

FOREWORD

Time Is Right To Reach Back And Look Forward

Ivan Brown

It is very encouraging indeed to see the collection of articles that appears between these covers, and that comprises the second issue of the First People's Child & Family Review. This collection resulted from a request to a wide variety of authors to consider the topic Reconciliation in child welfare, and to generate some ideas that would contribute to our greater understanding of it.

The reason for this request was to help set the scene for a planned Reconciliation in Child Welfare Movement. This Movement is conceived as a North America wide dialog that will enable us to change our thinking and the nature of our relationships, and thus to move toward child welfare policy and practice that works to our better advantage.

One initial event will act as the "kick-off" for the Reconciliation Movement, but many other events – both large and small – are expected to follow. The initial event is entitled *Reconciliation: Reaching Back, Looking Forward: Indigenous People and Child Welfare*¹ and will take place in Niagara Falls, Canada in October 2005. This will be an exciting opportunity for 200 invited leaders from across Canada and the United States to come together to help create the movement that will address – over the coming years – the best ways for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to work together to support child welfare for Aboriginal children, families and communities.

To succeed, the Reconciliation Movement will have to be honest about historical and current relationships. In particular, it will have to recognize that it is essential to begin by looking at past harm and by understanding the reasons

why that harm occurred. It will be just as important, however, to examine our current practices to see where imbalances of power and philosophy are still resulting in harm being perpetuated. Only by understanding – then altering – such imbalances in an open and willing way can Reconciliation truly begin to take place.

The articles in this issue of the *First People's Child & Family Review* help us along this path toward understanding. It will be our responsibility for knowing when we understand sufficiently to move forward and alter those things that are not in our children's best interests.

¹ *Reconciliation: Reaching Back, Looking Forward: Indigenous People and Child Welfare* is an event of the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, and is sponsored by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada, the National Indian Child Welfare Association (USA), the Child Welfare League of Canada, and the Child Welfare League of America.

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EDITORIAL

To Reach Out in Friendship?

Terry Cross and Cindy Blackstock

In North America, we know very little about reconciliation, but for the original peoples of this continent there is a growing urgency that we learn, especially in the field of child welfare. This issue of this journal represents one step in that direction. The contributors to this issue are, along with many other colleagues, on a path seeking answers. For without a path, there is no hope, and without hope there is no resolution.

Reconciliation takes two willing partners, the injured and the perpetrator. Indigenous peoples of North America, over the past centuries, have experienced oppression, loss, and exclusion. Yet, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples understand that the way forward for our children depends on our ability to hear the lessons of the past, learn from them, and carve out in a vigilant way a new relationship together based on respectful co-existence.

One may legitimately wonder if this social conflict is reconcilable. We know that the challenge ahead is significant and that not everyone in our profession is ready for this conversation. Both sides share the desire to make things better. However, the barriers are often the most likely allies for change. It sometimes seems that government is simply a structure to perpetuate injustice. Mainstream helping professionals, policy makers, researchers, and child welfare leaders are made up of people of good intent who, in most cases, care about human rights and justice. Why, then, do they usually conduct their affairs as if we do not exist? Who do we turn to if the good guys ignore us?

In this context, there is risk in even coming to the table. If we are recognized by each other, we can become one through

dialogue. If one ignores the other, we are condemned to remain oppressor and oppressed, colonizer and colonized. Christodoulidis in his article "Truth and Reconciliation as Risks" (2000) cites the following quote from Simone Weil (1989):

**"You do not interest me."
No man can say these words
without committing a cruelty
and offending against justice.**

The phrase manifests in many forms, such as when Native peoples are ignored in research findings and lumped among the amorphous category "other" or reported as "insignificant." Most often the essence of this phrase appears as acts of omission. It is why policy does not change even when report after report affirms that change is necessary. It is why practice does not change even when helpers are of good will, open mind, and rational thought. It is at least part of the reason that the same government that enacts policy to preserve the family can be the agent of destruction of indigenous families through perpetuation of boarding schools.

The reasons that many interventions in Aboriginal child welfare are unhelpful or destructive stem from two closely related larger societal problems: 1) systemic colonialism, a situation that allows the more powerful to take what they want from the less powerful — in this case, Aboriginal peoples; and 2) racism, the treating of Indigenous peoples differently just because of their racial heritage.

If we really care about children and families, we must care about all of them regardless of race or political status. If Indigenous children and societies are to survive, child welfare advocates both Native and mainstream

know that standing still is not an option. It is up to us to demonstrate leadership on this matter. In both Canada and the United States, too many Indigenous children are living their lives in institutional care, in foster homes, and in corrections facilities. Too many Indigenous parents and community members do not feel supported in their care-giving roles. Our child welfare institutions, although well intended, continue to make mistakes because we have not yet learned to form relationships that result in support that is best for Indigenous children and families.

To redress these problems, a necessary beginning point is to build relationships by engaging in dialogue that will initiate a process of reconciliation between the mainstream child welfare field and the indigenous peoples of the United States and Canada. This dialogue must be founded on principles of respect, understanding, inclusion, and truth. It involves a confirmation of, and learning from, our historical experiences and moving toward a new sustainable relationship that supports children that thrive. This new relationship will foster recognition and support for the right and ability of Indigenous peoples to make the best decisions for Indigenous children. The ultimate goal of this process in both the United States and Canada — for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples — is unity in child welfare in support of the well being of children.

As a first step, five national organizations are hosting a North American forum in the fall of 2005 on reconciliation in child welfare. Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders from communities, professions, and governments — who are committed to changing the way we think and act as social workers to benefit Indigenous children and their families — will convene in the spirit of reconciliation.

Yet the responsibility of the reconciled goes beyond the interpersonal dialogue and a one-time meeting. As reconciliation builds bridges between parties, each party then assumes a responsibility to build bridges within its own constituency for the purpose of furthering the reconciliation agenda. The dialogue provides an alliance-

building framework, allowing us to find the common denominators that tell us where to start. Meeting gives us a space for recruiting allies and building the relationships that are the foundation of success. Success will demand that we look beyond making a place for legitimate dialogue to creating a place where we can find common identity as helpers. Finding the space to work together will require the best in each of us, because within that space the demands are great, and once committed, we share dual accountability for our success.

The goal of the initial meeting is to build relationships and engage in dialogue that will initiate a process of truth and reconciliation between the mainstream child welfare field and the indigenous peoples of the United States and Canada. This will necessarily mean acknowledging and affirming the sovereign and moral authority of indigenous peoples' governments to make decisions regarding their children. This event puts in focus current relationships between Indigenous peoples and the child welfare system, calling for a confirmation of, and learning from, our historical experiences and moving toward a new sustainable relationship that supports successful children, and founded on principles of respect, understanding, inclusion, and truth. Together we will strive for excellence in child welfare by:

- ✦ Recognizing, affirming, and supporting the right of Indigenous adults and communities to care for their children and youth;
- ✦ Exploring what reconciliation means for those who have been oppressed in a child welfare context and for those organizations that have, intentionally or unintentionally, been involved in that oppression;
- ✦ Supporting the optimal well-being of Indigenous children, youth, and families as determined and defined by Indigenous peoples;
- ✦ Seeking broad understanding of the ongoing impact of colonialism on child welfare systems;

- ♦ Understanding the ongoing impacts of colonialism on Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and communities and take direct and respectful action to mitigate those impacts.
- ♦ Allowing those who have experienced the harm the permission to define that harm and have their reality validated;
- ♦ Experiencing reconciliation and healing through high-level engagement in dialogue, experiential activities, and ownership of the issues; and,
- ♦ Engaging in an ongoing and courageous conversation that supports our mutual responsibility to keep watch in order to avoid the mistakes of the past and ensure that our current relationship supports our shared vision.

Our challenge is to build a core leadership movement dedicated to lasting shifts in thought, policies, and practices that support the well-being of indigenous children, families, communities, and culture. The articles presented in this journal are meant to inform others of the process, highlight promising advances, and recruit new allies to the cause. We hope that you are moved as well, by the words of the authors who have so courageously taken the first steps on the journey.

If we are to successfully reach out, we as Indigenous people must call on all the strength passed down to us and begin doing what needs to be done - whether we are seen or not. More than anything else – our vision is that in this process more and more Indigenous peoples light their own candles of hope and believe that the strength within them is enough to do what needs to be done to safely care for our children. The work will be easier, quicker, and more effective if we have allies. It is our mission to reach out in friendship but to not wait anymore.

Christodoulidis, E.A. (2000) "Truth and Reconciliation as Risks." *Social and Legal Studies*. Vol. 9:(2) 179-204.

Terry L. Cross, MSW, ACSW, LCSW

Terry Cross is an enrolled member of the Seneca nation of Indians and is the developer and founder of the National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA). He is the author of *Heritage and Helping*, an eleven manual curriculum for tribal child welfare staff including a volume on working with substance abusing families. Mr. Cross is also author of the positive Indian parenting curricula, as well as cross-cultural skills in Indian child welfare. He also co-authored "toward a culturally competent system of care" published by Georgetown university, child development center. His life and work in both Indian and non-Indian settings and his academic background give him unique skills to serve the project. He has 30 years of experience in child welfare, including 10 years working directly with children and families. Mr. Cross served on the faculty of Portland State University School of Social Work for 15 years. He has served on the board of the national committee to prevent child abuse and has been an advisor to the American professional society on the abuse of children. Mr. Cross has directed the Indian child welfare association since it's founding in 1983 and has traveled to make presentations internationally in relation to child welfare work. Terry is experienced in evaluation design, and policy related research and has organized culturally specific technical assistance programs for over 16 years.

