

OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE

Advocacy Services
Program Evaluation

Executive Summary

2017
Manitoba



OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCATE
ADVOCACY SERVICES PROGRAM REVIEW:
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Office of the Children's Advocate (OCA) is an independent office of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly and represents the rights, interests and viewpoints of children and youth throughout Manitoba who are receiving, or are entitled to receive, services under *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. The OCA does this by advocating directly with children and youth and by reviewing public services after the death of any child if that child or their parent or guardian had received child welfare services in the year before the child's death.

The Children's Advocate is empowered by legislation to review, investigate, and provide recommendations on matters relating to the welfare and interests of children and youth. Our office has continued to change and evolve based on the work we do and the feedback we receive from youth and other stakeholders. As a result, we have four main areas of activity at the OCA. These include:

1. The Advocacy Services program works with children and youth currently receiving services, and those young people who may be entitled to receive services, under *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*. Staff members provide a wide range of activities which entail reviewing child welfare involvement, speaking with services providers, meeting with children and youth to help them understand the decisions being made by stakeholders; and attending meetings to provide direct advocacy support for a child or youth.
2. The Special Investigation Review program is notified of all deaths of children under age 18 in Manitoba and will conduct a review of public services when any of the following are true: when a child in care dies, when a child dies and there is an open CFS file, or if the child or their family had involvement with the child welfare system within one year of the death.
3. The Communications, Research & Public Education program works to expand public awareness of our office and educate the public on various issues related to children, children's rights, and child welfare. It analyzes trends in child welfare and produces special reports and publications to promote public awareness of the experiences of children, youth, and families involved with child welfare.
4. The Quality Assurance program works to ensure that the quality of services and activities at the OCA remain at a high standard and responsive to the needs of children and youth. One of the primary objectives of this program is to look within our organization for areas of service enhancements.

This report provides an executive summary of the Advocacy Services Program Review undertaken over the period of May 2015 – March 2017.

Scope and Purpose of the Review

In May 2015 the Children’s Advocate’s Quality Assurance program initiated a review of the Advocacy Services program. This review was comprised of two phases:

- Phase 1 was initiated in May 2015 and completed in March 2016
- Phase 2 was initiated in April 2016 and completed in March 2017

Phase 1

Phase 1 consisted of secondary data collection, involving a review of Advocacy-program related materials, and internal staff information gathering to answer the initial review question, “**What are we currently doing?**” Phase 1 concluded in a document outlining the historical development of the Advocacy Services program and a program logic model.

Phase 2

Phase 2 looked more closely at the processes involved in Advocacy Services work, service delivery and future direction of the program. The primary focus of this phase was to determine the current objectives of the Advocacy Services program; define what was working effectively and determining what may need to be enhanced; describing what internal staff, external stakeholders and sources of referral (SORs) regard as important to Advocacy work; and determining what staff value as important steps forward. This phase sought to answer two primary review questions:

- **How are we delivering services?**
- **How can we improve?**

This executive summary summarizes both phases of the Advocacy Services Program Review.

Methodology

Phase 1 of the Advocacy Services Program review involved a secondary data review of existing OCA documents including:

- OCA Annual Reports
- Advocacy Services Program Annual Reports
- Advocacy Services Program meeting minutes
- Policy and Procedures documents
- Systemic reports, and
- Other relevant documents that relate to the historical development of the Advocacy Services Program

A mixed-methods approach was designed for Phase 2 of the review, meaning that both qualitative and quantitative methods were utilized. There were five phases of data collection in Phase 2:

- I. Semi-structured interviews conducted with Advocacy staff. In total 15 interviews were conducted with staff and management responsible for Advocacy service provision.
- II. Focus groups held with external collateral stakeholders. An initial letter of introduction was sent out to 10 selected Child and Family Services (CFS) agencies, the four child and family services authorities and the Child and Family Services Division, notifying them of the program review and inviting them to participate. Agencies invited to participate in the review were those who had the most frequent number of cases involved with the OCA over the period of April 1, 2014 - May 4, 2016. There was also effort taken to ensure that the agencies selected were representative of northern/southern, and rural/urban areas of Manitoba. Of the 15 organizations invited, nine subsequently participated in the review.
- III. Surveys distributed to internal Special Investigations Review program staff members.
- IV. Telephone survey with Sources of Referral (SORs). In total, there were 103 SORs who we attempted to contact; 38 were successfully reached and participated in the telephone survey.
- V. Distribution of surveys to other community organizations. In an attempt to collect information from a wide-range of organizations with which Advocacy staff may have on-going interaction, we sent out a letter of introduction with a corresponding survey to 17 community organizations. Of the 17 community organizations invited to participate in the review, 1 responded.

