

January 16, 2019


Dear Community Partners:

Over the past year or so, Kenora-Rainy River Districts Child and Family Services has been updating our Strategic and Service Plans. In that effort, we may have reached out to you for your input and guidance as to how we can continually improve our services to best meet the needs of children, families and communities within the regions of Kenora and Rainy River.

For your information, I have attached the Kenora-Rainy River Districts Child and Family Services' Strategic Plan and Service Plan for the period 2018 - 2020. As an addendum and to provide you with some insight into how we are internally aligning our services to achieve the outcomes identified within the Service plan, particularly our child welfare services, I have also attached a new Service Framework that will guide staff in their ongoing work.

While Strategic and Service Plans are largely aspirational, we will work hard to ensure our planning is reflected in the services that impact children and families within our communities.

Respectfully,



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Executive Director

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Child Welfare Service Philosophy

Kenora-Rainy River Child and Family Services

Appreciating* Families: A Framework for Child Protection Workers

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Introduction

The provision of child welfare services in the province of Ontario is guided by the provisions of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act (2017), previously the Child and Family Services Act, the Ontario Child Protection Standards and Eligibility Spectrum, as well as the other Provincial Standards that mandate our children, family and residential services.

The preamble to the CYFSA states that while the primary purpose of our work continues to be the safety, protection and best interests of children, our primary purpose now also includes that we utilize the strengths of families, understand and respect the importance of cultural inclusion and listen to the voice of the child in all of our judgments and decisions.

Our agency has long embraced these purposes and it is our position that all of our work should be: child centered (safety, protection and best interests); family focused (utilizing the strengths and inherent knowledge) and; community based (engaging the kin, social and other networks to keep children close to their family/kin/communities).

Safety/Protection/Well-Being

Safety - Condition of being protected from harm or the risk of harm
Protection - The act of protecting one from harm or risk of harm
Well-Being - The state of being comfortable, healthy or happy

Appreciation of Authority

The work of Child Welfare often includes the most intrusive reach of the State into the usually private affairs of families and therefore we must be keenly aware at all times of the power we possess in relation to the families with whom we work. This power is ever present even if we feel we are not wielding it openly. It is felt and it can be intimidating.

Transparency

As such, our services should be completely transparent. Our communication must be clear and we must endeavor to ensure that what has been communicated has been understood as intended. Bureaucratic, esoteric and legalistic messages should be communicated in a manner that is friendly and understandable. The voices of children, parents, and community members must not only be solicited, but heard and given weight in all decisions.

Cultural Competency/Anti Oppressive Practice

Cultural competency demands that we understand communities with which our children and families belong and that our expectations and judgments are consistent with the cultural context of their communities and consistent with the prime purposes of the CYFSA. In addition to Cultural Competency, our agency adheres to the concepts reflected within the Anti Oppressive Practice framework as summarized by deBore and Coady, 2007, p.35:

- Soft, mindful and judicious use of power
- Being aware of one's own power and the normalcy of client fear, defensiveness and anger
- Responding to client negativity with understanding and support instead of counter-hostility and coercion
- Conveying a respectful and non-judgmental attitude
- Providing clear and honest explanations about reasons for involvement
- Addressing fears of child apprehension and allaying unrealistic fears
- Not prejudging the veracity of intake, referral or file information
- Listening to and empathizing with the client's story
- Pointing out strengths and conveying respect
- Constantly clarifying information to ensure mutual understanding
- Exploring and discussing concerns before jumping to conclusions
- Responding in a supportive manner to new disclosures, relapse and new problems
- Following through on one's responsibility and promises
- Using a person-to-person, down –to-earth manner (vs. donning the professional mask)
- Engaging in small talk to establish comfort and rapport
- Getting to know the client as a whole person-in social and life-history context

- Seeing and relating to the client as an ordinary person with understandable problems
- Recognizing and valuing the client's strengths and successes in coping
- Being realistic about goals and parent about progress
- Having a genuinely hopeful/optimistic outlook on possibilities for change
- Using judicious self-disclosure toward developing personal connection
- Being real in terms of feeling the client's pain and displaying emotion
- Going the extra mile in fulfilling mandated responsibilities, stretching professional mandate and boundaries.

Services to children and families will require workers to hone the following skills to ensure effective outcomes:

- Critical Thinking
- Reflective practice
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Ongoing (Re) assessment
- Judicious Recordings

Critical Thinking

Critical Thinking is the process of continual reflection upon one's own practices, judgments and experiences with the goal of advancing one's own performance. It is a form of self and professional development and it is a process that should be in continual motion as new experiences and decisions occur.