Cindy Blackstock, B.A., M.M.

A member of the Gitksan Nation, Cindy has worked in the field of child and family services for over twenty years on the front line, in professional development and research. In her current capacity, Cindy is honoured to be the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (www.fnfcfs.com) This national organization seeks promotes the works and knowledge of First Nations child and family service agencies and regional organizations in Canada by providing research, professional development and networking services.

Cindy was honoured to participate in numerous provincial and national research projects. She has published numerous research papers, articles and curriculum related to Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. Current professional interests include being a member of the NGO Working Group of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, member of the United Nations Indigenous Sub Group for the CRC, Board of Directors for Boys and Girls Clubs of Canada and the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of the Child.

Surviving the Storm

Ozaawi Bineziikwe (The names referred to in this story have been changed.)

This is a photograph of the Fort Alexander Residential School at Sagkeeng, Manitoba, which Ozaawi Bineziikwe attended as a child. The school was torn down in 1970. Photograph taken from the Manitoba Historical Society, Available online: <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/pageant/14/architecture.shtml>.



How times have changed from simplicity to complexity. I've been a witness to many of these drastic changes. The thirties, forties and the fifties were times when you didn't have to worry about electrical bills, casinos, utility bills, and all that new era stuff. Life was harsh but simple. Today, everything is a mad rush: the traffic, the bills, the addictions, the diseases that people have developed in the last forty to fifty years....

For most of our lives, my siblings and I lived with our grandfather. The days always began with chores. My older brother was responsible for hauling water from the river and making sure we had enough wood for the tin heater and the kitchen stove. My younger brother sawed, chopped, and piled the wood in neat rows along the east side of the house. He would also rake up the bark from the trees and store them in a gunny-sack for kindling. Whenever we were at home, the boys would be expected to haul and fill the barrels with drinking water. It was quite the walk to the river and back. Back then, the water wasn't polluted. They also had to make sure that the rain barrels or tubs stood against the house so that we would have rain water for personal hygiene. Later on, the community hired men to deliver water on a weekly basis.

Today, all you have to do is turn on your taps and you've got water whether it's hot or cold.

We also didn't own a lawn mower in those days, so my brother Eli had to crawl around the yard and pull out the long grass. Even a rake was hard to come by, especially if you were poor, which we were. In the winter, they would spend hours in the bush with grandfather setting rabbit snares and cutting and collecting wood for the two stoves. Sometimes, Dad or Grandpa would take the boys ice-fishing. Mind you, we rarely ever saw our dad. We all loved the fish liver and caviar with potatoes, onion, bannock and lard (what a feast!). In the spring, they would hunt for beaver dams and set the traps so we could have beaver for Sunday dinner. We never knew what a turkey looked or tasted like when we were kids.

On the summers that Dad was around to go sturgeon fishing, we got to feast on sturgeon oil with fried bannock. There was no such thing as opening up a refrigerator or a freezer back in those days. Any meat we had was wild game and fish. The only meat we could afford once in a while from Allard's Store was a stick of bologna. We used to call it Indian Steak in those days. Most of the time, the old men would smoke

the meat and fish so nothing spoiled. I don't think my stomach could handle that kind of meal today, but I still have that good old Indian Steak once in a while. When you purchase it today, it costs you a mint.

Any meal we had in those days was appreciated because we didn't know what the next day or next week was going to bring. We went hungry more times than you can shake a stick at.

My older brother left home quite early; I don't remember exactly when. But all of a sudden he just wasn't living with us anymore. The next time we heard from him, he was with a woman and they had a son. As it turned out, he married this woman, and they went on to have several more children. I love them all.

My older sister also left home at the tender age of sixteen. She, too, ended up getting married and having a large family. I missed her so much after she left, because now I became the next target for the abuse she had to endure over the years; that left my younger brother, my younger sister and me to do the household chores. Ours chores consisted of the everyday cleaning around the home. We would haul our own laundry water and we would heat the water on top the kitchen stove or we would set it on an open-fire outside, weather permitting.

Whenever it was laundry day, Grandfather would keep a wicked fire going in the kitchen stove, so we could heat up the water and our little cast irons for ironing. We didn't have water heaters or electric irons or washing machines; we didn't even have electricity. Being the oldest child at home now, I was responsible for doing the laundry. My wash-line would be full of laundry that was never really white, but what do you expect from a child? I was a child with a one-track mind: play, play, play. Grandfather and I would prepare the meals together. I would make the bannocks and he would cook the meat and potatoes. My little sister would set the table and wait patiently for supper. She'd sit on her bed and watch and wait.

We didn't have a large house; we all lived in a one room house but it was cozy and

comfortable. Sometimes, Uncle, Auntie, and their son would come and live with us. There were never any excuses although our home barely had enough room for five people. We not only shared our tiny little home, we shared food, stories, dreams, pain and love.

My mother left the family when I was around five years old. I really do not have very many early memories of her. For years, I resented the fact that we had never experienced a life with two parents. I resented my mother for the fact that my sisters and I had to experience sexual abuse at the hands of a relative. I guess I resented her for every negative experience we encountered as children. I know that I couldn't bond with my mother after she began visiting me and my little family. (Too little, too late I figured.)

In my deepest of hearts, I still to this day don't know if I ever forgave my mother. For those of you out there who have your Mothers, count your blessings everyday because you are truly blessed. I pray and ask the Creator to give me that forgiving heart and little by little, I'm getting there, thank God. Dad never explained about why Mom left. We heard all sorts of stories from family and community members. But anyway, we were motherless. It almost felt as if we were orphans, although both parents were still around.

All we had were the two old men who, by the way, loved their booze, God rest their souls. It was a regular thing with Dad and Grandpa to go out on drinking benders. Sometimes they would buy vanilla when they really wanted to party. I guess they didn't mind smelling like a couple of cakes.

I remember one incident that grandfather and his friends used to laugh at. They were partying that one night; when all of a sudden these gunshots went off. All these old men were scrambling around in a panic yelling, "Someone is shooting at us!" Grandfather later realized that he had shoved a full case of vanilla underneath the kitchen stove and because the stove was going full blast; the full bottles of vanilla extract exploded. Those were the gunshots they heard.

I also remember praying to the Creator to burn all the beer parlors down so they would stop drinking. Now that I'm an adult, I can understand how hard it must have been for grandfather to have to look after five children. Although grandfather loved his booze, I knew he loved us with all his heart. When he passed away my heart broke into a billion pieces. I missed him so much and I still do today. Once in awhile he comes and visits me in my dreams just to let me know he's watching over me. I can honestly say that there never should have been any doubt about his love for us kids but we still doubted that fact. That doubt existed because we didn't understand what forms love can come in.

We would also question and wonder about the love portion of our lives, because we spent a lot of time fending for ourselves. Today, I'm so grateful for grandfather, who deserved a break because I don't think we were angels all the time. We did our fair share of mischievousness. I remember, one summer; we broke into this building so we could steal something to eat. Another time, we stole a boat and went crazy on dad's bill at the store. We almost paid for that prank. While we were on our way back from the store, we encountered a deadly thunder storm. We were right in the middle of the lake when this storm blew in. We lost our oars and the boat was filling up with water. After about a half hour of terror, an older gentleman we knew from the camp came and rescued us.

We found different ways to entertain ourselves because we never had any toys, so we occupied our time with mischievous antics. The only toys that I remember we ever had were these spinning tops that were made out of thread spools and wooden dolls made out of drift wood. Today, children have so much that they take for granted and lack appreciation for (even for family.)

Because my siblings and I witnessed and experienced so much physical, and verbal abuse, it was hard for us to openly show any form of affection, so we would settle for a pat on the head, a treat of home-made strawberry jam or a box of Cracker Jack popcorn. Still yet today, I find it hard to show affection. If and when I do, I am very

careful that I don't send the wrong message.

This was our lifestyle whenever we had a chance to spend any time at home. There were five of us kids at home: my older brother Thomas, younger brother Eli, older sister Mary, younger sister Sally and myself. My older brother, older sister and I were the first residential school victims amongst the children. I am going to get ahead of my story a bit so that as you continue to read; you will understand the chain of events that happened in my story.

I'm sure that if our father and grandfather had other options, we never would have become institutionalized. We heard stories from friends about how their parents would take them into the bush to hide until they felt it was safe to come back home. As a matter of fact; there is a movie (Rabbit Proof Fence) which is based on a true story similar to ours. It gives you a clear and honest picture of what it was like back in the day when the Indian Agent was running our affairs. Parents had no voice in decision making on the future of their children. This of course left them with a sense of helplessness and despair. Dad used to talk about that.

In his mind, his children were not really his children, so to speak.

Once my siblings and I were in the residential school system for awhile, we would have discussions about the kind of lives we had. We would question which environment was more beneficial to our well-being. Life was not peachy in boarding school but we did spend a lot of time with no supervision from an adult at home. The point is; we were children who never expected the two-parent stable home life, so we would wonder about many things. We were institutionalized ten months out of a year in the residential school, except for the times when we were allowed to go home, for instance at Christmas and summer holidays.

