Chapter 2
Department of Social Development
Foster Homes

Contents

Department of Social Development
Foster Homes

Summary

Introduction

2.1   Children are our most important resource. We all want to protect and nurture our sons and daughters. Sometimes, though, for any one of a number of reasons such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence or mental health issues, children are abused or neglected. In such cases, the Province steps in to protect these children at risk. Under the *Family Services Act*, the Department of Social Development (Department) has been assigned responsibility for child protection.

2.2   When it is determined a child should be removed from a home, he or she will be placed in the care of the Minister either temporarily or permanently. The Minister provides two types of residential services for children in care: foster homes and group homes. Social workers approve and monitor these alternative living environments for children who are under the age of nineteen and unable to live with their parents. The focus of this chapter is foster homes.

2.3   *"**Foster families** are volunteers who are trained to provide a family home environment for children in the care of the Minister of Social Development when they are unable to remain with their natural families."*[1] *"As of March 2012, there were 531 foster families…."*[2] *"At any given time, there are more than 1,100 children in foster care."*[3]

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[1] Department website – Children's Residential Services – Foster Homes
[2] Department of Social Development, *2011-2012 Annual Report,* November 2012, page 37.
[3] Department website – Family Foster care - Information card

Department has
documented standards
for foster homes

2.4   We were pleased to find the Department has documented standards[4] for foster homes, which are revised periodically. However, we observed inconsistencies (*Environment of Care Checklist*) and noted two areas not sufficiently addressed by the standards. We recommended the Department establish standards for contracting with foster families; and we recommended the Department amend its standards to provide comprehensive and consistent direction for approving and monitoring provisional[5] (foster) homes.

Approval standards for
foster families are not
always met

2.5   One of the objectives of our work was *to determine if the Department complies with its documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their natural families*. While Department staff acknowledge the importance of the approval standards and believe the standards are always met prior to approving a foster family, we tested a sample of foster family files and concluded documentation is often not present in the foster family's file to show that all the requirements were met prior to approving a foster family.

2.6   The results of our testing indicate many instances of non-compliance with the approval standards. Only two of the 20 files contained all of the required documentation for approving a foster family. Examples of documents missing (with the number of occurrences) included: *Family Development Plan* - completed by the social worker upon approval of a foster family and used on an on-going basis to assess their competency to foster (9); *Oath of Confidentiality* signed by the foster parents (7); and *Environment of Care Checklist* – the home inspection checklist used by the social worker to assess the suitability of the residence (7).

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[4] "standards*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005*. "Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance."* (section 1.1, page 1)

[5] *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."* (standards, page 22)

| ***Inconsistencies in file information*** | **2.7** We observed the following inconsistencies in information between the foster family's manual and electronic files during the testing of twenty (20) files: |

- Nine (9) instances of differing approval dates;

- Seven (7) instances of differing assigned social worker; and

- Seven (7) instances of differing number of approved foster spaces.

Foster parents receive training

2.8 Applicants and foster parents are required to do training. We are pleased the results of our testing indicate foster parents receive required training.

Annual reviews are not always done

2.9 We tested for compliance with specific standards relating to monitoring foster families. The standards require the social worker to *"assess the foster family's competency to foster on an on-going basis"*[6] by doing an annual review which includes updating the *Family Development Plan* and performing a home inspection using the *Environment of Care Checklist.*

2.10 We found annual reviews are not always completed as required by the standards. Only three of the 18 files tested contained documentation indicating annual reviews were done regularly.

Criminal background record checks are not always done according to the standards

2.11 We are also concerned with our findings regarding criminal background record checks. According to the standards, as part of the assessment of a prospective foster family, *"The CRS Social Worker must request an SD Record Check and a Criminal Record Check on all prospective applicants and any person over the age of 19, residing in the household."*[7] Eight of the 20 files we examined lacked documentation indicating the record checks were done prior to approving the foster family.

2.12 Record checks are also required on an ongoing basis. According to the standards, "*A prior contact check with the department of Social Development and a criminal*

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[6] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers– Foster Homes*, January 2005, standard 23, page 24.
[7] Ibid, standard 5, page 11.

record check must be completed on a foster family every five years after approval or sooner if required."[8] The results of our testing indicate the ongoing record checks are not always done. Eleven of the 20 files we tested were foster families whom had been operating for over five years, thus requiring the ongoing record check. Seven of the eleven files were missing documentation, indicating the ongoing record checks had not been completed as specified in the standards.

2.13   We recommended the Department comply with its documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their families.

Monitoring of foster families needs improvement

2.14   We found monitoring of foster homes was inadequate at both the regional and central office levels because the Department is not ensuring compliance with the standards. We recommended the Department implement regular monitoring procedures for both regional and central office staff.

More foster homes are needed

2.15   The significant decrease in the number of foster homes is very concerning. The number of foster homes has declined by 41% over an eight year period. Stakeholders are concerned with the declining number of foster families. An inadequate supply of foster families could result in adverse consequences to vulnerable children in need of care. For example, siblings may get separated, or a child may get placed in a foster home in a different region than his or her community or perhaps be placed in a group home. (Group homes are not intended for children who would do well in a foster home.)

2.16   An inadequate supply of foster families could also have a significant negative financial impact on the cost of care to the Province. Cost of care information clearly shows foster home care is significantly less costly than both contracting for care and group home care. Each foster home bed not available costs the Province an additional

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[8] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Family Foster Care Standards*, January 2005, standard 8.2.2, page 37.

$95,751 as a group home bed.

2.17   We recommended the Department develop a long-term strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available to meet regional needs and to help meet *"The Children's Residential Services program primary goal … to ensure consistent, high quality residential services to children who are in the temporary or permanent care of the Minister."* [9]

Funding for foster   **2.18**   The funding model for foster homes needs review.
homes needs review   Changes in the foster family monthly rates since 1996 have not kept pace with inflation. (The monthly rate for a child who is eleven years or older living in a foster home increased by 15.3% from 1996 to 2013, while the consumer price index increased by 38.7% [10] for the same period.) Several reimbursement rates relating to children in foster homes appear outdated. For example, the clothing and seasonal allowances currently paid to foster parents for items such as winter coats, boots, gloves and school supplies are based upon a rate that is ten years old.

2.19   Current rates may be having a negative impact on retaining and recruiting foster families. If the Department loses vital volunteer foster families and has to pay higher costs for children in care, it will have a significant negative financial impact for the Province. Even more importantly, it will also affect the environment for children in care (i.e. foster parents or group home). The Department indicated group homes are not intended for children who would do well in a foster home, which may create even more significant financial and social costs to the Province in the future.

2.20   In order to sustain the Province's vital foster family resources, we recommended the Department review all rates and funding relating to foster homes and propose changes to Government as appropriate to eliminate any disincentive to current or prospective foster parents. This should be completed within twelve months of the release of our report. We also recommended the Department

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[9] Letter to the Auditor General from the Department dated January 25, 2013.
[10] Statistics Canada, *Your Guide to the Consumer Price Index,* 1996 and figures from its website. With the CPI in 1996 = 88.9 and 2013 = 123.3, the change in CPI is an increase of 34.4 points, which is 38.7%.

review rates and funding relating to foster homes on a regular and ongoing basis.

Program information was not readily available

2.21   Having accurate program information is a prerequisite to properly managing a program. We found general program information (the number of children in foster homes, a list of active foster families) was not readily available. We believe this could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of departmental planning for foster homes, and we recommended the Department reconcile its foster family data with each of the regions on a regular basis to ensure information used by central office for program planning is complete and accurate.

Need for public reporting on the effectiveness of the program

2.22   The second objective of our work involved accountability and performance reporting: *to determine if the Department of Social Development publicly reports on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program.* We found the Department is not publicly reporting on the effectiveness of the program and we recommended the Department start doing so.

Recommendations

2.23   Our recommendations to the Department are presented along with its responses to each recommendation in Exhibit 2.1.

Conclusion

2.24   Our work had two objectives. The first objective was: *to determine if the Department of Social Development complies with its documented foster home standards[11] for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their natural families.*

2.25   We conclude the Department of Social Development does not always comply with its documented foster home standards. The standards for approving a foster family are not always met, and the monitoring of foster families needs improvement. Our work did not include reviewing the quality of the care provided by foster homes and therefore we provide no comments or

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[11] *"documented foster home standards"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005. *"Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service."* (section 1.1, page 1).

conclusion in that area.

2.26   The second objective of our work was: *to determine if the Department of Social Development publicly reports on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program.*

2.27   We conclude the Department of Social Development does not publicly report on the effectiveness of its *Children's Residential Services* program. The Department has not established measurable performance indicators or performance goals for the Children's Residential Services program, which are prerequisites for effectiveness reporting.

Exhibit 2.1 – Summary of Recommendations

2.1	Recommendation	Department's Response	Target Date for Implementation
	Foster Home Standards **2.57 We recommend the Department of Social Development establish standards for contracting with foster families.**	*The Department develops care plans with foster families for all children placed in their home. When a child has complicated/complex behavioural/emotional needs that require a higher level of intervention and supports than a foster family is expected to carry out, regions have been writing a contract of expectations for the foster family which outline specific interventions/treatments in dealing with that particular child. These contracts are developed and made with foster families who have already been approved to foster, who have been fostering and have skills required to deal with specific behaviours. The contract is written to specify expectations of the foster family to meet the special needs of the child and is attached to that particular child. When the child is no longer in the home the contract with foster family is void. Or if the child moves to another home, the contract follows the child and is reviewed/renewed between the Department and the new foster home. This is a process of the Child in Care Program versus the Children's Residential Services Program. The Department will develop Standards for the development of those contracts.*	*October 2014*
	2.58 We recommend the Department of Social Development amend its standards to provide comprehensive and consistent direction for approving and monitoring provisional (foster) homes.	*A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the child(ren) placed in the home. They are not available for other children as are foster families (CRS Practice Standards for Social Workers – Foster Home 2005).* *The Department is currently working on changes to address kinship services and kinship care. Once we have that in place, provisional homes will no longer exist and the homes will be known as kinship homes. There will be Kinship Standards developed for those services at that time.*	*Ongoing*

Exhibit 2.1 – Summary of Recommendations (continued)

2.1	**Recommendation**	**Department's Response**	**Target Date for Implementation**
Approving Foster Homes **2.72 We recommend the Department of Social Development comply with its documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their families.**		*The Department agrees with the recommendation. The Department continues to regularly examine and improve its program standards. The Foster Care Standards were revised in February 2013 and will assist the CRS program staff in providing safe, secure and nurturing environments for children in care. Additionally, during regular contact with the Regional Program Delivery Managers and CRS Supervisors, much emphasis is placed on adhering to the standards to ensure compliance with standards and ultimately ensure the best possible placements are available for children who are not able to live with their family. As identified by the regions training for CRS social workers on Family Development Plans is scheduled for Fall 2013. Additional training needs will be addressed in a timely manner.*	*Immediately*
Monitoring Foster Homes **2.86 We recommend the Department of Social Development implement regular monitoring procedures for both regional and central office to ensure compliance with its standards. The procedures could include, but not necessarily be limited to, the following:** • **a periodic review of a sample of files to determine compliance with standards; and** • **a regular review of "expired approval dates" recorded in the electronic information system, with follow-up to ensure the foster family's annual review is completed on time.**		*The Department agrees with the recommendation. Regions are responsible to ensure compliance to Program Standards. CRS Supervisors review foster homes assigned to each individual social worker to ensure Program Standards are being met. The CRS Program Consultant has regular meetings with CRS Supervisors and more emphasis will be placed on ensuring compliance to the standards and suggested methods will be provided, i.e. supervisors can review individual social workers foster home list to ensure compliance or during unit meetings, the supervisor can randomly select samples of foster homes to review compliance to standards.* *Although, it is important to ensure that annual reviews are done in a timely manner (annual review date), there are several reasons that they may not be completed in the month they are due. However, it is imperative that the annual reviews be done with 3 months of the due date. This will be addressed with supervisors during meetings and in Standards.* *Additionally, the Program Delivery Managers will be made aware of the Office of the Auditor General's findings and part of their role is to ensure compliance to the Program Standards and that reviews are done in a timely fashion.*	*Immediate and ongoing*

