

Aggregate Review of Aboriginal Case Practice Audits – 2003-2005

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History

In June 2004, MCFD's Quality Assurance standards took effect. These standards promoted excellence and ensured children and families received consistent, high quality services under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act* (CFCSA). These standards provided the mandatory framework for quality assurance and outlined the requirements for delegation, case practice audit and case review. The responsibility for case reviews and audits was devolved to the regions; however Aboriginal Services Branch maintained the responsibility to over see quality assurance in the delegated agencies. Delegated Aboriginal agencies were audited using the Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool (ACPAT), which measured compliance against Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators (AOPSI). At that time, the Director implemented a three year practice audit schedule for the agencies. The goal was to audit a minimum of five delegated agencies a year while also allowing for additional audits to be completed upon request of the delegated agency or the Director. During this time period, Aboriginal Service Branch, in conjunction with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), developed a Common Audit Tool to audit the delegated Aboriginal agencies against the operational standards of AOPSI and the financial standards of INAC. The goal was to integrate the practice audit with the Common Audit Tool to ensure that delegated agencies met all the standards as set out by AOPSI and INAC.

Purpose of a Case Practice Audit

The purpose of a practice audit is to improve and support child service, guardianship, family service and investigative practice.

The specific purposes of the audit are:

- To confirm good practice and further 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; and
- To provide information for use in updating and/or amending practice standards or policy.

Methodology

The computerized Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool (ACPAT) is used to collect the data and generate office summary compliance reports and a compliance report for each file audited. The files were randomly selected from the total of open files. Cases were selected to ensure that a cross representation of files

were reviewed as well the electronic records available on the Management Information System (MIS), where required.

Scope of Review

This review is focused on the case practice audits, conducted by the Aboriginal Services Branch, of seven delegated aboriginal agencies between October 2003 and November 2005. Of the seven agencies, 3 were delegated C4/ Guardianship and 4 were delegated C6/ Child Protection. These were the first practice audits for the agencies, three of the agencies volunteered to be pilot sites. In addition, a second audit of one of the agencies was conducted during this review period.

Audit Findings

Agencies with C4/Guardianship Delegation

This level of delegation enables the delegated agency to provide the following services:

- Guardianship for children in continuing custody;
- Support services to families;
- Voluntary Care agreements;
- Special Needs agreements;
- Establishing and maintaining residential resources for children in care.

Two of three agencies in this delegation level were pilot sites for the Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool. The agencies audited were responsible for providing Guardianship services to vastly different aboriginal communities. One agency served one small coastal on-reserve community, the second served a number of on-reserve communities in the interior and the third served a large urban community, covering a great geographical area.

The audits identified a number of strengths within the agencies including:

- Most children in care were placed in long term placements with family members or community members in their home communities.
- The staff stated they worked in a very supportive environment.
- A positive working relationship with the local MCFD offices and the communities.
- An emphasis was placed on the importance of culture and family which ensured that children received culturally appropriate services and information regarding their aboriginal heritage.
- The staff had a great deal of knowledge about the communities and its members.

The audits also identified a number of barriers to service including:

- A lack of dedicated administrative support staff which meant that the social work staff were responsible for their own filing.
- A lack of ongoing professional development which impacted the social workers ability to remain up to date on new assessment tools, interviewing techniques and plan of care documentation.
- A lack of a clear client complaints process which was needed in order to prevent triangulation between the client, the agency and the Chief and council.
- Lack of social worker staff coverage for vacancies.
- An overall lack of social work staff which affected remaining social worker's ability to maintain file documentation for their own caseload as well as vacant caseloads.
- The large geographic area covered by the agency required the social workers to spend an extensive amount of time traveling to see their clients. As a result, the staff were not always able to cover the large region in an efficient manner.

While the delegation enables the agency to provide all of the above services, the agencies audited only provided guardianship services for children in care and therefore only Child Service (CS) files were audited. A total of 83 CS files were audited with an average compliance of **43.4%**.

Upon further review of the audits, it is clear that there were some common findings related to the overall low compliance:

- Lack of file documentation such as written plans of care (CPOC), opening recordings, workers notes on contact with the family and children, reports from service providers, medical correspondence and current snapshots.
- Poor quality of the plans of care that were on file. Many of the plans of care were lacking clarity regarding the long term plan for the child, as well as the details which make up the eight categories of the plan of care.
- Lack of organization of the physical child in care files. In some cases, the file were not clearly labeled making it difficult to identify whom the file belonged to. There were no sections within the file to identify areas such as health, legal, assessments or financial. Information was not placed in chronological order making it hard to locate information in relation to a specific time frame.

Agencies with C6/Child Protection Delegation

This level of delegation enables the delegated agency to provide the following services:

- Child protection;
- Temporary custody of children;
- Permanent guardianship of children in continuing custody;
- Support services to families;
- Voluntary Care Agreements;
- Special Needs Agreements;

- Establishing and maintaining residential resources for children in care;
- Family Service;
- Child protection hearings and orders under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*;
- Related orders under the *Child, Family and Community Service Act*.