I can vividly recall my first day in boarding school. My dad delivered my brother, older sister and me to this huge, cold, cucumber-smelling place that chilly September day in 1949 or 1950. I remember the priest and a couple of nuns pulling us apart as we

desperately tried to hang on to one another. I swear those nuns looked like identical twins. Little did I know that I would not see my brother again for the next ten months (not up close, anyway.) Once in a while I would manage to get a glimpse of him from a distance, but we were never allowed to make contact. If we got caught looking at one another, the nuns would make sure we were punished. We were segregated right from day one. Any eye contact with the opposite sex during meal-times meant sitting through the entire meal with a paper-bag over your head. I don't think we missed out on any kind of feast anyway, because half the time you couldn't recognize what was on your plate. Their idea of a healthy breakfast consisted of one slice of bread with a little bit of watered down milk and a dash of brown sugar. Sometimes the bread had a bitter moldy taste, but we didn't care; we were starving. You just ate whatever was being served, otherwise the sisters made you starve until the next day.

My life for the next eleven years was like a nightmare. I had feelings of abandonment; abandonment when Mother left, abandonment when Dad delivered us to the residential school, and abandonment when we lost Grandfather. I'm sure there were at least a hundred and fifty children around me, and yet I felt so, so, alone. Although my sister and I were in school at the same time (physically) we were never allowed to sit and spend time together. I can't even begin to remember if we ever spoke to each other the whole time we were in school. So, I had to love her from a distance too, just like my older brother. Now, when I think about those times and the feelings I felt then, it was almost like being adopted into a white family. The clergymen were our fathers, the nuns were our mothers, and all the children at the school were our siblings. My sister remained in the system for approximately seven years, and then she was whisked away to a girl's home. They finally gave up on her after her sixteenth birthday. I'm sure she was ecstatic to finally be free of her residential school shackles. Many times during our residential school years, I witnessed the emotional and physical abuse

my sister endured silently. Mary always had bedwetting problems as a child. They made all the girls who wet their beds parade up and down the hallways so that the rest of the children in the refectory would see them. The nuns who were supervising the lunch hour would stand by the doorway, and perpetuate the snickering as they announced the *Piss Parade*; as they called it. My older sister experienced that humiliation every day while in boarding school; yet she never complained. Who was she going to complain to anyway? You had nobody, so you suffered in silence like my sister did. I wet the bed once, my first night in school. I was too afraid to go to the washroom. I covered my sheet with my bedspread so my sheets would be dry by morning. Eventually, the nuns discovered my stained sheets and I was in for a beating.

My younger sister experienced similar abuse and humiliation once she entered the system. She used to wet the bed too. But she was a fighter; -she refused to allow these vicious, wicked people to do to her what they wanted. She would kick, scream, bite, and curse at them. Boy! That was fun to watch. She usually had an audience who cheered her on. Later on, after the fun was over, her audience paid with brutal consequences. Of course, I played a part in the cheering, so I was punished just as brutally.

You knew what was going to happen to you and yet you enjoyed the moment, and of course that's typical of any child. The nun who was supervising the playroom would punish you by having you stand on top of the table while she wildly swung a yardstick across your legs. If she missed you the first time around, you can bet she was going to get you (next time). There was nowhere to hide, so you just tried to be tough. There was no escaping anything in that horrible place. If you broke any bones, you were never taken for medical treatment you healed and waited for the next event.

Every day at four o'clock, we would gather in the playroom and get dressed to go outside. We would all get these big round biscuits for our four o'clock snack. I sometimes wonder why I didn't break any teeth. Later on I found out those biscuits

were dog biscuits. We were so hungry all the time that anything that was thrown at us, we ate. It was as if we were animals; animals who knew nothing but hunger. We would steal from the garden whenever we had the chance; it didn't matter if you ate the mud on the raw potatoes and carrots. It didn't even matter if we were caught, we would still steal the next day. All I can say is; hunger turned us into desperate little thieves. Today there is absolutely no need for anyone to starve. The food banks are always willing to help you out in your time of need. I know I've had to ask for help many times when my money just didn't stretch far enough. I thank the Creator that I am able to provide for my children, and that they never have to steal in order to eat.

I hated, (the four o'clock play session) because this dirty old man (who was one of the workers) would come into the playroom and feel up the girls. Ever so often, I'd be one of his victims. Although this went on regularly, I was afraid to open my mouth. Who would have believed in a savage anyway? This dirty, evil old man reminded me about who I was (a savage) and warned me about being a tattler. He said nobody would listen or believe me anyway, so I kept this my dirty little secret. I always wondered if I had done anything wrong and why this old man did what he did to me. He would wait for me to remove my dress so that I could put my pants on, and then he would grab me and sit me on his knees while he fondled me. I wanted to scream but nothing would come out. It was almost like I had lost my voice. I always knew when he entered the playroom that I was going to be one of his victims again. I wanted to go home to Grandpa's where I felt safe and warm. Mind you, with Grandpa, that safe warm feeling would vanish whenever the drinking began. So there was nowhere to hide, no one to confide in, I just had to be tough and learn to take whatever people dished out. I was just like someone's pet dog, I aimed to please and licked feet everyday if I had to, but I still dreamt and wished I could go home to Grandfather's.

Many a night, I would lie in bed (in the dormitory) and listen to the old steam

radiators that sat along the wall. The whistling noise that these radiators made reminded me of my grandfather's teapot. At home, every night, Grandpa would put this ugly little enamel teapot on top the tin heater which stood in the center of the room and let it simmer till it made that little whistling sound. In residential school, the nights were long, cold, and lonely and I missed grandpa and his little whistling teapot. I would cry myself to sleep and try to dream about food, and grandfather's warm downy comforter.

Morning would come and I would wait and see what the next day held. I was either going to experience pain or I just did my best to avoid being noticed at all cost, that way, I didn't have to get hurt. I soon learned to blend in with the walls and the playroom fixtures just to avoid unnecessary beatings. I remember being on the receiving end of many of those beatings, I just can't remember why I got them. I was either getting whipped or struck with a yardstick or getting my ears pulled so hard that I wondered when mine were going to fall off my head. Every time I look at myself in a mirror; I'm reminded of those horrifying times in my life.

The educational part of being in residential school was not a totally different experience. As a matter of fact, the abuse just intensified. My self-esteem at this point was non-existent. I wore this label that said, "Touit savage", meaning "little savage. I had already come to believe that I was nothing but a dirty little Indian and a savage. When you're a child and adults label you or call you names, you start to believe that that's who you are. In the classroom I was taught how to become a civilized little Indian. We were reminded of our evil rituals and how we were going to go to hell if we practiced them.

From seven in the morning till eight at night we were taught how to pray and beg for forgiveness for the fact that we were savages. Every morning, we had catechism. The priest hung this calendar in the classroom as a reminder of our unworthiness. This calendar was known as Lacombe's Calendar. I remember always worrying about meeting God and having to hear Him say, "You were bad and you're an

Indian so you go to hell,” -that is where the people who stood on the left hand side of God went. According to the priest and the nuns, we were standing on that left hand side of God. I struggled to memorize every prayer that the priest ever taught me.

We especially had to pay attention to the Act of Contrition. It began like this: “Bless me Father, for I have sinned, it has been these many days since my last confession,” and then we had to admit to sins we didn’t even know we had committed. I don’t remember knowing what a sin was; I just knew that I had to concoct a whole bunch of them just so the priest would forgive me. For some reason, I felt that I desperately needed to be forgiven, especially from the priest, because he said he was the only connection to God I would ever have. He would give you your penance by asking you to say this many Our Fathers, a couple of Act of Contrition’s, and maybe twenty Hail Mary’s, depending on how he was feeling that day. For a while, that ritual gave me some inner peace, but only because I thought I had earned some love from the priest who had heard my confession.

It seemed I was always looking for love, acceptance and approval. I can’t really recall ever being exceptional when it came to academics; but I sure learned to memorize these prayers real quick. One of the priests used to invite my friends and me to come and visit him at the seminary. We didn’t understand then what his motives were, but stuff happened during those visits. Being the giddy, foolish and love-starved little girls we were at that time, we just accepted his advances as a show of affection.

I just went along with the flow, waiting for the day when I didn’t have to stay in that hell hole. Several times during my school years, I remember having my knuckles rapped with the sharp side of a ruler: I don’t even remember what I did to deserve that. If you pulled your hands away and Sister missed you, she would get a couple of the boys to hold you down on her desk and then you really got a wicked knuckle busting. I have problems with the joints in my fingers today, but I don’t know if it was a direct result of those beatings.

I was whipped until I couldn’t cry any more. I was dragged around by the hair until I couldn’t feel my scalp and I don’t remember why. I was scrubbed until my skin was red and sore. They had these big tubs in the laundry rooms where the scrubbing took place. After the redness would go away, I would worry because my skin was still brown (Was I going to get another scrubbing?)

The sisters also had this horrible smelling powder that they shook into our hair. This container had the picture of a witch with a broomstick in her hands. I can’t recall the name of the product, but I believe it was for lice, and even if you didn’t have any cooties, you were still powdered. I wish I could recall why I had to experience all that torture as a child. I believed that I was never going to be forgiven, never loved by God, and that I was nothing more than a dirty little savage. But you had to swallow hard and learn to be tough or you were never going to survive. That is why we are called Residential School Survivors. You know what? Today I am proud to wear that label because the truth is I am a survivor.

