

**British Columbia Foster Care
Education Program**

**CARING FOR CHILDREN:
OVERVIEW**

(3 hours)

Ministry of Children and Family Development

July 2002

Legislation, Policies, and Principles Underlying Curriculum

Legislation, policies, and principles of the Ministry of Children and Family Development underlie the development and delivery of the curriculum for the British Columbia Foster Care Education Program.

Foster parents may find the contents of the following publications of interest:

- Child, Family and Community Service Act, particularly sections on guiding principles, service delivery, best interests of the child, and the rights of children in care
- Standards for Foster Homes
- Guardianship of Children and Youth-in-care – A Model of the British Columbia Guardianship Program
- Condensed Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care
- Looking After Children Assessment and Action Record and Comprehensive Plan of Care
- Practice Standards for Guardianship
- Pre-Service Foster Parent Orientation Curriculum.

About the Author

Leslie Welin, M. Ed., is a faculty member in the Child and Youth Care Program at Malaspina University-College. She has a master's degree in Counselling Psychology from the University of Alberta. Prior to joining Malaspina, Leslie worked in a number of settings, including schools and private practice with children, youth, and families. She has conducted numerous workshops with foster parents, social workers, mental health professionals, and law enforcement and medical personnel on child development, the impact of trauma on children and youth, and guiding children's behaviour.

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INTRODUCTION

Introduction

A. RATIONALE

Research suggests training is a crucial element in the recruitment and retention of caregivers. The British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations and the Ministry of Children and Family Development recognize the crucial role that caregivers play in child protection and the need for highly skilled, specialized caregivers to meet the increasingly complex needs of children and youth.

The British Columbia Foster Care Education Program has been developed to provide a standardized and structured approach to caregiver training that builds on the skills and experiences caregivers bring to their role, as well as knowledge to support their ongoing training and development.

B. CUSTOMIZING AND CORE THEMES FOR TRAINING

This training is a joint project of the British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations and the Ministry for Children and Families. A set of core themes runs throughout all training modules. They are:

- Vulnerability of all children and youth-in-care
- Teamwork
- Child and youth development
- Communications
- Guiding children's behavior
- Family support
- Diversity
- Inclusion
- The Ministry for Children and Families Guardianship Model.

It is helpful that the foster parent has an understanding of the following material:

- Child, Family and Community Service Act
- Standards for Foster Homes
- Guardianship of Children and Youth-in-Care – A Model of the British Columbia Guardianship Program
- Looking after Children Assessment and Action Record.

C. LEARNING OUTCOMES The caregiver can:

- describe and identify the legislation under which the caregiving system operates and its relationship to children/youth experiencing care
- describe the guardianship model and explain the importance of the condensed assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care to the life of the child/youth
- describe the role of the caregiver as a member of the caregiving team in terms of day-to-day care, contributing to and carrying out the Plan of Care, and relating to the child or youth's family and community
- reflect on an overview of the BC Foster Care Education Program and describes the content areas within.

D. PREPARATION

The "Caring for Children: Overview" module is a single, three-hour session. Foster parents should be familiar with the material in the module. Read it thoroughly and imagine yourself going through the various exercises and activities. Think of examples you might have experienced in your own fostering career.

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- Coming out of the recognition that caregivers are being asked to care for and to guide children with increasingly complex needs, the BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations and the Ministry of Children and Family Development published the "Foster Care 2000" document stating that the intent of a training program is to support caregivers "*...in adding to their parenting, planning, and negotiating skills and developing their confidence and ability to advocate for the needs of the child in care*" (p. 3)
 - There have been a number of studies indicating that if caregivers are to be successfully recruited and retained, opportunities for increased training, as well as support and respect for the work caregivers do, will be needed. Waldock's article (see reference section) provides background material for you.

The need for highly skilled caregivers comes out of a concern for the safety and well-being of children.

- The recognition of the abilities and experiences caregivers bring to caregiving and the desire to support them in their continued professional development to provide for the safety and well-being of children and youth has resulted in the development of this training process.

2. LEGISLATION: CHILDREN IN CARE

(30 minutes)

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe and identify the legislation under which the caregiving system operates and its relationship to children/youth experiencing care.

