

**ABORIGINAL SERVICES C4 GUARDIANSHIP PRACTICE AUDIT  
REPORT**

Métis Family Services (IGA)

**Field Work Completed: October 27, 2006**

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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

- 1. PURPOSE..... Page 1**
  
- 2. METHODOLOGY ..... Page 1**
  
- 3. AGENCY OVERVIEW ..... Page 2**
  - a) Delegation..... Page 2
  - b) Demographics..... Page 2
  - c) Professional Staff Complement ..... Page 5
  - d) Supervision/Consultation..... Page 5
  
- 4. STRENGTHS OF AGENCY ..... Page 6**
  
- 5. CHALLENGES FACING AGENCY..... Page 7**
  
- 6. IDENTIFIED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT ..... Page 8**
  
- 7. COMPLIANCE TO CHILD SERVICE PRACTICE ..... Page 8**
  
- 8. RECOMMENDATIONS..... Page 11**
  
- 9. APPENDIX 1: AGENCY AUDIT COMPLIANCE REPORTS..... Page 12**



# **ABORIGINAL SERVICES C4 GUARDIANSHIP PRACTICE AUDIT REPORT**

## **Métis Family Services (IGA)**

### **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the audit is to improve and support practice regarding child protection, guardianship, family service and resources for children in care. Through a review of a sample of cases, the audit is expected to provide a baseline measure of the current level of practice, confirm good practice, and identify areas where practice requires strengthening. As this is the first audit for the agency, this report should be seen as a platform for improvement.

The specific purposes of the audit are:

- To confirm good practice and further the development of practice;
- To assess and evaluate practice in relation to existing legislation and the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI);
- To determine the current level of practice across a sample of cases;
- To identify barriers to providing an adequate level of service;
- To assist in identifying training needs;
- To provide information for use in updating and/or amending practice standards or policy.

The audit is being conducted using the Aboriginal Audit Tool developed by the Aboriginal Services Branch. Audits of delegated agencies providing child protection, guardianship, family services and resources for children in care will be conducted according to a three year cycle.

### **2. METHODOLOGY**

Field work was conducted from October 16-27, 2006 by one auditor. The computerized Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool (ACPAT) was used to collect data, generate office summary compliance reports and a compliance report for each file audited. There were a total of 117 open child service files at the time of the audit. Forty child service files were audited, which was 34% of the open files. There were 4 caseloads and files were randomly selected from each caseload in order to get an equal representation of files from each worker. All of the child service files had been transferred from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) to Métis Family Services (MFS). Only the work conducted by the MFS guardianship team, who are responsible for the child service files, was audited. Also, the audit reviewed only the work done by this team during the past 3 years.

This auditor met with available MFS guardianship staff on October 12, 2006, a few days before the audit began. The purpose of the meeting was to meet staff and to review the

audit purpose and process. This auditor was available to answer any questions from staff that arose during the audit process. Staff members were invited to meet with this auditor to discuss office systems and procedures. During the audit, this auditor met with the executive director, the team leader of the guardianship team, the team leader of the family strengthening team, 4 guardianship team social workers and the administrative assistant/guardianship team assistant. At the completion of the audit, a meeting occurred with available guardianship staff to discuss the general findings of the audit as well as describe the next steps of the audit process including the report and recommendations.

### **3. AGENCY OVERVIEW**

#### **a) Delegation**

Métis Family Services is delegated at C4 Guardianship. This level of delegation enables a delegated agency to provide the following services:

- Guardianship of children in continuing custody;
- Support services to families;
- Voluntary care agreements;
- Special needs agreements;
- Establishing and working with residential resources for children in care.

MFS was established in 1998 and received C4 delegation in April 2001. Although C4 delegation includes the above mentioned delegated services, the only delegated service MFS is currently providing is that of guardianship of children in continuing custody.

