Nation governments. It consists of representatives

from Government of Yukon, Government of Canada, First Nations and CYFN, with the shared goal of improving outcomes for First Nations children, youth and families.

A number of organizational changes were made over the last two years to support our shift in child welfare practice. These include: realigning Regional Services under the director; creating Family Enhancement teams; creating the Family Resource unit; co-locating a new team with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation; creating a team of analysts to review our policies and procedures in partnership with CYFN; and creating barrier-free universal access to family programming. We also implemented Nts' äw Chua, a new supportive housing and semi-independent living program for youth.

In addition, through our partnership with First Nations and CYFN, we embarked on a significant, innovative initiative called Honouring Connections. Through this initiative, we are reviewing all existing continuing custody orders with First Nations and CYFN (where applicable) to determine if the children and youth in the director's care can be reunified with family, extended family, community, and culture.

This report will further expand on the initiatives I have highlighted above, and will look at how we have situated ourselves to face the challenges of the future. None of this could be achieved without the tireless efforts of our staff, colleagues, and partners. I wish to thank all HSS and FCS staff, First Nation health directors, the CYFN, and government and community partners for working together to improve the lives of children, youth, and families. By strengthening partnerships and working together, we will achieve great things for Yukoners.

Sincerely,

Geraldine MacDonald
Director of Family and Children's Services

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Executive summary

This report provides a detailed overview of the child welfare services and supports provided by the Department of Health and Social Services from April 1, 2017 to December 31, 2019.

It identifies a number of significant accomplishments achieved over this period, and also looks at system changes that are affecting our philosophies, practices and service delivery. Quantitative and qualitative data is presented to demonstrate the direct impact on children, youth and families within a narrative that explains our services. Please note that, due to limitations in data collection, some quantitative data is represented both in calendar years and in point-in-time counts from fiscal years.

The report's first section, Strategic Context, provides brief overviews of the *Child and Family Services Act*, Yukon demographics, and changes to our service delivery model.

The second section, Our Continuum of Support and Services, gives a detailed description of the various programs available for children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system. The continuum starts with Preventative Supports to Keep Families Together, which includes Agreements for Support Services for Families which have been consistently accessed over the last years by an average of 216.6 families per year. Other preventative supports include our Family Support Program, which has significantly increased their service levels from 192 home visits and 362 community visits with families in 2017 to 312 home visits and 486 community visits in 2019. Following a description of new Family Enhancement Teams that provide cohesive and consistent services for families, we discuss the Family Group Conferencing program that has held an average of 19.3 conferences per year from 2017 to 2019.

Next, the Out-of-Home Care portion of the continuum discusses the significant changes made to our Extended Family Care Program to meet the needs of growing number of families accessing it. The number of children in extended family care increased from 54 in 2017 to 145 in 2019. This increase is correlated with a notable decrease in the number of children in the care and/or custody of the director from 141 in 2017 to 95 in 2019. However, the overall number of children and youth requiring out-of-home care due to safety concerns has not significantly decreased. Still, we strive

to place children with extended family in the hopes that it will increase the likelihood that they remain connected to their parents, community and culture.

Important initiatives were launched to improve our foster care program, such as cultural competency training and culturally-sensitive application processes, so that if a child must be placed in a different family setting, they are still connected to their community and culture. The decrease in the number of youth in the Transitional Support Services (TSS) program, or group care, from 29 youth in 2017 to 18 youth in 2019 resulted in two group care programs closing, reallocation of staff and other program changes to better support youth. We anticipate the number of youth in group care to further decrease in 2020 as other programs gain momentum and fewer children enter care.

The third part of the continuum, Programs for Youth and Young Adults, introduces Nts'aw Chua. This is a supportive and semi-independent living program that incorporates Indigenous and non-Indigenous elements in its practice model, and offers improved transitional supports for youth from 15 to 24 years of age. A special community partner spotlight on the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre highlights their important contributions to support youth in our community. Finally, a discussion on the Agreements for Support Services for Youth and Agreements for Transitional Support Services shows the rapid increase in the number of these agreements from 23 in 2017 to 42 in 2019.

The director of FCS is also the provincial/territorial director of the Youth Criminal Justice Act, therefore the section on Youth Supports and Services highlights the Youth Achievement Centre (YAC). YAC now provides low-barrier, preventative, community-based services to at-risk youth. They have created a complement of employment initiatives and wilderness therapeutic programming with community partners that invest more into at-risk youth, as demonstrated by the significant increase in the number of hours youth spend in programming.

The subsequent section, Promoting Child and Family Wellbeing beyond the CFSA, describes our broader systemic approach to promote protective factors within families, irrespective of child welfare concerns. Our Healthy Families program has expanded to more rural communities than ever before with culturally-responsive programming, which has resulted in a 72.3% increase in program enrollment by families from pre-2017 to 2019. After a discussion on the three-year, \$7M, Canada-Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Agreement and how we support licensed child care programs, we

introduce the Family Resource Unit (FRU), which will provide preventative programming to all Yukon families with a universal, barrier-free approach.

In the Relationships with First Nations section, we detail the significant steps taken towards reconciliation, such as forming the Trilateral Table on Wellbeing of Yukon First Nations Children and Families with the Government of Canada, First Nations governments and the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) for strategic focus on child welfare. Other progressive actions include changing the flow of Indigenous Services Canada's prevention and enhancement funding directly to First Nations; increased collaboration between FCS and First Nation Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons to better serve First Nation communities; and our work to complete Memoranda of Agreements on child welfare with Carcross/Tagish First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Over the past few years, we strengthened our relationship with CYFN and the First Nations Health Social Development Commission in the area of child welfare. In January 2019, we launched the Honouring Connections project with First Nations and CYFN to re-connect all children in long-term care and/or custody of the director to their families, communities and cultures.

The following section reports on our relationship with internal HSS partners, namely Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services' (MWSU) Child, Youth and Family Treatment Team (CYFTT), as well as Social Supports' Child Disability Services. Both have improved the services they provide to children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system.

The Continuous Service Quality Improvement portion of the report describes training and professional development initiatives such as the 2017/18 and 2018/19 Child Welfare Core Training, the latter of which had significant participation from First Nation Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons. It also details the policy and program changes implemented as a result of the recommendations from the reviews of our group care program, such as the Costanzo Report (2018), the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner's Report (2019) and the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate's Report (2019).

Finally, our Looking Ahead section will introduce you to the program enhancements and partnerships to expect from us in the near future: our new child welfare practice model – Signs of Safety, our integrated child welfare case management project, re-visioning of our group care program, increased focus on restorative justice for at-risk

youth, community-based safety resources managed by First Nations, and the rural licensed child care project.

Strategic context: legislation, demographics and service delivery

The Department of Health and Social Services' (HSS) Family and Children's Services (FCS) branch provides child welfare services to Yukoners under the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA). Given the complexity of delivering these services, it is important to consider the context in which they are provided.

The CFSA came into effect in 2010 and introduced progressive principles and mechanisms to strengthen families, prevent child apprehensions and to promote family reunification while preserving and addressing the cultural identity needs of service users. Guided by this progressive statute, practice shifted over the last decade to provide family-centred, strengths-based, relationship-focussed, and culturally competent services, all of which emphasize that the best way to protect children on a long-term basis is to strengthen and support their families, including their extended families.

On May 29, 2018, the Minister of HSS appointed a six member Advisory Committee to undertake a broad review of the CFSA and make recommendations to improve our child welfare system. The Advisory Committee travelled to all Yukon communities and engaged with many Yukoners to gather their perspectives on the CFSA. Their report (*Embracing the Children of Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*) for HSS was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on October 28, 2019. The Government of Yukon is currently reviewing the Advisory Committee's 'required actions' with view to amend our legislation and consider any related policy changes.

According to the Yukon Bureau of Statistics, the estimated population of the territory on September 30, 2019 was 41,408, of which 8,890 (21.5%) were between 0 to 19 years of age. The majority of the population (32,395 or 77.9%) resided in the Whitehorse area. Yukon's Indigenous population, including those with status under the *Indian Act* and those who self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit, amounted to

8,524 or 20.6% of the total population. However, more than 70% of the children, youth and families involved in the child welfare system self-identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit.

Approximately, 4,760 (55.8%) of the Indigenous population resided in Whitehorse and 3,764 (44.2%) resided in rural communities. To ensure that the CFSA was applied consistently across the territory and so that children, youth and families received support services according to the same standards regardless of whether they lived in a rural community or Whitehorse, in October 2018, HSS realigned Regional Services under the director of FCS (referred to as the “director”). This realignment has positioned us to use existing staffing resources more strategically.

