

Working Title Family Court Counsellor		Name	
Position Number	Reports to Position No., Class & Level	Division, Branch/Unit Court & Justice Services, Business & Resolution Services	Ministry Justice
Present Classification HSW 5		Requested Classification	
Dept ID	Program Code	Project Code (if applicable)	

**PURPOSE:** Give a brief summary of the job, covering the main responsibilities, the framework within which the job has to operate and the main contribution to the organization (see [Section 2.3](#)).

Working within current legislation, department policy and office procedure, a Family Court Counsellor (FCC) meets (remotely or in-person) with Self-Represented Albertans who have child(ren), and are contemplating, in the midst of, or post separation/divorce with the goals of minimizing child(ren)'s exposure to toxic stress, screening for the presence and severity of family violence, problematic substance use, or mental health concerns (depression, bi-polar disorder, etc.), provide information about parenting plans, options for resolving conflict, making referrals to community resources, and reducing the strain on the Family Court system. An FCC assists parties attending Alberta Court of Justice and/or King's Bench family docket by assessing for safety concerns, discussing the court application with all connected parties, facilitating resolution of areas of dispute, describing court process, dispute resolution options and presenting summaries of multiple court applications, with several families to the Justice for their consideration. In addition to providing the above services, FCCs are expected to support the training, mentorship and professional development of new staff and Bachelor or Master of Social Work practicum students.

Significant knowledge supplemented by experience is required of theoretical models, specialized techniques, and practical and theoretical procedures related to client interviewing, safety assessments, and dispute resolution. The FCC regularly encounters situations of high emotional intensity in dealing with clients and is expected to resolve conflicts and de-escalate volatile situations in the office and outside of docket court. Extensive knowledge of human behaviour, including family violence, child and youth development, crisis intervention, family dynamics, mental health, addictions, systems theory and conflict resolution is required. Throughout service delivery, FCCs defuse emotions and educate clients about diverse family law related matters including appropriate resolution options, best interests of children, communication, conflict reduction skills and court processes and procedures. Expert knowledge of Alberta court legislation, court procedures, court etiquette and trends are required to be successful.

The FCC, reporting to the team lead, works independently and collaboratively with colleagues in the same location and across the province to ensure seamless service delivery to Albertans. Strong working relationships with Court Operations, Judiciary and the legal community are required to ensure services are delivered to clients and operation of Alberta Court of Justice and/or King's Bench family docket court. At the direction of Assessment Services (AS) management and Team Lead, FCCs will complete data collection and participate in program development initiatives to ensure services are provided in a user friendly, cost-effective manner.

**RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVITIES:** The purpose of the job can be broken down in different responsibilities and end results. Each end result shows what the job is accountable for, within what framework and what the added value is. Normally a job has 4-8 core end results. For each end result, approximately 3 major activities should be described (see [Sections 2.1](#) and [2.2](#)).

**Screening, Assessment & Referral**

- Completes in-depth interview and psychosocial assessment to identify issues including levels of conflict, complexity and urgency of presenting issues and collaborates with the client to develop and document an action plan.

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- Screens and assesses Albertans requesting assistance to determine needs, interests, and legal status to provide accurate information and relevant services.
- Screens each case for family violence, mental health, addictions, and risk of suicide/homicide.
- Identifies options available for the client to resolve the issue and guides the client's decision-making process by asking questions and providing relevant information.
- Provides information on a range of topics including, but not limited to: effective and positive communication between the parties in family matters, the impacts of family violence, negative impact of conflict on children, impact of separation on children, dispute resolution options, court systems, processes, legal terminology and the Parenting After Separation & High Conflict courses.
- Focuses clients on best interests of the child and provides information on brain development, and ages and stages of child development.
- Supports clients with completion of appropriate court applications in accordance with relevant legislation.
- Combines professional principles and ethics with practical experience to pose the right questions that facilitate decision making in the best interests of the children and incorporating the needs of all other impacted parties.

#### **Case Management**

- When court applications are filed, connects with respondents, and provides assessment and referral services for them.
- Provide ongoing case management services for all self-represented parties to a related court action. This includes the respondents and parties that bring additional applications such as grandparents or other family members.
- Follows up on procedural matters, including subsequent court filings and legal service requirements.
- Continually assesses for safety risks or possible barriers to service delivery and provides supports accordingly.
- Negotiates resolution of issues between the parties using conflict resolution skills including identifying the needs and interests of the parties, reducing obstacles to effective communication, and exploring alternative outcomes.
- Liase with Children's Services workers, Alberta Supports staff, legal counsel, and community agencies to coordinate services and best support the family.

