



Response to Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office Systemic Review and Recommendations

Health and Social Services
Social Services Division

July 2019



Health and Social Services Response to Recommendations

The Department of Health and Social Services (HSS or the department) has undertaken or will be undertaking work to address the recommendations of the report *Empty Spaces – Caring Connections: The Experiences of Child and Youth in Yukon Group Care*. Descriptions of the steps already completed, and those currently underway, are set out below. Of the recommendations in the report, 27 are accepted (with one being accepted with modification). Three of the recommendations have not been accepted.

Family and Child Services (FCS) recognizes that effective change for all children and youth, and more specifically children and youth in group care, requires a broad, interconnected and coordinated approach. Systemic issues require a systemic response. Foundational change must happen at all levels and across all programs within governments. The Department of Health and Social Services, of which FCS is a part, has undertaken a broad and inclusive approach to the enhancement of services and supports to Yukon children, youth, and families. This avenue recognizes that change must extend beyond any one person, one policy, one program, one branch and one government. FCS, and HSS more broadly, also recognize that change must occur across all areas to truly effect systemic change, which could result in healthier outcomes for children, youth and families.

The Yukon Child and Youth Advocate Office's (YCAO) review grouped the 30 recommendations thematically. The recommendations within the report pertained to three main areas: policy, procedure, and legislation; case management; and training. The following response from the department groups the recommendations into four thematic areas, and cross-references the work of FCS to address the recommendations.

Thematic Categorization of Recommendations

The review lists 30 recommendations (see Appendix) and are thematically grouped as:

- o Stepping Stones for Change – two recommendations (1-2)
- o Caring Connections and Community Anchors – five recommendations (3-7)
- o Cultural Identity – eight recommendations (8-15)
- o Child and Youth Participation – 11 recommendations (16-26)
- o Group Care Through a Child Rights Lens – four recommendations (28-31)

*Recommendation 27 was not listed in the systematic review.

Recommendations pertain to three main areas:

- o Policy, procedure, and legislation
- o Case management
- o Training

Thematic Grouping of Recommendations

1. Relationships, Safety, Loss, and Caring Communities

- Supporting a child and youth's well being in wraparound services.
- A greater understanding is needed about the loss children and youth experience when entering into group care as well as, when leaving group care.
- A greater understanding of how to maintain relationships to ease transition back into a community.

2. Cultural Identity

- Increasing policy implementation around cultural identity.
- Allowing children to understand and practice their culture allowing for a greater sense of belonging.

3. Case Planning

- Involving youth and support individuals in case planning.
- A mechanism to supporting sibling relationships.
- Exploring where children are placed.

4. Leaving Group Care

- Better preparation for children leaving group care so they have a better chance of success.
- Assisting children and youth in transition to family environments, foster care, and/or independent living.

Cross-Reference of Family and Children's Services initiatives with thematic recommendations of Yukon Child Advocate Office

The following is a reverse chronology of initiatives and processes undertaken and/or planned by FCS and HSS. Each initiative is connected to one or more of the accepted thematic recommendations within the YCAO review.

