

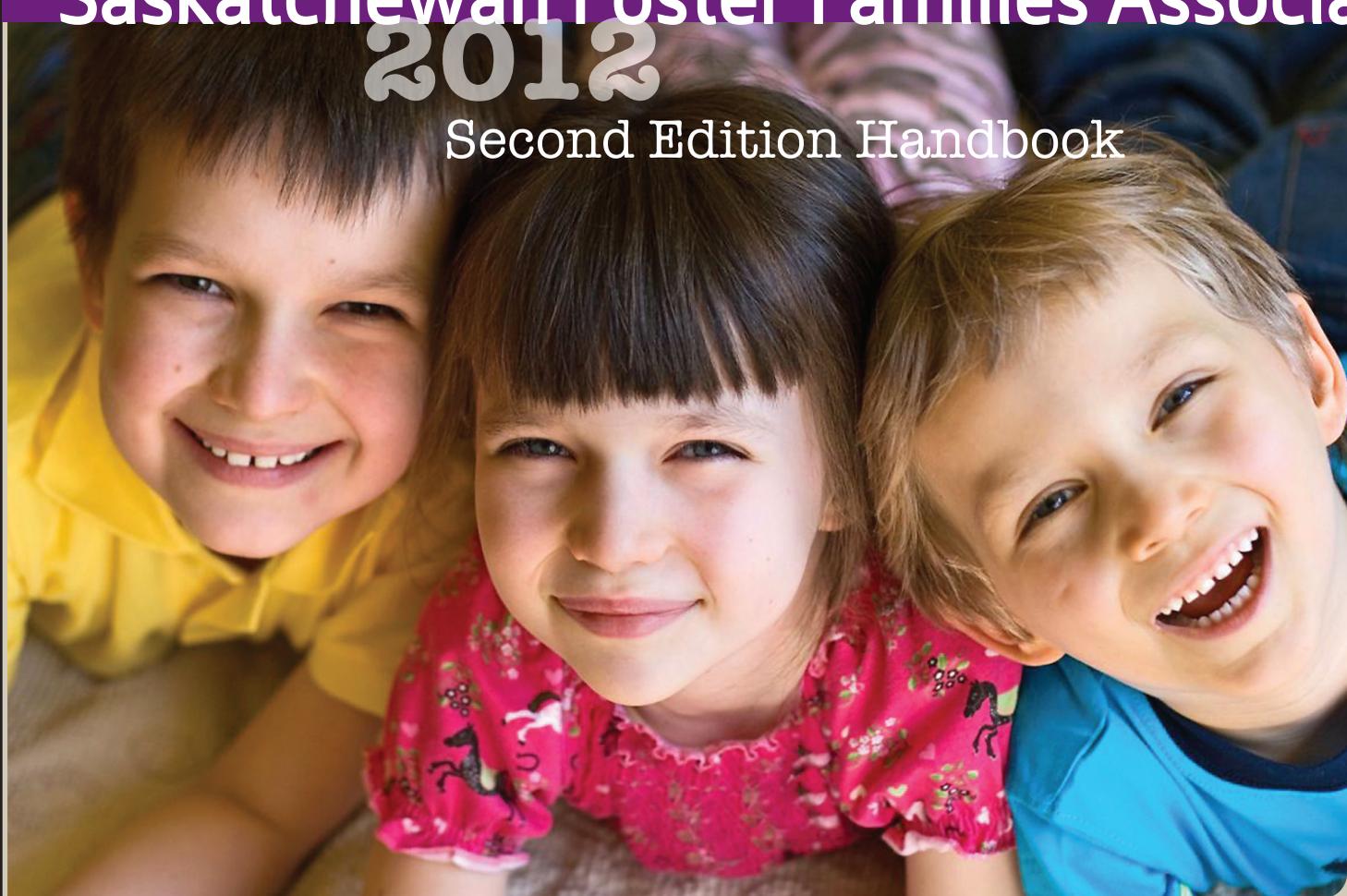


SASKATCHEWAN
FOSTER FAMILIES



Saskatchewan Foster Families Association 2012

Second Edition Handbook



www.sffa.sk.ca

Empowering resilient families for the betterment of society





Saskatchewan Foster Families Association

2012

Second Edition Handbook

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Introduction

The Saskatchewan Foster Parent Handbook is a resource for new and experienced foster parents. It includes information on everyday issues as well as answers to frequently asked questions about foster care.

This handbook is not intended to be a policy statement, but rather an additional resource to the information that has already been provided through training and policy. If you require additional information, please refer to the Children Services Manual (CSM), your foster child's caseworker or the SFFA.

Each section of the handbook will provide an overview of foster care, explanations of policy, responsibilities of the foster family, advice and other important information on areas that foster families may face. It is our goal to illustrate how the efforts and contributions of foster parents, Ministry staff and others involved in foster care result in a professional, team approach which best meets the needs of the children in care.

Purpose of the foster care program

Foster care is an essential family and child welfare service for children, youth and their families who must live apart for a limited or long period of time. It is an alternative out-of-home support service for children

and youth in care who are unable to remain with their families because their biological parents are unable to care for them. The goal of foster care is to provide opportunities for the healing, growth, development and support

of the children so that they may be reunited with their biological family. The responsibility of the foster family is to provide foster children with safe, healthy and nurturing relationships and environments.

The Child and Family Services Act

Children come into care under the authority of The Child and Family Services Act either through a voluntary agreement between Social Services and the parents, or by an order of the court. Support services are then provided to the child's family so the child can eventually return home. Until it is safe for the child to return home, Social Services provides a home or other residential placement that will best meet the needs of each child. The majority of children in the care of the Ministry are placed in foster homes.

Wherever possible, placements with extended family or within the child's cultural community are sought in order to maintain family and cultural connections. The majority of children remain in care for brief periods of time before returning to their immediate family, extended family or cultural community. Over 80% of children leave care within one year of entering.

Visit <http://www.socialservices.gov.sk.ca/childrens-services-manual.pdf> for more detailed information.

The majority of these children leave care within the first six months. Wards under permanent or long term care orders represent about 40% of the total number of children in care. Only a small number of children become permanent or long term wards during a year and an equally small number of permanent or long term wards leave care.

Foster families come from all walks of life, and a variety of cultural, education and economic backgrounds.