Phase 1: Advocacy Services Program Review
Historical Development and Program Logic Model

Phase 1 of the program review entailed compiling secondary resources for the purpose of describing the historical development of the Advocacy Services program and developing a program logic model. Briefly summarized below are some of the major events and occurrences that happened from 1993-2015 followed by the program logic model that was developed.

The Office of the Children’s Advocate (OCA), primarily in response to the Kimelman Report,¹ was created under *The Child and Family Services Act (CFSA)* and proclaimed on April 1, 1993. At this time, the office operated under the umbrella of the Department of Family Services and the Children’s Advocate reported to the Minister of Family Services. The mandate of the Children’s Advocate was to advise the Minister of Family Services on matters relating to the welfare and interests of children receiving or entitled to receive services under *the CFSA* and *The Adoption Act*. The Children’s Advocate was responsible for reporting the results of an investigation to parents or guardians and the director of the agency involved, and for also reporting results to the child if he or she was 12 years age or older. The Children’s Advocate also was to submit an annual report to the Minister of Family Services.

Shortly after the Office of the Children’s Advocate was established, there was internal and external concern relating to the requirements that stipulated the Children’s Advocate report to the Minister of Family Services. Opponents criticized that this may negatively affect the capacity of the Children’s Advocate to be sufficiently independent to speak about children’s issues. This was again brought to light in 1996, as members within the OCA expressed that the OCA should have a broader mandate. The majority of the OCA’s activity at this time was urban-based as staffing resources did not allow for consistency, visibility and accessibility to adequately serve rural, northern, and Indigenous communities.

Fiscal year 1997-1998 marked the fifth year since the OCA was established, and also an end of term for the first Children’s Advocate, Wayne Govereau. When the initial legislation that governed the OCA was proclaimed in May 1993, there was a clause requiring that within three years of coming into effect the legislation would be reviewed. As such, a sub-committee of the Standing Committee on Privileges and Elections undertook a public review of the legislation. In June 1997, the Sub-Committee tabled a majority report and minority report. Recommendations of the majority report entailed:

- That the Children’s Advocate report directly to a Committee of the Legislature
- That the Children’s Advocate be appointed for a specific term in office

¹In the early 1980s, following the notorious Sixties Scoop, in which many Indigenous children were removed from their families for adoption by non-Indigenous parents, the Manitoba government established a Review Committee on Indian and Metis adoptions and placements. Judge Edwin C. Kimelman chaired the Committee. His 1984 report, *No Quiet Place*, is more commonly known as The Kimelman Report.

- That the Children’s Advocate continue to have the authority to receive complaints from across all government departments and forward these referrals to the appropriate agency or person for resolution
- That in cases where the Children’s Advocate and an agency continue to disagree, a referral of the case be made to the Director of Child and Family Services for resolution under *the CFSA*
- That the Children’s Advocate must delegate authority to ensure greater access to services of the office to children and families in rural/northern Manitoba
- That the Office of the Children’s Advocate, the Department of Family Services and other stakeholders commence a process to develop measures which would evaluate the goals, objectives and outcomes of the child and family services system

In response to the public review of legislation, government passed Bill 4, an Act to amend *the CFSA* in the spring of 1998. In essence, Bill 4 provided for the Children’s Advocate to report independently to the Legislative Assembly, and that the position would have a three year term of office, once renewable.

On March 15, 1999, in response to recommendations from the review, the Children’s Advocate became an independent office of the Legislative Assembly, and newly appointed Children’s Advocate, Janet Mirwaldt, moved into her position. At this time, the Advocacy Services program was the only program in existence at the OCA, and approximately eight staff and one volunteer were working at the office.

On March 29, 2005, Janet Mirwaldt ended her term as Children’s Advocate. In her final annual report (2004-2005), she wrote:

“My experience as the Children’s Advocate, over the last six years, has underlined my belief that the mandate of the OCA needs to be expanded beyond the child and family service system to include all other child caring systems and services provided by or funded by government. This expansion needs to be accompanied with clear and comprehensive authority. I believe that with the appointment of a new Children’s Advocate, it would be timely to expand the mandate of the OCA” (pg.7).