In 1957, five of us junior girls ran away from the school. Every evening, we were taken to evening benediction (time to pray some more). Remember I said we had to pray real hard because of who we were? That particular evening, we begged the supervising nun to let us spend extra time outside. Our begging, of course, fell on deaf ears. Instead we ended up having to go in earlier than usual.

It was 7:30 in the evening on a beautiful warm summer evening. The sun was still up but Sister couldn’t wait to get rid of us for the evening, so off to bed we went. In rebellion we sang, “I’m in the Jailhouse now”, and boy, that really irked her. As we were preparing to retire for the night, several of the girls began making escape plans which, of course, I was a part of. At this point, I didn’t care; if running was our only other option, then so be it. So as soon as Sister went into her room, we all jumped up, pushed the fire escape door open and ran down the fire escape stairs as fast as our little legs could carry us. I guess Sister came out of her room just as we managed to push the door open.

She came to the top of the stairs and began yelling, “Run, girls, run!” out of frustration.

We ran across the school yard, across the gravel road and into the bush. My crazy cousin Mal decided to be funny. She ran up one side of the teeter-totter and down the other side before she continued to run with us across the school yard.

That bush was swamp but people still built their homes there. We spent a good portion of that night in those swamps just waiting for all the lights to go out at the school. We watched as the lights scanned the entire school yard on each side of the school. It was almost like a movie: they (the priest and the sisters) were the wardens and we (the girls) were the prisoners. The water was bitterly cold but we were tough Indians except for one of the girls who we half carried out of the swamps as we headed to the highway later that night. Cousin Mal always had such a big heart that she removed her undershirt and her petticoat so that we could wrap up our friend’s feet. That was just before the roads were paved.

I don’t know exactly what time we arrived at Auntie’s that night, but Mal reassured us that auntie would feed us and put us up for the night. Well, she did, but Uncle Chuck didn’t seem happy about this situation. We realized later that he, too, was afraid of getting into trouble for taking us in. I’m surprised the Principal didn’t order some kind of reprimand for Uncle Chuck. The next morning, four of us girls felt it was time to make our exit. Mal obviously had other plans why, she didn’t bother to get dressed that morning! She thought she would be safe staying behind, but she sure had a rude awakening an hour later.

While we were walking along the ditch, the school Principal and Uncle Chuck pulled up and ordered us to get into the car. We were then driven back to Auntie’s house to pick Mal up. On our way back to the school, the principal decided to drive to one of the girls’ mother’s home. As soon as Mrs. Frumond came out and saw who was sitting in the car, she began yelling and pointing the finger at Mallory. As usual, Mal

was the scapegoat; although we all knew the decision to run was made as a group.

Mal just took the yelling and the finger pointing and shrugged it off. She knew she would be the one to shoulder all the blame anyway. Mal was always perceived as tough skinned; she just never let anybody see her pain. I loved her back then when we were kids, and I love and respect her even more today. She is one of the true survivors.

“This is for you, Mal; if you should happen to read this and you recognize our story; I love you for being the kind, loving person that you were then and still are today.”

When we arrived back at the school, our parents were sitting in the parlor. The father of one of the girls hit her so hard that she flew across the room into the hallway. That was to appease the glaring Principal who was watching. After our parents left, we were ordered to go to the dormitory and rest.

We walked into the dormitory to find all the girls sitting on their beds waiting for our arrival. Sister then ordered us to remove all our clothes, put on a night-gown and go to bed. We didn’t even make it to the pillow, and the Principal walked in. Father Principal then ordered us to line up in front of him. He had a huge belt in his hand and before he executed the whipping, he gave a lecture warned us anyone else any ideas about running, this was what would happen. I cannot begin to imagine instilling that kind of fear in a child. I remember some of the smaller girls breaking out in sobs as we were being whipped- my little sister was one of them. Every time the belt hit our little bodies, we had to say, “Thank you, Father”. Of course, tough-skinned Mal refused to say, “Thank you, Father”, so she received extra lashings. I swear to this day that that was no ordinary belt; it was more like a fan belt with these metal tips that cut into your flesh.

Anyone who was ever whipped at that school can attest to the fact that the belt that was used was no ordinary belt. After the whipping, we compared the welts on our bodies. We looked like we had been burnt, but we scoffed at the marks although they were very painful.

For weeks after that, we were treated like common criminals. I can't recall if we were even allowed to change our clothes. We were ostracized by the whole school. I had feelings of guilt and shame every time I saw one sister who was pretty decent to me. I would catch her staring at me and when we'd make eye contact, she would shake her head and look away. I wondered if she would ever be nice to me ever again. Later on when I became a parent, I learned how to lay those same kinds of guilt trips on my daughter. The nuns and the priests were sure excellent teachers when it came to teaching those Painful Attributes.

Our parents weren't aware of the beating that took place on a regular basis. But one Sunday afternoon while we were visiting our parents, one of the Sisters reported the beatings to Mal's mother (Lydia). When Lydia saw how badly her daughter had been beaten, she was furious and marched right down to the Principal's office. Lydia was not the kind of person who would hold back if she had to say what was on her mind, especially because she was already aware of several other incidents related to her sons. Shortly after that, Mal was removed from school for awhile, but eventually returned. My cousin Mal was my source of strength. I felt that if she could endure all that pain, so could I.

We experienced horrendous brutality, but we survived. The kind of brutality we were exposed to was sinful and hard to comprehend because we were children. How do you protect yourself when you're a small child? It's too bad we didn't have children's services back then. We had a truant officer, but I don't think he had a whole lot of power or control over their matters.

In the early sixties, I was expelled from the residential school, because I finally fought back. I had taken enough. I couldn't take it any more. I guess I had reached my breaking point. I remember thinking that if I was going down; I was taking Sister Greta down with me. Somehow I found the strength to fight back.

That stark, dreary morning, the day began like many other days. We all sang the

national anthem, "O Canada", and "God Save the Queen". Of course we also prayed for what seemed like an eternity. Heaven forbid if we didn't pray for our savageness. We were having a Latin class that day and I guess we weren't fluent enough for Sister Greta, who was our teacher at the time, her wickedness seeped out of her mouth first and her fist later. I was one of those who felt the boniness of those fists that day, so I struck back in self-defense. I remember thinking, "I don't care if I commit a sacrilege. I'm an Indian and I'm going to hell anyway", so I hit her back. Sister Greta began screaming at the top of her lungs about the sin I had just committed and about how God would never forgive me, and that I was going to hell for sure. I was ordered to leave the classroom immediately, so I did.

Not being sure of what my next move should be, I went upstairs to the dormitory to hide, but one of the nuns came and found me and ordered me to leave the school premises immediately. Later on that day, I found out I was expelled. I ran home and announced the fact that I was free at last.

I was so elated that day that upon my arrival at home I worked frantically to clean house just to let my happiness show. And to celebrate my new-found freedom, I baked a horrible-tasting raisin pie for my grandfather, but he ate it anyway. Years later, he told me he had forced the pie down with his tea, it was so horrible. I remember making my crust just like bannock and to thicken my raisins, I used a mixture of flour and cold water. I baked my pie in one of grandfather's enamel plates. I waited for him to sit down at the table so I could present my first pie. I was so proud of myself. Too bad we didn't have frozen pastry back then. At least grandfather wouldn't have needed the five cups of tea he needed that day.

There were several other pupils who felt Greta's Rage that day, and who were also expelled. We've kept in touch over the years so we could share our boarding school experiences (or our nightmares, as we so often referred to them). We would relive some of the horrors and wonder whatever became of our tormentors. After all that abuse and after all these years past, we

were still able to laugh at the whippings and the fact that we were still alive today. Someone was truly looking after us.

I thought that the nightmares were over. As fate would have it, I was still to suffer the after effects of those horrible years.

In the early sixties, I married my now deceased husband, John, and we had our daughter Gillian. My husband was a wonderful, loving, easy-going man. He provided for our every need, whether it was financial, emotional or physical. Many a night, John and I would exchange our nightmares about the boarding school. He talked about all the physical and sexual abuse he encountered during those school years. He would talk about his childhood and the fact that he never felt loved either. John and I spent twenty- some years together. Some of those years were hard because I still suffered some abuse. The abuse would happen whenever he felt the urge to go out and drink or when he wanted to spend time with his former girlfriend.

During those twenty years, we swore that we were never going to allow our children to experience what we had experienced. We never shared the horror stories with our daughter or our foster children. I guess we felt that there was no need to burden our daughter and our foster children with all that negativity. As the old adage goes, "let sleeping dogs lie". That is what we thought we believed we were doing by not sharing that part of our lives with them.

Now, today, I realize how unfair that was to our daughter, because she is only now just beginning to understand why we were the kind of parents we were back then. We lacked parenting skills and we certainly didn't know the first thing about nurturing children, much less how to be loving parents. How could we teach or give something we had never had in our childhood?

Now, in my sixties, I have made it my life's focus to change what I can in the way I treat my daughter and my grandchildren. I no longer carry that burden by myself, because it was never my cross to carry in the first place. I was a child, an innocent

child, with no knowledge of anything.

