



Government of Northwest Territories / Gouvernement des Territoires du Nord-Ouest

2022-2023 ANNUAL REPORT

DIRECTOR OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

2022-2023 RAPPORT ANNUEL

DIRECTRICE DES SERVICES À L'ENFANCE ET À LA FAMILLE

Le présent document contient un sommaire en français.



If you would like this information in another official language, call us.

English

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French

Kīspin ki nitawihtīn ē nīhīyawīhk ōma ācimōwin, tipwāsīnān.

Cree

Tḥchᑭ yatı k'èè. Dı wegodi newᑭ dè, gots'ō gonede.

Tḥchᑭ

ʔerihtł'ís Dēne Sųhné yatı t'a huts'elkēr xa beyáyatı theʔą ʔat'e, nuwe ts'ën yółti.

Chipewyan

Edı gondı dehğáh got'je zhatié k'éé edat'éh enahddᑭ nıde naxets'é edahlı.

South Slavey

K'áhshó got'ıne xədə k'é hederı ʔedıhtł'é yerıııwé nıde dúle.

North Slavey

Jii gwandak izhii ginjik vat'atr'ijáhch'uu zhit yinothtan jı', diits'at ginohkhii.

Gwich'in

Uvanittuaq ilitchurisukupku Inuvialuktun, ququaqluta.

Inuvialuktun

Ċ'bdĀ ǀǀǀ^{ǀb}Δ^c ǀǀǀΔ^{ǀc} Δ^{ǀb}ǀǀǀ^{ǀc}ǀǀǀǀǀ^b, ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}ǀ^{ǀc}.

Inuktitut

Hapkua titiqqat pijumagupkit Inuinnaqtun, uvaptinnut hivajarlutit.

Inuinnaqtun

1-855-846-9601

Message from the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services

The Honourable Julie Green

*Minister of Health and Social Services
Government of the Northwest Territories*

October 1, 2023

Dear Minister Green,

It is my pleasure to provide you with the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services (CFS).

The Annual Report provides an overview of the services we provide to children, youth, and families across the Northwest Territories (NWT). The Report also highlights service level trends that can help to identify where the CFS system can be enhanced and where there has been a positive impact on the people served.

Data are crucial for effective decision making, and the data in this report are drawn from the lived experiences of children, youth, and families in the NWT. In this light, the Director's Report will continue to be used as an important pathway for transforming child and family services into a more culturally safe system. This report can provide insight on how system transformation efforts are going, and if these changes are moving in a direction that better meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system requires a whole-of-government approach, including engagement and pathways for community and Indigenous government participation. We remain committed to working with various partners, including Indigenous governments and communities, to find innovative approaches to service delivery. Working with partners with shared interests will strengthen the design, delivery, and access of CFS services.

I wish to extend my gratitude to the CFS staff, caregivers, care providers, and community partners for their continued support and unwavering dedication to the wellbeing of children, youth, and their families.

Sincerely,

Colette Prevost

Statutory Director of Child and Family Services

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Executive Summary

The 2022-2023 Report of the Director of Child and Family Services (CFS) provides a detailed summary of services delivered in the Northwest Territories (NWT) between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023. Services include adoption services, family preservation, prevention supports, and protection services, which are available and provided to each of the 33 communities in the NWT.

It is important to acknowledge that the data being presented in this report reflects the lived experiences of children, youth, and families in the NWT. Information in this report provides an opportunity for residents of the NWT to see the types of supports and services delivered through CFS. This report also highlights service level trends that can help to identify where the CFS system can be enhanced and where there has been a positive impact on the people served.

Between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, 1,102 children and youth received either prevention and/or protection services through CFS. Prevention services represent 50% of the services delivered through CFS. Furthermore, the Family Preservation Program continued to expand their service delivery with 100 families and 27 youth served during 2022-2023. In 2022-2023, 29 of 30 adoptions in the NWT were custom adoptions.

When services are required, the CFS system makes every effort to provide them in the child/youth's parental or family home. Compared to last year, there was a slight increase in the percentage of children and youth being supported in their family home (from 75% to 77%). In some cases, a child/youth cannot safely reside in the parental or family home, and an out-of-home placement is needed. Placements must be considered in the order of priority to make every effort to maintain the connection between a child/youth and their family,

community, and culture. The proportion of regular placement resources (foster placements) continued to steadily decrease, as the proportion of extended family placement resources increased. For the first time, the proportion of extended family placements exceeded the proportion of regular placement resources. Most Indigenous children/youth (62%) who required support outside their familial home were living with an Indigenous caregiver. This means more children/youth have a greater opportunity to maintain cultural and familial connections.

Community-based programming is the first option to assist children/youth with their individual counselling or treatment needs. If those needs cannot be met in-territory, out-of-territory specialized services may be explored with the child/youth, family, and caregivers, when appropriate. In 2022-2023, 42% of children/youth receiving Out of Territory specialized services were supported through a Family Treatment Program, meaning they travelled with their family members to participate in the program. The Family Treatment Program provides support to the whole family with the goal of improving family safety, family functioning, and parent and child wellbeing.

Despite these positive trends, the data continues to reveal areas that require our collective attention and highlights the importance of integrating services beyond CFS to better serve children, youth, and families in the NWT. Disparities in income and housing security are two of the most common reasons why families and youth are requesting voluntary services. Furthermore, there continues to be an overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth within the NWT CFS system.

The continued overrepresentation of Indigenous children in receipt of CFS supports serves as evidence that CFS needs to shift the structure and delivery of services. Over the past year, the CFS system has advanced numerous initiatives to better support the evolving needs of children, youth, and families within the NWT. For example, the two-day Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism (CSAR) Training for CFS staff was tailored specifically to focus on harmful historical and present-day CFS policies that have contributed to anti-Indigenous racism and systemic barriers for clients. This training was delivered to 17 CFS staff in November 2022, with the view of offering this training annually. In 2022-2023, the topic of CFS was added as a standing agenda for the Indigenous Advisory Body¹.

The Department also completed the CFS system-wide audit for the 2021-2022 fiscal year. The audit findings will support system improvements, such as revisions to standards and focused staff training, and authority-specific actions to improve compliance with standards.

Throughout 2022-2023, the Department has continued to share data to Indigenous governments who have voiced their interest in receiving such information about the services offered to members of their communities.

The Department has been participating in coordination agreement discussions with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the federal government since April 2022 to identify how it can support the successful implementation of the *Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligaksat* in the NWT.

In 2023-2024, a detailed Strategic Direction and Action Plan (Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan), will guide the system forward with confidence that the CFS system will continue to move towards system transformation. Guidance from the CSAR Division and Indigenous Advisory Body along with key guiding documents, including recommendations from the Standing Committee on Social Development on their review of the *Child and Family Services Act*, serves as a foundation for the development of the new five-year action plan. In 2023-2024, the Strategic Direction and Action Plan will function as a continuation of the foundational work set by the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), the Bridge Plan, and other CFS initiatives that have been implemented over the past 5 years. The Strategic Direction and Action Plan will envision a broader and deeper change to fundamentally shift the CFS system towards the goals of a culturally safe health and social services system and providing better supports to children and youth in ways that promote their overall safety and wellbeing.

¹ The Indigenous Advisory Body was established to provide guidance and advice on incorporating Indigenous tradition, culture, and healing practices within the NWT Health and Social Services system and aims to address inequities experienced by Indigenous residents when accessing health and social services.

Sommaire

Le Rapport annuel 2022-2023 de la directrice des Services à l'enfance et à la famille (SEF) présente un résumé détaillé des services fournis aux Territoires du Nord-Ouest (TNO) entre le 1^{er} avril 2022 et le 31 mars 2023. Parmi ceux-ci, on compte les services d'adoption, les services de préservation des familles, les services de soutien à la prévention et les services de protection, qui sont accessibles et fournis dans chacune des 33 collectivités des TNO.

Il convient de souligner que les données présentées dans ce rapport illustrent les expériences vécues par les enfants, les jeunes et les familles des TNO. L'information contenue dans ce rapport permet aux résidents des TNO de voir les types de soutien et de services offerts par l'entremise des SEF. Le rapport met également en lumière les tendances au niveau des services qui peuvent aider à déterminer les aspects à améliorer du système des SEF ainsi que ceux qui ont eu un effet positif sur les personnes desservies.

Entre le 1^{er} avril 2022 et le 31 mars 2023, 1 102 enfants et jeunes ont reçu des services de prévention ou de protection par l'intermédiaire des SEF. Les services de prévention représentent 50 % des SEF. En outre, le Programme de préservation des familles a continué de se développer aux TNO, apportant ainsi un soutien à 100 familles et à 27 jeunes en 2022-2023. Par ailleurs, 29 des 30 adoptions réalisées aux TNO en 2022-2023 étaient des adoptions selon les coutumes autochtones.

Lorsque des services sont nécessaires, le système des SEF s'efforce de les fournir dans le foyer parental ou familial de l'enfant ou du jeune. Par rapport à l'année dernière, le pourcentage d'enfants et de jeunes bénéficiant d'un soutien dans leur foyer familial a légèrement augmenté (de 75 % à 77 %). Dans certains cas, lorsque

l'enfant ou le jeune ne peut pas résider en toute sécurité dans le foyer parental ou familial, un placement hors du foyer est nécessaire. Les placements doivent être examinés selon l'ordre des priorités dans le but de tout mettre en œuvre pour maintenir le lien entre l'enfant ou le jeune et sa famille, sa communauté et sa culture. La proportion de placements ordinaires (placements en famille d'accueil) diminue progressivement tandis que la proportion de placements en famille élargie augmente. Pour la première fois, la proportion de placements en famille élargie a dépassé la proportion de placements ordinaires. La plupart des enfants et des jeunes autochtones (62 %) qui avaient besoin d'un soutien en dehors de leur foyer familial vivaient avec un aidant autochtone. Ainsi, un plus grand nombre d'enfants et de jeunes ont la possibilité de conserver leur culture et leurs liens familiaux.

Les programmes communautaires sont la première option pour aider les enfants et les jeunes à répondre à leurs besoins individuels en matière d'accompagnement ou de soutien. Si ces besoins ne peuvent être satisfaits sur le territoire, des services

spécialisés hors territoire peuvent être envisagés avec l'enfant ou le jeune, et sa famille et les personnes qui s'en occupent, le cas échéant. En 2022-2023, 42 % des enfants et des adolescents bénéficiant de services spécialisés hors territoire ont été pris en charge dans le cadre d'un programme de soutien familial, ce qui signifie qu'ils ont voyagé avec les membres de leur famille pour participer au programme. Le Programme de soutien familial, qui apporte un soutien à l'ensemble de la famille, a pour objectif d'améliorer la sécurité et le fonctionnement de la famille ainsi que le bien-être des parents et de l'enfant.

Malgré ces tendances positives, les données continuent de mettre en évidence des problématiques qui requièrent notre attention collective et soulignent l'importance d'intégrer les services au-delà des SEF de manière à mieux servir les enfants, les jeunes et les familles des TNO. Les disparités de revenu et la sécurité liée au logement sont deux des causes les plus fréquentes pour lesquelles les familles et les jeunes font d'eux-mêmes appel à des services de soutien. De plus, il y a toujours une surreprésentation des enfants et des jeunes autochtones dans le système des SEF des TNO.

Cette surreprésentation continue des enfants autochtones dans le système des SEF prouve que les SEF doivent modifier la structure et la prestation de leurs services. Au cours de l'année écoulée, le système des SEF a lancé de nombreuses initiatives pour mieux répondre aux besoins changeants des enfants, des jeunes et des familles des TNO. Ainsi, la formation de deux jours sur le respect des valeurs culturelles et la lutte contre le racisme destinée au personnel des SEF met expressément l'accent sur les politiques actuelles et passées des SEF qui ont contribué à alimenter le racisme à l'égard des Autochtones et les obstacles systémiques auxquels se heurtent les usagers. Cette formation a été dispensée à 17 membres du personnel des SEF en novembre 2022, et l'objectif est d'offrir cette formation chaque année. En 2022-2023, le sujet des SEF a été ajouté à l'ordre du jour permanent du Comité consultatif autochtone¹.

