

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE
Director of Child and Family Services

2019-2020



RAPPORT ANNUEL DE LA DIRECTRICE DES
Services à l'enfance et à la famille

2019-2020

Le présent document contient un sommaire en français.

English

French

Cree

Tłchq

Chipewyan

South Slavey

North Slavey

Gwich'in

Inuvialuktun

Inuktitut

Inuinnaqtun

1-855-846-9601

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR, CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

October 1, 2020

The Honourable Julie Green
Minister of Health and Social Services
Government of the Northwest Territories

Dear Minister Green,

I am pleased to submit the 2019-2020 Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services. As the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services, I am confident this report reflects an accurate summary of services delivered under the *Child and Family Services Act* along with progress on key initiatives.

Over the past year, we have made steady progress in transforming Child and Family Services to better meet the needs of children and youth. As we move forward, the *Federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* will provide the impetus to strengthen relationships with Indigenous Governments and Communities to advance reconciliation, recognize and affirm Aboriginal and treaty rights, and support program and service delivery by Indigenous Governments. Successful implementation of the Federal Act is a positive step in improving services and supports to children, youth and families, and is likely to reduce the number of Indigenous children and youth in care.

Through the Director's Annual Report, we will continue to monitor our approach to services across the many communities of the Northwest Territories. This report gives us the opportunity to reflect on system improvements and reform while positioning us for the year to come. I intend this report to be a forum to amplify the voice of children, youth and families and to showcase the strength and resilience of our communities.

As we enter the upcoming year, I look forward to advancing the mandate of the Federal Act, quality improvement initiatives, engagement with children, youth and families and fostering positive relationships between social workers and families to evolve our services.

I wish to thank Child and Family Services staff and our many stakeholders for their continued contributions toward ensuring the wellbeing of children, youth and their families.

Sincerely,

Colette Prévost
Statutory Director, Child and Family Services

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Executive Summary

The 2019-2020 Report of the Director of Child and Family Services provides a summary of services delivered in the Northwest Territories (NWT) under the *Child and Family Services Act* between April 1, 2019, and March 31, 2020.

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, 1,239 children/youth received either prevention or protection services from the Child and Family Services System.

54% received **Voluntary Support Services**

33% received services through a **Plan of Care Agreement**

10% received supports through a **Permanent Custody Order**

3% received supports through a **Temporary Custody Order**

In the past ten years, there has been a continued decreasing trend in the number of children and youth under a Permanent Custody Order. This is an important development as it suggests a positive movement in the strength and resiliency of communities to support families and their children – a movement that is well aligned with the Federal Act *respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls for Action.

This past fiscal year, over 90% of children/youth who received prevention and protection services were living in their family home or with a foster caregiver in their home community. Supporting children and youth in home communities leads to sustained cultural identity and connections.



Despite having more children staying at home or in their home community, there is still an overrepresentation of Indigenous children/youth in Child and Family Services. Over the past year, 98% of children/youth who receive prevention and protection services were Indigenous, even though only 54% of children/youth in NWT are Indigenous. This overrepresentation is our call to action to strengthen partnerships with Indigenous Governments and Communities to better support children, youth and families across the NWT.

Over the past year, the Child and Family Services System has advanced a number of quality initiatives to better support the evolving needs of children, youth and families within the NWT. The 2018-2019 system-wide audit was completed for Child and Family Services System. The audit findings will support system improvements, such as revisions to standards and focused staff training, and authority-specific actions to improve compliance with standards.



Our system's stability depends on a committed and steady workforce and over the past many years, maintaining staffing has been a challenge. In April 2019, we introduced 21 new positions to the Child and Family Services System. Despite the addition of new resources, the vacancy rate for Child and Family Services staff decreased from 25% to 8.6%. As part of the Quality Improvement Plan introduced in August 2019, the ability to recruit and retain staff to the system is instrumental to our overall improvement strategies. In our continued effort to support our service system, a number of training opportunities have been offered to staff over the past year, including the enhanced Core Statutory Training for Community Social Services Workers and Structured Decision Making© refresher training sessions.

The national landscape of Child and Family Services is evolving with the new Federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Child, Youth and Families* that came into force on January 1, 2020. This Act recognizes the inherent rights of Indigenous communities to care for their children. Over the next several years, we will work with Indigenous Governments and Communities to shift how the Child and Family Services system is designed, how standards are developed, and how workforce practice knowledge is supported. In January 2020, the Minister reached out to Indigenous governments in the NWT inviting ongoing and open dialogue to build on the strength of partnership to advance the best interest of children, youth and families in the Territories. We must explore every opportunity to support communities and families to care for their children and youth in an effort to preserve family and ensure cultural continuity for all children and youth of the NWT.

Sommaire

Ce rapport annuel de la directrice des Services à l'enfance et à la famille présente les services fournis aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) en vertu de la *Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille* pour la période allant du 1^{er} avril 2019 au 31 mars 2020.

Pendant l'exercice 2019-2020, 1 239 enfants et jeunes ont reçu des services de prévention ou de protection de la part du système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille.

54 % ont reçu des **services de soutien volontaires**

33 % ont reçu des services par l'entremise d'un **accord concernant le projet de prise en charge**

10 % ont reçu des services par l'entremise d'une **ordonnance de garde permanente**

3 % ont reçu des services par l'entremise d'une **ordonnance de garde temporaire**



Au cours des dix dernières années, on a observé une diminution constante du nombre d'enfants et jeunes visés par une ordonnance de garde permanente. Il s'agit d'une évolution importante qui démontre la force et la résilience des collectivités en ce qui concerne le soutien apporté aux familles et aux enfants. Cette tendance positive s'inscrit dans les objectifs de la *Loi concernant les enfants, les jeunes et les familles des Premières Nations, des Inuits et des Métis* (loi fédérale) et des appels à l'action de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation du Canada.

L'année dernière, plus de 90 % des enfants et des jeunes qui ont reçu des services de prévention et de protection vivaient à la maison familiale ou chez un tuteur dans leur collectivité d'origine. En aidant les enfants et les jeunes dans leur collectivité, on contribue à développer leur identité culturelle et on les aide à tisser des liens.

Malgré le fait qu'un plus grand nombre d'enfants restent à la maison ou dans leur collectivité, les enfants et les jeunes Autochtones sont encore surreprésentés dans le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille. Au cours de la dernière année, 98 % des enfants et des jeunes qui ont reçu des services de prévention et de protection étaient autochtones, même s'ils ne représentent que 54 % des enfants et des jeunes des TNO. Cette surreprésentation est notre appel à l'action pour renforcer les partenariats avec les gouvernements et les collectivités autochtones pour mieux soutenir les enfants, les jeunes et les familles partout aux TNO.

Au cours de la dernière année, le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille a fait progresser des initiatives de qualité pour mieux répondre aux besoins changeants des enfants, des jeunes et des familles des TNO. En 2018-2019, un audit a été réalisé à l'échelle du système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille. Les constatations de cet audit permettront d'améliorer le système, notamment en révisant les normes de pratique et la formation du personnel, et en favorisant la prise de mesures au niveau de la direction pour accroître le respect de ces normes de pratique.



La stabilité de notre système est tributaire d'un personnel engagé et constant. Cependant, au cours des dernières années, il a été difficile de maintenir le personnel approprié en poste. En avril 2019, nous avons créé 21 nouveaux postes dans le système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille. Avec l'ajout de nouvelles ressources, le taux de postes à pourvoir dans le système a diminué de 25 à 8,6 %. Le plan d'amélioration de la qualité lancé en août 2019 met l'accent sur la grande importance de la capacité à recruter et à maintenir en poste le personnel approprié dans le cadre de nos stratégies d'amélioration générale. Dans le but de continuer à améliorer nos services, nous avons offert au cours de la dernière année des occasions de formation à nos employés, notamment des séances de mise à jour sur la formation de base obligatoire pour les travailleurs des services sociaux communautaires et la formation *Structured Decision Making*® (Prise de décisions structurées).

Le contexte national des Services à l'enfance et à la famille a évolué avec l'adoption de la nouvelle *Loi concernant les enfants, les jeunes et les familles des Premières Nations, des Inuits et des Métis* (loi fédérale) le 1^{er} janvier 2020. Cette loi reconnaît les droits inhérents des collectivités autochtones de s'occuper de leurs enfants. Au cours des prochaines années, nous collaborerons avec les gouvernements et les collectivités autochtones pour modifier les fondements du système des Services à l'enfance et à la famille, revoir la façon dont les normes sont élaborées et mieux appuyer le développement des connaissances professionnelles du personnel. En janvier 2020, la ministre a approché les gouvernements autochtones des TNO pour les inviter à un dialogue ouvert en vue d'établir un partenariat qui favorisera l'intérêt supérieur des enfants, des jeunes et des familles des TNO. Nous devons envisager toutes les façons d'aider les collectivités et les familles à s'occuper de leurs enfants et de leurs jeunes afin de protéger les liens familiaux et d'assurer la continuité culturelle pour tous les enfants et les jeunes des TNO.