Reflective Practice

Reflective practice is an ongoing objective (re)analysis and (re)evaluation of all the pertinent issues in order to form a judgment. In child welfare, the issues of concern are continually changing and so an earlier judgment may no longer be valid when looking at current circumstances. We need to be open to changing our judgments given the circumstances and refuse to be wedded to previous positions, whether our reticence to change is for legal reasons, professional convenience or personal motivations.

Ongoing Assessment

As explained under Reflective Practice, ongoing reassessment means that we need to be open to changing the bureaucracy and legal process if the circumstances demand it. So if, for example, we enter a service agreement with a family while an application is before the court and the family achieves the goals agreed to in the service agreement, is the order we requested in the application before the court still necessary? And if

not, we should be open to amending it to something more suitable to the present needs of the family, including no order at all if that is warranted.

This will require circumspection in our recordings, especially for court purposes. We should be upfront concerning a family's struggles including, perhaps more importantly, their strengths and successes. Our focus should not be to win a court case, but to assist families in navigating their troubled waters.

In the provision of child welfare services, the question we must continually ask ourselves is not "what does the family need to do to deserve to have their children home", or as they might put it "what hoops do they have to jump through?" The question to constantly be asking ourselves is "what we as an agency, and I as a worker, can do to assist this family to have their child home"?

We must drop the hammer of persecution and extend our hand in a collaborative exercise to have the family feel included, valued and affirmed.

Least Intrusive Intervention

The decision to intervene in the life of a family and question parents about their capacity to parent is an extremely traumatic experience whether our reasons for intervening are verified or not. The act of removing a child from a parent is often the most devastating intervention for all involved. As such, it is this agency's position that children should only be removed from their families as per the guidance of the CYFSA and the Child Protection Standards of Ontario (2016) and only after all other means have been explored to maintain the child at home, keeping paramount the safety, protection and well-being of the child..

Permanency

If a child must be removed from their family all attempts should be made to place the child with kin or other community members and then our efforts must transition to working with the family and their community circle to have the child returned as quickly as possible, while ensuring that the safety, protection and best interest of the child are kept at the forefront. Permanency for children is a paramount facet of the legislation, regulations and standards and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that children are, to the best of our ability and resources, not raised within the child welfare system, and no less a responsibility to ensure that no child leaves care without an enduring attachment to at least one nurturing adult with whom they can rely on for assistance in their continued growth.

Good Enough Parenting

When a decision is made to intervene, it is the position of our agency that the focus will be on the safety of the child, while withholding any personal biases concerning the parents parenting style. While some of our parents may engage in what some might consider questionable behaviors, our focus should be on whether these behaviors have caused or are likely to cause harm to the child, not whether the behaviors offend the sensibilities of the worker as a person or an agency representative. We are in the 'child safety business' not the 'making the parent perfect (whatever that means) business'.

Family Engagement

As mentioned the primary purpose of our work is guided by the CYFSA which includes ensuring the safety, protection, and best interests of children within the context of utilizing family strengths and understanding their cultural needs.

Any decision made to intervene in a family must be consistent with the Eligibility Spectrum and the Ontario Child Protection Standards.

When a child is harmed by a parent(s) or is placed at risk of harm, it is important to ascertain what that harm is and who is responsible so we can assist the family in mitigating it. However this task is better accomplished through engaging the family with our belief that they love their children and wish for them to grow up happy and free from harm. Again, while ascertaining who is responsible for the harm caused or likely to be caused is critical, an intervention intent on assisting the family in understanding what may have gone wrong, free from a bias of culpability, will have a better chance of engaging the parent to work in a collaborative manner in strategizing plans forward.

Most families who experience harm to their children have not grown up consistently harming their child, or being harmed as children. There have been times in their lives when they were happy, protective, nurturing parents. We need to understand these times and the qualities that the parents exhibited during them and by extension we, and the parents, may get a better understanding of how things got off track and what strategies can be employed to assist the family in returning to a place of health.

So while understanding the ‘what’ and ‘who’ of the harm to the child, it is better to do so through the engagement of the parent as a partner rather than putting the focus on blame and culpability. More often than not, the latter approach will result in an apparent show of resistance to engaging and working collaboratively.

Resistance

When a parent demonstrates resistance to our presence, it should be understood as a defense mechanism. The questioning of their capacity as parents, coupled with our statutory authority, enhanced by a demeanor of perceived or real condemnation would understandably induce a resistant response. Resistance as a defense mechanism is not an unrealistic response to one’s ‘fight or flight’ dilemma that many of our families may feel they are confronted.