- **Vision 20/20 Youth Justice Forum** – In the spring of 2020, FCS will undertake a Youth Justice Forum with a focus on best practice, including avenues to modernize services and to enhance the focus on restorative and preventative approaches. This is being led by the Youth Justice team and will involve First Nations and Justice partners. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Supervisor Training** – In October 2019, supervisory training will be implemented which will offer components on strengths-based supervision in child welfare, First Nations, critical thinking, cognitive biases, and the Challenge of Choice. Some of these modules are for all supervisors. Others are limited to child welfare supervisors. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Family Group Conferencing (FGC) Review** – In September 2019, FCS will undertake a review of the current Family Group Conferencing model to explore options to modernize service and include opportunities for First Nations to implement and manage their own approach to FGC. This is pending and work on the scope of review has yet to be completed. (1, 2, & 3)
- **Realignment of Teams and Stronger Focus on Prevention** – In June/ July 2019, FCS is hiring an additional supervisor for a two-year period to support realignment of family enhancement teams and support a stronger focus on prevention and enhancement services, youth transitions, and children in care. (3 & 4)
- **Staff Engagement Session** – In June 2019, a cross-program staff engagement day focused on team building. It included a cultural training component and knowledge sharing across programs. (3)
- **Risking Connections Train-the-Trainer** – In June 2019, Transitional Support Services (TSS) and Mental Wellness and Substance Use Services (MWSU) partnered in a train-the-trainer program for Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice which includes an historical trauma component. A faculty trainer from Connecticut attended to provide trainer programming. This allows Yukon to have our own trainers in this critical area. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Financial Lean Process** – In May 2019, FCS hired a third party to conduct a review of the day-to-day financial processes of FCS and provide observations and recommendations to streamline the processes. This will assist in efficiency through reduction of steps to financial processes and consequently alleviate the wait times for payment to clients and vendors. (3 & 4)
- **Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice** – In April 2019, TSS and MWSU partnered to deliver a joint Basic Training on Risking Connections and Trauma Informed Practice to all TSS and MWSU staff. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Psycho-Educational Sessions** – In March/April 2019, TSS and MWSU implemented psycho-educational sessions for TSS caseworkers and withdrawal management youth workers. This is important training for staff. (3)
- **Youth-Focused Supports and Services** – In April 2019, MWSU began offering youth-focused supports and services for TSS youth and youth in care. (1 & 3)
- **Child and Youth Advocate Training Sessions** – In February and March 2019, additional half-day orientation training sessions were held with the YCAO to ensure that additional FCS staff and new child protection staff had access to information on the YCAO, the Protocol between YCAO and Health and Social Services, as well as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). A total of three sessions were completed and more are planned in the future to ensure that new staff receive this information. HSS is exploring the option of having this attached to the Organizational Development branch for access by all government employees. (1, 2, 3, & 4)

- **Transitional Support Worker** – In February 2019, FCS realigned caseloads and added a transitional support worker to support post-care services as well as youth agreements. A second transitional support worker position was added in June 2019. (1)
- **Community Based Supports for Youth** – In February 2019, Integrated Supports for Yukon Youth (ISSY) transitioned to Skookum Jim Friendship centre with no disruption to services and supports for youth. Youth are able to access daily supports, programming and connection to supports in community. A full review of the program will be undertaken in 2019/20. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Parenting Programs** – In February 2019, Healthy Families partnered with Skookum Jim's Traditional Parenting to collaborate on potential co-delivery opportunities for parenting programs. HSS is currently exploring opportunities to jointly offer healthy families and traditional parenting programs in the communities. (1 & 2)
- **Records Management System** – In February 2019, a new records management system began to be implemented within FCS. The tentative completion date is for winter 2019/2020. (2 & 3)
- **Joint Supervisors Meeting** – In January 2019, HSS established monthly meetings of FCS child welfare supervisors from across Yukon to ensure consistency in service delivery and enhanced communications between all FCS offices. (3)
- **Cross-Program Review of Case Plans** – Since January 2019, group home and FCS leadership meetings to review and confirm case plans for children in group homes are moving forward. There is continual focus on reunification opportunities for all youth and/or transition opportunities to extended family, foster care or supported independent living. (3 & 4)
- **Honouring Connections: Continuing Custody Order Review** – Launched in January 2019, HSS, Yukon First Nations, and the Council of Yukon First Nations are working together on a process to reassess all 50 Yukon First Nations children and youth under continuing care orders and, where possible, reunify them with their families, extended families, communities and/or culture. In all cases, it is expected that enhanced cultural connection plans will be established for children and youth. Child and youth access with extended family members will be reassessed to ensure their rights are being upheld. HSS will undertake the reassessment and reunification processes, where possible, for all non-Yukon First Nations children and youth as well. This process will highlight the voices and views of children, youth and their families. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Paralegal Position** – In December 2018, HSS introduced a pilot paralegal position to support social workers with legal processes and completion of affidavits. This increases the ability of social workers to focus on prevention and enhancement support work with children, youth, and families. It is important to note that there has been a significant reduction in the number of files before the court. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Family Enhancement Team at Kwanlin Dün First Nation (KDFN)** – In December 2018, FCS moved one of its family enhancement teams to the McIntyre subdivision to work collaboratively with KDFN social services staff to provide better, more cohesive services and supports for families. (2)
- **Plans of Care** – In December 2018, a directive was issued for completion of all Plans of Care and status reports every six months. Currently, all Plans of Care are completed. Plans of Care are completed by FCS social workers and involve family, First Nations, and children and youth age appropriately, and caregivers. Plans of Care include a cultural component. (3)
- **Extended Family Care Agreements (EFCA)** – As of November 2018, extended family caregivers are now provided with the same level of financial supports and services that are available to foster caregivers. Financial Supports and Services for Extended Family Caregivers include: monthly base rate, clothing and special needs rate allowances, respite, homemaker and alternate child care services, exceptional transportation reimbursements, annual holiday travel allowances, school supplies, exceptional supports/services (those not listed previously), other supports, and in-kind contributions such as training, parenting programs and family counselling. FCS continues to see a significant increase in the number of EFCAs that allow children and youth to remain with their families and stay connected to communities and culture. (1, 2, 3, & 4)