Introduction

The 2019-2020 Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services provides a summary of services delivered in the Northwest Territories (NWT) under the *Child and Family Services Act* between April 1, 2019, and March 31, 2020. This report also meets the requirement under the *Child and Family Services Act* to provide an annual report to the Minister of Health and Social Services.

Many aspects of this report have been refreshed from previous years, specifically the way data is presented and the language used to describe the different areas of Child and Family Services. Our aim is to provide information that is more accessible and informative to the public so they are aware of what the Child and Family Services System has accomplished in the past year and the next steps we are taking to evolve the system to best serve the children, youth, families and communities across the NWT.

Examining Child and Family Services' data annually provides an opportunity for the system to look for areas of change and find ways to better evolve our services to better meet the needs of children, youth and families in the NWT. We are also able to reflect on key progress made throughout the year, and to outline our vision for the future.



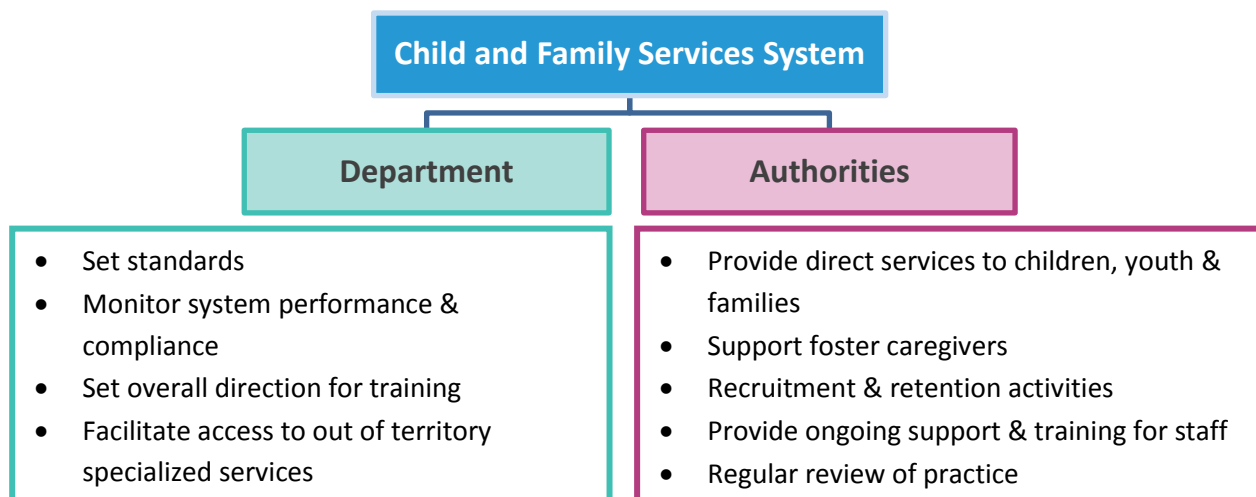
Northwest Territories' Child and Family Services System

The NWT Child and Family Services System aims to protect and support children, youth and their families, and encourage strong, healthy families. The Child and Family Services System is governed by the *Child and Family Services Act*, *Adoption Act*, *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act* and the Federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families.

Children, youth and families are supported by variety of Child and Family Services Staff – Family Preservation Workers, Case Aides, Community Social Services Workers and Foster Care and Adoption Workers. Community Social Services Workers and Foster Care and Adoption Workers receive specialized training to become statutorily appointed as “Child Protection Workers” and “Adoption Workers” to ensure appropriate supports and services to children and families, who are served under the *Child and Family Services Act* and *the Adoption Act*.

131 Staff Support
the Child and
Family Services
System

The Child and Family Services System is comprised of staff from the Department of Health and Social Services as well as from the Health and Social Services Authorities.



Key Progress in 2019/2020

- 21 new positions were added to the Child and Family Services System (April 2019).
- The Core Statutory Training for Community Social Services Workers was enhanced and a full day of on-the-land learning experiences in partnership with the Arctic Indigenous Wellness Foundation was added to the training.
- Staff recruitment model has led to a successful number of Community Social Services Workers positions being implemented across a number of regions.

Initial Involvement with Child and Family Services

Children, youth and families are usually supported by Child and Family Services through two types of services:

1) Prevention Services

Some parents, caregivers, children or youth contact Child and Family Services to ask for assistance. A wide range of services, known as voluntary support services, can be offered. An initial meeting with the parents, children and/or youth occurs to identify needs within the household and within the community, and if referrals to other services are needed to address short and long-term needs of the family.

2) Protection Services

When a report of suspected child maltreatment is received, the Community Social Services Worker uses a screening tool to assist them in how to respond. If child maltreatment is suspected after the initial screening, an investigative response is initiated to determine if protection services should be offered.

In 2019-2020, there were 333 (15%) requests for Voluntary Support Services and 1,970 (85%) reports of suspected child maltreatment.



The Reporting of Suspected Child Maltreatment and Neglect

Everyone shares a responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children and youth. Anyone who suspects child maltreatment and neglect has a responsibility to bring these concerns forward to their local Child and Family Services office or to their local RCMP office. Contact information for local Child and Family Services offices is available on the Department of Health and Social Services website at www.hss.gov.nt.ca/report-child-neglect.

In 2019-2020, the most common reporting sources were RCMP, relatives, community members, schools and custodial parents.

Suspected Child Maltreatment and Neglect

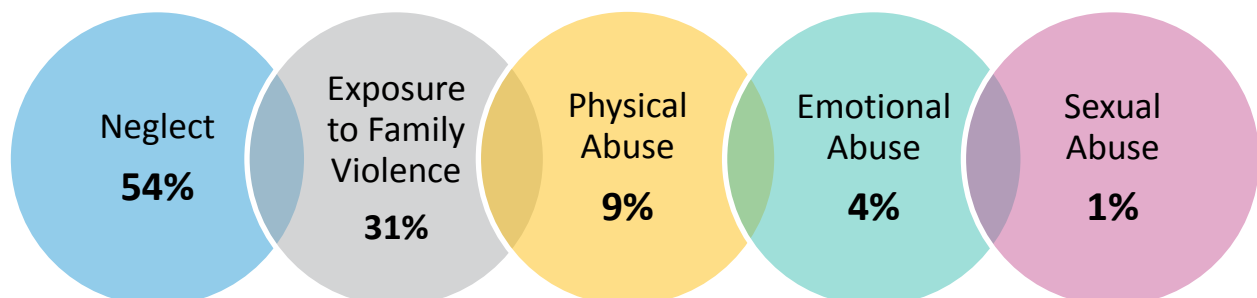
Suspected child maltreatment and neglect is based on concerns brought forward by community members and service providers. Therefore, this data reflects children and youth who have been brought to the attention of the Child and Family Services. Not all reports lead to the substantiation of child maltreatment and neglect.

When the Community Social Services Worker receives a call about suspected child maltreatment and neglect, they collect screening information to help them decide whether an investigation should be started. If the investigation finds that there is a confirmed situation of child maltreatment or neglect, a protection service will be introduced for the family and their children.