Material:

Handouts

- Handout #5 Relevant Sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act

Overheads

Overhead #6 Legislation: Children in care

Our society recognizes the vulnerability of children and youth and that there is a moral and legal obligation to protect their safety and well being. British Columbia, as part of the Canadian commitment to the United Nations Convention on

the Rights of the Child, recognizes that children require special care and assistance. The principles of the Convention can be found interwoven into the Child, Family and Community Service Act. The Act provides the legal mandate (right and responsibility) for the Government to provide child welfare services, including foster care.

In pre-service orientation, people were introduced to the Child, Family and Community Service Act. A reminder that the Act, as well as Standards for Foster Homes, spells out the responsibilities of caregivers, provides direction, and lets foster parents know what is expected of them when caring for children.

Because the caregiver is part of a larger system she is legally mandated to assist and guide children and youth-in-care, and that the people who work in it are accountable for what happens. Some people think that caring for children and youth is something that we do naturally; however, it is something that we learn mostly from being parented ourselves. Therefore, in order to support and enhance caregivers' abilities to meet what the legislation expects of them in caring for the children and youth of other people, this training program was developed.

Exercise:

Using Handout #5, "Relevant Sections of the Child, Family and Community Service Act," briefly review the four sections of the Act that have implications for caregivers:

- guiding principles
- service delivery principles
- best interests of children
- rights of children in care.

Reflect upon the following:

- Guiding Principles
- Service Delivery Principles
- Best Interests of the Child
- First page of Rights of Children in care
- Second page of Rights of Children in care.

Reflect upon the following questions:

Using Overhead #6, "Legislation: Children in care"

1. What are some of the key difficulties/dilemmas/anxieties you have that come out of carrying out your responsibilities in these sections of the Act?
2. How have these sections helped you in carrying out your responsibilities?

Concerns might include children in care and inappropriate use of Rights of Children in care, difficulty in contacting other people involved in child/youth's care, or being involved with the child's family members.

Sections of the Act may have helped caregivers by providing clear expectations about their roles.

Debrief:

As caregivers we need to recognize how the difficulties/dilemmas/ anxieties that caregivers face affect the children or youth who are in care and about how having a clear understanding of what is expected of caregivers impacts the children or youth who are in care.

Legislation and policies clearly affect what caregivers do and that by having a clear understanding, caregivers can better carry out the important role they have taken on: caring for children, youth, and families who find themselves in exceptional circumstances that require Government participation to find ways to provide for the safety and well-being of the child or youth.

The Rights of Children in care has generated some controversy. Subsequent modules do address ways to guide the behavior of children and youth that respects their rights and at the same time recognize the responsibilities of children and youth.

3. GUARDIANSHIP AND COMPREHENSIVE PLAN OF CARE

(35 minutes)

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe the Guardianship Model and explain the importance of the Comprehensive Plan of Care to the life of the child or youth.

Caregivers can familiarize themselves with the details of the Guardianship Model, the Practice Standards for Guardianship, and the Comprehensive Plan of Care available to you in the documents listed in Section B as well as in the Forward.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #6 The Guardianship Model
- Handout #7 The Comprehensive Plan of Care
- Handout #8 Standard C. 1 Comprehensive Plan of Care in Standards for Foster Homes
- Condensed Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care You will need to contact a Ministry of Children and Family Development representative for copies of the Condensed Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care document for participants' use.

Overheads

- Overhead #7 The Guardianship Model
- Overhead #8 Comprehensive Plans of Care: Discussion Questions
- Overhead #9 The Condensed Assessment Comprehensive Plan of Care

This section includes:

- a brief review of what guardianship is and who makes up the guardianship team
 - an introduction to the Guardianship Model
-

- an exploration of the importance of the Comprehensive Plan of Care to the life of a child or youth.

The Government takes on a guardianship responsibility when a child's legal guardian requests the Government, in a legal agreement, to care for their child or when the court determines the safety and well-being of a child or youth is in question and appoints the Ministry of Children and Family Development, to assume the rights, duties, and responsibilities of a parent.