#### **b) Demographics**

Métis Family Services is the only delegated Métis agency in B.C. The agency is located in Surrey. The staff positions currently consist of 1 executive director, 1 financial coordinator and 3 teams. The guardianship team consists of 1 team leader, 5 guardianship social workers, and 1 resource worker. The family strengthening team consists of 1 team leader, 3 rapid response workers, 1 community mentor, 1 parenting program facilitator, 1 canoe and tool times coordinator. The administrative team consists of 1 executive assistant, 1 administrative assistant/guardianship team assistant, and 1 receptionist.

Co-located in the office is a Drug and Alcohol Counsellor who is employed by the Native Courtworker and Counselling Association of British Columbia. This service is available to anyone seeking counselling relating to drug and alcohol issues. Part of MCFD's Surrey Aboriginal team, consisting of 1 team leader and 3 family service workers, is also co-located in the building. This co-located MCFD team only provides services to Métis families.

The mandate of the guardianship team is to be responsible for Métis children in care under continuing custody orders (CCO) whose files have been transferred from MCFD to MFS. This team has open files on MIS regarding the CCO's. As MFS does not have any open resource files, the guardianship team works closely with MCFD Fraser Region's resource team. This resource team is located in Abbotsford and is responsible for providing placements for all children in care in the Fraser Region.

The work of the family strengthening team includes providing intensive short term services to Métis families; a mentoring program for youth; parenting programs in the community; as well as other services to children and youth through the canoe program and tool times (a drop in program). These services are provided to Métis living in the Surrey area. This team works closely with the co-located MCFD family service staff as well as with the MCFD Aboriginal office in Surrey who provides family service and intake. This team also works closely with the 3 other delegated Aboriginal agencies in the lower mainland. In addition, this team assists MCFD/other Aboriginal agencies throughout the province, as well as agencies/ministries throughout Canada, who are working with Métis families from B.C. Also, when Métis children appear before court in B.C. under the *Child, Family and Community Services Act* (CFCSA), the child's social worker is to advise the Métis Commission, in Victoria, of this court action. The Métis Commission, in turn, advises MFS of this court action. This team often works with the child's worker regarding planning for the child. Although this team maintains records of their work, they have no open files on MIS. Most of the families this team is involved with are also involved with MCFD and the open MIS files are registered to MCFD.

The administrative support team provides services to all agency staff.

In addition to using the services provided by the family strengthening team and co-located staff, MFS utilizes services in the community which include, mental health, MCFD's Youth and Mental Health, infant development, public health, medical and dental services, hospitals, police, schools, headstart/day care, aboriginal support programs in schools, and various counseling programs. Also, Kal-how-eya is located next door to MFS and provides programs similar to those provided by Friendship Centers. MCFD After Hours also provides services to clients. These services are provided during non-office hours, both during the week and on weekends. All of these services greatly assist staff in their work with clients.

As already stated, the office is situated in Surrey and currently provides adequate space for MFS staff as well as the co-located staff. There is a main entrance to the building and the receptionist provides services for all staff in the building. MFS has their own file room, and the co-locators have their own space for storing files.

MFS is unionized and belongs to the Health and Education Union. The Vancouver Aboriginal Child and Family Services Society is the only other Aboriginal agency in B.C. that is unionized, and is a member of the B.C. Government Employees Union. Although these 2 agencies belong to different unions, they have negotiated their contracts together.

MFS has a Board of Directors, which directs the work of the agency. The Board meets monthly and the team leaders prepare reports (when requested) that the executive director presents to the Board. The executive director also reports back on issues discussed at Board meetings.

MFS has protocols with the Aboriginal agencies in the Lower Mainland as well as with some MCFD offices. They are in the process of considering revising some of the existing protocols as well as developing protocols with other agencies/MCFD offices.

Shortly after receiving delegation in 2001, some child service files for Métis children in continuing custody in the Lower Mainland (mostly Fraser Region) were transferred from MCFD to MFS. Due to the limited number of MFS guardianship staff, the agency has only been able to accept a relatively small number of CCO files. MFS is currently only able to accept new CCO files, when current CCO files are closed due to children reaching legal age. Also, due to limited funding, MFS has not been able to backfill positions when workers are on leave. In regards to the guardianship team, this has meant that when a worker is on leave, that caseload has to be divided among the remaining workers. This was the case in January 2006, when a worker left on leave. The remaining workers ended up with caseloads of over 40 CCO files. This size of caseload was unmanageable, and it was extremely difficult for the workers to provide the necessary service for children in their care.