- **Review of Child in Care Allowances** – In November 2018, a review of all allowances and support payments for children and youth in care was initiated. This included areas such as clothing, recreation, holiday, birthday and graduation allowances, and vacation travel. A jurisdictional scan across Canada was completed to analyze costs, and HSS is in the process of finalizing updated financial amounts and incorporating the complexities of cost of living differences across Yukon. This is expected to be completed by the end of August 2019. (3 & 4)
- **Healthy Families Community Programming** – In October 2018, HSS began partnering with Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation in Old Crow. In February 2019, HSS partnered with First Nation of Na-Cho Nyäk Dun in Mayo to begin delivering a Healthy Families program once a month in the community. (1 & 3)
- **Realignment of Regional Services and Integrated Services for Yukon Youth (ISYY)** – In October 2018, regional services and ISYY were realigned under the Director of FCS to be consistent with responsibilities under legislation. Consistency in service delivery, effective and efficient use of resources, and stronger communication and interaction between communities and Whitehorse will reduce the disconnect of child, youth and families who travel from the region to Whitehorse. (3)
- **File Management System** – After the closure of ISYY, HSS has a revamped process for records which were held at ISYY to ensure all information is contained under one FCS file management system. (3)
- **Client Complaints and Concerns Training** – In September 2018, mandatory Client Complaints and Concerns training was conducted for all FCS staff. This training was done jointly by FCS staff and the Public Service Commission Organizational Development branch and was meant to reinforce with staff the processes and requirements for handling all issues related to quality-of-service concerns. Additional training sessions will be ongoing. (3)
- **Memoranda of Agreement (MOA)** – In September 2018, HSS began the MOA process. The HSS-Kwanlin Dün First Nation MOA is undergoing a scheduled review. HSS is in the process of finalizing an MOA with Ta'an Kwäch'än Council, has started MOA negotiations with Carcross/Tagish First Nation, and is preparing for MOA negotiations with Ross River Dena Council. MOA outline cooperation between HSS and individual First Nations on the delivery of child welfare services to the First Nations' citizens. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Comprehensive Review of Critical Incident and Incident Processes and Procedures** – In September 2018, FCS initiated: a comprehensive review of critical incident and incident processes and procedures; a jurisdictional scan of best practices; and ways to align TSS and FCS policies. Revised processes, procedures and forms are expected to be completed in August 2019. A comprehensive training to support these changes will be provided to staff at all levels. The revised processes will include the requirement for youth involvement, where they consent to be involved. Additional TSS staffing supports put in place over the last year were in response to HSS's identification of opportunities within this report. With specific attention to recommendation #25, FCS has a robust, formal reporting process. Revised processes with respect to critical incidents and incident processes and procedures will include youth participation as appropriate. Currently, the RCMP are involved and conduct external investigations and provide reports as per our process. As well, the lead on serious critical incident reviews is conducted by a senior management representative, who is removed from the day-to-day operations. There is also involvement of the appropriate First Nation in the assessment and/or investigation process for Yukon First Nations clients. HSS is satisfied that these processes, with their clear roles for external participants, fully meet the need for effective and responsive incident reporting and investigation. (3)
- **Core Training** – In the fall 2018, a second pilot of Core Training was conducted, with presentations by the Deputy Child Advocate and other staff from the YCAO. The child welfare Core Training is intended to provide HSS staff working in the area of child welfare service delivery with the basic skills and knowledge necessary to provide services described within the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA). (1, 2, 3, & 4)