Since the child or youth no longer has his own family to care and nurture him, there is trust placed in every person who is involved with the young person on the ministry's behalf to act in ways that have the child's best interests at heart, for the child's benefit, and with the child's safety and well-being as the most important considerations.

The following points should be noted:

- British Columbia has developed a Guardianship Model to ensure that each person in care receives care which actively promotes the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social needs of the child or youth
- The guiding principles, service delivery principles, best interests of children, and rights of children in care are the legal principles that guide the Guardianship Model. At the heart of the model are the rights of children, and youth-in-care. Using Handout #6, "The Guardianship Model," and Overhead #7, "The Guardianship Model," briefly outline the elements of the model.

Exercise:

One of the most important functions contained in the Guardianship Model is planning for the child. The following activity illustrates the kind of thinking useful in generating ideas for developing the plan for care.

Please think of a young person you have cared for and about. You may want to get a picture of the child or youth in your mind: what she looked like, her mannerisms, how she talked, what she liked to do, and so on.

Was the child or youth able to move forward in life in terms of physical, social, emotional, and spiritual growth and development?

Reflect upon:

TRAINER'S INSTRUCTIONS

- what the child or youth's personal strengths were
- what the child or youth was good at
- what their hopes, expectations, anxieties, and worries were for the child or youth.

While all parents have hopes and expectations for their children, caregivers' hopes and expectations for a child in care must be realistic, based on the child's capabilities, and grounded in his Plan of Care.

You may want to record these on flip chart paper using the following format:

Personal strengths	Good at	Hopes, expectations	Anxieties, worries

It is the child who is the focus of the Comprehensive Plan of Care. Taking the time to assess the child's strengths and needs in each of the dimensions of the Plan of Care keeps the child at the center of the development of the Comprehensive Plan of Care.

Summary Remarks:

Use Handout #7, "The Comprehensive Plan of Care," and Overhead #9, "The Comprehensive Plan of Care" to briefly review the developmental dimensions that are at the center of the plan of care. British Columbia has two formats for developing a Comprehensive Plan of Care:

- the internationally recognized Looking After Children Assessment and Action Record and Comprehensive Plan of Care
- a shorter version called “the Condensed Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care.”

Both documents use the same dimensions to assess and develop a Plan of Care for children and youth.

By including input from each child’s guardianship team, a concrete action plan for the child that focuses on identified needs and strengths is developed. Since a young person and her interactions with other people and the environments in which she grows and develops change, the child’s Comprehensive Plan of Care must reflect those changes. In other words, it is a living document.

Most plans of care are “needs based.” We know, however, that focusing on strengths and building upon what people can do is a more effective way to work with them than focusing on what is wrong with them.

You may wish to take time on your own to review Handout #8, “Standard C. 1 Comprehensive Plan of Care in Standards for Foster Homes.”

The Comprehensive Plan of Care is important to caregivers since it clarifies and specifies the responsibilities of the caregiving team in implementing the plan. Available supports should also be clarified and specified. A child’s Comprehensive Plan of Care emphasizes the importance of focusing on positive developmental outcomes for a child or youth. Given the day-to-day contact that the caregiver has with a young person, the caregiver plays a pivotal role in carrying out the implementation of the child’s Comprehensive Plan of Care.

4. THE CAREGIVER AS PART OF EACH CHILD’S GUARDIANSHIP TEAM (60 minutes)

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can describe the role of the caregiver as a member of the caregiving team in terms of day-to-day care, contributing to and carrying out the Comprehensive Plan of

Care, and relating to the child or youth's family and community.

Materials:

Handouts

- Handout #9 Teamwork
- Handout #10 Role of the Caregiver

Overheads

- Overhead #10 Teamwork

The areas to be considered are as follows:

- working in a team
- the caregiver's role.

Working as a member of a guardianship team in providing day-to-day care for a child or youth, as well as contributing to carrying out a Comprehensive Plan of Care, requires a high level of cooperation.

Ponder the question, "Who do you think comprises the guardianship team?" Note your responses down and refer to the list of participants identified as "the guardianship team" in the References section.

Reflect upon what are some of the ways in which people show stress and frustration?

What causes frustration for you:

- during the day-to-day care of young people
- when contributing to and carrying out the Comprehensive Plan of Care
- when relating to the child or youth's family and community

What might you do to contribute to the success of a guardianship team?