As has already been stated, the MCFD Fraser Region has a resource team which is responsible for placements of all children in care in that Region. This includes the CCO's in care of MFS. Attempts are made to maintain children in their home communities, but due to a shortage of resources this has not always been possible, and at times children have been placed in other communities. Staff stated this was very difficult for their CCO's, who not only had to move from one resource to another, but also from one community to another.

Funding for the CCO's being cared for by MFS is provided through the MCFD Fraser Region. For MFS to assume responsibility for a CCO in another MCFD Region, the file is usually transferred to the Fraser Region. This has meant that the child's home Region is no longer responsible for placements for the child. In cases where placements have broken down, the CCO's have had to be removed from their home communities and placed into other communities. MFS currently does have a few CCO's who are residing in long term placements in other Regions. However, should these placements break down, it is almost certain that these files will be transferred to the Fraser Region and placements for these children will need to be found in the Fraser Region.

As has already been stated, in regards to delegated work, MFS is mainly providing guardianship services for CCO's. A resource worker has been hired although, to date, the agency has not been able to focus on resources in the manner in which they would like. To date, the agency has not been able to provide services regarding family service files, voluntary care agreements, and special needs agreements. Also, as the only open files on MIS were those carried by the guardianship team, only that team was audited.

The guardianship team has access to both MIS as well as the Titameg program. The Titameg program provides workers with an opportunity to record their notes, etc. The whole team has access to this program and is able read each other's notes and be up to date as to information regarding specific cases. Although some aspects of this program are a duplication of MIS, staff found this program to be beneficial.

#### **c) Professional Staff Complement**

As previously outlined, the positions on the guardianship team consisted of 1 team leader, 5 guardianship social workers and 1 resource worker. At the time of the audit, 1 guardianship social worker has been on leave since January 2006 and 1 guardianship social worker has been on leave since March 2006. The resource worker position was created upon delegation of the agency, and a worker was hired for this position. However, due to shortage of staff the resource worker is currently carrying a CCO caseload. A new worker was just hired and was attending delegation training during the audit. When the guardianship social worker, who is currently on leave, returns in March 2007, the worker who was hired into the resource position will be taking leave. MFS hopes that when this worker returns in March 2008, will be able to assume responsibility in the resource position. The situation regarding the worker on leave is unknown. The team leader and 3 current social workers are delegated. One worker has interim delegation. The two workers on leave also have delegation. One worker, who just joined the team, is in the process of obtaining delegation.

There has been a considerable changeover of staff on the guardianship team during the past year. The team leader and one worker have extensive experience and have been with MFS for several years. However, the other 4 workers have limited experience. The team leader for the family strengthening team was a member of the guardianship team for a number of years and a year ago became the team leader for the family strengthening team. This team leader also has delegation, but the rest of that team does not.

#### **d) Supervision/Consultation**

Staff of the guardianship team advised that the team leader has an open door policy and is available for consultation most of the time. In addition, the team meets on a weekly basis. Cases as well as other information are discussed at these meetings. Also, the team leader and individual social workers meet approximately every 2 months to review caseloads.

As already stated, the team leader for the family strengthening team is also delegated. The two team leaders provide coverage for each other and schedules are adjusted to ensure that one team leader is available to staff for consultation. When a team leader is not located physically in the office, they are available for consultation by cell phone. On occasions when a team leader is on an extended leave, such as vacation, a formal request is made for the senior guardianship social worker to act on behalf of the team leader.

During those times, the remaining team leader remains available for support and consultation to the social worker who is acting in the team leader role.

The team leader for the guardianship team stated that both team leaders meet with the executive director on an as needed basis as well as meeting regularly as a management team. The team leader stated that the executive director also has an open door policy, is available and very approachable. The executive director is not delegated, but his input into situations is greatly valued.