We could not accurately represent the vital work being done by staff over the course of this reporting period without acknowledging the challenge of staff recruitment and retention. At times, high turnover rates in social work staff, especially in the communities, has disrupted services to clients. Isolated Northern communities and difficulties in securing housing creates challenges for us to recruit and retain experienced social workers. But, as a result of this realignment and a one-team approach to child welfare services, during staffing shortages we are able to more easily transfer staff from Whitehorse to the communities to help reduce any disruption to services. While difficulties in child welfare social worker recruitment and retention are expected to persist in Yukon, as they are across Canada, we will continue to look for ways to use collaboration, partnership and innovation to strengthen the overall system.

Our continuum of supports and services

Based on the CFSA, we have developed an extensive continuum of support and services for families. Preventing children and youth from entering into the care is the starting point for this continuum. When families need help to keep children safe at home, we make every effort to keep them together with wraparound supports tailored to their needs. When this is not possible, and all other options have been exhausted, the second part of our continuum responds with out-of-home care options for children and youth, such as extended family care, foster care and group care. The third part of our continuum provides programs and services to youth and young adults involved with FCS to achieve their life goals as they transition out of the child welfare system. This section of the report provides a detailed account of these three distinct parts of our continuum.

A. Preventative supports to keep families together

We recognize the importance of keeping families together whenever possible. To help do this, we redirect funding and provide preventative programs, as described below, to reduce the likelihood that children will need care outside of their family setting.

Family support services

According to s. 10 of the CFSA, we can provide a broad range of family support services to promote family integrity and overcome the obstacles that may have resulted in child protection concerns. Based on a comprehensive family assessment and case plan, we offer services such as child care, respite, counselling, financial supports, and parenting programs. If the family requires longer-term support, then, under s.11 of the CFSA, we explore the possibility of entering into Agreements for Support Services for Families (ASSF) with a parent who has custody of a child to provide the necessary support services for the child to either remain in, or return to, their family home.

Over the last three years, families with identified child protection concerns have consistently accessed ASSFs, as demonstrated in Figure 1. Although the numbers fluctuated from 230 families in September 2017 to 180 families in September 2018, the number for families rose to 240 in September 2019.

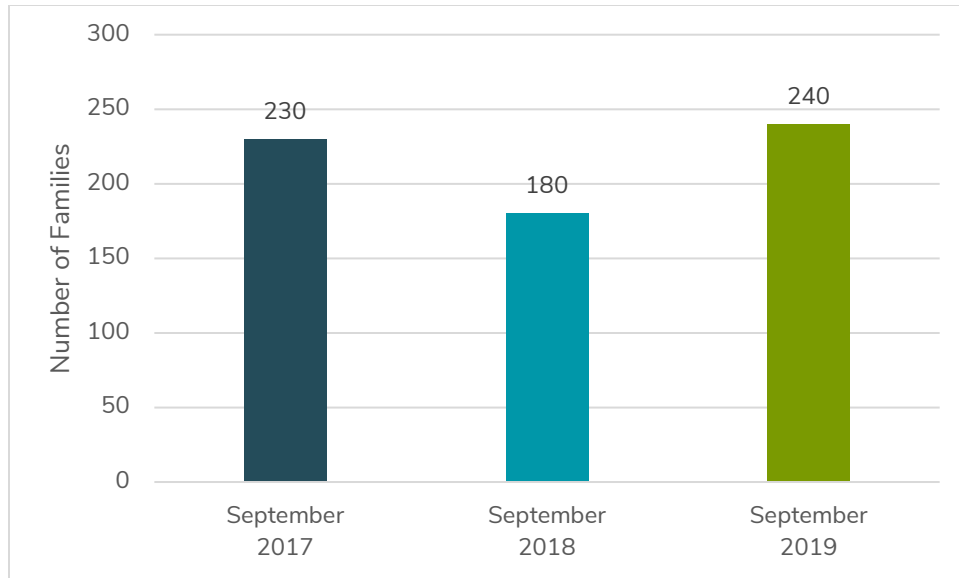


Figure 1. Number of families with Agreements for Support Services for Families (ASSFs). This figure shows the number of families with ASSFs in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting agreements that may have been renewed over several fiscal years, and to minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts during this reporting period.

Family support program and the child and youth support program

In order to assist families to address identified child protection concerns, our Family Support program provides intensive home-based supports to families as well as parenting and group sessions geared to build on parents' strengths and improve caregiving skills. The program collaborates with other government and community resources to develop specific strategies that address concerns affecting a child's safety and well-being within the family. Additionally, workers facilitate group events, including holiday dinners, summer barbecues, and other seasonal outdoor activities to encourage family participation, social interaction, peer support and self-care for families.

Although the Family Support program delivers services exclusively in Whitehorse, it does try to support the rural communities whenever possible. For example, in 2019, it collaborated extensively with the First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun to provide training and program materials so that some of the Family Support program's curriculum (namely, the Take-a-Break program designed to help isolated parents form social bonds with their peers and engage with the community) can be delivered in Mayo, Yukon. Likewise, the program regularly shares program materials and resources with regional social workers so that some programming is available in the rural communities.

Figures 2 and 3 represent the home and community visits conducted by the Family Support program and the number of programming hours delivered to families, respectively. When comparing 2018 to 2019, we see a massive jump in the number of visits and programming hours delivered to families. This increase is due to the following program changes in 2019: filling vacancies to reach a full staffing complement; increased oversight from the supervisor; expanded eligibility criteria to provide programming even after a family’s involvement with the child welfare system ended; and an expanded definition of client-related meetings that captured visits that were previously unaccounted for.

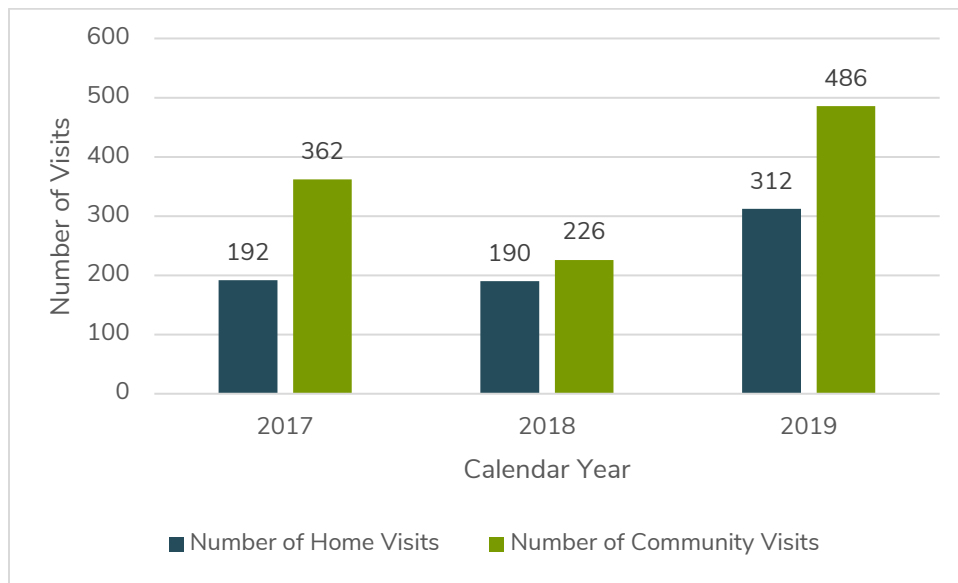


Figure 2. Home visits and community visits conducted by the Family Support program. This figure shows the number of home visits and community provided in the 2017, 2018 and 2019. Home visits are when Family Support Workers meet with families in their place of residence. Community visits are when Family Support Workers meet families in public places within the community.

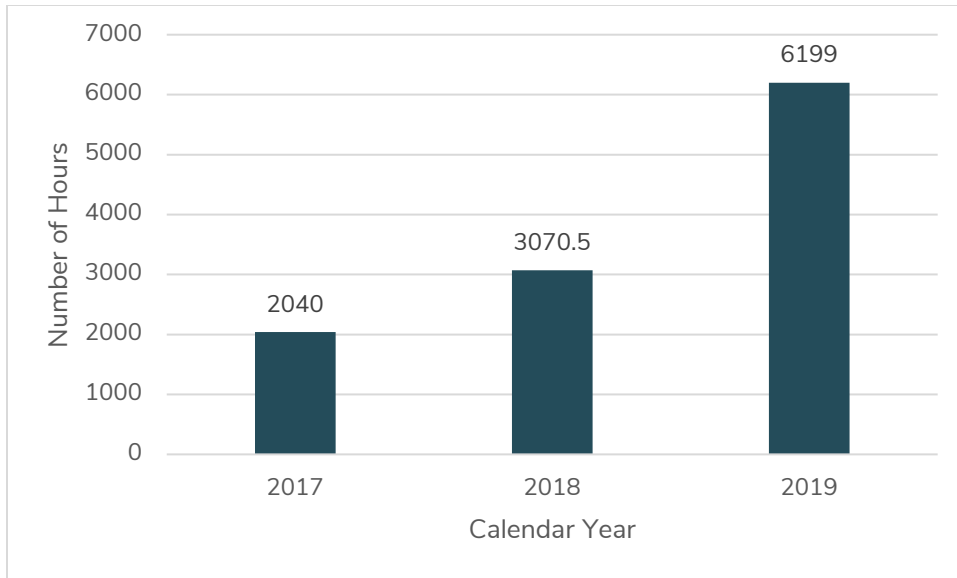


Figure 3. Family Support program hours delivered to families. This figure shows the number of hours of programming the Family Support Program delivered to families in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

While the Family Support program focuses on parents and caregivers, the Child and Youth Support program develops and facilitates programming for children aged 5 to 19 years of age who are either involved with FCS or are in the care and/or custody of the director. One-on-one recreational activities and group programming build essential life skills, including problem solving, communication and self-regulation. Figure 3 shows the number of children and youth who participated in one-on-one and group programming. Over the last three calendar years, the average number of participants per month has remained consistent.