At this time, Mirwaldt argued that “It is only the children and youth in the child and family services system that are afforded the right to an independent Children’s Advocate” (pg. 8). Ten years after this was written, the OCA is still lobbying for an expanded mandate.

On April 8, 2005, Billie Schibler was appointed Children’s Advocate for a three year term.

On April 8, 2008, Children’s Advocate Billie Schibler was reappointed for a second three-year term.²

² In April 2010, Billie Schibler took a leave from her post as Children’s Advocate. At that time, Bonnie Kocsis became Acting Children’s Advocate until the appointment of Darlene MacDonald as Children’s Advocate in April 2011.

On September 15, 2008, *the CFSA* was amended to include *The Children’s Advocate Enhanced Mandate*. This amendment shifted responsibility for child death reviews from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, to the OCA. Section 8.2.3(1) of *the CFSA* now included “Review after the death of child,” which gave the Children’s Advocate the responsibility to review the death of a child who was in the care of, or received services from, an agency under this Act within one year before the death, or whose parent or guardian received services from an agency under this Act within one year before the death. Effective September 15, 2008, the Special Investigations Review program became the second program at the OCA.

On April 11, 2011, Darlene MacDonald was appointed Children’s Advocate for a three-year term.

In November 2011 during an office-wide planning day, staff members collectively reviewed and revised the vision and mission statements of the office. The revised statements read as follows:

“Our vision is a safe and healthy society that hears, includes, values, and protects all children and youth”.

“The mission of the Office of the Children’s Advocate is to ensure the voices of children and youth involved with the child welfare system are heard. As an independent office, we advocate for systemic change for the benefit of children and youth under The Child and Family Services Act and The Adoption Act”.

The guiding principles of the office were updated in March 2013 as follows:

1. We respect the dignity of children and youth and their right to be heard.
2. We work for equity for all children and youth and for a system that is responsive to meeting the needs of children, youth, and their families.
3. We support the community’s collective responsibility for providing resources and services to children, youth, and their families.
4. We know that community outreach is an ongoing process.
5. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* serves as a cornerstone for our activities and efforts.

In 2012, the Communications, Research, & Public Education program at the OCA was established. A focus of this program is conducting research and systemic analysis of child welfare issues and developing various types of educational resource materials that are used by office staff for community engagement, public awareness, and outreach work.

In April 2013, the Quality Assurance program at the OCA was established. The objective of this program is on developing internal quality assurance processes that promote organizational stability and prepare for future growth.

In April 2014, Darlene MacDonald was re-appointed for a second three-year term.

Throughout fiscal year 2014-2015 there were numerous media announcements made by the Children's Advocate urging the government to take action on recommendations made in the final report of the Phoenix Sinclair Inquiry in relation to the independence of the OCA as well as an expansion in mandate.

In June 2015, the Manitoba government introduced Bill 25, *The Children's Advocate Act* that was described by government as the response to Commissioner Hughes' 2013 inquiry recommendations calling for an expansion and strengthening of the OCA. The bill was largely criticized as insufficient and shortly afterwards, the government withdrew the bill and committed to redrafting a stronger piece of legislation.

In December 2015, the government introduced Bill 16, *The Children's Advocate Act*. It passed first reading, but at the close of the legislative session in March 2016, the bill remained unpassed and therefore died on the order table. As Children's Advocate, Darlene MacDonald publicly noted, "This is unfortunate for Manitoba's most vulnerable citizens who will continue to go without the kind of advocacy across public services that they require."

In the spring of 2016, a provincial election saw the changing of the Manitoba government and a new party came to power. The new provincial government announced publicly that they supported the idea of an expanded mandate for the children's advocate. On March 2, 2017, the government introduced Bill 9, *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act*. At the time of writing, that Bill has progressed to second reading as of March 21, 2017.