Exhibit 2.1 – Summary of Recommendations (continued)

2.1	**Recommendation**	**Department's Response**	**Target Date for Implementation**
Foster Home Supply **2.107 We recommend the Department of Social Development develop a long-term strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available to meet regional needs and to help meet, "*The Children's Residential Services program primary goal … to ensure consistent, high quality residential services to children who are in the temporary or permanent care of the Minister.*"**	*The Department agrees with the recommendation for creating a long term strategy. Although there has been a decrease in the number of foster homes, there has also been a decline in the number of children coming into care due to improvements made to the child protection service delivery model. Enhancements made to the child protection system have enabled more children to remain safely with their families, by providing supports for families in order for children to remain in the family home and not requiring foster care.* *The Department has been and remains to be committed to engaging in recruitment and retention efforts for foster families. This is done in a number of ways; one of which is a yearly recruitment campaign that is launched provincially during National Foster Family Week, the 3rd week in October. Additionally, in the spring, there is a provincial undertaking involved with public awareness on the need for foster homes through advertising on radio and in newspapers.* *Each of the 8 regions is responsible for recruitment and various tactics are used for this specific to the regional need. Generally they partake in radio and newspaper advertising but they have also set up displays at various work locations, have hosted lunch and learns where they talk about fostering with the hope to spark potential interest, and community events where they partner with their local Foster Family Association and set up a display where people can talk with not only the government employee but also a current foster parent. The Department also partners with the New Brunswick Foster Family Association to gather ideas and work together on efforts to recruit and retain foster families.*	*May 2014*

Exhibit 2.1 – Summary of Recommendations (continued)

2.1	Recommendation	Department's Response	Target Date for Implementation
Funding for Foster Homes **2.122 We recommend the Department of Social Development review all rates and funding relating to foster homes and propose changes to Government as appropriate to eliminate any disincentive to current or prospective foster parents. This should be completed within twelve months of the release of our report.**	*The Department agrees with the recommendation to review all rates related to foster care. The current basic maintenance rates were effective April 2010 and the Department is reviewing the rates and will be making recommendations for an appropriate increase. This proposed increase will be considered under the budgetary process. In addition to the basic maintenance rates, foster families receive money through the child's case plan for additional services, supports and special items for the child.*	*April 2014*
2.123 We recommend the Department of Social Development review rates and funding relating to foster homes on a regular and ongoing basis.	*The Department agrees with the recommendation. Although rates and benefits provided for children in care are reviewed, the Department will introduce a regular schedule for reviewing all funding provided to foster families. Any proposed increase would need to be considered within the budgetary process.*	*April 2014*
2.124 We recommend the Department of Social Development take steps to increase the awareness of costs available for reimbursement to foster families.	*The Children in Care Program establishes individualized case plans for each child placed in a foster home. The variation in items required may be significant based on the needs of the child. The Department will provide greater guidance through Program Standards to enable a more consistent range of items reimbursement may be provided for. Foster families are made aware of the financial rates and benefits paid on behalf of children in care (Basic Maintenance Rates) upon approval as a foster family.*	*October 2014*
2.125 We recommend the Department of Social Development be consistent in the amounts reimbursed to foster families.	*The Children in Care Program establishes individualized case plans for each child placed in a foster home. The variation in items required may be significant based on the needs of the child. The Department will provide greater guidance through Program Standards to enable a more consistent range of items reimbursement may be provided for. Foster families are made aware of the financial rates and benefits paid on behalf of children in care (Basic Maintenance Rates) upon approval as a foster family.*	*October 2014*

Exhibit 2.1 – Summary of Recommendations (continued)

2.1	Recommendation	Department's Response	Target Date for Implementation
Program Information **2.129 We recommend the Department of Social Development reconcile its foster family information (statistics, data, names) with each of the regions on a regular basis to ensure information used by central office for program planning is complete and accurate.**	*The Department agrees with the recommendation to reconcile its foster family information. The foster home social workers are responsible for inputting of data into the computer system (NB Families) which is the information source for central office. That information is used generally as a trending indicator for long term program planning and is not impacted by minor discrepancies. The Department is aware that some discrepancies occur in any information system. The Department will attempt to ensure consistencies in information between the region and the data system through more stringent monitoring.*	*Immediate and ongoing*
Public Reporting **2.134 We recommend the Department of Social Development publicly report on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program. Such performance information should be included in the Department's annual report and on its website.**	*The Department agrees with the recommendation. The Department provides information in the Department's Annual Report on the Children's Residential Services program which is in line with all other departmental programs. Key performance indicators are being developed for all departmental programs and will ultimately be publically reported upon.*	*Annual Report 2013/14*

Background on the Foster Care Program

Child protection, children in care, and children's residential services

2.28   Children are our most important resource. We all want to protect and nurture our sons and daughters. Sometimes, though, for any one of a number of reasons such as drug or alcohol abuse, domestic violence or mental health issues, children are abused or neglected. In such cases, the Province steps in to protect these children at risk.

2.29   Under the *Family Services Act*, the Department of Social Development (Department) has been assigned responsibility for child protection. The Department of Social Development's website states:

> *"It is the responsibility of the government to provide protection services to children who are being abused or neglected by their family. Some children can receive services in their own home while other children must be placed in foster care."[12]* … *"Any person who has information causing him to suspect that a child has been abandoned, deserted, physically or emotionally neglected, physically or sexually ill-treated or otherwise abused must inform this Department of the situation without delay."[13]*

2.30   When it is determined a child should be removed from a home, he or she will be placed in the care of the Minister either temporarily or permanently. The objective is *"to provide a safe and secure environment where children who have to be separated from their natural families are supported to reach their potential."[14]*

2.31   ***Children's residential services*** – The Minister provides two types of residential services for children in care: foster homes and group homes. Social workers approve and monitor these alternative living environments for children who are under the age of nineteen and unable to live with their parents. *"**Foster families** are volunteers who are trained to provide a family home environment for children in the care of the Minister of Social Development when they are unable to remain with their natural*
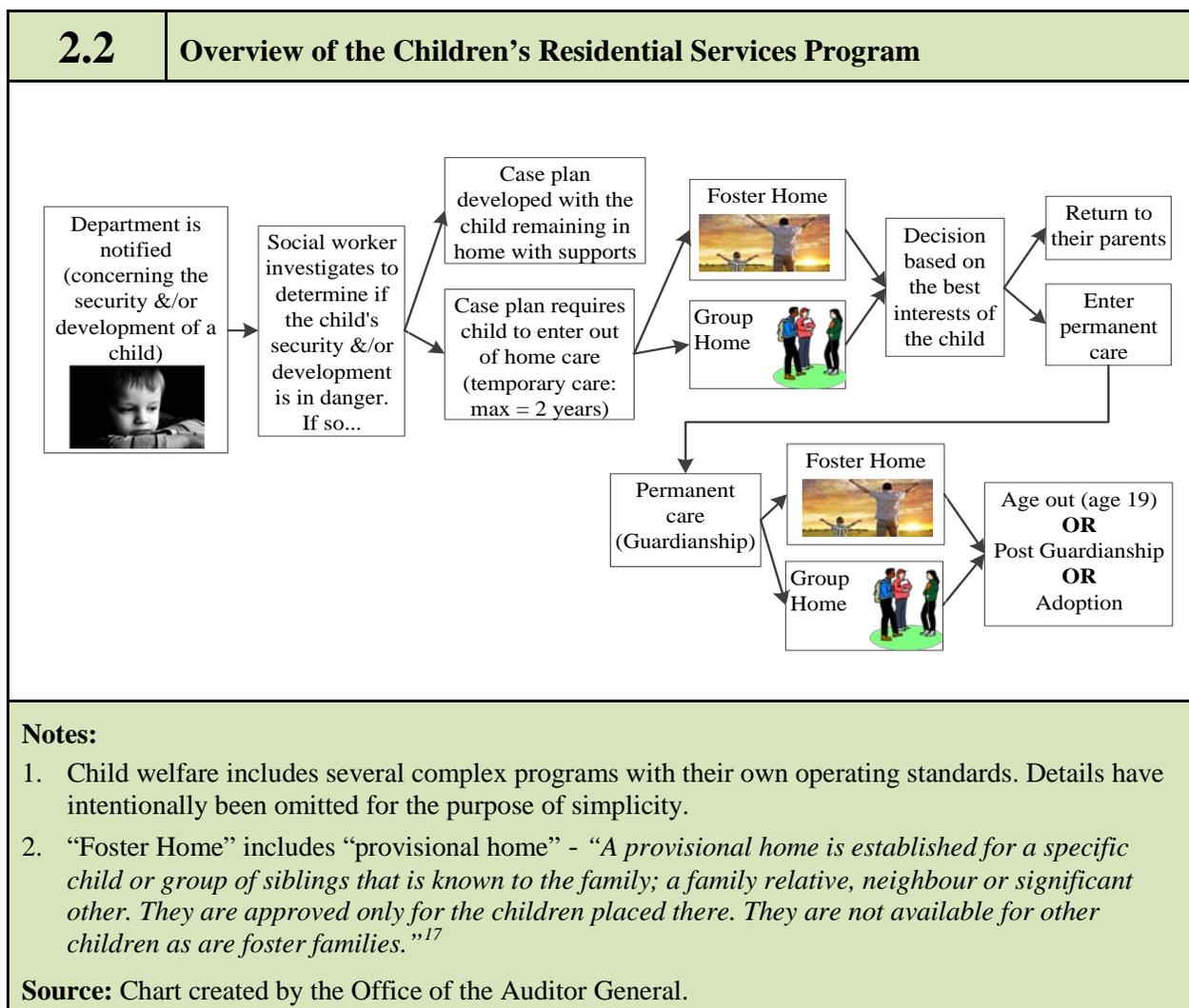
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[12] Department website – Family Foster Care
[13] Department website – Services: Child Protection
[14] Department website – Services

families."[15] **Group homes** *"offer group care services to youth (0-18 years of age) under the care of the Minister of Social Development who are unable to remain in a foster home or biological home due to their physical or behavioural challenges."*[16] Exhibit 2.2 provides an overview of how a child enters the program.

Exhibit 2.2 – Overview of the Children's Residential Services Program

2.2	Overview of the Children's Residential Services Program

Notes:

1. Child welfare includes several complex programs with their own operating standards. Details have intentionally been omitted for the purpose of simplicity.

2. "Foster Home" includes "provisional home" - *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."*[17]

Source: Chart created by the Office of the Auditor General.

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[15] Department website – Children's Residential Services – Foster Homes
[16] Department website – Services
[17] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005, page 22.

Foster families	**2.32** Foster families are volunteers who apply to the Department. There are basic eligibility criteria for the program, such as (but not limited to) the following:

- being at least 19 years of age;

- having good physical and mental health;

- passing a criminal record check;

- being financially self-sufficient; and

- having space in the home for additional children.

A program social worker meets with the applicant to assess: parenting skills, interpersonal skills and family dynamics. Applicants participate in training before being approved as a foster family by the Department. **Appendix I** provides general information on foster homes (the program).

