

An Interdisciplinary Journal

Honoring the Voices, Perspectives and Knowledges of First Peoples through Research, Critical Analyses, Stories, Standpoints and Media Reviews

Foreword

Jennifer King¹

¹ First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, Ontario, Canada

Corresponding author: Jennifer King, jking@fncaringsociety.com; 613-230-5885

The *First Peoples Child & Family Review*, in collaboration with the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research, is proud to present this special issue on Aboriginal child and youth mental, spiritual and cultural health. The issue seeks to broaden the conversation on 'mental health' as it relates to Aboriginal peoples, and particularly Aboriginal children. Mainstream definitions of mental health fail to recognize the holistic perspective embraced by many Aboriginal families and communities, which sees emotional and mental health as inseparable from spiritual and cultural well-being. These differing understandings have profound implications for how researchers, policy-makers and practitioners approach mental health work with Aboriginal families, as well as the experience and relative benefit of the services received. Indeed, an approach that addresses only the cognitive or emotional aspects of mental health will fail to meet the needs of many Aboriginal children. The articles in this special edition look beyond conventional approaches to explore a multi-faceted understanding that respects Aboriginal worldviews and privileges traditional knowledge.

We would like to thank Madelynn Slade, a Michel Cree and Metis youth advocate from Alberta for her insightful editorial to this special edition. In 2012, Slade was one of six First Nations Youth Ambassadors selected represent the interests of First Nations children and young people at the United Nations. The Ambassadors met with the Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland, to present evidence on the discriminations experienced by First Nations children in Canada, often drawing on personal experience to show how inequities in child welfare, education and health care have affected their communities. The Ambassadors were the only youth in Canada's delegation, and the first Indigenous youth from Canada to speak to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. Slade has remained a strong and active supporter of Indigenous child rights, and is currently pursuing a degree in Child and Youth Care. Her editorial situates child welfare as more than a policy and human rights concern, but an issue of mental, spiritual and cultural health affecting the everyday lives of First Nations children across Canada. She shares her personal experience as a youth in care to illustrate the lived experience and consequences of a child welfare system that has and continues to fail Indigenous children and families.

Slade's editorial contextualizes the six articles published in this edition by grounding research and policy in the lived experience of First Nations children and youth. The articles discuss issues of mental, spiritual and cultural health at various stages of the life cycle. Amrita Roy explores the concept of intergenerational trauma and the implications for mental health during pregnancy. Latimer et al., discuss the need for a

holistic approach when working with First Nations children to address experiences of pain, while Brownlee and colleagues look at the bullying experiences and behaviours of Aboriginal elementary students in northwestern Ontario. The issue then moves to explore various strategies and initiatives undertaken by families, communities and researchers to support and nurture the mental, spiritual and cultural health of Aboriginal children. Working collaboratively with the community of Saddle Lake, Alberta, Pazderka et al. discuss their research into culturally appropriate practices to promote early childhood attachment. Muir and Bohr also explore theme of traditional and cultural approaches to caregiving, offering a review of the literature on values and practices in Aboriginal parenting. The final article in this edition focuses on systemic strategies to protect and promote the health and well-being of First Nations children. Authors Sinha and Blumenthal describe the Federal government's administrative response to Jordan's Principle, a child-first policy to ensure First Nations children receive equitable access to government services such as health care. The article also provides an overview of an ongoing legal case, filed in 2011, seeking to enforce Jordan's Principle.

The editorial board of the *First Peoples Child and Family Review* and the Alberta Centre for Child, Family and Community Research would like to thank our authors and reviewers for their contributions to this important topic. We hope that readers will find the discussion to be thought-provoking, rich, timely and inspiring. Addressing the mental health needs of Aboriginal children and youth means acknowledging a broader definition that respects Aboriginal worldviews. We hope that this issue supports and assists readers to honour this approach in their own research, practice and policy work with Aboriginal children and families.