#### **Caseflow Conference**

- Chairs caseflow conferences and exercises judicial authority to
- Adjourn matters.
- Ensure administrative requirements are met.
- Prepare consent documents for the Court's approval.
- Document on the Court record all outcomes and relevant data.
- Ensure that emergent cases are scheduled for Court in a timely fashion that is determined by the gravity of the situation.
- Assist the parties in the caseflow conference to explore all possible areas of consent and alternative methods of resolution.

#### **In-Court Support**

- Provides information, support guidance and assistance to clients prior to, during and following docket court.
- Reviews court applications/responses, with multiple families (often 10 or more families) at each docket court appearance, to gather facts to facilitate conversations about the resolution of issues and discuss resolution options.
- Assists the Court by presenting a neutral, objective overview of the matter including areas of consent, outstanding issues and matters for consideration to the docket court justice. The presentations often include sensitive information that need to be presented in a tactful way that maintains neutrality yet provides critical information to the Justice about things like child abuse allegations, and family violence.
- Responds to actions, directions and requests from the Judiciary that fall within the scope of the FCC role.

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- Manage safety needs of clients at Court. This may include connecting clients with Sheriffs, or various other stakeholders like victim's services, duty counsel or shelter workers.
- Travel to regional courts occurs at most locations.

#### **File Family Court Applications**

- As a clerk of the court, files applications for Court regarding parenting, contact, guardianship, grandparent access, and any variation or enforcement of these orders, ensuring that all attendant documents are properly completed in the prescribed form.

#### **Mentorship & Coaching**

- At the direction of AS management, trains new staff.
- Support the development of social work practicum students working within the FCC role.
- Attend regular meetings for the purpose of reviewing complex circumstances and various practice approaches to implement.
- Seeks out and participates in learning opportunities to enhance skill and service delivery capacity.

#### **Consultation & Public Relations**

- Participates in ongoing development and improvement of AS Programs
- Attends regular FCC meetings to learn of issues and trends related to service delivery, and to provide feedback for the improvement of AS programs and services.
- Under the direction of AS management, assumes various positions on government and community-based agencies, boards or groups to provide links between Business and Resolution Services and the community.
- Consults with the judiciary, legal community, other BRS departments, government and community agencies regarding the services delivered by AS and relevance to population needs.
- Develops and implements partnerships with other government and community agencies to promote effective referrals between organizations.
- Participates in activities that promote awareness of BRS, including but not limited to presentations and training for internal and external stakeholders and community agencies.
- Provides input on emerging trends and service challenges that impact service delivery, policy, and procedures.

#### **Administration**

- Maintain digital client files that document service delivery.
- Complete client interview summary records as per professional (Social Work code of conduct) and FOIP documentation standards and provincial file management procedures at all stages of work with clients.
- Prepare referral documentation as required.

**SCOPE:** List specific information that illustrates what internal or external areas the job impacts, and the diversity, complexity, and creativity of the job (see [Section 2.4](#)).

This position is responsible for providing expert intervention and assistance to self-represented Albertans with family legal issues. The work occurs in a highly complex framework of various levels and branches of court (King's Bench, Alberta Court of Justice, Criminal, Family, Child Protection, etc.). Extensive understanding in several functional areas is required to interface effectively with functional specialists from within the department, from other departments, and/or from stakeholder groups. Other team members as well as the clients can be widely dispersed throughout Alberta, which increases the level of complexity and the need to be proficient in oral and written communications as well as with new communication and service delivery technologies. The population accessing services are diverse and come from a variety of socio-economic and cultural backgrounds, may have mental health, addiction and/or capacity issues and accessing the Court system exacerbates an already emotional situation. Staff are expected to provide service to all people and therefore require skills to defuse and manage intense emotional situations. Client situations are most often complex in nature and most often involve multiple clients with opposing and conflicting needs and positions.

**\*\*Impact on courts and court operations\*\***

### **Diversity**

- The incumbent is responsible for providing services to clients from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. Working within the Court system also requires frequent contact with the judiciary, court staff, the legal community, and other departments. Contact within the community at large is required to make referrals to appropriate agencies and services.

### **Complexity**

- The incumbent is required to work with diverse and complex situations and populations that reflect the community at large. Well-developed interpersonal and communication skills are required to provide optimum services.
- Complexity and variety of AS services requires the application of practical and theoretical knowledge to a wide variety of complex and changing situations.
- Working within various urban and rural settings with diverse socio-economic and ethnic populations requires a current working knowledge of resources available in the community.
- The FCC role requires in depth knowledge of numerous pieces of legislation, provincial statutes, regulations, practice notes, policy directives and manuals that often overlap and interact in extremely complex ways.
- The incumbent must remain current with new and changing trends and theories related to client service delivery, dispute resolution and dynamics of human behaviour to support evidence-based practice, maintain registration with professional college, and continuous improvement of programs and services.
- This position requires the ability to work with minimal supervision to complete a variety of ongoing and changing tasks.
- The incumbent requires flexibility and adaptability to work in an environment characterized by varying degrees of uncertainty, frequent organizational changes, sensitive issues, and often volatile clientele.