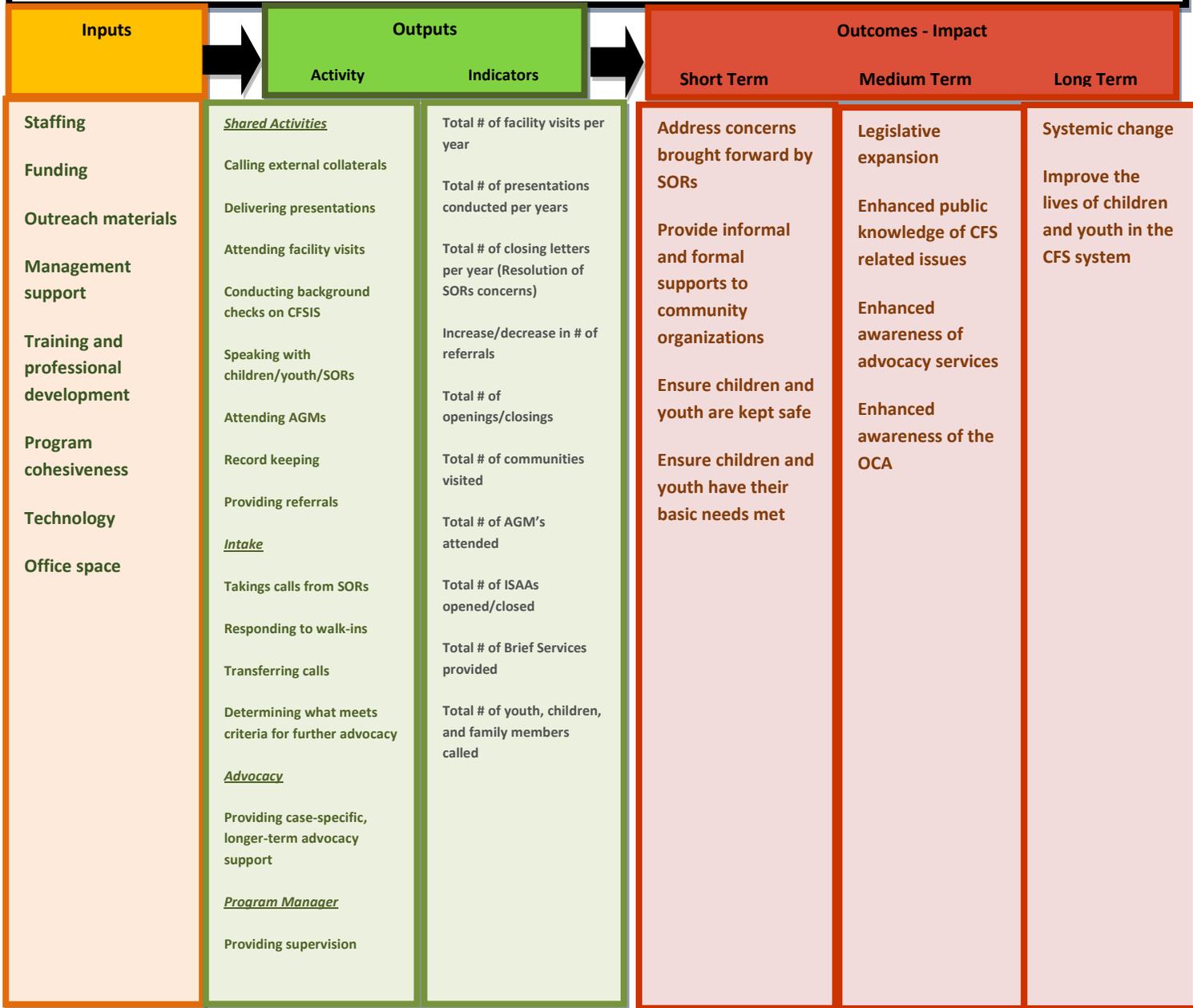
Program Logic Models

A logic model is a description of the chain of results that connect activities to final outcomes. The purpose of a logic model is to clarify the process by which activities lead to expected outcomes. In June 2015, Advocacy staff members were asked to complete a brief survey that asked about various aspects of the Advocacy Services program. Their responses helped inform the final logic model design as portrayed in the following figure.

The “inputs” refer to the resources Advocacy Services staff use to conduct their activities. “Activities” describe what work processes are involved in conducting their work. “Outputs” refer to the services produced. “Short term outcomes” represent the immediate client response to the services delivered (1 year or less after service delivery); “intermediate outcomes” represents effectiveness of service delivery for the client, referring specifically to the benefits and/or impact on behaviors (3-5 years after service delivery); and “long term outcomes” represents the strategic policy initiatives stemming from service delivery (5+ years after service delivery).