Foster homes – program delivery   **2.33**   There are two key players involved in providing foster homes: the Department and the foster families. **Appendix II** shows the parties involved. (The four units within the Department which are directly involved with delivering the program are shaded.) Regional offices are responsible for delivering the *children's residential services program*, which includes foster homes. The *program design & quality management division* at central office is responsible for planning, design and monitoring, including accountability of the program.

2.34   "*The New Brunswick Foster Families Association is an organization for foster families, run by foster parents to serve and support each other in their work as caregivers.*"[18] There is a local New Brunswick Foster Family Association (NBFFA) serving each region, as well as a provincial association. **Appendix III** has additional information on the NBFFA.

Statistics for foster care   **2.35**   The following information was obtained from the Department:

- *As of March 2012, there were 531 foster families… .*[19]

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[18] New Brunswick Foster Family Association's website: http://www.nbfosterfamilies.ca/nbffa.html.
[19] Department of Social Development, *2011-2012 Annual Report,* November 2012, page 37.

- *At any given time, there are more than 1,100 children in foster care.*[20]

- *In 2011-12, 402 children were in temporary care each month on average;… 581 children were in permanent care and 68 youths received post-guardianship services on average per month.* [21]

- An older document dated 2006 stated, *"Children are spending an average of 1,527 days or 4.2 years in care. 93% spend over 1 year."*[22] We asked the Department for updated figures. The Department informed us current data is not readily available as these figures were generated for a specific purpose at that time.

- The Department informed us expenditures for children in temporary and permanent care were approximately $25 million in fiscal 2011-12. This includes children living in foster homes and group homes. This figure does not include health-card costs relating to prescription drugs and dental and vision services for these children. This figure also excludes grants to group homes for overhead costs, such as rent and staff.

- There was a decline of 85 foster homes (14%) over the last three years. Exhibit 2.3 provides a comparison of the number of foster homes by region from April 2010 to April 2013. Five of the eight regions had a decline in the number of foster homes. Saint John lost 38 foster homes, which was the greatest number in any one region. However, Miramichi lost 17 foster homes over the three years, which was equal to a 35% decrease in its resources. Three of the eight regions had an increase in the number of foster homes. The Chaleur region had the greatest increase: six foster homes (16%).

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[20] Department website – Family Foster Care - Information card
[21] Department of Social Development, *2011-2012 Annual Report,* November 2012, page 38-39.
[22] Department intranet - *Charter for Change – Opportunity Proposal –~2006-2007, page 24.*

Exhibit 2.3 – Comparison of the Number of Foster Homes by Region from April 2010 to April 2013

2.3	Comparison of the Number of Foster Homes by Region from April 2010 to April 2013					
Region	**2010**	**2011**	**2012**	**2013**	**Change from 2010 to 2013**	**% Change from 2010 to 2013**
Saint John	182	160	149	144	-38	-21%
Moncton	136	128	115	115	-21	-15%
Fredericton	77	72	69	69	-8	-10%
Peninsula	58	59	53	44	-14	-24%
Miramichi	48	49	40	31	-17	-35%
Chaleur	38	32	41	44	6	16%
Edmundston	34	26	30	38	4	12%
Restigouche	24	26	28	27	3	13%
Total	597	552	525	512	-85	-14%

Notes:

1. **Region** lists the eight regional offices from which the Department delivers the program.

2. **Change from 2010 to 2013** represents the decrease or increase in the number of foster homes over the three-year time period.

3. **% Change from 2010 to 2013** represents the decrease or increase in the percentage of foster homes over the three-year time period.

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information provided by the Department.

Introduction to Findings

What we examined and the objectives of our work

2.36   The objectives of our work were*:*

1. To determine if the Department of Social Development complies with its documented foster home standards[23] for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their natural families.

2. To determine if the Department of Social Development publicly reports on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program.

2.37   Our work focused on the Department and its compliance with the program delivery standards. We did not assess the quality of the standards, and we did not examine foster family compliance with the operating standards. Further, a different program (the child-in-care program) is responsible for monitoring the child in a foster home and hence was excluded from our work.

2.38   We developed criteria to use as the basis for our work. The criteria were reviewed and agreed upon by the Department.

2.39   We started planning our work in November 2012 and concluded our fieldwork by May 2013. Our work included the following:

· reviewing legislation and policies for the program;

· holding discussions with staff from various divisions at central office;

· visiting one of the eight regional offices, where we met with staff from various programs (child protection, children in care, and children's residential services - foster homes). We discussed the process for approving foster families and reviewed various documents used in the region, both manual and electronic;

· corresponding with staff from each of the eight regional offices;

· meeting with representatives of the provincial Foster

[23] "standards*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005. *Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service.* (section 1.1, page1)

Family Association (NBFFA) and a local association. These association representatives are foster parents. We also met with the acting Child & Youth Advocate;

· examining program standards;

· analyzing information provided by the Department, both from central office and regional offices;

· selecting a sample of foster family files from each of the regions and reviewing the files for required documentation; and

· performing other procedures as determined necessary.

2.40   Our audit was performed in accordance with standards for assurance engagements, encompassing value-for-money and compliance, established by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada, and accordingly included such tests and other procedures as we considered necessary in the circumstances.

2.41   Certain financial and statistical information presented in this chapter was compiled from information provided by the Department of Social Development. It has not been audited or otherwise verified. Readers are cautioned that this financial and statistical information may not be appropriate for their purposes.

How we present our findings in this chapter

2.42   In this chapter our key findings are reported in sections. Each key finding is supported with detailed findings. Our key findings are listed here.

Key Findings	Page Number
✓ The Department has documented standards for foster homes.	31
! Approval standards for foster families are not always met.	35
! Monitoring of foster families needs improvement.	41
! More foster homes are needed.	46
! Funding for foster homes needs reviewing.	55
! General program information was not readily available.	65
! The Department does not publicly report on the effectiveness of its foster home program.	66

Key used in this chapter   **2.43**   The following key is used to classify our findings:

- ✓   represents a positive observation;
- !   represents an area needing improvement or further consideration; and
- ●   represents other observations.

Key Finding: The Department has Documented Standards for Foster Homes

Background   **2.44**   Operating standards provide direction and describe an expected level of performance; they help people perform tasks properly, which should result in consistent delivery of quality service.

Summary of Findings   **2.45**   We found the following:

Findings	Page Number
✓ The Department has documented standards[24] for foster homes.	32
✓ Periodic revisions keep standards current.	32
! We observed a few inconsistencies and omissions in the standards.	32
! Inconsistencies in approving provisional (foster) homes (for a specific child/ren) could put the children and the Department at risk.	34

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[24] "standards*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005. *Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service.* (section 1.1, page1)

The Department has documented standards for foster homes

2.46 The Department has documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their families. *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes, January 2005* contain approximately 40 standards which provide direction to staff for several key program areas including the following:

·   recruiting foster families;

·   assessing an applicant;

·   approving a foster family;

·   managing the fostering experience;

·   processing complaints;

·   closing a foster family; and

·   working with the local Foster Family Association.

2.47 There is also a *Family Foster Care Standards* manual, which is the guide for foster families. It contains over 70 service standards which provide direction in areas including the following:

·   the rights of the child and the foster family, the involvement of the biological family, and the responsibilities of the Department;

·   becoming a foster family;

·   caring for children;

·   the environment of care (the household); and

·   reporting incidents.

Periodic revisions keep standards current

2.48 Both the *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes* and the *Family Foster Care Standards* were recently revised in February 2013. Both sets of standards had previously been revised in 2005. Staff informed us the revision process was comprehensive and involved input from central office and the regions.

We observed a few inconsistencies and omissions in the standards

2.49 Although the scope of our work did not include assessing the quality of the standards, we did observe a few inconsistencies and omissions in them.

2.50 The *Environment of Care Standards Compliance*

Checklist (Environment of Care Checklist) is not complete. This checklist is used by the social worker when they inspect the home as part of the annual review of foster families. We found six omissions (i.e. items in the standards that were not recorded on the *Environment of Care Checklist).* For example, the *Family Foster Care Standards* outline to foster parents that foster children are not permitted to be exposed to second-hand smoke. There is no mention of this in the *Environment of Care Checklist.*

2.51   The Department indicated contracting for care is becoming more prevalent because of the increasingly difficult behavioural problems of children coming into care and the difficulty in attracting volunteer foster parents. Although the use of contracts with foster families is on the rise, there is no mention of them in the standards and no documented guidance on their use.

2.52   "A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."[25] While staff at central office indicated the approval of a provisional (foster) home does not require many of the forms (such as: an application form, three personal references, a Family Development Plan, an approval letter, a Form 1 – Approval of a Child Placement Resource or a Foster Family Resources Agreement), this is not clear in the standards. The standards clearly state only one exemption for provisional (foster) homes, which is the training requirement. We believe this lack of clear direction has caused inconsistencies in approving and monitoring provisional families observed in our testing, which is discussed next.

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[25] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005, page 22.

Inconsistencies in approving provisional [26] (foster) homes could put the children and the Department at risk

2.53   Six of the 20 files we tested were provisional (foster) homes. We tested these files to determine if the limited approval requirements, explained to us by central office staff, were met. None of the six provisional (foster) home files we tested met the requirements.

2.54   Of particular concern were differences between regional and central office understanding of requirements. Two regions indicated provisional (foster) families were not required to take the oath of confidentiality. Central office confirmed this was required. And one region believed provisional (foster) homes did not require an annual review, which central office confirmed was in fact required.

2.55   We feel the inconsistencies with approving and monitoring provisional (foster) homes could put children and the Department at risk. Since the Department sanctions the placement and approves provisional homes, we believe most requirements for regular foster families should also be required for provisional (foster) families.

Conclusion

2.56   We were pleased to find the Department has documented standards for foster homes, which are revised periodically. However, we observed inconsistencies (*Environment of Care Checklist*) and noted two areas (contracts and provisional homes) not sufficiently addressed by the standards in order to mitigate risks to the Department.

Recommendations

2.57   **We recommend the Department of Social Development establish standards for contracting with foster families.**

2.58   **We recommend the Department of Social Development amend its standards to provide comprehensive and consistent direction for approving and monitoring provisional[27] (foster) homes.**

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[26] See [27] below

[27] *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."* (standards, page 22)

Key Finding: Approval Standards for Foster Families are Not Always Met

Background   **2.59**   One of the objectives of our work was: *to determine if the Department of Social Development complies with its documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their natural families.* We reviewed the *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* (standards), dated January 2005. The standards state the following on page 1, *"Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service."* We tested for compliance with specific standards relating to approving foster families. This involved speaking with staff and reviewing a sample of foster family files.

Summary of Findings   **2.60**   We found the following:

Findings	Page Number
● Department staff acknowledge the importance of the approval standards and believe the standards are always met prior to approving a foster family.	36
! Foster family file documentation suggests non-compliance with the standards.	36
! There are inconsistencies in information between the foster family's manual and electronic files.	38
! Criminal record checks are not always done in accordance with the standards.	39
✓ Foster parents receive training.	39

Department staff acknowledge the importance of the approval standards and believe the standards are always met prior to approving a foster family

2.61 Program staff at central office indicated they expected full compliance with the approval standards. When we visited a regional office to obtain a better understanding of the delivery of the program, we discussed the approval process with several staff. The process described seemed thorough and appropriate. While one social worker was responsible for each foster family applicant and completed the assessment, the entire team met and discussed the applicant's case, and the supervisor's approval was required for each foster family. Staff acknowledged the importance of having a rigorous approval process. They were confident the approval standards were met.