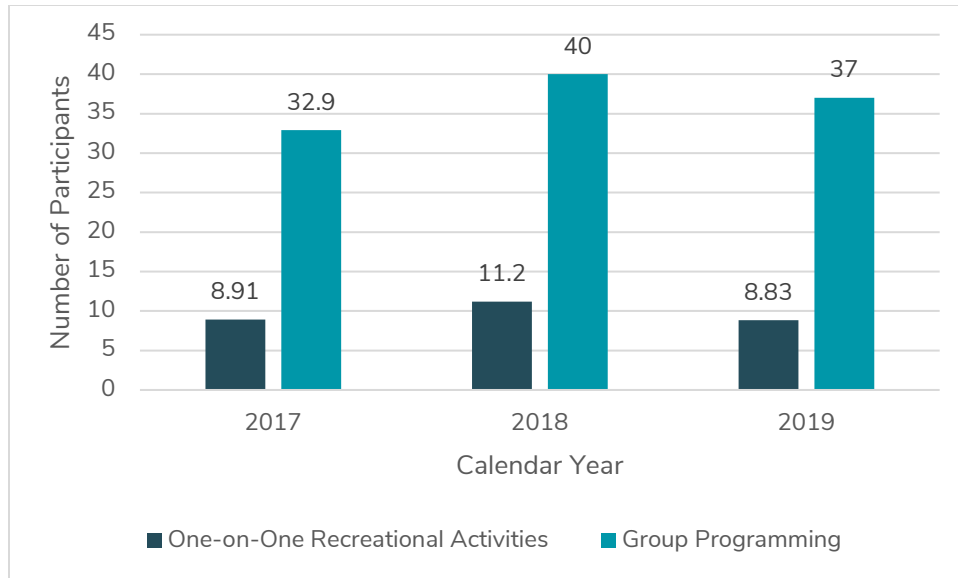


Figure 3. The average number of participants in the Child and Youth Support program. This figure shows the average number of children and youth who participated in one-on-one recreational activities per month in each calendar year, as well as the average number of children and youth who participated in group programming per month in each calendar year.

Going forward, plans are underway to realign these two programs under FCS' Family Services unit to better meet the needs of children, youth and families with child protection concerns. However, a portion of the Family Support Team will be assigned to the Family Resources Unit to provide prevention-oriented, universal programming to all Yukoners (see pg. 29 for more information).

Family enhancement teams

In 2018, we realigned units within FCS to create Family Enhancement teams. These teams are designed to work closely with families, caregivers, children and youth in a more holistic manner to encourage prevention and family reunification. These teams provide longer-term, ongoing services to children and families. They are responsible for cases involving child protection, family services, children in care, youth support, and extended family care. The social workers assigned to Family Enhancement Teams hold specialized caseloads catered to their strengths to promote the best service delivery possible.

To improve our working relationship with First Nations providing social services to their members, in November 2018 we co-located one of our Family Enhancement Teams

with Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN) Social Services within the McIntyre subdivision in Whitehorse. As a result of this collaborative relationship, KDFN families receive coordinated supports and more cohesive services. We are exploring the potential to create additional partnerships with other Yukon First Nations.

Family group conferencing

The Family Group Conferencing program offers one of the cooperative planning processes under the CFSA (s. 6) that can be used when a case plan is required for the safety or care of the child or support services for the family. It provides a neutral setting for families to work collaboratively with FCS, the respective First Nations, community partners and collaterals to create meaningful plans that are centered on the child and family.

Our statistics indicate that, while the number of referrals declined from 2017 to 2019, the number of Family Group Conferences held during this period, as well as the number of Family Group Conferences held with First Nation families remained fairly consistent (see Figure 4). Since February 2019, the Family Group Conferencing program has been operating with only one Family Group Conference coordinator which has resulted in a decline in conferences that are noted in the following table.

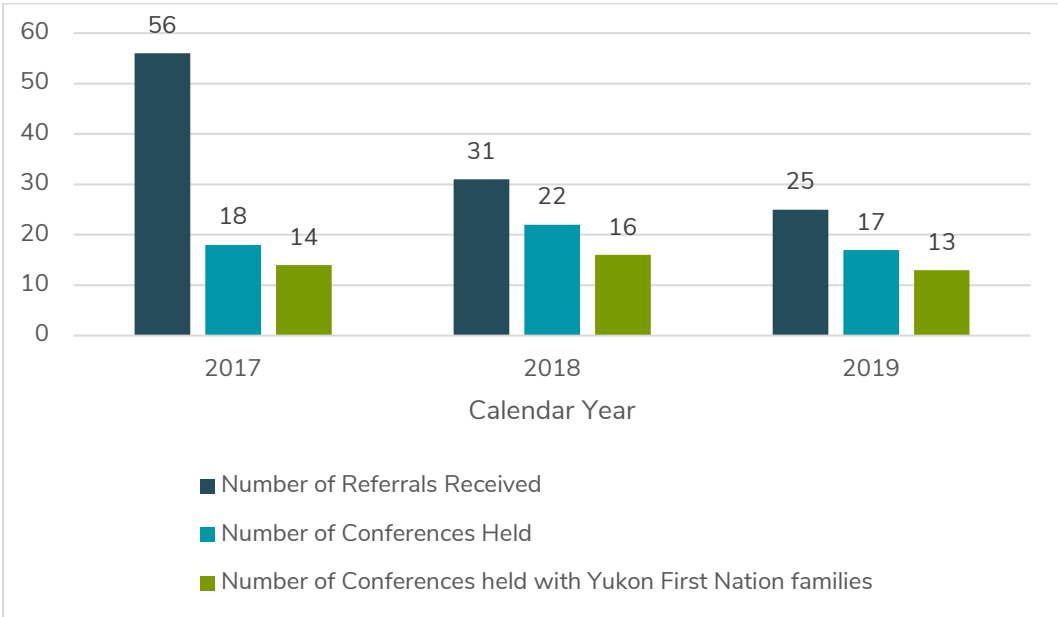


Figure 4. Number of referrals for Family Group Conferences and the number of Family Group Conferences held, including Family Group Conferences with First Nation families.

To address concerns raised about the capacity and limitations of this program and to look for opportunities to support the creation and/or utilization of existing Yukon First Nations processes, we expect to undertake a review of the current program model for Family Group Conferences in the near future.

B. Out-of-home care

When the identified child protection concerns in the family setting remain unresolved and the child's safety is at-risk, we work with the family to explore options for the child to receive care outside of their family home. This is referred to as out-of-home care. While our goal is always to address child protection concerns and work with parents and family on reunification, this is not always possible. Until safety is established, the child may be in one of the following out-of-home care options described below.

Extended family care

If a child is in need of out-of-home care, our first choice is for the child to reside with their extended family. Supported and mandated through the CFSA, specifically s. 14, Extended Family Care Agreements (EFCAs) allow children who require out-of-home care to remain with extended family rather than come into the care and/or custody of the director. Extended family caregivers include people who are related to the child by blood, through a spousal relationship, or any other persons who have, or had, a parent-like relationship with the child.

In November 2017, we were the first jurisdiction in Canada to increase financial supports provided to extended family caregivers to match the funding levels foster caregivers received. Then, in October 2018, we clarified policies and processes to ensure that all children in out-of-home care, regardless of whether they are in foster care or in extended family care, receive equivalent supports and services. Financial supports and services available to extended family caregivers include:

- a monthly base rate;
- clothing and special needs rate allowances;
- respite, homemaker, and alternate child care services;
- exceptional transportation reimbursements;
- annual holiday allowance and travel allowances;
- school supplies; and

- in-kind contributions such as training and parenting programs, and family counselling.

In September 2019, we re-aligned staffing positions to create the Placement Resource Unit and provide dedicated support workers for both foster caregivers and extended family caregivers.

