



Section 2 – Voluntary Support Services Agreements

Standard 2.1

Voluntary Services Agreement and Case Plan

The Child Protection Worker/Designate (including Authorized Person, and Supervisor/Manager) may enter into a **Voluntary Services Agreement and Case Plan (VSA)** with the parent(s)/caregiver(s) who have custody of their child (0-15 years of age, or youth 16-18); or with the care provider(s) (as defined in an **Federal Government's Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families**) who has day-to-day care of an Indigenous child/youth. Furthermore, the Child Protection Worker/Designate can also enter into a **VSA** with expectant parent(s) who require prenatal support.

REFERENCE

Child and Family Services Act, Section 5

Child and Family Services Standard - 6.12 Case Review

Child and Family Services Standard 6.6 - Child and Family Services Minimum Contacts

Child and Family Services Standard - 7.1 Placement Priorities for Children and Youth

Child and Family Services Standard - 7.2 Approval of Extended Family and Provisional Placement

Child and Family Services Standard 10.15 Commitment to Indigenous children, youth and families

Child and Family Services Standard - 10.16 Requirement to Provide Notice Before Taking a significant Measure in Relation to an Indigenous Child of Youth

Federal Government's Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families, Section 9

PURPOSE

- To provide support services when no protection concerns exist. These support services can also be provided to help prevent child protection needs from developing.
- To offer early help when families need it the most
- To support the family to access services without relinquishing their legal rights and responsibilities towards the child or youth.
- To provide services to families who require parenting support.

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- To support care providers with access to services for children whom they are caring for on a day-today basis.
- To provide support services to expectant parent(s).
To identify family strengths and needs as well as responsibilities to accomplish goals set out in their Voluntary Services Agreement and Case Plan.

PROCEDURE

Responsibilities

Child Protection Worker/Designate:

Determining the Cultural Identity of an Indigenous Child or Youth:

- At the initial contact, ask the child/youth and their parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) as well as the expectant parent(s) about their cultural identity, i.e., Indigenous, etc.
- Discuss with the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) if they would like their Indigenous Governing Body(s) (IGBs), applicable Aboriginal Organization(s) (AAOs) or cultural organization to support them and to participate in the case planning process for their **VSA and Case Plan**. The IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization **must only** be contacted with the consent of the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s).
 - **Form 10.15.1 Invitation to Participate in Case Planning Process for Child/Youth/Young Person (Non-Significant Measure)** can be used to invite a representative to participate in the development of a Case Plan if the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) consents to their participation.
- Consult with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) if there are questions about the child/youth's cultural identity and if applicable, consult with members of the child/youth's extended family, Aboriginal Organization, Indigenous Governing Body, and other cultural organization for a non-Indigenous child/youth.
- If direct community connections are not available with the child/youth's Indigenous or cultural

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communities, contact local Indigenous or cultural agencies and organizations for information about services, events and activities that may be applicable and available to children, youth and families.

- Considering the impact of racism and systemic discrimination, work with racialized children, youth and families to assess strengths and recognize resiliency when planning and delivering services specific to them.
- On consent, reach out to cultural group or community members who can help foster the child/youth's connections to their cultural communities, and/or who could support the child/youth in an out-of-home placement if necessary.
- Document in MatrixNT the community or communities to which the child/youth is represented by or could belong to, including both maternal and parental cultural communities.

Case Planning:

- Determine who has lawful custody of the child/youth or who provides the day-to-day care* of the child/youth.
 - A parent is considered to have lawful custody when:
 - They have been the primary caregiver.
 - They have a valid custody order or agreement; or
 - They have custom adopted the child/youth.
 - When engaging with a person who is not the parent, verify that this is the person with lawful custody through a Custom Adoption, Custody Order or is the primary caregiver. Consult with the Supervisor/Manager if in doubt.
- Consult with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) to determine

* Care Provider is defined in an *Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families* as a person who has primary responsibility for providing the day-to-day care of an Indigenous child, other than the parent, including in accordance with the customs and traditions of an indigenous group, community, or to which the child belongs.

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what support services they require in order to meet their needs. When dealing with expectant parent(s), it is important to identify what support services are required before and after the birth of their child. Giving priority to preventative and support services will often require additional steps beyond a referral.

- Review the **Voluntary Services Agreement Checklist tool 2.1.2** with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) to determine if they are eligible for support services through a **VSA**. If the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) meet the criteria in the **Checklist**:
 - Determine the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s)' strengths and needs;
 - If required, determine a suitable out of home placement as per **Standard 7.1 Placement Priorities for Children and Youth**;
 - Ensure the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) understand their roles and responsibilities during the term of the **VSA**; and
 - Interview and consult the child 12 years and older (as developmentally appropriate; and/or in a manner that is responsive to their developmental understanding) if the services within the **VSA and Case Plan** pertain to them. Moreover, ensure conversations with them are developmentally appropriate; and/or in a manner that is responsive to their developmental understanding.
- Refer to the **Philosophy of Voluntary Support Services Agreements tool 2.11** for a list of the types and extent of services that may be offered to the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s).
- Discuss with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/ caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) and the child 12 years of age or older whether they want to include their IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization representative(s), if applicable, in the development of their **VSA and Case Plan** as they may be aware of people, services and programs that may be of benefit to the individual or family.
 - If the parent(s)/care provider(s)/ caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) and the child 12 years of age or older consents to the involvement with their IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization, meet with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/ caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) and the child 12 years of age or older and their IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization to develop a clear understanding of the needs and what support services they require. Consider the input of the IGB(s) or cultural organization as part of the

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development of the family's **VSA** goals.