Foster family file documentation suggests non-compliance with the standards

2.62 We tested for compliance with specific standards relating to approving foster families. We selected a sample of twenty foster family files. We chose two files from each of the eight regions and an additional two files from the largest two regions. We examined the files to determine if there was documentation demonstrating the approval standards were followed. Additional information on our testing of foster family files is provided in **Appendix IV**, which includes details on the sample of foster family files selected for testing, a list of the standards relating to approving a foster family, and the documentation required in a foster family's file. If there was no documentation indicating a standard was followed, then we considered the file to be in non-compliance. Exhibit 2.4 shows the results of our testing of foster family files.

2.63 The results of our testing indicate many instances of non-compliance with the approval standards. Only two of the 20 files contained all of the required documentation for approving a foster family.

Exhibit 2.4 - Results of Testing Foster Families Files

2.4	**Results of Testing Foster Families Files**				
	Compliance		**Non-Compliance**		**Total Files Applicable**
	# of files	**% of files**	**# of files**	**% of files**	
Approval	2	10%	18	90%	20
Training	13	100%	0	0%	*13
Record Checks – With Application (Approval)	12	60%	8	40%	20
Record Checks – Every 5 years (Monitoring)	4	36%	7	64%	**11
Consistent Information	7	35%	13	65%	20
Annual Reviews	3	17%	15	83%	***18

Notes:

1. **Compliance** refers to foster family files that were tested and found to be in compliance with the standards.
2. **Non-Compliance** refers to foster family files tested and found to be non-compliant with the standards.
3. **Total Files Applicable** is the number of foster family files tested for the specific attribute.
4. **Approval** – The standards require the social worker to perform several tasks, such as inspecting the home and assessing the applicant, prior to the foster family being approved.
5. **Training** – The standards require the applicant to take certain training.
6. **Record Checks** – The standards require anyone over 18 in the foster home to have a criminal record check and Departmental check done upon application and every 5 years thereafter.
7. **Consistent Information** – Each foster family has both a manual file and an electronic file. Our testing compared some information in both of the files to ensure consistency.
8. **Annual Reviews** – The standards require ongoing monitoring of foster families following their approval. The social worker is required to visit the foster home annually to perform a home inspection and an annual review of foster parents.

* Seven files were exempted from our testing for appropriate training documentation because six were provisional (foster) homes who are exempt from the training standard and the remaining foster family had just recently been approved and their one year period for completing the training had not yet lapsed.

** Nine files were exempted from our testing for monitoring of record checks every 5 years because they had not been foster parents for 5 years and the time had not yet lapsed.

***Two files were exempted from our testing for regular annual reviews because the foster families had recently been approved and a full year had not yet lapsed.

Source: Chart created by the Office of the Auditor General using the results of testing 20 foster family files. The results were confirmed by the Department.

2.64   Our findings were confirmed with each of the regional offices. Documents missing (with the number of occurrences) included the following:

- *Family Development Plan* – completed by the social

worker upon approval of a foster family and used on an on-going basis to assess their competency to foster (9);

- *Oath of Confidentiality* signed by the foster parents (7);

- *Environment of Care Checklist* – the home inspection checklist used by the social worker to assess the suitability of the residence (7);

- *Form 1 – Approval of a Child Placement Resource* - The approval of a resource (foster home) is granted by the Minister[28] and the supervisor signs *Form 1* on behalf of the Minister (5);

- *approval letter* to the foster family issued by the Department indicating the type of services they have been approved to provide and the number of beds (5);

- *foster family assessment report* - prepared by the social worker who must "*conduct at least three Mutual Family Assessment Meetings with each applicant, at key intervals, throughout the approval process.*"[29] The report is signed by the social worker, supervisor and applicant (3);

- *letters of reference* - three (3) written references from non-family members are required for each applicant[30] (2);

- *Foster Family Resource Agreement* – signed by foster parents before the Department places a foster child in the home (2); and

- *application* - completed by the individual interested in becoming a foster parent (1).

There are inconsistencies in information between the foster family's manual and electronic files

2.65   During the testing of twenty (20) foster family files, we observed the following inconsistencies in information between the foster family's manual and electronic files:

- Nine (9) instances of differing approval dates;

- Seven (7) instances of differing assigned social

[28] according to *Section 6, Regulation 91-170* of the *Family Services Act*
[29] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005, page 16.
[30] Ibid, page 11.

worker;

- Seven (7) instances of differing number of approved foster spaces for the household; and

- One (1) instance of differing expiry dates (i.e. the date of next annual review).

2.66   Given central office uses the electronic information on foster families, these discrepancies are significant. We believe the lack of accurate information on foster homes at the departmental level could reduce the effectiveness of program planning, which is discussed later in this chapter along with our recommendation.

Criminal record checks are not always done in accordance with the standards

2.67   "*SD Record Check and Criminal Record Check*" policy states, "*This policy has been developed to ensure that programs and services funded and/or approved by SD (Social Development) establish and maintain practices which protect children and vulnerable adults from being physically, sexually or financially abused by persons associated with these services. This policy applies to both facility and in home services, and includes an SD record check and a criminal record check.*"[31] The policy applies to foster homes. Also according to the standards, as part of the assessment of a prospective foster family, "*The CRS Social Worker must request an SD Record Check and a Criminal Record Check on all prospective applicants and any person over the age of 19, residing in the household.*"[32]

2.68   Eight of the twenty files we examined lacked documentation indicating the record checks were done prior to approving the foster family. (Exhibit 2.4 shows the results of our testing of foster family files.) However, in each of the tested files, there was evidence the record checks were subsequently obtained.

Foster parents receive training

2.69   Applicants and foster parents are required to do training. "*It is mandatory for all applicants to take the PRIDE Pre-service Training which is a nine (9) week or 27-hour program of introduction into fostering and an*

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[31] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005, Appendix A, page 1.
[32] Ibid, standard 5   page 11.

assessment of the applicant's ability to foster."[33] Provisional[34] families are excluded from this requirement. The standards state, "*It is not mandatory for provisional families to participate in the PRIDE Pre-Service Training or the on-going service training, but they are encouraged to participate.*"[35]

2.70   The results of our testing indicate foster parents receive required training. All of the 13 files tested contained training documentation.

Conclusion   **2.71**   From our testing, we concluded documentation is often not present in the foster family's file to show that all the required standards were met prior to approving a foster family.

Recommendation   **2.72**   **We recommend the Department of Social Development comply with its documented foster home standards for providing a safe and secure environment for children who have to be separated from their families.**

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[33] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes,* January 2005, page 3.

[34] "*A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families.*" (standards, page 22)

[35] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers– Foster Homes*, January 2005, page 22.

Key Finding: Monitoring of Foster Families Needs Improvement

Background   **2.73**   The Department should monitor foster families according to documented standards[36] to ensure a safe and secure environment is maintained. We tested for compliance with specific standards relating to monitoring foster families. This involved speaking with staff and reviewing a sample of foster family files. Additional information on our testing of foster family files is provided in **Appendix IV.**

Summary of Findings   **2.74**   We found the following:

Findings	Page Number
! Annual reviews are not always completed as required by the standards.	42
! Non-compliance with the maximum number of children standard was found.	42
! Criminal record checks are not always done in accordance with the standards.	43
! Program monitoring at the regional level is inadequate.	43
! Program monitoring by central office is inadequate.	43

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[36] "standards*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005. *Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service.* (section 1.1, page1)

Annual reviews are not always completed as required by the standards

2.75 The standards require the social worker to *"assess the foster family's competency to foster on an on-going basis"[37]* by doing an annual review which includes updating the *Family Development Plan* and performing a home inspection using the *Environment of Care Checklist.*

2.76 The results of our testing indicate foster parents are not monitored according to the standards. Annual reviews are not always completed. Only three of the 18 files tested contained documentation indicating annual reviews were done regularly. The other 15 files did not comply. (We considered the file to be non-compliant when documentation for one or more annual reviews was missing.) Exhibit 2.4 shows the results of our testing. Our observations included the following:

- Nine files were missing a *Family Development Plan.* Two regions said they did not use the *Family Development Plan.* They had requested training on how to complete the form but had yet to receive it.

- Seven files were missing the *Environment of Care Checklist* for one or more years.

Non-compliance with the maximum number of children standard was found

2.77 The standards allow for a maximum of five foster children in a home.

"A Novice/Regular Foster Home is approved for a maximum of five (5) children in care, including children served by other agencies.[38]

The total number of dependents within a Novice/Regular Foster Home, including children in care, must not exceed seven (7). Dependents include natural children under the age of 19, frail and elderly family members, and residents or clients placed under other programs."[39]

2.78 During our testing of foster family files, we reviewed one file indicating the foster family was approved for ten children, far in excess of the maximum

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[37] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes,* January 2005, standard 23, page 24.
[38] Ibid, page 17.
[39] Ibid, page 17.

specified in the standards.

Criminal record checks
are not always done in
accordance with the
standards

2.79   To protect children from abuse, the Department has a policy requiring record checks before an applicant is approved as a foster family and on an ongoing basis thereafter. According to the standards, "*A prior contact check with the department of Social Development and a criminal record check must be completed on a foster family every five years after approval or sooner if required.*"[40]

2.80   The results of our testing indicate the ongoing record checks are not always done. Eleven of the 20 files we tested were foster families whom had been operating for over five years, thus requiring the ongoing record check. Seven of the eleven files were missing documentation confirming the ongoing record checks had been completed as specified in the standards.

Program monitoring at
the regional level is
inadequate

2.81   Regional supervisors are responsible for ensuring the social workers working with foster families are delivering the program in accordance with standards. However, based upon the discrepancies found by our testing (annual reviews are not always completed as required by the standards; non-compliance with the maximum number of children standard; criminal record checks are not always done in accordance with the standards), we believe monitoring at the regional level is inadequate.

Program monitoring by
central office is
inadequate

2.82   The following central office units, which are involved in Children's Residential Services (foster homes and group homes), have monitoring responsibilities listed in their descriptions.

· "*Program Design & Quality Management (Division) is responsible for the planning, design and monitoring, from a provincial perspective, of all Departmental programs.*[41]

· "*The Child Welfare and Youth Services Branch is responsible for the planning, design and monitoring*

[40] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Family Foster Care Standards*, January 2005, standard 8.2.2, page 37.
[41] Department website - Mandate

*of all departmental child welfare and youth programs
and services. These include the following programs
and services: ... , Child Protection Services, Child In
Care/Post-guardianship Services, ... Children's
Residential Services (foster homes and group homes),
... .*[42]

- Clinical Auditing and Child Welfare Training – *"The
New Brunswick Child Welfare Quality Assurance
Clinical Audit program was launched in February,
2010. Clinical audits provide an independent,
objective and systematic review of the manner in
which child welfare programs including Child
Protection (…), Children in Care, … , Children's
Residential Services (foster homes and children's
residential centres), …, are delivered. Clinical
Auditing is a strength-based process of collecting
information towards continuous improvement in the
service-delivery of Child Welfare programs. … The
purpose of the clinical audits is to assist in increasing
public and staff trust and confidence in the
Department and in helping to ensure the highest level
of services provided to the children of New
Brunswick."*[43]

2.83   Despite these documented responsibilities,
discussions with central office staff indicated they do
limited quality control and monitoring procedures to
ensure the standards are met and to ensure there is
consistency with foster homes throughout the Province.

2.84   Our findings, which confirmed lack of central
office monitoring, are:

- prevalent non-compliance with the approval
standards;

- annual reviews not always done; and

- inconsistencies between the regions in enforcing the
requirements for provisional (foster) families.

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[42] Department website - Mandate
[43] Program description provided by the Department

Conclusion   **2.85**   The Department does not always monitor foster
                                families in accordance with documented standards in
                                order to ensure a safe and secure environment is
                                maintained for children in care. Program monitoring by
                                both the regional offices and central office is inadequate.