Le Ministère a également achevé l'audit du système des SEF pour l'exercice 2021-2022. Les conclusions de l'audit permettront d'apporter des améliorations au système, telles que des révisions des normes et une formation ciblée pour le personnel ainsi que des mesures adaptées à chaque autorité pour améliorer le respect des normes.

Tout au long de l'exercice 2022-2023, le Ministère a continué à partager des données avec certaines administrations autochtones sur le nombre d'enfants et de jeunes bénéficiant de services dans leurs collectivités.

Depuis avril 2022, le Ministère participe à des discussions sur les accords de coordination avec la Société régionale inuvialuite et le gouvernement fédéral pour déterminer comment il peut soutenir la mise en œuvre réussie de l'*Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligaksat* aux TNO.

En 2023-2024, l'orientation stratégique et le plan d'action des services aux enfants, aux adolescents et aux familles permettront d'orienter le système des SEF pour qu'il poursuive sa transformation. Les orientations provenant de l'unité responsable du respect des valeurs culturelles et de la lutte contre le racisme et du Comité consultatif autochtone ainsi que les principaux documents d'orientation, notamment les recommandations du Comité permanent des affaires sociales découlant de son examen de

la *Loi sur les services à l'enfance et à la famille*, servent de fondement pour l'élaboration de ce nouveau plan d'action quinquennal. En 2023-2024, l'orientation stratégique et le plan d'action s'inscriront dans la continuité du travail de base établi par le Plan d'amélioration de la qualité (PAQ), le plan de transition et d'autres initiatives des SEF qui ont été mises en œuvre au cours des cinq dernières années. L'orientation stratégique et le plan d'action prévoient un changement plus étendu et plus profond pour réorienter fondamentalement le système des SEF vers les objectifs d'un système de santé et des services sociaux respectueux de la culture et fournir un meilleur soutien aux enfants et aux jeunes de manière à promouvoir leur sécurité et leur bien-être général.

¹ Le Comité consultatif autochtone a été créé pour fournir des orientations et des conseils sur l'intégration de la tradition, de la culture et des pratiques de guérison autochtones dans le système de santé et des services sociaux des TNO et a pour but de remédier aux inégalités subies par les résidents autochtones lorsqu'ils accèdent aux services de santé et aux services sociaux.



Introduction

The Child and Family Services (CFS) system plays an important role in promoting the safety and wellbeing of children and youth in the Northwest Territories (NWT), through services such as prevention supports, family preservation, protection services and adoptions.

The 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services provides a summary of services delivered in the NWT under the *Child and Family Services Act*, *Adoption Act*, *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act*, and the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* between April 1,

2022, and March 31, 2023. This report provides an opportunity to examine the types of supports and services delivered through CFS. Monitoring data and service level trends can help to identify where the CFS system can be enhanced and where there has been a positive impact on the people served.

CFS is committed to having pathways to include children, youth, and families in decisions that directly impact their lives and communities, including how their lived experiences are reflected in data and how it is being used for adapting service design and delivery.



Embedding Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Principles

Indigenous people have always cared for their children using their own systems of care. Canada's history and ongoing legacy of racism and colonialism - enacted through cultural genocide, the residential school system, the Sixties Scoop, and the modern-day child and family services systems - intentionally interrupted and denied communities from accessing Indigenous systems of care². Systemic racism, which is racism that manifests within organizations through policies and practices, maintains inequities for Indigenous families. One key indicator of systemic racism is the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the Child and Family Services (CFS) system in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and across Canada. In 2022-2023, 97% of children and youth receiving prevention and protection services in the NWT identified as Indigenous,

despite only representing 57% of children and youth in the NWT. Community members have voiced their concern about the historical and current delivery of CFS, and overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system, particularly within protection services.

The NWT health and social services system is committed to addressing and eliminating systemic racism by promoting cultural safety and anti-racism. To ensure a unified approach, CFS is working closely with the CSAR Division leading this work to embed cultural safety and anti-racism principles throughout its service design and delivery, including the development of this Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services.

² Blackstock, C., Cross, T., George, J., Brown, I., & Formsma, J. (2006). Reconciliation in *Child Welfare: Touchstones of Hope for Indigenous Children, Youth, and Families*. Ottawa, Canada: First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada/Portland, USA: National Indian Child Welfare Association, p.6.



Section 1: Northwest Territories' Child and Family Services System

The Child and Family Services (CFS) system is responsible for delivering services to ensure the best interests of children, youth, and families; maintain family unity; and promote the strength of communities. Services include prevention supports, family preservation, and protection, which are available and provided to each of the 33 communities in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

Children, youth, and families receive services and supports from foster caregivers as well as frontline

CFS staff including Community Social Service Workers³, Family Preservation Workers, Case Aides, and Foster Care and Adoption Workers³. Specialized training is provided to all staff to ensure they have the required knowledge and Statutory Appointments to provide these services.

The CFS system includes staff from the Department of Health and Social Services Health and Social Services Authorities, and the Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES SYSTEM

Department of Health and Social Services

- Develops practice standards and training curriculums
- Monitors overall system performance and compliance to legislated responsibilities
- Supports access to out-of-territory specialized services
- Facilitates and registers departmental, private, and step-parent adoptions
- Facilitates the appointment, training, and compensation (via honorarium) of Custom Adoption Commissioners

Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority

Tłıchǫ Community Services Agency

Hay River Health and Social Services Authority

- Provides direct services to children, youth, and families
- Responsible for system staff recruitment and retention activities
- Provides ongoing support and training to staff
- Monitors system performance

³ Community Social Services Workers receive specialized training to become statutorily appointed as "Child Protection Workers" under the *Child and Family Services Act*. Foster Care and Adoption Workers are also Community Social Services Workers who receive specialized training and are appointed under the *Adoption Act*.

Approximately
131
staff supported children,
youth, and families
through CFS in
2022-2023.

Section 2: Pathways to Child and Family Services

Supports under the realm of Child and Family Services (CFS) are available for youth, family, or expectant parent(s) who are experiencing stressors that exceed their natural support systems. Supports can range from prevention services through to protection services.

1. PREVENTION SERVICES

The Community Social Services Worker (CSSW) collaborates with the youth, family, or expectant parent(s) to identify the supports that will best meet their needs. The aim of prevention services is to support the strengths of youth, families, and expectant parent(s) to preserve family unity. Prevention services may include connections to other service providers, wellness programs, or activities that support wellbeing.

During the initial meeting, the CSSW strives to use a holistic approach to identify culturally safe and relevant services that reinforce the individual/family's resilience and strengths.

In 2022-2023,
163 requests for prevention services were made.

Examples of requests under prevention services:

- Housing Advocacy
- Short-term Financial Assistance
- Support in Accessing Wellness Services
- Referrals to Prenatal Services

2. PROTECTION SERVICES

Protection services are guided by the principles that family wellbeing should be supported and promoted; and children have the right to live a life free from abuse, harm, and neglect.

When there is a concern that a child/youth may be at risk of maltreatment, a report must be made to a CSSW⁴. Based on the conversation with the reporter, the CSSW will determine if the information meets the threshold for further action to support the safety and wellbeing of the children/youth.

If further action is required, the CSSW will speak with the child(ren), youth, parents, and any other individuals that can contribute to a better understanding of the family's situation. Based on the information gathered by the CSSW, children/youth, and families may be offered prevention supports or may require protection services to promote their safety and wellbeing.

⁴ The *Child and Family Services Act* requires any person who has information of the need of protection of a child or youth shall, without delay, report the matter to their local Child and Family Services office, peace officer or authorized person.

In 2022-2023,
Child and Family Services received
1,585
reports of suspected maltreatment.

Section 3: Types of Services for Children, Youth and Families

Between April 1, 2022, and March 31, 2023, there were 1,102 children and youth who received prevention and/or protection services through Child and Family Services (CFS).

PREVENTION SERVICES

Voluntary Services Agreements (VSA): Support families with children/youth between the ages of 0-18 (inclusive) and expectant parent(s) who would benefit from support as identified by the individual/families.

Support Services Agreements (SSA): Support youth, ages 16 to 18 (inclusive) to offer support and guidance in their transition to adulthood.

Extended Support Services Agreements (ESSA): Support young persons in their transition to adulthood. This service is offered to young persons who were in the permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services on their 19th birthday and until they turn 23.

PROTECTION SERVICES

Plan of Care Agreement (POCA): Provides an alternative to the court process when there is an ongoing protection concern involving children under 16 years of age. POCAs collaboratively identify the strengths and unmet needs of the family. Supports and services are offered as an approach to family preservation. Depending on the situation, the child may remain in the family home or be cared for outside the home.

A Supervision Order (SO) is an order that is made by the court when a child needs protection and when it is in the child's best interests to remain in (or be returned to) the care of their parent(s) or care provider(s). The child is supervised by a Child Protection Worker in accordance with any terms or conditions that the court considers necessary. Supports and services continue to be provided to the family while the SO is in place.

Supervision Orders do not apply to youth.

Temporary Custody Order (TCO): Transfers custody of the child/youth temporarily to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Work is continued with the family to reunite the child/youth in their family home and parents are supported to maintain a meaningful relationship with their child(ren)/youth.

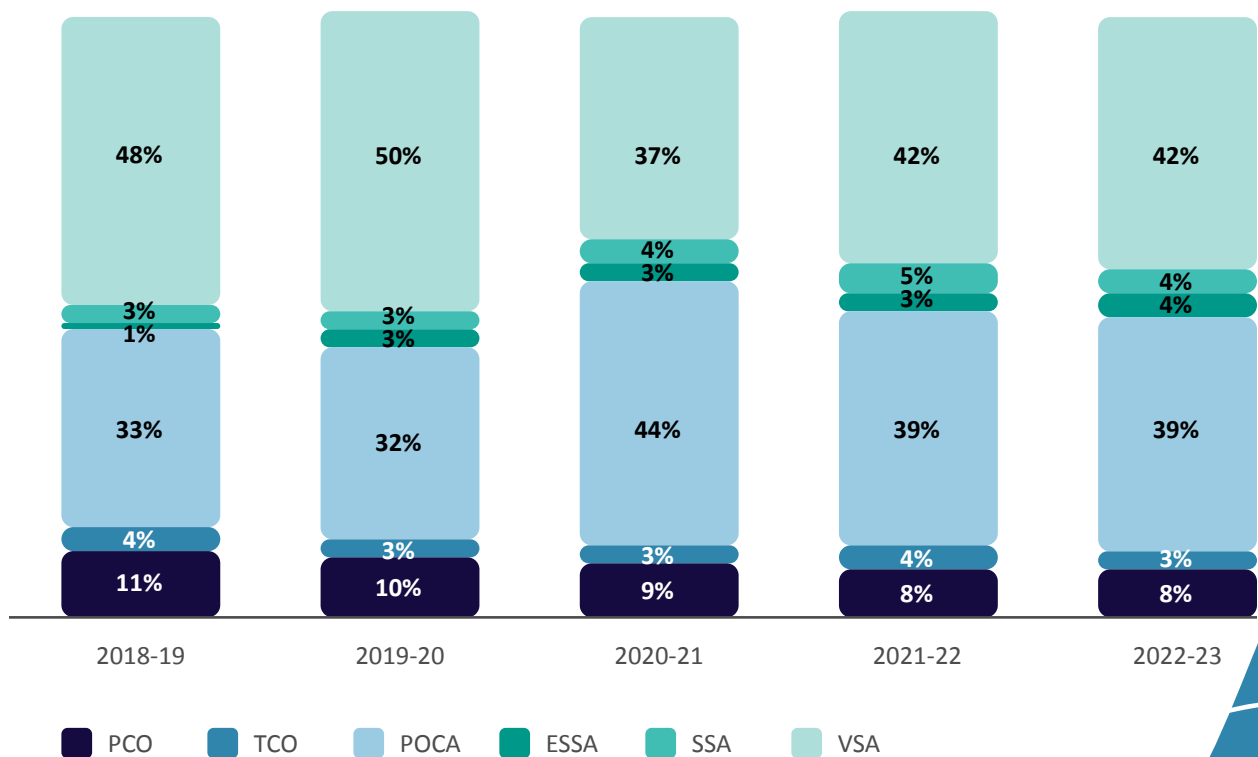
Permanent Custody Order (PCO): Transfers the custody and care of the child/youth permanently to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Depending on each unique situation, the child may continue to live with foster caregivers, extended family or be adopted.