Logic Model Design (March 2016)

Program Statement: The Advocacy Services program is governed by *The Child and Family Services Act* and *The Adoption Act*, and exists for the purpose of providing services to children and youth who are involved in the child and family services (CFS) system. The Advocacy Services program strives to ensure the voices of children and youth involved in CFS are heard, to encourage dialogue between collaterals that considers the best interest of the child, and to help ensure a positive resolution process. Additionally, Advocacy Services brings awareness of children’s rights through public education delivered to children and youth, parents, foster families, and other community members. Advocacy Services further aims to encourage systemic change by using acquired knowledge to support positive initiatives for constructive change that will better support the unique needs of children and youth in the CFS system.



Phase 2: Advocacy Services Program Review
Service Delivery

Phase 2 of the Advocacy Services program review incorporated feedback from internal OCA staff members, sources of referral (SORs) and external collaterals.

Feedback provided fell within three broad areas:

- Advocacy Services program roles and responsibilities
- Service delivery
- Future direction of the program

Internal Staff Feedback: Advocacy Services Program Roles and Responsibilities

Internal staff members noted the following as being part of their roles and responsibilities:

- **Ensuring children and youth get their needs met:** Particularly as it relates to services being delivered by the CFS system. This may include information gathering and bridging gaps between service agencies and organizations.
- **Providing a voice to children in care:** Including educating youth about what their rights entail, encouraging self-advocacy, and ensuring the voice of the child is heard when decisions are being made.
- **Community outreach:** Offering community information on what the OCA does and the services offered.
- **Systemic projects:** Addressing and representing observed systemic issues through special projects.

External Feedback: Advocacy Services Program Roles and Responsibilities

Eight external organizations participated in focus groups with an additional organization providing written feedback. Of these nine organizations, all of them spoke highly of the Advocacy Services program, and were able to articulate the important work the program conducts.

External stakeholders described from their perspective what they saw as Advocacy Services primary roles and responsibilities, also indicating how the program's work impacts their organizations. Of the primary roles and responsibilities external stakeholders cited the following:

- **Being a voice for children and youth:** Which further entails being a mediator and bridging gaps for service which is a welcomed resource, particularly in an overburdened system.

- **Educating children, youth, and the community:** Supporting children and youth in learning how to self-advocate is particularly important. Providing education to the public is viewed as an asset to the community. There is also an element of community outreach in visiting facilities and bringing outreach materials that promote awareness of the office.
- **Representing the best interest of the child and youth:** Providing a form of quality assurance to the CFS system, as well as an advocacy role for anyone with concerns about the services a child or youth is receiving or not receiving from the child and family services community. This also includes responding to concerns raised about services that fall under *The Child and Family Services Act* and or *The Adoption Act*.

External collaterals described many instances and experiences of positive interaction with Advocacy staff. The following qualities were articulated by external representatives:

- Advocacy staff are understanding of what the agency is able to do and realistic in acknowledging the limitations and barriers.
- Advocacy staff give external collaterals an opportunity to expand on what is happening from the agency's perspective.
- Advocacy staff allow external collaterals the time to collect the information necessary to answer the questions posed.
- Advocacy staff arrange meetings with service providers and create a space for collaborative problem-solving. They also typically follow-up after the meeting to see what movements have been made towards resolution.
- Advocacy staff demonstrate that they are genuinely invested in the well-being of the child or youth, and go beyond what their responsibilities are to ensure the safety of the child or youth.

External collaterals also described ways Advocacy Services work positively impacts their organizations:

- Advocacy staff support the child or youth to better understand the agency's decisions and processes, particularly when it comes to case plans. Advocacy staff also may be better positioned to talk with the child or youth while bridging communication between the agency and the child or youth. This further creates a feeling of safety for the child or youth where the child or youth may be more receptive to the conversation, while feeling supported and heard.

- Advocacy staff help the agency workers better understand the perspective of the child or youth. Externals described how they appreciate the child or youth-focused manner the Advocacy staff reflect in their work.
- Advocacy staff help external organization staff to think a different way, slow down the process, and reflect on decisions made. For instance, having a third party involved in service provider meetings can be helpful as it brings a fresh perspective. Advocacy staff may also bring new information to the table that will impact the resolution process.

Many of the external collaterals observed that while there has been an historical sense of a power imbalance existing between the CFS agencies and the Advocacy Services program, this working relationship has evolved to be much more collaborative. One organization commented that in the past, the OCA had a "watchdog" reputation which was intimidating to social workers, but that their experience the last few years has been a fair and equitable one. This philosophical shift has been advantageous to agency staff, promoting more of a collaborative approach rather than a critical, or adversarial one. Additionally, externals appreciate when Advocacy staff acknowledge the limitations they encounter, suggesting that understanding that such barriers exist helps promote development of effective case plans that are in the child's or youth's best interests.

