

The Law Foundation of British Columbia commissioned the Evaluation of Aboriginal Collaborative Decision-Making Projects Final Report as part of a special funding initiative that it has been engaged in since 2004 in the area of child welfare law. The purpose of the Child Welfare Fund Initiative, which was generously funded by grants of over \$3 million from the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), was to fund projects which would expand the use of alternative dispute resolution processes in the area of child protection law, particularly for Aboriginal children. The Law Foundation funded 19 projects under the Child Welfare Initiative, 11 of which were service delivery projects and the balance of which were to train child protection mediators.

The Law Foundation conducted an evaluation of ten of the service delivery projects. One project did not complete and therefore was not part of the evaluation. The purpose of this report is to present a summary of final data collected from the service delivery projects.

The report presents a positive picture of successful outcomes associated with child welfare services' use of collaborative decision-making (CDM) models. As you review the report, please keep in mind that some of the data included in the report is from a number of years ago (three or more) and there have been some new developments. For example, MCFD's child protection policy 3.4: *Collaborative Planning and Decision Making within Child Protection Service Practice*, which was implemented in April 2012, sets out the expectation that, in child welfare practice, CDM is offered throughout the case management continuum in planning for children and in resolving disputes with families regarding the care for their children. This policy has expanded on policy that has been available since January 2008, when the Presumption in Favour of CPDM Policy and Procedures Guide was implemented.

MCFD in the last few years has developed and enhanced programs to support out of home living arrangements for children where an extended family member or other significant person in a child's life cares for the child if the parents are unable to, without the child being taken into foster care. The following out-of-care options have been developed and/or enhanced:

- The Extended Family Program (EFP) is available when parents are temporarily unable to care for their child, and provides services and financial support to extended family or other individuals who have a relationship with the child, but who is not their legal guardian. The goal is to reunite children with their parents. The EFP also provides transportation costs in extenuating circumstances;
- The maintenance rates for interim, temporary and permanent out-of-care orders have been increased in order to harmonize with restricted foster care maintenance rates in order to increase the incentive to using out-of-care options for children and reduce barriers to their use; and
- The permanent transfer of custody under section 54.01 allows for a permanent guardianship order to be made without the child first being taken into care. This supports certainty and positive outcomes for these children by providing an

alternative to bringing them into continuing custody of a director when they have an established relationship with the care provider and a return to the parents' home is not an option.

We are happy to share this report with you and welcome your comments. It is the first of its kind in this particular area of collaborative decision-making, and we believe that it will be useful to all those interested in the field. We also hope it will be helpful in building a body of knowledge in this unique area of work.