Matching a Foster Child to a Foster Family

When a child needs a foster home placement, all efforts are made to match the needs of the foster child with the training and preferences of the foster family. By classifying foster homes, the level of training, skill and experience of the foster family can assist with the matching process. There are four types of foster care:

Emergency

Provides immediate care to children on short notice at any time of day or night, often with little information. Children may be in poor health or physical condition, and may require care for up to two weeks.

Short term

Provides care and prepares children for transition to their families, to



By classifying foster homes, the level of training, skill and experience of the foster family can assist with the matching process.

extended family, or to another permanent home.

Long term

Provides care to children who are unable to return to their natural families. In some cases, this may be until the children move to independent living.

Therapeutic Foster care

Is a specialized program for those children and youth who present a range of behavioural, social, developmental and emotional problems that make it difficult for the regular foster care system to meet their needs. For some of these young people, placement with a therapeutic foster family is a preferred alternative to institutional care. Therapeutic foster families receive specialized training and support.

How many children can be placed in my home?



The number of children placed in the home must be based on the assessed capacity of the foster home and the needs of the children. The maximum number of children that can be placed in a foster home at any given

time is four, **except** under the following conditions:

- The placement of sibling groups
- Placement of children in a home in which they have lived previously
- Short term emergency placements
- Provision of short term respite

No more than two of the above circumstances are allowed at any time as the basis to exceed four children.

When exceeding the number of four children, age must be considered as a

factor. If four preschool aged children are in the home, no more than two may be under 24 months of age **or** if no other preschool children are in the home, three children under 30 months of age may be placed.

Exceptions will only be made with Regional Director approval or designate approval, which will require review and renewal every two weeks.

Foster parent training

All foster parents must participate in a standard training program (PRIDE).

PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education) is a competency based model of practice implemented by the Ministry of Social Services for the development and support of foster families. It was designed with the assistance of foster and adoptive parents in order to strengthen the quality of care to children.



All foster parents must participate in a standard training program (PRIDE).

Through PRIDE, foster parents learn the importance of promoting a child's positive sense of identity, history, culture and values to help develop self-esteem.

PRIDE is based on the following five competencies:

1. Protecting and nurturing children
2. Meeting children's developmental needs and addressing developmental delays
3. Supporting relationships between children and their families
4. Connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime
5. Working as a member of a professional team

Foster Parent Training Standards

Foster families must successfully complete the following training requirements prior to approval of their home and placement of children:

- PRIDE (Parent Resources for Information, Development and Education) Pre-Service sessions 1 - 9 (27 hours) (see Practice Guidelines for complete list of PRIDE Pre-Service training sessions);
- Saskatchewan Aboriginal Culture Component (3 hours);
- Standard First Aid and Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR Level B) recognized by Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety (17 hours).

- Training on culturally relevant information about aboriginal people of Saskatchewan is mandatory and is provided at the pre-service PRIDE training.

Foster families must successfully complete the following training requirements after their home has been approved:

- PRIDE Core In-Service modules 1 & 2 (mandatory training - 21 hours);
- FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) (mandatory training - 3 hours);
- PRIDE Core In-Service modules 3 - 12 as determined by the foster family and their resource worker, based on the PRIDE Family Development Plan (see Practice Guidelines for complete list of PRIDE Core In-Service modules);
- Standard First Aid and Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR Level B) recertification recognized by Saskatchewan Occupational Health and Safety every three years (9 hours).

Additional training, including Advanced and Specialized modules, will be provided based on the PRIDE Family Development Plan agreed upon by the Ministry and the foster family and approved by the Ministry.

What to expect

Before a child is placed in your home, you are given information about the child which will help you to decide whether or not to accept the placement. Foster parents are entitled to all known background information that is relevant to the care of the child. When a child is placed in your home, you should receive information such as:

- Identifying information (name, birth date, Saskatchewan Health Card Number, etc.)
- Information about why the child is in care

- Health needs (allergies, health conditions, medications, etc.)
- Information about school
- Any possible problems or expected behaviours of the child
- Information about who may visit the child, including the frequency, time and place

Depending on the circumstances, sometimes little information is available at the time of placement. This can be the case especially for emergency placements. As soon as information becomes available, it will

be shared with you. You have the right to say no to a placement if you feel that your family is unable to meet the needs of the child.

It is important to involve all members of the family in the decision making process. Evaluating your family's strengths helps you to determine what you could offer the child and/or what supports may be required. Be sure to discuss any concerns, especially if there are special issues involved such as disabilities, cultural differences or past history concerns.

Confidentiality

Remember, as foster parents, you must respect the rights and dignity of each child in care. Foster families must avoid discussing identifiable information concerning a child. Information may be shared with other professionals involved in the care of the child (e.g. teachers, doctors), but you should limit that information to only what is needed in order to provide services. Responsible sharing of information with close relatives or other foster families who are in contact with the child is sometimes



necessary and should be done in a considerate manner that will not harm the child or his/her birth family.

Temporary caregivers should only be given enough information to meet the needs of the child. You must refrain from discussing any details regarding the child's family situation, background or the reason for the child's placement.

If you are in doubt as to whether or not you should share certain information, it is a good idea to discuss the matter with your caseworker.

Belongings

When a child is placed in your home, they may bring clothing, toys or other possessions with them. Although these items may not seem very valuable, these belongings may be

precious to that child and should be treated respectfully. These possessions may be what they treasure most of all, especially because they are being separated from their families and placed

in a strange environment away from what is familiar to them. Children in care should have appropriate luggage and a place to store their belongings.



As a foster family, one of your responsibilities is to support and encourage contact between the child and the child's birth family. Although it may be difficult to show acceptance

Record keeping

Record keeping is essential because your family will be spending more time with the foster child than anyone else. These entries and observations are integral to future planning and for the child's memories.

How should I record information?

- A journal of precise notes in point form is acceptable
- Be sure to write down the dates and times
- Use a separate journal or notebook for each child and ensure that it remains confidential
- Describe any incidents as accurately and thoroughly as possible

What should I record?

- Visits with the natural family
- School progress or school related issues
- All health appointments, immunizations, medications, health care issues or injuries

Birth families

towards the child's family, especially if the child has suffered maltreatment, this is integral to the emotional needs of the child and for planning for the child's return home to their family.