There were some questions from externals as to what the process is when an Advocacy staff member contacts the agency worker, and if it is protocol to always contact the supervisor first. There were also questions as to what the formal process is for closing a case, citing that the agency has received emails, letters and telephone calls, and confirming what the agency can expect when Advocacy staff close a case may be beneficial to agency stakeholders.

External collaterals described how they, alongside the OCA, have a common goal: to do what is in the best interest of the child or youth. By keeping this goal at the forefront, there are opportunities to see all perspectives in joint meetings. Externals suggested that their experience has generally been to come to a consensus on what is best for the child or youth, and have not typically felt like they are being "directed" by the OCA, which is one reason they value the OCA's involvement on cases.

Several external organizations commented how they have increased the number of calls they make to the OCA. Reasons for calling include asking for information and advice. They also reported frequently referring children, youth, and families to the OCA.

Advising that it may be more convenient to CFS agency workers to have one Advocacy Services staff member rather than encounter several throughout the process, one external suggested the following: "...when a child calls intake, the one OCA worker (should) stick with that child every time...because some cases are so complex, that if I have to explain to different people the case, it is a problem...we need a consistent person for the case every time so we don't have to repeat the history of the file."

While this comment was made by only one person, it does relate to Advocacy staff feedback regarding the possible benefit of restructuring the program so to allow one staff member to follow a given case throughout its duration.

Collective feedback from external collaterals indicates that there have been positive strides forward in achieving successful working relationships with the OCA, and that they appreciate the efforts made to enhance communication and interaction with CFS agencies and authorities.

Internal Staff Feedback: Service Delivery

Advocacy staff described the *processes* involved in service delivery, outlining the following activities:

- **Communicating and meeting with children, youth, SORs, external collaterals, community representatives, and other relevant parties:** Service delivery as described by Advocacy staff largely entails calling CFS workers and supervisors, contacting the child or youth and their families, and speaking with other external collaterals.
- **Travelling to communities:** At times, meeting with children or youth, SORs, external collaterals, community representatives, and other relevant parties may require travelling to other communities. Travel may be case-related or for the purpose of conducting community outreach.
- **Community outreach/Education:** Community outreach may entail attending AGMs and other organizational and community events, conducting facility visits, and conducting presentations for various groups. The presentation material can be revised to best suit the needs of the audience.

External Staff Feedback: Service Delivery

External collaterals commented on *how* they perceive the Advocacy Services Program to deliver services:

- **Process for correspondence:** Several external representatives described receiving written correspondence from the Advocacy Services program that alerts them as to when a file has been opened at the OCA. They report that the supervisor of an agency worker is often contacted by an Advocacy staff member or the program manager inquiring into a particular situation prior to speaking with the agency worker. Feedback emphasizes the importance of alerting the supervisor prior to calling the agency worker, so that the supervisor can best support the worker if required. External collaterals expressed some confusion as to when they should expect to receive a closing letter that the investigation into a matter is completed. Clarifying this process may be beneficial.

- **Effectiveness and efficiency:** External collaterals described how the Advocacy Services program strives to assist foster parents, children, youth, parents, etc., if they are having an issue with the CFS agency, or if they feel like they are not being heard. They often view one of the program’s responsibilities as being a liaison between individuals and organizations. Externals articulated how the Advocacy Services program is efficient and effective in the work they conduct, and indicated that the program supports children and youth in a manner that facilitates resolution of challenges. Additionally, many external representatives responded that services are delivered in a timely manner, and further articulated that there have never been instances where cases were felt to remain open longer than necessary. Also, externals commented that they have observed Advocacy staff to attend even last minute meetings which demonstrates their commitment to supporting the child or youth.