Overall, the proportion of children/youth receiving services under an Extended Support Services Agreement (ESSA), Support Services Agreement (SSA), Permanent Custody Order (PCO), and Temporary Custody Order (TCO) is consistent between 2018 and 2023 (Figure 3.1).

However, in 2020-2021, the proportion of Voluntary Services Agreements (VSA) decreased while Plan of Care Agreements increased.

The past two years (2021-2023) showed that services are trending towards similar proportions from 2018-2020, which typically showed that approximately 50% of services were prevention focused (VSA, SSA, and ESSA). Subsequent years of data will need to be monitored to determine what might be influencing changes in service use, such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, approach to service delivery, etc.

Figure 3.1 Proportion of Child and Family Services provided to children, youth, and families, by service type

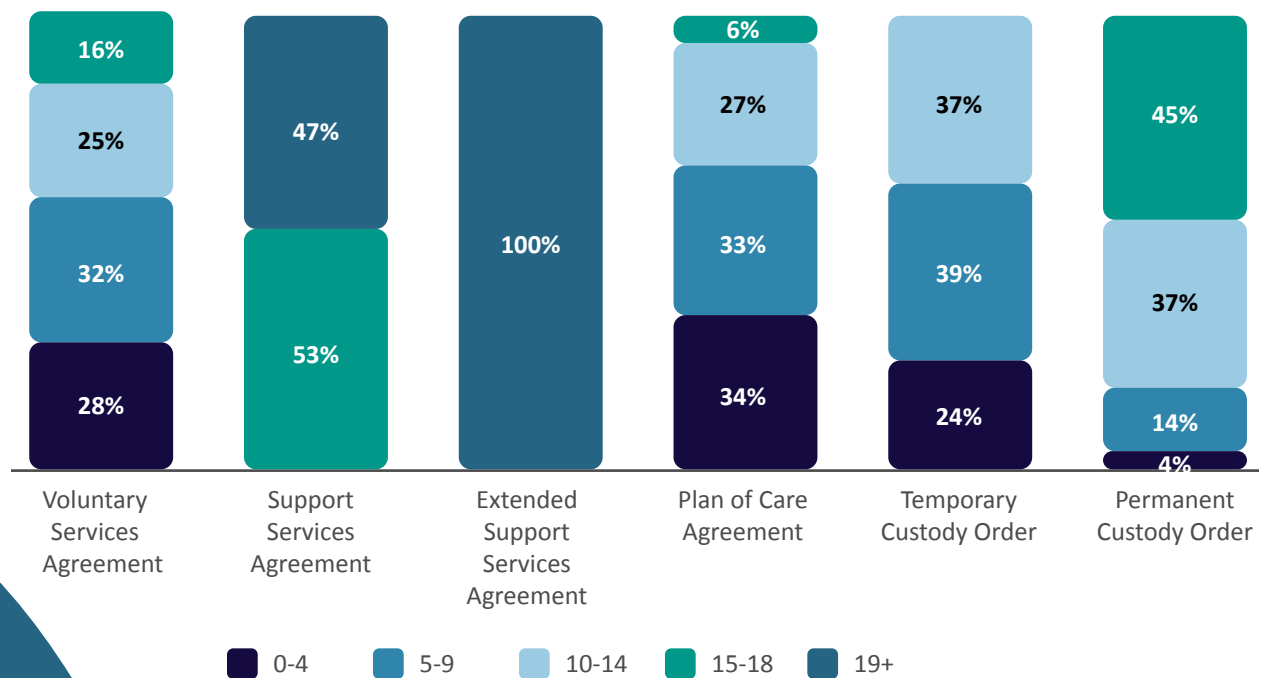


Section 4: Children and Youth Who Receive Child and Family Services

HOW OLD ARE CHILDREN/YOUTH RECEIVING SERVICES?

The type of service provided through Child and Family Services (CFS) depends on the child/youth’s age and family situation. Figure 4.1 shows the different age groups of children/youth for the type of services provided through CFS.

Figure 4.1 Child and Family Services provided according to age



While Support Services Agreements (SSA) are intended for youth between the ages of 16 to 18 (inclusive), 47% of SSAs were with individuals over the age of 19 in 2022-2023. This is due to the extension of support services for youth who would normally age out of receiving CFS during the Declared State of Public Health Emergency. The COVID-19 Service Extension expired on June 30, 2022.

WHERE ARE CHILDREN AND YOUTH LIVING WHEN RECEIVING SERVICES?

Children and youth achieve better outcomes when given access to supports in their home community. To promote wellbeing and family preservation, the Child and Family Services (CFS) system aims to provide local supports and services to children, youth, and families.

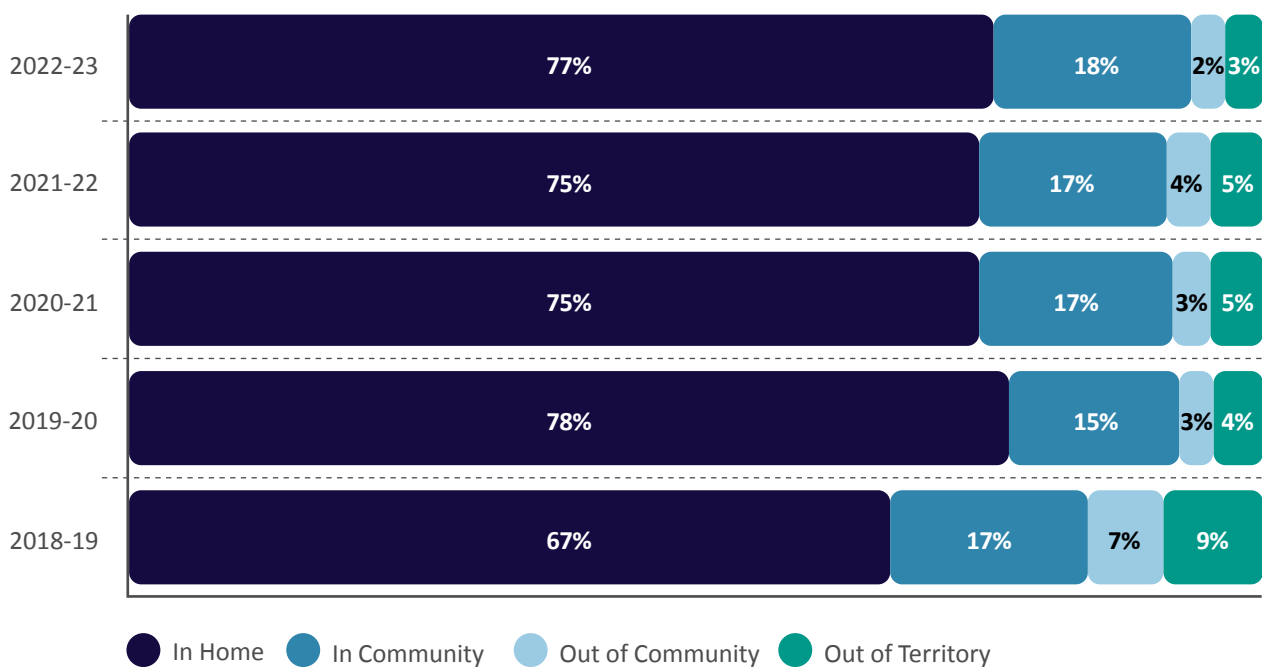
Whenever possible, children/youth are supported to live in their family home or within their home community. Maintaining connections with culture, community, friends, and family promotes the overall wellbeing and healthy development of children and youth.

77%
 of children/youth received services while living in their home.

18%
 of children/youth received services within their home community.

In 2022-2023, **95%** children/youth who received CFS were residing in the home or within their home community.

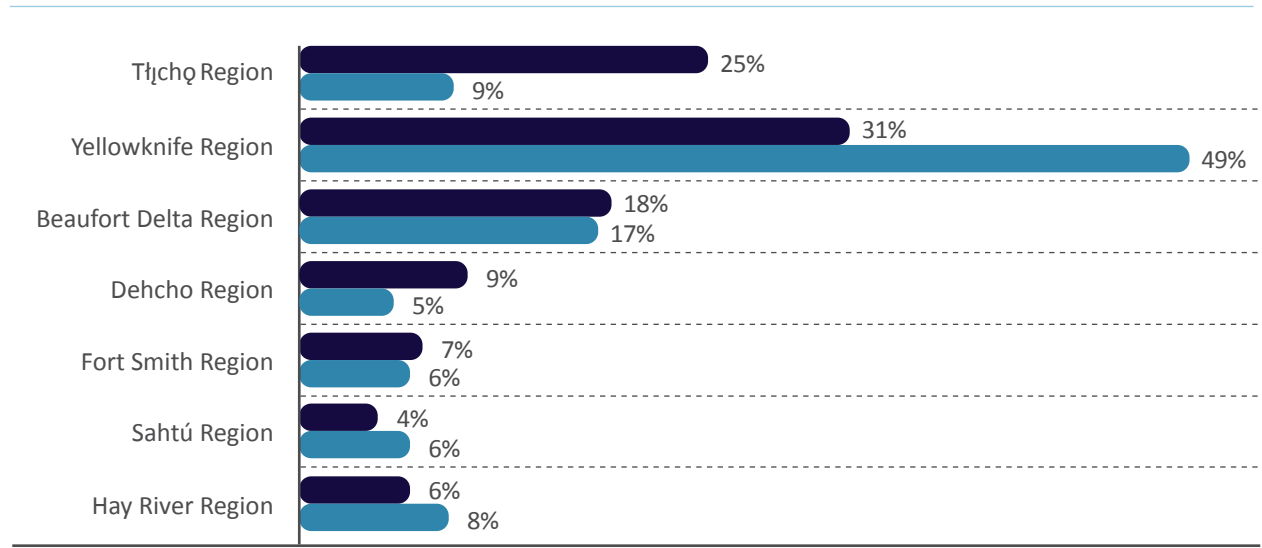
Figure 4.2 Locations of where children/youth received Child and Family Services



CHILDREN AND YOUTH RECEIVING SERVICES BY REGION

Understanding the level of services in each region can help to develop and enhance community-based programs that support children, youth, and families. Services can then be tailored to address regional priorities, community differences and accent community strengths. **Figure 4.3** shows the percentage of the child/youth population in each region and compares it to the percentage of children/youth receiving CFS services in each region.

Figure 4.3 Comparison of the child/youth population with percentage of children/youth receiving CFS services in each region.

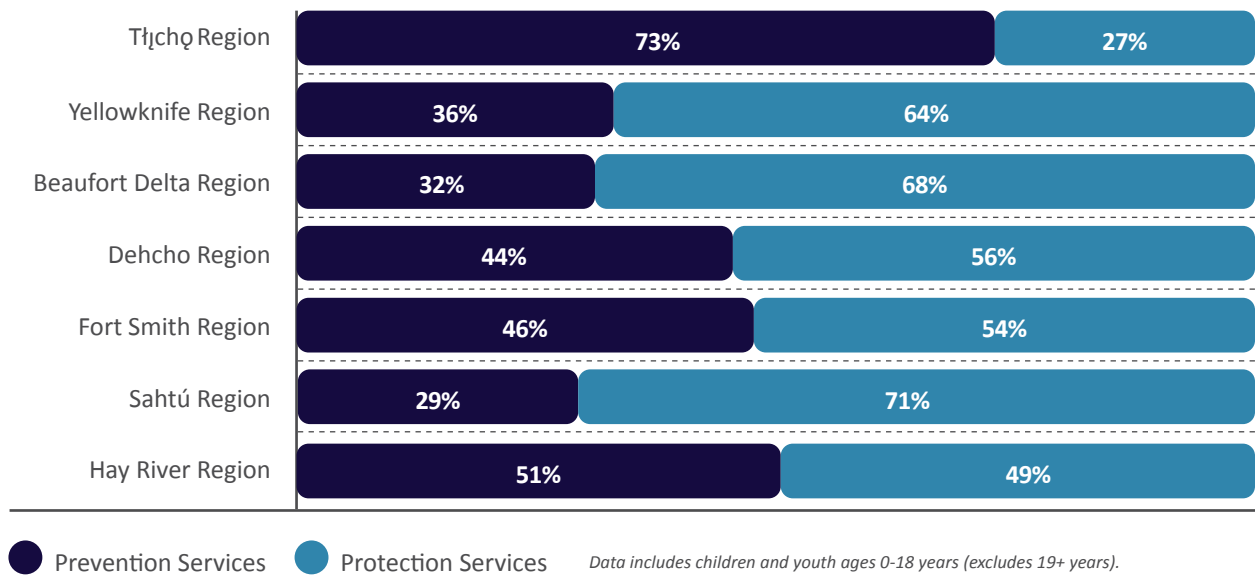


● Percentage of the NWT child/youth population in the region.
 ● Percentage of children/youth receiving CFS services in the region

Data includes children and youth ages 0-18 years (excludes 19+ years).