My husband and I fostered thirteen children right up to his passing in December of '82. I had to let all my foster children go after we buried John. For months, maybe years, I lived in a trance where I can't remember if I ate, slept, or even conversed with anyone. My daughter took over the role of mother to all my children. I never even made time to console her when this should have been when we were closest. My self pity rode the show. I thought of no one but myself. I forgot I had a daughter who needed me. I ask the Creator every day to forgive me for treating my child the way I did. I thank him for my gift, my daughter. Still yet today, in my heart I celebrate our wedding anniversary. Every September the 6th, I'll do something special to remember our marriage. Losing my husband was like losing an essential part of my being. I always felt empty and angry at the world and especially toward the Creator. My spirituality was non-existent at that point. I quit believing in God, life, love and myself.

I was so distraught that I turned to the bottle and to drugs. I fell in and out of abusive relationships. I didn't care who I went to bed with, I just needed to be with someone. I weighed just a little over two hundred pounds before my husband died. I had several nervous breakdowns, and ended up in the hospital every time. I was in such turmoil over my loss that my weight went right down to less than a hundred pounds in just a few short months. I carried on for about five or six years, before I finally realized what I was doing to myself and my children. During all this turmoil, I forgot I had a daughter who needed her mother. I forgot I had two beautiful grandsons. I was so busy wallowing in my self-pity that I became this selfish person and it was time to wake up and start all over.

Turning over a new leaf in my life was not the easiest thing to do, because I still hadn't done anything to deal with my mental, spiritual and emotional issues. I even took refuge in a mental institution because I felt I needed to hide from the world for a while. I needed to come to terms with every skeleton

in my life. I needed to find myself again and I most certainly needed to reconnect with the Creator's love and guidance. I was so totally lost and messed up by that time I knew I had a lot of work ahead of me.

While all this was happening, my daughter and I resented and hated one another. We were not on speaking terms, so I couldn't go to her for any emotional support or vice versa. She was going through severe hard times too, because of her father's passing. I always felt that she kind of blamed me for his death. I understand why now. When you lose a loved one, you find yourself blaming the people closest to you, and of course, you blame the Creator too.

Instead of bonding, we went our own separate roads to hell and misery. We rarely ever saw one another during those hard years. We attempted once or twice to go for counseling, but that just opened up feelings, so we stopped.

My daughter and I ended up sharing accommodations for several years. Once in a while we would have pleasant days, and then sometimes we would make life a living hell for one another. She would make me feel like a helpless little child, who needed acceptance and approval for everything. Of course, I completely forgot to consider how she must have felt when she was going through the same kind of abuse. Her need for acceptance and approval must have been a hundred times greater than mine; after all, she was an only child, a lonely one at that.

Here I am trying to teach my children about love, respect, honesty, and all those saintly attributes I don't even have. Right now, as I'm sharing these experiences, I am shedding tears because I can feel the pain all over again. I shed a few tears every now and then because if I don't, I'll explode emotionally. Twenty-two years later, and I'm still riding that emotional roller-coaster. Emotions built up from my nightmarish years in residential school and my personal life experiences, but I guess the Creator must know what He's doing when it comes to his plans for me. Those emotional build-ups are getting fewer and easier to handle

as time passes, and I've learned to leave my pain in His hands. I have become a stronger woman in every sense of the word. I have grown mentally and spiritually over the years, but I know I still have a lot to learn.

I've come to believe that our plans aren't necessarily the Creator's plans. I've come to believe in destiny, His destiny. I understand now that there's a reason for everything that happens in our lives. I believe He directed my path and made a way for me to meet this wonderful lady Ella, God bless her. I knew when I first met Ella that she was the one the Creator had sent to guide me. Our paths crossed not by accident, but by destiny. I believe the Creator was, and still is, designing a plan and a purpose for the little bit of knowledge I've acquired over the years. He made a way for Ella and I to meet so I could write this story for you out there that might be hurting.

I refuse to be pretentious about my Anishinaabe ways, but I'll wait for His guidance. Maybe the fact that I'm writing and sharing my experience with you is part of His purpose for me and you the reader (Meegwetch indinaa Manidoo). Right now, there's a law suit against the government and the churches for all the abuse that was inflicted upon our people. At the onset, when this was just in the talking stages, I had refused to acknowledge anything and everything to do with residential school. I just wanted to forget about the whole sordid event and carry on with my life. In my mind, I felt that our torturers had already been dealt with; especially the ones who went onto face their Creator. But I guess we are all meant to walk our separate roads so that we can find forgiveness and inner peace by not allowing the pain to fester within our minds and hearts. By that, I mean we need to deal with what had happened to us as children. As we know that God knows everything, then surely He also knows the effects our past experiences have had on our children and grandchildren. So we need to deal with the issues, we need to share them with loved ones, but we also owe it to our children to explain why we are the way we are as parents.

What did we ever learn in residential school

about love and nurturing? My daughter and I have discussions about these painful topics and about our relationship and how my lack of parental skills has affected her parenting skills. My daughter has two sons. She has had to come to terms and admit to her sons that the abuse stemming from my past had filtered on to them. I never realized that I was abusing my daughter until this talk about the boarding schools came out. I didn't abuse her by leaving welts or scars on her body; I abused her by hurting her spiritual, mental and emotional being. I'm ashamed to say that it was almost as if I was on a high. Here I was an adult with control over a small human being who couldn't defend herself. Does that sound familiar?? Sadly, this is how it was for me, too. I was unable to defend myself against my tormentors. I will never stop apologizing for the pain I inflicted on them, although I know the blame does not entirely lie with me. I try to teach my children to forgive no matter what.

So why am I finding it so hard to be forgiving? There's a saying, "practice what you preach." I, for one, am not always able to practice what I preach. I am proud of my daughter for all her patience, and I thank her for her willingness to forgive me, and I am extremely thankful for the blessings that the Creator has given me, my grandsons. I so need their forgiveness for what I did to their mother and how my past has filtered down into their lives (Meegwetch Noosinaan). Hopefully, one day when they have their own families, they will recognize the warning signs. I pray and hope that I will live long enough so that I can hold my first great grandchildren from each of the boys.

I could fill a million pages, and my story still wouldn't be complete. Every once in a while, I'll share my story with my co-worker, just so I can release some of the pain I'm be feeling at that moment.

Many, many years have gone by, and I'm still haunted by my residential school nightmarish memories. You can suppress those memories for a while, but you eventually have to deal with them, because if you don't, they can resurface and hurt you and your family spiritually,

emotionally, and mentally. So if you are reading my story, and you have had similar experiences, please don't hang on to them. Share them with your children, so they'll have a better understanding of why you are the way you are. You will cry a million tears while you are sharing the memories, but that is what it takes in order for the healing process to begin. I know I've cried a lake-full over the years, and I'm still not done with the crying yet.

There are some years of my life that I did not want to share with anyone, but because this story is my life I will disclose everything. After losing my first husband, I didn't think I would ever remarry. On one of my long strings of jobs, I met someone whom I thought I could trust with every aspect of my being: emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. I trusted this man so much that I listened to his lines and tuned out other people who loved me genuinely.

In '93, this Romeo and I tied the -knot. We spent seven years together as husband and wife. He fed me a million lines and I was stupid enough to believe him, only to find out; that he had betrayed my trust. Although Romeo swears to this day that he is not guilty of his crime, I know he committed adultery. There I was again, playing the good little housewife so I could receive approval and acceptance. This man had absolutely no concept of trust, honesty or love for that matter. He was everything I didn't need in my life, but I have still been able to find the compassion in my heart to forgive him. I gave him every ounce of my love.

His daughter was slinging sexually related accusations at me, which at the time I was not listening to. I found out later that there was a lot of incest in his family, just like mine what a connection to make, eh? I also supported him financially. It seemed that as soon as Romeo realized I was able to go out and work, he just quit working altogether. For a number of years we lived on welfare (Easy Street, he called it). I worked part-time so I could support his gambling and smoking addictions. What a fool I was!!!

By the year 2000, I was alone again. I didn't

realize how heavenly being alone could be. I don't feel the need for male companionship anymore because I'm satisfied just having my children. There is no doubt about their love for me. I don't have to buy their love: it's free.

My life has changed completely in the last eight years....my daughter and my grandsons have been my inspirations and I've decided to take them up on their advice to return to school. Although I had many doubts about my academic capabilities, I went anyway. The first year was hard for me because I lacked the study and time management skills. Again, I just kind of went along with the flow, just like I did in boarding school. I realized I was still stuck in the residential school rut and I needed to find a way to escape from that rut, and I did. To my greatest surprise, I found myself enjoying my academic activities and the fact that I'm actually a very intelligent human being. I completed the Adult Ten Program and received a grade ten certificate and then I decided to take my journey a few steps further.

I applied for a language course at the local college in the city where I'm currently living. I shocked myself by completing and receiving my Diploma as a certified Interpreter and Translator. I was an Honours graduate at that. So much for being a stupid savage. I went another mile by taking the teacher education program. At first I thought that I would receive an incomplete mark as I did not finish my practicum. I did not participate in the graduation program that year. Several months later, I received this letter from the director of the program, indicating to me that I could verify my certification. I'm not making any excuses here, but I honestly could not afford to purchase these documents. Every job I had did not pay me nearly enough to do anything but survive. I was struggling financially so I was juggling the money and the bills with what little I had, and we still had to buy groceries. I was so fortunate to have my children with me: otherwise, I would never have made it money-wise.