As such, resistance should not be taken as further evidence of the parent’s culpability, but rather understood in the context of the traumatic experience our intervention may have created for them. And as such, while we must be honest about our responsibilities and authority, we can as well attempt to engage them on a mutual journey to understand what may have gone wrong and offer our assistance to make things better.

Our focus should be threefold; understanding the how and who of the child’s harm or risk of harm; ensuring the ongoing safety of the child and; engaging the parents in self-determined reflection and possible strategies for change.

Consistency in Practice

Different stages of service to children and families may be distinct entities in our Information management system, but in terms of service delivery the service approach should remain consistent from one stage to the next. Even though each stage of service may involve a different worker and supervisor, it is imperative that there is a seamless transition from one stage to the other and this is accomplished by at least one transfer case conference as is mandated by our child protection standards and should include the outgoing worker and supervisor, the incoming worker and supervisor, the family and any persons who have been identified in the service plan as necessary in achieving its goals.

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Involvement in the court process is by its nature adversarial. Once in the corridors of 'justice', lawyers are engaged, communication is formalized, positions are entrenched and more often than not, at the end, there are winners and losers. This is completely antithetical to the framework that this agency is wishing to embrace.

As such, when we find ourselves at odds with families for whatever reason, it is the position of the agency and reinforced through legislation that we engage the services of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) provider. ADR offers a safe venue where all parties can come together with a third party to discuss the issues at dispute and respectfully work together to arrive at solutions that are agreeable to all. ADR doesn't work in all instances, but often enough it is a viable alternative to court and should be requested for all matters that find themselves before the court or have a likelihood of doing so.

Our Vision: *Children & families reaching their full potential.*

Our Mission: *We are dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of every child by providing effective services to children and families.*

We will achieve this through:

Client Services:

Using evidence-informed practice and service excellence to provide a range of child and family services.

Advocacy:

Being a champion for, and on behalf of our communities.

Partnerships:

Fostering connections to our communities, sharing expertise and seeking a broad range of partnerships.

Leadership:

Contributing our knowledge and experience to generate innovation that promotes positive change.

Embracing Strengths

We embrace the strengths and promote the wellness of children, youth, families, staff, board and communities by:

1. Advancing a culture of inclusion, accountability, effective communication, and positive leadership.
2. Strengthening board, management and staff collaboration.
3. Providing child-centred services using a strength-based approach.

Maximizing Resources

We make the best use of our resources to enhance positive outcomes for children and families by:

4. Being more efficient and effective in our operations.
5. Strengthening accountability for positive outcomes.
6. Developing opportunities for sharing services.

Promoting Service Excellence

We work with families and community partners to provide early support and respond to emerging client needs by:

7. Developing innovative models of service that promote positive outcomes for children and families.
8. Enhancing the skills and assets of children and youth to maximize their potential.
9. Strengthening relationships with, and within each of our communities.

Positive Attitude Relationships Integrity Diversity Excellence

OUR VALUES



Agency Service Plan 2018-2020

Strategic Directions

2018-2020 Objectives and Priorities

The staff, management and Board of Kenora-Rainy River District commit to the children, families and communities residing within the districts of Kenora and Rainy River that we will, over the course of this service plan, achieve the following goals:

1. Meet or exceed the provincial benchmarks for the annual Service Performance Indicators for positive outcomes in Child Welfare service delivery.
2. Achieve a minimum 80% compliance or greater on all standards within the Ministry's Quality Improvement Plan.
3. Reduce the number of children in the care of the Agency.
4. Reduce the number of children placed outside the Districts.
5. Reduce the number of indigenous children in the care of the Agency.
6. Increase the number families involved in Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).
7. Decrease the number of families that are before the court.
8. Enhance the development of children receiving services from our Agency (OnLAC data).
9. Reduce the time that children must wait before being able to access our Children's Mental Health Services in the Rainy River District.

Embracing Strengths

Service Framework
Focus on the strengths of children, families, kin and community partners
Management Team to lead and monitor framework
All Staff trained in the use of the framework

Maximizing Resources

Operational Review
Child Welfare - End to End Review
Children's Mental Health - Accreditation

Promoting Service Excellence

Innovative Models of Service
Evidenced-informed models that promote positive outcomes
Enhancing the skills and assets of children and youth
Strengthening relationships with our communities

Vision: Children and families reaching their full potential. **Mission:** We are dedicated to ensuring the safety and well-being of every child by providing effective services to children and families.
Values: Positive Attitude; Relationships; Integrity; Diversity; and, Excellence.

Agency Service Plan 2018 - 2020

The staff, management and Board of Kenora-Rainy River Districts Child and Family Services commits to the children, families and communities residing within the Districts of Kenora and Rainy River that we will, over the course of this service plan, achieve the following goals:

