



AFKA Annual Reports

REPORTING PERIOD: OCTOBER 1, 2022 – SEPTEMBER 30, 2023

ALBERTA FOSTER AND KINSHIP ASSOCIATION

ANNUAL REPORTS

REPORTING PERIOD: October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023

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2. VICE PRESIDENT.....RENE RAJOTTE
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A. EXECUTIVE REPORTS

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Sylvia Thompson

Welcome to Fall!

It is my sincere wish that everyone had a good summer. It certainly was a busy one. With family visiting from the UK, we spent most of August travelling the province, most notably Calgary, Drumheller, Jasper and a wedding in Edson. We truly have a beautiful province.

More on the business side of things, the AFKA also has been extremely busy. More info on that soon. I am very pleased to that we almost have a full Board of Directors. We are also working on various board projects. One of these is a welcome and introduction manual for new board members. I look forward to having this soon. Our board is also participating in training for Policy Governance Boards. I am pleased and impressed by the way we function now. We have training, meetings, mail-outs and presentations virtually, in person and a combination of both. The ability to be so flexible allows us to get information out to everyone in as many ways possible. Check out our website, as well.

I would like to thank all those who are attending and participating in meetings, surveys and sessions. I know how busy life is. What we do is so important and vital, so it is good to be as informed as possible. Thank you also to those who have reached out to us for support, information or to chat. We continue to build on the ways we can help to support you. Please continue to reach out and let us know what would be beneficial for you in way of supports.

Thank you for all you do. The impact you have on many lives is unmeasurable and far reaching. Our world truly is a better place with you in it and doing what you do.

You are truly amazing!

Sylvia Thompson

VICE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Rene Rajotte

As I write this report, we are enjoying this beautiful Fall weather, but still a bit smoky at times. I hope that those of you that had to move out of your homes because of the fires have been able to return home.

Hopefully everyone has been able to take some time to enjoy the summer, it always seems to come and be gone before you know it. We definitely notice the days getting shorter and feel the Fall air in the mornings and evenings.

Another year has come and gone; it doesn't seem that long since we have been in Jasper. It has been a busier year for me this year being a bit more involved with AFKA. It will be exciting for us to share with you at the conference some of the work that is being done. We are so fortunate to have Melissa and her staff working for us, to support you and thinking of ways to make things better for you the caregivers. THANK YOU!

The awards selection was a big undertaking again this year; as always it took a lot of time. We had many nominations again this year, which was great. It was difficult in many cases to narrow things down to pick an award winner. Congratulations to our award winners who will be recognized in October and at the AFKA Awards Banquet.

I have always really enjoyed our annual conference. I love the drive out there, the courses that are offered and just being able to visit with everyone there from across the province. For those of you who haven't been to the conference, if you can at all make it possible, I would encourage you to go to be able to visit with many that do the same work you do.

I would like to thank foster and kinship caregivers, and ministry staff, for making a difference in young people's lives. You do such incredible work. Hope to see many of you in Jasper, take care and all the best.

Rene Rajotte

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Melissa Jones

It's truly shocking that a year has passed since the last annual report and last year's training conference. Although the time has seemed to pass quickly, there has been so much happen this last year to celebrate and reflect on. Our team has gone through some changes in staffing, leading to adjustments in responsibilities. Even though our loads have increased this year, we are all so committed to continuing to do the best we can for our membership of foster and kinship caregivers.

We have been working diligently with third party support to increase our effectiveness at reaching our membership more quickly, efficiently and with increased accuracy. We have a new CRM ready to launch by the end of October 2023, with a current full listing of active foster and kinship caregivers in Alberta. This data management system will provide us with a vehicle to connect with our caregiver community, as well as to improve our ability to provide information to key stakeholders as needed. We have also been working on very purposeful strategic goals, which will be highlighted at our upcoming training conference; this information will also be released shortly after our conference, so all those who were unable to attend will be made aware of exciting things to come!

Within our team, we are always working to support in the best way we can, within the capacity of our small team. Our team is incredibly dedicated to supporting every one of you. Please take some time, if you've ever been supported in any way by our team, to send them a thank you. Words of thanks and encouragement from our members do help in keeping the team going forward, knowing they are having a supportive impact on the lives of those in our caregiving community. In the last while, you may have seen an increase in networking and training opportunities. Our teams have been working on new and innovative ways to create connections for our membership; these will be shared in the next quarter.

Our team continues to have important meetings with various stakeholders, always trying to connect with those who have an important role in the life of children/youth in care. In these meetings we are sharing the challenges we are witnessing by caregivers, the things that are working well, as well as working toward repairing relationships so that continued work together can be done to best support the children/youth who would benefit from more positive relationships and continued connections. We know the challenges do not appear to diminish in a short period of time, nor will they likely ever fully diminish. However, it's important to continue the conversations and to continue to have hope that what we are doing is having even the tiniest bit of impact for someone to make their life a little less complicated.