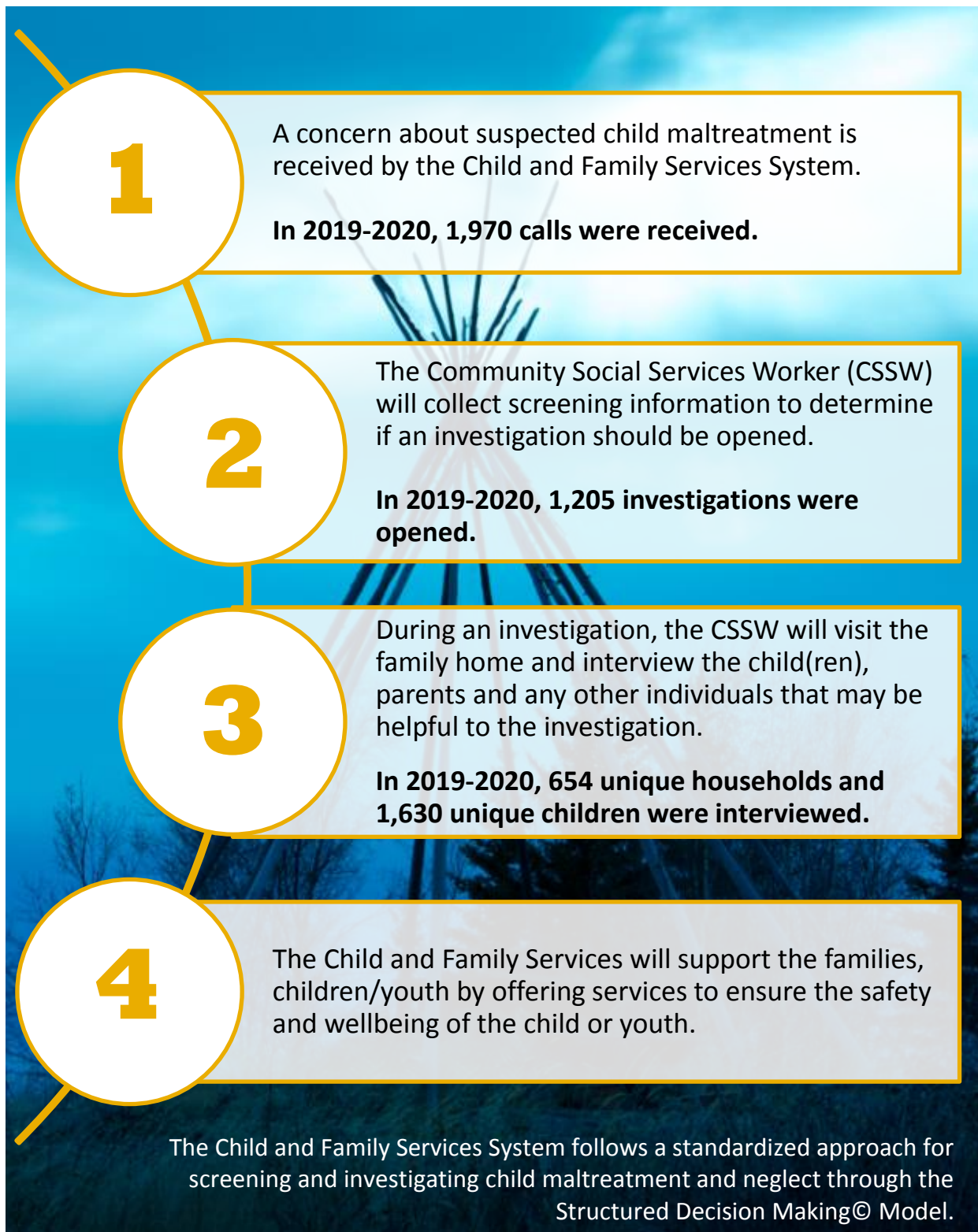
Harm to a child or youth can be categorized into five main areas: neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse and exposure to family violence. These terms are defined in the [Glossary](#) (Appendix A). It is important to note that sexual abuse is typically underreported in most Canadian jurisdictions, which may also be the case for the NWT.

In 2019-2020, there were a total of 3,366* reported suspected child maltreatment types.

**More than one person may call about concerns they have about a specific child or youth.*



What happens when a concern of suspected child maltreatment and neglect is brought forward to Child and Family Services?



Services for Children, Youth and Families

Child and Family Services provides support to children, youth and families through either prevention or protection services.

Prevention Services

- **Voluntary Services Agreements:** Support families with children between the ages of 0 to 18 by providing financial support for a variety of needs, and help ing them connect with other support services.
- **Support Services Agreements:** Support youth, ages 16 to 18, who are unable to live with their parents and to help them transition to adulthood.
- **Extended Support Services Agreements:** Support young adults in their transition to adulthood. This service is provided to young adults who were in the permanent custody of the Director on their 19th birthday until they turn 23.

Protection Services

- **Plan of Care Agreement:** Provides an alternative to the court process and collaboratively identifies strengths and needs with the family. Supports and services are offered as an approach to family preservation. Depending on the situation, the child may remain in the family home or cared for outside the home.
- **Supervision Order:** Enables the child to remain in their family home with the supervision from a Community Social Services Worker.
- **Temporary Custody Order:** Transfers the custody of the child temporarily to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Work is continued with the family to reunite the child in their family home.
- **Permanent Custody Order:** Transfers the custody of the child permanently to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Efforts are made to find a permanent home for these children, either through extended family members or adoption.

In 2019-2020, 1,239 children/youth* were receiving either prevention or protection services from the Child and Family Services System.

*While a child or youth can have multiple statuses within the year, only the most recent status was included in the analysis so that the number of unique children/youth could be calculated.

Overrepresentation of Indigenous Children and Youth

In 2019-2020, 98% of children and youth receiving services are Indigenous, even though only 54% of children in the NWT are Indigenous. The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in Child and Family Services is our call to action to strengthen a variety of partnerships to better the lives of children, youth and families across the NWT.

In many jurisdictions across Canada, there is an overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in their experiences with the Child Welfare System.

Children and Youth Receiving Services by Ethnicity:

First Nations- 76%

Inuit- 19%

Métis- 3%

Non-Indigenous- 2%

We are at a critical point where we need to evolve Child and Family Services in collaboration with Indigenous Governments and Communities. Our interest is to strengthen partnerships with Indigenous Governments and Communities in order to co-develop customary care models and implement the Federal Act *Respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*.

Reforming the Child and Family Services System in collaboration with Indigenous Governments and Communities will support more families to stay together, while preserving the identity and sense of belonging for Indigenous children and youth in their families and within their communities.

Where are children and youth receiving services?

Whenever possible, children and youth are supported to live in their family home or within their home community. This helps the child and youth maintain connections with culture, friends, family and other supports.



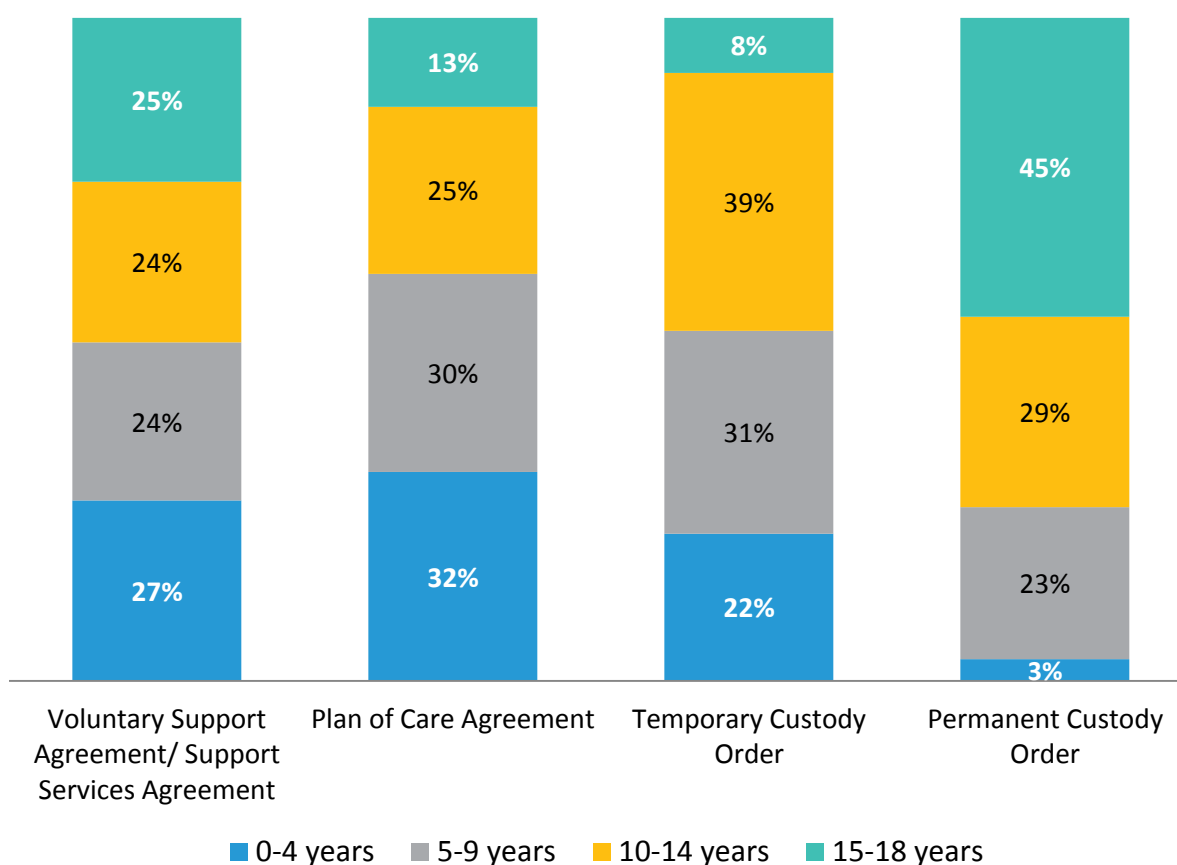
93% of children and youth who received services were residing in the home or remained in their home community

How old are the children and youth receiving services?