These policy, procedural and program changes were implemented as a response to the growing number of families accessing the extended family care program, as displayed in Figure 5, as well as to reduce barriers and encourage more extended family members to provide out-of-home care.

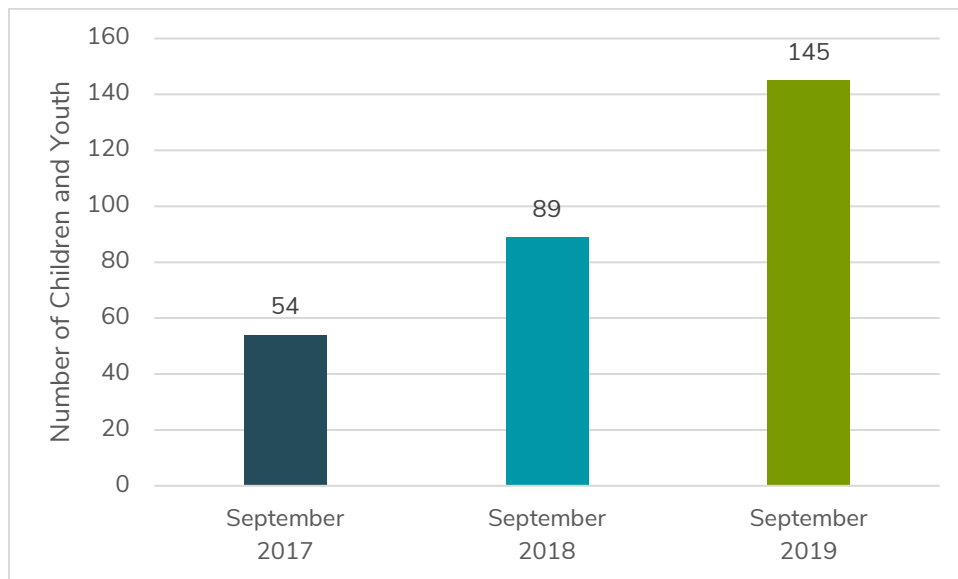


Figure 5. Number of children in the Extended Family Care program. This figure shows the number of children in extended family care in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting children in EFCAs that may have been renewed over several fiscal years and to minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts.

This increase in the number of children in the extended family care from 2017 to 2019 correlates with a significant decrease in the number of children in the care and/or custody of the director, as shown in Figure 6.

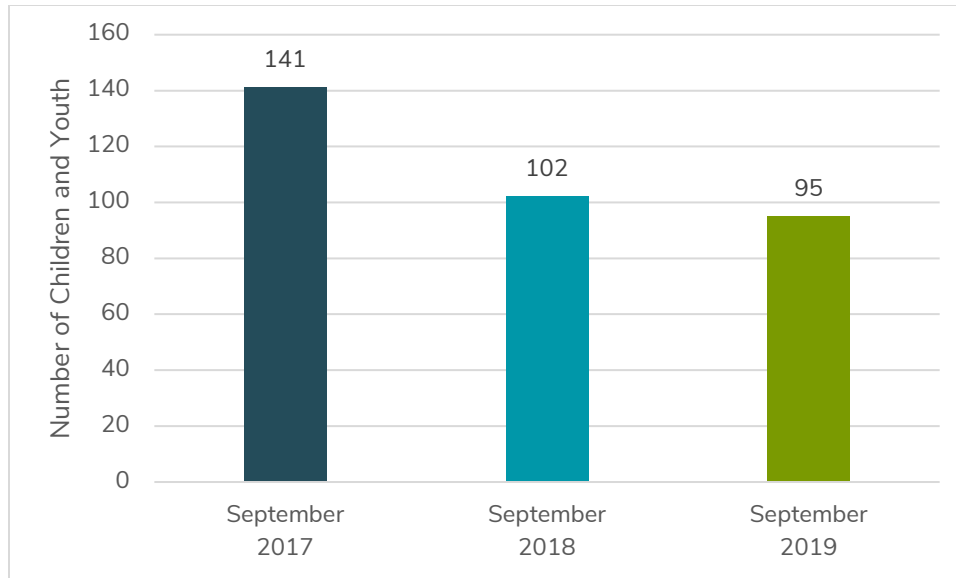


Figure 6. Number of children and youth in the care and/or custody of the director. This figure shows the decrease in the number of children and youth in the care in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting children and youth over several fiscal years and to minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts. Please note: adding the numbers of children in foster and group care will not directly result in the total number of children in care because the figures would be missing children in other types of placements (e.g. out-of-territory treatment, family visitation, etc.).

If Figure 6 is viewed in isolation, the decrease in the number of children in the care and/or custody of the director could be interpreted to mean that more children and youth are safe in their family homes. However, the rising figures in the Extended Family Care program indicate that the overall number of children and youth requiring out-of-home care due to safety concerns has not significantly decreased. Child welfare concerns rooted in complex social issues such as intergenerational trauma, poverty, parental substance use, mental wellness and/or family violence cannot be resolved by the CFSA alone. However, we are pleased that the system is responding in better ways through the Extended Family Care program, as described above, to keep children and youth closer to their families, communities and culture.

Foster care program

Once all options for extended family care are exhausted, we then, in collaboration with parents and other partners such as the child's respective First Nation, explore alternative options for out-of-home care. The preferred approach for out-of-home care

is a family environment where the child can continue to receive support to reach their developmental milestones and maintain connections to their family, culture and community. The foster care program strives to provide this with trained foster caregivers who work with the child, the child's parents and FCS.

A noteworthy trend in our data is the decrease in the number of children in the foster care program from 2017 to 2018, as shown in Figure 7, which coincides with the increase in the number of children in the extended family care program (see Figure 5). The stable number of children in the foster care program from 2018 to 2019 (see Figure 7) confirms the continued need for the foster care program as an option in our continuum of supports.

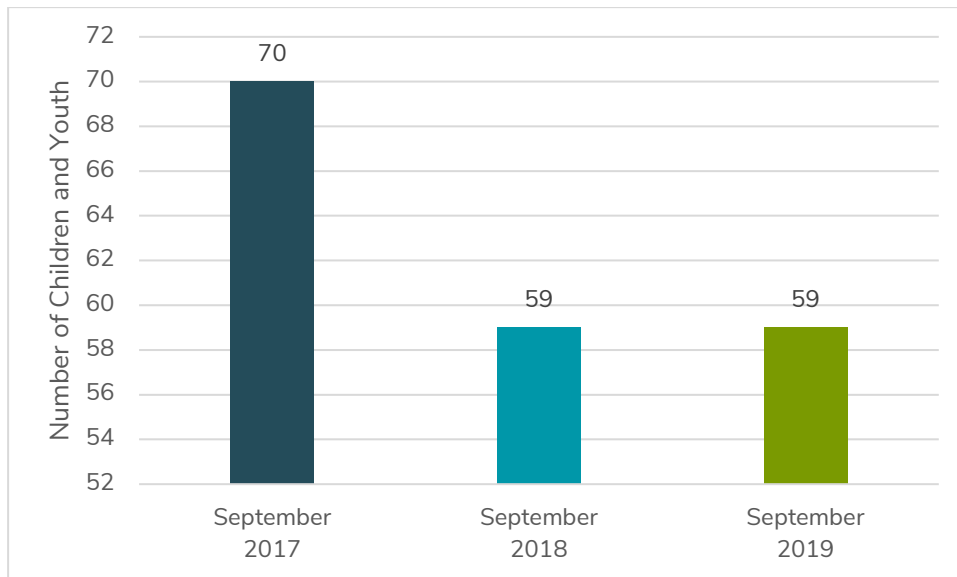


Figure 7. Number of children and youth in care and/or custody of the director placed in the Foster Care program. This figure shows the number of children and youth in the foster care program in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting children and youth that may have remained in foster care over several fiscal years and to minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts.

Increasing cultural competency among foster caregivers and ensuring children in foster care have opportunities to be involved in cultural activities was an area of focus in 2017-19. We organized and facilitated several events to cultivate an increased cultural awareness and knowledge for foster caregivers, as well as family-focused events with content tailored for children. For example, our 2018 caregiver appreciation event

included a special performance by the Dakhká Khwáan Dancers, where they invited all of the children to dance with them on stage. In June 2018, we held our annual caregiver barbeque and picnic in the Long Ago Peoples Place, a recreated First Nations village in Champagne, Yukon, designed to teach Southern Tutchone history and culture. In 2019, we invited Elders and Knowledge Keepers to our annual caregiver barbeque and picnic to teach traditional hand games and provide ceremonial drumming.

In partnership with First Nations, the Mutual Family Assessment process was redesigned during 2017-19 to be more user friendly, less intrusive, and more culturally sensitive with an increased focus on skills and strengths. Mutual Family Assessments work to ensure that foster homes meet the needs of children placed in their care. This new process will be piloted throughout Yukon in 2020.