There are also monthly agency meetings which are attended by all agency staff. Discussions during these meetings focus on matters relating to the agency as well as health and safety issues. Consideration is being given to inviting co-located staff to these meetings as well, particularly around issues relating to building safety, etc.

#### **4. STRENGTHS**

A major strength of Métis Family Services is the supportive work environment and the level of commitment of staff. Staff are very supportive of each other. Although there have been personality differences in the past, current staff get along well. Due to the small size of the agency, staff know each other's cases well and assist each other whenever possible. Staff is also supported when they bring their own children to work. The workplace harmonizes with family life. MFS staff is enthusiastic about their work and enjoy working with people. There is good staff morale at MFS. In turn, MFS staff is committed to serving their clients and the community. They bring a strong work ethic to the tasks performed by the agency and feel accountable to the community that they serve.

MFS is also an agency which utilizes a culturally sensitive, creative and collaborative approach when providing services. The practice at the agency allows for and encourages new and creative measures to be used in working clients, while at the same time, ensuring the safety of children. Currently, considerable work is being done by the family strengthening team to provide prevention services to Métis families in the area. Also, many of the staff at MFS are Métis and consider it a strength to work with their own people.

Workers felt that they were able to provide quality care to the children that they work with, as well as with the caregivers. A considerable number of children in continuing care are residing in long term placements. MFS is working hard to ensure that these placements continue and that the support which is required is being provided to both the caregiver and child. As such, the guardianship workers felt that they had good contact with their CCO's caregivers. The workers also felt that clients get to know agency staff and develop a good sense of the functioning of the agency, as a result of a number of the services provided by the agency being administered through the office.

An additional strength identified by the agency is its ability to provide a positive learning environment for practicum students. The agency views themselves as a teaching institute and has had positive feedback from both the students who complete their practicum at the

agency and by the educational institutes who place students there. MFS often hires many of the practicum students upon receiving their degree and feel that this is a positive experience for both the agency and the staff.

Staff felt that the agency is well organized and functions well operationally. There is clarity as to agency's existence and staff felt that the board of directors is knowledgeable about the work of the agency and have a good understanding of the mandate of Métis Family Services.

MFS also has good working relationships with a number of other services providers in the region. MFS states they have good working relationships with the various MCFD offices in the Fraser Region, including the MCFD Resource Team which is located in Abbotsford. MFS also has a good working relationship with other delegated Aboriginal agencies in the lower mainland. The agency does not report feeling isolated and works in conjunction with other agencies in the community.

The following additional strengths of the agency were also identified by the agency during the course of the audit:

- Agency following policy – staff stated that the agency is committed to following existing policy/standards. Before decisions are made, policy/standards are reviewed.
- Organization of physical files – they physical files are in good order with the documents being grouped into sections, in chronological order. Filing was up to date and there was no backlog of filing.
- Safety/security at workplace – safety and security at the workplace are stressed.

## **5. CHALLENGES FACING AGENCY**

One of the greatest challenges currently facing the agency is the lack of skilled and experienced foster homes in the Fraser Region. Due to limited funding, children in MFS care for whom no resources exist, need to be looked after by MFS during the day. Arrangements are made for these children to be looked after by child care workers in hotels during the night. Some of the children are youth who can look after themselves during the day, but younger children and/or children with special needs who are not able to care for themselves, need to be cared for by MFS. The range of time children have been cared for in the office has varied from several days to 1 month. Several children have been cared for by MFS during the day on more than one occasion. Staff stated that from March –August/06, they virtually had a child in the office at all times.

Although this has been a real challenge for the guardianship team, the agency states that they choose to view this challenge as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship with the children and community they provide services to. While this can be disruptive to the functioning of the whole agency, staff has found that the children have developed an increased sense of comfort with the agency and all staff who work within the agency. Furthermore, this experience can be detrimental to the children who are required to

remain in the office during the day. MFS tries to find activities for them at the office, certainly does not enhance the relationship between worker and child, although the agency does see this as enhancing the relationships between the child and the worker, get a better chance to see what the child's challenges are, they get to know the worker, the agency, get a better chance to engage them there is a huge silver lining Also at times, services children were receiving had to be stopped, as staff was unable to provide the necessary transportation to and from these services. See the children's involvement as a positive.