- **FCS Policy Review Team** – In August 2018, a dedicated FCS policy team was established to undertake an extensive policy review of FCS policies and to respond to the recommendations of the Child and Family Services Act Advisory Committee and other reviews. The policy team is also focused on review and revisions to TSS programming with lenses of ensuring the alignment of both child protection and group home program policies. (2, 3, & 4)
- **Placement Review Committee (PRC) Review** – In August 2018, FCS undertook a review of the long standing PRC committee process. This review was undertaken with First Nations partners. Revisions to the PRC process have been completed and a policy is now completed. Placement decisions involving group home placement will now be conducted as part of the main case planning and decision making processes. The PRC will focus only on out-of-territory treatment options if required. First Nations partners, family and youth will participate in this new PRC process and decision making. Release of the revised PRC process and associated communication and training was completed in June, 2019. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Child Protection Training for Yukon** – In August 2018, a Core Training design team, made up of Yukon First Nations representatives, the Council of Yukon First Nations and HSS staff began work to help finalize the content and design of child protection training for Yukon. This work is ongoing. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Case Management System** – In August 2018, HSS began developing a new case management system within FCS to provide better decision-making tools, improve service delivery, and enhance the ability to track the needs of children, youth, and families. This is a significant undertaking and is expected to take two years from development to implementation. Engagement with Yukon First Nations partners will continue to occur as we build this new system. (2 & 3)
- **First Nation Service Delivery Model** – In August 2018, a new replacement home for the Girls' Receiving home was put on hold. This step was taken to support HSS's commitment to partner with Yukon First Nations on conducting a facilitated review of group care, which would include options for Yukon First Nations service delivery model and other models of care identified, developed and managed by First Nation partners. This process has not yet been initiated. This review will be determined in consultation with First Nations partners. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Signs of Safety Practice Framework** – In June 2018, a workshop was held with First Nations partners on options for a practice framework for child welfare. A decision was made to go with Signs of Safety Practice Framework and to create a Yukon-specific screening tool. This will incorporate strong linkages to family and family history, genograms, etc. (1, 2, & 3)
- **Child and Family Services Act Review** – In May 2018, HSS established an external advisory six-member panel on the Child and Family Services Act. This review is broad and has a full consultation strategy. Submission of the final report is expected shortly. It is expected that this review will provide significant and relevant recommendations to enhance legislation, policy and service delivery. It will focus on a collective, innovative and partnered approach. This will be an opportunity to apply a stronger connection to the UNCRC where appropriate. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Child Youth and Family Counsellors** – As of April 2018, there is now a Child Youth and Family Counsellor position in each of the four rural Mental Wellness and Substance Use community hubs. These are master's degree-level clinical counsellor positions. This provides community-based access to counsellors for children and youth. (1)
- **Revisions to Family Referral Form** – In April 2018, FCS initiated a review of the Family Referral Form (FRF) which is the initial form completed when families become involved. The revised form gathers more information and has a stronger ability to identify situations that fall within/without the legislated mandate of FCS. This revised form is being piloted in May 2019. (2 & 3)
- **Family Support Positions** – In April 2018, HSS funded 14 family support positions in communities to be employed by Yukon First Nations. These positions provide direct, community-based supports to families, children, and youth. It is designed and delivered by each First Nation to meet the needs of their community members. (1 & 2)