The age in which children and youth access different services through Child and Family Services differs by age group. Examining these differences is helpful in understanding how we can plan and work with our program areas to best support them.

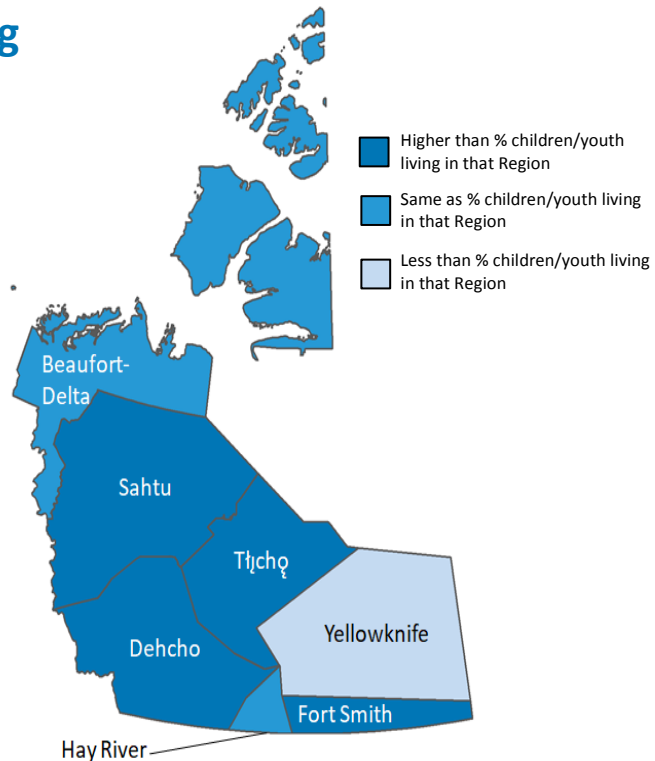
39% of children under a Temporary Custody Order were between 10 and 14 years old. As the age of a youth increases, there is likelihood of progressing to permanent care. It is important to focus resources on supporting family reunification or finding extended family members that can care for the youth.

45% of youth under a Permanent Custody Order were between 15 and 18 years old. This speaks to the importance of supporting youth in maintaining connections to culture and community as they approach their transition to adulthood.

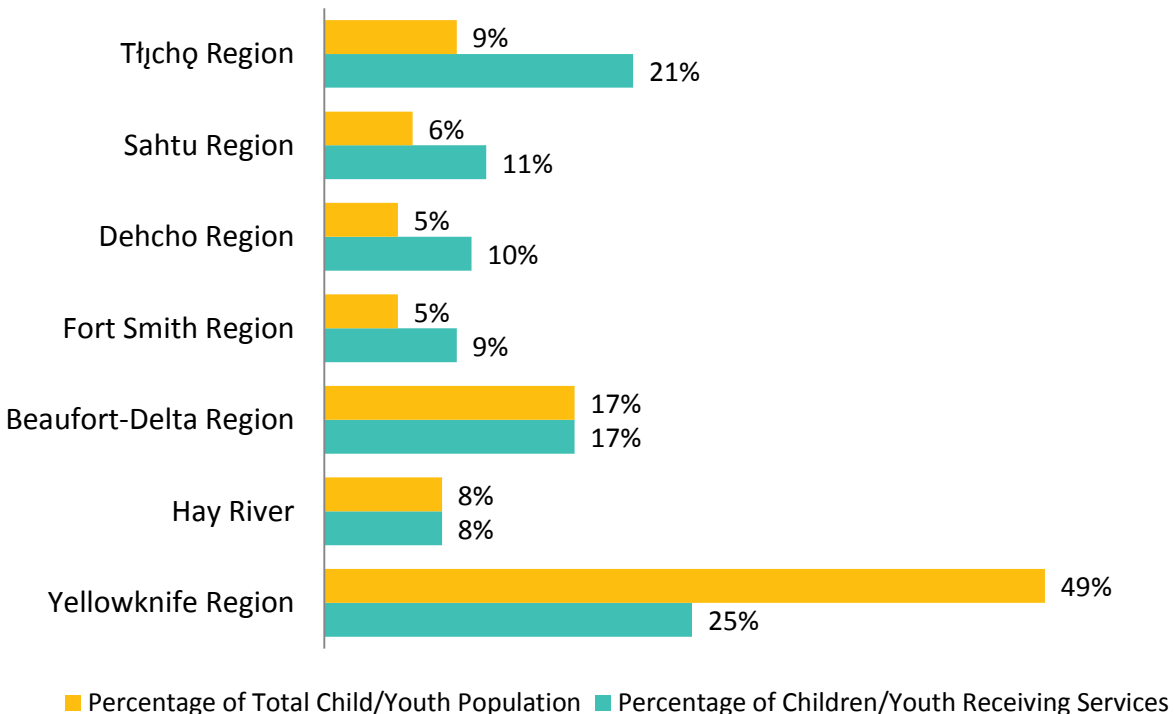


Children and Youth Receiving Services by Region

Understanding the level of service need by region is important to support the development of targeted community-based programs to better meet the needs of families. We must recognize that a single approach may not best support all children, youth and families. How services are designed and delivered must take into consideration community and regional differences, strengths and pressures.



Percentage of children and youth by region who are receiving Child and Family Services as compared to the total child and youth NWT population



Voluntary Support Services

A wide range of services, known as voluntary support services, can be offered to parents, caregivers, children, or youth who contact Child and Family Services to ask for support. There are two types of agreements that fall under voluntary support services - **Voluntary Services Agreements** and **Support Services Agreements**.

In 2019-2020, **736 children/youth*** were receiving **Voluntary Support Services** in the NWT.

94% of children and youth receiving services were under a **Voluntary Services Agreement**

6% of youth receiving services were under a **Support Services Agreement**

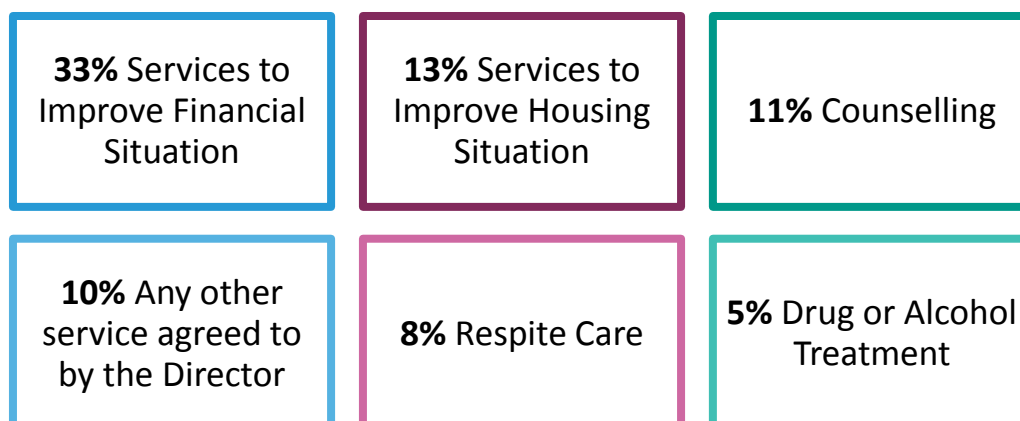
*This refers to the number of unique children/youth who received Voluntary Support Services in 2019-2020.

Voluntary Services Agreement

Families with children between the ages of 0 to 18 can receive financial assistance to meet a variety of needs and help to connect them with other support services through a Voluntary Services Agreement. Depending on the reason for the family needing support, these services help to prevent child protection concerns related to income instability.

In 2019-2020, **508 services** were requested under a **Voluntary Services Agreement**.