Use Handout #9, "Teamwork," and Overhead #10, "Teamwork," to review what teamwork, within the context of a guardianship team, constitutes.

Walk through Handout #10, "Role of The Caregiver,"

5. INTRODUCTION TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA FOSTER CARE EDUCATION PROGRAM
(10 minutes)

Learning Outcome:

The caregiver can reflect on an overview of the British Columbia Foster Care Education Program and describe the content areas within.

Materials:

Handout

- Handout #11 The British Columbia Foster Care Education Program

Instructions:

An agreement was made between the British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations and the Ministry of Children and Family Development to provide a vehicle for caregivers to enhance their skills in carrying out their roles.

Use Handout #11, "The British Columbia Foster Parent Care Education Program," to highlight areas included in the training. Suggest participants take time at home to review the handout.

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FOR PARTICIPANT'S USE ONLY

GUARDIANSHIP MODEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

Legislated Rights of Children and Youth-in-care	<i>The concept of guardianship in British Columbia child welfare legislation encompasses all the rights, duties, and responsibilities of a parent in providing</i>
The Right Place at the Right Time for Each Child	<i>for the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of a child.</i>
Regional Guardianship Partnerships	<i>At the heart of guardianship is trust that the guardian and all those involved with the child will</i>
The Guardianship Team	<i>act in the child's best interests, for the child's benefit and with the child's safety and well-being as</i>
Caring for the Child	<i>paramount considerations.</i>
The Child's Unique Needs	<i>British Columbia has designed a guardianship model</i>
Developing Independence	<i>that ensures each child in care receives focused integrated planning and care. The model consists of</i>
Standards of Care	<i>several components each integral to providing optimum care for children and youth. This booklet</i>
Quality Assurance	<i>provides a description of each component and its relevance to the guardianship model.</i>

Model of the British Columbia Guardianship Program

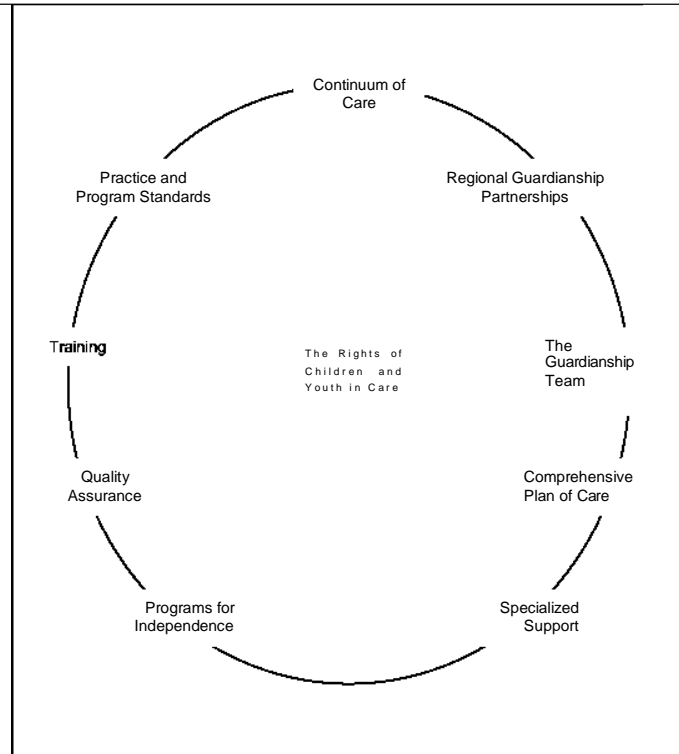
<i>The Guardianship Model</i>	
<p><i>Vision</i> For the healthy growth and development of children in care, guardianship needs to ensure that children have a sense of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • belonging • competence (mastery) • personal responsibility • generosity of spirit <p>Every component of the guardianship model supports this vision.</p>	<p><i>Goals</i> The goals of guardianship are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to provide every child in care with a safe and secure home environment • to provide for the physical, emotional, and developmental needs of a child.