- Document a summary of the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) needs and circumstances in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** including the following:
 - Information about what services are available from other formal and informal sources such as housing, income support, self-help groups, extended family members, friends, neighbours, the child/youth's Indigenous or cultural community and educational and recreational programs that could help meet the child/youth's and family's needs;
 - Information necessary to plan for the child/youth's care;
 - Whether a suitable out of home placement is required (needs assessed in consultation with the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization, if applicable), and
 - The length of the **VSA**, which can be up to six (6) months in duration and renewed until it is no longer needed, is terminated, or the child/youth turns 19 years old.
- Develop the **VSA and Case Plan** based on the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s), or expectant parent(s)' identified needs, goals and responsibilities.
- Review the draft **VSA and Case Plan** with the Supervisor/Manager to ensure the services offered within the **VSA** can be provided.
- Meet with the child/youth, if appropriate, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s), or expectant parent(s) and IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization representative(s) if applicable, to review and make any additions or changes to the draft **VSA and Case Plan**.
- Review the final draft of the **VSA and Case Plan** with the Supervisor/Manager and obtain their approval and signature on the **VSA and Case Plan**.
- Finalize the **VSA and Case Plan** as per the recommendations of the child/youth, if appropriate, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s), or expectant parent(s), IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization (if applicable) and the Supervisor/Manager. The timeframe for the **VSA and Case Plan** cannot exceed **six (6) months** and cannot be extended beyond the child/youth's 19th birthday.
- Invite the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization, if applicable, to sign the **VSA and Case Plan**; however, the **VSA and Case Plan** are still valid

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regardless if the IGB(s) sign it.

- Provide the child 12 years of age or older, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) with a signed copy of the **VSA and Case Plan** and place a copy of the forms as well as **Case Notes** on the hard file and upload copies of the documents to MatrixNT.

Case Management:

- Ensure ongoing communication and contact occurs with the child/youth, parent(s), care provider(s)/caregiver(s), expectant parent(s) and their Extended Caregiver, Provisional Caregiver or Regular Foster Caregiver, (if applicable) as required by the **Standard 6.6 Child and Family Services Minimum Contacts** to support them in achieving their identified goals in their **VSA and Case Plan**. Document these contacts in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** and place on the hard file.
- Invite the IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization, by consent only, to participate in service planning with the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s). Document the meetings in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** and ensure any updates or reviews are documented during the **Case Review** process.

Out of Home Placement Arrangement:

- Assess whether services can be provided within the home, and if these services would result in better outcomes for the child/youth because placement out of the home should be the last resort. That said, if the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) are unable to identify a placement (family arrangement) and the child/youth requires placement in a foster care resource, **Standard 7.1 Placement Priorities for Children and Youth** must be followed and notice must be provided to the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s), IGB(s) of the Indigenous youth as outlined in **Standard 10.16 Requirement to Provide Notice Before Taking a Significant Measure in Relation to an Indigenous Child of Youth**.
- If CFS is coordinating the out of home placement, complete **Genogram form 9.1.3** using the **Genogram Code Key tool 9.1.1** as per **Standard 9.1 Concurrent Planning for Children and Youth** and **Standard 9.5 Permanency Planning for Children or Youth** to map out the family relationships and other significant relationships that can assist with identification of a

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child/youth, family and expectant parent(s)' cultural community. Considering the following information while completing the **Genogram**:

- Aim to gather information about at least **three (3)** generations: the child/youth's generation, their parents and grandparents as well as the expectant parent(s) relations;
 - Include significant others who lived with or cared for the child/youth;
 - Start with drawing the family structure, who is in the family, in which generations, how they are connected, birth/marriage, deaths etc.;
 - You may ask them to tell you a bit about each person and how they offer support to the child, youth or family;
 - As the child/youth tells you about family members and relationships, make a note alongside the name;
 - Ask about relationships between family members;
 - Ask about family values, beliefs and traditions; and
 - Try to explore patterns and themes.
- Upload a copy of the completed **Genogram form** to MatrixNT and place a copy of it on the hard file.
 - Consult with the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and IGB(s), if applicable, to determine placement options. It is important to follow the placement priorities as outlined in the **Standard 7.1 Placement Priorities for Children and Youth** before finalizing the placement plan with the child/youth. Document the placement decision in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** and place a copy of the form on the hard file.
 - If funding is required for a placement option identified by the parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and/or IGB(s), AAOs or cultural organization, then:
 - Complete the **Foster Home Application form 7.3.2** and **Extended Family and Provisional Placement Assessment form 7.2.1** with the individuals identified as a placement option for the child/youth. Follow the procedures outlined in **Standard 7.2**

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Approval of Extended Family and Provisional Homes. If there are concerns with the identified placement, explore alternative placements as per **Standard 7.1 Placement Priorities for Children and Youth**.