- **Social Work Positions** – In April 2018, FCS realigned caseloads and introduced specific social work positions to support Extended Family Care Agreements (EFCA) and Family Services (FS) files. EFCA and FS provide services to children and youth within family, or extended family, settings reducing the need for out-of-home placement, while maintaining connection to family, culture, and community. (2 & 3)
- **Family Enhancement Teams** – In April 2018, child protection teams were realigned to form Family Enhancement Teams with a stronger focus on prevention and enhancement approaches in practice. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Enhanced Supports to Youth in Transition** – In April 2018, HSS purchased a property at 22 Wann Road in Whitehorse to replace two group home buildings. The replacement group home will accommodate up to 10 youth in independent and semi-independent suites. Renovations on the property began in March 2019, and it is expected that youth will be living in the home in fall 2019. HSS is in the process of an engagement strategy to incorporate the voices of youth currently in care, youth who have aged out of care, First Nations partners, non-governmental organizations that work with Yukon youth, and other key partners. The goal is to develop an innovative program model that focuses on the skill development that youth require so that when they transition out of care they can successfully live independently, and have connections to community, culture, and supports. (2, 3, & 4)
- **Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada Prevention and Enhancement Supports** – In March 2018, HSS, in consultation with Yukon First Nations, agreed to changes in the allocation of funding which increases a direct flow of funding to Yukon First Nations communities. The changes to the funding are a direct result of continued collaboration, engagement and negotiation between the department, the CYFN's Yukon First Nation Health and Social Development Commission and Federal Health representatives. This change to the funding allocation serves to further strengthen capacity in First Nation Communities to improve outcomes for First Nation children and youth. This approach recognizes that by working together we can improve outcomes for Indigenous children, youth and families. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Caregiver Support Review** – In February 2018, a Request for Proposal process was initiated to seek expert support on how to re-establish a foster care association. In April 2018, this contract was awarded and work began. Work included engaging with existing and former foster parents, Yukon First Nations, FCS staff, and other stakeholders to analyze and recommend a clear direction for future efforts. The final report was received in October 2018, and recommended a joint association be established with foster parents and extended family caregivers in order to keep sufficient numbers for this type of non-governmental organization. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **FCS Staff Engagement on Training** – In February 2018, a staff-wide engagement was held to determine required and desired training in all areas. A roll-up of training requests has been completed and implementation of identified training has begun on an individual and collective basis. (1)
- **Early Learning and Child Care (ELCC) Bilateral Agreement** – In February 2018, the first ELCC bilateral agreement between the Government of Canada and Yukon government was signed. It will see the Government of Yukon received \$7.163 million over a three-year period from April 1, 2017 to March 31, 2020. A number of initiatives were started or expanded as a result of the funding under this agreement. Some initiatives include grandparent subsidy to support grandparents caring for grandchildren, treatment spots in centres across Yukon to support parents and/or caregivers undergoing treatment. (1 & 3)
- **Transitional Support Services (TSS) Staffing** – From 2018 until present, TSS has implemented a pool of on-call staff to provide additional support and supervision to group homes. Two evening and weekend supervisors have been added to better support front-line staff and youth. There is now a personnel assistant to perform scheduling functions which removes a time consuming function from supervisors. TSS has also co-located a human resources representative to improve services and supports to clients and staff. Staff are not scheduled to work alone, and every effort is made to fill last-minute vacancies. HSS also established a position dedicated to leading the formal development of transitional support services programming for youth (Wann Road). (1, 2, 3, & 4)

- **Trilateral Table on Child Welfare** – In January 2018, senior officials came together and established the Trilateral Table on Child Welfare 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. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Federal Legislation on Child Welfare – The Indigenous Family Unity Act** – Since January 2018, Yukon government officials at varying levels have been participating in Federal government meetings in regards to the proposed legislation. Yukon continues to participate and evaluate the impact of implementation of Federal legislation, how it interfaces with current legislation, self-governing agreements, and the additional opportunities for First Nations partners. Yukon will engage with its First Nation partners on implementation. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Healthy Families** – Healthy Families is a program that provides support to families who are expecting a baby up until the child is school-age. In October 2017, approval was given for the Healthy Families program to forgo accreditation so that the narrow intake criteria could be replaced. This resulted in more families being served by the program. There is now universal access to the supports of this program. Although formal program data is still limited, early information is showing large increases in client uptake of this program in all communities where the service is offered. (1, 2, & 3)
- **Toll-Free Foster Recruitment Number** – In October 2017, FCS opened a toll-free foster care recruitment inquiry number. (3)
- **Core Training** – In fall 2017 and 2018, the Advocate and her staff presented at the internally-developed Core Training, where they discussed the topics of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) 94 Calls to Action, YCAO Annual Report (2017), the *Child and Youth Advocate Act*, as well as the protocol between YCAO and HSS (2016). This training was mandatory for all front-line staff and supervisors and included some management. More than 90 per cent of all front-line staff and supervisors were trained, some were missed due to operational requirements. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Quality Assurance Position** – In 2017, HSS established a position dedicated to quality assurance, internal auditing, and data management of child welfare information, including group home programming. HSS continues to explore the most effective and efficient manner to utilize this position. The position has not yet been filled, but the process has begun and it should be filled shortly. (3)
- **TSS Support Services Planning & Cultural Connection** – Revised the 'Clinical Course of Treatment' process (case plan) within TSS in order to focus on Yukon First Nations children and youth and their connection to culture. In addition to the case plan completed by the FCS social worker, children and youth placed at TSS receive an orientation that specifically identifies cultural goals and plans for each youth. This orientation identifies day-to-day activities for the child or youth that include, but are not limited to, meal and menu planning, working with a cultural liaison from the child's First Nation, attending cultural gatherings and events, and maintaining cultural contacts. Elders sometimes attend the group home for contract work. TSS is currently working to reinvigorate or redesign the cultural committee, so that it is collaborative and inclusive with strong involvement of youth, staff, First Nations and Elders. It will incorporate TRC and reconciliation activities, land-based and cultural opportunities for children and youth. (2 & 3)
- **Youth Agreement Practice Update** – Although these agreements have been in place since the *Child and Family Services Act* was implemented in 2010, emphasis has been placed on educating staff in the utilization of these types of youth agreements. FCS has seen a significant increase in their use and this practice is in line with empowering youth in their own case planning. Youth agreements are a viable alternative to group care and can often better facilitate transitional planning for youth. Youth are more engaged and invested in the success of self-developed case plans (1, 2, 3, & 4)