Recommendation   **2.86   We recommend the Department of Social
                                Development implement regular monitoring
                                procedures for both regional and central office to
                                ensure compliance with its standards. The procedures
                                could include, but not necessarily be limited to, the
                                following:**

· **a periodic review of a sample of files to determine
  compliance with standards; and**

· **a regular review of "expired approval dates"
  recorded in the electronic information system, with
  follow-up to ensure the foster family's annual
  review is completed on time.**

Key Finding: More Foster Homes are Needed

Background   **2.87**   For their protection, children can be temporarily or permanently removed from their parents and placed into the care of the Minister. This can happen at any time, day or night, any day of the year. Children in care of the Minister need a place to live where they will be properly cared for. A foster home[44] is the Department's first choice for children in care. The Department refers to foster families as a *"vital resource"*[45]. Having an adequate supply of foster homes is crucial to *"vulnerable children in need"*[46].

Summary of Findings   **2.88**   We found the following:

| Findings	Page Number
! The number of foster homes has declined by 41% over an eight year period.	47
! There are challenges to recruiting and retaining foster families.	48
! An inadequate supply of foster families could result in severe consequences for vulnerable children.	49
! Stakeholders are concerned with the declining number of foster families.	50
! There is no long-term provincial strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available when needed.	51
! The loss of foster families could have a significant financial impact on the Province.	53

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[44] "foster home" includes "provisional home" - *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."*

[45] Letter to the Auditor General from the Deputy Minister - Department of Social Development, 2013.

[46] Ibid

Exhibit 2.5 - Resources Available to Children in Care – Foster Homes and Group Homes

2.5	Resources Available to Children in Care – Foster Homes and Group Homes
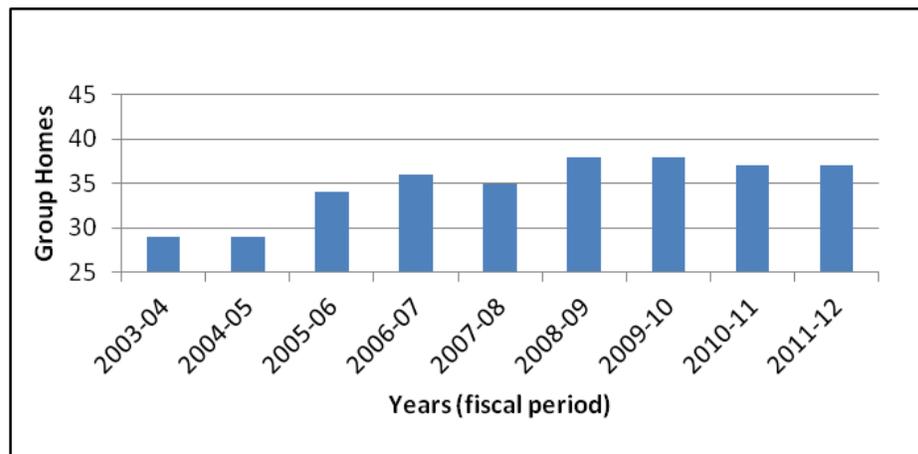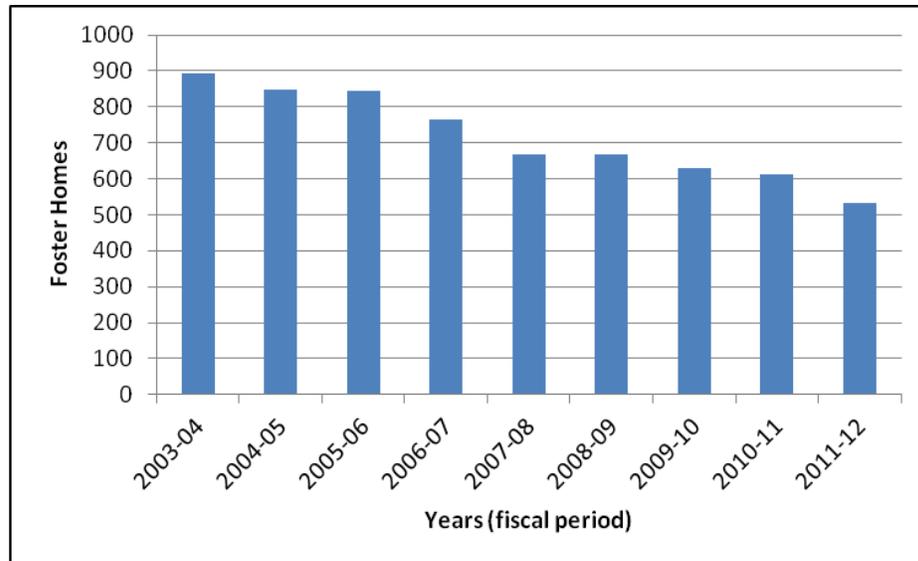
Notes:
1. **Foster Homes** *provide a child or siblings with a nurturing and supportive alternative home when they are not able to live with their birth family.*
2. **Group homes** *are privately operated "home-like" environments for up to six children.*
3. **Fiscal period** *is the financial reporting period for GNB (April 1 through March 31).*

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information from the Department's annual reports and website.

The number of foster homes has declined by 41% over an eight-year period

2.89   The number of foster homes and group homes each year since 2003-04 is shown in Exhibit 2.5. Our observations include the following:

· There has been a decline of 41% in the number of foster homes over an eight-year period. The number

of foster homes has gone down by 362, from 893 foster homes in 2003-04 to 531 in 2011-12.

- There has been an increase of 28% in the number of group homes over an eight-year period. The number of group homes has gone up by eight, from 29 group homes in 2003-04 to 37 in 2011-12.

2.90   One region provided us with documentation showing the number of foster homes in its area had decreased by 51% from July 2003 to October 2012.

There are challenges to recruiting and retaining foster families

2.91   The Department and the NBFFA representatives indicated the following issues present challenges to recruiting and retaining foster families:

- **Funding -** NBFFA representatives indicated the level of funding currently available to foster families negatively affects both retention and recruitment of foster families. This is discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

- **Relief care** - It is difficult for foster families to get relief care when there is not a sufficient supply of foster families. Relief care is a break from fostering for an emergency, a health issue, a week-end, etc. Without adequate relief care, a foster family could "burn-out" and terminate their offer to provide service.

- **More difficult behaviours of children** - The children coming into care are more challenging to care for than in the past. This makes fostering more demanding and can create stress for foster families.

- **Aging foster parents –** A large portion of the current foster parents are families who have been volunteering for several years. They are aging and becoming seniors who sometimes lack the energy that fostering demands today.

- **Both parents working -** Many more households have both parents in the work force leaving less time for volunteering, and being a foster family can be a challenge. In the past, people came forward wanting to be foster parents but this rarely happens anymore.

- **As the number of foster families declines, the program becomes more demanding on the remaining foster families** because there are fewer and shorter breaks between foster care assignments.

This may affect retention if foster families resign because of fatigue. This may also affect recruitment because in the past, foster families publicly shared positive experiences providing word-of-mouth recruitment.

· **New policy -** In 2005, the Department introduced a policy which made employees of the Department ineligible to become a foster parent. The Department indicated this policy was necessary to eliminate any perceived or potential conflict of interest. Prior to the introduction of the policy, some employees were foster parents. Given their backgrounds, Department staff may be more likely to consider fostering. (The Department employs approximately 1,580[47] people.)

An inadequate supply of foster families could result in severe consequences for vulnerable children

2.92   When there are not enough foster families, it is the vulnerable children in need who are impacted the most. The Department indicated an inadequate supply of foster families may cause, and at times has caused, the following events:

· **Compliance with the matching standard[48] may be difficult for the Department.** The standards require the social worker to "*match the child's placement needs with the proper resource*"[49]. When foster home availability is limited, finding a placement that best meets the needs of a particular child may not be possible.

· **Siblings may get separated.** Foster homes approved for three or four children may each only have one space vacant. Therefore when siblings enter care, each child may be assigned to a different foster home having only one space available.

· **The child may get placed in a foster home in a different region.** This can create other unpleasant issues. For example, the child may have to attend a different school which could create academic or social

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[47] 1582 employees listed on the Department's website – June 2013.

[48] "standard*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005*. Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service.* (section 1.1, page1)

[49]Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005*,* standard 22, page 23.

problems. Distance may also make getting to appointments (medical, therapy, etc.) and visits with their parents more difficult.

· **The child may be placed in a group home.** Typically, group homes are limited to children "*who are unable to remain in a foster home or biological home due to their physical or behavioural challenges.*"[50] Group homes are not intended for children who would do well in a foster home.

· **There have been situations where a child was placed temporarily in a hotel room** with supports until a placement was identified that could meet the child's needs. The Department indicated while this has happened, it is a rare occurrence.

· **The placement process becomes less efficient**. The social worker requires more time to find a foster home for a child when spaces are limited. Emergency placements can be very difficult; it may take several hours to find a foster home bed while the child sits and waits at the regional office.

· **Clinical decision may be affected.** When a social worker is aware there is no foster home available in their area for a child or several siblings, they may leave the child(ren) with their family rather than have them relocated to another region or splitting up siblings. If this is the case, services are put into the home to ensure the safety and security of the child(ren).

Stakeholders are concerned with the declining number of foster families

2.93   When we started our work the Department informed us, "*The Department of Social Development is presently struggling to maintain sufficient numbers of foster homes and is continually recruiting individuals to open their homes to vulnerable children in need.*"[51]

2.94   When we visited a regional office to obtain a better understanding of the delivery of the program, most staff raised the issue of the declining supply of foster families and the challenges it was causing. Five regions indicated

[50] Department website - Services
[51] Letter to the Auditor General from the Department dated January 25, 2013.

there is no foster home availability for 12-19 year-old children in their area.

2.95 Representatives of the two NBFFAs, with whom we spoke, expressed concern over the declining number of foster families and the possible causes and effects.

There is no long-term provincial strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available when needed

2.96 With regards to child protection and children in care of the Minister, the Department states the following on its website:

- *"The Minister assumes all parental rights and this Department is responsible to ensure that these children have adequate substitute families until placed for adoption or they reach adulthood."[52]*

- *"Decisions are based on what is in the best interests of the child."[53]*

- *"It is the Department's belief that every child has the right to be a member of a permanent family."[54]*

2.97 The standards require each region to recruit families to become foster families. Each of the eight regions informed us of its recruitment efforts, which were quite consistent and included promotional activity through such means as: radio messages, newspaper advertisements, distributing promotional material at public events, and holding public information sessions.

2.98 Included with the standards are guidelines which suggest, "… *regional unit conducts a recruitment needs assessment for foster placement resources at least once per year prior to beginning a recruitment campaign*". Three regions indicated they did not do a recruitment needs assessment. Documentation of a needs assessment was provided by one region, which reported having a recruitment committee. Another region indicated its needs assessments were conducted on an ongoing basis. Central office does not oversee or monitor their processes.

2.99 Several regions reported a strong need for foster

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[52] Department website - Services - *Protection Program*
[53] Department website - Services - *Children and Youth in Care of the Minister*
[54] Ibid

homes for specific age groups. In particular:

- Foster homes for 12-19 year olds: typically older children are not adopted and not requested by foster families. Recent changes to the legislation expanded the age for the program from 16 to 19, thus increasing the length of time foster care is needed.

- Foster homes for pre-school children: foster families want children who are in school, particularly families with two working parents.

2.100 One region went even further stating, *"We have a high need for new homes for children of all ages. We have not been in a position during any of these years to say we have enough homes for one particular age category."*

2.101 The guidelines for the recruitment standards also suggest, *"The Provincial Program Consultant for Children's Residential Services is responsible for a province wide information and recruit* [sic] *strategy in conjunction with the NB Foster Family Association. Promotion materials are provided to the regional offices for on-going use."* The program consultant informed us of the recruitment efforts which included updating the program's promotion materials and advertising. The regions reported they find the promotion materials helpful.