The birth family includes the child's parents or guardians at the time they came into foster care. It also includes siblings and other extended family members who may be significant to the child. By remaining positive, non-

judgmental and showing support, the child will not feel like he or she has to choose between two families and that he or she has permission to love and care about both. Working with birth families and keeping them informed of their child's activities and progress helps them to feel part of their child's life and assists in the reunification plan.

- Unusual behaviors or changes in behavior of the child
- Achievements or successes of the child
- Changes in the child's circumstances
- Cultural activities that the child may have participated in
- Any incidents that you feel may be important

Why should I keep these records?

- A diary of these events can help you to remember at a later date
- They may assist with decision making and future planning
- They can be used to supply factual information in court or during case planning
- Recording the child's behavior (both negative and positive) can identify a behavior pattern
- There will be a written record of events in the case of something that may be later disputed

- A recording of incidents can help you to obtain additional help or supports if necessary
- Having detailed records can reduce your family's risk of having a complaint or allegation made against you, especially if a complaint is made a long time after the event

Keeping valuable mementos such as health information, immunization records, awards, report cards and school projects ensures that people, places and memories important to the child are not forgotten.



Case planning

Case planning is crucial when a child comes into care. Continual assessment is necessary when evaluating the current and future needs of the child. Case plans are developed through case conferences, interviews with the child, family, caregivers or others who provide services to the child. Case plans can include vital information about a child's past, his/her family, the child's development and what skills or resources may be necessary to care for the child. Case plans also aid in selecting the appropriate caregiver(s) for the child.

The case plan includes goals and tasks that must be accomplished in order to:

- reduce identified risks to child safety
- build family strengths and supports
- resolve problems identified through family assessment

• meet the child's developmental needs including maintaining family attachments

Family Contact plan: When it is safe, children should have as much contact as possible with their parents, siblings, extended family, friends or elders as possible. Regular phone contact or the exchange of letters is an alternative if contact is not possible or infrequent.

Shared Parenting plan: Shared parenting involves the child's family, the caseworker and the care providers willingly including each other when planning for the needs of the child in care. Birth parents will be invited to participate, where appropriate, in the day-to-day care of their child even though the child is in foster care.

Family Reunification plan: Family reunification outlines the tasks that are required to be completed in order for the child to safely return home. These tasks must be completed in order to reduce or eliminate the child protection concerns and create a safe and secure environment for the child.

Case plans help to ensure that the child's unique cultural, social, physical, emotional and identity needs are being met while in foster care. Case planning requires teamwork between the caseworker, family and the care providers. Foster parents are a critical part of this team approach. Obtaining and sharing information during case conferences helps to determine what is in the best interests of the child.

How can I help my foster child adjust?

Remember that both you and your foster child will need time to adjust. Don't expect everything to go smoothly right away. Foster children may have intense feelings about what has happened to them. They have left their families and familiar surroundings and are uncertain of the future. Each child will express their feelings in a unique, individualized way.

Children removed from their homes feel the shock of separation and will go through aspects of the grieving process. A child expressing these feelings is not an indicator that you are not doing a good job!



Children who have been abused may also interpret routines, comments, traditions or communicating in

different ways than you would expect. Many loving acts which would be considered innocent and normal in a secure home, such as a hug, tickling, or light hearted teasing, may be scary and emotionally difficult for a child who has been abused. Be aware of the child's background and pay attention to any signs of the child being frightened or uncomfortable. By having a routine in your home, keeping your emotions consistent and following through on what you say you will do, your home will reflect a certain amount of predictability and calm which will help the child to adjust.

Life books

Children who live with their birth families have the opportunity to grow up surrounded by the history of events in their lives. Children who come into care are often denied this opportunity. Changes in placements can mean living with different families in different neighbourhoods. Long periods of time spent in care can mean that the past may be confusing or forgotten. Children have a right to know who they are and where they have come from. Life Books can help children understand and accept their past and help to make sense of what is happening to them. Life Books may also provide an opportunity for the child to discuss his or her feelings about the recorded information.

The Life Book is intended to provide a permanent history for a child by recording as many significant events in the child's life as possible. This can be done by collecting pictures, historical data, memorabilia, stories and the special events in a child's life. Creating a Life Book gives you the opportunity



to show foster children why they should be proud of themselves. This visual history is a wonderful way for the child to remember their time with you.

Here are some suggestions for creating a Life Book:

The Life Book can be a folder, binder, photo album, or assembled package which includes:

- Photographs of birth parents, siblings, grandparents, extended family and any details or information that is available
- Photographs of foster families and any names, details or information about them

- Photographs of the child's school or any previous schools
- Photographs of activities, holidays, birthdays or other significant events
- Souvenirs from trips, events or concerts
- Report cards
- Certificates of achievement
- Letters from family and friends
- School projects
- Any information that is important to the child

A Life Book must be started for every child who remains in foster care for more than six months. It becomes part of the child's belongings and must accompany the child when he or she moves from the foster home. The child has the right to decide whether or not to share the Life Book with anyone.

While foster parents may complete this task, they should not be expected to do the Life Book without some assistance, training and supervision of the caseworker.

Financial support

Foster parents receive a monthly payment to cover the costs associated with raising a child. The payment allows foster parents to provide for physical needs including food, shelter, clothing, personal items, transportation and recreation. Additional funds may be available for expenses such as sports, music lessons, cultural activities and other special needs. These funds are based on the developmental needs of each child

and are assessed within individual case plans.

Children in foster care are entitled to receive supplementary medical services, which provide for most health needs, including prescription medication, eye care and dental services.

Foster parents who are caring for children with significant behavioural

or medical needs may require additional funds beyond the basic compensation rates. This is called Fee for Service, which is intended for situations where the services provided by caregivers are significantly greater than those which are normally provided to children in care. This is based on services actually provided and not simply on the behaviours or needs of the child.

Culture

Culture is part of a child's identity and heritage. Preserving the culture of all children in care is crucial for their development and identity. While efforts are made to consider culture when deciding placement of a child, often the child and the foster family may have differences in culture and religion. It is essential that you respect the religion or culture of any child in your home. At no time should the child be required to adopt the foster parent's religious beliefs or rituals.

Culturally relevant information about Aboriginal people of Saskatchewan has been added to the PRIDE pre-service. This is a mandatory three hour training session for all foster parents in Saskatchewan. As the diversity of cultures continues to grow in our province, being respectful and inclusive of everyone (regardless of culture, background, race, language, ability or ethnic origin) becomes increasingly more important. It is beneficial to discuss any cultural needs

of the child with the caseworker.