Now! I'm currently in a position where I can apply my life experiences and my teaching skills. Shortly after I learned that I would be teaching; I wondered about this certificate

business or the lack thereof, so I took my concerns to an Elder in my community. His answer to my concern was, "You know who you are. You are Anishinaabe aren't you? Who told you that you needed this piece of paper that would give you permission to teach your language? Your language was a gift from the Creator; share it and teach it. I never needed that piece of paper to teach my children how to be Anishinaabe."

So here I am; I will teach what the Creator gave me. I am sure He won't require a piece of paper that says he is giving me the permission to share and teach his gifts.

As you read my story, can you recognize the mind-set of always needing permission to be a human being? It is always about approval from someone other than oneself. For once in my life, I am giving myself that approval to pass on to the younger generation what I learned these past sixty years. I give myself approval to share my experiences and my gifts from the Creator. I give myself approval to be able to show love to my children and my Anishinaabe brothers and sisters.

I could write forever because I have so much to share with you, but I will conclude my story and leave you with this message:

- *Believe in yourself and others will believe in you*
- *Love yourself and your fellow person will love you*
- *Share the gifts the Creator gave you*
- *Be proud of who you are, whether you're Red, White, Black or Yellow*
- *Forgive those who hurt you and the Creator will forgive you also*
- *Respect yourself and others will respect you.*

Miigwech

Ozaawi Bineziikwe (Golden Eagle Woman)
(My spirit name)

First Nations Women Workers' Speak, Write and Research Back: Child Welfare and Decolonizing Stories

Michelle Reid



Abstract

This research is a similar study to Gold's (1998) study on the promotion of physical and mental health of mainstream female social workers in child welfare. Six First Nations women Child and Family Service (CFS) Social Workers (FNWCFSSW's) who work in First Nations agencies gathered with me to share individual and collective stories about our CFS experiences. First Nations women and I discussed the impacts of our work on our holistic health, how we coped with the work, and strategies to deal with the issues that we face. This study outlines the research process that we engaged in, and, essentially weaves together the challenges, resilience, innovations, and unique experiences of First Nations women CFS Social Workers in a First Nations setting under a delegated authority model. As a result of these discussions five major themes were identified. The five themes that emerged from this study include the stress of dual accountability, the stresses of unrealistic expectations and multiple roles, the emotional costs and benefits of the intensity of the relationships, the fact that meaningful work gives strength and how the women coped and maintained their holistic health. This study reveals the important need for future participatory research to be conducted with FNWCFSSW and First Nations peoples. Ultimately, this paper speaks to the importance of changing the nature of a long-term colonial relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples within the child welfare system and in dominant mainstream research processes.

Introduction

We don't want our children to be dealing with the stuff we are dealing with as First Nations people now. I don't want my child or any other First Nations child to be sitting at the negotiation tables and fighting for their inherent rights. My children and our children are my strongest motivator for being in this [CFS] work.
(First Nations Woman Child and Family Service Social Worker participant).

This quote captures the heart, spirit and underlying commitment and purpose that all of the women spoke of for engaging in CFS work and importance of becoming involved in this research. It is predominantly women who work as the social workers within the approximately 120 First Nations CFS (on-reserve) agencies across Canada, which is why this study focuses primarily on FNWCFSSW. The effects of the *Indian Act* and the past provincial CFS laws, policies and actions within Canada on First Nations peoples' holistic health are widely documented, but there seems to be little published about the impacts of the work on the CFS worker's themselves.

Research to date has explored the impact of non-First Nations female child protection social workers' work on their health and reported that the work does negatively impact their health. Numerous studies have utilized a feminist approach but there has not been a study conducted from a First Nations gendered analysis or approach. Although there may be similar challenges between mainstream female CFS social workers and First Nations women social workers regarding the impacts of their work on their health, this research specifically explores the impacts of the work on the holistic health of women social workers who work within reserve-based First Nations child and family service (CFS) agencies.

This research is an attempt to be the beginning of a continuing conversation that brings forward a greater understanding about the unique differences in terms of the setting, context, cultures, and experiences of the women that impacts their holistic health. This research is both an assertion

of First Nation's women's voices and a reaching out to the minds and hearts of all, especially those involved in CFS and social service organizations to change the nature of a colonial relationship with Aboriginal peoples and embrace social justice. Within the child welfare arena the struggle continues to be for the right to be ourselves as distinct cultural peoples who have inherent rights to have our traditional lands, identities, cultural ways and practices respected and protected.

Research Purpose: Honouring Space, Validating Voices and Reaching to the Minds and Hearts of Many for Change

The purpose of this research is to honour and provide space for the women to give voice and engage in a research process that is respectful, meaningful, relevant and beneficial to them and other First Nations peoples, specifically other First Nations women CFS Social Workers. This research validates women's experiences and provides insight into the effects of their work on their holistic health. This study promotes the holistic health and self-care for women and is a beginning process for women to develop individual and collective strategies to better ensure and rebalance their holistic health.

The research process attempts to build a bridge between a mainstream school of social work research course and a First Nations' way of doing research. Hopefully, this research will raise the consciousness and challenge the assumptions of the Canadian federal and provincial government systems and employees, schools of social work and social workers (students and field workers), and researchers who work or will be working with First Nations CFS agencies, communities and peoples.

Specifically, this paper encourages critical analysis by these groups and individuals on how their CFS laws, systems, policies and actions may be harmful towards First Nations peoples, including FNWCFSSW, or may be part of the process of reconciliation and decolonization between Aboriginal

and non-Aboriginal peoples. The following section provides an overview of my story and how the research began.

Researcher Standpoint: The Beginning of the Research Process

This research project is rooted in my own personal and work experiences as a Heiltsuk woman. My personal struggle continues to be to maintain and reclaim my Heiltsuk identity amidst the colonial policies, structures and barriers that exist. My commitment is to protect the cultural identities of the current and future generations of First Nations peoples and advocate for our self-determination.

My work experiences have taken me through the dominant mainstream education and other social service systems. I have felt the effects of my work experience in the CFS field and witnessed the colonizing effects on the holistic health of my female colleagues. I had been working for five years in my home community planning, organizing, and delivering the services of a CFS agency. I have experienced the struggles of working under a delegated system and building relationships with federal and provincial representatives. I have also felt fierce pride and identified many issues in working with First Nations peoples. After working tirelessly to assist in the emergence of a community based CFS Agency, I decided to take a year's leave from my position. I wanted to pursue my MSW, reflect on own experience with the CFS work and attempt to rebalance my health which had been impacted by the strain and intensity of doing the work.

As I reflected on my many interactions and experiences with First Nations women who were working in similar capacities, I began to recognize that many of my colleagues' health were also being affected by the work. Since I was in a university graduate program and had an opportunity to conduct research, I wanted to generate honest dialogue with First Nations CFS Social Workers to see how their work impacts their holistic

health. I was committed to doing research in a manner that was going to be relevant to both First Nations peoples and myself, despite the challenges that I faced in the mainstream academic program and research course. I was determined to no longer leave myself at the door as a Heiltsuk woman. I wanted to ensure that, along with the First Nations knowledge, experiences, research relationships and processes, my own tacit knowledge was validated most meaningful for First Nations peoples. During my literature review, I located a study by Gold (1998) that was similar to what I wanted to explore in my research with the women. The next section provides an overview of the research I conducted which was similar in concept to that conducted by Gold.

Previous Research: A Similar Study

Gold (1998) used a feminist critique and approach to interview 40 female Child Protection Social Workers about the impact of their work on their mental and physical health and how they coped and protected their health. She found that "despite some of the rewards associated with child welfare work that the women experienced their work as damaging to their mental and physical health"(p.717). This current study addresses the issues that Gold's study did not by interviewing FNWCFSSWs who not only experience patriarchy, but also experience colonialism and racism that is perpetuated through the current CFS laws, policies and practices. Furthermore, I endeavored to use a participatory community action research approach that emphasized the community context that the women identified as being important to them as part of their First Nations gendered analysis.

Gold's (1998) study explored the physical and mental impact of the work on female child protection social workers' health, whereas this study explored the holistic health of FNWCFSSW as defined by the participants in this study. Another difference is that the participants in Gold's study worked in mainstream Ontario Children's

Aide Societies, while the FNWCFSSW worked in reserve based delegated First Nations CFS agencies. Furthermore, Gold's study emphasized an individual focus, whereas this study emphasizes a First Nations family, community and cultural context. Timpson (1995) notes that "Native agencies face the challenge of working with just not individual problems, but problems that affect the entire communities and require community healing and the prevention of further intergenerational damage" (p. 540). This challenge could impact the holistic health of FNWCFSSW because it is difficult to meet the needs of an entire community.

Given the similarities and differences and an interest from the FNWCFSSW in the field, this study was initiated (1) to explore the impacts of CFS work on FNWCFSSWs' holistic health and (2) to identify how FNWCFSSWs' coped and what strategies they used to rebalance their holistic health. The theoretical perspective of the gendered First Nations perspective and decolonization approach used for this research is discussed in more detail in the following section.