The top 6 services requested were:

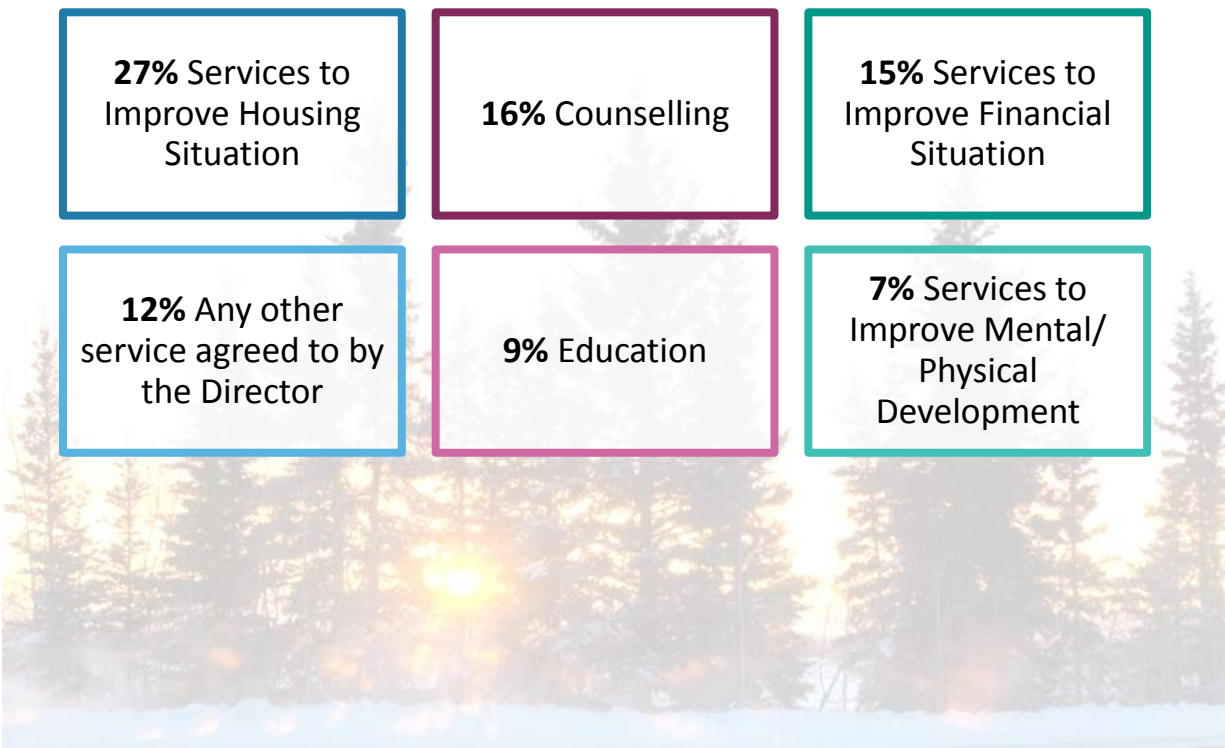


Support Services Agreements

Youth between the ages of 16 and 18 can access financial assistance and support services through Support Services Agreements. This service is provided to youth who are unable to live with their parents and need help transitioning to adulthood.

In 2019-2020, **104 services** were requested under a **Support Services Agreement**.

The top 6 services requested were:



Key Progress in 2019/2020

- A Prevention and Family Preservation Lead was hired to guide the development and implementation of the family preservation program. (November 2019).
- Brief Services Agreement was developed to provide short-term financial support for families in need of assistance (March 2020).
- Child and Family Services staff were offered training to provide referrals to the [Strongest Families Institute](#) (March 2020).

Plan of Care Agreement

An engaging approach to family preservation is sometimes achieved through a Plan of Care Agreement, which provides an alternative to the court process. The Community Social Services Worker works collaboratively with parents/caregivers, children under the age of 16, and anyone else identified by the family in an effort to develop a plan with supports and services that builds on the strengths and needs of the family.

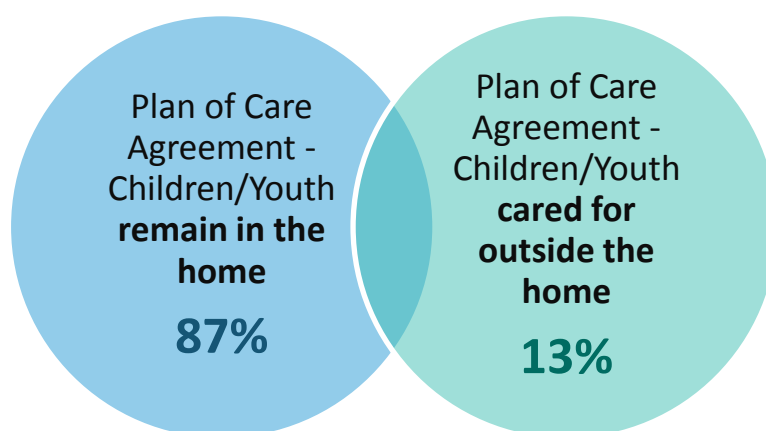
In the NWT, 505 children/youth* had a Plan of Care Agreement in 2019-2020.

*This refers to the number of unique children/youth with a Plan of Care Agreement in 2019-2020.

Depending on the circumstances, the children/youth may continue to live in their home or may need to be temporarily placed outside the home with extended family or in a foster home. Where possible, the Community Social Services Worker will provide supports to families so they can care for their children/youth at home as this helps to support family preservation and cultural continuity.

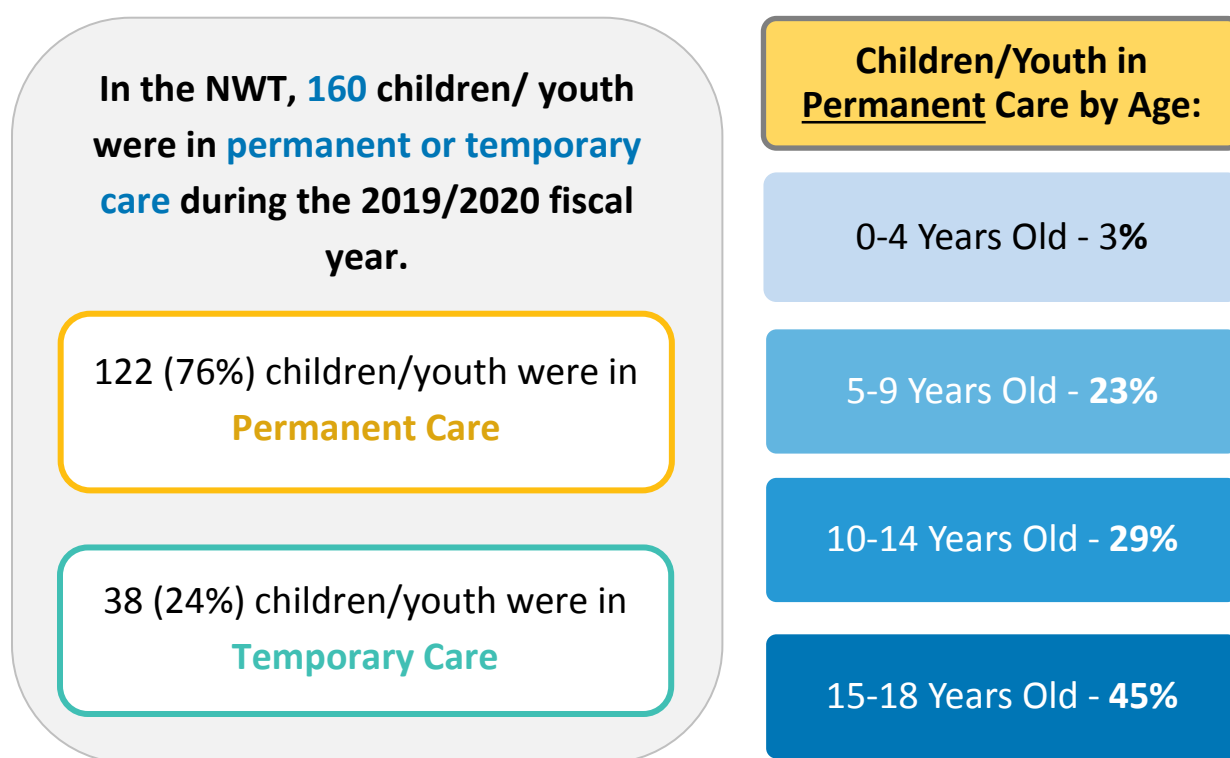
When families are supported to safely care for their children/youth at home, they are able to maintain important connections with their children/youth and reduce disruptive changes to family care which could have long-lasting impacts on the children/youth.

In 2019-2020, more children and youth with a Plan of Care Agreement lived in their family home than with extended family or in a foster home.



Children and Youth in Temporary and Permanent Care

From time to time, it may be safer and preferable to care for children/youth outside the home setting, especially during times when families are undergoing difficult life challenges. In these situations, a child may be placed in the temporary or permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Children/youth brought into temporary or permanent care are placed in an alternate placement until they are able to return home. In those unfortunate instances where a reunification with the family home is not possible, a permanent home can be found through adoption or private guardianship.



Number of children/youth in Permanent Care over time



Over the past ten years, there has been a **significant decrease** in the number of children/youth in permanent care.



Why is it important to see a decrease in the number of children/youth in permanent care?

The strength and capacity of families and communities to care for their children is shown through a continued decrease in the number of children/youth in permanent care over the past ten years. When children can remain in the care of family, extended family and within their own community, it strengthens their identity and allows them to remain connected to their community and culture. The reduction in the number of Indigenous children/youth in care directly aligns with the *Federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls for Action.