2.102 Both the regional offices and the program consultant informed us recruitment activities varied each year depending on available funding. One region indicated there was no set recruitment budget. Another region indicated they needed to do local publicity but had no budget for advertising for two years.

2.103 The Department does not have any formal plan for recruiting and retaining foster families. While program promotion may be a valuable component, it is not a complete strategy on its own. There is no long-term strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available when needed. We believe a strategy is needed which addresses both short-term and long-term needs, identifies specific regional office and central office involvement, and is adequately funded.

The loss of foster families could have a significant financial impact on the Province

2.104   While obtaining cost information for foster homes was difficult, we learned the following:

·   The Department's cost to keep a child in a foster home for one year ranges from a minimum of $8,800[55] to an average of $22,700[56].

·   Staff indicated when a region is unable to find a foster family for a child, they may advertise to employ someone for child care. Contracted care means the foster parent is being paid for his or her time to care for the child, which is different than a regular foster home where the foster parents volunteer their time. During our testing of twenty items, we found one 2009 case for contracted care in a provisional[57] (foster) home. The cost was approximately $57,000 for that year.

·   For group homes, the Department informed us the average cost per bed based on the annualized Department grant funding for fiscal 2011-2012 is $95,751. This figure for group home grant funding does not include specific costs relating to a child, such as the clothing, school supplies and Christmas allowances, which is included in the fostering costs above.

2.105   Cost of care information clearly shows foster home care is significantly less costly than both contracted care and group home care. Each foster home bed not available costs the Province an additional $95,751 as a group home bed. Recent experience indicates the number of foster homes is decreasing and the number of group homes is increasing (Exhibit 2.5 presented earlier). If this trend continues, it will have a significant negative financial impact to the Province.

Conclusion

2.106   The significant decrease in the number of foster homes is very concerning. The number of foster homes

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[55] Appendix V – Estimated Minimum Annual Cost to Keep a Child in a Foster Home.

[56] Calculated by the Office of the Auditor General using unaudited figures provided by the Department: the cost of foster care for fiscal 2011-12 of $25 million divided by the number of children in foster care in the same year of 1,100 ($25,000,000 / 1,100 = $22,727).

[57] *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."* (standards, page 22)

has declined by 41% over an eight year period. An inadequate supply of foster families could result in adverse consequences to vulnerable children in need of care (siblings may get separated, a child may get placed in a foster home in a different region than his or her community or perhaps be placed in a group home) and have a significant negative financial impact on the cost of care to the Province. The Department does not have a documented plan to address the shrinking supply of foster families.

Recommendation

2.107   We recommend the Department of Social Development develop a long-term strategy to ensure sufficient appropriate foster homes are available to meet regional needs and to help meet, ***"The Children's Residential Services program primary goal … to ensure consistent, high quality residential services to children who are in the temporary or permanent care of the Minister."*** [58]

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[58] Letter to the Auditor General from the Department dated January 25, 2013.

Key Finding: Funding for Foster Homes Needs Reviewing

Background   **2.108**   Foster families are volunteers who are reimbursed for some of the costs associated with the care of the foster child. The Department pays the following:

· When they have a foster child living with them, foster parents are paid a set monthly rate[59] depending on the age of the child.

· "Allowances" are paid at specific times of the year for seasonal clothing, school supplies and Christmas gifts.

· The child's care plan may include additional services and items, such as recreation or therapeutic, for which funding is provided to the foster family or paid to the service provider directly.

· In addition, the Department provides *"a monthly fee-for-service based on the type of foster family classification. The foster family classification is based on training, experience and skill development. Each classification has a monthly corresponding fee-for-service which compensates foster families for their time, skills and efforts."[60]*

Summary of Findings   **2.109**   We found the following:

Findings	Page Number
! There has been little change in the foster family monthly rates since 1996.	56
! Several additional reimbursement rates relating to children in foster homes have not been revised for six or more years.	60
! Rates could impact the retention and recruitment of needed foster families.	62
! The Department has no policy or documented direction for a regular review of rates.	63

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[59] "monthly rate" refers to the total of the basic maintenance rate and the federal special allowance.

[60] *Financial Rates and Benefits for Children in Care and Service Fees for Foster Families,* August, 2001. The monthly fee-for-service is $200 per month/child for regular foster families (having at least six months of active fostering experience) and $516 per month/child for therapeutic, special needs and young offenders foster families. (New foster families do not receive a fee-for-service payment until they have at least six months of active fostering experience.)

Exhibit 2.6 - Foster Family Monthly Rates for Past Years

2.6	**Foster Family Monthly Rates for Past Years**

Notes:

1. **Year** indicates the years when there was a change in the foster family monthly rate with the exception of 2013, which is present to indicate no change since 2010.

2. **Basic Maintenance Rate** is set by the Department for three age groupings: 0-4 years, 5-10 years, and 11+ years. The monthly rate is the highest for foster children 11+ years and is presented above.

3. **Federal Special Allowance** - *"The Federal Special Allowance, or portion thereof, may be given to the child for his or her own spending money. It may also be used to help purchase special items for the child. The child should also be encouraged to save or invest a portion of this allowance for future purchases of major special items."* (*Financial Rates And Benefits For Children In Care* policy dated November 1996)

4. **Monthly Rate** is the total of the Basic Maintenance Rate and the Federal Special Allowance.

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information provided by the Department (unaudited).

There has been little change in the foster family monthly rates since 1996

2.110 *Financial Rates And Benefits For Children In Care* policy dated November 1996 states, *"The Department will provide funds to foster families on behalf of children in care … in accordance with the amounts and criteria outlined in the following tables. … The Department will attempt to provide each foster family with adequate funds through the regular monthly maintenance check to meet the specific needs of each child, based on the child's care plan, and minimize the use of billings and separate reimbursements."*

2.111 The foster family monthly rates for the years since 1996 are presented in Exhibit 2.6. Some of our observations regarding the monthly rates include the

following:

- Since 1996, the basic maintenance rate for the 11+ years-old foster child has increased by $69 (15.3%). The increase is similar for the other two age groupings (0-4 years and 5-10 years) at $58 and $63 (17% and 16%).

- According to the rates used by the Department, the federal special allowance increased by 88% over the same period (an increase of $74.67 since 1996).

- Since 2007 there has been an increase of eight dollars ($8). This equates to a 2% increase over the past six years.

- The last foster family monthly rate change occurred in April 2010, over three years ago.

Exhibit 2.7 - Analysis of Components of the Monthly Basic Maintenance Rate for Foster Children

2.7	**Analysis of Components of the Monthly *Basic Maintenance Rate for Foster Children***					
				Increase from 2002 to 2013		**CPI Increase from 2002 to 2013 (%)**
Component	**1996**	**2002**	**2013**	**$**	**%**	
Lodging	$100	$107	$107	0	0	63.4 & 15.5
Food	157	168	188	20	11.9	38.6
Clothing	55	57	77	20	35.1	1.8
Personal care	23	24	32	8	33.3	10.0
Transportation	35	35	35	0	0	24.4
Babysitting	45	45	45	0	0	-
Recreation/Special occasion	35	35	35	0	0	6.6
Total Monthly *Basic Maintenance Rate*	**$450**	**$471**	**$519**	**$48**	**10.2%**	

Notes:

1. **Components** *of the* Basic Maintenance Rate for Foster Children *are set by the Department for three age groupings: 0-4 years, 5-10 years, and 11+ years. The monthly rate is the highest for foster children 11+ years and is presented above for 1996, 2002 and 2013 (the current rate effective April 2010).*

2. **CPI = Consumer Price Index** *is a measure of the rate of price change for goods and services bought by Canadian consumers. It is the most widely used indicator of price changes in Canada.*

3. **Lodging** *includes additional costs of: utilities, household supplies, sheets and towels, dishes, and normal wear and tear on furniture and appliances.*

4. **Clothing** *includes: socks and underwear, outerwear, footwear (including sneakers), sportswear (i.e. jogging suit).*

5. **Personal care** *includes: haircuts, personal hygiene products, over-the-counter cold medications, vitamins, etc.*

6. **Transportation** *covers the costs of trips to/for: recreational activities, shopping, haircuts and similar routine activities.*

7. **Babysitting** *provides support to foster families to enable them to pursue activities related to their overall wellbeing as a family, and covers such activities as: personal shopping, visits to doctor, recreational and social pursuits.*

8. **Recreation/Special occasion** *covers culturally normative activities for any foster child. Special occasions include: birthday presents and party, holiday expenses (Halloween, Easter, etc.), Mother/Father's Day present, end-of-school year present, presents given by the child to others. Recreation costs include: books, games, toys, tapes, tape rentals, outings.*

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information provided by the Department (unaudited). Descriptions of the components are quoted from "*Financial Rates and Benefits for Children in Care*" November 1, 1996. The increase from 2002 to 2013 was calculated for both the $ and % figures. CPI = Consumer Price Index figures are from the Government of Canada website – Consumer Price Index by province (monthly) (New Brunswick).

2.112   We examined the components of the basic maintenance rate for foster children and compared rate changes to inflation. Exhibit 2.7 shows the components of the basic maintenance rate for foster children for three points in time and compares the 2002 rate with the current rate. It indicates the increase in each of the components over the last 11 years. It also shows the consumer price index (CPI) increase from 2002 to 2013 in terms of percentage (%) for most of the components. (We used the CPI as an indicator of inflation.) Our observations include the following:

- The two largest components of the basic maintenance rate are lodging and food.

- Lodging has remained unchanged at $107 over the last 11 years. The lodging component includes: utilities, household supplies, and normal wear and tear on furniture and appliances. The CPI for energy increased by 63.4% from 2002 to 2013. (This means in 2013 the price of energy increased by 63.4% in comparison to the price in 2002.) The CPI for household operations, furnishings and equipment increased by 15.5% during the same time period. This means that while the reimbursement for lodging for foster children has not increased since 2002, the price increases of the lodging components (energy and household operations) to the consumer (foster parents) have increased by 63.4% and 15.5% respectively.

- Food has increased from $168 to $188, an increase of $20 (11.9%) over the last 11 years. The CPI for food increased by 38.6% during the same time period. This means that while the reimbursement for food for foster children has increased by 11.9% since 2002, the price increase of food to the consumer has increased by 38.6%. The increase in the price of food since 2002 is essentially more than triple the increase in the rate for food to foster families.

- Transportation, babysitting and recreational rates have not changed since 1996.

- We did an overall comparison of the increase in the

foster family monthly rate to the increase in CPI for the period 1996 to 2013. The basic maintenance rate for a foster child increased by 15.3% while the CPI increased by 38.7%.[61] Adjusting the 1996 foster family monthly rate for the overall 38.7% increase in prices results in a 2013 monthly rate of $624.15, which is $105.15 higher than the current rate paid for foster care.

Several additional reimbursement rates relating to children in foster homes have not been revised for six or more years.

2.113   The clothing and seasonal allowances currently paid to foster parents (for items such as winter coats, boots, gloves and school supplies) are based upon a rate that is ten years old. The foster family monthly rates (to help with the costs of lodging, food, clothing, personal care, etc.) have remained unchanged for over three years. Other rates have not changed for six or more years.

2.114   Information pertaining to the reimbursement of costs relating to foster children are presented in Exhibit 2.8. It shows the items or costs that are subject to reimbursement, the rate, and the date of the policy stating the reimbursement rate. The items are listed in order of the age of the rate, with the oldest rate being first.