Theoretical Perspective: A Gendered First Nations Decolonization Approach

Smith notes that "research" is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary... (and) has been linked inextricably with European colonialism..., scientific research and placed indigenous peoples as the other" (1999, p. 1). Therefore, I endeavored to engage in a participatory community action research approach, and rely on participants' gendered First Nations analysis that emphasized the community, cultural and family context that the participants all identified as being important.

A gendered First Nations perspective is specifically through the eyes of First Nations women". Feminism in the context of a First Nations analysis is distinguishable from a mainstream feminist ideology; it incorporates not

only an analysis of patriarchy, but includes an analysis of the impact of colonization and state oppression (Sayers & MacDonald, 2001, p.8).

Overall, a gendered First Nations perspective helps ensure that the research process does not become an act of colonizing or disrespecting the women who courageously participate, but is a means of decolonization in which we can "research back", "write back" and "talk back" (Smith, 1999, p. 7).

Decolonization does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or Western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes (Smith, 1999, p. 39).

Like Gold's (1998) Study, this current research explores women child and family service child social workers' experiences and the impacts of their work on their health. There is a large body of feminist literature that critiques the child welfare ideologies, laws, policies and practices and explores the "gendered nature" of the work and the impacts and stress on female child protection social workers (Gold, 1998; Swift, 1995; and Callahan 1993). While Gold (1998) explored the gendered nature of the work, she did not include a gendered First Nations analysis or perspective, specifically.

There is an increasing body of literature from First Nations women's perspectives that analyze the impact of patriarchy, colonialism, and the imposition of social (CFS) services and health systems and practices on First Nations people's health; however, there does not appear to be literature that examines explicitly the impact of the CFS work on FNWCFSSWS' holistic health (Gunn Allen, 1992; Monture-Angus, 1995; Maracle, 1996; Huntley & Blaney, 1999; Sayers & MacDonald, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Stewart, Huntley & Blaney, 2001; MacDonald, 2002; Ouellette, 2002; Anderson & Lawrence, 2003;

Lawrence, 2004; and Mihesuah, 2003;).

The First Nations CFS literature outlines that the CFS social work laws, policies, practices and ideologies have been and continue to be premised on Eurocentric, colonial and paternalistic relationships, values and beliefs and outline the ongoing aspirations of First Nations peoples towards self-government and self-determination. In addition, the literature critiques the Province of British Columbia's Delegation Enabling Agreement (DEA) (Mckenzie & Hudson, 1981; Johnson, 1983; K.L. Lee and Associates, 1992; Kline, 1992; Wotherspoon & Satezwich, 1993; Armitage, 1993; Absolon, Mitchell & Armitage, 1996; MacDonald, 2000; Brown, Haddock & Kovach, 2001; and Blackstock 2001). This literature does not focus on "a gendered First Nations analysis" or the impacts of CFS work on FNWCFSSWs' holistic health.

There is an emerging body of literature that outlines Aboriginal research perspectives and decolonizing approaches (Kirby, 1989; Hampton, 1995; Gilchrist, 1997; Mihesuah, 1998; Smith, 1999; Martin, 2001; Blackstock & Bennett, 2002; Sinclair, 2004; Absolon, 2004; Brown & Strega, 2004; Absolon & Willet, 2004; Kovach, 2004; and Thomas, 2004;). The next section provides a brief overview of the First Nations peoples' worldviews as it relates to traditional child rearing practices, along with the past and current child and family services laws and delegated enabling agreements to provide a conceptual framework of the unique context and setting that the First Nations women live and work with that could impact their holistic health.

A Conceptual Framework: Setting The Research Context

Thousands of Years of Caring for Our Children: Traditional First Nations Child and Family Systems

For thousands of years prior to colonization First Nations peoples had strong and thriving cultures, worldviews and diverse tribal, social, political, economic, spiritual and support

systems that ensured the holistic health and well-being of our children. Blackstock (2003) states, "the holistic worldview held that in order for a child, family or environment to achieve an optimal level of functioning, the physical, emotional, spiritual and cognitive must be in balance" (p.333). When issues arose within families regarding the care or well-being of children, the communities would deal with the issues within a community context that was rooted in relationships and systems of accountability. The holistic worldview, interdependence and cultural ways of knowing and being shaped all facets of First Nations peoples' lives, including concepts and practices of maintaining their individual and collective holistic health as First Nations peoples.

Residential School and Child Welfare: Historical Overview

The Canadian government's colonial policies attacked all levels of First Nations societies. Their cultural systems and practices were criminalized and demoralized under the Indian Act and other colonial mechanisms, including the child welfare system. The imposition of Canadian child and family service laws and systems on the lives of First Nations peoples started in the 1890's with the implementation of the Indian Act and the policy of mandatory attendance to residential schools, and was later reinforced with the 1951 extension of the child welfare system onto reserves. Both the multigenerational effects of residential school and the child welfare system on the lives of Aboriginal children, families, communities and cultures have been well documented and continue to be evidenced by the social, health, justice factors that surface within First Nations communities today. Furthermore, current child welfare and social work practices are viewed by many as continuing the cultural genocide, patriarchy and racism that impact the lives of First Nations women and children (Johnson 1983; Howse & Stalwick 1990, 1993; Hamilton & Sinclair, 1991; Kline 1992; Timpson 1995; Absolon, Mitchell & Armitage, 1996; RCAP 1996; MacDonald 2002; and Blackstock 2004).

Current Day Child Welfare & Delegation Enabling Agreements: Realities/Relationships

The dominant mainstream Canadian society, social work profession and child welfare systems have acknowledged the impact of the residential schools and early child welfare laws, policies and practices on First Nations peoples. The Canadian provincial child welfare systems and bureaucrats have made commitments to engage in a new relationship with First Nations peoples, to reduce the number of First Nations children in care and to assist in improving the overall social and health conditions for First Nations peoples; however, there is little evidence that these proclamations have resulted in meaningful improvements for First Nations peoples.

Despite the realities and overwhelming socio-economic conditions of First Nations peoples and the numbers of First Nations children in care, Canadians continue to believe colonization is a thing of the past. They are not aware that First Nations peoples continue to be defined and bureaucratically controlled under the current colonial laws, policies and realities of the Indian Act and child welfare statutes.

Canadian government laws, policies and dominant practices continue to have a devastating impact on First Nations communities and cultures. First Nations peoples have proclaimed that, despite contemporary child welfare reforms, even more Aboriginal children are removed from their communities and end up being taken into state care and placed in Non-Aboriginal homes (“North Short of Help”, 2001). Blackstock (2003) states, “First Nations children represent approximately 8% of the child population in Canada although approximately 35% of Canadian children in care are First Nations (p. 331).

Delegation Enabling Agreements

Since the 1990’s one of the newest modalities of child welfare that First Nations in British Columbia operate under is the

Delegation Enabling Agreement (DEA). The DEA speaks to the level of authority delegated to agency social workers pursuant to the respective provincial legislation in British Columbia. The provincial government enables individual First Nations CFS agency social workers with specified powers to carry out support, guardianship and protection duties and functions under the provincial CFS legislation. This legislation, and therefore, the DEA, embodies Euro-western based standards and practices

The federal Directive 20-1 provides the formula to fund on-reserve agencies for the provision of provincially delegated services. Directive 20-1 is a national funding formula administered by the Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND), which restricts funding to “eligible children on reserve.” A population threshold (based on children 0-18 years of age) influences how much funding each First Nations CFS Agency receives. According to the policies of Directive 20-1, in most provincial jurisdictions, First Nations CFS Agencies must be incorporated under the provincial child welfare legislation which requires them to comply with provincial legislation and standards (Bennett, 2004). This arrangement effectively negates opportunities to affirm self-governing models.

The DEA is a complicated process because of the jurisdictional disputes and lack of coordination between the federal and provincial governments, which has resulted in First Nations children and communities being faced with huge inequitable gaps in funding and services (MacDonald, 2000; and Durst, Macdonald & Rich, 1995). Within the context of such agreements, a scenario can arise in which the ‘feds’ hold the purse strings, the province holds the legal hammer, and the band is left to do the dirty and impossible task of addressing major social problems with insufficient human and fiscal resources (Durst, 1996, p. 16).

First Nations communities and peoples generally enter into CFS DEAs in order to access resources and authority to set up agencies to assist in dealing with the severe socio-economic issues facing their families,

and to confront the staggering increase of First Nations children being removed from their communities and cultures. First Nations peoples have continued to actively protest the removal of so many of their children and advocate for the recognition and incorporation of their own cultural and community systems as being the best way of caring for their First Nations children. “The delegation model is founded on the [paternalistic and racist] notion of “giving” [provincial] authority to deliver child welfare services, rather than recognizing First Nations’ inherent authority to care for their children” (Brown, Haddock & Kovach, 2001, p.146).

Although many First Nations agencies believe that their work benefits their children, families and communities, they view delegation as an interim measure towards self-government. Overall, First Nations peoples remain vigilant about asking the Canadian government and society for relationships based on mutual respect, the sharing of power and accountability; relationships that the government and larger society has made commitments to.

The research methodology, including the recruitment criteria, participant overview, researcher relationship with the participants, data gathering, data analysis, and the one study limitation identified are the focus of discussion in the next section.

