



## Federation Member Call with MCFD DM Bond COVID-19 Update March 18, 2020

*Federation Members can find a recording of this call on the FCSSBC Members-only site.*

This well attended one-hour call with MCFD Deputy Minister Allison Bond and Rob Byers, Executive Financial Officer and Assistant Deputy Minister began with DM Bond sharing an update. A question and answer time followed with Members, DM Allison Bond and ADM Rob Byers.

- Start by thanking you all for your ongoing service to British Columbians and your role in making sure our most vulnerable are served.
- There is a whole of government response that needs to be coordinated.
- I want to hear your questions and get the best answers we can, when we can get them.
- Dr. Bonnie Henry notes that this is a very trying time and we are all trying, and paying attention to the fluid environment.
- It is very challenging for those providing direct services especially with direction to maintain services.
- We have court mandates and family safety services that makes things more complicated.
- The ministry activated our emergency protocols on Monday (if you have not activated yours you should!).
- MCFD is coordinated with provincial emergency response perspective.
- All Ministry executives are here, even those self-isolating.
- There are lots of questions about staffing and we are dealing with the same issues, particularly staff who cannot work from home.
- For many of services we need to maintain a certain level to maintain child safety and we understand the challenges that Community Social Services are also facing.
- Health and safety is both from COVID-19 and for connection We have received information from other parts of government whose staffing is also changing and that also has an impact.
- Things are changing hourly; we understand you need answers.
- Government has committed to keep operating. This is important for us to know because you are a critical part of our service structure this includes many of you.
- You can assume that existing contracts will continue unchanged.
- If staff are staying home you will not be penalized, but we do not yet have a clear policy on voluntary closures, and we don't know what will happen but it's status quo until we know otherwise.

- Practice questions – being led by Cory Heavenor, Provincial Director of Child Welfare. We are working on many of these questions right now.
- Contracted Residential is a priority for today in cases where you may not have enough staff screened through the HUB.
- Positive response to innovative ways to stay connected with clients.

### Questions from the call:

#### “In home” programs:

- Question from a foster parent regarding direction to caregivers around managing visits with an infant/child’s family at this time? Some of these visits take place in the home. Wanting to ensure access for children’s well-being and attachment but balanced with COVID-19 risks.
- Direction for family preservation workers who are doing their work in family homes.
- Any direction around services like respite that is done in the caregiver’s home?
- For family care home/foster home placement models what direction for if the client or another person in the home becomes ill with COVID-19?
- What direction are you providing Ministry and contracted staff regarding the transportation of youth within communities?

#### Access to supplies:

- How do residential facilities obtain protective gear for our staff if a child or staff becomes sick?  
(Note to Rob- we will start to gather this information for you)

#### Program closures:

- Does maintaining the status quo include programs such as Family Resource Programs? (note to Allison and Rob that FRPBC has an advisory on their website advising FRPs to follow the direction of local health and school authorities; I know of at least 5 in the lower mainland who have closed doors already. In some cases, they are co-located in a rec centre so when the rec centre closed so did they).
- Is there any movement to formally designate Residential Care Staff and In-Home Support Worker/Care workers as Essential Services?
- Program closures- Public health statement says gatherings of 50 are ok as long as people can keep social distance? Those who are contracted for group programs when we have programs for children or people with disabilities. A gathering of 50 is quite different than a program for children/families/people with disabilities. Group programs that may have less than 50. Direction from CLBC has also been to stay open but struggling with how to maintain the safe distances in some group programs. Have cancelled some family programs because we cannot maintain the cleaning and social distance precautions.

- If service providers close group programming but continue to support families and children/youth identified as critical/essential service (as a way to ensure families do not breakdown), will service providers (funded by MCFD) be supported with this decision by MCFD (to ensure contracted funding continues)?

#### Supports to families:

- What additional resources will families raising children with disabilities have while school is not in session? (particularly when parents have to work)? Will there be added flexibility with AFU (either carrying over funding or borrowing from next year)? Flexible rules and increase in SCD or CYSN respite funding?
- Guidance re: programs for youth on autism spectrum and closing of those programs re: funding? Also, guidance on helping families when children at home.
- Will families of children with disabilities have access to school-based therapists while school is not in session? Assistance with supporting transition (e.g., entering elementary; moving to middle or high school; high school to CLBC funded programming).
- Will Canadian Child Benefits be extended to special youth turning 18 in next few months who families are unable submit the PWD benefits application in the next few months.

#### Communication plan for MCFD and the community sector:

- Will local area managers send out information to contracted services regarding best practice as more information becomes available?

#### Funding for web-based platforms:

- Will there be compensation to organization who use web-based platforms to connect with clients that are Pippa compliant? Some like paid Zoom and Doxy.me have associated costs. Noted that Skype, Zoom and Team have offered free access but are not PIPPA compliant. (Note to Allison and Rob that we will gather some more information about this and send it along)