Staffing is another issue which is a challenge to the agency. There has been considerable turnover of staff at the agency. MFS has not been operating with a full complement of staff for some time and due to limited funding, MFS is not able to backfill when staff are on leave. When staff are on leave, caseloads are often distributed between the remaining workers creating unmanageable caseloads. Although MFS encourages its' staff to attend various training programs, staff attending training is often limited due to lack of funding and staffing shortages.

The following additional challenges facing the agency and agency's practice were also identified by the staff during the course of the audit:

- Dual accountability – it is a challenge to be accountable to both the Province and to the community.
- New Standards – staff view the new Standard 8 (social worker and child to meet every 30 days) as unrealistic and being very difficult to achieve.
- Needs of CCO's – The agency does not have the same level of access to programs and services as per the Ministry, thus limiting the agency's ability to address the needs of their children in care. As most CCO's have a number of special needs, MFS does find it a challenge to address these needs without this access to services.

## **6. IDENTIFIED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT**

The main issue identified on the child service files was the lack of documentation on the physical files. Documentation that was lacking included updated comprehensive plans of care (CPOC); reportable circumstances reported in required time period; documentation in relation to social workers' relationship and contact with child; discussing rights of children in care with child and caregiver; and discussing the appropriate discipline policy with child and caregiver.

In regards to CPOCs, some staff stated they were mostly up to date in completing the plans, whereas other staff indicated they were indeed behind, but were working on bringing them up to date. In regards to submitting reportable circumstances, staff had submitted these reports, but often not within the time period. The team leader advised this has already been addressed. In regards to social worker's contact with the child in care, staff indicated that for the most part, they saw their children regularly but had not recorded these contacts. The team leader confirmed that staff did have ongoing contact

with their CCOs. In regards to discussing the rights of children in care, staff stated they usually discussed the rights of children in care with the child, but were not aware of the need to also discuss these rights with caregivers. In regard to discussing the appropriate discipline policy with child and caregivers, staff stated they were not aware of this standard. They stated they will now add these expectations to their list of items to be discussed during planning sessions for the child.

## **7. COMPLIANCE TO CHILD SERVICE PRACTICE**

One auditor audited the child service files at Métis Family Services. As already stated, the only open files on MIS assigned to MFS were the child service files.

**Forty (40)** child service files were audited. There were a total of 117 open child service files. Overall compliance to the child service standards was 52%. The files were audited for compliance to the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators, C4 Guardianship child service including:

- The quality and adequacy of the plan of care
- The frequency and adequacy of the care plan review
- The level of contact with the child
- Placement stability and deciding when and where to move a child
- The degree of stability and continuity provided to the child while in care
- Informing the child and caregiver of the rights of children in care
- Informing the child and caregiver of the appropriate discipline policy
- The level of file documentation

The following provides a breakdown of the compliance ratings:

1. **Standard 14: Assessment of Risk Prior to a Returning a Child in Continuing Care to his/her Home** (AOPSI Standard 14) – no files applicable.
2. **Standard 15: Assessment of Risk when a Continuing Custody Order is to be cancelled** (AOPSI Standard 15) – no files applicable
3. **Standard 16: Permanency Planning** (AOPSI Standard 16) – no files applicable.
4. **Standard 17: Preparation for Independence** (AOPSI Standard 17) – 9 files (90%) compliant; 1 file non-compliant; 30 files not applicable.
5. **Standard 35: Interviewing the Child about his/her Care Experience** (AOPSI Standard 19) – 6 files (60%) compliant; 1 file (10%) non-compliant due to factors beyond the control of worker or supervisor; 3 files (30%) non-compliant; 30 files not applicable.