Preserving the culture of all children in care is crucial for their development and identity.

Travel

The Ministry of Social Services may pay travel costs above the Basic Maintenance rates for a child in care if the purpose of the visit is to access medical care, facilitate visits with the child's family or significant others, attend events that are beneficial to the child or where travel is required in the event of an emergency, such as the serious illness or death of a family member or significant others. The means of

transportation should be the most economical or reasonable given the circumstances.

For out of province travel, permission from the child's parents must be given if the child is in voluntary care. Parents of children who are temporary or long term wards should also be consulted whenever possible. A letter of permission and medical consent must be signed by the Regional Director through the Ministry of Social Services in order for the child to travel out of the province.

For international travel, a passport must be obtained for any child traveling outside of Canada. The application for the passport should be completed by the foster parent in consultation with the child's caseworker.

In addition, the Ministry may pay travel costs above the Basic Maintenance rates to enable a child to take a special holiday with their foster family.



when a **child** is placed in your home

Discipline

The children placed in your home come from a variety of backgrounds. Discipline may have been severe or inconsistent. As a result, foster parents must be nurturing and have a range of child rearing skills to help build the child's self esteem and develop self control and independence. Discipline is the purposeful direction of a child's life by a caregiver. All appropriate discipline focuses on discouraging undesirable behaviour and encouraging desirable behaviour.

All discipline should:

- Establish as much as possible, a positive, respectful and nurturing environment in the foster home.
- Present a mature and responsible role model to the children to demonstrate caring and sensitive values.
- Reflect a willingness to set reasonable limits and rules.
- Develop a wholesome environment in which children can feel safe, secure, appreciated and respected.
- Be appropriate to the developmental level of the child.
- Be motivated by a desire to assist the child.
- Be communicated in a way the child can understand.
- Be consistent with the child's cultural heritage, as the child understands it.
- Include encouragement and positive reinforcement.
- Include an increase in privileges and responsibilities, eg, "Please finish your homework before you watch television."
- Include acknowledgement, recognition and praise.
- Clearly establish rules and limits that are fair and applied consistently.

- Solicit, where appropriate, the child's involvement in determining disciplinary actions such as consequences or boundaries.
- Limit future activities that are casually connected to the undesirable behaviour.
- Provide counselling and teaching regarding anger management or addictive/compulsive behaviour.



Intervention is most effective when a parent disciplines a child immediately after the behaviour that is being discouraged.

Intervention could include (but is not limited to):

- Bringing the child's attention to the specific inappropriate behaviour.
- Expressing disapproval of the misbehaviour but not the child.
- Discussing the specific aspect of the misbehaviour/incident with the child.
- Redirecting the attention of the child.
- Coming between the child and the focus of their undesirable behaviour.
- Temporary removal from activity, situation or group.
- Allowing the child to experience appropriate consequences from outside agencies such as school, police or the community.

- Helping the child to experience fair and logical consequences.
- Restricting or removing privileges or withholding allowance.
- Reparation or restitution for damages such as payment, repair or extra duties.

Inappropriate Discipline

It is the foster parents' responsibility to act as an advocate for the child to make sure that no one in or out of the foster home uses inappropriate discipline on the children in their care. All disciplinary actions that do not respect the rights of the child or that diminish growth, development or enhancement of the child's self-respect are prohibited.

In addition, the following discipline methods are strictly prohibited:

- Corporal punishment, which is defined as: the inflicting of physical pain or the cause of physical harm within the disciplinary process, such as biting, punching, hitting, slapping, strapping, shaking, choking, kicking, spanking, hair or ear pulling and any other technique where the goal is to produce physical discomfort.
- Restricting or depriving a child of his/her basic needs such as food, clothing, shelter, bedding, sleep or washroom facilities.
- Using force or threats of force to intimidate.
- Demeaning remarks or derogatory name calling intended to hurt or degrade.
- Extensive and prolonged withholding of emotional response after the undesirable behaviour has stopped.

- Racial put-downs of any kind.
- Modeling of undesirable behaviour to teach the child a lesson.
- Deliberate destruction of a child's property.
- Forcing a child to take an uncomfortable or degrading position such as kneeling or standing in the corner.

- Locking an unattended child in any space for any reason.
- Using mechanical restraints such as handcuffs, ropes, chains, etc.
- Making a child eat undesirable substances such as soap, Tabasco sauce, etc.
- Administering drugs or medication intended to subdue reactive behaviour

- without the authorization of a physician.
- Withholding/refusing or threatening to withhold/refuse family contacts or home visits.
- Threatening to remove the child from the home as a means of discipline.

Respite

Respite is a planned block of time to provide the foster family with temporary relief from the day to day responsibilities of foster care. Respite is meant to provide an extended break in order to reduce potential for “burnout”. Families are encouraged to take respite

but are not obligated. All foster families at the intern and practitioner level are eligible for ten days of respite per year. It is recommended that the ten days be taken all at once (as the objective is to provide a break for foster parents), but this is not mandatory.

Foster parents must plan their respite days with their caseworker in advance. The plan must address the needs of the foster family and the needs of the individual children in the home. Foster parents are responsible for making their own respite arrangements in conjunction with their caseworker, who must approve the respite provider. Other foster families may also be respite providers.

Respite is meant to provide an extended break in order to reduce potential for “burnout”.

When a child leaves your home

A child may leave a foster home for a variety of reasons. The move may be initiated by the child, the foster family, the natural family or the caseworker. The child's goals may have been achieved, or a child may be moved so that siblings can be placed together. A change in foster family circumstances may also affect placements in the home. If a placement becomes too difficult, notifying the caseworker as soon as possible can prevent the placement from breaking down. If additional support has been put in place but isn't helping, a foster family can request that a child be moved. Sometimes it is

the children themselves who ask to be moved. A child may run away from the home and refuse to return. An adoption or the age of the child may also be a factor. The Ministry or the court may also move a child from the home. Although it is most beneficial to have everyone involved and prepared for the process, sometimes there may be little advance notice given.

Cooperate with everyone involved in order to make the move as easy as possible for the child. No matter what the reason is for leaving, supporting the child, reassuring him/her and

encouraging the child to leave with a positive attitude eases the transition.