<p>Principles The guardianship model is based upon the following principles.</p> <p>Guiding Principles It is important to note that the safety and well-being of children is the paramount consideration in all decisions and actions taken under the Child, Family and Community Service Act.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are entitled to be protected from abuse, neglect, and harm or threat of harm. • A family is the preferred environment for the care and upbringing of children and the responsibility for the protection of children rests primarily with the parents. • If, with available support services, a family can provide a safe and nurturing environment for a child, support services should be provided. • The child's views should be taken into account when decisions relating to a child are made. • Kinship ties and a child's attachment to the extended family should be preserved if possible. • The cultural identity of Aboriginal children should be preserved. • Decisions relating to children should be made and implemented in a timely manner. <p>Service Delivery Principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families and children should be informed of the services available to them and encouraged to participate in decisions that affect them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal people should be involved in the planning and delivery of services to Aboriginal families and their children. Services should be planned and provided in ways that are sensitive to the needs and the cultural, racial, and religious heritage of those receiving the services. • Services should be integrated, wherever possible and appropriate, with services provided by other ministries and community agencies. • The community should be involved, wherever possible and appropriate, in the planning and delivery of services, including preventive and support services to families and children. <p>Best Interest of the Child</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All relevant factors must be considered in determining the child's best interests, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the child's safety – the child's physical and emotional needs and level of development – the importance of continuity in the child's care – the quality of the relationship the child has with a parent or other person and the effect of maintaining that relationship – the child's cultural, racial, linguistic, and religious heritage – the child's views – the effect on the child if there is delay in making a decision. • If the child is Aboriginal, the importance of preserving the child's cultural identity must be considered in determining the child's best interests.
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The Guardianship Model

The British Columbia guardianship model includes:

- the legislated and enforceable rights of children in care
- the guardianship team
- regional guardianship partnership
- a comprehensive plan of care for each child and youth-in-care
- a range of specialized resources to meet a variety of children's needs
- specialized support programs for children and youth-in-care
- programs for independence for youth-in-care
- practice and program standards
- training for ministry staff and foster parents
- quality assurance program.



Legislated Rights of Children and Youth-in-care

Children and youth-in-care have specific rights that are enforceable. These rights must be honoured and actively promoted by everyone working with children and youth-in-care, including social workers and caregivers.

As defined in Section 70 of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*, children in care have the following rights:

- to be fed, clothed, and nurtured according to community standards and to be given the same quality of care as other children (including the caregiver's children) in the placement
- to be informed about their plans of care
- to be consulted and to express their views, according to their abilities, about significant decisions affecting them
- to reasonable privacy and to possession of their personal belongings
- to be free from corporal punishment
- to be informed of the standard of behaviour expected by their caregivers and of the consequences of not meeting their caregiver's expectations
- to receive medical and dental care when required
- to participate in social and recreational activities available and appropriate and according to their abilities and interests
- to receive the religious instruction and to participate in the religious activities of their choice
- to receive guidance and encouragement to maintain their cultural heritage
- to be provided with an interpreter if language or disability is a barrier to consulting with them on decisions affecting their custody or care
- to privacy during discussions with members of their families, subject to any court order made after the court has had an opportunity to consider the question of access to the child
- to privacy during discussions with a lawyer, the Child, Youth and Family Advocate, the Ombudsman, Member of the Legislative Assembly or a Member of Parliament
- to be informed about and to be assisted in contacting the Child, Youth and Family Advocate* and
- to be informed of their rights under this Act and procedures available for enforcing their rights.

*replaced by the Office for Children and Youth in 2002

In order to ensure that children in care are aware of their rights, formal advocacy bodies, and internal complaint processes the following materials have been developed.

Know Your Rights Booklet and Video

Know Your Rights: A Guide for Young People in Care is information to advise children and youth in care of their rights. It is now available only on the ministry

web site at

http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/child_family_service_act/Know%20Your%20Rights.pdf

Know Your Rights: A Video for Young People in Care is also available through the ministry or through the BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations.

For younger children, the coloring book *A Foster Family for Buddy* explains their rights at a developmentally appropriate level.

