



A tangled web of bureaucracy

Offices, agencies, authorities, branches

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By TAMARA KING

Child welfare in Manitoba is a tangled web of bureaucracy.

It's common to hear Manitobans talk about "CFS," short for Child and Family Services.

Technically, child welfare is overseen by the "Child Protection Branch," a provincial government department that Family Services and Housing Minister Christine Melnick is responsible for.

Four "authorities" -- Northern, Southern, Metis and General -- oversee 24 "agencies," one of which is Winnipeg CFS, says Linda Burnside, director of authority relations for the Child Protection Branch.

There may be numerous community offices within those agencies, Burnside says, like eastern Manitoba's Eastman agency, with offices in Steinbach and Beausejour.

There have been many questions about Manitoba's child welfare system since the murders of two young girls from the Fisher River reserve.

KILLED WHILE IN FOSTER CARE

As the Sun reported first yesterday, 2-year-old Heaven Traverse was killed Jan. 14, 2005, while in foster care, according to her father, Lawrence Traverse.

Phoenix Sinclair, a five-year-old who spent most of her life in foster care, was somehow handed back to her family. Samantha Kematch -- Phoenix's mother -- and her boyfriend Karl McKay were charged with first degree murder last week.

"It's a very complicated system," Tory family services critic Mavis Taillieu said yesterday.

"The system needs to be looked at and examined. I think what we need is a review of the system."

After navigating the child welfare system on behalf of her adopted son for close to five years, Val Surbey agrees.

"There's a continual turnover of workers. Files get lost, families get lost," Surbey said.

Not surprisingly, the executive director of the Child Protection Branch defends the system and dismisses concerns about confusion.

"It has just gone through a major restructuring, I wouldn't say it's any more confusing," Jay Rodgers told the Sun yesterday.