As a caring foster parent, you may experience intense feelings ranging from relief to profound loss. Fostering is not permanent. Children moving on from your home can mean success. Developing relationships and strong feelings with children in your care is a natural aspect of fostering. Learning when to let go is an important part of being a foster parent. After a loss or time of transition, you may need to take some time to adjust.

Health and safety information



Smoking

Protecting children from harm also means ensuring that they are not exposed to second hand smoke. Exposure to second hand smoke is detrimental to the health and development of children. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many are known to be harmful substances, including tar, nicotine, carbon monoxide, benzene, formaldehyde and hydrogen cyanide. More than fifty of these chemicals cause cancer.

Infants and children are particularly vulnerable to tobacco smoke because their lungs and respiratory tracts are still growing. Children have a higher metabolism and breathe faster and can therefore absorb higher amounts of smoke than adults.

Research shows that tobacco smoke can trigger colds, asthma, bronchitis, ear infections, allergies, pneumonia and breathing problems. There is strong evidence that infants exposed

to second hand smoke are at greater risk of dying from Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

Every child placed in a foster home will be provided with a safe, healthy and nurturing environment. Children in foster homes will not be exposed to second hand smoke.

- **Smoking will not be permitted in a foster home where a child is placed.**

- **Smoking will not be permitted in vehicles used to transport children.**

- In order to further ensure that vulnerable children are not exposed to residual tobacco smoke, it is recommended that all infants and children under the age of two, all medically fragile children and all children with allergies and/or asthma be placed in foster homes where all caregivers are not exposed to any type of smoke.

- This is not intended to restrict the spiritual use of tobacco, sage or sweetgrass.

- For those foster families who would like to stop smoking, the Ministry will cover costs associated with attendance at smoking cessation programs.

Fire Safety

In the event of a fire in the home, even a warning of a few seconds can make all the difference. Having a fire evacuation plan ensures that your family is prepared if a fire should ever occur. Ensure that everyone in the home understands the exit plan. Fire drills should occur at least every year or when a new foster child is placed in your home.

Foster families are encouraged to have suitable fire extinguishers in the home. All furnaces and the chimney are to be inspected annually. All fireplaces and wood stoves should be inspected and well maintained. In addition:

All families must have an evacuation plan in place in case of a fire.

- Smoke alarms should be installed on each floor of the home and be tested regularly. Batteries should be replaced at regular intervals.
- Carbon monoxide detectors should be installed on every level of the home. Carbon monoxide exposure kills, especially when occupants are sleeping.
- Child resistant lighters are NOT childproof.
- Do not let children play in cooking areas or hold them while cooking. Most burns happen at times of stress or high activity in your home, such as during meal preparation.
- Turn pan handles in when cooking on the stove
- High heat can cause oil to burst into flames. Heat it slowly and never leave it on high.

In case of a fire:

- Crawl low under smoke.
- Stop, drop and roll if your clothes are on fire.
- Find a safe way to evacuate from the house.
- Phone 9-1-1 from a neighbours house.
- Never return inside the home.

Storage of Hazardous Chemicals

- Store hazardous chemicals out of the reach of children at all times.
- Always replace the cap securely before you set the container down; all it takes is a second for an accident to occur.
- Teach children to recognize hazard symbols and teach them the dangers associated with chemicals.
- Always keep products stored in their original containers with the labels.

- Never allow children to touch or use household chemicals.
- Have handy the telephone numbers for your doctor, ambulance and fire department as well as the poison control centre.
- In case of an accident, call '9-1-1', your doctor or your local poison control centre. You should be ready to read information from the product's label. Be sure to follow any first aid treatment that is advised.

Medications

- All prescription and non-prescription drugs should be stored away from children's reach.
- All drugs should be stored in a locked facility.
- A child should have supervised access to a drug only if the caseworker and foster parent agree that the child is capable. The child should be trained how to self-administer a drug by the appropriate professional.
- All medications and/or vitamins should remain in an original container if being taken to school.

Infant and child safety

Crib Safety

Health Canada has issued a statement saying that cribs made before September 1989 are dangerous. This also includes cribs that do not have a label. They do not meet current standards. It is illegal to sell, import or advertise these cribs.

When purchasing a crib, look for:

- A label that shows when the crib was made.
- Check the crib often to make sure the frame is solid.
- Tighten screws regularly and check to make sure the sides lock into place.

The mattress:

- Make sure the mattress is tight against all four sides of the crib.
- Replace the mattress if it is not firm or if it is worn out.
- Move it to its lowest level as soon as the baby can sit up.

Safety rails:

- The bars should have no more than 2 3/8" between the bars.

- The rails should always be up and locked in place when the baby is in the crib.
- Bumper pads should never be used.

Bassinets or cradles:

- Should have a wide base and a sturdy bottom.
- Check for any protruding staples or hardware that could injure the baby.
- The mattress should fit firmly and snug in the bassinet.

Baby safety:

- Never tie the baby in the crib or let them wear a necklace or soother on a cord around the neck.
- The crib should be placed away from windows, curtains, blind cords, lamps, electrical plugs and extension cords.
- Babies should be supervised with toys and bottles.

Bunk Beds

Bunk beds can be a popular choice for families, especially when there are multiple children sharing a



room. However, bunk beds can be dangerous to children and they should be taught how to use them safely. The top bunk is not safe for children under six years of age.

When buying bunk beds, here are some things you should watch for:

- Make sure that the top bunk has guardrails on all four sides.
- Make sure the mattress fits snug and tight against all sides of the bed.
- Make sure the ladder is attached safely to the frame.
- Look for a label that says it meets American standards. Health Canada recommends American safety standards labeled as ASTM F-1427.

Playpens

It is important to follow all warnings and instructions provided with your playpen. A baby should not be left unsupervised for any length of time in a playpen.

Safety tips when using playpens:

- Be sure that the latches or pivoting hinges on the top rails are always closed or completely rotated in place. If they are not locked into place, the rail could collapse and trap a baby. Do not use a playpen if the latches do not remain closed.
- Some older playpens have protruding bolts that can catch on a child's clothing. As well, many have top rails that are covered in vinyl. If the vinyl has begun to tear, the vinyl and the foam inside become choking hazards. Older playpens can also have large mesh, which can be large enough to hook on a child's clothing. Playpen mesh should be a small mosquito type size.
- Never tie a soother or any other cord on a baby's clothing. Pacifier cords can become caught on the playpen, resulting in strangulation.
- Never add an extra mattress to the playpen.
- Do not allow large toys in the playpen. They can be used to climb out of the playpen, resulting in possible falls or injuries.
- If a child can climb out of the playpen, it should no longer be used.