<i>The Right Place at the Right Time for Each Child</i>	
<p><i>Continuum of Care</i> The ministry, in order to best meet the varied, unique, and often complex needs of children and youth-in-care, provides a continuum of care in a variety of residential care settings. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Foster Care by Extended Family</i> Wherever possible and in keeping with the child’s best interests, priority is given to placing a child with relatives. • <i>Foster Family Care</i> Foster Family Care provides substitute parenting to children and youth and supports important relationships of children and youth to their parents and extended families. In Foster Family Care homes, children and youth-in-care receive: 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - physical care such as clothing, food, and shelter - emotional care, including love and inclusion of a family - nurturing of both intellectual and emotional development - guidance and supervision - positive role modeling. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Specialized Residential Services</i> Specialized Residential Services provide a range of care and supports to children whose individual needs are beyond the capacity of available foster family care and are best met in specialized residential settings. <p>The goal is to assist the child to reach a point where he or she can return to living in a family.</p>

<i>Regional Guardianship Partnerships</i>	
<p>Regional guardian partnerships involve the working together of Ministry of Children and Family Development regional managers responsible for guardianship matters, representatives from the Federation of BC Youth-in-care Networks, the British Columbia Federation of Foster Parent Associations, the Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents Associations, aboriginal communities and other community partners to:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitate initial implementation of guardianship initiatives designed to improve the quality of care for children and youth-in-care. • facilitate regional initiatives to ensure that new staff, caregivers, and other community partners are informed of the guardianship model components. • ensure that initiatives are being implemented in a practical manner throughout the region, and • develop local community initiatives that better meet the needs of children and youth-in-care.

<i>Caring for the Child</i>	
<p>Children who are cared for by the ministry have a comprehensive plan of care developed. The Comprehensive Plan of Care describes how the child will be cared for. It outlines services that will be provided to the child based upon an assessment of his/her strengths and needs, in order to maximize his/her potential.</p> <p>The planning process involves the guardianship team and other key people in working together to promote the well-being of the child through a comprehensive plan of care that addresses seven major aspects of a child's life, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - placement - health and health care - education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - identity and competency - emotional and behavioural development - family and social relationships - self-presentation and social skills - self-care. <p>Tools to assist assessment and planning include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ~ Looking After Children Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care for all other children and youth-in-care ~ Condensed Assessment and Comprehensive Plan of Care for all other children and youth-in-care ~ health assessments ~ education/vocational assessments; and ~ psychological assessments.
<i>The Guardianship Team</i>	
<p>For each child in care, there is a guardianship team. The team is based on the integrated case management approach ensuring the integrated planning and delivery of services to the child. The guardianship team includes, whenever possible:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the child • the child's family and extended family • the child's guardianship social worker • caregivers (foster families, residential facilities staff). <p>It may also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ministry staff including resource social workers, youth probation officers, and contracted service providers in programs relating to alcohol and drug misuse, and mental health. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • other service providers such as community living service workers, child care providers, child and youth counsellors, teachers, and health care professionals • the Aboriginal community, if the child is Aboriginal; and • other responsible people whom the child considers important. <p>All of these people participate in helping the child by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contributing to and participating in the child's needs assessment and development of the child's plan of care, and • knowing what roles and responsibilities they have in the child's life.

Roles of the Guardianship Team

The Child

The child is the key member of the guardianship team. Wherever possible, the child's views should be sought and taken into account when decisions relating to him/her are made. All decisions about the child should be made in his/her best interests.

The Child's Family (including extended family members). In keeping with the guiding principles of the *Child, Family and Community Service Act, i.e.*, the child's kinship ties and attachment to his/her extended family should be preserved if possible; the child's family should be involved wherever possible in planning for the child.

Guardianship Worker

Each child in care has a guardianship worker who is responsible for the guardianship role. The guardianship social worker has direct responsibility for each child, coordinates services to the child and ensures the smooth operation of the guardianship team.

Caregiver

Foster families and staffed residential resources provide day-to-day care for children and youth-in-care. They operate under contract with the ministry. Provincial associations representing caregivers are funded by the ministry, and together the parties have developed practice standards and work on a number of service issues to ensure the best care of children.

Regional Managers

Each region has managers responsible for implementing the guardianship model in their regions and ensuring each child receives a high quality of care.