### **Creativity**

- The incumbent is required to provide information on relevant legislation and policy to aid client decision making in the best interests of the child(ren).
- Good analytic and assessment skills are required to identify and prioritize issues that need to be addressed.
- Facilitate a creative process where clients create options that will best meet the needs of everyone involved in the dispute.
- Requires independent decision making in relation to multiple laws and regulations while working with minimal supervision.
- Broad latitude to select from professional and theoretical principles to respond to each unique set of client circumstances.

### **Physical Demands:**

Office duties: Can involve long periods of sitting or standing while using a computer at a workstation. Work can be repetitive in nature and at times, heavy manual work may be required (i.e.: packing files, moving records). The ability to travel regularly for some staff is a requirement of this position.

Court Duties: Can involve long periods of sitting or standing while working with a large volume of people in an open setting outside and inside of the courtroom. Maintenance of multiple physical files containing sensitive, confidential client information is required and can be heavy to lift/carry.

### **Risk**

Security: Staff is required to work in secure areas and must follow policies and procedures to ensure security risk is minimized.

Counter/Meeting Room/Court: Exposure is common to Albertans who are in emotionally charged situations and may display strong emotion when interacting with staff. Contact with Albertans who may suffer from addictions or issues of mental health, or who may be violent is possible. Staff may experience vicarious trauma from ongoing involvement with complex, high conflict clients. Department and Government risk mitigation strategies must be followed.

**KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & ABILITIES:** Provide a list of the most important knowledge factors, skills and abilities including knowledge about practical procedures, specialized techniques, etc.; analytical and conceptual skills and abilities; and skills needed for direct interaction with others not only diplomas and degrees. Specific training if it is an occupational certification/registration required for the job.

### **Education**

- Undergraduate degree in social work (or related field) and two years of related experience (directly related education or experience will be considered on the basis of one year education for one year of experience; or one year of experience for one year of education).
- Significant knowledge supplemented by experience is required of theoretical models, specialized techniques, and practical and theoretical procedures related to assessment, intervention, dispute resolution, family violence and court processes/procedures is an asset.
- Registration with the Alberta College of Social Workers (ACSW) is required for all social work graduates.

### **Knowledge**

- Interviewing and assessment techniques and skills (i.e., Motivational Interviewing).
- In-depth knowledge of theory and practise of working with individuals and families in crisis and the underlying causes and behaviours associated with conflict, including high-conflict, family violence, power imbalances, the effects of conflict on child and youth development.
- Conflict resolution skills and techniques (i.e., negotiation).
- Well-developed understanding of human behaviour including the signs of physical and emotional distress.
- Impact of negative ongoing conflict on children and adults and strategies to alleviate/resolve conflict.
- Impact of family violence, family violence protocols, screening and risk assessments, and impact of family violence on members of the family.
- Cultural diversity.
- Impact of mental health and addictions concerns related to parenting.
- Parenting plan development in the best interests of child(ren).
- Government and Professional code of conduct & code of ethics.
- Government Code of Conduct.
- Other Court and Justice Services services.
- Related Acts, Regulations, Rules and Practice Notes. (i.e., *Protection Against Family Violence Act, Family Law Act, Extra-Provincial Enforcement of Custody Orders Act, Inter-Jurisdiction Support Orders Act, Child, Youth & Family Enhancement Act, Intake and Caseflow Management Regulation, Divorce Act*)
- Extensive knowledge of court processes, procedures, protocols, legal documents, and court etiquette.
- Justice, CJS, AS policies and procedures.
- Province-wide databases (Client Relationship Management, Justice Online Information Network, CASES).

**KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS & ABILITIES:** Provide a list of the most important knowledge factors, skills and abilities including knowledge about practical procedures, specialized techniques, etc.; analytical and conceptual skills and abilities; and skills needed for direct interaction with others not only diplomas and degrees. Specific training if it is an occupational certification/registration required for the job.

- Child Support Calculation software and its use.
- Provincial programs and community resources.
- Children's Services policies and procedures for appropriate referrals and collaboration.
- Understanding of the origins and consequences of work-related stress and use of coping and management skills to promote wellness.