Strollers

Health Protection Branch Canada has these tips for safe strolling:

- Follow the manufacturer's weight and height recommendations – the stroller must meet the regulations set in 1985. Make certain that if you are

using a second hand stroller that it has a lap belt or safety restraint that is solidly attached to the seat or frame. Make sure that the brakes and locking mechanisms are working and solidly attached.

- Always use the lap belt or harness. Ensure that the seat does not pull away from the frame, even in a sudden stop. Use the breaks when you stop and ensure that the wheels are fitted tightly.
- Make sure hands and feet are well away from the stroller before you fold it or make adjustments.
- Do not carry extra children unless you are following the manufacturer's recommendation.
- Do not use a stroller on an escalator.

High Chairs

A safe high chair has a wide base to reduce the risk of tipping. Do not allow older children to climb onto the chair. Keep the chair a safe distance from walls, windows, blind cords, mirrors, appliances and other furniture. The newer models that have a plastic crotch post are safer than the older chairs equipped with only a lap strap. Always use the strap and make sure that the tray is locked into place securely.

Car Seat Safety

In Canada, all children under the age of six or who are less than 40lbs. in weight must be secured in an approved and correctly installed childcare safety seat by law. All infant, child and booster seats sold in Canada must meet the safety regulations of Transport Canada. These regulations require safe materials, a national safety mark on the seat and an instruction booklet. All regulations are designed to help protect children in a sudden stop or collision.

The safest place for kids aged 12 and under is the back seat. It is widely recommended by the Canadian Automobile Association and the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control that children under the age of 12 never sit in the front seat of a vehicle which has an airbag. The force of an air bag that has been deployed can injure or kill a child. The National Center for Injury Prevention and Control states that the safest seat in the vehicle for young children is the middle of the back seat. This puts children away from the air bags and as far away as possible from the dangers of a front end collision.

Rear Facing Infant Car Seats:

- Zero to 20 lbs (0-9 kg)
- Use only as long as the top rim of the seat encloses the baby's head

Front-facing Infant Car Seats:

- 20-40 lbs (9 kg-18 kg)

Booster Seats:

- Over 40 lbs (18 kg+)
- The booster seat helps to position the seatbelt in the right place over your child's body
- You must use the seatbelt to hold the booster seat and child in place.

In addition, a car seat must be replaced if it has been in an accident. Car seats should never be purchased second hand in case it has been in a collision.

For more information, call:
Transport Canada
1-800-333-0371 (Toll free)

Reference:

<http://www.tc.gc.ca/eng/roadsafety/safedrivers-childsafety-car-index-873.htm>

Other things to be aware of when purchasing baby or children's items

Toys

- Do not buy or use second hand toys that are in poor repair, have sharp edges or are broken. Watch for loose pieces.
- Select only age appropriate toys (a child under the age of three should not play with a toy with small parts) and read all accompanying instructions
- Keep plush and soft toys away from fireplaces, stoves and other sources of heat.
- Balloons should only be used under supervision. Broken or deflated balloons are a choking hazard and should be disposed of immediately.
- For toys that require batteries, ensure that the batteries are properly installed and not accessible to the child.

Pacifiers

Pacifiers should not have a ribbon, or string attached due to the risk of strangulation. The shield should have ventilation holes and be large enough that it cannot fit into the baby's mouth. Dispose immediately of a pacifier if the nipple has holes or tears as it could break off into baby's mouth and cause choking.

Baby Gates

In Canada, baby gates with large diamond shaped or 'V' openings are not allowed to be sold. A child's head can get caught in these openings and strangulation can result. Collapsible gates must be sturdy, reinforced and small enough to prevent the child's head from being caught. Use a spring loaded gate at the bottom of the stairs.

Bicycle and roller blade helmets are designed to protect the head against a single impact. They should never be purchased second hand.



At the top of the stairs, use one that fastens to the wall.

Changing Tables

The table should have safety straps to prevent your baby from falling. The table should have shelves or drawers that are easily accessible so the baby is not left unattended when reaching for diapers, wipes or other items. A baby begins to roll over around four months of age; make sure that the table is equipped with safety straps to prevent your baby from falling.

Bicycle mounted child seat or bicycle towed child trailer

Have the child use a helmet and instruct them to keep their hands and feet inside the seat or trailer and always use the seatbelt.

Back carriers

The leg openings should be small enough that the child will not slip out, but large enough that it will not chafe the child's legs. The carrier should have padding which covers the portion of the metal frame that is near

the child's face.

Stationary Activity Centre

Make sure the activity centre is strong enough to hold your baby's weight. Never leave your baby alone in it. Keep the centre away from stairs, doors, windows, lamps, coffee tables, wood stoves, fireplaces or other sources of heat. Remember that young children can reach out and grab things that are not safe and possibly pull them down on their heads.

Sports Equipment

Hockey helmets and face protectors sold in Canada must meet safety standards set by C.S.A. International; a C.S.A. sticker must be on their product. Do not purchase equipment that is older than five years old or if it has been subjected to intensive use over two consecutive seasons. Bicycle and roller blade helmets are designed to protect the head against a single impact. They should never be purchased second hand.

Universal precautions

Practicing universal precautions can reduce the risk of disease.

Hand washing:

- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water.

Washing clothing and other linens:

- Clothing and linens soiled with blood or other body fluids should be laundered in the hottest water the fabric will allow. Soiled articles can be rinsed in cold water before washing in the hottest water allowed if necessary.

Using protective clothing and equipment:

- Use disposable latex gloves when handling or cleaning up blood and/or other body fluids. Household rubber gloves can be used, but they need to be cleaned with a bleach solution and



Practicing universal precautions can reduce the risk of disease.

rinsed repeatedly with water before using them again.

- Be sure to wash hands after removing gloves.
- Use waterproof coverings on any open cuts or sores.

Cleaning spills of blood or other body fluids:

- Clean contaminated surfaces with detergent and water. Disinfect all surfaces with a solution of bleach (one part household bleach to 10 parts water). Be careful, as some surfaces may be damaged by exposure to bleach solution.
- Rinse any mops or cleaning cloths with a bleach solution.

