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PRESS RELEASE

February 14 1994

The Edmonton Social Planning Council today released copies of Alberta Family and Social Services memorandums outlining a new restrictive policy towards providing income support to 16 and 17 year olds.

The new policy makes it virtually impossible for youth to receive welfare, and will inevitably increase homelessness, a problem which has reached crisis proportions in the inner city of Edmonton and elsewhere.

According to the document, all youth living independently and applying for social assistance are to be refused help and instead told to go to a child welfare office (in Edmonton, located at different sites) for assessment. Child welfare workers may only recommend social assistance benefits in "exceptional" situations, and must state their reasons in writing. Then the youth must go back to the social assistance office and apply again. The welfare worker must agree with the child welfare worker's recommendation for assistance before help is provided. If there is a disagreement between welfare and child welfare, the issue must be resolved through mediation before any help is provided.

If the youth negotiates their way through all these policy obstacles and back and forth from office to office, they receive a maximum benefit of \$336 per month, to cover shelter, food, and all other expenses. The standard allowance has been cut another ten percent from the amounts already slashed in October 1993. This benefits cut is in complete contradiction with the recommendations of the Department's June 1992 *Review of Services to 16 and 17 Year Olds*.

"The policy has been designed to make it virtually impossible for a child to receive help", said Council executive director Jonathan Murphy. "Few if any street kids will be able to jump all these hoops. They will end up back on the streets selling their bodies before they get any help from our government." Murphy added that "the amounts provided youth who can navigate the obstacles have been cut once again. Who could possibly rent a place to live and buy food and clothing on \$336 per month?"

A copy of the directives is attached. For further information, contact Jonathan Murphy at the Edmonton Social Planning Council, 423-2031.

SUBJECT: SFI Eligibility/16 and 17 Year Olds

ISSUER: Director
Supports for Independence Program

DATE ISSUED: Feb. 10, 1994

APPROVAL: Executive Director
Income and Employment Programs

EFFECTIVE DATE: Feb. 10, 1994

NUMBER: SFI-94-005

DISTRIBUTION: SFI Manual Holders/cc: Child Welfare Manual Holders

CROSS-REFERENCE: SFI-02-03-09

HEADQUARTERS CONTACTS: SFI Program Planners

INSTRUCTIONS: Child Welfare is also issuing a directive to their staff.
The content of this directive will be incorporated into the
next manual revision.

BACKGROUND

The government is concerned about the number of 16 and 17 year old youths who are dependent on Supports for Independence. Many parents have contacted the department and their MLA's to say that they are willing to provide for a youth at home if the youth abides by the family rules. Some parents say they were never contacted before the youth was given financial assistance.

The Government believes in supporting families and discouraging dependence on government when there are alternatives. Therefore, the department should intervene only when absolutely necessary. And when it intervenes, the goal is to keep families together if at all possible.

If the immediate family, the extended family or the community is willing to care for a youth, the department should encourage this, and help if necessary through counselling, mediation or limited financial assistance. If youths simply do not want to live at home, they need to consider how to support themselves, without government intervention.

POLICY

1. 16 and 17 year olds are eligible for standard and supplementary benefits if they are legally married and the family unit is eligible for assistance. The benefit rates on page 4 of this directive apply to all 16 and 17 year olds including legally married couples.

DIRECTIVE

EFFECTIVE DATE: February 8, 1994
NUMBER: CW-94-01

SUBJECT: Services to 16 and 17 Year Olds
ISSUER: Child Welfare and Family Services Branch
APPROVAL: Mat Hanrahan, ADM, Program/Policy Division
DATE:
DISTRIBUTION: Holders of the Child Welfare HANDBOOK
PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITY: Sharon Heron (427-0412)

TRANSMITTAL INFORMATION

The Government is concerned about the number of 16 and 17 year old youths who are dependant on Supports for Independence (welfare). Many parents have contacted the department and their MLA's to say that they are willing to provide for a youth at home if the youth abides by the family rules. Some parents say they were never contacted before the youth was given financial assistance.

The Government believes that it must support families and discourage dependence on government when there are alternatives. Therefore, the department should intervene only when absolutely necessary. And when it intervenes, it should keep families together if at all possible.

If the immediate family, the extended family or the community is willing to care for a youth, the department should encourage them; and help them if necessary through counselling, mediation or limited financial assistance. If a youth simply does not want to live at home, that youth needs to consider how to support themselves without government intervention.

Effective February 8, 1994, SFI will no longer accept an application for financial assistance from a 16 or 17 year old who is not legally married. If a youth requests assistance, SFI will refer them to child welfare. This amendment describes the procedures for handling such a referral.

NOTE: The following policy will be issued as an amendment to CWH 02. This directive expires once the amendment is implemented.

POLICY: INVESTIGATION OF 16 AND 17 YEAR OLDS

SUMMARY

If a 16 or 17 year old youth requests financial assistance from the Supports for Independence (SFI) Program, the SFI staff refer the youth to child welfare. If the youth accepts the referral and attends an interview, follow these procedures.

PROCEDURES

Determine whether the youth believes it is unsafe to return home. If the youth does not describe a need for protection under the Act, advise the youth to return home.

If the youth describes a need for protection:

- o If the youth's parent lives in the local district:
 - Have face-to-face contact with the parent to determine the risk to the youth of remaining at or returning home. If the problem is disagreement over rules but the youth is not at risk, encourage the family to seek a resolution through counselling, mediation or by making their own alternate living arrangements for the youth.
 - If the parent cannot be contacted immediately and the youth appears destitute, provide one week of financial assistance through Child Welfare according to the SFI rates (usually food only) to allow time to contact the parent. Ensure the youth's living arrangements are suitable and that any accommodation costs are within the SFI limits.

