



APRIL 2023

# RE-IMAGINING HOW WE SUPPORT PARENTS SO THAT ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE WITHIN THEIR HOMES & COMMUNITIES.

**EVERY PARENT HAS A RIGHT TO  
ACCESS SUPPORT.**

THIS RESOURCE WAS CREATED BY FAMILY ADVOCACY  
SUPPORT CENTRE AND STARLINGS COMMUNITY FOR  
THE EVENT: "A TIME FOR ACCOUNTABILITY: A  
COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO THE SERENITY REPORT."

WE HONOUR THE FAMILIES WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR STORIES AND EXPERIENCES WITH US, THE PARENTS GRIEVING THE LOSS OF THEIR CHILDREN, AND ALL THE CHILDREN WHO NEVER CAME HOME.

WE ALSO WANT TO THANK ALL THE INDIVIDUALS, GRASSROOTS AND MUTUAL AID GROUPS, ORGANIZATIONS, AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, *THE LIVED EXPERTS* WHOSE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM ARE GUIDING THIS WORK AS WE RE-IMAGINE HOW WE SUPPORT FAMILIES SO THAT ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE WITHIN THEIR HOMES AND COMMUNITIES.

CONTENT WARNING: THIS RESOURCE DISCUSSES CHILD APPREHENSION AND CHILD DEATH.

In order to improve the health and well-being of families, we believe we must shift the current paradigm from "what is wrong with this parent", to:

# “WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED?”

WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? A SAFE HOME. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? HARM REDUCTION. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? MONEY FOR THEIR KID'S LUNCHES. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? STABLE HOUSING. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? CULTURALLY RELEVANT SUPPORT. *WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? ACCESS TO RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS WITHOUT FEAR OF INTRUSIVE INTERVENTION OR FAMILY SEPARATION.* WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? FOOD SECURITY. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? A HOUSE CLEANER. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? ACCESS TO SELF CARE. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? RESPITE. **WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? TRAUMA-HEALING. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED? PEOPLE THEY TRUST. WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED?**

**PARENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO ASK FOR HELP,  
WITHOUT FEAR OF THEIR CHILDREN BEING REMOVED  
FROM THEIR CARE.**

## WHY "A TIME FOR ACCOUNTABILITY?"

In 2011, while fleeing domestic violence, Serenity's mother shared that she was having trouble providing basic needs for then-7-month-old Serenity. After reaching out for support, Serenity was removed from her Mother's care. Despite mom's best efforts to have Serenity returned home, Serenity died in 2014 while receiving intervention services under kinship care.

Since Serenity's death, there have been numerous recommendations, reports, and changes to mandatory reporting laws, legislation, policies and practices. However, the number of Indigenous children that are ending up in the foster system, or who become "*permanent wards of the state*", has not drastically changed. In fact, the number of deaths are INCREASING! It's time to move beyond recommendations and into accountability and actions that will protect families and save lives.

### 2014 THE TRAGIC DEATH OF 4 YEAR OLD SERENITY

Changes to mandatory reporting laws:

- [Child Intervention practice framework \(2014\)](#)

### 2018 Changes to mandatory reporting laws and child well-being frameworks:

- [A Stronger Safer Tomorrow \(2018\)](#)
- [Serenity's Law \(Bill 202, 2019\)](#)
- [Well Being and Resiliency Framework \(2019\)](#)

2021

In the 2021-22 fiscal year, 39 of the 49 children/youth that died while receiving child intervention services were Indigenous.

the most since 2008-09, which was an increase of 16 from the previous year.

55% of deaths between Oct 2021-2022 were from a suspected or confirmed drug toxicity.

### SERENITY INQUIRY FATALITY REPORT COMPLETED IN 2021

2022

Summary report stating 634 serious injuries or deaths of young people between April 1, 2012 and March 31, 2022. ([OCOYA 2022](#))

2023

[Between March 3, 2023 and April 8, 2023, there were 10 child and youth who died while involved in Children's Services.](#)

## WHY "A TIME FOR ACCOUNTABILITY?"

In the fatality inquiry report of 2021 surrounding Serenity's death, the judge boldly concluded that,

**...APPREHENSION IS A FORM OF VIOLENCE AGAINST THE CHILD AND MOTHER.....IN THIS CASE, THE RESULT OF THAT VIOLENCE WAS SERENITY'S DEATH.**

Parsons, Paige, CBC News, Jan 4, 2023

The number of Indigenous children in foster placements has only slightly decreased in the past 5 years, **with the monthly average in (2017-2018) being 2,586 and the monthly average in (2021-2022) at 2,527.**

The number of Indigenous children in Permanent care has steadily increased from **a monthly average of (3,777) in 2017-2018 to a monthly average of (4,431) in 2021-2022.**

Permanent Care: when a guardian's parental rights are terminated by the courts, and the child or youth is placed under the "care" and guardianship of the Ministry.