Figure 4.4 demonstrates the types of services delivered within each region – prevention services and protection services. This information helps with the understanding of regional differences in terms of services delivery as well as community needs.

Figure 4.4 Types of CFS Services delivered to each region in 2022-2023.



REDUCING THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE

Child and Family Services (CFS) in the Northwest Territories (NWT) includes both prevention services and protection services. In 2022-2023, 97% of children and youth receiving CFS in the NWT identified as Indigenous (either First Nations, Inuit, or Métis), despite only representing 57% of the overall child/youth population.

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system in the NWT and across Canada serves as evidence that the CFS system needs to shift the delivery of services. It is important to acknowledge the ongoing impacts of colonial systems and systemic racism that maintain inequities for Indigenous families. As such, creating and sustaining meaningful change within the CFS system means that careful efforts must be made to repair relationships and build trust with Indigenous people and communities.

Provisions under the NWT *Child and Family Services Act* and federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* are intended to invite the participation of Indigenous governments and organizations in planning for children/youth. An integrated approach that involves families and communities is essential in supporting the wellbeing of children and youth.

Analyzing CFS information in different ways informs service delivery improvements. Continuous reflection on how we examine data is equally important to ensure decisions are grounded in the lived experiences of the children, youth, and families we serve.

Children and Youth Receiving Services:

First Nations	76%
Inuit	16%
Métis	5%
Non-Indigenous	3%

Section 5: Promoting Wellbeing

Strong and consistent support systems promote the wellbeing of families. Early intervention and prevention services can offer crucial support during challenging times, particularly when families are challenged with not having the foundational support they deserve.

Child and Family Services (CFS) supports the delivery of early intervention and prevention services through voluntary services agreements and connections to other programs/services (e.g., Family Preservation Program). These services are available to children, youth, families, and expectant parent(s). The aim is to build on the strengths and resilience of families, and support connections to resources, community and culture that promote family unity and wellbeing.

VOLUNTARY SUPPORT SERVICES

Voluntary support services are available when there are no child or youth protection concerns. Three types of agreements fall under voluntary support services:

Voluntary Services Agreements: Support families with children/youth between the ages of 0-18 (inclusive) and expectant parent(s) who would benefit from support as identified by the individual/families.

Support Services Agreements: Support youth, ages 16 to 18 (inclusive) to offer support and guidance in their transition to adulthood.

Extended Support Services Agreements: Support young persons in their transition to adulthood. This service is offered to young persons who were in the permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services on their 19th birthday and until they turn 23 (for more information refer to **Section 10: Extended Support Services Agreements**).

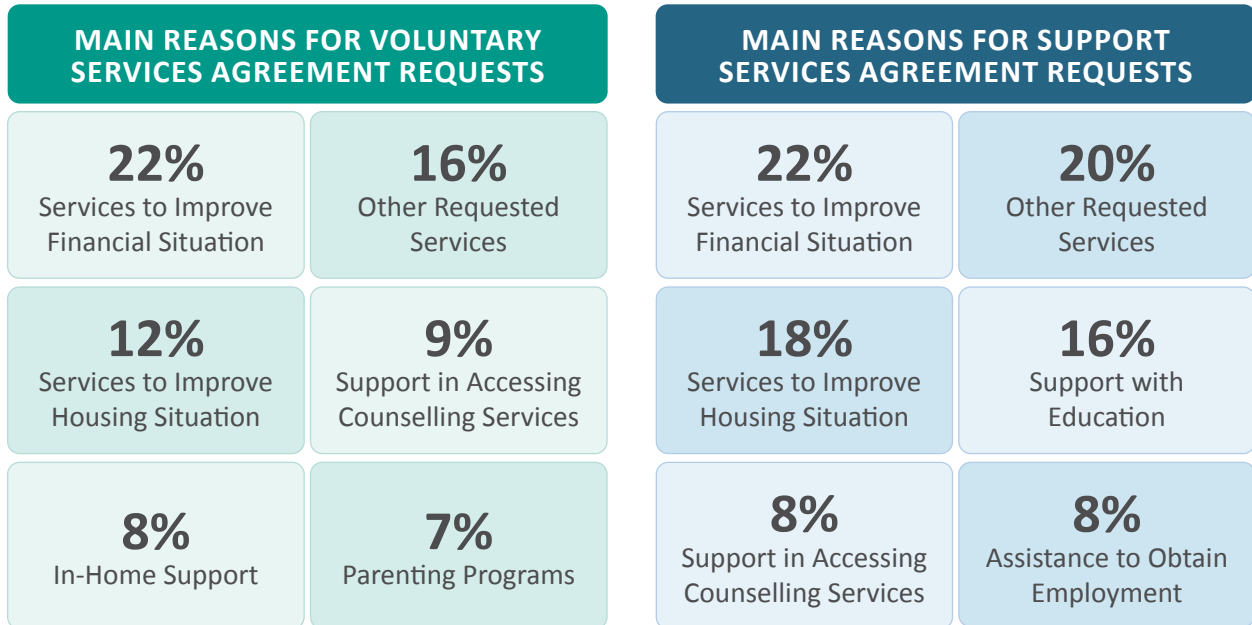
These agreements are tailored to the unique needs of each youth, family, or expectant parent(s). Youth, families, and expectant parent(s) may be encouraged to involve their Indigenous government(s) and/or cultural organization in case planning to integrate Indigenous knowledge, traditions and supports.

In 2022-2023, **575** children/youth* were receiving prevention services in the NWT.

*This refers to the number of unique children/youth who received prevention services (Voluntary Services Agreements & Support Services Agreements) in 2022-2023.

93%
of children/youth receiving services were under a Voluntary Services Agreement.

7%
of youth receiving services were under a Support Services Agreement.



Note the percentages above do not add up to 100% as only the top six reasons are presented. These data also show if multiple types of services identified within one request.

FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAM

The Family Preservation Program continues to work towards the adaptation and implementation of a team-based planning process with the goal of providing coordinated care to families. Through an approach that promotes family choice, family ownership, and family self-determination, services are tailored to meet the distinct needs of each family. The family is the active decision maker – invited to define their own strengths and needs, to define their goals and priorities, and when ready, to gather trusted team members (i.e., community members, extended family, and Elders) to be part of their circle of support.

The core services offered through the Family Preservation Program include:

1. Wraparound supports centered in community and culture.
2. Support with concrete needs, such as housing, food security, etc.
3. Parenting and familial support, such as culturally informed parenting education and family support, service coordination, and informal counselling.

In 2022-2023,
100 families and **27** youth were supported by the Family Preservation Program.

Section 6: Reporting and Investigating Suspected Maltreatment

The safety and wellbeing of children and youth is a shared responsibility of all residents of the Northwest Territories (NWT). When a person suspects that a child/youth's safety may be at risk as a result of maltreatment, it is their responsibility and legal obligation to report this concern to their local Child and Family Services (CFS) office or to their local RCMP detachment. The contact information for CFS offices throughout the NWT is available on the Department of Health and Social Services' website at www.hss.gov.nt.ca/report-child-neglect.

MALTREATMENT, ABUSE AND NEGLECT

The term "maltreatment" is an overarching term that encompasses both "abuse" and "neglect". In the NWT, most suspected cases of abuse and neglect are based upon reports made by service providers or members of the community. Based on the *Child and Family Services Act*, harm to a child/youth is categorized into five main areas:

- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Neglect
- Emotional abuse
- Exposure to family violence

When an initial report is made about child abuse or neglect, a Community Social Services Worker (CSSW) collects the referral information and uses the Structured Decision Making® (SDM®) Screening and Response Priority Assessment tool to determine if an investigation, a non-investigatory intervention, or no further CFS involvement is required.

In instances where an investigation is needed to further assess the immediate safety to the child/youth, the CSSW will complete the investigation and use the SDM® Risk Assessment tool to determine, through consultation with the family, what supports (if any) they may require ensuring the child/youth's safety and wellbeing.

REDEFINING NEGLECT

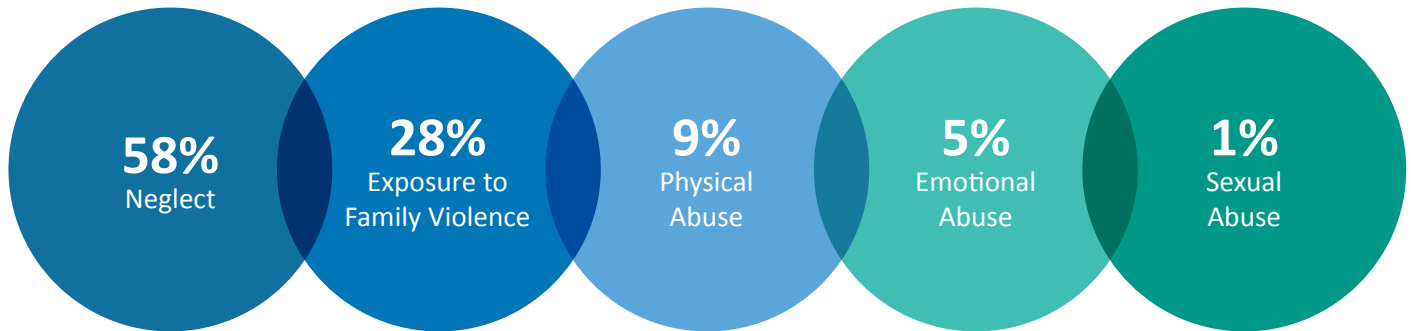
An important distinction within CFS is being able to assess child/youth protection concerns due to neglect versus the inability of a family to meet the basic needs of a child/youth due to socio-economic conditions.

Socio-economic conditions, such as poverty, are not necessarily reflective of an issue of maltreatment but rather a statement of the equitable access to resources necessary for the care of children and youth. This distinction begins with redefining the term "neglect" and giving more training and tools to Community Social Services Workers to assess the root cause of why a child or youth's basic needs are not being met.

Indigenous governments, families, and Community Social Services Workers have recommended the need to define neglect more clearly as separate from the socio-economic conditions a family may be experiencing, as they warrant different supports and services. CFS continues to prioritize redefining its approach to neglect and support changes in standards, training, and practice.

In 2022-2023, the most common sources of reports of suspected child maltreatment were RCMP, family members, community members, school staff, and custodial parents.

Figure 6.1 Reports of suspected maltreatment (by type) in 2022-2023



In 2022-2023, neglect was the most reported form of maltreatment in the NWT, followed by exposure to family violence.

Concerns related to “Neglect” and exposure to family violence are often the result of complex intersections of the social determinants of health⁵, including systemic racism, and intergenerational trauma resulting from colonialism, experienced by parents/caregivers. Awareness and knowledge of the root causes impacting child maltreatment is a key step towards developing interventions designed to better promote the safety and wellbeing of children and youth. Additionally, CFS recognizes the importance of supporting individuals who have experienced intimate partner violence as an integral part of preventing child/youth maltreatment. For example, CFS will often act as a bridge to other support service providers, such as the RCMP and counsellors.

⁵ Social determinants of health can be described as non-medical factors that influence health outcomes.



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

1

A concern about suspected child maltreatment is received by Child and Family Services.

In 2022-2023, 1,585 unique reports were received with 2,086 suspected child maltreatment concerns*.

2

The Community Social Services Worker will collect screening information to determine if an investigation should be opened.

In 2022-2023, 1030 investigations were opened.

3

During an investigation, the Community Social Services Worker will visit the family home and interview the children/youth, parents and any other individuals that may have information for the investigation.

In 2022-2023, 943 unique households and 3,137 unique children/youth were interviewed.