This past quarter has truly been a focus on continued relationship building, as well as the preparation for our 49th annual training conference and awards banquet. An enormous amount of work goes into preparing for this event, and it is one that is being done this year with a smaller team and bigger responsibilities. We are trying new things this year at our conference, mainly to try to implement some ideas resulting from feedback in previous year. We are hoping you will all enjoy the same training opportunities presented to everyone, that you have more time to rest, or that you take more time to spend with others in your foster and kinship caregiving friendships built from the past and those who are new. We hope for you to also feel heard and valued.

Thank you to my amazing team; words are not enough to say how valuable you are to the AFKA, and to the caregivers you support in whatever role you have with the association. You are ALL extremely important. Thank you, as well, to the Board of Directors. Our Board has seen some movement over the year and I appreciate the support and encouragement they provide; their vision of what we can do for caregivers is clear and there is awareness we are working on what we can achieve within our current capacity. We, as a team along with our Board of Directors, will continue to do as much as we can to support foster and kinship caregivers, as well as to create awareness of what it takes and means to be someone who cares for our province's most vulnerable children/youth. Thank you to our membership community for your patience as we navigate a new way of communicating and connecting with you in the near future; and most importantly, thank all of YOU for the care and dedication you provide to try to create a nurturing environment for the children and youth in your care. The relationships and connections you create with/for them last a lifetime and impact them in ways you may never fully understand.

I look forward to the upcoming year! Please feel free to reach out to any of our team members at any time. (1-800-667-2372; www.afkaonline.ca)

Melissa Jones

B. DIRECTOR REPORTS

DIRECTOR – TREATY 8

CARLY MORTON

Happy Fall, I hope you all have enjoyed the last of the summer season. With the new school year underway, new routines and the excitement of the kids getting older. The weather is getting cooler, and the leaves are changing such a beautiful season. What are some of the events and ceremonies do you are your family take part in during the fall? One that my family participates in is the Orange Shirt Day, this has a significant connection to myself and my family as I am first generation after residential schools. We attend ceremony to honour and remember past loved ones.

As the Director for Treaty 8 I have been blessed with partaking in several committees within the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association this past quarter, one being the nomination committee. This committee has the privilege of selecting Kinship, Foster, Caregiver Support and Child/Youth Support worker of the year within each region. All the nominations were inspiring, heartfelt, and showed a level of commitment to the children in care that went beyond what was asked of them. I so look forward to being part of this committee next year! Another committee that I have been able to take part in is holding the position of Chairperson for the fund-raising committee for the It's All About Kids conference being held this October in Jasper. It has been exciting to see how all the behind the sense work and the matriculas planning the staff take in organizing this amazing event. I look forward to meeting many Kinship and Foster families at the conference.

I also sit on the executive board of the Capital Regional Caregivers Council (CRCC) this has been an exciting time in this position as there has been more engagement with Kinship and Foster families and the executive have been able to take this information to the Government of Alberta upper management.

I feel absolutely privileged to hold the position of Director for Treaty 8 with the Alberta Foster and Kinship Association. This has given me the opportunity to work with Nations and Settlements within the traditional lands. Along with the opportunity to meet and learn what the different agencies withing the urban centers, and how they can support our children in care.

I would also like to thank the many Kinship and Foster families who stand as the foundation to our children in care! You are a true blessing!

Masi chok (thank you)

Carly Morton

DIRECTOR – MÉTIS

Bernadine Grant

Everyone was busy away doing summer activities over the summer break; therefore, no coffee time meetings were held. We will be moving towards a coffee meeting every second month and have found mornings work better.

Despite the struggles with the foster care system right now, it was mentioned that foster parents are still holding strong despite not getting supports and expense reimbursements on time.

Same challenges exist with getting child expenses reimbursed in a timely manner. Some expenses are nearing the \$15,000 threshold and families are finding this payment turnaround challenging to deal with as creditors demand 24% interest after a 3-week grace period.

Other challenges are in regard to gaining guardianship over children placed since birth or early years and the process to go to court and get checks done on the homes the children have grown up in. This process has been frustrating and overwhelming for families.

The high costs of everything beyond just food prices .. gas, utilities, rent, etc.

Trying to gain supports for children in terms of specialists – counselling and other therapies.

There are foster parents with open beds which seems to contrast the message being sent that there is a foster care crisis of no beds right now. Where is the disconnect here? Why are children being housed in offices temporarily when there are beds in foster homes to place them in?

My goals are to connect with the Metis Nation of Alberta to connect foster parents with Metis activities and events. Also, to advocate for neurodivergent children with the MNA as some of their events are beyond what our kids in care can participate in.

Bernadine Grant

DIRECTOR – SOUTH REGION

Jean Parker

Hello from the South Region! Back to school brings back structure and routine. For our family it also means barrels of apples to cook with and the smell of apples and cinnamon wafting through our home. I love autumn smells and schedules.

My name is Jean Parker and I am pleased to introduce myself as the incoming AFKA Board Director for the South Region. My husband and I have been foster parents for thirteen years in Pincher Creek. We also run a day home full time. I am very excited to meet more foster and kinship families in our region

and to be a voice for you. It has been a little while since our region has had representation and we have some work to do. I would love to hear from all of you foster and kinship parents in our region. What is working? What challenges are you facing? How can we support each other better? My email will be posted soon on the AFKA website, so please reach out.