- **TSS Post-Care Youth Support Services** – TSS has an existing policy to allow for up to six months of support services by group home staff for all youth who exit services. In many situations, youth continue to return to their former group homes years after leaving. FCS intends to increase monitoring during the 2019/20 fiscal year so a clearer picture of TSS post care service utilization can be made available. Additional aftercare and outreach support programming options will be explored with the youth and our partners over the next year (1, 3, & 4)
- **Literature Review and Jurisdiction Scan** – HSS developed a working group to conduct a literature review, jurisdictional scan of best practices in transitional supports for youth, and conduct engagement with a goal of redesigning transitional services for Yukon. (3 & 4)
- **Best Practices in Group Care** – HSS is committed to continuous quality improvement and to following best practices in the field of group care. An example of this is the new transitional supports facility on Wann Road and the development of contemporary and innovative supports for youth. HSS has suspended the building of an additional replacement group home and will engage with First Nations partners on opportunities to chart a new course for group care. Ideally, the use of group care would not be a part of the continuum of care. However, in the current reality, Group Care remains a necessary option. FCS must always be positioned to provide placement given our legal responsibilities under the CFSA. HSS will keep reviewing and reconsidering, and if the time comes that Group Care does not have to be an option, HSS will utilize other options that have evolved to best meet the needs of those in care. (1, 2, 3, & 4)
- **Collaborative Case Planning** – Work has been undertaken to ensure that all case planning meetings are attended by the necessary individuals including the child or youth client where appropriate, Yukon First Nations, and other service providers. This ensures that all individuals important in the lives of children and youth are part of the planning, and important processes like placement, visitation and family and sibling connections are recognized and supported. (1, 2, & 3)
- **Youth Achievement Centre (YAC)** – Over the past few years, due to a decrease in youth formally involved in the Youth Justice system, FCS has made changes in programming at YAC to allow for more at-risk youth to engage in recreational and other programming. This has increased opportunity and support for youth who may be disengaged from the traditional school structure. FCS will engage with its Department of Education partners and the new Assistant Deputy Minister of First Nations Initiatives to review opportunities for innovative supports to children and youth who are living with trauma and who are not benefiting from the traditional approach to education. This is pending for a potential 2019/20 start. (3 & 4)

Reviews Undertaken and Underway by the Department

Incident Reports – In June 2018, the Assistant Deputy Minister, the Director, and policy staff conducted a review of all 2593 incident reports from April 2015 to March 2018.

Consultant Reports on TSS – In June 2018, HSS conducted a review of nine consultant reports on TSS since 2002 and the status of the 186 recommendations, with a focus on continuous improvement.

Better Outcomes for Children and Youth – In June 2018, Better Outcomes for Children and Youth action plan was completed.

Historical Critical Incident File Reviews – In October 2018, an historical critical incident files review was undertaken at the request of the Director to provide insight into historical files, practices and thematic patterns. These reviews are still in process with an anticipated completion for late summer 2019.