4

Child and Family Services will support children/youth and families by offering services to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the children and youth.

* 2,086 suspected child maltreatment concerns reported differs from the total number of unique child maltreatment reports received (1,585) as: 1) More than one person may report suspected maltreatment concerns they have about a specific child or youth and 2) There can be multiple children or youth involved and more than one type of child maltreatment within one report.

RECURRENCE OF MALTREATMENT

Recurrence refers to the re-opening of a CFS file within a twelve-month period of its closing. Recurrence of maltreatment can be understood through three different indicators:

REPORTS OF SUSPECTED PROTECTION CONCERNS

Of the **914** children who were the subject of reports of suspected protection concerns in 2021-2022

48.7% were subject of **another report of suspected protection concerns** within 12 months of the initial report.

INVESTIGATIONS

Of the **904** children who were the subject of investigations in 2021-2022

48.6% were subject of **another investigation** within 12 months of the initial report.

SUBSTANTIATED PROTECTION CONCERNS

Of the **536** children who were the subject of substantiated protection concerns in 2021-2022

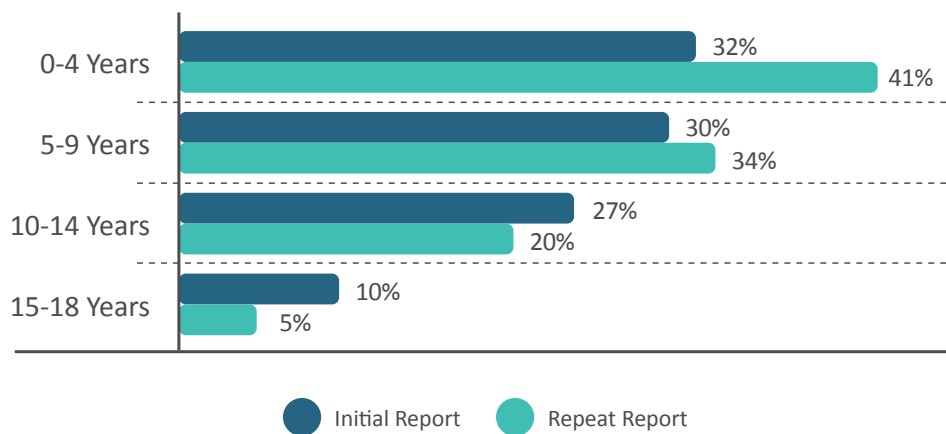
40.5% were subject of **another substantiated protection concerns** within 12 months of the initial report.

High recurrence of child maltreatment may mean the family was not provided with adequate supports to meet their unique needs and situations. It may also mean the family did not have the right supports in place after they stopped receiving services through CFS.

Differences between genders, age groups and maltreatment types were examined for initial and repeat reports of suspected maltreatment. Understanding these differences in the recurrence of maltreatment helps to tailor interventions and be more responsive to the needs of families.

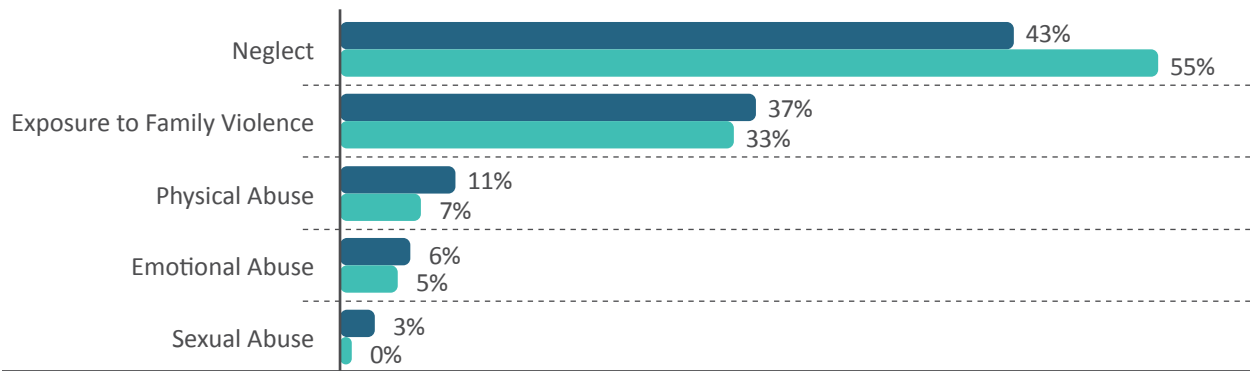
Female and male genders were almost equally represented in initial and repeat reports. Non-binary identities were also considered, but the numbers were too low to be reported as this may inadvertently identify the individual(s).

Younger children between the ages of zero and ten years old are more likely to be the subject of a report of suspected maltreatment. This is consistent between initial and repeat reports. People may be more alert to the risk of maltreatment for young children when compared with adolescents. Younger children may also be more vulnerable to maltreatment.



Suspected neglect and exposure to family violence were most commonly reported to CFS. Socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, housing insecurity, and financial instability can at times be interpreted by concerned observers as situations of neglect. Anyone who suspects child abuse and/or neglect has a responsibility to report these concerns to their local Child and Family Services office. The Community Social Services Workers are guided by practice standards to determine if the suspected maltreatment has occurred.

Socioeconomic factors may also intersect with the impact of intergenerational trauma, which can contribute to the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in both prevention and protection services. It is important that CFS re-examines how neglect is defined and how we can better support families through prevention and family preservation services, outside of a child protection context.



● Initial Report ● Repeat Report

Suspected neglect and exposure to family violence were more likely to be re-reported to CFS. This speaks to the complexity of addressing the underlying socio-economic factors and intergenerational trauma. This further highlights the need to support families using an integrated and holistic approach through a variety of social supports and services.



Section 7: Plan of Care Committees and Agreements

In cases of substantiated maltreatment, families are provided with the option of a Plan of Care Agreement (POCA), a voluntary and less intrusive approach than what they may experience through a formal court process. A POCA supports family unity and provides the family an opportunity to identify the supports necessary for healing. Families who enter a POCA are still entitled to legal counsel.

POCAs bring together the family, the Community Social Services Worker (CSSW), and any other individuals/organizations identified by the family to agree on supports and services that build on the strengths and needs of the family. This group of participants are known as the “Plan of Care Committee”.

When possible, and in line with the best interests of the child, the priority is for children to continue to live in their parental home while the family receives services.

Of the 24% of children who were being cared for outside of the family home through a POCA, 18% remained in their family community, 3% involved a child moving to another community, and 3% received services out-of-territory.

In 2022-2023, **500** children* had a Plan of Care Agreement.

*This refers to the number of unique children with a Plan of Care Agreement in 2022-2023.

76%

Plan of Care Agreement –
Children remain in the home

24%

Plan of Care Agreement –
Children cared for **outside**
of the home

PLAN OF CARE AGREEMENTS – PLACING THE CHILD OUT-OF-HOME

Child and Family Services (CFS) makes every effort to provide services in the child/youth's parental or family home. In some cases, a child/youth cannot reside safely within the parental or family home and an out-of-home placement is needed. In this instance, a CSSW discusses appropriate placement options with the parent and the child/youth in attempt to find a home where the child/youth feels comfortable and secure. In alignment with the federal *Act respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families*, CSSWs follow "Placement Priorities" to ensure all efforts are made to preserve the connection between a child/youth and their family, community, and culture (for more information refer to **Section 9: Placement Resources**).

RIGHTS OF PARENTS, CAREGIVERS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Parents, legal caregivers, children, and youth are entitled to be informed of their right to be represented by legal counsel throughout the protection process, including the plan of care stage. These rights are protected under the *Child and Family Services Act*. The Act also requires, to the extent that it is practicable, that the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services facilitate access to legal counsel and, where appropriate, the services of an interpreter. Similarly, children and youth can seek independent counsel through the Office of the Children's Lawyer.

It is not uncommon for parents to experience increased stress and anxiety when they discuss the care of their children or youth with a CSSW; therefore, it is important that CSSWs show empathy and compassion, and ensure every effort is made to help parents navigate their options and assert their rights.

Additionally, a CSSW may enter into or offer referrals to mediation services to parents, legal caregivers, children, and youth in an effort for dispute resolution outside of the formal court system. Through mediation, parents, legal caregivers, children, and youth can decide their own solutions based on a collaborative and non-adversarial approach. In general, these processes are intended to ensure that the rights of the parents, legal caregivers, children, and youth are upheld and protected during the Plan of Care process.



Section 8: Temporary Custody Orders and Permanent Custody Orders

In certain circumstances, it may be safer to care for children/youth outside the family home for longer periods of time, especially when families are experiencing numerous challenges and barriers to wellness.

When supports and services for parents do not address safety concerns, a child may be placed in the temporary or permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services to preserve their safety and wellbeing.

Children/youth who are brought into temporary or permanent care reside with alternative caregivers in another home. The Community Social Services Worker follows placement priorities to help maintain cultural and familial connections (for more information refer to **Section 9: Placement Resources**). The goal is to provide children with nurturing care homes that offer holistic connection and supports to thrive. In instances where reunification with the family home is not possible, the child/youth may continue to live with foster caregivers, extended family or be adopted, depending on each unique situation. More information related to adoptions is found in **Section 12: Adoptions**.

71%

of children/youth (102)
were in **Permanent Care**

In the NWT, **143** children/youth were in permanent or temporary care in 2022-2023.

29%

of children/youth (41)
were in **Temporary Care**

Children/Youth in Permanent Care by Age:



Almost 80% of children/youth in permanent care were over the age of ten. As children/youth in care are aging, ongoing opportunities must be offered to maintain a connection to their families, community, culture, language, and identity.

Number of children/youth in Permanent Care over time:

172

children/youth
2013-2014

102

children/youth
2022-2023

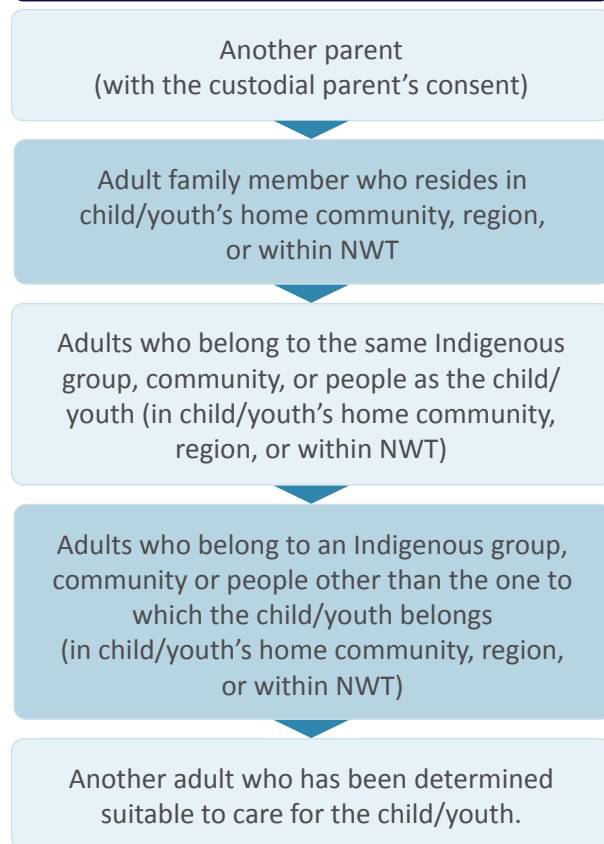
40.7%
decrease in the number of
children/youth in permanent care
over the past 10 years

The decrease in the number of children/youth in permanent care speaks to the resiliency of families and communities and a shared dedication to maintaining nurturing and supportive environments in which a child/youth can grow. When children/youth stay in the care of their family and extended support network, it allows them to remain rooted in their community and culture. The reduction in the number of children/youth in permanent care may represent the broader system change currently being undertaken by CFS. It can also suggest the changes in practice which promote family unity and the collaboration of community members, Indigenous governments, and families in the care and support of children/youth.

Section 9: Placement Resources

Home, family, community, and cultural connections are all important parts of a person's identity and wellbeing. Child and Family Services (CFS) recognizes that efforts must be made to protect and promote the social and cultural rights of a child/youth's life. Community ties include extended family, friends, and cultural activities, which form a child/youth's social world. These relationships are best preserved within the child/youth's home community, particularly when services are being provided through CFS.