- If an out of home placement has occurred, the placement should be reviewed every **three (3) months** to determine if it is in the child/youth's best interest to continue to be in this placement. Furthermore, the reasons for any change or lack of change with respect to placement must be clearly documented in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** as well as per **Standard 6.12 Case Review**.
- Document all actions that have been taken in the ongoing reassessment of a return to in-home placement of the child/youth with their parent(s)/care provider(s)/ caregiver(s) or adult member of their family, and where applicable, the reason(s) why such placement is not in the child/youth's best interests. Also, this reassessment must be clearly documented during the **Case Review** process.

Supervisor/Manager:

At the Initial Request for Service:

- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate meets with the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) to determine if it is in their best interest to include the IGB(s) or cultural organization in the development of the **VSA and Case Plan**.

Determining the Cultural Identity of an Indigenous Child or Youth:

- Remind the Child Protection Worker/Designate to speak to the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) about their cultural identity, i.e., Indigenous, etc. and to document in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** the community or communities to which the child/youth is represented by or could belong to, including both maternal and paternal cultural identities.
- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate completes the **Genogram form** to map out the family relationships and other significant relationships that can assist with identification of a child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) and expectant parent(s)' cultural community.

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Case Planning:

- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate coordinates and supports the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) in accessing appropriate community services to meet their needs.
- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate appropriately documents their work and client support in MatrixNT as a **Case Note** and places a copy of the form on the hard file.
- Review the draft **VSA and Case Plan** with the Child Protection Worker/Designate to ensure the services offered within the **VSA** can be provided.
- Review and approve the final draft of the **VSA and Case Plan** with the Child Protection Worker/Designate.

Case Management:

- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate meets with the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s), expectant parent(s) and their Extended Caregiver, Provisional Caregiver or Regular Foster Caregiver (if applicable) as per **Standard 6.6 Child and Family Services Minimum Contacts** to support them in achieving their identified goals in their **VSA and Case Plan**.
- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate has inquired and understood the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant(s)' views and has engaged and collaborated with the IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization, if appropriate.
- Ensure that if the IGB(s), AAO(s) or applicable cultural organization is involved in planning for the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s), the joint service planning meetings with the individuals are clearly documented on MatrixNT as a **Case Note**.
- Review the **Case Notes** when expectant parent(s) is requesting support services to ensure supports are being provided which will promote the success of the family unit before and after birth.

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Out of Home Placement Arrangement:

- Ensure the Child Protection Worker/Designate obtains the child/youth, parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s)' and the IGB(s), AAO(s) or cultural organization's (if applicable) views regarding alternative placement options and considers their opinions when making the placement decision. Moreover, ensure the placement decision is well documented in Matrix NT as a **Case Note**.
- Consult with and provide approval to the Child Protection Worker/Designate to place a child/youth in an out of home placement.
- Remind the Child Protection Worker/Designate that whenever a child/youth is placed out of the home or moved to a new placement, to follow the required priority of placement.

NTHSSA Deputy Director of Practice:

- Ensure that all Supervisors/Managers are aware of and inform Child Protection Worker/Designate of the importance of the **Federal Government's Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and Métis children, youth and families** and its importance on practice.
- Ensure that all open files clearly identify the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous heritage of the child/youth and their parent(s)/care provider(s)/caregiver(s) or expectant parent(s) accessing services through Child and Family Services.
- Ensure that when a child/youth is placed in an out of home placement, there is a written rationale that outlines the efforts made to attend to priority placement considerations, engage and collaborate.
- Provide information and feedback pertaining to the use of the **VSA** with families and expectant parent(s) to the Statutory Director as requested.
- Promote practices to ensure adherence to **Standard 2.1 Voluntary Services Agreement**.

DHSS Director of Child and Family Services or Deputy Director:

- If applicable, provide the Regional Health and Social Services Authorities and the Northwest Territories Health and Social Services Authority with a copy of the Community Agreement as per **Section 20(1) and (2) of the Federal Government's Act respecting First Nations, Inuit and**

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Métis children, youth and families.

- Where these do not already exist, the Director will work with the child/youth's Indigenous community to advance regional Community Planning Tables to formalize engagement opportunities and protocols.
- Maintain a list of applicable Aboriginal Organizations and Indigenous Governing Bodies.
- Receive the Quality Reviews on a quarterly basis from the Deputy Director of Practice of Designate.

FORMS

- Form 2.1.1 Voluntary Services Agreement and Case Plan
- Form 7.3.2 Foster Home Application
- Form 7.2.1 Extended Family and Provisional Placement Assessment
- Form 9.1.3 Genogram
- Form 10.15.1 Invitation to Participate in Case Planning Process for Child/Youth/Young Person (Non-Significant Measure)

TOOLS

- Tool 2.1.1 Philosophy of Voluntary Support Services Agreements
- Tool 2.1.2 Voluntary Services Agreement Checklist
- Tool 9.1.1 Genogram Code Key

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