Recommendations Not Accepted or Accepted with Modification

Although HSS agrees with and accepts 27 of the 30 recommendations from the report, three of the recommendations either cannot be implemented or, in HSS's view, identify issues that are better addressed in other ways. There is one recommendation that is accepted with modification. The following explains HSS's position:

Recommendation 31: Accepted with Modification

“Provide exit surveys for staff prior to their leaving the Department. Surveys are to document reasons for leaving the position and ensure quality of care for children and youth in Group Care.”

HSS accepts this recommendation with the following information specified. All Yukon government staff have the opportunity to participate in an exit interview if they so choose to. Exit interviews cannot be imposed on staff, but are always encouraged. Staff have an ongoing obligation throughout the period of their employment to report immediately any quality of care concern to ensure it is addressed appropriately. Should staff wait to exercise their legislated responsibility during an exit interview, they potentially place children and youth at risk and this is unacceptable.

Recommendation 6: Not Accepted

“Amend the *Child and Family Services Act* and associated policy s. 8.2.8, to extend eligibility to receive supports beyond 24 years of age. Developmental ages need to be considered for youth aging out of Group Care.”

HSS recognizes the need for a continuum of supports for youth as they age. However, not all of these supports appropriately belong under Family and Children's Services (FCS). Services need to expand to other program areas and ensure linkages with other governmental and community-based programs and supports to ensure a full continuum of supports for youth now and in their future years. The department is currently awaiting the final report from the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFSA) Advisory Committee, established by the Minister of Health and Social Services, which has completed a broad consultation process in order to incorporate their recommendations with respect to persons over the age of 24 as appropriate.

Recommendation 9: Not Accepted

“Create opportunities to hire cultural advisors to work within Group Care. An advisor would be a liaison for connecting the child or youth with their First Nation, local community, guide the child or youth in cultural teachings, attend cultural events, and support access to all aspects of their culture.”

HSS believes that connection to family, community and culture is a requirement of all who work with our children, youth and families. Ongoing recruitment efforts support diversity applicants in all positions. As well as recognizing the diversity in the distinct Yukon First Nation communities, it is important that HSS work with all Yukon First Nations partners as we support their respective community members. HSS believes that having this support from each Yukon First Nation is a stronger approach than potentially limiting this work to one position. HSS will continue to work with First Nation partners to determine the best options for moving forward.

Recommendation 12: Not Accepted

“Design an independent cultural/reconciliation committee which includes children and youth in Group Care and make access to cultural events and land based opportunities a priority.”

HSS is committed to the goals behind this recommendation. However, HSS believes that these goals can best be achieved with a revitalization of our previous culture committee, or the implementation of a similar model that has youth participation and an enhanced focus on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) and reconciliation activities. Additionally, devising a truly independent cultural/reconciliation committee would be very challenging, structurally, given the legal responsibilities of FCS.

Appendix

Here is the list of recommendations from the Yukon Child & Youth Advocate Office's systemic review, *Empty Spaces Caring Connections: The Experience of Children and Youth in Yukon Group Care*.

Stepping Stones for Change

1. Conduct a review of how policy, as prescribed by the Child and Family Services Policy Manual (2013), is implemented in employee practice. Through this Review, children, youth, families, and First Nations identified gaps between the implementation of Policy into service delivery. A comprehensive review of the Child and Family Services Policy and Procedures, through a child's rights lens, is required to address the gaps in service delivery with particular attention to Chapter 13: Children in Care.
2. Provide intensive and culturally based supports for families to address protection concerns for children and youth without removing children from their home. Supports need to augment the parent's caregiving strengths and enhance caregiver capacity and safety.

Caring Connections and Community Anchors

3. Increase family visitation by engaging children and youth in discussions to determine the people who are important in their life. Explore community anchors to actively facilitate safe family contact and promote meaningful connections.
4. Review the process for sibling placement decisions and develop plans for contact or reunification. Ensure discussion and decision points are documented. Children and youth need to have access to family and significant individuals throughout their childhood so they have a place to belong when they leave Group Care.
5. Work with Department of Education to address attendance and learning gaps for children and youth living in Group Care. Schools are often core community anchors and impact positive educational outcomes such as graduation, post-secondary studies and future employability.
6. Amend the *Child and Family Services Act* and associated policy s. 8.2.8, to extend eligibility to receive supports beyond 24 years of age. Developmental ages need to be considered for youth aging out of Group Care.
7. Implement policies to ensure formal supports and continuity for children and youth transitioning from Group Care to families or independent living.