Resource Worker

Resource social workers are responsible for recruiting, supporting, and retaining a range of skilled foster families as well as residential resources, which reflect the needs of children and youth-in-care.

Adoption Worker

Adoption workers are responsible to carry out the functions mandated by the *Adoption Act*, including services for non-ministry adoptions. Services for ministry adoptions include adoption planning for children in care and for children whose birth parents are considering adoption; services to recruit, assess, and prepare parents who are considering adoption of children through the ministry; and support services to families who have adopted a child through the ministry.

Regional Aboriginal Manager

The manager works closely with Aboriginal communities in the region, including any Aboriginal child and family service agencies whose social workers may have, or are negotiating to obtain, delegated authority.

Other Professionals

Professionals such as child and youth care workers, youth probation officers, health care practitioners, and educational/vocational specialists contribute their specialized knowledge and skills in the assessment of the child's needs and related action to achieve realistic measurable outcomes.

The Child's Unique Needs

Specialized Services

The ministry has the capacity to provide case supervision and clinical consultation in the areas of health (including the use of sessional physicians), education, training, and employment.

Intensive Support Services

These include treatment or crisis interventions to address mental health and/or substance use, and 24-hour supervision for children and youth who may endanger themselves or others.

Child and Youth Services

These include one-on-one professional workers for children in care who require ongoing counselling, but do not require intensive support services.

After Hours Support for Foster Parents

This service assists foster families manage unusually stressful situations during hours when normal ministry supports are not available, thereby stabilizing the child's placement. The service features both:

- centralized, province-wide assistance by phone, and
- direct personal assistance in each region.

Federation of British Columbia Youth-in-care Networks (FBCYICN)

This provincial body is funded by the ministry to help youth-in-care communicate with one another, have a voice in the ministry's plans for policy and practice, and advocate for and assist in enhancing the quality of care received by children or youth-in-care.

Federation of Child and Family Services of British Columbia

The federation is the collective voice for member child and family serving agencies throughout the province. It provides a forum for identifying, studying, and acting on issues directly related to the promotion of excellence in the field of child and family well being in British Columbia.

BC Federation of Foster Parent Associations (BCFFPA)

This federation helps foster families communicate with one another, have a voice in the ministry's plans for policy and practices, and advocate for change to strengthen the quality of care received by children or youth-in-care.

Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parent Associations

The Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parent Associations works with the ministry to provide consultation and support to Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal child and family agencies. In addition, the Federation works in a supportive capacity with Aboriginal foster parents in order to enhance the quality of care provided to Aboriginal children and youth-in-care. The Federation is involved in recruiting Aboriginal foster homes and developing culturally sensitive training for non-Aboriginal foster parents caring for Aboriginal children.

REFERENCES

Developing Independence

Services for Independence

The ministry provides youth-in-care with the support, skills, and guidance they need to become successfully independent upon reaching the age of 19 and leaving care.

The age at which a youth's social worker begins to prepare him or her for independence varies according to the youth's level of behavioural and emotional development and living circumstances. Generally, a social worker begins to prepare a youth for independence by the time the youth reaches 15 years of age.

Useful Tips for Youth Leaving Care

This handbook has been developed to help young people prepare for independence. It contains helpful information relating to practical issues such as living skills, budgeting, school, health, finding housing, jobs, and developing and maintaining support networks.

Useful Tips for Youth Leaving Care Facilitator's Guide

The ministry has developed a companion document to the *Useful Tips* handbook, to help facilitators take youth through a defined preparatory independence life skills program for youth leaving care. The content is matched with the topics in the *Useful Tips* handbook, giving youth opportunities to put the various living skills they are learning into practice. The *Facilitator's Guide* contains eight learning units that can be adapted for use in a group or individual format. Foster parents can use the *Useful Tips* materials, guiding youth through the learning units on a daily basis to assist youth to learn basic skills.

Youth Education Assistance Fund

Youth who are between their 19th and 24th birthdays who were in permanent government care, and who are eligible for the B.C. student assistance program through the Ministry of Advanced Education, can apply for bursaries of up to \$2,500 per year to a maximum of \$10,000 over five years.