To further enhance support to caregivers, in 2018-19, we hired a consultant group to assess the feasibility of a more inclusive caregiver association for both foster and extended family caregivers. We received the consultant's report, confirming interest for such an association, in October 2018 and it was subsequently presented to First Nations. Our Placement Resource Unit will continue to work on developing this initiative in the coming year.

Foster care recruitment was an ongoing priority over the reporting period of 2017 to 2019. In addition to all of the foster caregiver recruitment initiatives underway, we are in discussion with the Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) to co-develop a Yukon-wide caregiver recruitment strategy.

Transitional support services

Transitional Support Services (TSS) provides group care, intensive support services and supervision to youth in the custody of the director whose needs cannot be fully supported in extended family care or foster care. While a youth is in the TSS program, the youth, their social worker, TSS workers, the youth's family and their First Nation, all work collaboratively to develop and implement a comprehensive case plan that helps map the way forward for the youth to achieve their life goals.

Assisting youth to maintain connection to their culture while in group care is a key priority. To this end, TSS supports youth to participate in cultural programs with First Nations partners, such as the Moosehide Gathering in summer 2018 and the Jackson

Lake land-based healing camp. The staff and management at TSS incorporate First Nations cultural elements into daily living within the group care homes, in addition to helping children and youth in care to access their culture and community.

Starting in 2017, TSS made important changes to better support youth as they prepare to transition to life on their own or return to the family. Some of the changes include:

- hiring additional program support staff to work one-on-one with youth and assist with searching for and supporting youth on unplanned absences;
- staffing a personnel support position, which performs call-outs for shift coverages so that supervisory and front line staff can focus on providing care; and
- creating additional supervisory positions for after-hours, including evenings and weekends.

Despite these efforts, we acknowledge that the best place for youth is within family settings, preferably close to their community, until they can reunify with their parents. Social workers have increased their efforts to find alternatives to group care and to routinely re-explore the possibility of potential extended family care placements or reunifying youth with their families. These efforts have resulted in a prominent decrease in the number of children and youth in our TSS program, as shown in Figure 8.

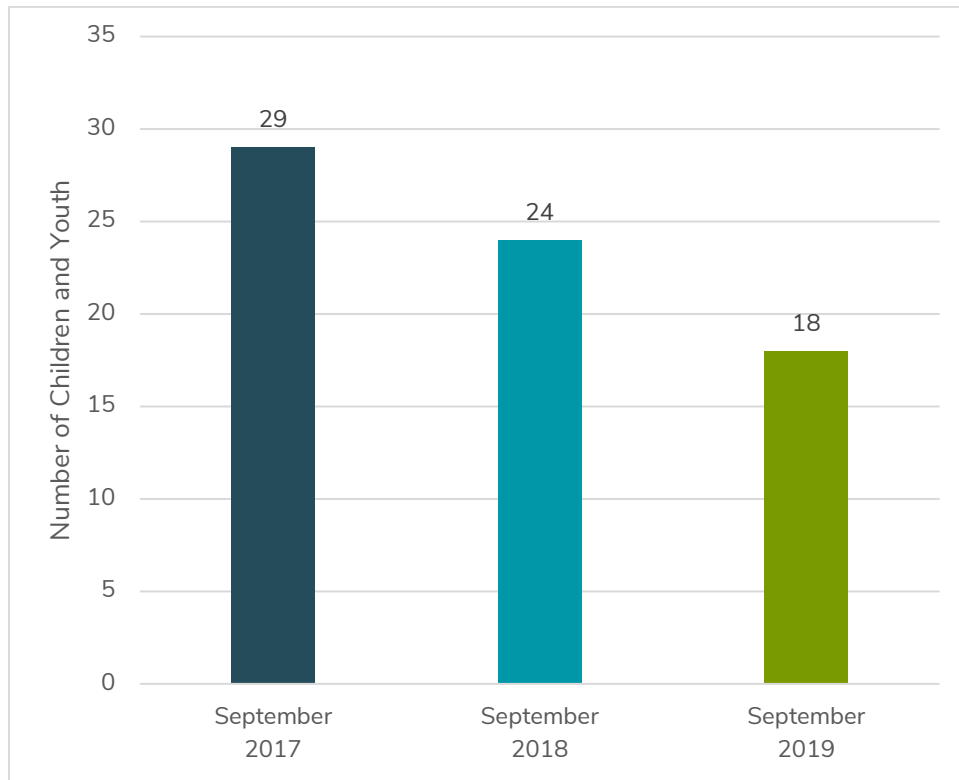


Figure 8. Number of children and youth in the TSS program. This figure shows the number of children and youth in the TSS program, or group care, in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting children and youth that may have resided in the TSS program over several fiscal years and to minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts.

Youth form important bonds with their peers and TSS program support workers while they are in group care. Accordingly, we have implemented policies to ensure that these bonds can continue after a youth leaves the program. The TSS aftercare policy allows youth who have left the program to return to their placements for up to six months for optional services, such as meals, emergency supplies, and support from staff. As these transitions can be challenging, TSS will continue to provide support through its current mandate and will look for opportunities to expand the services and care provided to youth.

C. Programs and services for youth and young adults

We understand that youth and young adults are more likely to succeed and live self-sufficiently when focussed programs and supports that emphasize building life skills and connecting with their natural support networks are available. In order to help facilitate their successful transition to self-sufficiency and lasting connections, we provide the following programs and services for youth from 16 years of age to young adults under 24 years of age, with some exceptions.

Agreements to assist youth and young adults

The CFSA introduced two distinct mechanisms, the Agreement for Support Services for Youth (s. 16) and the Agreement for Transitional Support Services (s. 17) to further assist youth and young adults. The Agreement for Support Services for Youth is for those from 16 to 19 years of age who are not able to safely reside in the family home and where there is no parent or other person that can assist them. The Agreement for Transitional Support Services is for young adults from 19 to 24 years who have been in the custody of the director and are making the transition to independent living.

Both of these agreements may provide financial assistance for housing and living expenses, and supports to help youth gain independence, self-confidence, life skills and deal with concerns such as mental health and substance use issues or returning to school. In order to be eligible for either of these agreements, youth must be actively engaged in working towards self-reliance, as well as participating in education, employment or training.

Supporting youth and young adults is a priority for the department. FCS continues to work internally and with other Government of Yukon departments, as well as First Nations and community partners to enhance the services available in Yukon. As indicated in Figure 9, we are using these agreements more to provide support to youth and young adults.

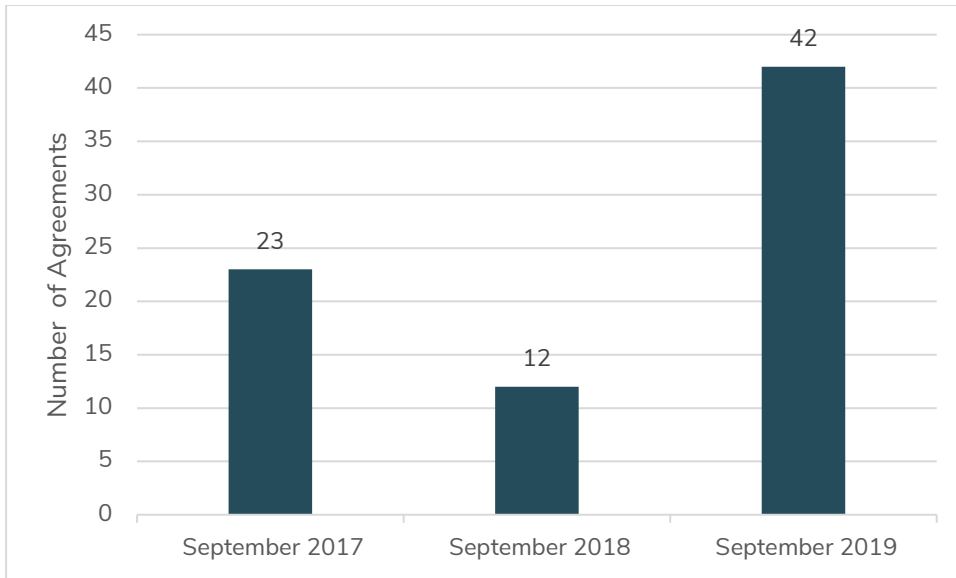


Figure 9. Number of agreements for support services for youth and number of agreements for transitional support services. This figure shows the number of families with ASSFs in a point-in-time count approach from September 2017 to September 2019. To avoid double counting agreements that may have been renewed over several fiscal years and minimize other reporting errors, we chose September (middle of the fiscal year) to provide point-in-time counts.