Disposal of contaminated waste:

- Secure waste in a sealed double plastic bag before discarding with routine garbage. If there are any sharp objects that may be contaminated, they should be put in a puncture proof plastic or metal container that can seal firmly.

Safeguarding

Foster care is a high-risk profession. It is demanding and can be stressful. Foster families are in a unique relationship with the child compared to the child's birth family or guardians; while performing the day to day responsibilities of a parent, the foster family is not legally defined as a parent of a child in care. Foster parents are in a contractual relationship with the Ministry to provide quality service for a child in need of protection placed in their care. The Ministry is required to provide foster families with adequate support to provide this service. Due to the nature of foster care, foster families may be at greater risk of an allegation than other families. Stresses and limited coping capacity can occasionally lead to an environment

where a particular foster family's parenting ability is impaired, leading to an abusive or neglectful reaction.

How can I effectively safeguard my family?

While there is no absolute way to protect your family against allegations of abuse, there are ways that foster parents can protect themselves in case of an allegation.

The most effective way is to document:

- Keep a daily log of events that occur in your house.
- Date every entry in your log or journal.
- List the activities of the day. Include the time and who was involved.
- Be sure to record both positive and

negative situations that your children may have encountered each day.

- Also include any people who visit on any given day. Document who visited, when, why and how long they stayed.
- If an incident occurred, state only what happened. You can use direct quotes but make sure you are accurate with whom you are quoting.
- Identify every reliable witness and piece of corroborating evidence.
- If possible, take pictures.
- State just the facts. Leave your personal opinion out, however, you may write down your thoughts in another section.
- Document any cancellations of meetings, appointments, absences or changes in plans.
- Document any changes in a child's

health or behaviour – confirmed or suspected.

- Document any modifications to medication or medical or dental appointments.
- List any damages or changes to the child's physical environment (prescribed or not) which could affect their safety, behaviour or quality of life.
- Report any bruises, scratches, wounds, sores, bumps, infections, headaches, etc. which have occurred through accidental injury, self-injury or any difficult to explain circumstances. From an outsider's view, injuries could be perceived as being sustained through negligence or abuse.
- Record any telephone calls with professionals or extended family or friends regarding the incident of the child's behaviour at the time of contact and the advice given verbatim.
- Document statements regarding actions to rectify a possible emergency or safety hazard, such as

first aid treatment given or boarding up a broken window, etc.

Other ways to help safeguard your family include:

- Participate in Core Training available on working with children and youth that have been abused physically or sexually.
- Make time to read books or pamphlets that will increase your awareness of abuse. Obtain a copy of the Ministry of Social Services procedures for handling allegations of abuse.
- Have 'house rules' for everyone about privacy, night wear, etc. This is particularly important when dealing with foster children who are sexually aware or who have been sexually abused.
- Open communication with your caseworker is extremely important. Inform your caseworker of any significant events or changing

dynamics in the home. Insist that the caseworker sign the log whenever he/she reviews it.

- It is strongly recommended that you have an appropriate and authorized adult present with your children and foster children. Make sure you know what constitutes an authorized adult through the Ministry of Social Services regulation.
- Build and maintain a support system. You may experience additional pressures due to the children you have in your care, disrupted family dynamics or from difficulties that arise from dealing with the caseworker or the Ministry of Social Services. Attending local foster meetings, connecting with your local peer support member or counseling provided by the Ministry can help give you the support you need. Keeping confidentiality in mind, it is very important that you have someone to turn to in a time of crisis.

What do I do if my home is under investigation?

Allegations of abuse or neglect of children in care must be responded to immediately in order to ensure the safety and well-being of all children in the home.

When a complaint is received, the caseworker receives as much information as possible. The information is taken to the supervisor who determines whether or not there is a basis for an investigation. The caseworker responsible for the family will advise the foster family of the complaint and will advise as

to whether or not an investigation is proceeding. At this time, due to the potential conflict of interest for Ministry workers, an Advocate from the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association (SFFA) is available to offer information and support throughout the investigation process, unless you choose not to have their involvement. If you should ever become a subject of an investigation, it is imperative that you feel supported and heard during the process. During this time, the investigating caseworker, in consultation with their supervisor,

will determine whether or not the child/children should remain in the home or be removed pending the outcome of the investigation.

If you should come under investigation, it is important to note that the Ministry of Social Services or the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association does not cover legal fees in the case of an allegation. The caseworker and the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association can help you to access publicly funded services as appropriate.

Property damage claims

What happens if a child has damaged our home? Do I need to have insurance?

Foster families are expected to carry sufficient insurance to cover the value of their property. Deductibles for such insurance must fall within a normal range. You must take reasonable measures to assure that your property is protected from damage and that the children in your care are instructed in the proper care of property and provided with appropriate supervision.

While the primary source of compensation must be through insurance, the Ministry does not wish foster families to experience undue hardship due to damages by children placed in their care.

As fully approved foster homes, members of the SFFA are eligible for coverage under the insurance “rider” that the SFFA purchases, which applies when a claim is not valid or collectible under the foster family’s personal insurance due to the criminal or willful acts of the foster child. This “rider” does not cover damage to vehicles. Personal insurance on property and possessions must also be carried by the foster family.

In the event that the damage is not covered by personal home insurance or the SFFA liability insurance rider, foster families may seek compensation from the Ministry of Social Services. The

foster parent(s) should notify the SFFA of any damage or loss caused by a foster child or children in their care. The SFFA will arrange for an Independent Damage Assessor to carry out an assessment of the loss or damage. An assessment will be completed to determine the origin, details of damage and the cost associated with the loss.

Following the completion of the assessment, the Damage Assessor will provide the Ministry of Social Services with a detailed report, outlining the damage amount the foster parent is seeking for the Ministry’s consideration and possible reimbursement.

Appeals/conflict resolution

When foster parents disagree with a decision made by a caseworker, they will notify the caseworker, who will arrange a meeting with the foster parents to discuss their concerns within five working days.

Following the meeting, if the foster parents believe the matter has not been resolved, they may notify the caseworker, who advises his/her supervisor.

The supervisor contacts the foster parents to discuss the matter and will arrange a meeting with all parties in an effort to come to a mutually satisfactory resolution. The meeting takes place within five days of the supervisor’s contact with the foster parents, or as soon as practicable.