**The increase number of Indigenous children in permanent care does not match the number of children being placed in a permanent home. In fact, the number of Indigenous children that are finding permanent placements has decreased in the last 5 years, with the monthly average in 2017-2018 being 106, to a monthly average of only 50 in in 2021-2022.**

Alberta Child Intervention Data Tool (2023)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO:

# RE-IMAGINE HOW WE SUPPORT FAMILIES SO THAT ALL CHILDREN CAN THRIVE?

The health and well-being of youth is inextricably linked to the health and well-being of parents. When we meet the needs of parents, we support the intergenerational well-being and safety of their children, while contributing to healthy families and strong communities.



**GET TO THE ROOT**

**CENTRE PARENT & YOUTH VOICES**

decolonize  
mental health  
supports

**FINANCIAL  
SECURITY**

**MEET  
PARENT  
NEEDS**

**DISRUPT RACIST POLICIES**

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE  
CRISES SUPPORT**

**ADDRESS THE HARM  
CAUSED BY THE  
SYSTEM**

**Prioritize FAMILY  
PRESERVATION**

**COLLECTIVE CARE**

**ADDRESS INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA**

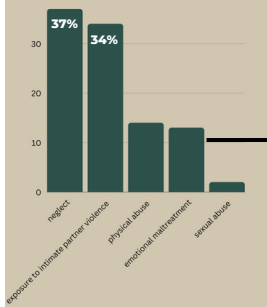
**REPORTING IS SAFE  
NOT SUPPORT RESOURCES**

**health, housing, food security, childcare**

The primary concern in **71%** of maltreatment investigations involving First Nations children was *neglect or exposure to intimate partner violence*.

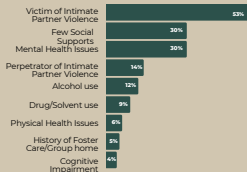
First Nations/Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (2019)

**Primary Caregiver Risk Factors in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Alberta in 2008**

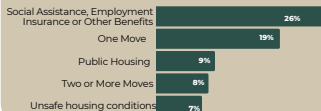


Alberta Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (2008)

**Primary Caregiver Risk Factors in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario in 2018**



**Household Risks in Substantiated Child Maltreatment Investigations in Ontario in 2018**



Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect- 2018



When we can't take the abuse anymore...many women risk losing their kids. We are told we need to get better, and that we're unhealthy because we stayed. But the system continues the cycle of abuse we are trying to escape from, pulls us back in...and then punishes us.

-Parent with lived experience (Preserving Families Support Group Alberta)

## RE-DEFINE

Alberta's child welfare legislation (CYFEA) defines neglect as:

**For the purposes of subsection (2)(c), a child is neglected if the guardian (a) is unable or unwilling to provide the child with the necessities of life...**

"Neglect is when a parent or guardian does not provide their child or youth with basic age-appropriate care such as: **food, clothing, shelter, love and affection, and protection from harm.**

(Government of Alberta Child, Youth, Family Enhancement Act)

Neglect... is inextricably linked to that of child and family poverty, and other structural and systemic issues including inadequate housing, mental illness, and intergenerational trauma.

Moving Beyond Neglect Report (2022) Child Welfare League of Canada

**"Children must not be apprehended just based on poverty or caregivers health."**

Bill C-92 Rights of Parents, Wahkohtown Law and Governance Lodge

In policy and in practice, a distinction is rarely drawn between caregivers who are **unwilling to provide for their children, and those that are willing yet unable to due to forces beyond their control.** Risks caused by chronic conditions and systemic inequities need to be understood and addressed differently than the risks associated with other forms of maltreatment.



They are **experienced by the whole family and resolving them requires holistic interventions that prioritize family well-being.**

Moving Beyond Neglect Report (2022) Child Welfare League of Canada



## RE-DEFINE

# FAMILY POLICING VS CHILD WELFARE

**“Family policing”** is a term coined by Dorothy Roberts, an American social justice advocate. Today, the term has been adopted by organizations across Canada and the United States.

Child welfare services have historically been referred to as “intervention services, child welfare or child protective services”. **\*Key principles include:**

- the child’s safety and well-being are the top priority.
- the family is responsible for the care & supervision of their children. With the support of the community, most parents are able to protect their children from harm.
- Keeping your family safely together is important.
- All children and youth should be supported to maintain relationships that are important to them, be connected to their own culture, practice their beliefs and have a plan for their care.
- Indigenous expertise must be honoured and respected in matters involving their children, youth and families.

