

**ABORIGINAL SERVICES C4 GUARDIANSHIP PRACTICE AUDIT  
REPORT**

Carrier Sekani Family Services (IQB, IQC & IQF)

Field Work Completed: February 15, 2007



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

## **Carrier Sekani Family Services (IQB, IQC & IQF)**

### **1. PURPOSE**

The purpose of the audit is to improve and support child service, guardianship, family service and investigative practice. Through a review of a sample of cases, the audit is expected to provide a 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; and
- To provide information for use in updating and/or amending practice standards or policy.

The audit is being conducted using the Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool. Audits of the 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**

This was a common audit involving the Aboriginal Regional Support Services Team of the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) and the office of the Comptroller General (OCG). There were 3 auditors from the OCG.

Field work was conducted from January 22 – January 26 and February 12 – February 15, 2007. The computerized Aboriginal Case Practice Audit Tool (ACPAT) was used to collect the data and generate office summary compliance reports and a compliance report for each file audited. A total of 15 child service files and 12 resource files were audited. Cases were randomly selected from a total of 42 open child service files and 32 open resource files. In all, 37 files were audited or 35% of the open files. Files were audited to the previous three years and only delegated work completed by Carrier Sekani Family Services was audited.

Upon arrival at Carrier Sekani Family Services (Carrier Sekani) in Prince George, this auditor and the auditors from OCG were introduced to the Executive Director and

Program Director of Family Services. The auditors met with the Associate Director of Family Services/Clinical Supervisor who was able to provide a tour of the Carrier Sekani offices and introduce the auditors to staff. As the agency was in the midst of an office move, there was two delegated social work staff in the office upon the auditors' arrival.

As Carrier Sekani Family Services is composed of three offices (Prince George, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake) an initial meeting with all staff did not occur. This auditor did meet with staff in all three offices to discuss office systems and procedures. At the completion of the audit, a meeting occurred with this auditor, the Program Director, the Associate Director/Clinical Supervisor and the MCFD practice analyst from Aboriginal Regional Support Services who is responsible for supporting the agency. The general findings of the audit were discussed as well as, the next steps of the audit process including the report and recommendations.

### **3. AGENCY OVERVIEW**

#### **a) Delegation**

Carrier Sekani Family Services is currently delegated at C4 Guardianship. 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.

#### **b) Demographics**

Carrier Sekani Family Services (Carrier Sekani) was first incorporated as a non-profit society in 1990. Voluntary Services or C3 delegation was achieved by Carrier Sekani in January 1998. C4 Guardianship delegation was reached in March 2003. Carrier Sekani Family Services represents 11 First Nations. The nations are Burns Lake, Cheslatta, Lake Babine, Nadleh Whut'en, Nee Tahi Bhun, Skin Tyee, Stella'ten, Saik'uz, Takla Lake, Wet'suwet'en and Yekooche. These communities represent approximately 5,616 registered members, 3,242 of whom live on reserve. The communities are located in the north central region of British Columbia. The traditional territory covers a large geographic area from Anaheim Lake in the south to Takla Lake in the north, and the Rocky Mountains in the east to Hagwilget in the west.

Currently, Carrier Sekani has three offices located in Prince George, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake which provide services to their nation members. Travel time from Prince George to Vanderhoof is approximately one hour 30 minutes, while the travel time from Vanderhoof to Burns Lake is approximately two hours by vehicle. There is also bus service and train service between the three communities.

Carrier Sekani has provided a number of services over the years and continues to provide a multitude of services to their nation members. The Child and Family Services Program of Carrier Sekani is responsible for providing delegated services under the *Child, Family and Community Services Act*. Non-delegated programs such as the special services, family preservation, family support and family dispute resolution are also child and family programs which are provided by Carrier Sekani to nation members. Carrier Sekani Family Services focuses on providing community based services which are culturally appropriate for Carrier Sekani people.

The ROOTS program is an additional program which is managed by the agency. The goal of the ROOTS program is to reunite children with their families, community and culture. As a part of the ROOTS program, Carrier Sekani has been involved in developing cultural plans as well as cultural camps for nation member children across the province. The way in which these children are connected may vary, but Carrier Sekani has committed to assisting children in care, social workers, foster parents and adoptive parents develop life long connections for all nation member children.