43.5% decrease in the number of children/youth in permanent care over the past ten years

You can see that the seeds we plant in childhood have lifelong consequences. If we plant seeds of discrimination then we set in play a strong likelihood of a tragic and difficult adulthood. But if we plant seeds of justice and equality and culture that breeds self-confidence, we're going to see those same positive experiences grow throughout their lives. – Dr. Cindy Blackstock, 2019¹

Where are children/youth in care living?

The best option for placing children or youth outside the home is for them to stay with extended family members or community members known to the child or youth. When the child/youth cannot be placed in these types of homes, they are placed in a regular foster home. Regular foster homes also play an important role in providing a caring and supporting home for children and youth.

In the 2019-2020 fiscal year

51% of foster homes who accepted placements were extended family members or individuals known to the child.

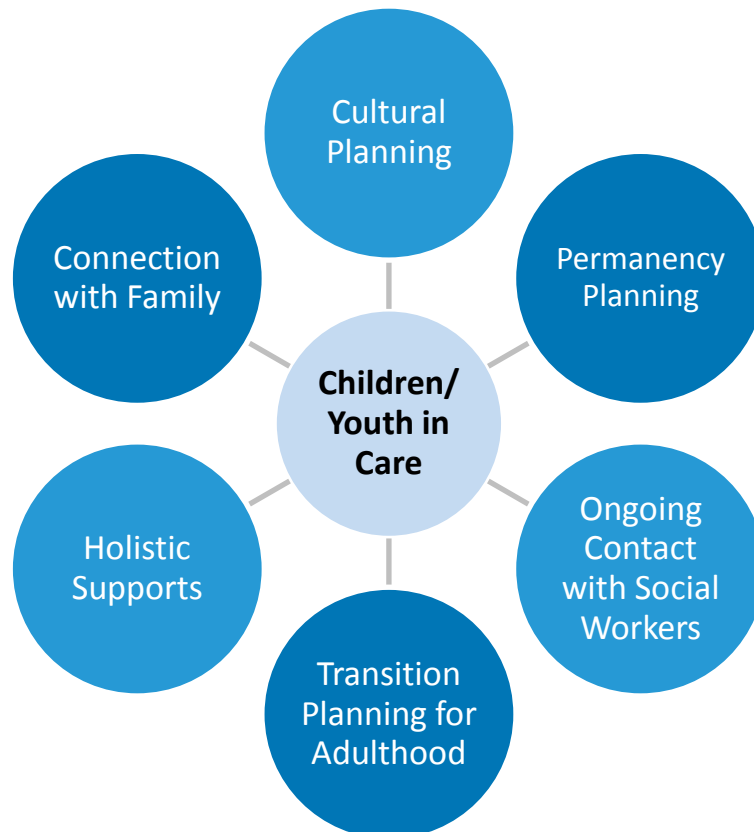
49% of foster homes who accepted placements were regular foster homes.

There are differences in larger regional centers in their recruitment of foster homes. As a result, we sometimes see a higher percentage of regular foster homes in larger regional centers than in smaller communities.

¹ Dr. Cindy Blackstock. 2019. *Reconciliation means not having to say sorry a second time: Conversation with Cindy Blackstock, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society*. Retrieved from: <https://www.amnesty.ca/blog/reconciliation-means-not-having-to-say-sorry-a-second-time-conversation-with-cindy-blackstock-f>

How are children/youth in permanent care supported?

Our goal is for children and youth to have opportunities to establish lifelong relationships and maintain connections to their community, culture and language as well as strengthening their sense of identity. Community Social Services Workers play an important role in supporting children and youth to maintain strong connections to their families, communities, and to a variety of supports and services that promotes their cultural, spiritual, emotional, social, and physical wellbeing.



Key Progress in 2019/2020

- Revised the minimum contact standard to ensure best practice approach to engagement with children, youth and families (October 2019).
- Supported the provision of training in March 2020 to a number of foster caregivers and foster care staff from across the NWT on how to support children and youth with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder (March 2020).
- Child and Family Services staff were offered training to provide referrals to the [Strongest Families Institute](#) (March 2020).

Extended Support Services Agreement

A young adult can continue to receive support services until their 23rd birthday if they were in the permanent care of the Statutory Director on their 19th birthday. Extended Support Services Agreements with the young adult are voluntary.

In 2019-2020, 45% of youth in permanent care were between the ages of 15 and 18 years. Therefore, working with youth to understand their goals, what services they need and establishing a network of supports are important as they approach the age of 19.

The Extended Support Services Agreement aims to help young adults transition to independent living through a variety of financial supports and services, such as skill building opportunities, financial supports to further their education, and supports to find stable housing.

32 young adults
were under an
Extended Support
Services Agreement
in 2019-2020.

Percentage of youth in permanent care who signed an Extended Support Services Agreement when they reached the age of majority



Next Steps

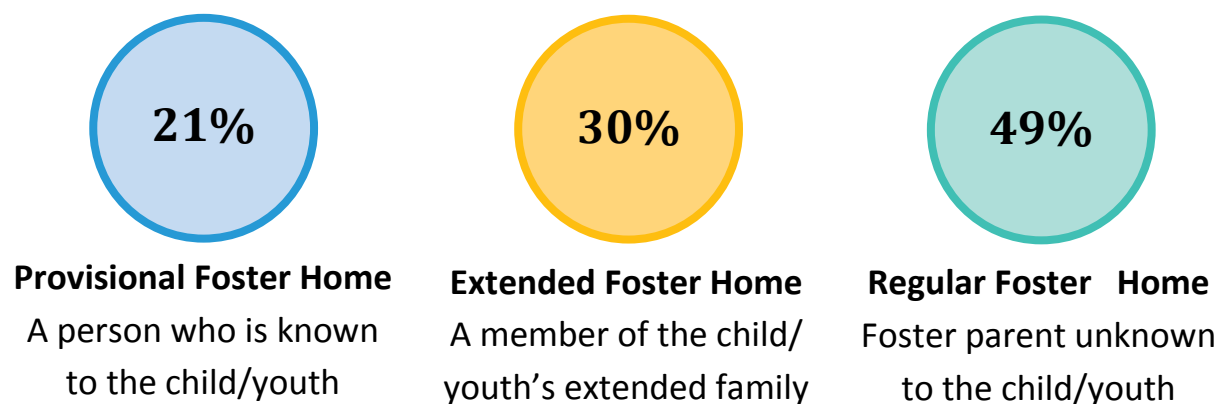
- The DHSS is in the process of establishing a Youth in Care Network, which can provide youth opportunities to speak on important issues regarding their experience in care, develop important life skills to support transitioning to adulthood, and make lasting friendships with other youth who have similar life experiences.

Placement Resources

Whenever possible, services are provided to children, youth and families in their parental home. From time to time, it may be safer and preferable to care for children/youth outside the home setting. The Community Social Services Worker discusses appropriate placements options with the family if the child/youth needs to live outside the home. The first placement option is with extended family and then with a known community member. Children/youth who remain in their home community have reduced disruption to their lives as their social activities, education, friends, extended family, cultural activities and traditions are more likely to be maintained. Along with keeping their community supports, children/ youth can be supported by Community Social Services Workers who are familiar with the community.

Resources are focused on supporting family reunification. However, sometimes reunification with the family at home is not possible and a permanent home can be found through extended family members or adoption.

There were 136 foster homes who accepted child placements in 2019-2020.



Next Steps

- Engagement with Indigenous communities to inform the co-development of customary care models so that more children and youth can remain in the care of their family, extended family and within their own community.
- To ensure foster caregivers are supported across the NWT, the DHSS will work with the Foster Family Coalition to broaden the reach of their organization.

Out of Territory Specialized Services

The Out of Territory (OOT) Specialized Services Program provides individual children and youth from the NWT access to specialized services in British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Southern Specialized Services are for children and youth with significant developmental and physical disabilities, genetic disorders, acquired brain injuries, psychiatric illness, psychological disorders, addictions issues, and complex behaviour issues secondary to trauma, where their needs go beyond the capacity of NWT programs and services. Children or youth are assessed and matched with specialized services that will best meet their identified needs.

Community-based programming in the NWT is the first option to assist children and youth with their individual counselling or treatment needs. Therapeutic Treatment Centres are also available in Yellowknife and Fort Smith.

In Child and Family Services, family treatment is offered as an option through the OOT Specialized Services Program in Saskatchewan. The Family Treatment Program is for the whole family to work towards the goal of improving family safety, family functioning and child wellbeing so families can remain together.

In 2019-2020, there were a total of **64 children and youth*** receiving specialized services outside the NWT.

* The Out of Territory registry is a separate database from MatrixNT and has the capacity to collect data on Supervision Orders. Therefore, in this analysis, Supervision Orders were included.