However, our work with parents and youth have influenced our belief that the term family policing more accurately captures the roles the child welfare system plays in the lives of families, which include **“surveillance, regulation, and punishment, all roles associated with policing rather than children’s welfare”**. (UpEnd Movement Glossary).

“  
People need to feel safe that they can say, “I’m hurting, I’m angry, I’m frustrated, and not have that used against them, because they shared it in a moment when they were in crisis.”

Lynne M. Parent advocate

““The entire system appears to have worked against this goal, despite [the mother] maintaining a strong involvement with her children throughout and making best efforts to meet the demands of Children’s Services.”

Judge Renee Cochard

““Although “birth alerts” are no longer allowed in 2023, parents continue to be “flagged” in the system when accessing supports during pregnancy”

Community front line worker

\*Source: Government of Alberta

\*\*CBC Paige Parsons - CBC News - Posted: Jan 04, 2023 12:01 PM MST |



**“This system is not working for Indigenous people or low-income families. Parents should be supported so their children can remain with their families and communities. It’s time for drastic changes, and parents must be at the center of these changes”.**

Lynne Marshalsay, Lynne Marshalsay, FASC Indigenous Parent Liaison and Board of Director, Preserving Families Founder

IN A 2022 FASC QUESTIONNAIRE, ALBERTA PARENTS WHO HAD CHILD INTERVENTION INVOLVEMENT TOLD US WHAT THEY NEEDED BUT DIDN'T HAVE ACCESS TO:

FINANCIAL &  
EMOTIONAL  
SUPPORT

HOLISTIC  
FAMILY  
SUPPORT AND  
CARE

TRAUMA/  
GRIEF  
THERAPY

GUIDANCE ON WHAT  
TO DO FOR MOST  
EFFICIENT  
REUNIFICATION,  
ADVOCACY FOR MY  
SPECIFIC SITUATION,  
[SYSTEM TO] LISTEN  
TO THE CHILDREN  
ABOUT THEIR  
EXPERIENCES.

SUPPORT, SOMEONE  
WORKING WITH ME TO  
GET BACK MY KID BACK  
AND NOT AGAINST ME

COUNSELLING,  
UNDERSTANDING,  
TREATMENT PLAN

TO WORK WITH ME  
TO GET MY KID BACK,  
TO HAVE HEART FELT  
COVERSATIONS OR  
SUPPORT

GETTING MORE  
SUPPORT WITH MY  
MENTAL HEALTH,  
I WASN'T GIVEN  
ENOUGH  
RESOURCES OR  
HELP. MY BPD AND  
ANXIETY WERE  
USED AGAINST ME.

## YOUTH VOICE



**My parents wanted to support, and I wanted them to receive it, but the systems designed to support them had too many gaps.**

Kloey Cook, Starlings Community Youth Co-lead

In a 2021 Starlings Community questionnaire, youth told us they didn't reach out for support for family challenges due to fear of family separation:

"**Was too scared** to be taken away from my sober parent."

"I want people to have compassion. If my parents had community support, felt they could get help without losing us, maybe they would have gotten help."

I want society to know how difficult it is for children to get help when their parents aren't getting help.

"I didn't reach out for help as a youth because **alternatives to living with my parents were much worse** (foster care, social housing for youth underfunded)"

"I didn't want my siblings and I to end up in foster care."

"I never reached out for help as a youth because **it's not always safe to tell someone** especially when the system can't always guarantee your safety."

# ORGANIZATIONAL VOICE

IN A 2022 FASC QUESTIONNAIRE, *ALBERTA MANDATED REPORTERS TOLD US:*  
Describe your experience with Children's Services when supporting a client.



Often demonstrated a lack of willingness to centre the client's needs, goals, and expectations.

Often have to educate the worker on how to work with the parent.

Generally feel lack of consistency, transparency, collaboration

There are times when the case worker is listening and hearing the families needs and there are case workers who cause more trauma and harm when they intervene.

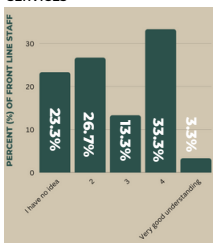
This experience has generally been positive, but there have been issues when it comes to clear communication and transparency.

Sometimes workers are great and sometimes they have villainized the parent.

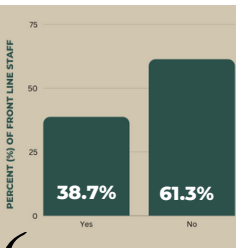
It was challenging. Both the client and I felt like we were walking on egg shells, and we were being careful with what we said and did.