Carrier Sekani Family Services also has a health department which provides a host of services. These services run the range of an addiction recovery program to an early childhood development program to mental health and tobacco cessation programs. Each of the three offices has a health department which is able to provide services to the nation members in each community. Additional services in the communities include schools, RCMP, hospitals, fire department, medical and dental services, and other counseling. As Prince George is a more urban centre than both Vanderhoof and Burns Lake, individuals from the smaller centres often travel to Prince George in order to access specialized resources.

Staff who provide delegated services often work closely with the other program areas operated by Carrier Sekani. They also work closely with the local Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) offices in Prince George, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake. Although the agency's main responsibility is to provide services to members on reserve, they also provide services to members who live off reserve when possible. Currently the agency does not provide ongoing family service.

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

The agency currently consists of three offices, Prince George, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake. The Prince George office (IQF) is where the Executive Director, Program Director and the Associate Director of Family Services/Clinical Supervisor are housed. In addition to the management located in the Prince George office, the office also houses the Resource Supervisor, the Guardianship Supervisor, and two social work staff. The office also has an office manager as well as the finance manager. The resource supervisor provides supervision to all resource social work staff in all three offices, while the guardianship supervisor only supervises the one guardianship worker located in Prince George.

In the Vanderhoof office (IQC) there is a guardianship supervisor and two social work staff. In the Burns Lake office (IQB) there is also a guardianship supervisor and two social work staff. In each office, there is a social work staff is comprised of a resource social worker and a guardianship social worker. As previously mentioned the resource social workers in both Vanderhoof and Burns Lake receive their supervision from the Resource supervisor in Prince George. In both offices there is an office manager who provides administrative support. ROOTS workers and family preservation workers are located in all offices as well.

Only the work done by the delegated Family Services Program was audited. Total staff in the Family Services program consists of the Executive Director, the Program Manager, Associate Director of Family Services/Clinical Supervisor, resource supervisor, three guardianship supervisors, three resource workers and three guardianship social workers. In addition to these delegated staff, there also exist ROOTS workers, administrative support staff and family preservation workers. There is also a financial manager based in the Prince George office that provides services to all three offices.

Prior to joining Carrier Sekani, the clinical supervisor and all three guardianship supervisors previously worked for the Ministry of Children and Family Development. The resource supervisor and one guardianship supervisor had been previously employed with the agency in social worker roles. The resource supervisor was moved into the supervisory position on a permanent basis , while the Burns Lake guardianship supervisor became the supervisor The Prince George guardianship worker is , while the Vanderhoof supervisor has been with that office . Previously the Vanderhoof guardianship supervisor had supervised in the Prince George office for a number of years.

Of the current six social work staff employed with the agency, two workers have been with the agency for . The remaining four social workers have been employed with Carrier Sekani for . Although the social work staff have been with their respective offices , all teams appear to work very well together and there is a sense of commitment from all staff at the agency. All of the resource and guardianship social workers are delegated. The agency is seeking to hire additional guardianship social workers to provide service in the Prince George area.

During the course of the audit, the Prince George and Burns Lake offices had both recently moved. There were also plans for the Vanderhoof team to relocate to a new office space; although the team would be remaining in the same building they are currently housed. The Prince George and Burns Lake offices were under going renovations to ensure that the buildings would fit the needs of the social work staff. It is not clear if the Vanderhoof office will also require renovations once the team moves to their new location. Although these office moves will provide more room for current staff and address their existing needs, there will be limited room for expansion in all offices. There was also limited meeting space in the Prince George and Vanderhoof offices.

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

The entire Carrier Sekani Family Services team meets once a month to discuss issues that are affecting the agency and for team building. As the resource team is located in three different offices, the resource team also makes a point of meeting in person at least once a month for consultation and supervision. The resource supervisor is based in Prince George and regularly utilizes email and telephone contact in order to maintain contact with all staff.

Supervision from the guardianship team differs from the resource team as the guardianship supervisors are located in the same physical location as their social work staff. Supervision varies depending on the supervisor but all share an open door policy where staff are able to simply knock on the door and discuss cases at hand. The guardianship supervisors will provide coverage for each other when required.

All supervisors report to the Clinical Supervisor/Associate Director of Family Services. The clinical supervisor is available to the team supervisors for consultation and support at all times. There exists a good relationship between all the supervisors and the supervisory staff feel encouraged by the support they receive at this level.

#### **4. STRENGTHS OF AGENCY**

Carrier Sekani staff noted many strengths in working for the delegated Aboriginal agency. As previously mentioned, staff report feeling very supported by their supervisors. They report that the agency is very team oriented as well as family oriented. Staff also report that the agency is very supportive of staff wellness. Should workers like an extended lunch to take a fitness class, this is not frowned upon.