#### **Skills**

- Excellent communication, including interviewing, oral, written, and active listening skills.
- Risk assessment skills in relation to suicide, homicide, and family violence.
- Assessment skills related to clients and to support FCCs and practitioner development.
- Analytical and conceptual skills.
- Engage cooperative and non-cooperative clients in resolution and decision-making processes using a variety of intervention skills.
- Creativity and problem-solving skills.
- Consulting and advisory skills.
- Conflict resolution, family mediation and negotiation.
- De-escalation techniques, personal safety and safety planning for other staff and the public.
- Empathy, sensitivity to confidentiality, respect, and ethical behaviour.
- Intervention skills.
- Assessment, counseling, and crisis intervention skills
- Strong organization skills to handle volume and complexity of work in a detail-oriented manner. (Errors have high degree of negative outcomes (i.e., incorrect court orders)).
- Time management/coping skills.
- Community and inter-governmental liaison/relations.
- Accurate client record keeping in accordance with provincial and professional guidelines.
- Public speaking.
- Human relation skills (interacting with people within or outside the Department).
- Record keeping Computer skills – ability to use all current software (M365, VOIP telephony, CRM, JOIN, CASES, ChildView, etc.) and future programs.
- Case management and information gathering skills in complex, highly emotional situations.

#### **Abilities**

- Ability to self-regulate emotional responses in prolonged, stressful situations while working with others.
- Ability to engage and develop rapport (trusting, professional working relationship), in an open, public setting (outside of a docket courtroom), with a diverse client base to ensure accurate information is obtained to present in the courtroom.
- Ability to multi-task and navigate many high priority tasks calmly and effectively in a fast-paced, high volume, public setting.
- Ability to quickly understand substantive, historical, and personal nature of previously unknown conflict.
- Ability to problem solve and prioritize work in courtroom with minimum supervision.
- Ability to synthesize and summarize critical information in a clear and concise manner.
- Ability to train and educate people in conflict resolution coaching, parenting skills, child development and other related skills and topics.
- Ability to speak coherently and clearly when providing court presentations.
- Ability to work independently and collaboratively as a member of a team and cross-ministry initiatives.
- Ability to be empathetic, creative, sensitive, respectful, and understanding of clients in crisis.
- Ability to de-escalate volatile clients (using crisis management skills) and monitor client escalation through verbal and non-verbal cues and recognize and mitigate any security issues as they arise.

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- Ability to identify and talk through a problem with team members to get their perspective, another viewpoint, develop insight and identify priorities.
- Ability to travel to other Court and Program locations as may be required to deliver service to circuit courts and requested by AS management.
- Ability to use technology in support of distance learning and delivery of program services.
- Ability to combine professional principles and ethics with practical experience to pose the right questions, and to facilitate the development of workable solutions to unique, complex problems involving multiple parties and diverse interests.
- Ability to work cooperatively as a member of a team and cross-ministry initiatives.

**CONTACTS:** The main contacts of this position and the purpose of those contacts.

- Albertans in general and Self-represented Albertans who have a family law issue in Alberta to facilitate access to services and referrals.
- Assessment Services Team management for guidance, direction, and consultation.
- Team members from all Business and Resolution Services Team (Program planning, program policy and procedures, consultation, and coordination of services).
- Assessment Services Program staff, including Caseflow Coordinators and Program Supports.
- Business and Resolution Services Administration (Program Policy and procedure).
- Court Operations Staff (King's Bench and Alberta Court of Justice) relating to court documentation, processes, scheduling, and court appearances.
- The Judiciary (Consultation, providing consent orders, providing information, and receiving referrals).
- Other ministries (i.e. Children's Services, Service Alberta, etc.) and non-government agencies for consultation, information sharing, and case coordination.
- BRS Directors for program policy and procedure.
- BRS Legal Counsel for legal consultation and clarification.
- Justice Sheriffs for security, family violence issues and information sharing.
- Legal Community and agents for information sharing, public presentations, referrals, and consultation.
- Policing agencies for information sharing.

**SUPERVISION EXERCISED:** List position numbers, class titles, and working titles of positions directly supervised.

N/A

**CHANGES SINCE LAST CLASSIFICATION REVIEW:** This section is not required to be completed if the job description is being written for the conversion to PREP. It should be completed for any subsequent classification requests under PREP.

N/A

**ORGANIZATION CHART:** An organization chart that includes supervisor, peers and staff **MUST** be attached.

*This information is being collected under the authority of Section 10 of the Public Service Act and will be used to allocate positions within a classification plan and to manage the Alberta government human resources program. If you have any questions about the collection of this information, contact the Compensation Manager, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Peace Hills Trust Tower, 10011 - 109 Street, Edmonton, Alberta, T5J 3S8, phone 408-8400 or contact your Ministry Human Resource Office.*