One of four agencies in this delegation level was a pilot site for the Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool. In addition, this agency underwent a second audit one and a half years later. The agencies audited were responsible for providing Child Protection services to vastly different aboriginal communities. While all the agencies were considered to be several of the largest in the province, one agency served one large coastal on-reserve community, the second served several on-reserve communities in the north, the third served a large number of both urban and on-reserve communities, covering a great geographical area and the fourth served a number of on-reserve communities on the west coast of the province.

The audits identified a number of strengths within the agencies including:

- Most children in care were placed in long term placements with family members or community members in their home communities.
- The staff stated they worked in a very supportive environment.
- A positive working relationship with the local MCFD offices and the communities.
- An emphasis was placed on the importance of culture and family which ensured that children received culturally appropriate services and information regarding their aboriginal heritage.
- The staff had a great deal of knowledge about the communities and its members.
- The agency had developed a very good training program for their caregivers and family care homes. The agency encouraged their caregivers to continue their professional development and training.
- The social work practice included integrated case management and case conferences. This practice benefited both the client and the social workers.
- The physical files were in very good order, with documents being grouped into sections, in chronological order.
- The level of documentation completed by the agencies was very well done. The documentation was consistent, concise and accurately reflected the level of work which was being completed by the social work staff.

The audits also identified a number of barriers to service including:

- One agency not being connected to MIS which would have enabled information to be shared province wide between the agency and MCFD offices.

- The agency that was responsible for providing services over a large geographic area required considerable travel time to service the communities.
- A number of the communities were very isolated with clients not having phones. This made it difficult for the social workers or service providers to contact the client.
- In some of the communities, resources in general were limited and specialized resources were not available at all.
- Large caseloads for the social workers.
- Lack of experienced supervisors.
- At times, the communities did not accept the authority granted to the agency. This resulted in those communities being unwilling to release information and being hostile to the social work staff. At times, it became a safety issue for the social workers.

While the delegation enables the agencies to provide all of the above services, one agency did not maintain Resource (RE) files and one agency did not maintain separate Family Service (FS) files. That particular agency's practice was to amalgamate the family service (FS) information within the child service (CS) files.

The average compliance for the Child Service (CS) files was **66.23%**.

The review of the audits identified that the agencies scored well in the areas of appropriately determining the needs of the child, gathering biographical information and family history, development of a comprehensive plan of care (CPOC), monitoring of the child's plan of care, informing the child and caregiver about appropriate discipline standards, deciding where to place a child, deciding to move the child, planning a move for a child, following procedures when a child or youth is missing, lost or runaway, providing initial and ongoing medical and dental care for a child in care, documenting the social worker's relationship and contact with a child in care, interviewing the child about his or her care experience, file closure, recording and documentation of children in care files and documenting supervisory approval regarding guardianship services.

The agencies did not score as well in the areas of discussing the rights of children in care with the child and caregiver, following procedural requirements regarding reportable circumstances and assessment of risk prior to returning a child in continuing custody to his/her home. On some, but not all of the files, information was lacking regarding file recording and documentation of children in care files and preparation for independence.

The average compliance for Family Service (FS) files was **76.32%**.

The review of the audits identified that the agencies scored well in the areas of appropriately receiving requests for service, providing appropriate information and referral for services, interagency coordination, documenting the family

service plan and components for support services and special needs agreements and obtaining supervisory approval regarding family services.

The agencies did not score well in the areas of overall file documentation and reviewing the family service plan.

The average compliance for Child Protection Investigations was **71.18%**. The review of the audits identified that the agencies scored well in the areas of conducting a Prior Contact Check (PCC) and registering the file, assessment and emergency response, deciding whether to investigate, determining the investigation response time, informing the police, seeing and interviewing the child, seeing and interviewing the parent, assessing the child's immediate safety and deciding whether the child needs protection, following protocols with MCFD and ancillary agencies, following the time limit for investigation and supervision orders and transferring a family service case.

The agencies did not score well in the areas of obtaining supervisor approval regarding child protection services, documenting the initial plan of investigation, completing the investigation within the required time limit, adhering to the steps in the investigation, arranging a medical examination of a child, documenting the risk assessment and the risk reduction plan. As well on some but not all of the files audited, the social workers were unable to see and interview the child and the parent.

The average compliance for the Resource (RE) files was **62.38%**. The review of the audits identified that the agencies scored well in the areas of signed agreements with caregivers, completing home studies, monitoring and reviewing homes (Annual Reviews), receiving the caregiver application documents, providing caregiver orientation and training of caregivers.

The agencies did not score well in the areas of following procedural requirements regarding a quality of care review of a family care home, providing written information on the child to the caregiver and closure of the family care home.

Overall Assessment

Upon reviewing the practice audits of the seven delegated agencies, there are several common findings that were identified:

- The agencies are providing collaborative, culturally appropriate services to the children and families in the communities.
- The priority of placing children in care with family and community members is being met, both for short term as well as long term placements.
- Coverage of large geographic areas impacts the ability of the social worker to complete the required work within the expected timeframes.

- The organizational structure of the agency impacts the overall delivery of services.
- Good physical file organization is necessary to maintaining order of the required documentation.
- A comprehensive plan of care needs to be completed with care and attention to gathering all the required information which makes up the eight categories of the plan of care.