Staff at the agency is committed to serving their clients and their communities using a culturally focused approach. The agency supports and encourages staff to think “outside of the box,” and to come up with innovative ideas to address the needs of their clients. There are relatively small caseloads at the agency and staff appreciate the smaller size.

The auditor also noted that the agency has strong leadership and administrative procedures. It was clear by auditing files that there is a good system of reporting in place, while balancing the autonomy of the social work staff. There are clear procedures which have been developed by Carrier Sekani to ensure that standards and policy have been followed. There is also strong administrative support in all offices which ensure that files are well organized and contain current file information. The administrative support staff was very knowledgeable on the status and locations of all files attached to the agency.

Other strengths of the agency and the agency’s practices include:

- Organization of physical files – the physical files were in good order with the documents being grouped into sections and in chronological order. Current and archived files were stored in an organized manner, easy to locate and access.
- Large pool of culturally appropriate services – the agency provides a large number of services to the communities of Carrier Sekani. These services are culturally appropriate to the Carrier Sekani culture and are accessible by the delegated workers.

## **5. CHALLENGES FACING AGENCY**

One of the challenges facing Carrier Sekani is the lack of office space. Although all three offices are in varying stages of relocating, the spaces to which the offices are moving to leave little or no room for expansion. As the agency moves to C6 Child Protection delegation and the number of children and families served by the agency increases, the pressure for office space will also increase.

Travel can be a challenge for all staff at Carrier Sekani. As previously discussed the distance between the three offices can be up to three and a half hours, depending on the road conditions. From the three offices, there is also travel to the communities that those particular offices serve. Some social work staff can be required to travel of up to six hours on logging roads in order for contact to be made with a child in care or the caregivers. While this is the worst case scenario, travel is an every day expectation of working for Carrier Sekani.

An additional challenge facing the agency is the manner in which complaints from the community are managed. The communities do not always direct their concerns to the social workers or supervisors. Instead, they often choose to bring up their concerns to the Executive Director or Program Manager. The discussions and outcomes do not always directly involve the social workers and/or supervisors and can at times, leave the social workers/supervisors second guessing their decision making.

A final challenge which affects the practice of the agency is the ability of the offices to print cheques. Currently all cheque requisitions must be made through the Prince George office. While this is not an issue for regular or monthly payments, this can become a serious issue when an emergency arises. The offices outside of Prince George use purchase orders in these instances, but there are times when a purchase order is not accepted and only a cheque will do.

## **6. DISCUSSION REGARDING THE TWO PROGRAMS AUDITED**

As already stated, the audit reflects the delegated work done by Carrier Sekani Family Services over the past 3 years.

### **a) Child Service files**

The audit of the child service files uncovered that although there are three separate offices, each with a different guardianship supervisor, the level of compliance between all three offices was very consistent. The combined scoring of the three offices was very positive at 81.18% compliance. Carrier Sekani Family Services has developed some very practices and procedures with regards to documentation and recordings. The files were very well organized and with clearly produced review recordings and workers notes.

Overall, Carrier Sekani scored very well in the areas of developing plans of care as well as monitoring plans of care to ensure that they are an accurate reflection of the child's current situation. It is also important to note, that the plans of care that are on file are for the most part, very well done and provide a full picture of all aspects of the child's life. The agency takes care when planning placements for children. The agency appears to focus on the best possible placement for the child, taking the time required to ensure that the placement fits for both the child and the caregiver. It should also be noted that the agency focuses on maintaining cultural connections for the children in care of their agency. Through partnerships with other Carrier Sekani programs and with the support of their caregivers, the agency has been able to create an environment which supports children in care to maintain and develop connections to their culture as well as with family and extended family.

While there were minimal areas of concern, there were issues which were brought forth during the course of the audit. There remain outstanding issues between Carrier Sekani and MCFD when it comes to file transfers. As the agency has taken on some very special needs children, discussions continue between MCFD and the agency on how to address financial resourcing as well as accessing community resources for these children. As these discussions continue, children in care suffer as the agency is unable to plan for the future without knowing what resources they will have at their disposal. Also, the agency does not always have the same level of access to services in the community as MCFD and this has become problematic when files are transferred to Carrier Sekani. While there has been some ability to negotiate with MCFD on these services, this affects the ability of the agency to provide the same level of service as MCFD to their community members.