FIGURE 9.1 PLACEMENT CONSIDERATIONS IN ORDER OF PRIORITY:



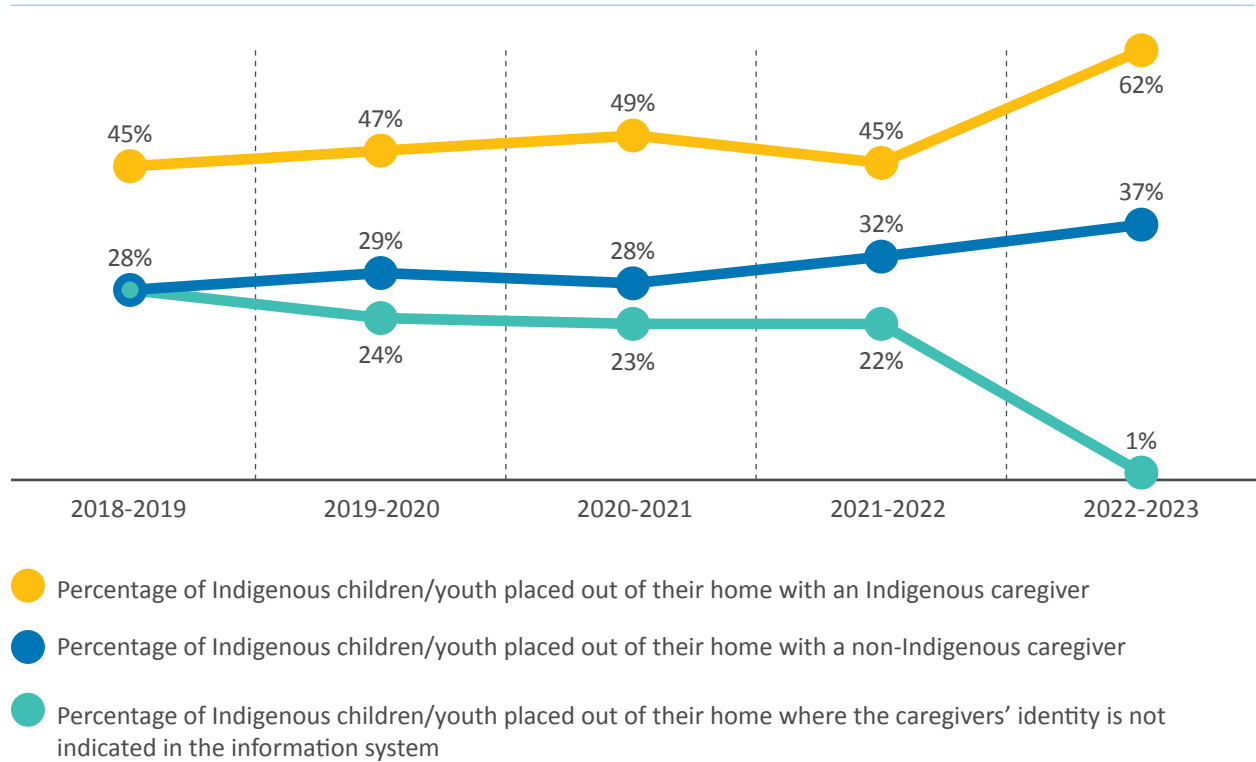
PLACEMENT PRIORITIES

When services are required, CFS makes every effort to provide them in the child/youth's parental or family home. In some cases, a child/youth cannot safely reside in the parental or family home, and an out-of-home placement is needed. In this case, a Community Social Services Worker (CSSW) discusses appropriate placement options with the parent and the child/youth to find a home where the child/youth feels comfortable and secure.

Placements must be considered in the order of priority, as per **Figure 9.1**. Placement priorities promote the best interest of the child/youth, by ensuring CSSWs make every effort to maintain the connection between a child/youth and their family, community, and culture. Early and diligent outreach to extended family members helps maintain and strengthen important family relationships during out-of-home care. Depending on each unique situation, it may also support the journey towards reunification, placements with extended family, and/or adoption.

In 2022-2023, 62% of Indigenous children/youth who required support outside their familial home were living with an Indigenous caregiver (see **Figure 9.2**).

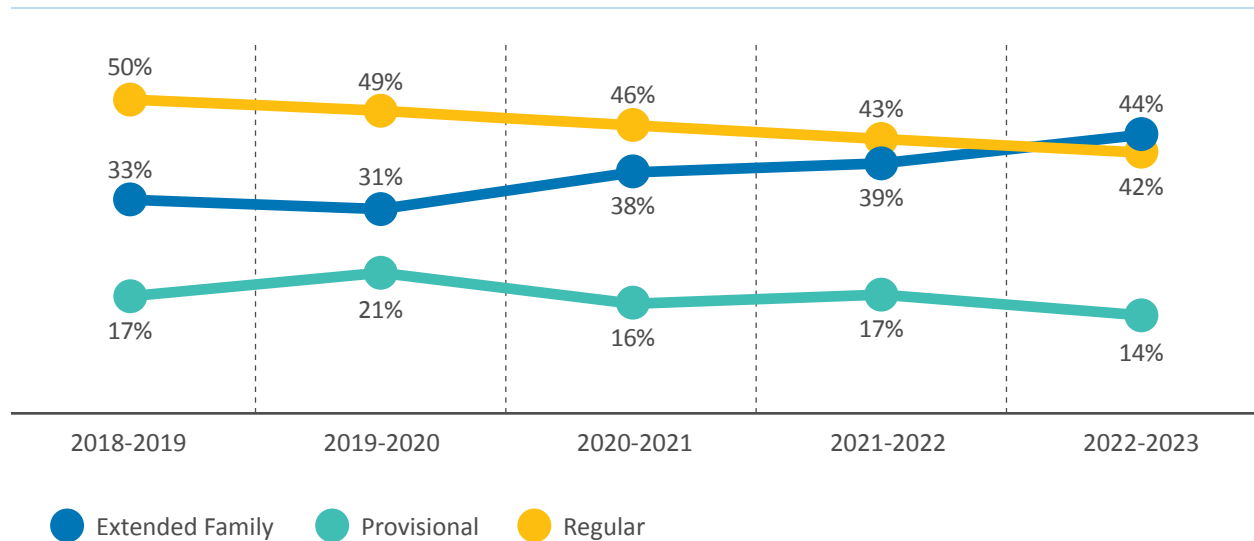
Figure 9.2 Overall proportions of Indigenous children/youth placed in an out-of-home placement resource, by Indigenous caregiver identity



Over the past five years, improvements have been made in recording the Indigenous identity of caregivers (from 72% to 99% recorded identity of caregivers). In 2022-2023, there was particular focus on improving the recording of this information in Matrix NT along with other mechanisms. This information is important as we measure the impact of “Placement Priorities” through the implementation of the federal *Act respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* and our commitment to increasing the number of Indigenous placement caregivers, as outlined in the ***GNWT response to SCOSD’s Report on the Child and Family Services Act.***

In 2022-2023, there were 138 out-of-home placement resources across the NWT. The proportion of regular placement resources is steadily decreasing, while the proportion of extended family placement resources is increasing (see **Figure 9.3**). When children/youth are placed with extended family members, they can better maintain cultural and familial connections.

Figure 9.3 Overall proportion of out-of-home placement resources, by placement type



REUNIFICATION EFFORTS

Family reunification is the process of supporting a child/youth, who was in an out-of-home placement, to be in the care of their parent or extended families. This is the main goal for short-term and long-term case planning. As such, it is important to focus on practices that help achieve successful reunification. Parents and extended families are more willing to participate and engage in activities that promote reunification when Community Social Services Workers develop meaningful relationships with parents and follow their lead in planning.

CFS recognizes the unique nature of extended family relationships. The data in the 2022- 2023 Annual Report suggests evidence of collaborative efforts to keep children/youth in their home communities and placed within their larger support network.

Section 10: Extended Support Services Agreements

Youth in care have the right to positive supports, resources, and safe housing as they transition to adulthood to enable them to thrive as adults.

Extended Support Service Agreements (ESSAs) are offered to young persons who were in the permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services on their 19th birthday and until they turn 23. ESSAs are voluntary agreements that can provide supplementary support (financial and non-financial), service navigation, and connections to other supports/services to help the young person transition to adulthood. Young persons may opt in or out of ESSAs at any time.

The ESSA offers reliable, consistent support during this critical period of a young person's life that respects choice and encourages self-determination, while also providing guidance. Therefore, an ESSA gives the young person control to identify how and when they need supports.

Youth between the ages of 15 and 18 (inclusive) represent 41% of those in permanent care. It is important that youth have the support they need to develop a transition plan that incorporates short-term and long-term goals, and resources needed to establish a healthy network of support as they approach their 19th birthday.

In 2022-2023, a total of

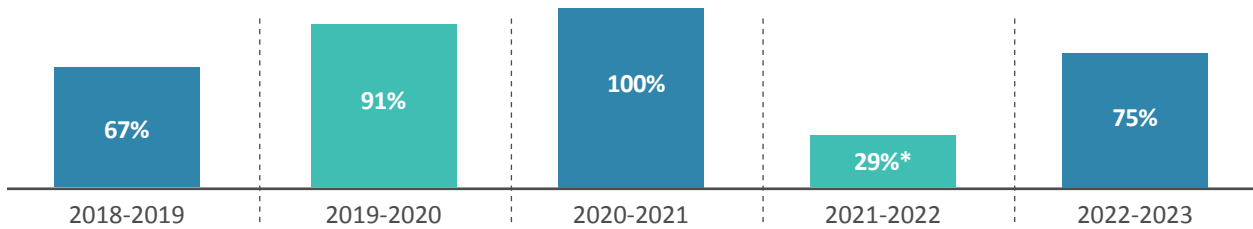
39

young persons received services under an ESSA.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE TRANSITION PLAN INCLUDE:

- Social and emotional skills development
- Healthy relationship skills
- Opportunities to make decisions and take risks
- Skills that enhance independent living
- Educational materials and supports
- Skills and resources to find and maintain housing
- Financial literacy and guidance
- Career and education goals
- Mental wellness support
- Preservation of culture
- Connections to community-based programs

Figure 10.1 Percentage of young persons who reached the age of majority (19 years) that signed an ESSA



* A typographical error was made in the 2021-2022 Director's Report, which incorrectly stated that 23% of young persons who reached the age of majority signed an ESSA. The correct percentage (29%) for 2021-2022 has been presented in the 2022-2023 Director's Report.

The number of young persons who are eligible to sign an ESSA is small and varies from year to year. Small differences in the number of individuals who signed an ESSA can have a large, apparent effect on the overall percentage.

The decision to enter an ESSA is unique to each young person. The young person may have established supports elsewhere (i.e., employment, income assistance, student financial assistance, adult services, etc.) and/or they want to seek independence from the CFS system. It is important to note that support offered through an ESSA will continue to be available to these young persons until their 23rd birthday, as they can opt-in and out of these services voluntarily.



Section 11: Out-of-Territory Specialized Services

Child and Family Services (CFS) provides a range of specialized services to meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and families. Community-based programming is the first option to assist children/youth with their individual counselling or treatment needs; CFS works with community partners to identify local, northern options for children and youth. If those needs cannot be met in-territory, out-of-territory specialized services may be explored with the child/youth, family, and caregivers, when appropriate.

The Out-of-Territory Specialized Services Program supports children, youth, and families whose needs go beyond the capacity of Northwest

Territories (NWT) programs and services. These specialized services are available in British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. Children and youth are individually assessed and matched with services that best meet their identified level of care and service needs.

Family therapeutic treatment services are offered as an option through the Out-of-Territory Specialized Services Program. The Family Treatment Program in Saskatchewan provides support to the whole family with the goal of improving family safety, family functioning, and parent and child wellbeing.

In 2022-2023, there were a total of **31** children and youth receiving specialized services outside the NWT.

42% of children/youth in out-of-territory specialized services were supported through a **Family Treatment Program**.

58% of children/youth in out-of-territory specialized services were supported through an **Individual/Group Treatment program**.