6. **Standard 19: Case Closure for Children in Continuing Custody (AOPSI Standard 20)** – no files applicable.
7. **Standard 20: Responsibilities to the Public Trustee (AOPSI Standard 22)** – 3 files (50%) compliant; 3 files (50%) non-compliant, 34 files not applicable.
8. **Standard 23: The Rights of Children in Care (AOPSI Standard 23 Level 12)** – 1 file (3%) compliant; 38 files (97%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable.
9. **Standard 24: Process for Determining the Needs of the Child (AOPSI Standard - 24 Level 12)** – 34 files (87%) compliant; 5 files (13%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable.
10. **Standard 25: Biographical Information and Family History (AOPSI Standard 26 Level 12)** – 2 files (100%) compliant; 38 files not applicable.
11. **Standard 26: Development of the Comprehensive Plan of Care (AOPSI Standard 3)** – 40 files not applicable.
12. **Standard 27: Monitoring of the Child's Plan of Care (AOPSI Standard 5)** – 18 files (45%) compliant; 22 files (55%) non-compliant.
13. **Standard 28: Informing the Child and Caregiver about Appropriate Discipline Standards (AOPSI Standard 9)** – 39 files (100%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable.
14. **Standard 29: Deciding Where to Place a Child (AOPSI Standard 10)** – 15 files (100%) compliant; 25 files not applicable.
15. **Standard 30: Deciding to Move the Child in Care (AOPSI Standard 12)** – 15 files (100%) compliant; 25 files not applicable.
16. **Standard 31: Planning a Move for a Child (AOPSI Standard 13)** – 11 files (79%) compliant; 3 files (21%) non-compliant; 26 files not applicable.
17. **Standard 32: Reportable Circumstances (AOPSI Standard 18)** – 6 files (55%) compliant; 5 files (45%) non-compliant; 29 files not applicable.
18. **Standard 33: When a Child or Youth is Missing, Lost or Runaway (AOPSI Standard 7)** - 10 files (100%) compliant; 30 files not applicable.
19. **Standard 34: Providing Initial and Ongoing Medical and Dental Care for a Child in Care (AOPSI Standard 36 Level 12)** - 34 files (87%) compliant; 5 files (23%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable.

- 20. Standard 35: The Social Worker's Relationship and Contact with a Child in Care (AOPSI Standard 6) – 12 files (30%) compliant; 28 files (80%) non-compliant.**
- 21. Standard 36: Case Transfer (AOPSI Standard 39 Level 12) – 9 files (100%) compliant; 21 files not applicable.**
- 22. Standard 37: File Closure (AOPSI Standard 20) – no files applicable.**
- 23. Standard 39: Recording and Documentation of Children in Care Files (AOPSI Standard 21) – 10 files (25%) compliant; 30 files (75%) non-compliant.**
- 24. Standard 21: Investigating Allegations of Abuse or neglect of Child in Care in Family Care Homes (AOPSI Standard 20 Level 12) – 2 files compliant (50%); 2 files (50%) non-compliant; 36 files not applicable.**
- 25. Standard 22: Quality of Care Review of a Family Care Home (AOPSI Standard 21 Level 12) – 1 file (100%) compliant; 39 files not applicable.**

## **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Present: Ron Shortt, , Acting Executive Director, Métis Family Services  
 Rob Parenteau, Supervisor, Métis Family Services  
 Judy Smith, Social Worker, Métis Family Services  
 Gary McDermott, Deputy Director, Aboriginal Regional Support Services  
 Denise Connell, Practice Analyst, Aboriginal Regional Support Services

Date: March 12, 2007

The following recommendations were developed in consultation with Métis Family Services and MCFD Aboriginal Regional Support Services Team. The timeframe for completion of the recommendations is June 23, 2007.

To address the areas of documentation, Métis Family Services will:

1. Review and revise, if necessary, existing file checklists. A process as determined by the agency will be developed to ensure that the checklists are being updated on a regular basis.
2. Develop a work plan to review and update plans of care for children in care.

Aboriginal Regional Support Services Team will:

1. Revise audit methodologies so that where a secondary case management system is used by the agency to record case information, the auditor will determine if that information has been placed on the file and if not, ask the agency if they would like to add this information to the file to have it reviewed/audited.

Louise Reimer  
Contract auditor  
November 17, 2006.