#### **b) Resource files**

Many of the resource files open with Carrier Sekani had either been recently transferred to the agency by the MCFD or had recently been opened by the agency. In fact, all the resource files audited had been open with the agency for less than three years. Overall, the combined scoring of the three offices was very positive at 84.62% compliance.

The Carrier Sekani resource team has been able to develop forms and practices to ensure that particular standards such as discipline policies, safe storage of firearms, etc., are reviewed on a regular basis with the caregivers. The resource team also feels that these forms are quite helpful in ensuring that standards are followed. The auditor also felt that the annual reviews which were completed were very well done. Carrier Sekani has done

a great deal of work to develop positive working relationships with all their caregivers and the level of documentation on the resource files reflects these efforts.

Although there were no major issues affecting practice at the agency, one negative appears to be the level of information sharing which has occurred between the agency and MCFD. There have been instances where, due to the level of delegation of Carrier Sekani, MCFD has been required to conduct a protocol investigation on a Carrier Sekani home. The resource team has appropriately followed up on the reports of abuse or neglect in foster homes, but upon completion of the investigation, MCFD has not been forthcoming in providing a written copy of the report to the agency. Although the agency has been able to gather the pertinent information such as the outcomes and recommendations, the written report has not been provided for the delegated Aboriginal agency's files.

## **7. COMPLIANCE TO THE PROGRAMS AUDITED**

The audit of the child service and resource files was completed by one auditor. The “not applicable” scores were not included in the total.

### **a) Compliance to Child Service Practice**

A total of **fifteen (15)** open child service files were audited. Six (6) files were audited from IQB Burns Lake, four (4) files were audited from IQC Vanderhoof and five (5) files were audited from the IQF Prince George office.

Overall compliance to the child service standards was **81%**. IQB had an office compliance level of 86%; IQC had a compliance of 81%; while the compliance for IQF was 77%. The files were audited for compliance to the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators C4 Guardianship child services 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 in care;
- Informing the child and caregiver of the rights of children in care;
- Informing the child and caregiver of appropriate discipline policy;
- The level of file documentation.

The following provides a breakdown of the compliance ratings for all of Carrier Sekani:

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) – 8 files (80%) compliant; 1 file (10%) non-compliant with factors; 1 file (10%) non-compliant; 5 files not applicable
5. **Standard 18: Interviewing the Child about his/her Care Experience** (AOPSI Standard 19) – 5 files (83%) compliant; 1 file (17%) non-compliant; 9 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) - 12 files (86%) compliant; 2 files (14%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable
8. **Standard 23: The Rights of Children in Care** (AOPSI Standard 23 Level 12) – 12 files (80%) compliant; 1 file (7%) non-compliant with factors; 2 files (13%) non-compliant
9. **Standard 24: Process for Determining the Needs of the Child** (AOPSI Standard 24 Level 12) – 15 files (100%) compliant
10. **Standard 25: Biographical Information and Family History** (AOPSI Standard 26 Level 12) – 15 files (100%) compliant
11. **Standard 26: Development of the Comprehensive Plan of Care** (AOPSI Standard 3) – 13 files (93%) compliant; 1 file (7%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable
12. **Standard 27: Monitoring of the Child's Plan of Care** (AOPSI Standard 5) – 12 files (80%) compliant; 2 files (13%) non-compliant with factors; 1 file (7%) non-compliant
13. **Standard 28: Informing the Child and Caregiver about Appropriate Discipline Standards** (AOPSI Standard 9) – 11 files (85%) compliant; 2 files (15%) non-compliant; 2 files not applicable
14. **Standard 29: Deciding Where to Place a Child** (AOPSI Standard 10) – 7 files (100%) compliant; 8 files not applicable
15. **Standard 30: Deciding to Move the Child in Care** (AOPSI Standard 12) – 6 files (100%) compliant; 9 files not applicable