External representatives had several ideas on how they deem services to be most effectively delivered which include the following:

- **Encourage youth to speak for themselves when possible:** Externals perceived the most effective support Advocacy staff can provide is when they encourage the youth to speak on their own behalf, as opposed to staff speaking for them.
- **Ensure Advocacy staff members understand organization protocols:** External collaterals proposed that it is important for Advocacy staff to have knowledge of current protocols within an organization to prevent barriers that may arise down the road. Recognizing the challenges from an organizational perspective is vital to developing a sound and realistic plan for the child or youth.
- **Allow the CFS agency or authority to have their side heard before determining an action plan:** For external collaterals, it is important that Advocacy staff take the time to meet with agency workers for the purpose of ascertaining their perspective. Being sensitive to the fact that there divergent solutions to consider was noted as important to external representatives.
- **Ensure consistent follow-up with the CFS agency worker and supervisor:** Ensuring that the CFS agency worker and supervisor are notified of changes in the case or case closures is valued by external collaterals. Additionally, providing a summary list of any recommendations made to the agency or authority would aid externals.
- **Opportunity for further follow-up:** External collateral feedback indicated that in the future they would like to see an increase in contact between their organizations and the OCA. Specifically, externals see a benefit in having a break-down of how many times the Advocacy Services program had contact with the agency to best understand the volume of cases being reviewed by the OCA. Externals further recommend that the OCA could provide them with an aggregate breakdown of relevant statistics to external CFS agencies and authorities, particularly as it relates to frequency of contact.

Finally, external collaterals saw great benefit in continued meetings with Advocacy staff, and welcomed opportunities for engagement and collaboration.

Sources of Referral (SOR) Feedback: Service Delivery

Sources of referral (SORs) were also asked about how they perceive services to be delivered. The majority of SORs reported services being both efficient, with 76% reporting that staff returned their calls within 1 or 2 days; and effective, with SORs citing the following:

- The Advocacy staff provided information that moved the SOR in the right direction.
- The Advocacy staff provided information that informed what the next step would entail.
- The Advocacy staff provided referral information, including how to access the proper people, who to call, and how to reach them.
- Having someone listen was helpful because it reassured the SOR that they were doing the right thing.
- SOR expressed gratitude that they didn't feel staff were dismissive; they felt that Advocacy staff listened and tried to help them.
- SOR felt that the Advocacy staff provided useful insight into the situation, and provided an honest response.
- Advocacy staff were supportive to the SOR.

The following suggestions for service enhancement were made by SORs:

- Several SORs expressed wishing there was further communication and on-going service delivery with the Advocacy staff member with whom they'd had contact.
- SOR expressed frustration with the legislative barriers present that restricted OCA involvement in some cases, however recognized that this is not the fault of the OCA, but would like to see an expansion in the OCA's mandate.
- SOR would have liked more information on who to contact to move the case forward.
- SOR would have liked more information on their rights as defined under the UNCRC.
- SOR suggested it would be useful if they didn't have to leave a voice message, particularly in cases that are time-sensitive.

- SOR suggested it would be helpful to have more information on how the OCA can help small children and babies.

Future Direction

Advocacy Services program staff are continually striving to improve upon service delivery and will take external feedback into consideration while reviewing the Advocacy Services program review. Further follow-up will be discussed among staff and management regarding:

- The closing process once a file is complete and maintaining consistent procedure regarding closing letter correspondence with external agencies,
- Further exploring the concept of restructuring the program so that each staff member responds to service requests and follows a case until completion,
- Continuing to maintain contact with external organizations via facility visits, presentations, outreach work, and case consultations,
- Continuing to ensure that there is diversity among staff members hired, and
- Exploring ways to attain additional feedback from the children and youth we serve.

One remaining goal of the Children's Advocate, along with OCA staff members, is to continue to advocate for an enhanced mandate that will grant us the ability to deliver services to not only children and youth involved in child welfare, but also to children and youth throughout Manitoba. An expanded mandate that would also grant the power to investigate calls for service in other government departments such as justice, education, and health would also be beneficial to children and youth receiving services from a variety of public departments. Continuing to support this vision of an expanded mandate is viewed as an office-wide goal.

At the time of writing, Bill 9, *The Advocate for Children and Youth Act* progressed to second reading on March 21, 2017.

Conclusion

The primary goal of this review is to collaboratively identify the strengths of the Advocacy Services program and the areas that may need to be clarified or improved. While there are no program recommendations derived from this review, there are several areas of focus the program and the office will take under consideration as it continues to grow and evolve. Having attained a well-informed understanding of areas that should be addressed in the future from internal staff and external collaterals, the Advocacy Services program is well-positioned as we move into the 2017/18 fiscal year.

Acknowledgements

On behalf of the Children’s Advocate, the Quality Assurance program would like to extend our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in this review. The feedback that was provided by internal OCA staff, sources of referral (SORs), and external collaterals was instrumental in the development and completion of this review.

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