63% of children or youth in the OOT Program received services in an Individual/Group Treatment program



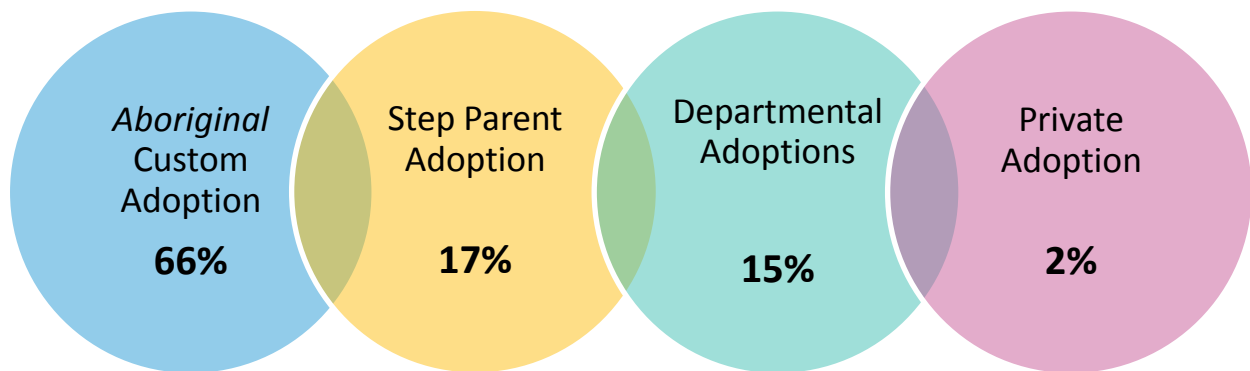
37% of children or youth in the OOT Program received services in a Family Treatment program

All children, youth and families receiving OOT Specialized Services have a Child and Family Services status along with a case plan that includes permanency and cultural plans that could include reunification, repatriation and/or guardianship.

Adoptions in the Northwest Territories

In the NWT, there are four different types of adoptions: *Aboriginal* Customary Adoption, Step Parent Adoption, Departmental Adoption and Private Adoption.

During the 2019-2020 fiscal year, **47 adoptions** were completed in the NWT.



From 2010 – 2020, the average number of adoptions per year is 48.

Aboriginal Custom Adoption has been a long-standing practice amongst Indigenous people of the NWT. Under the *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act (ACARA)*, Custom Adoption Commissioners are nominated by their local Indigenous organization based on their knowledge of Indigenous customary law. *Aboriginal* custom adoption is important as it recognizes the inherent rights of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities to care for their children.

Key Progress in 2019/2020

The Department of Health and Social Services facilitated a gathering in Inuvik, NWT for Custom Adoption Commissioners in October 2019. An opportunity for:

- Enhancing skills and understanding about the custom adoptions process
- Creating a network of support and knowledge exchange of customary practices
- Updating the Handbook for Custom Adoption Commissioners

Other Key Progress from the 2019-2020 Fiscal Year

In August 2019, the Department released the Child and Family Services' Quality Improvement Plan for 2019-2021. The Quality Improvement Plan allows the Department to better manage, resource, and structure the Child and Family Services System to ensure the sustainability of the significant changes completed through the Building Stronger Families Action Plan. The Quality Improvement Plan follows four underlying strategic directions: Culture of Quality, Human Resource Planning, Building Staff Capacity, and Engagement.

Culture of Quality

Between September 2019 and February 2020, the Department and Authorities completed the system-wide audit for Child and Family Services. Audits are reviews of compliance to established standards. This audit reviewed the compliance of child protection and prevention practice with the *Child and Family Services Act* and the NWT Child and Family Services' Standards and Procedures Manual. The audit covered the period between April 1, 2018 and March 31, 2019, and included any child prevention, child protection and foster care files that were open at any point during the audit period.

The audits are an examination of the system's compliance to practice standards aimed at highlighting system pressures and opportunities to address areas for improvements. The audit results guide the regions in their system improvement action plans. We are committed to the ongoing monitoring of areas of pressure to ensure the system's quality and compliance through the quality review process, which informs the Child and Family Services' Quality Improvement Plan.

We continue to see areas of challenge where there are staffing pressures and high workloads. We anticipate that the new human resources added to the Child and Family Services System will help in improving compliance and support to children, youth, families and foster caregivers.



Key Strengths Identified by the Audit

- Good compliance related to Voluntary Support Services Agreement.
- The majority of Plan of Care Agreements were signed in a timely manner.
- The majority of Community Social Services Workers were applying to child protection court within the legislated timelines outlined in the *Child and Family Services Act*.
- For Child Protection Orders, the child/youth, lawful caregivers and foster caregivers were consulted about permanency plans.

Key Challenges Identified by the Audit

- Interviewing caregivers, children and youth in a timely manner.
- Updating key information to assess the suitability of existing foster parents.
- Developing transition plans for young adults transitioning to independent living.
- Providing notice to caregivers of their right to access legal counsel through certain child protection processes.
- Providing notice to applicable Aboriginal organizations related to apprehension orders, child protection orders and youth protection orders.

Human Resource Planning

In April 2019, twenty-one (21) new positions were added to the Child and Family Services System. A third of these positions were focused on design and training, which has helped to advance a number of actions within the Quality Improvement Plan. The remainder were frontline positions, which have been introduced to directly support children, youth and families. A human resources recruitment and retention plan for the Child and Family Services System was completed in May 2019. A staff recruitment model is being used where we can fill multiple Community Social Services Workers positions at the same time across the NWT. This has resulted in more streamlined and efficient hiring of Community Social Services Workers.



Decreased Staff Vacancy Rate

October 2018: **25%** vacancy rate

April 2020: **8.6%** vacancy rate

In October 2019, the Authorities completed a Foster Care Recruitment and Retention Strategy. The strategy was informed by a foster care survey that was sent to all foster caregivers throughout the NWT to assess their satisfaction with the support, services and training provided by the Department, NTHSSA, Regions and Foster Family Coalition of the NWT. There is a need to build a more sustainable care model in the NWT that includes an increased focus on the recruitment and capacity building of extended family care.

Strengthening Practice Knowledge

During 2019-2020, new funding for training was introduced to support the field of practice. This training is further supported by the Training and Practice Improvement Leads which are additional system features designed to support training and practice knowledge for frontline staff.



TRAINING HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019-2020

- Foster caregivers and foster care staff training on best practices on how to support children and youth with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome Disorder.
- Supervisor and Manager professional development on Leadership, Trauma and Shame Resiliency.
- Enhanced Core Training for Community Social Services Worker.
- Custom Adoption Commissioners Training.
- Piloted “Advanced Interviewing Training” with the Tłıchq and Yellowknife regions and produced videos, which will be made available to all staff.
- Supervisors, Managers and some frontline staff training on Structure Decision Making® Assessment Tools. This enabled the new Training and Practice Leads to become expert SDM® trainers within the NWT Child and Family Services System.
- All Child and Family Services refresher webinars on specific Structured Decision Making® Assessment Tools.

Engagement

The Federal government's *An Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* came into force on January 1st, 2020. Indigenous Governments and Organizations can enact their own child and family services laws for their citizens. In January 2020, the Minister reached out to Indigenous Governments in the NWT inviting ongoing and open dialogue as we look to build on the strength of partnership to advance the best interest of children, youth and families in the NWT.



The commitment to enhance staff engagement has been fostered over the last year with regular all staff/web conferencing opportunities. These system wide engagements provide the opportunity to keep staff informed of key initiatives and practice changes. They also ensure a forum for dialogue on emerging changes to the system to ensure staff members are contributors to continuous quality improvement. In February 2020, all Child and Family Services Staff were asked to complete a self-assessment on factors related to retention. The biggest area of strength was having connection to peers and the greatest area of pressure was associated with a high administrative workload (i.e., paper work, filing, and documentation). Results from this survey are being used to create strategies to improve staff support, satisfaction and wellness.

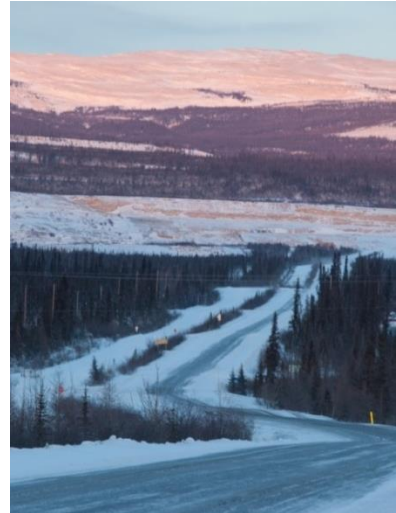
Moving Forward in 2020-2021

The national landscape of Child and Family Services is evolving with the new Federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis Child, Youth and Families* that came into force on January 1, 2020. This Act recognizes the inherent rights of Indigenous communities to care for their children. We must explore every opportunity to support communities and families to care for their children and youth in an effort to preserve family and ensure cultural continuity for all children and youth of the NWT. To better support communities and families, a shift is required in how the Child and Family Services system is designed, how standards are developed, and how workforce practice knowledge is supported.