If the risk to the youth cannot be determined within a week, ask the district manager (CW) for approval to provide further financial assistance to allow time to complete the investigation. The district manager may approve up to 2 more weeks assistance.

- o If the youth's parent lives in another district, immediately contact the district office where the parent lives and ask child welfare to determine the risk to the youth of returning home.
- o If the youth requires financial assistance from the department, while the department determines if the child is in need of protective services, arrange to return the youth to the community where the parents reside for assistance. Contact the office where the youth is being sent to alert them to the youths return and need for assistance until the assessment is complete.
- o If the youth's parent lives outside Alberta:

2. All other 16 and 17 year olds including:
- 16/17 year old single persons
 - 16/17 year olds living common-law
 - 16/17 year old living common-law with someone 18 years old or over
 - pregnant 16/17 year olds
 - 16/17 year old single parents
 - 16/17 year olds who are separated or divorced
- are ONLY eligible in the following circumstances:

- o after Child Welfare Services has investigated the case in accordance with Child Welfare legislation and policy and has provided a written recommendation for SFI benefits, and
- o SFI program agrees with Child Welfare's recommendation, and
- o the applicant meets all other SFI eligibility criteria.

PROCEDURES

When a 16 or 17 year old (who is not legally married) applies for SFI benefits, the SFI worker refers the youth to Child Welfare. If the youth refuses to accept the referral or attend the Child Welfare interview, no SFI benefits are granted since the youth has refused to avail him/herself of an available resource. (SDA, sec. 16(2))

Child Welfare Assessment

The preferred outcomes of a Child Welfare assessment, in order of priority, are:

- o If Child Welfare determines the youth is not at risk and may return home, no SFI services or benefits are provided. Child Welfare advises the youth no financial benefits will be provided. Child Welfare may refer the youth and his family to appropriate counselling or support services available in the community.
- o If Child Welfare determines the youth cannot return home, but the family arranges for the youth to live with another adult, the parents are responsible to pay for the child's care. When the parents are unable or unwilling to pay, the adult providing care may apply for Child in Need benefits (Category 34).
- o If Child Welfare concludes the youth needs protection under the Child Welfare Act, through apprehension, custody, or a support agreement, Child Welfare will provide appropriate protection services.
- o On an exceptional basis, Child Welfare can recommend SFI benefits if:
 - Child Welfare determines the youth is not in need of protection, and
 - Child Welfare determines the youth cannot return home, and,

- Phone the parent to determine whether the parent can care for the youth or make alternate living arrangements for the youth.
- Consider repatriating the youth. If the youth can be repatriated, ask the parent to make travel arrangements. If the parent cannot afford the transportation costs, arrange to send the youth by the most economical means.

OUTCOME

- o If the investigation determines that the youth needs protection under the Act, provide the appropriate protective services.
- o If the investigation determines that the youth is not in need of protection under the Act, but the family and youth believe the youth cannot return home, request the family to make private arrangements for the youth to live with another adult.
- o If the parent of the 16 or 17 year old who is not in need of protection cannot or will not provide financial support, but approves of the adult caregiver for the youth, advise the adult caregiver to apply for SFI Children in Need benefits.
- o If the investigation determines that the youth who is not in need of protection cannot return home and the family cannot make alternate living arrangements, provide a written recommendation to SFI intake that indicates why this is an exceptional situation where the youth cannot live with the family and does not need protective services. To be eligible, the youth must:
 - be attending school or actively seeking employment;
 - have located room and board accommodations within the SFI limits, and
 - meet other SFI eligibility criteria.
- o If the SFI worker disagrees with your recommendation, refer the matter to the district manager for resolution.

- the family and Child Welfare cannot make alternate arrangements for the youth.
- o If financial assistance is required while Child Welfare examines the situation, it is provided by Child Welfare.
- o If SFI benefits are the most applicable option, the Child Welfare worker provides a written recommendation to the SFI Intake Worker.
- o The recommendation from Child Welfare must indicate why this is an exceptional situation where the youth cannot live with the family but does not need protective services.
- o If there is disagreement between Child Welfare and SFI staff regarding the written recommendation, the issue is referred to the District Manager for resolution.

NOTE: When Child Welfare service is provided from another worksite, the managers of the respective programs jointly resolve the dispute.

Determining SFI Eligibility For Independent Support

- o Based on SFI guiding principles and practices i.e., SFI as a program of last resort, SFI intake workers must agree with the written recommendation before any benefits are provided.
- o In addition to all other SFI eligibility criteria, the youth must be:
 - living in a stable shelter situation. The preferred shelter situation for a 16 or 17 year old is room and board. However, if the youth is living in an established shelter situation other than room and board, the worker may approve benefits if the situation is in the best interest of the youth and no protection concerns are evident.
 - in full-time attendance at school and making reasonable progress or,
 - actively seeking employment or
 - temporarily unavailable for work (such as disability or health problems, family care responsibilities, last trimester of pregnancy).
- o The rates for benefits are outlined on the attached chart.
- o 16/17 year olds in receipt of SFI and in school full-time are not referred to SFB. (Note: This is a major policy change.)
- o If the family refuses to provide financial assistance to the child, and SFI benefits are provided based on the above criteria, a referral must be made to Family Maintenance to pursue subrogation.