Nts' äw Chua: supportive housing and semi-independent living

Supporting youth transitioning to independence from the care and/or custody of the director was, and continues to be, an area of high priority. In April 2018, HSS purchased a residential property with semi-independent units to implement an innovative supportive housing and semi-independent living program. We engaged with youth currently in care, young adults who have aged out of care, First Nations, Elders, and service providers in the community to develop a program model to help youth successfully live on their own and maintain connections to their culture.

In December 2019, we officially launched Nts' äw Chua: Supportive Housing and Semi-Independent Living Program. Nts' äw Chua is a Southern Tutchone phrase, and roughly translates to 'wild rhubarb little creek', which is the traditional name for the Porter Creek neighbourhood where the program is located.

Based on information gathered during the engagement, the program provides:

- housing and primary care for youth from 15 to 19 years of age;
- life skills training to assist youth to live on their own;

- a combination of on-site and outreach services to children, youth and young adults from 12 to 24 years of age; and
- safe, supportive, and culturally relevant programming.

The Nts' äw Chua program is rooted in a “two-eyed seeing model” that brings together Indigenous and non- Indigenous worldviews. From an Indigenous perspective, the Seven Grandfather Teachings, the Medicine Wheel and Circle of Courage were integrated into the model. From a non-Indigenous perspective, the model includes trauma-informed and trauma-responsive approaches as well as elements from the Systems of Care and Natural Supports models. The principles from these models have been incorporated into our policy and procedures manual, training and hiring procedures.

Community partner spotlight: Skookum Jim Friendship Centre

Skookum Jim Friendship Centre (the Centre) is a well-established, non-profit, charitable organization that has provided holistic support to Indigenous people for over 50 years. The Government of Yukon has a long-standing partnership with the centre, providing funding to them to support programming for youth such as the Youth Emergency Shelter, Youth Support Services, the Tän Sakwäthän Youth Diversion program, and the Family Support Worker program. Funding provided to the centre has remained consistent in 2017/18 (\$900,373) and 2018/19 (\$840,000). However, given that the centre expanded to provide the Youth Support Services program (described below), FCS committed to providing additional support in 2019/20 with \$886,556 from April 1, 2019 to December 31, 2019.

The centre's Youth Emergency Shelter and emergency after-hours outreach services serve youth from ages 17 to 23 who require a safe environment, with supports including a safe bed, counselling, and referrals to additional services.

In February 2019, the centre launched its low-barrier Youth Support Services program for youth aged 12-24 with the goal of assisting youth to access services. More specifically, support workers will work one-on-one with youth in the community to secure housing, obtain identification, and participate in recreational activities (e.g. canoe trip, hikes, fishing and horseback riding) or to access emotional support during difficult circumstances. They will also help youth access food or any other government or emergency services when needed.

The department also provides funding to the centre to deliver the Tān Sakwāthān Diversion Program, an eight-week program for youth aged 12-17 years who are in conflict with the law. The program is intended to encourage participants to connect with or reconnect with their cultural identity, community, and history, and help reduce youth crime and “break the cycle”.

The centre’s Family Support Program works with youth and their families to provide referrals, workshops, community events (such as camps) and facilitate discussions with Elders. The goal is to work with youth and families to improve relationships, resolve conflict, connect with culture and build self-esteem.

Youth supports and services: Youth Achievement Centre

According to s. 174(3) of the CFSA, the director of FCS is also the provincial/territorial director under the *Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA)*. In Yukon, FCS’ Youth Supports and Services unit has the legal mandate to deliver services under the YCJA.

Over the last few reporting years, the number of youth involved with youth criminal justice system has continued to decline. The few youth involved continue to be served by either Whitehorse-based probation staff or regional social workers in partnership with Yukon First Nations, as appropriate. As a result, our Youth Achievement Centre (YAC) has transformed to meet the needs of a changing population of youth in high-risk situations and provide low-barrier, preventative, community-based services.

By creatively using existing resources and building partnerships with community partners such as BYTE, Skookum Jim Friendship Centre, KDFN Recreation, City of Whitehorse, Contagious Mountain Bike Club and Whitehorse Cross Country Ski Club, YAC has created many employment initiatives and offered wilderness therapeutic programming. Some examples include building mountain bike trails, constructing furniture and cabin construction projects, and participating in remote canoe and hiking trips. Participants gain basic work-related life skills, social skills, and improve their self-esteem, while learning carpentry and construction skills, outdoor survival skills and connecting to the land and natural environment.

While the number of youth enrolled in YAC programming remained fairly consistent, with 67 total youth in 2017/18 to 69 total youth in 2018/19, the number of hours that youth spent in programming significantly increased, from 5,861 hours in 2017/18 to 7,669 in 2018/19. This increase indicates two things: that youth with more complex needs enrolled in YAC programming, and that youth found the programming to be more engaging. Although two fiscal years do not provide enough data to be confident of these trends, we continue to look for opportunities to address the needs of at-risk youth and work on youth crime prevention.

Promoting child and family well-being beyond the *Child and Family Services Act*

In 2017, the Government of Yukon adopted **'our people-centred approach to wellness helps Yukoners thrive'** as one of its enduring priorities, which acknowledged that "improved coordination of early childhood programs maximizes benefits to children". Consistent with this priority and best practices in child welfare, we expanded and realigned our early childhood programming to serve more families. While child welfare services provided under the *CFSA* can mitigate child protection concerns and keep families together, a broad systemic approach that promotes protective factors, such as healthy relationships and early childhood development, can help families thrive. This section of the report describes the programs and services that assist and complement the child welfare mandate, or the *CFSA*, and contribute to better outcomes for all children and families.

Healthy Families

The Healthy Families program provides universal, barrier-free home-based supports and services in Whitehorse and in rural communities to parents from prenatally and/or birth until the child reaches school age (usually 5 years of age). In addition to teaching parents about family functioning, child health and development, and parent-child

interactions, it connects families to resources and helps families set and reach their goals. Services are offered at no cost to parents.

In 2017, Family and Children Services decided to forego the accreditation through Healthy Families America due to privacy and confidentiality concerns, which allowed us to move away from the standardized curriculum and expand the program to rural communities (Watson Lake, Pelly Crossing, Carmacks, Mayo, Haines Junction, Old Crow, Burwash Landing and Dawson) with culturally responsive programming. Most recently, in 2019, we created a Healthy Families worker position based in Carcross to provide services to the community and surrounding area. These program expansions were in response to requests from the respective First Nations within those communities. As a result of these changes, we are able to reach more families than ever (see Figure 10). In fact, when comparing pre-2017 family enrollment of 130 families per year to 2019 family enrollment, we see a 72.3% increase in family enrollment.

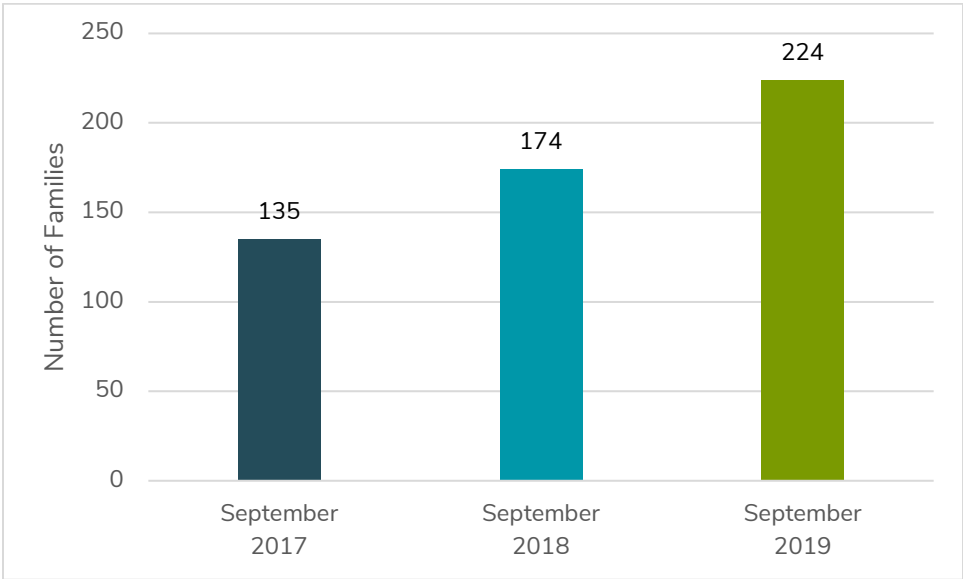


Figure 10. Number of families that accessed the Healthy Families program. This figure shows the number of families that voluntarily accessed the Healthy Families program across Yukon from each calendar year from 2017 to 2019.

Canada-Yukon early learning and child care agreement

In February 2018, the Minister of Health and Social Services signed the Canada-Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Agreement. This bilateral agreement provides Yukon with more than \$7 million over three years to fund investments that support four main areas of early learning and child care (ELCC):

- affordability and accessibility;
- inclusivity;
- innovation; and
- improving quality through training.