[61] Statistics Canada, *Your Guide to the Consumer Price Index,* 1996 and figures from its website With the CPI in 1996 = 88.9 and 2013 = 123.3, the change in CPI is an increase of 34.4 points, which is 38.7%.

Exhibit 2.8 - Reimbursement of Costs Relating to Foster Children

2.8	Reimbursement of Costs Relating to Foster Children	
Item / Cost	**Reimbursement Rate**	**Last Revision Date**
Clothing & seasonal allowances (note 4)	Spring clothing: $70 / $78 / $112 School clothing & supplies: $57 / $206 / $273 Winter clothing: $109 / $144 / $168 Christmas allowance: $114 / $122 / $130	2003
Relief care	Foster child in regular care: $3/hr. $35/day Foster child in therapeutic care: $5/hr. $50/day	October 2004
Emergency home & bed retainer rate	The emergency bed retainer rate is $50/bed/month. The emergency maintenance rate is $50/day/child for a maximum of 7 days.	July 2006
Transportation	$0.34/km	January 2007
Regular monthly rate	Various rates depending on age of the foster child. Example: 11 years & older = $678.67/month	April 2010

Notes:

1. **Item / Cost** lists the various costs relating to foster children which the Department reimburses.

2. **Reimbursement Rate** shows the amounts paid by the Department according to policy.

3. **Last Revision Date** shows the date of the policy stating the current reimbursement rate.

4. **Clothing & seasonal allowances -** Various rates dependant on age of the foster child. The rates shown are for the following age groups respectively: 0-4 years / 5-10 years / 11+ years

5. **Relief care** – *"The provision of relief care is recognized as a component of modern-day foster care services, based on the nature of the children being served and the expectations placed on foster families by the Department, other agencies and individuals. ... The type and length of relief care should reflect a balance between the needs of the child, including his or her need for attachment, and the foster family's need for support and renewed energy."*

6. **Emergency home & bed retainer rate -** "*An Emergency Home is defined as an approved foster family that has agreed to accept emergency placements between 5 p.m. and 8 a.m. or during a weekend (Friday after 5 p.m. until Monday at 8 a.m. or statutory holidays) if an approved bed is available.*"

7. **Transportation -** "*Transportation reimbursement is only provided for the following case plan related activities: ...*" and the policy lists several activities including: health services (doctor, dentist, optometrist etc.), therapeutic services (counseling, speech/language, etc.), to and from: relief care setting, visits with their parents, daycare, school, recreational activities that supports the child's development, etc.

8. **Regular monthly rate** – includes a basic maintenance rate and the federal special allowance.

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information provided by the Department, including: *Social Development: Policy – Reimbursement of Transportation Costs Incurred by Foster Parents on Behalf of Children-In-Care*, January 2007; *Emergency Home and Bed Retainer Rate Policy,* July 2006; *Policy on Relief Care for Foster Parents Looking After Children In Care.*

Rates could impact the retention and recruitment of needed foster families

2.115   All stakeholders expressed concern over the rates paid to foster families.

- When we visited a regional office to obtain a better understanding of the delivery of the program, staff raised the issue that some rates paid to foster families appeared unreasonably low. Particular reference was made to transportation and relief care.

- Half of the regions informed us reimbursement rates are affecting the recruitment of foster families. Potential applicants often are discouraged and lose interest when they hear about the level of funding available to them.

- Representatives of the two NBFFAs, with whom we spoke, expressed foster family concerns with inadequate reimbursement of costs, inconsistencies in items approved for reimbursement and the amounts paid, and inadequate awareness of the costs subject to reimbursement. "*Rates are the biggest and oldest issue for foster families.*"

2.116   NBFFA representatives indicated the reimbursement of travel costs is an issue for foster families. The rate paid to volunteer foster families is lower than the rates the Province pays its employees and private providers of transportation. NBFFA representatives also indicated many foster families are unaware they can ask for reimbursement of travel costs, and have also expressed concerns about the consistency of approval of travel costs.

2.117   We explored this issue and found the following:

- *"Foster families receive $35/month in a child's monthly basic maintenance for routine transportation. This is for transportation that is not specific to any one child's needs but to family inclusive activities such as going to the movies, going shopping, etc. ... Transportation reimbursement is only provided for the following case plan related activities ... ."*[62] The

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[62] *Family and Community Services: Policy – Reimbursement of Transportation Costs Incurred by Foster Parents on Behalf of Children-In-Care*, January 2007.

policy lists several activities including: health services (doctor, dentist optometrist etc.), therapeutic services (counseling, speech/language, etc.), to and from: relief care setting, visits with their parents, daycare, school recreational activities that supports the child's development, etc.

· The reimbursement rate for foster families is 34 cents per kilometer (Exhibit 2.8 shown earlier). The reimbursement rate is 41 cents per kilometer [63] for employees of the Province.

· We reviewed the contract for one private provider of transportation services. The terms were $18 per hour plus 30 cents per kilometer, with an administration fee of 3%. The effective rate under this contract is 49 cents per kilometer. Additional fees applied for services outside city limits and for public holidays.

2.118   Without increasing the rates to keep pace with the cost of living, the Department appears to be expecting foster families to bear the costs of inflation. Current rates may be having a negative effect on the number of active foster families.

The Department has no policy or documented direction for a regular review of rates

2.119   Both the Department and the NBFFAs indicated foster families are volunteers who are reimbursed for some of the costs associated with the care of the foster child. Both groups indicated the amounts paid by the Department do not cover all costs. Given the Department is aware that the rates paid are below the cost of care, we would expect the rates be reviewed regularly and increased with the cost of living to ensure *"each foster family is provided with adequate funds"[64]* and it continues to be economically feasible for provincial residents to volunteer as foster parents.

2.120   However, the Department does not have policies or procedures in place requiring the regular review of foster family rates.

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[63] GNB Administration Manual
[64] *Financial Rates and Benefits for Children in Care,* November 1996.

Conclusion

2.121 The funding model for foster homes needs review. Changes in the foster family monthly rates since 1996 have not kept pace with inflation, and several reimbursement rates relating to children in foster homes appear outdated. Current rates may be having a negative impact on retaining and recruiting foster families. If the Department loses vital volunteer foster families and has to pay higher costs for children in care, it will have a significant negative financial impact for the Province. Even more importantly, it will also affect the environment for children in care (i.e. foster parents or group home). The Department indicated group homes are not intended for children who would do well in a foster home, which could create even more significant financial and social costs to the Province in the future.

Recommendations

2.122 We recommend the Department of Social Development review all rates and funding relating to foster homes and propose changes to Government as appropriate to eliminate any disincentive to current or prospective foster parents. This should be completed within twelve months of the release of our report.

2.123 We recommend the Department of Social Development review rates and funding relating to foster homes on a regular and ongoing basis.

2.124 We recommend the Department of Social Development take steps to increase the awareness of costs available for reimbursement to foster families.

2.125 We recommend the Department of Social Development be consistent in the amounts reimbursed to foster families.

Key Finding: General Program Information was Not Readily Available

Background

2.126   Having accurate program information is a prerequisite to properly managing a program.

Findings

2.127   ***General program information was not readily available.*** Obtaining accurate program information was a challenge for us throughout our work. For example:

· The Department provided us with figures for the number of children in temporary and permanent care for the past four years. The figures include children living in foster homes, in group homes and in independent living arrangements (for some children in post guardianship). The figures provided to us were inconsistent with those reported in the Department's annual reports for the same years.

· The Department was unable to provide us with the total cost of foster home care for fiscal 2011-12. During the reporting phase of our work, the Department provided a statement, which included the following. "*The Children's Residential Services program does not have a specific budget or segregated financial reporting activity. The Child Protection and Child in Care programs are the drivers for financing of the Children's Residential Services program in that the money is attached to the child who is in care of the Minister*." The Department estimated expenditures in fiscal 2011-12 for all children in care (living in foster homes and group homes) to be $25 million.

· A list of active foster families for each region provided by the Department contained former foster families that we determined were no longer active from our review of regional listings.

Conclusion

2.128   There are errors in program information at the Department. This could have a negative impact on the effectiveness of departmental planning for foster homes.

Recommendation

2.129   We recommend the Department of Social Development reconcile its foster family information (statistics, data, names) with each of the regions on a regular basis to ensure information used by central office for program planning is complete and accurate.

Key Finding: The Department does not Publicly Report on the Effectiveness of its Foster Home Program

Background

2.130 Reporting on the effectiveness of a program is a component of being accountable. Section 15(2) of the *Auditor General Act* mandates our office to report cases in which we have observed that satisfactory procedures have not been established to measure and report on the effectiveness of programs. This serves as the basis for the second objective of our work, which was:

> *To determine if the Department of Social Development publicly reports on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program.*

The Children's Residential Services program includes both foster homes and group homes.

Findings

2.131 We reviewed the Department's website and the *Department's Annual Report for 2011-2012* and found information on foster homes in both sources. However, neither source reported on the effectiveness of the foster home or children's residential services programs.

2.132 We met with several staff at central office from different divisions who confirmed the Department has not developed measurable performance indicators or set performance targets for the Children's Residential Services program. These must be in place before the Department can report on its effectiveness in delivering the program. Without publicly reporting on performance, the Department is not being accountable to the taxpayers who fund the program.

Conclusion

2.133 The Department is not publicly reporting on the effectiveness of the Children's Residential Services program.

Recommendation

2.134 We recommend the Department of Social Development publicly report on the effectiveness of its Children's Residential Services program. Such performance information should be included in the Department's annual report and on its website.

Appendix I – General Information on Foster Homes

General Information on Foster Homes

Foster care:

- *Foster care provides a child or siblings with a nurturing and supportive alternative home when they are not able to live with their birth family.*

- *Some children need foster care for only a few days but others require foster care for several years. Children coming into care are more likely to be nine years of age or over.*

- *There is an ongoing need for foster families for children of varying ages, but over the past few years the need for homes for adolescents and teenagers has increased.*

Foster children:

- *Are in care because there is conflict in their family; their parents are chronically ill; or they have been neglected or abused.*

- *Have families that cannot provide adequate care or the necessities of life.*

- *Range in age from infants to 19 years old.*

- *Come from a variety of cultural, racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds.*