Cultural Identity

8. Confirm that children and youth in Group Care who are eligible to register with a Yukon First Nation have their enrollment forms completed and accurately documented in client files. Children and youth must have knowledge of their First Nation culture to make informed decisions about maintaining their language and cultural identity. It is important for children and youth to stay connected to their family and community, and participate in cultural activities.
9. Create opportunities to hire cultural advisors to work within Group Care. An advisor would be a liaison for connecting the child or youth with their First Nation, local community, guide the child or youth in cultural teachings, attend cultural events, and support access to all aspects of their culture.
10. Engage children, youth, families and First Nations in researching and completing genograms, eco-maps and/or lifebooks. Upon leaving Group Care, the child or youth must receive a copy of any documents describing their family history and cultural connections.
11. Work with local First Nations and the Council of Yukon First Nations, as per Section 22.4.1 of the Umbrella Final Agreement, to address barriers to increasing the low numbers of First Nations staff working in Group Care. The number of First Nation staff working in Group Care needs to increase.
12. Design an independent cultural/reconciliation committee that includes children and youth in Group Care, and make access to cultural events and land-based opportunities a priority.

13. Ensure mandatory attendance and accountability of staff participation in the History of Yukon First Nations course, as outlined in the CFSA Policy and Procedures Manual. Staff must attend this training within six months of being hired to ensure best practice.
14. Promote the development of, and incorporate opportunities for, family healing, as outlined in the TRC Call to Action 1-iv, through culturally appropriate avenues. Treatment options must ensure safe and supportive healing and address experiences of harm to all family members, while reflecting the inherent trauma and loss of being in Group Care.
15. Provide mandatory First Nation focused trauma informed training within six months of hire to all staff working with children and youth. Trauma informed practice must be implemented when working with children, youth and their families. Staff require training and clinical supervision to de-escalate behaviours and manage crisis situations in the Group Care settings.

Child and Youth Participation

16. Ensure staff have the qualifications and access on-going professional training that is specific to the developmental needs of children and youth in Group Care. This includes life skills and understanding related to engagement, developmental stages, and the impacts of trauma on development.
17. Ensure staff inform children and youth living in Group Care about the reason they were brought into Group Care.
18. Engage children and youth in development of a new child friendly booklet that welcomes them and outlines the house rules. As an orientation protocol, Group Care staff need to assist children and youth to navigate this booklet to ensure the young person understands the contents.
19. Implement mandatory training of the UNCRC for staff which includes the responsibility of governments to implement and uphold the rights of children and youth in care, and how staff can effectively interact with YCAO.
20. Inform children and youth of their rights, particularly the right to privacy, within the first week of placement in Group Care.
21. Inform children and youth of the timelines of the case planning process and emphasize the ways in which participation will be structured so as to include an opportunity to express their view and voice their concerns in decision-making.
22. Engage and motivate children and youth, to participate in case planning meetings, in developmentally appropriate ways such as hosting them at child friendly venues, and having drawing materials or other ways to communicate that align with the child or youth interests.
23. Implement and utilize a holistic approach to support the young person's physical, mental, emotional, social and cultural wellbeing in order to improve outcomes for children and youth.
24. Replace the current complaints procedures handout with a document that has a child rights lens and is developmentally appropriate. This document is to be reviewed by YCAO before being finalized.
25. Develop formal reporting and independent investigation processes for responding to critical incidents for children and youth residing in Group Care. Include the child or youth's experience, and perspective, in the review and document both follow up and outcomes.
26. Provide staff with clinical supervision in order to ensure best practice and quality supports for children and youth living in Group Care.

Group Care Through a Child Rights Lens

28. Review current case and transition plans to ensure children and youth in Group Care have comprehensive and complete plans which reflect the recommendations of this Review.
29. Review and monitor the timelines of Temporary or Continuous Custody Orders for children and youth in Group Care and ensure the safety, best interests and views are considered when extending a placement or moving a child or youth.
30. Review and reconsider the purpose of Group Care based on current best practice, research and recommendations regarding the use of Group Care as a placement option for children and youth.
31. Provide exit surveys for staff prior to their leaving the Department. Surveys are to document reasons for leaving the position and ensure quality of care for children and youth in Group Care.