Section 12: Adoptions

Adoption refers to the process in which the social and legal care of a child is transferred from the natural parent to the adoptive parent(s). Adoption can take place for several reasons and can look different for every child, depending on their unique situation.

In the NWT, there are four (4) types of adoption:

- 1. Custom Adoption** is a long-standing practice amongst Indigenous people of the NWT and is the most common type of adoption. Under the *Aboriginal Custom Adoption Recognition Act* (ACARA), Custom Adoption Commissioners are nominated by their local Indigenous governments and organizations based on their knowledge of Indigenous customary law.
- 2. Departmental Adoption** only applies to a child/youth placed in the permanent custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services (CFS) through a court order which is granted under the following circumstances:
 - a.** The court has determined the child/youth needs protection, has made a declaration that a child/youth needs protection, and has determined it is in the child/youth's best interests. Family reunification is always the first priority, but when that option is not possible, adoption can be one way to meet their essential needs. With the consent of the parent(s) and child if 12 years of age or older, their Indigenous government(s) and/or cultural organization would be notified and asked to engage and collaborate in the planning process for the child/youth prior to an adoption being finalized.
 - b.** With the consent of a parent, the court has determined it is in the best interests of the child/youth to place the child/youth in the

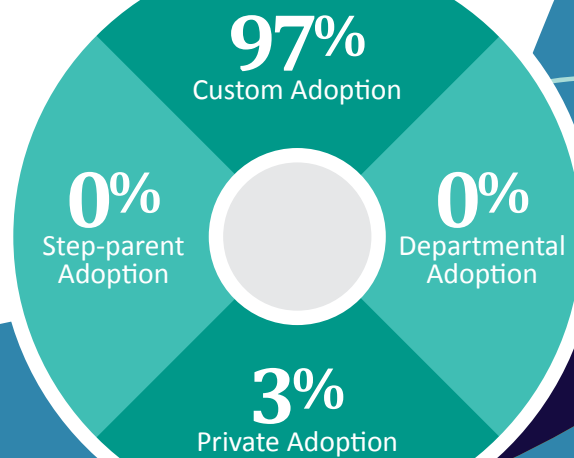
permanent care of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services for the purposes of adoption.

- 3. Step-Parent Adoption** refers to an adoption by a non-biological parent wishing to adopt the children/youth of their spouse or common-law partner.
- 4. Private Adoption** refers to adoption arranged between two families. In these adoptions, the birth parent(s) choose the adoptive family.

In 2022-2023, 29 of 30 adoptions in the NWT were custom adoptions.

From 2013-2023, the average number of adoptions per year is

41



Section 13: Key Accomplishments from 2022-2023

In April 2022, the Child and Family Services (CFS) system implemented a one-year action plan to act as a “bridge plan” to link the 2019-21 Quality Improvement Plan with a broader plan for system transformation initiatives. The “Bridge Plan” outlines 12 actions the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) committed to improve service delivery for children, youth, and families, and the CFS system as a whole.

Key accomplishments from 2022-2023 include:

CULTURAL SAFETY IN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Part of the commitment in the “Bridge Plan” was to work closely with the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism (CSAR) Division to begin embedding cultural safety and anti-racism principles throughout the CFS system.

In 2022-2023, the CSAR Division tailored the existing CSAR Training specifically to focus on harmful historical and present-day CFS policies that have contributed to anti-Indigenous racism and systemic barriers for clients. This two-day CSAR training was delivered to 17 CFS staff in November 2022, with the view to offer this training annually. CFS Staff can also participate the regular CSAR training or the one specific to Indigenous staff if the staff member identifies as Indigenous.

In 2022-2023, updates were made to the Cultural Support Plan⁶ in collaboration with the CSAR Division to support the mandate of the Federal Act. The Department is in the process of developing training that will further support the implementation of the Cultural Support Plan⁶ for children and youth.

The CSAR and CFS Divisions collaborated in the development of the Annual Report of the Director of Child and Family Services. The report was reviewed with a lens of cultural safety and anti-racism along with careful attention in the way the information was analyzed and presented.

⁶ A cultural support plan is used when children or youth is supported placed outside their family home. The purpose of the plan is to outline how cultural supports will be recognized, promoted, and preserved to maintain the child/youth's youth connection with their family, culture, and community.

AN ACT RESPECTING FIRST NATIONS, INUIT AND MÉTIS CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

The federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* (Federal Act) sets out minimum principles and standards for service provision that apply across Canada when providing child and family services to Indigenous children and youth. Since the implementation of the Federal Act in January 2020, the Department continuously revises practice standards and procedures to ensure best alignment with the national principles under the Federal Act.

The Department has reached out to all Indigenous governments in the Northwest Territories (NWT) with an offer to meet and discuss its implementation of the Federal Act. This offer

remains active, should an Indigenous government want more information on the GNWT's implementation of the Federal Act. Throughout 2022-2023, the Department continued to share data with a number of Indigenous governments on the number of children and youth receiving services in their communities.

The Department has been participating in coordination agreement discussions with the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and the federal government since April 2022 to identify how it can support the successful implementation of the *Inuvialuit Qitunrariit Inuuniarnikkun Maligaksat* in the NWT.

EXPANDING THE NWT FAMILY PRESERVATION PROGRAM

The 2022-2023 year was the first full year the NWT Family Preservation Program was offered by all three authorities. The Family Preservation Program expanded support to youth during 2022-2023. The areas of support provided to youth included: assistance with personal wellness and safety; stabilization of concrete needs such as housing and employment; school attendance; assistance with access to recreational and social opportunities, and assistance with the transition into adulthood out of permanent care.



ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF QUALITY WITHIN CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

In 2022, the Department and Authorities completed a CFS system-wide audit, where compliance with the CFS Act and key standards was reviewed. The audit covered the period between April 1, 2021, and March 31, 2022, and included child prevention, child protection and foster care files that were open at any point during the audit period.

The audits are an examination of the system's compliance to practice standards aimed at highlighting system pressures and opportunities to address areas for improvements through Authority-specific action plans. We are committed to the ongoing monitoring of areas of pressure to ensure the system's quality and compliance through the quality review process.

Based on the audit, the key strengths and areas for improvement are as follows:

KEY STRENGTHS

- Most investigations were completed within legislative timelines and as per standard requirements before initiating ongoing services.
- Prevention agreements were supportive to families regarding access to food and necessary items to meet their basic needs.
- The majority of Plan of Care Agreements (POCA) were signed in a timely manner and the terms of the POCAs were appropriate.
- Family arrangements as placements options have increasingly been explored and utilized.
- The majority of Child Protection Workers applied to child protection court within legislated timelines as set out in the *CFSA*.
- Foster care files showed significant contact with foster caregivers and the Foster Care and Adoption Worker.
- Access provisions as outlined in permanent custody orders were followed and developed with the input of legal counsel.

KEY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Documentation and approach to interviews with caregivers, children, and youth.
- Centering goals in case plans around children/youth rather than parents/caregivers.
- Completing case reviews as per standard requirements.
- Updating key information to assess the suitability of existing foster caregivers.
- Long-term planning for children and youth in the permanent custody and care of the Director.
- Advising lawful caregivers of their right to access legal counsel throughout the child protection processes.
- Providing notice to family members and Applicable *Aboriginal*⁷ organizations related to apprehension orders, child protection orders and youth protection orders.

⁷ The term "Aboriginal" in the context of "applicable Aboriginal organization" reflects the terminology currently used in the Child and Family Services Act and the Adoption Act. DHSS will propose that this outdated terminology is revised when each Act is amended in the future.

FOCUSING ON COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Access to safe housing, mental wellness supports, recreational opportunities, and pre-and post-natal care are the building blocks supporting families and communities. As such, CFS staff have actively participated on Interdepartmental Working Groups that focus on the topics of youth, family violence, and integrated services delivery.

In 2022-2023, the topic of CFS was added as a standing agenda for the Indigenous Advisory Body⁸. Throughout 2022-2023, CFS leadership met with the Indigenous Advisory Body to discuss general updates, data, and receive guidance on the proposed direction of the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Plan and Action Plan, which has an anticipated release in November 2023.

⁸ The Indigenous Advisory Body was established to provide guidance and advice on incorporating Indigenous tradition, culture, and healing practices within the NWT Health and Social Services system and aims to address inequities experienced by Indigenous residents when accessing health and social services.



Section 14: Moving Forward

The Quality Improvement Plans (2019-2021 and 2022-2023) laid the foundation for system transformation through the advancement and integration of numerous initiatives within the Child and Family Services (CFS) system. For example, 56 new positions, including the Family Preservation Program, were introduced to the CFS system between 2019 and 2021. Numerous enhancements have been made to the audit process and quality reviews as well as data monitoring and reporting. There are improved mechanisms for clinical supervision, staff engagement, training, and professional development. While progress has been made, there remains much work to be done in transforming CFS into a culturally safe system that supports children and youth in a meaningful way and ensures that more families stay together. The following describes our commitments in 2023-2024 and beyond:

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT

The Standing Committee on Social Development (SCOSD) initiated their review of the *Child and Family Services Act* (CFS Act) during the 19th Legislative Assembly. In April 2022, the Department of Health and Social Services released a discussion paper outlining proposed changes to the CFS Act to enable residents to provide feedback on these proposed changes. A *What We Heard Report* is available online that summarizes feedback received from Indigenous governments, residents with experience in the CFS system, as well as partners in service delivery. In October 2022, the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) responded to recommendations released by the SCOSD on their review of the CFS Act.

The recommendations from SCOSD and *What We Heard Report* will inform the amendments to the CFS Act during the 20th Legislative Assembly and continued system transformation efforts.

INTEGRATION AND COMMUNICATION

Addressing the overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system requires a whole-of-government approach, including engagement and pathways for community and Indigenous government participation. We must communicate with communities, families and staff in a way that is accessible and meets their needs. Finding opportunities for knowledge exchange will also ensure that CFS is learning and growing based on what we hear from communities, families, and staff. We will continue to seek out new opportunities for integration with NWT and GNWT initiatives; actively participate on existing Interdepartmental Working Groups; and have continued participation with the Indigenous Advisory Body. We are committed to working with partners with shared interests to strengthen the design, delivery, and access of CFS services.

OUR PATH FORWARD

The overrepresentation of Indigenous children and youth in the CFS system in the NWT and across Canada serves as evidence that the CFS system needs to shift the delivery of services. Guidance from the Cultural Safety and Anti-Racism Division and IAB along with key documents, including recommendations from the Standing Committee on Social Development on their review of the *Child and Family Services Act*, will serve as a foundation for the development of the new five-year action plan. In 2022-2023, the overarching activities and vision for the Action Plan will be presented to a variety of partners for their feedback.

The proposed direction of the Action Plan include:

- Working collaboratively with Indigenous governments who are developing and enacting child and family services laws under the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* or through a final self-government agreement.
- Establishing multiple pathways for children and youth to be better connected to their home, family, community, and culture.
- Improving the funding structure and training for foster caregivers.
- Strengthening the readiness of youth when they transition to adulthood, such as support for housing sustainability, mental wellness, and healthy ways of coping with life stressors.
- Examining and addressing systemic racism in the CFS system generally, including impacts and barriers specific to the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff.
- Exploring in-territory options that can be sustainably delivered to better meet the needs of children and youth.
- Reducing administrative demands for frontline staff to facilitate increased opportunities to connect with families.

In 2023-2024, we will release the Child, Youth and Family Services Strategic Direction and Action Plan, which envisions broader and deeper changes to fundamentally shift the CFS system towards the goals of a culturally safe health and social services system and providing better supports to children and youth in ways that promote their overall safety and wellbeing.



Appendix A: Glossary

- LEGEND**
- ◆ Definition is from the Department of Health and Social Services' *Caring for Our People: Cultural Safety Action Plan (2019)*.
 - Definition is in accordance with the federal Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth, and families.
 - Definition is based on the current *Child and Family Services Act*, and the *CFS Standards and Procedures Manual*. Definitions will continue to be examined and updated as we adapt to a changing system, particularly through the implementation of this Strategic Direction and Action Plan.

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is the ongoing action to identify, address and prevent racism in all its form⁹.