- *Are brothers and sisters.*

- *Have emotional, developmental or physical challenges.*

- *Are in foster care with the consent of their family, or by court order.*

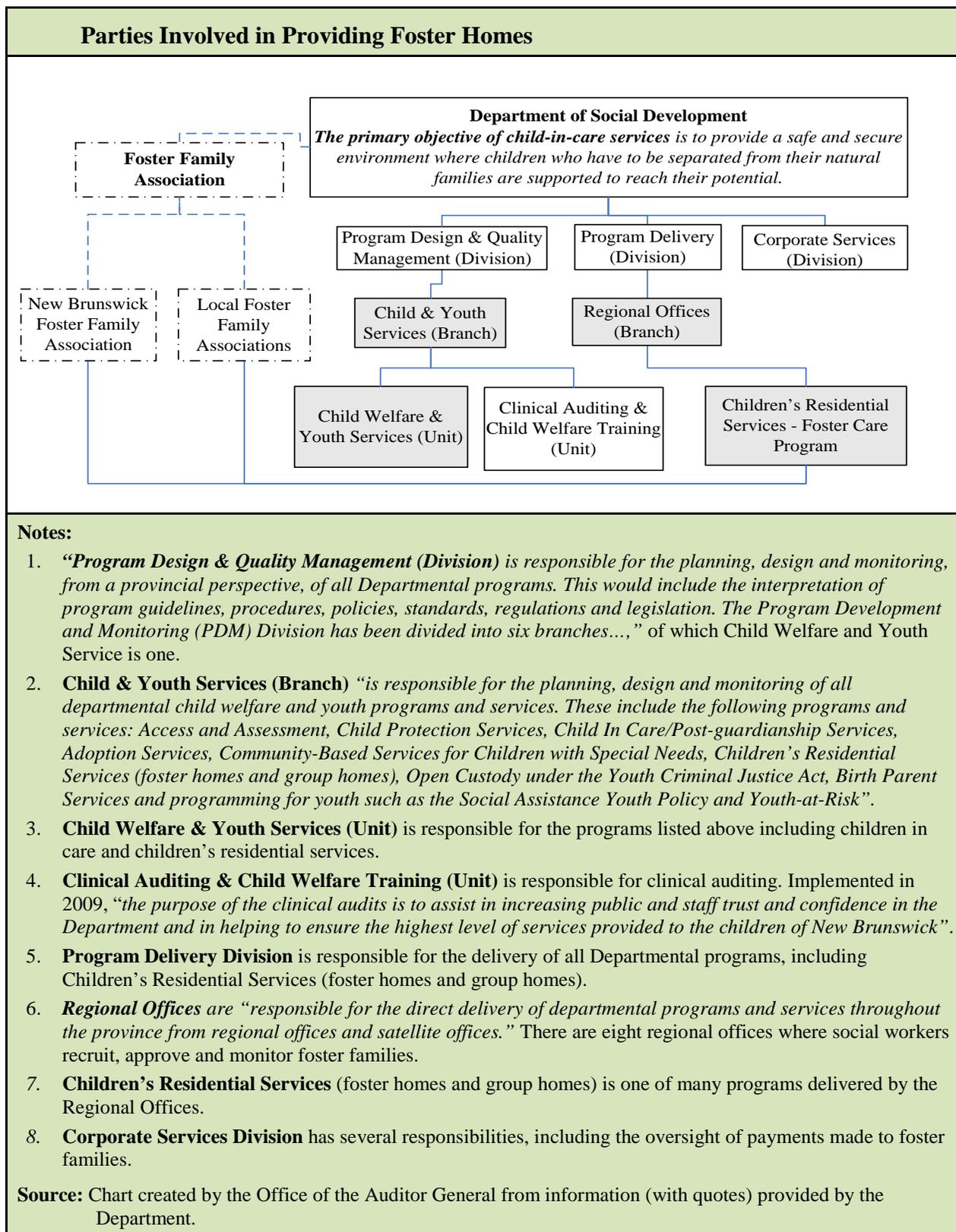*Foster families are couples or single adults who:*

- *Can form healthy relationships with others.*

- *Are able to meet the care and supervision needs of the child and/or youth.*

- *Have good parenting skills and insight into child behaviours.*

- *Are financially self-sufficient.*

- *Have sufficient physical space in their home to accommodate the child's needs.*

- *Clear criminal record check and Department prior contact check.*

Support foster families receive:

- *Monthly allowance for each child to cover the cost of items such as food, clothing, lodging, and other expenses the child may have.*

- *Medical and dental costs for the child.*

- *Training and ongoing support from the Department.*

- *Support from both the local and provincial Foster Family Association.*

Source: Excerpts from the brochure *Share life, Become a foster family* found on the Department's website, 2013.

Appendix II –Parties Involved in Providing Foster Homes

Parties Involved in Providing Foster Homes

Department of Social Development
The primary objective of child-in-care services is to provide a safe and secure environment where children who have to be separated from their natural families are supported to reach their potential.

Foster Family Association

New Brunswick Foster Family Association

Local Foster Family Associations

Program Design & Quality Management (Division)

Program Delivery (Division)

Corporate Services (Division)

Child & Youth Services (Branch)

Regional Offices (Branch)

Child Welfare & Youth Services (Unit)

Clinical Auditing & Child Welfare Training (Unit)

Children's Residential Services - Foster Care Program

Notes:

1. *"**Program Design & Quality Management (Division)** is responsible for the planning, design and monitoring, from a provincial perspective, of all Departmental programs. This would include the interpretation of program guidelines, procedures, policies, standards, regulations and legislation. The Program Development and Monitoring (PDM) Division has been divided into six branches...,"* of which Child Welfare and Youth Service is one.

2. **Child & Youth Services (Branch)** *"is responsible for the planning, design and monitoring of all departmental child welfare and youth programs and services. These include the following programs and services: Access and Assessment, Child Protection Services, Child In Care/Post-guardianship Services, Adoption Services, Community-Based Services for Children with Special Needs, Children's Residential Services (foster homes and group homes), Open Custody under the Youth Criminal Justice Act, Birth Parent Services and programming for youth such as the Social Assistance Youth Policy and Youth-at-Risk".*

3. **Child Welfare & Youth Services (Unit)** is responsible for the programs listed above including children in care and children's residential services.

4. **Clinical Auditing & Child Welfare Training (Unit)** is responsible for clinical auditing. Implemented in 2009, *"the purpose of the clinical audits is to assist in increasing public and staff trust and confidence in the Department and in helping to ensure the highest level of services provided to the children of New Brunswick".*

5. **Program Delivery Division** is responsible for the delivery of all Departmental programs, including Children's Residential Services (foster homes and group homes).

6. *Regional Offices* are *"responsible for the direct delivery of departmental programs and services throughout the province from regional offices and satellite offices."* There are eight regional offices where social workers recruit, approve and monitor foster families.

7. **Children's Residential Services** (foster homes and group homes) is one of many programs delivered by the Regional Offices.

8. **Corporate Services Division** has several responsibilities, including the oversight of payments made to foster families.

Source: Chart created by the Office of the Auditor General from information (with quotes) provided by the Department.

Appendix III – General Information on the Foster Family Association

General Information on the Foster Family Association

General:

Established in 1982

The New Brunswick Foster Families Association is an organization for foster families, run by foster parents to serve and support each other in their work as caregivers.

Objective:

Our Objective is to be the voice of all foster parents while working to improve fostering in the Province of New Brunswick.

Role of the Provincial Association:

The NBFFA works in partnership with the Minister and Department of [Social Development] on training, policy and program development.

Role of the Local Association:

Providing the following services to our members:

· *Training*
· *Social Functions for foster families*
· *Networking*
· *Recruitment & Retention of Foster Parents*
· *Group Support*
· *F.A.S.T – Foster Assistance Support Team*

Source: New Brunswick Foster Family Association's website. http://www.nbfosterfamilies.ca/nbffa.html

Appendix IV – Information on Our Testing of Foster Family Files

This appendix includes the following:

·   details on the sample of foster family files;

·   a list of the standards[65] relating to approving a foster family; and

·   the documentation required in a foster family's file.

Details on the Sample of Foster Family Files
The following list provides details on the sample of foster family files tested: ·   Twenty (20) files were tested. ·   The testing covered all eight regions. Four files were tested for both the Moncton and Saint John regions. Two files were tested from the remaining six regions. ·   Fourteen (14) of the 20 files tested were *regular* foster families. ·   Six (6) of the 20 files were *provisional* families. *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."*[66] One of the six provisional home files tested was for contracted care. ·   Foster family initial approval dates for the tested files ranged from 1992 to 2012. Six of the 20 files involved foster families approved in 2005 or earlier.

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[65] "standards*"* refers to the Department's *"Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes"* dated January 2005. *Practice standards are mandatory and establish a minimum level of performance to meet the compliance required in a particular service.* (section 1.1, page1)

[66] Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers – Foster Homes*, January 2005, page 22.

Appendix IV – Information on Our Testing of Foster Family Files -
continued

Standards Relating to Approving a Foster Family
The following is a list of the standards relating to the approval of foster families. · *Practice Standard 4 – Application Forms/ References/ Medical Statement* · *Practice Standard 5 – SD Record Check and Criminal Record Check* · *Practice Standard 6 – Non-negotiable Eligibility Criteria for Prospective Foster Families* · *Practice Standard 7 – First At-home Consultation Meeting* · *Practice Standard 8 – PRIDE Pre-Service Training* · *Practice Standard 9 – Mutual Family Assessment Meetings* · *Practice Standard 10 – Written Assessment of Applicant on Completion of PRIDE Pre-service* · *Practice Standard 11 – Number of Children for Type of Home* · *Practice Standard 12 – Approval* · *Practice Standard 13 – Final Consultation with Applicant* · *Practice Standard 14 – Foster Family Resource Agreement* · *Practice Standard 15 – Identification Card* · *Practice Standard 16 – Oath of Confidentiality* · *Practice Standard 17 – Provision of Family Foster Care Standards and Other Related Documents to the Foster Family* · *Practice Standard 20 – Assessment of a Provisional[67] Home*
Source: Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers– Foster Homes*, January 2005.

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[67] *"A provisional home is established for a specific child or group of siblings that is known to the family; a family relative, neighbour or significant other. They are approved only for the children placed there. They are not available for other children as are foster families."* (standards, page 22)

Appendix IV – Information on Our Testing of Foster Family Files -
continued

Foster Family File (Practice Standard 31)
The CRS Social Worker must ensure that each foster family approved by the Department of Social Development has a manual and an electronic file.   *Procedures:*   *The Foster family's manual file shall contain the following information where applicable:*   • *Application Form*   • *Completed Consent for SD Record Check and Criminal Record Check*   • *Three (3) letters of References*   • *Medical (if any)*   • *Foster Family Assessment Report*   • *Letter of Selection-In or Counselled-Out*   • *Foster Family Resource Agreement*   • *Oath of Confidentiality*   • *Family Development Plan*   • *Annual reviews*   • *Environment of Care Compliance Checklist*   • *Professional Development Records*   • *Incident Complaints Report*   • *Foster Home Incident Report*   • *Correspondence related to the foster family*   • *Third party reports related to foster family*   • *Any release of information signed by the foster family*   *The Foster Family's electronic file must be kept up-to-date as required per the current computer system standards.*
Source: Province of New Brunswick – Department of Social Development, *Children's Residential Services Practice Standards For Social Workers– Foster Homes*, January 2005.

Appendix V – Estimated Annual Minimum Cost to Keep a Child in a Foster Home

Estimated Annual Minimum Cost to Keep a Child in a Foster Home	
Basic maintenance rate for a foster child - age 11+ years (monthly)	
Lodging	$107
Food	188
Clothing	77
Personal care	32
Transportation	35
Babysitting	45
Recreation/Special occasion	35
Total basic maintenance rate	$519
Federal special allowance (monthly)	160
Monthly payments to foster parents	$679
Payments for one year ($679 x 12)	$8,148
Clothing & seasonal allowances	
Spring clothing	112
School clothing	104
School supplies	169
Winter clothing	168
Christmas allowance	130
Total payments for one year*	**$8,831**

Notes:

1. ***Basic maintenance rate for a foster child*** and its components are set by the Department for three age groupings: 0-4 years, 5-10 years, and 11+ years. The monthly rate is the highest for foster children 11+ years and is presented above for 2013, the current rate effective April 2010. See Exhibit 2.7 for additional information.

2. ***Federal special allowance*** - *"The Federal Special Allowance, or portion thereof, may be given to the child for his or her own spending money. It may also be used to help purchase special items for the child. The child should also be encouraged to save or invest a portion of this allowance for future purchases of major special items."* (*Financial Rates And Benefits For Children In Care* policy dated November 1996)

3. ***Clothing & seasonal allowances*** - Various rates dependant on age of the foster child. The rates are the highest for foster children 11+ years and are presented above for 2013, the current rate effective 2003. See Exhibit 2.8 for additional information.

4. ***Total payments for one year**** is the total of known payments for each foster child. Additional payments may be made for relief care, transportation and other costs identified in the child's case plan, as well as health costs such as prescriptions, glasses and dental services.

Source: Table created by the Office of the Auditor General with information provided by the Department (unaudited).