I have had excellent relationships with many workers but also experienced workers whose decisions seem subjective and also workers who are often unavailable.

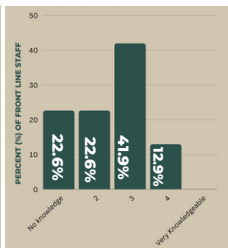
WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT HAPPENS AFTER YOU REPORT A FAMILY TO CHILDREN'S SERVICES



HAVE YOU HAD ANY EDUCATION AND TRAINING ON MANDATORY REPORTING?



RATE YOUR UNDERSTANDING AND KNOWLEDGE OF CHILD LEGISLATION IN ALBERTA (CYFEA)



50% of respondents who answered "yes", said their training was **more than 5 years ago** and **93.5% of all** respondents said yes, they would be interested in receiving additional training & support in understanding Children's Services legislation, policies & processes.

# COMMUNITY CALLS TO ACTION

FAMILIES MATTER



## CHALLENGE YOUR ASSUMPTIONS OF FAMILIES:

The next time you hear of a parent whose children have been apprehended on the news, consider, "What are my beliefs about this parent? Do I understand the context of this situation? Has media acknowledged the systemic barriers? What information is missing?"

## CONSIDER: WHAT DOES THIS PARENT NEED?

Reporting is NOT SUPPORT: an investigation can have collateral harm on an entire family. What steps can you take to include the parent in identifying and addressing the underlying root causes and what needs the family has.

## ENGAGE WITH LIVED EXPERTS:

How can you meaningfully engage with Indigenous and grassroots parent and youth initiatives that are centring the voice and knowledge of lived experts and addressing systemic barriers for families.

## EMAIL YOUR MLA:

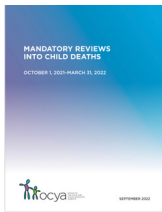
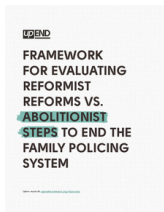
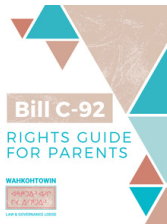
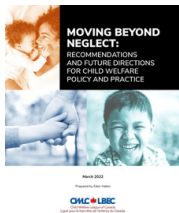
There is strength in numbers and families need our collective acknowledgement and support. Email your MLA using our template found [here](#).

## TRANSFORM WITH US-GET IN TOUCH!

HELLO@FAMILYADVOCACYSUPPORTCENTRE.CA  
INFO@STARLINGS.CA

# RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE

TO ACCESS THE RESOURCES BELOW, CLICK ON THE IMAGE.



## ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED IN THE WEBINAR

### HOSTS:

#### FAMILY ADVOCACY SUPPORT CENTRE:

The Family Advocacy Support Centre's mission is to increase access to resources and supports for families with the goal of minimizing intrusive interventions and family separation. Founded in 2022 by Forensic Social Worker Rebecca Foshole-Luke, FASC focuses on legal education and system navigation, organizational capacity building, and community training.

Learn more: <https://www.familyadvocacysupportcentre.ca/>

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#### STARLINGS COMMUNITY

Starlings community's mission is to increase access to resources and support for youth and families exposed to the *stigma* of a parent's substance use. Founded in 2020 by Registered Nurse and Peer with lived experience, Agnes Chen, SC focuses on advocacy, knowledge translation, organizational training, and peer and caregiver empowerment. Learn more: <https://www.starlings.ca/>

### PARTNERS

#### PRESERVING FAMILIES:

Preserving Families is a support/ information group founded by parent advocate Lynne Marshalsay, and is for people who have or have been victims of Alberta Child and Family Services. This group is Alberta Specific so no members outside of Alberta will be accepted. Learn more:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/936156537121396/>

**RECONCILIATION ACTION GROUP:** Formerly Change Langevin, this Calgary based community group is committed to ensuring that reconciliation is an action word. Learn more: <https://www.facebook.com/ReconciliACTgr/about>

#### CREATING HOPE SOCIETY:

Creating Hope Society is a non-profit society established to recognize that the sixties and seventies child welfare scoop of Aboriginal children is a continuation of the Residential Schools era. Their co-founder and current executive director, Bernadette lahtail, has a passion are to create awareness of Indigenous history, specifically to inform Canadians of the ongoing ripple effects of Residential Schools and the 60s and 70s child welfare scoop. Learn more: <https://www.creatinghopesociety.ca/about/>