If there is not a satisfactory resolution, the foster parents may request to meet with the Director, Service Delivery or designate. The Director, Service Delivery or designate arranges a meeting with

the foster parents and may include the caseworker and supervisor if appropriate. The foster parents may invite their Saskatchewan Foster Families Association support person. The meeting will be held within fifteen working days after receiving the request, or as soon as practicable.

Following the meeting, the **Director, Service Delivery** or designate should meet with his/her worker and supervisor, arrive at a decision, and advise the foster parents in writing of the decision within five working days, or as soon as practicable.

In those situations involving decisions to close the foster home, if the matter is not satisfactorily concluded at the service centre level through the Conflict Resolution process, the foster parents may contact the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association to invoke the appeal process.

Following notification of an appeal, the Executive Director of the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association immediately informs the appropriate Director, Service Delivery and the Director, Service Delivery, Central Office to advise of the appeal. The Director, Service Delivery, Central Office arranges a meeting with an independent adjudicator, who is appointed and contracted by the Ministry to hear the appeal.

The adjudicator conducts his or her review into the concerns by gathering information from all sources, including the foster parents, Ministry employees, and SFFA employees. When the review is concluded, the adjudicator records the information he or she has gathered, completes a report and submits it to the Executive Director, Service Delivery. The Executive Director, Service Delivery, reviews the information and makes a final decision, based on the recommendation of the adjudicator.

When should I call for support?

Being a foster parent isn't easy, but it is rewarding. It is important to know that you have support when you are struggling. If you have questions about policy, case planning or need support with investigations or quality of care, know that you are not alone. There are many different people who can support you and answer any questions that you may have.

Saskatchewan Foster Families Association

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, Inc. (SFFA) is an association established to support foster parents in their work as caregivers. Every foster family that has been approved by the Ministry of Social Services within the province of Saskatchewan is considered a member of the Saskatchewan Foster Families Association.

The SFFA is a registered charitable organization comprised primarily of foster families. The provincial association receives core funding from the Ministry of Social Services (MSS), however operates independently as a Community Based Organization (CBO).

Vision Statement

Empowering resilient families for the betterment of society.

Mission Statement

The Saskatchewan Foster Families Association exists to improve the quality of care for all children and youth in care requiring provincial services in Saskatchewan by encouraging, promoting and assisting in the development of healthy foster families.

Our Purpose

- To educate and support foster families in their work
- To develop a better understanding in the community of the role of foster families
- To advocate on behalf of foster families



Being a foster parent
isn't easy, but it is
rewarding.

SFFA Services and Resources

The SFFA is a team comprised of:

- Executive Director
- Program and Financial Administrator
- Caregiver Training Consultant
- Foster Family Advocates
- Community Liaison
- Training Coordinator
- Program and Office Assistant
- Tech Support
- Newsletter
- Damage Assessor

Together, this team listens to the needs of families, advocates on their behalf and provides support when needed. Educational sessions are also available to foster parents which further aid in their skill development.

In addition, the SFFA offers the following resources:

- Advocacy, support and education
- Volunteer recruitment and support
- Start-up and ongoing support of Local Committees
- 'The Advisor': a quarterly newsletter which provides updates on SFFA program development, reports from the provincial association, updates on the Ministry of Social Services policies and information of interest to foster parents
- Resource centre: the SFFA office houses a number of books and videos on various issues relevant to foster care. These resources can be borrowed by contacting the SFFA office.
- Website with updated events and information www.sffa.sk.ca
- Workshops, conferences and training

For more information, please contact:



Saskatchewan Foster Families Association, Inc.

**233 4th Avenue South
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 1N1**

**Phone: (306) 975-1580
Toll Free: 1-888-276-2880
Fax: (306) 975-1581
E-mail: sffa@sasktel.net
Website: www.sffa.sk.ca**

Peer Support Program

The SFFA coordinates a Peer Support Program, which consists of foster parent volunteers who work to facilitate and maintain an



Peer Support Persons can provide confidential, empathetic and non-judgmental service surrounding issues of foster care.

effective communication system between the foster families, social workers and the Ministry of Social Services. Peer Support Persons can provide confidential, empathetic and non-judgmental service surrounding issues of foster care. A Peer Support Person can provide resources, current information regarding policies and assist foster families in resolving matters of dispute between themselves and the Ministry of Social Services.

Volunteers of the Peer Support Program are experienced foster parents who are trained and monitored by the SFFA. They must sign an Oath of Confidentiality and commit to the duties of the program. All volunteers work to promote and encourage practices and procedures which support foster families and fostering in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan Youth in Care and Custody Network

The SYICCN is a non-profit organization that advocates and supports youth aged 14-24 in or from foster care/young offender systems. The SYICCN's purpose is to ensure that young people involved in government care are able to have a voice in their lives and their communities in order to make improvements to the services they receive. The SYICCN is mandated to help set up local 'networks' throughout Saskatchewan and develop strategies that empower youth in and from the system.

For more information on SYICCN or local youth networks in Saskatchewan, please contact:

SYICCN Inc.

**Macro Business Place
205A-2505 11th Avenue**

**Regina, Saskatchewan
S4P 0K6**

Phone: 306-522-1533

Fax: 306-352-3133

E-mail: info@syiccn.ca

Saskatchewan Children's Advocate Office

Who they are

The Children's Advocate Office works on behalf of the children and youth in Saskatchewan. Their vision is that the interests and well-being of children and youth are respected and valued in our communities and in government practice, policy and legislation. In addition to conducting research or advising any minister responsible on matters relating to the interests and well-being of children, their efforts focus on the three main functions of the Office:

- Advocacy on behalf of a child or group of children to resolve matters

through non-adversarial approaches.

- Investigations into any matter concerning a child or group of children, or services to a child or group of children by any government Ministry or agency.
- Public education to raise awareness of the rights, interests and well-being of children and youth.

Who can call and how they help

Anyone can call the Children's Advocate Office. Children and youth are encouraged to call on their own behalf, however, parents,

foster parents, social workers, health professionals and others call on the behalf of children and youth.

For more information please contact:

Saskatchewan Children's Advocate Office

**315 25th Street East
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan
S7K 2H6**

Phone: (306) 933-6700

Fax: (306) 933-8406

E-mail: childadvocate@saskcao.ca

Website: www.saskcao.ca