The current agreement expires on March 31, 2020, and the Government of Yukon is currently working with the Government of Canada to negotiate a new agreement that will take effect on April 1, 2020.

Some of the initiatives and program expansions launched using funding from the Canada-Yukon Early Learning and Child Care Agreement during this reporting period include:

- \$15,000 in funding to each of the 14 Yukon First Nations governments to assess early learning and child care needs in their respective communities.
- \$15,000 in funding was provided to *La garderie du petit cheval blanc* to assess early learning and child care services in the francophone community.
- Increased the Direct Operating Grant, which provides funding to licensed child care programs to manage their operating and maintenance costs, by 14.5%, with an additional 20% for rural programs.
- A grant for grandparents to cover the costs of licensed child care fees when they are the primary caregivers.
- A grant for young parents to cover the costs of licensed child care fees while completing secondary education.
- The development of a curriculum framework for all licensed child care programs for children 0 to 8 years of age.
- An early childhood education bursary program to provide funding for ELCC studies to enhance the quality of ELCC programs.
- Funding to Yukon College to offer early childhood education courses in communities outside of Whitehorse.

- Funding to the Yukon Child Care Association to host an annual early learning and child care conference.
- Funding to the Child Development Centre to offer Handle with Care and other supportive programming, as well as training to administer the Ages and Stages Questionnaire.
- Enhancement grants to assist with start-up costs for new licensed child care programs, to meet health and safety requirements and for radon testing and mitigation.
- Awareness campaigns regarding the importance of early childhood educators to support early childhood educator recruitment.
- Enrichment grants for licensed programs to purchase culturally and/or developmentally appropriate toys and equipment.

Family Resource Unit

In keeping with HSS' commitment to an ongoing continuum of supports throughout the lifespan, we realigned the Early Childhood, Prevention and Support Services Unit to form the Family Resource Unit (FRU). This newly-created unit includes the Child Care Services Unit, Healthy Families, a Family Support Program and Family Group Conferencing.

FRU's Family Support program offers similar prevention services to all Yukon families in a universal, barrier-free approach. Preventative services are now more accessible than ever before as child welfare involvement is no longer required to be eligible for the Family Support Program.

This new unit also supports preventative services provided by our community partners. It collaborates with Skookum Jim Friendship Centre and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council to assist in delivering their traditional parenting programs and culture camps that teach parenting skills through the traditional knowledge of Elders. In the coming months, FRU will explore additional opportunities to enhance its services and in-kind contributions to community partners.

Relationships with First Nation partners

A key priority for Yukon has been the work with Yukon First Nation partners to shift our focus from a protection to a prevention based model which is resulting in better outcomes for children and families, and keeping children with their family, extended family and community. We are committed to the ongoing journey towards reconciliation with First Nations and addressing the overrepresentation of First Nations children in care. This section of the report will detail the significant steps we have taken in this journey during 2017-2019.

Trilateral Table on Wellbeing of Yukon First Nations Children and Families

In January 2018, senior officials from the Government of Yukon, Government of Canada, First Nations governments and CYFN came together and established the Trilateral Table on Wellbeing of Yukon First Nations Children and Families to determine how to facilitate information sharing, promote collaborative decision-making on priorities, coordinate program implementation, and discuss allocation of financial resources. Federal, territorial, and First Nations government officials signed the terms of reference on February 18, 2019.

Indigenous Services Canada – prevention and enhancement supports

In March 2018, the Government of Yukon, First Nations governments, CYFN, and the Government of Canada, collectively agreed to changes to increase prevention and enhancement funding flowing directly to First Nations communities. This change in funding allocation further strengthens capacity in First Nations communities to improve outcomes for First Nations children and youth. This approach recognizes that by working together, we will improve outcomes for Indigenous children, youth and families.

First Nations Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons

In order to work closer with Yukon First Nations to identify solutions that ensure children remain in the community and connected to their families, we offer funding and

training for Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons. Hired and managed by Yukon First Nations, these Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons work hand-in-hand with FCS social workers. They even complete some of the same training; in 2018/19, approximately 50% of our core child welfare training participants were Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons from Yukon First Nations. Using their intimate knowledge of the community and family dynamics, they provide unique insight and creative solutions. They are an important prevention service and part of the resource network that can rapidly respond to the needs of the community.

Memoranda of agreement

To improve child welfare processes and operationalize the provisions of the CFSA that require First Nations involvement, we have entered into cooperation agreements with Yukon First Nations governments known as Memoranda of Agreement (MOA). These MOAs not only guide the delivery and administration of child welfare services to First Nations citizens, but also support First Nations child welfare service delivery. To date, we have completed MOAs with KDFN and Kluane First Nation, and are in the process of finalizing negotiations with Carcross/Tagish First Nation and Ta'an Kwäch'än Council. Additionally, we are in the early stages of preparing for negotiations with another First Nation. We are pleased to work with any Yukon First Nation interested in pursuing an MOA with FCS to enhance our working relationship and further crystallize their involvement in child welfare services.

Honouring Connections

We recognize that when children and youth remain in long-term government care under Continuing Custody Orders (CCO), they lose connections to family, community and culture. This loss of connection results in negative impacts on their emotional, physical, cognitive and spiritual well-being. Without a significant departure from past practices, future generations will inherit these negative impacts and First Nations children and youth will continue to be overrepresented in the child welfare system.

In response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's first Call to Action that asked all levels of government to commit to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in care, we launched the *Honouring Connections* project in January 2019 with First Nations and CYFN. This project will reassess all 50 First Nation children and youth under CCOs with a goal to, where possible, reunify them with their families, extended

families, communities and/or culture while focusing on their individual circumstances and needs. First Nations are currently determining their individual level of involvement in reassessing their respective children, youth and families; developing transition plans; and providing necessary supports and services for reunification. FCS will lead the reassessment and reunification processes for all non-Yukon First Nation children and youth.

Yukon will be a leader in Canadian child welfare by undertaking such an initiative, which to our knowledge has never been attempted by other provinces or territories, especially in coordination with the jurisdiction's respective First Nations, Inuit and/or Métis partners.

Council of Yukon First Nations and the First Nations Health and Social Development Commission

The Council of Yukon First Nations and the First Nations Health and Social Development Commission have provided invaluable support, guidance and direction for the delivery of child welfare services in Yukon. They were instrumental in some of the significant accomplishments detailed in this report, such as the changes to the Extended Family Care program, adopting Signs of Safety as our new child welfare practice model (see Looking Ahead pg. 38), and policy development for sending children and youth for specialized treatment outside of Yukon. We appreciate their commitment to child welfare and look forward to working together in partnership in the years to come.

Birth alerts

As stated in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls report, "birth alerts" predominantly impacted marginalized women and disproportionately Indigenous mothers. The report recommended the removal of birth alerts from practice. In support of this commitment, in May 2019, Yukon officially discontinued the use of "birth alerts" or "hospital alerts" which often resulted in newborn children being taken away from their parent within days of birth. The last time a child was taken into care after a "birth alert" in Yukon was in 2017. Yukon was the first jurisdiction in Canada to move in this direction, with some other provinces and territories following shortly after.

Partners in the Department of Health and Social Services

Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services – Child, Youth and Family Treatment Team

We collaborate closely with HSS' Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSU) to provide wraparound services to children, youth and families with child protection concerns. Together, we are continuously exploring opportunities to enhance the respective service delivery models. More specifically, MWSU's Child, Youth and Family Treatment Team (CYFTT) offers mental health services to all children, youth and their families, including children in foster care, group care, extended family care, and the new Nts' äw Chua program. Children and youth may access these services through self-referrals, parent referrals or third-party referrals (e.g. child welfare social workers, teachers). This team uses trauma-responsive and culturally-informed practices to engage with children and youth at a ground-level and reduce barriers to accessing treatment.

As a result of this close relationship between MWSU and FCS, when youth in our care are undergoing crises, we can connect them to CYFTT for more positive outcomes instead of referring them to Whitehorse General Hospital or other supports that result in waitlists.

Social Supports – Child Disability Services

According to s. 12 of the CFSA, the director can provide in-home supports and out-of-home care services to a parent with a child that has complex needs, even if there are no child protection concerns. However, in Yukon, voluntary, family-centred supports and services to such parents are provided through Social Supports' Child Disability Services to deliver disability services across the lifespan from children to adults. Some of Child Disability Services' key supports include respite services, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and autism assessments. During the 2017-19 reporting period, Child Disability Services served 150 children from 137 families.

Continuous service quality improvement

As part of our commitment to provide quality programs to children, youth and families, we regularly enhance our staff skills and overall services through training and professional development initiatives, quality assurance audits, and policy and procedural revisions. In spring 2019, the FCS branch began the Organizational Culture Conversations Project, an initiative to look at how we can build strong teams and workplace culture. What follows is a more detailed look at each of these areas supporting quality improvement.