Jean Parker

DIRECTOR – CENTRAL REGION

Danielle Gouchie

Hello from central region. We have had a beautiful summer and are hopeful fall continues with the warm weather! Kids are back in school, routines are settling back into place and winter sports are in full swing! We have had busy year here in Central. The Central Alberta Caregiver Council has been working hard to support caregivers throughout the region. Last fall they hosted a corn maze family event which was a great success! Later in the winter they hosted lunch followed by an afternoon of tubing at Canyon Ski hill. Both events were well attended! The Red Deer Foster parent association had a successful tech day hosted by the support unit in Red Deer. Help was given to caregivers with electronic CMI's and the new PRIDE e learning website.

The CACC is hoping to have another Canyon Tubing event this winter, so keep watching for that to occur!

The CACC meets once a month via zoom and welcomes all Central Region caregivers to attend. Meetings are spent, planning caregiver events and networking. The CACC is looking for more board members so if you are interested, please reach out, either to myself or through the Central Region Foster Parents Facebook page.

The Red Deer Foster Parent Association also meets once a month in Red Deer. This is a night for networking and connection between foster parents! You can connect with the local association through the Central Region Foster Parent Facebook page as well. They are always looking to support fellow caregivers!

Caregivers across the region continue to face challenges related to the increasing costs associated with just about everything! Inflation, food costs and gas prices continue to place stress on caregivers and their families as basic maintenance, recreation and other supports provided for our kiddos in care are not matching the increased costs. The concerns were captured via a survey sent out by the AFKA and forwarded to the Ministry.

Caregivers are also facing challenges with high Child and Family Services staff turnover, lack of support, lack of transitioning of children in care, lack of permanency planning for children in care, and a general feeling of not being included as part of the team.

This October will mark my 1st year as a board member with the AFKA. It has been an amazing opportunity to connect with AFKA staff, other regional board members, local association presidents and caregivers all over the province. It has given me an appreciation for how similar the challenges faced by caregivers are, how dedicated everyone is to their kids and how we all want the same thing at the end of the day. What is best for the children who are in our care. My intent going forward into my second year as a board member is to continue to listen to caregivers in the region and advocate on behalf of caregivers so that you can continue caring for the children in your home. So please reach out to me to share the challenges, the successes and attend your regional networking/association get togethers!

Danielle Gouchie

DIRECTOR – EDMONTON REGION

Shauna Baxter (Acting)

Not yet received

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR – NORTH REGION, CENTRAL & EAST STREAM

Bev Towe

Hi caregivers in the north central and east,

It's been a slow few months for regional council and support groups, as summer is over and school is back in, hoping to start connecting again.

Our next regional council meeting will be October 11; and then Dec 8 in the morning. All meetings are by zoom, please come and join us. Contact Stephanie French at 1-780-307-3168 or email her at s-l-larson@hotmail.com to get on the invite list for zoom meetings.

It is caregiver appreciation month, please go out to your local events, you all will be getting an email from your support workers with dates and times.

Please contact me at 780-207-1041 or my email is bev.towe@hotmail.com.

Let's all work together to make caregiving in the north a unified group.

Bev Towe

ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR – NORTH REGION, WEST STREAM

Terri Forseille

Hard to believe the kids are already back to school and extra-curricular activities are in full swing. Seems like summer break only started a short time ago.

This past year definitely brought some big challenges for many of the caregivers in the West Zone with all the fires and smoke. Really this seemed to be true of the entire province. Hopefully Caregivers affected have been able to get back to some sort of normal. With October right around the corner, many are looking forward to the AFKA's "It's All About Kids" training conference in Jasper October 26-28th. Maybe I'll get to connect with some of you there.

Presidents had a chance to meet with the previous Minister of Children and Family Services, Minister Mickey Amery, in February to voice their concerns about the challenges caregivers are facing currently across the province.

Caregivers along with myself were invited to meet with CFS staff to discuss operational planning in March, we met up in St.Paul.

Northwest Council held their AGM recently in September. We are looking for a secretary so if your interested please let me know. The meeting dates have been set for the year, all meetings except June are virtual. Join us if you can, the more caregivers the better.

Upcoming important dates

- Grande Prairie Support meetings are held at Mr. Mikes @ 7pm Oct 10th, Nov 14th & Dec 12th (the 2nd Tuesday of every month)
- High Level Support meeting date TBA
- High Prairie FPA is planning support meetings in Slave Lake, Valleyview and High Prairie dates TBA
- Northwest Council dates for the year ahead November 15/23, January 17/24, March 20/24, June 5/24 AGM (face to face in Peace River)
- Caregiver Connection dates October 4th and November 1st @ 1pm & October 11th and November 8th @ 8pm

If you would like more info about any of these meetings/gatherings, please contact me @ (780)536-7421.

Terri Forseille