16. **Standard 31: Planning a Move for a Child** (AOPSI Standard 13) – 6 files (100%) compliant; 9 files not applicable
17. **Standard 32: Reportable Circumstances** (AOPSI Standard 18) – 1 file (100%) non-compliant; 14 files not applicable
18. **Standard 33: When a Child or Youth is Missing, Lost or Runaway** (AOPSI Standard 7) - 3 files (100%) compliant; 12 files not applicable
19. **Standard 34: Providing Initial and Ongoing Medical and Dental Care for a Child in Care** (AOPSI Standard 36 Level 12) – 11 files (73%) compliant; 4 files (27%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable
20. **Standard 35: The Social Worker's Relationship and Contact with a Child in Care** (AOPSI Standard 6) – 7 files (47%) compliant; 1 file (7%) non-compliant with factors; 7 files (47%) non-compliant
21. **Standard 36: Case Transfer** (AOPSI Standard 39 Level 12) – no files 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) - 6 files (43%) compliant; 8 files (57%) non-compliant; 1 file not applicable
24. **Standard 21: Investigating Allegations of Abuse or neglect of Child in Care in Family Care Homes** (AOPSI Standard 20 Level 12) – 15 files not applicable
25. **Standard 22: Quality of Care Review of a Family Care Home** (AOPSI Standard 21 Level 12) – 1 file (100%) compliant; 14 files not applicable

**b) Compliance to Resource Practice**

Twelve (12) open resource files were audited. Six (6) files were audited from the IQB Burns Lake office, three (3) files were audited from the IQC Vanderhoof office and three (3) files were audited from the IQF Prince George office.

Overall compliance to the resource standards was **85%**. The compliance for IQB was 88%, while the compliance for IQC was 69% and the compliance achieved for IQF was 93%. The files were audited for compliance to the Aboriginal Operational and Practice Standards and Indicators C4 Guardianship resources including:

- Application and orientation of caregiver;
- Homestudy of caregiver;
- Training of caregiver;

- Signed Agreement with caregiver;
- Providing caregiver with written information regarding child;
- Monitoring and reviewing homes.

The following provides a breakdown of the compliance ratings:

1. **Standard 14: Application and orientation** (AOPSI Standard 14 Level 12) – 3 files (75%) compliant; 1 file (25%) non-compliant with factors; 8 files not applicable
2. **Standard 15: Homestudy** (AOPSI Standard 15 Level 12) – 3 files (75%) compliant; 1 file (25%) non-compliant; 8 files not applicable
3. **Standard 16: Training of caregivers** (AOPSI Standard 16 Level 12) – 7 files (78%) compliant; 2 files (22%) non-compliant; 3 files not applicable
4. **Standard 17: Signed agreement with caregivers** (AOPSI Standard 17 Level 12) – 10 files (83%) compliant; 2 files (17%) non-compliant
5. **Standard 18: Providing information on the child** (AOPSI Standard 18 Level 12) – 11 files (100%) compliant; 1 file not applicable
6. **Standard 19: Monitoring and reviewing homes** (AOPSI Standard 19 Level 12) – 6 files (75%) non-compliant; 2 files (25%) non-compliant; 4 files not applicable
7. **Standard 20: Investigating allegations of abuse or neglect of children in care in family care homes** (AOPSI Standard 20 Level 12) – 1 file (100%) compliant; 11 files not applicable
8. **Standard 21: Quality of care review of a family care home** (AOPSI Standard 21 Level 12) – 1 file (100%) compliant; 11 files not applicable
9. **Standard 22: Closure of the family care home** (AOPSI Standard 22 Level 12) – 2 files (100%) compliant; 10 files not applicable

## 8. RECOMMENDATIONS

Present: , Associate Director , Carrier Sekani  
 Family Services  
 , Guardianship Supervisor, Carrier Sekani Family Services  
 Ray Bronson, A/Deputy Director, Aboriginal Regional Support Services  
 Denise Connell, Auditor, Aboriginal Regional Support Services  
 Frank Mossop, Practice Analyst, Aboriginal Regional Support Services

Date: May 14, 2007

In response to the audit report, Carrier Sekani Family Services has implemented a checklist for documentation of all resource files throughout the agency. Team assistants now have responsibility for reviewing files and checklists to ensure the required documentation is attached. Carrier Sekani Family Services is also in the process of developing and implementing a checklist for documentation on guardianship files.

The following recommendations were developed in consultation with Carrier Sekani Family Services and MCFD Aboriginal Regional Support Services Team. The timeframe for completion of the recommendations is three months.

*Carrier Sekani Family Services will:*

- Complete the regional Protocol with the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD). The protocol with MCFD will include, but will not be limited to, the areas of file transfer, information sharing and communications.
- Develop internal policy on the AOPSI standard: the social worker's relationship and contact with the child. Once developed, this internal policy will be reviewed with all delegated staff.

*Aboriginal Regional Support Services will:*

- Upon the request of Carrier Sekani Family Services, support the agency in the development and/or review of the protocols and/or policies listed above