Applicable Aboriginal¹⁰ Organization ●

An Indigenous government or organization set out in accordance with the NWT's Child and Family Services Regulations. A list identifying applicable Aboriginal organizations is maintained by the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services and can be found here - www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/applicable-aboriginal-organizations.pdf

Apprehension ●

Apprehension occurs when a child is removed because it has been determined that the child is at risk of immediate harm. A child can be apprehended from the care of the parent/care provider or from the person having care of the child at the time of the apprehension.

Children who are apprehended are placed in the care of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. After an apprehension, a child can transition back into the care of their parent/care provider/person having care of the child without the matter going to court when the protection issue is resolved in less than 72 hours.

Apprehension less than 72 hours ●

Apprehension less than 72 hours means that a child transitions back to the care of their parent/care provider/person having care of the child without the matter going to court when the protection issue is resolved in less than 72 hours.

Care Provider ■

A care provider means a person who has primary responsibility for providing the day-to-day care of an Indigenous child/youth, other than the child/youth's parent, including in accordance with the customs or traditions of the Indigenous group, community, or people to which the child/youth belongs.

⁹ Berman, G. & Paradies, Y. (2008). Racism, disadvantage and multiculturalism: towards effective anti-racist praxis. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 33 (2), p.214-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802302272>.

¹⁰ The term "Aboriginal" in the context of "applicable Aboriginal organization" reflects the terminology currently used in the *Child and Family Services Act* and the *Adoption Act*. DHSS will propose that this outdated terminology is revised when each Act is amended in the future.

Caregiver (placement resource) ●

A caregiver is an individual providing a service on behalf of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services, such as a placement resource for the child or youth when they must be cared for outside of the home.

A caregiver can be:

- Extended Family Caregiver: the child/youth's extended family
- Provisional Caregiver: a community member who is known to the child/youth/family
- Regular caregiver: someone who is not known to the child/youth/family

Case Plan ●

A Case Plan is a plan that must be established for a child/youth by a Community Social Services Worker.

A Case Plan generally provides details on:

- Where and with whom the child/youth will live;
- Support services promote the safety and wellbeing of child/youth in the home;
- counselling, mental health supports and wellbeing;

- how the child/youth will maintain connection with parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth where the child/youth will not be living with them;
- the child/youth's education;
- the child/youth's cultural, social and recreational activities; and
- any other matter the Community Social Services Worker considers necessary and in the best interests of the child/youth

Child ●

A child means a person who is under 16 years of age (i.e. 0-15 years, inclusive).

Child Protection Order ●

Child Protection Order ensures the protection, health and safety of a child by providing care for the child while the parent/care provider(s)/person having care of the child are unable or unavailable to care for the child. The Community Social Services Worker can apply to the courts for a Supervision Order, Temporary Custody Order or a Permanent Custody Order.

Community Social Services Worker ●

Community Social Services Workers support children, youth, and families in the NWT.

Community Social Services Workers receive specialized training to become statutorily appointed as "Child Protection Workers" under the *Child and Family Services Act*. Foster Care and Adoption Workers are also Community Social Services Workers who receive specialized training and are appointed under the *Adoption Act*. Once appointed, they have very specific duties and responsibilities when providing child and family services.

Cultural Safety ◆

Cultural safety is defined as an outcome where Indigenous peoples feel safe and respected, free of racism and discrimination when accessing health and social services.

Cultural Support Plan ●

The Cultural Support Plan supports a child or youth in reclaiming or maintaining connection with their identified community and/or organizations and clearly identifies goals and responsibilities for cultural support. Furthermore, the Cultural Support Plan contains the child/youth's community/regional history, family and kinship connections, cultural knowledge and traditions.

Director of Adoptions ●

Director of Adoptions is appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Services under the NWT's *Adoption Act*. Duties and powers of the Director of Adoptions are set out under the Act.

Director of Child and Family Services ●

Director of Child and Family Services is appointed by the Minister of Health and Social Services under the NWT's *Child and Family Services Act*. Duties and powers of the Director of Child and Family Services are set out under the Act.

Equity ◆

Equity in health means that everyone has the opportunity to be healthy and recognize that differences in social determinants of health impact peoples' ability to achieve their highest potential of health. Achieving equity requires allocation of resources and designing policies and programs that target populations with the most disproportionate disparities.

Emotional Abuse ●

Emotional abuse is a pattern of negative behaviour, repeated destructive interpersonal interactions, or a single, significant destructive interaction by the parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth toward the child/youth.

The impact on the child/youth of being exposed to these emotionally harmful behaviours may include depression, significant anxiety or withdrawal, self-destructive or aggressive behaviour, or delayed development.

Extended Support Services Agreement ●

Extended Support Services Agreements is a written agreement that supports young persons in their transition to adulthood. This service is offered to young persons who were in the permanent care and custody of the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services on their 19th birthday and until they turn 23.

Exposure to Family Violence ●

Exposure to family violence is considered a form of child/youth maltreatment. Exposure to family violence is considered when there is evidence of family violence between two or more adults in the household, and the child/youth's safety is of immediate concern.

Family ■

When providing services to an Indigenous child or youth, family includes a person whom a child/youth considers to be a close relative or whom the Indigenous group, community, or people to which the child/youth belongs considers, in accordance with the customs, traditions, or customary adoption practices of that Indigenous group, community, or people, to be a close relative of the child/youth.

This broad definition of “family” is also being applied, where applicable, when providing services to non-Indigenous children/youth.

Family Mapping ●

A technique used to create a visual representation of a person’s family and relationships between members. This technique helps identify family members who may be able to provide support to the child, youth, and family.

Indigenous Governing Body ■

A council, government or other entity that is authorized to act on behalf of an Indigenous group, community or people that holds rights recognized and affirmed by section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.

Neglect ●

Neglect is the lack of action by a parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth in providing for the adequate care and attention of the child/youth’s needs, resulting in harm or substantial risk of harm to the child/youth.

Neglect is different than a parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth being unable to provide basic needs due to socio-economic conditions, such as poverty or lack of adequate housing.

Out-of-Home Placement Resources ●

Out-of-Home Placement Resources provide care for children/youth who are unable to live in their family home. See definition for “caregiver” for more information on the types of placements.

Out-of-Territory Specialized Services ●

Out-of-Territory Specialized Services are used to provide children/youth with specialized residential treatment services that are not available in the NWT.

Permanent Custody Order ●

Permanent Custody Order permanently transfers the custody, rights and responsibilities of a child to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services until the child reaches the age of 16, however, with the agreement of the youth, a Permanent Custody Order can be extended to the age of majority (19). When a child is in Permanent Custody, they will remain in a home that offers holistic connection and supports to thrive or be adopted, depending on their unique situation.

The Permanent Custody Order may be extended to the age of majority (19) if the youth is in agreement.

Physical Abuse ●

Physical abuse is action by the parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth that caused or is likely to cause a child/youth to sustain a physical injury.

Plan of Care Agreement ●

Plan of Care Agreement (POCA) is a written agreement that provides an alternative to the court process when there is an ongoing protection concern involving children under 16 years of age. Depending on the situation, the child may remain in the family home or be cared for outside the home.

The maximum term of a POCA (including extensions) is two years. The Plan of Care Agreement is for children and cannot be used beyond a child's 16th birthday.

Plan of Care Committee ●

Plan of Care Committee prepares a Plan of Care Agreement for a child considered to be in need of protection. The Plan of Care Committee is composed of:

- At least one person who has lawful custody of the child;
- The Indigenous governing body/bodies (when applicable);
- The “Applicable Aboriginal organization/organizations” (when applicable);
- Other support individuals identified by the family;
- The child (if 12 years of age or older), and
- One Community Social Services Worker.

Sexual Abuse ●

Sexual abuse is any sexual act on a child/youth by the parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth, adult in the household, intimate partner of a parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth, or, adult or household member who is unable to be ruled out as an alleged abuser.

Significant Measure (s.12 notice)

Section 12 of the federal *Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* requires the child and family services providers to provide notice to the

child/youth's parent(s), care provider(s), and Indigenous governing body or bodies prior to taking the significant measure with the goal of engaging and collaborating on the planning for the child or youth.

Social Determinants of Health ◆

Social Determinants of Health are economic and social conditions that influence the health of people and communities. These conditions are shaped by the amount of money, power and resources that people have, all of which are influenced by policy choices. Social determinants of health affect factors that are related to health outcomes and include early childhood experiences; level of education; being able to keep a job; the kind of work a person does; having food, or being able to get enough food; access to health services and the quality of those services; housing status and physical environments; amount of money earned; gender; and discrimination and social support.

Supervision Order ●

Supervision Order is a court order which directs a Community Social Services Worker to supervise the home of a child according to the terms and conditions of the Order.

The Order may be for a period of up to one year. A supervision order does not apply to youth.

Support Services Agreement ●

Support Services Agreements is a written agreement for youth, ages 16 to 18 (inclusive), to offer support and guidance in their transition to adulthood. Support Services Agreements can be made for six months and can be renewed up until the age of majority (19).

Systemic Racism¹¹

Systemic racism describes how mainstream institutions, including the public service, normalize and condone, often unintentionally, long standing racist ideas and beliefs into policies, practices, and norms. This results in a system that inherently privileges the ideas and needs of the dominant

white population while disadvantaging non-white racial groups, like Indigenous peoples. In turn, systemic racism contributes to inequities for Indigenous peoples. Within health and social services, these inequities impact access to services and quality of care received by Indigenous clients, resulting in inadequate outcomes. Systemic Racism occurs when institutions, such as health and social services, give space to discrimination whether it is intentional or not.

Temporary Custody Order ●

A temporary custody order is when the custody of a child or youth is temporarily transferred by the court to the Statutory Director of Child and Family Services. Temporary Custody Orders are age specific.

A Community Social Services Worker may not make an application for an order for temporary custody of a child/youth that results in a continuous period during which the child/youth is in temporary custody exceeding:

- 12 months, in the case of a child under 5 (five) years of age;
- 18 months, in the case of a child 5 (five) years of age or over but under 12 years of age; or
- 24 months, in the case of a child 12 years of age or over.

Also, a court may not make or extend an order that would result in a child being in the temporary custody of the Director for a continuous period exceeding:

- 15 months, in the case of a child under five years of age when the order was made;
- 24 months, in the case of a child five years of age or over but under 12 years of age when the order was made; or
- 36 months, in the case of a child 12 years of age or over when the order was made.

¹¹ Government of the Northwest Territories. (2021). Northwest Territories Health and Social Services System Human Resources Plan. Retrieved from: www.hss.gov.nt.ca/sites/hss/files/resources/nwt-human-resources-plan-2021-2024.pdf. (p.13).when each Act is amended in the future.

Unique child / youth (data)

The term “unique” means that a child/youth is only counted once within a particular dataset. For example, a child/youth may have received different types of services throughout the year; however, only the most recent service type for a child/youth may be included in the analysis. This allows for the determination of the number of individual children/youth who received a service through child and family services in that timeframe.

Voluntary Services Agreement ●

Voluntary Services Agreements is a written agreement that supports families with children/youth between the ages of 0-18 (inclusive) and expectant parent(s) who may require assistance with a variety of needs, as identified by the individual/families. The child/youth may reside in their own home or elsewhere. The initial term of a Voluntary Services Agreement is for six months, with the option for additional six-month renewals until the child/youth reaches the age of 19 (age of majority).

Youth ●

Youth means a person who has attained 16 years of age but not attained the age of majority (i.e., 16 – 18 years, inclusive).

Youth Protection Order (16 - age of majority) ●

Youth Protection Order ensures the protection, health and safety of a youth by providing care for the youth while the parent/care provider(s)/person having care of the youth are unable or unavailable to care for the youth.

The Community Social Services Worker can apply to the courts for a Temporary Custody Order or Permanent Custody Order. An apprehension is not required.

Circumstances where a Youth Protection Order may be appropriate, are as follows:

- The youth cannot reside with his or her parent/care provider/person having care of the child/youth(s).
- The youth is unable to care for and protect themselves.
- The youth is unable or unwilling to enter into a Support Services Agreement due to developmental, behavioral, emotional, mental or physical incapacity or disorder, or the effects of the use of alcohol, drugs, solvents or other similar substances.
- The youth is living in circumstances of a child who needs protections under subsection 7(3) of the *Child and Family Services Act*.

For more information, please visit:

www.hss.gov.nt.ca

or email at hsscommunications@gov.nt.ca