The Child and Family Services System is an integral component in supporting communities and families. As such, we will develop pathways to work with Indigenous communities to advance the mandate of the Federal Act and the NWT *Child and Family Services Act*. We will develop practice standards related to the Federal Act to guide our

engagement with Indigenous children, youth and families. Our primary focus is on positive government-to-government relationships, and to continue to work with Indigenous governments to support Indigenous law-making in child and family services, either through the Federal Act or through Self-Government Agreements.

Strengthening partnerships with key stakeholders is critical in improving services and outcomes for children, youth and families. Therefore, we will develop and implement an engagement strategy, which will include the establishment of a Youth in Care Network, to enable us to draw on the knowledge and experience of others and to evolve and better coordinate services. An integral part of the engagement activities will be working with communities to co-develop customary care and family preservation models so that more children can remain in their own home or home community with the stability and support of their families and communities.



We will continue to address the capacity to provide care and support to children and youth through the creation of a plan to allocate frontline positions in areas of greatest need. We are committed to increasing the number of Indigenous and northern staff to improve the delivery of culturally informed services. In the plan to add more positions to the Child and Family Services system, we will create a family preservation program to provide greater support for parents. To ensure the better coordination of services for children and youth, we will enhance our coordination protocols with other programs and services. We will also strengthen Child and Family Services' staff capacity for cultural safety through cultural competency training.

The work outlined for the next year and beyond will enable us to continue to advance the strategic priorities under the Child and Family Services Quality Improvement Plan – building staff capacity, creating a culture of quality, engaging stakeholders, and human resources planning.

“The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation we are forced to go the distance.” Justice Murray Sinclair, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada²

² Justice Murray Sinclair. 2010. Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples. Retrieved from: www.trc.ca/assets/pdf/mrroom_Interim%20report%20English%20electronic.pdf

Appendix A: Glossary

Voluntary Services Agreement	Voluntary Services Agreement, under Section 5(1) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> , states "the Director may enter into a written agreement with a person who has lawful custody of a child to provide services or to assist others in providing services, or to assist that person's family in obtaining services, to support and assist that person's family to care for the child." The children may reside in their own home or elsewhere. The initial term of a Voluntary Services Agreement is for six months, with provision for additional six-month renewals until the child reaches the age of 18.
Support Services Agreement	Support Services Agreement, under Section 6(1) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> , states "the Director may enter into a written agreement with a person who has attained the age of 16 years but has not attained the age of majority and cannot reside with his or her parents to provide services or to assist others in providing services, to support and assist that person to care for himself or herself." Support Services Agreements can be made for six months and can be renewed up until the age of majority.
Extended Support Services Agreement	Extended Support Services Agreement, under Section 6.2 of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> , states "the Director may, in respect of a youth who was in the permanent custody of the Director immediately before attaining the age of majority, continue to provide services or to assist others in providing services, or to assist that person in obtaining services, after that person attains the age of majority until he or she attains 23 years of age".
Plan of Care Agreement	A Plan of Care Agreement is a written agreement made between the person(s) with lawful custody of the child and the Plan of Care Committee where child protection concerns exist. The Agreement outlines a case plan for the child and the family. The children may reside in their own home or elsewhere. The maximum term of a Plan of Care Agreement (including extensions) is two years. The Plan of Care Agreement is for children considered to need protection as defined in the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> and cannot be used beyond a child's 16 th birthday.

Apprehension	Apprehension occurs when a child is removed from the care of the person with lawful custody or from the person having care of the child at the time of the apprehension. A community Child Protection Worker, a peace officer or a person authorized by the Director under Section 55(1) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> can apprehend a child when he or she believes the child to be "in need of protection." Apprehended children are placed in the care and custody of the Director of Child and Family Services.
Apprehension less than 72 hours	After an apprehension, a child can be returned to parental care without the matter going to court when the protection issue is resolved in less than 72 hours.
Supervision Order	A Supervision Order is a court order under Section 28(1)(b) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> , which directs a Child Protection Worker to supervise the home of a child according to the terms and conditions of the Order. The Order may be for a period of up to one year.
Temporary Custody Order	Custody of a child is temporarily transferred by court order under Section 28(1)(c) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>, to the Director of Child and Family Services. Temporary Custody Orders are age specific. A Child Protection Worker may not make an application for an order for temporary custody of a child that results in a continuous period during which the child is in temporary custody exceeding: (a) 12 months, in the case of a child under 5 (five) years of age; (b) 18 months, in the case of a child 5 (five) years of age or over but under 12 years of age; or (c) 24 months, in the case of a child 12 years of age or over. Also, a court <u>may not make or extend an order</u> that would result in a child being in the temporary custody of the Director for a continuous period exceeding: (a) 15 months, in the case of a child under five years of age when the order was made; (b) 24 months, in the case of a child five years of age or over but under 12 years of age when the order was made; or (c) 36 months, in the case of a child 12 years of age or over when the order was made.

Permanent Custody Order	A Permanent Custody Order under Section 28(1)(d) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> , permanently transfers the custody of a child to the Director of Child and Family Services until the child attains the age of 16. The Director has all the rights and responsibilities of a parent under Section 48 of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i> . The Permanent Custody Order may be extended to the age of majority if the youth is in agreement.
Youth Protection Order (16-18yrs)	A Youth Protection Order under Section 29.2(a)(b) & 29.6(1) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>, ensures the protection, health and safety of a youth by providing care for the youth while the youth and his or her parent(s) and/or guardian(s) are unable or unavailable to care for the youth. The child protection worker can apply to the courts for a Temporary Custody Order or Permanent Custody Order; no apprehension is required. Circumstances, where a Youth Protection Order may be appropriate, are as follows: • The youth cannot reside with his or her parents; • The youth is unable to care for and protect himself or herself; • The youth is unable or unwilling to enter into a Support Services Agreement due to developmental, behavioral, emotional, mental or physical incapacity or disorder, or the effects of the use of alcohol, drugs, solvents or other similar substances; or • The youth is living in circumstances of a child who needs protections under subsection 7(3) of the <i>Child and Family Services Act</i>.
Sexual Abuse	Sexual abuse is any sexual act on a child by a parent/caregiver, adult in the household, or intimate partner of a parent/caregiver, or a household member is unable to be ruled out as an alleged abuser.
Physical Abuse	Physical abuse is action by the parent/caregiver that caused or is likely to cause a child to sustain a physical injury.
Emotional Abuse	Emotional abuse is a pattern of negative behaviour; repeated destructive interpersonal interactions; or a single, significant destructive interaction by the parent/caregiver toward the child. The impact on the child of being exposed to these emotionally harmful behaviours may include depression, significant anxiety or withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour, or delayed development.

Neglect	Neglect is the lack of action by a parent/caregiver in providing for the adequate care and attention of the child's needs, resulting in harm or substantial risk of harm to the child.
Exposure to family violence	Exposure to family violence is considered a form of child abuse or neglect. There is evidence of family violence between two or more adults in the household, and child's safety is of immediate concern.
Parental Home	A parental home is the home of the child's legal guardian or where they routinely reside with an adult who has the authority to provide for them.
Foster Homes	Foster homes provide care for children who are unable to live in their family home. There are three types of foster homes in the NWT: regular, extended family, and provisional. Regular foster homes are able to provide care to any child or youth that is placed in foster care. Extended family and provisional foster homes are extended family members or community members who are known to the child or youth, and are available specifically to accommodate that child until that child no longer needs foster care.
Group Homes	Group homes are sites where multiple children or youth live in a home-like setting, cared for by either house parents, or a staff of trained caregivers. There are three group homes that operate in the NWT – Fort Smith, Inuvik and Yellowknife.
Northern Specialized Treatment Resources	The Territorial Treatment Centre in Yellowknife provides treatment for up to eight children aged eight to 12 years and Trailcross Treatment Centre (operated by SHIFT), located in Fort Smith, provides treatment for up to nine youth aged 12 to 18 years. These two residential treatment resources in the Northwest Territories provide services for children or youth with behavioural, emotional, psychological or psychiatric issues.
Out of Territory Specialized Services	Out of Territory Specialized Services are used to provide children and youth with specialized residential treatment services that are not available in the NWT. The length of time that children or youth are placed in southern placements depends on the individual needs of the child or youth, and whether their needs may be met within the home community after their stay in a southern placement.