Eligible young people can apply for the bursaries through the Ministry of Advanced Education's student services branch. For more information see their web site at

[www.aved.gov.bc.ca/ studentservices /](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/studentservices/), or call them at 387-6100 in Victoria, 604 660-2610 in the Lower Mainland, and 1 800 561-1818 (toll free) in Canada and the U.S.A.

An information guide for youth in care and staff/foster parents is available on the web site

[http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/scholarships /yea_fund.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/scholarships/yea_fund.htm)

<p>Standards of Care</p> <p>The following practice and program standards are intended to ensure consistent, high quality services for children and youth-in-care, and to ensure the safety and well being of children and youth-in-care in British Columbia.</p> <p>Practice Standards for Guardianship</p> <p>These standards describe the required level of performance by those persons who are delegated to carry out the director’s guardianship responsibilities and authority in relation to a child or youth-in-care. The standards reflect the obligation of the director to ensure that the child’s individual needs are met and that actions and decisions taken are in the child’s best interests, based on the child’s individual need, and for the child’s benefit.</p>	<p>Standards for Foster Homes</p> <p>These standards describe expected outcomes for children and youth-in-care who reside in foster homes, including the practical steps caregivers must take to achieve the expected outcomes.</p> <p>Standards for Staffed Children’s Residential Services</p> <p>These standards describe the required level of performance for individuals and organizations contracted by the ministry to provide staffed residential services to children and youth-in-care under the <i>Child, Family and Community Service Act</i>.</p>
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Quality Assurance

The Ministry of Children and Family Development is committed to providing a consistent and high level of guardianship care to children and youth to ensure the child's best interests. In order to monitor and improve the quality of care, the ministry has developed a quality assurance program that includes the following:

Foster Parent Screening

Current caregiver screening practices are being strengthened with the development of a new caregiver screening tool that provides concrete assistance in the initial assessment and subsequent reviews of caregivers.

Training

The ministry offers mandatory pre-service training as well as mandatory basic training for all foster families. This training is also available to staffed residential service providers and their child and youth care staff.

Guardianship Training

Training pertaining to guardianship responsibilities is being provided as part of the on-going training for newly hired ministry workers. In addition, there is specific training designed for guardianship workers to promote competent professional practice.

Reportable Circumstances

The ministry has clear policies and procedures with respect to the reporting of critical injuries or other serious incidents involving a child in care. Ministry workers communicate all serious and/or critical incidents involving children in care to the deputy director's case review team in order to ensure all appropriate actions are taken to promote safety and well-being of the child or youth.

Regional Audits

Regional managers responsible for guardianship conduct audits of guardianship and residential practice in their regions. The practice audit assesses compliance with relevant practice standards. On completion of the audit, a regional plan is developed to address any practice concerns identified.

Provincial Audits

The provincial audit unit of the Quality Improvement branch undertakes scheduled audits of ministry offices providing guardianship services, once every four years. Twenty percent of an office's child service files are reviewed for compliance to current practice standards. On completion of the audit, a formal audit report is prepared and a plan is developed to address any practice concerns identified. The results of all audits are included in a provincial data base to provide a standardized and comprehensive assessment of both provincial and regional guardianship and residential practice.

Protocols

Protocols have been drafted jointly by the ministry and the B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations to address situations where the ministry receives a report that a child in care has been abused or neglected in a foster home; where a quality of care concern is identified, and where the foster parent(s) and ministry staff cannot agree on an issue. A new framework is being developed for regional authorities.

Authorities External to the Ministry

These authorities are available to children and youth-in-care when it is believed that appropriate services are not being provided or a child or youth-in-care's rights are not being respected

- Office for Children and Youth
- Office of the Ombudsman.

Under Development

Practice Standards for Residential Resource Work

These standards direct the practice of those who are delegated to carry out the director's responsibilities and authority when working with residential resources for children and youth-in-care, including family care homes and staffed residential programs. The standards describe the level of performance required to recruit, screen, select and support a range of residential resources to meet the individual needs of children and youth-in-care.

Exit Interviews

A format is being developed to interview children and youth who are leaving care. Children leaving care are routinely asked to provide their views on the successes and challenges they faced at specific places of care and their overall experience while in care.