Training and professional development

In 2017/18, we delivered a Child Welfare Core Training course with a revised curriculum to all of our child welfare social workers with the aim of not only improving their understanding of foundational child welfare competencies, but also improving the working relationships between Whitehorse staff and staff in the communities. Based on lessons learned, we revised our curriculum and offered another Child Welfare Core Training course in 2018/19 for all incoming child welfare social workers as well as First Nation Family Support Workers/Community Liaisons, FCS policy analysts and CYFN child welfare analysts. The second offering of the Child Welfare Core Training course intended to improve working relationships between FCS and First Nations at the child welfare operational level.

In addition to all of the courses and training offered through Government of Yukon's Organizational Development branch, in 2018 and 2019, staff were provided training on client complaint processes, respecting client rights and other policy revisions related to TSS and group care.

In addition, our foster and extended family caregivers also received and were eligible to attend a variety of courses and workshops including trauma-informed and responsive care training (i.e. Risking Connections), First Aid, suicide intervention training and the Crisis Prevention Institute's Non-violent Crisis Intervention training. Given all the exciting and necessary changes that are in progress or planned for FCS in the coming year, training and professional development will continue to be a busy area for our branch.

Quality assurance

According to the CFSA, we must report our compliance with child welfare standards to the Minister every three years. Over the 2017-2019 reporting period, we shifted our internal compliance auditing process to occur every two years, away from the previous annual auditing cycle, to allow more time for our quality improvement initiatives to improve outcomes. In December 2019, we hired a quality assurance analyst to help develop a quality assurance framework tailored to Yukon and informed by the CFSA's guiding principles and Signs of Safety's Meaningful Measures, the new child welfare practice model we are implementing in 2020 (see pg. 38 for more information).

Internal and external reviews on group care

In 2018, a number of allegations pertaining to the services delivered by Transitional Support Services (TSS) came to light. As a result, several internal and external reviews were launched to fully investigate these allegations and provide recommendations to address any systemic issues.

In response, the Minister requested the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate to conduct an independent and impartial review of the TSS program from April 1, 2015, to April 1, 2018. The Deputy Minister of HSS retained an external investigator from a legal firm in British Columbia to review these allegations and determine whether FCS followed the proper policies and procedures [the Costanzo Report (2018)]. As well, the Public Interest Disclosure Commissioner conducted a special investigation under the *Public Interest Disclosure of Wrongdoing Act (PIDWA)* into similar issues and allegations [the *PIDWA Report (2019)*].

We participated fully and forthrightly in all of these reviews to identify systemic issues that compromised care and support to children and youth. In light of these reviews, we took a number of significant steps described in this report and invested substantial human resources to address these issues and improve the quality of our services. For example, in 2018 we created a team of three policy analysts to conduct comprehensive policy reviews and jurisdictional scans on best practices with a view to align TSS policies with the CFSA and its respective policies. Based on the recommendations from the internal and external reviews, many policy and procedural revisions were undertaken in 2019 and respective training was delivered to staff. In the coming years,

we will continue to identify opportunities to improve the delivery of services to Yukon children, youth and families.

Organizational culture conversations project

When there is a strong organizational culture where all staff, from senior management to frontline, embody the values of the organization, employees are engaged, turnover is typically low and relationships with clients are strong. Simply put, the organization prospers as a collective. To better understand our own organizational culture, or “the way things are done around here”¹, in April 2019, we launched our Organizational Culture Conversations project in partnership with the Public Service Commission’s Organizational Development branch and the Respectful Workplace Office. We hosted a total of 20 crucial conversations (i.e. staff workshops and focus groups) with over 130 FCS staff to discuss topics such as what they are proud of and thankful for in our organizational culture, as well as what can be improved, how leadership can support a healthy culture and staffs’ role in culture-building.

In February 2020, ODB shared with management the themes, reflections and feedback from the conversations. In the coming months, the findings will be shared with staff and we still start the discussion on taking actions based on these results. Interwoven in this process is our all staff engagement days that incorporate and build upon the themes’ and topics from this work. This initiative emphasizes that, regardless of the position we are in, we all have a role in maintaining a healthy workplace that supports the healthy delivery of services to the people we serve.

¹ Deal T. E. and Kennedy, A. A. (1982, 2000) *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1982; reissue Perseus Books, 2000

Looking ahead

As the child welfare landscape changes and we learn more about the complex issues affecting the children, youth and families in our communities, we will use our creativity and existing resources to offer the best services possible. Described below are some of the notable initiatives, program enhancements, and partnerships to expect from us in the near future.

Signs of Safety

In collaboration with CYFN and our First Nations partners, in summer of 2018 we worked to identify child welfare practice models more appropriate for Yukon that would be compatible with the CFSA. Following extensive research, consideration, and engagement with First Nations, the collective decision was reached to adopt the Signs of Safety (SoS) practice model.

The SoS model is a flexible, strengths-based, family-centered, safety-organized approach to child protection casework that is consistent with the recommendations to improve child welfare services from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada final report, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls final report, as well as the guiding principles highlighted in the CFSA. Additionally, implementing the SoS practice model in collaboration with First Nations will provide an opportunity to respond to Item 5 within the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society's Spirit Bear Plan by introducing training, policies, and practice that helps further efforts towards reconciliation.

In fall 2019, a three-year contract was signed to allow the project to proceed with the help of SoS consultants. Pre-implementation activities in fall 2019 have focused on identifying barriers to implementing the new practice model and preparing staff, management, CYFN and First Nations partners on the model basics and what can be expected with the implementation. The official SoS implementation launch is scheduled for April 2020 with staff, leadership and partner training to take place in May 2020.

Family case management project

In 2018, following recommendations from the Auditor General of Canada Report of FCS (2014); the Costanzo Report (2018); the PIDWA Report (2019); the Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office Report (2019); and FCS management and staff, we began

planning for an integrated Family Case Management (FCM) system, which was completed in fall 2019. Soon after, we started our phased approach to implementation. We are currently working towards launching the first phase of the new system in November 2020 and second phase in October 2021. Some of the benefits of a case management system include:

- enhanced services to families;
- reduced paperwork for social workers, resulting in more time spent with children, youth and families;
- streamlined financial processes and greater financial accountability; better statistical reporting; and
- increased compliance with privacy legislation.

Re-visioning of services offered by Transitional Support Services

As FCS continues to support families to keep children in their homes and communities, as well as reunify those in long-term care with their families, fewer children and youth will require group care. In order to utilize TSS resources to better meet our emerging client needs, we will review our current service delivery model with the goal of refocusing resources to address gaps in our continuum of supports. This work will be done in partnership with youth, staff, First Nations and community partners.

Increased focus on restorative justice

Our Youth Supports and Services program, in partnership with First Nations, CYFN, and other community partners, are set to review current practices to shift our focus to restorative practices and prevention.

We are working closely with KDFN to expand the restorative community conference program to include a KDFN-based position embedded within the community. By expanding this program to include a First Nation coordinator, we hope to provide youth with an alternative to the court system while incorporating traditional principles and values rooted in their culture.

Additionally, we will host the Vision 20/20 restorative justice forum in the fall of 2020 alongside First Nations, other Government of Yukon service providers, and community

partners to discuss best practices, avenues to modernize services, and enhance the focus on restorative and preventative approaches to youth justice.

Community-based safety resources

At the request of several Yukon First Nations and in collaboration with First Nations governments, we are exploring the development of community-based safety resources, such as community care homes (i.e., “Auntie’s Home”) operated in First Nations communities. These homes would provide short-term/emergency care to children under the age of 19 with the goal of keeping children in their communities, while resources are deployed to address safety concerns in the family home.

Rural sustainability of licensed child care – pilot project

Rural sustainability of licensed child care is a priority for this government. With input from First Nations governments, community partners and community members, we are embarking on a pilot project to develop a model for funded child care in the communities. In early 2020, we will launch the two-year project that will provide operational funding to two non-profit, licensed child care centres in the communities (Watson Lake Daycare in Watson Lake, and Little Blue Early Child Care and Learning Centre in Dawson). This funding will help increase the quality of services, stabilize parent fees and implement a stable wage grid for early childhood educators with the expectation that this will facilitate staff recruitment and long-term retention.

Progressive initiatives, program enhancements, and partnerships like the ones noted above create a feeling of optimism and hope for the future. We recognize that systemic issues require systemic responses and we cannot address the effects of residential schools, the 60s scoop, and violence against Indigenous women and children without concerted, collaborative, and coordinated efforts. Our approach to child welfare is ever evolving with our focus shifting from intervention to prevention. Our approach to service delivery is shifting towards increased partnership with First Nations and communities, and collaboration across government and community to address the challenges faced by Yukon families, children and youth. We look forward to reporting on our future initiatives, successes and learning in the next annual report.