Recruitment Procedures

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to recruit the women in order to “achieve representativeness and answer the research question” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 70). The criteria included women who identified themselves as being First Nations and who have had two years of frontline child and family service experience in a First Nations CFS agency. I chose not to broaden the scope to off-reserve or Aboriginal urban CFS agencies because I wanted to explore the specific First Nations Agency Social Workers’ experiences. A letter of invitation to participate in the study was sent out to First Nations Child and Family Service agencies

through the Caring for First Nations Children’s Society in British Columbia.

The Women Who Participated and Our Process

The first six women from diverse First Nations cultural groups and agency settings contacted me directly and were selected on the basis that they would be in the Vancouver or Vancouver Island area during January or February of 2002 and would be able to arrange an interview. Three of the participants live and work within their own communities and three do not. The women’s ages range between 30 and 50 years. Participants were women who identified themselves as First Nations social workers who have had two years of frontline child and family service experiences in an on-reserve CFS Agency. The women have worked between five and 25 years in the CFS area. Two of the women have also worked as provincial child protection social workers. The women share similar experiences of being directly or indirectly impacted by residential school and the child welfare system and see the impacts of colonization on their communities.

Researcher Relationship with the Women

Smith (1999) states that “insider researchers have to be ethical, respectful, as reflexive and critical... [and]... humble because the researcher belongs to the community as a member with a different set of roles and relationships, status and position” (p. 139). Participants said this research process and my relationship with them and with each other were important because I am an “insider researcher.” My role as an “insider researcher” is derived from my identity as a Heiltsuk First Nations woman social worker engaged in providing Child and Family Services and I am also a part of the women’s community. Given that I have known the women previously and shared a similar lived experience as a First Nations woman social worker helped to reinforce the trust and respect between

us and provided the basis for the stories to be shared in the way that they were. I endeavoured to be respectful with the women by having open and honest conversations with them about the research topic, process and my responsibility as both a First Nations woman and a researcher. Smith further asserts that “Insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis, as so do their families and communities (Smith, 1999, p. 137).

I felt a high degree of responsibility and accountability to the women, particularly to ensure that I respectfully and accurately captured their experiences in the research process and findings. In order to test my own taken-for-granted views about my lived and shared experiences as a FNWCFSSW, I communicated regularly to ensure that there was a feedback process from the women in order to capture their meanings.

Making Meaning of the Stories: The Data Gathering and Analysis Process

Qualitative methods are an essential component of research in First Nations communities in attempting to capture experiential knowledge shaped by both historical relations and a particular community context (Mckenzie, Seidl & Bone, 1995 p. 638).

Individual interviews with open-ended questions were used for five of the six women. In person interviews lasted approximately two to three hours. Although I used an interview guide, the women guided the interview as to what was important for them to share about their experiences. I conducted one email interview using the same format as the other interviews. The women and I carried out our interviews where they were most comfortable and their privacy could be ensured, such as my home, or in their home. The women provided their informed consent and participated voluntarily. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, whose communities are very small, identifying

information was omitted from this study.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory was selected as the method for data analysis because it is seen as a “process, whereby theory is an ever-developing entity and not a perfected product” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 87). “Grounded theory [also] supports the feminist [gendered First Nations analysis] epistemological underpinnings that participants are the experts about their experience and that subjective experience is valid knowledge (Wuest, 1995, p. 2).

I used grounded theory methodology to explore, analyze and extend knowledge about the participants’ experiences of their work on their holistic health. Themes and findings have been conceptualized from transcribing the interview transcripts verbatim, analyzing the women’s stories, and engaging in a systematic process of identifying relationships between the categories. Finally, conducting membership checks with the women ensured the themes were meaningful to them and the validity of the research. This process provided a foundation to the development of a theory that reflects the main connections of the impacts of the womens’ work on their holistic health.

Four women and I gathered for dinner, and they gave me feedback about the initial research findings. The women discussed the importance of this research and the follow up meeting because it gave them the space to share, support and validate both their individual and collective experiences. To honour the women for the sharing of their stories and the work that they do with our children, families and communities, I offered them food and gifts (self-care gifts, feathers etc.).

Research Limitation

The sole limitation identified in doing this research is the small sample size of women who participated in this study. It is recognized that the sample does not make the findings generalizable to a larger population, although other FNWCFSSW could possibly have

similar experiences and challenges of working and living in the same setting.

The women share and describe in the following research findings and results section the multi-dimensional impacts of their CFS work on their holistic health and how they have coped and what strategies they have used to rebalance their holistic health within the context of their own voices, experiences and political representation.

Findings And Results

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The research findings provide rich information and insight into the experiences of the women who participated in this study. The women articulated that this research gave them the opportunity to “reflect”, “think about” and “discuss” this important issue. One participant stated “this is the first opportunity that I have had someone ask me my experience as a First Nation women working in a First Nations community as a social worker.”

During this research process, the women discussed life as being an experience of struggling constantly to get their “ways (CFS) validated within their own right and not within the paradigm of the western mainstream cultures.” The women declared that “it is a myth that colonization is over,” that they continue to remain in a “colonial”, “racist” and “paternalistic” relationship with the Canadian government and CFS laws, policies, practices and systems which impact their holistic health.

The women acknowledged that some of the CFS work may impact their holistic health in ways similar to Non-First Nations female CFS social workers. They stressed that their experiences are unique because they work in different community and cultural settings that may involve the added complexity of working with their own families or extended family members or people that they have relationships with. Furthermore, the historical and current colonial relationship and context that they live and work in as First Nations women

Child and Family Service Social Workers presents unique and different challenges for them which impacts their holistic health.

The women believe that it is important to provide their definition of holistic health because they believe that their work does not simply impact their mental and physical health. The women describe holistic health as:

Keeping and incorporating all of the elements of yourself and your life: the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual parts of yourself are cared for and nurtured, and if you do that you will be okay, and you will be able to maintain balance and good holistic health.

Not only trying to achieve balance in your life, but recognize what your needs are and have needs met. All of the aspects of your being are so intertwined and impacted by the work.

The women did not want to polarize completely the positive and negative aspects of their work on their holistic health. They wanted to conceptualize the realities, challenges and rewards that they live and work in as FNWCFSSW and how their work impacts their holistic health.

The major themes that were identified include: 1) stress of dual accountability; 2) the theme of meaningful work gives strength; 3) the stresses of unrealistic expectations as First Nations women and CFS social workers; and 4) the emotional costs and benefits of the intensity of relationships. Furthermore, how the women coped and what strategies they used to rebalance their holistic health were briefly examined.

The Stress of Delegated Authority and Dual Accountability

In terms of operating under the Province of British Columbia’s CFS DEA and having dual accountability between the provincial and federal government and the First Nations community members that they work with, the women emphasized that their

“duties and responsibilities are much broader and intense”, as well as “very large and complex”, “unrealistic” “contradictory” and “unmanageable.” The women believed that the colonial relationship and delegated model that exists between them and the Canadian government creates “the greatest source of their frustration”, “tremendous pressure from all sides”, “lack of power and control” and “stress.” Although the women stated that there are some good relationships with individual DIAND or MCFD (Ministry of Child and Family Department) employees, overall the relationship is described as “not easy”, difficult, “about power and control” and “crappy”. In addition, this relationship creates the most “challenges” and directly impacts their holistic health.

The women discussed the “pressure” and “pain” of working under the delegated models within their communities where they are dealing with the ongoing “impacts of colonization” and do not want to be seen as “perpetrators of colonialism” towards their own people. One participant stated that “we do not want to duplicate the past CFS failures towards First Nations people.” Another participant stated “the delegated relationship is disempowering because we are forced to work under an imposed foreign systems which often creates cultural conflicts.” Another participant stated their belief that “this provincial system, process and language that is being imposed on us does not support and promote us as First Nations women to work in this field and stay healthy.” The women believed that it is a daily challenge in their work to attempt to “walk between two worlds”, “get their own worldviews”, and have their “cultural child care practices” validated and incorporated into their programs. Another participant described the delegated situation as “working between conflicting cultures and not having any shared power or control.”

Furthermore, the women felt that the delegated and colonial relationship was “tiring”, “draining”, and “taxing” on the “heart”, “body”, “mind” and “spirit”. One participant stated that “when we signed our DEA, I had to take time off because of the

stress.” The women believed it is “hard”, “difficult” and “draining” to live with the “ethical muteness” of the government towards the “plight of First Nations people.” The women expressed their “burden” of “explaining” and “justifying” their realities while “advocating” for government changes and funding that will benefit First Nations children and families.

The women spoke about the “huge pressures”, “inequitable and insufficient resources”, and the “lack of infrastructure and capacity” from the government to do their work. The women felt that the insufficient funding and capacity within their agencies and communities contributed to the multiple roles that they ended up taking on. One participant said, “I am the Director. I also have to double as a Supervisor when we are short staffed and I do most of the investigations. I also do the community and political work with the regional, federal and provincial government and I sit on various committees and boards.” Another participant stated, “a lot is asked of you...you work long hours, and it is difficult to feel you have done a job well enough and met all of the responsibilities and demands. The women emphasized that the “strain” of their work can “make you sick”, “suck the life right out of you” and “almost kill you.”

Meaningful Work Gives Strength

The women discussed the meaningful work that gives the strength and includes (1) dealing with the historical injustice and intergenerational impacts of colonization, (2) is a motivating force, (3) benefits the children and families that they work with, (4) and provides creativity, inspiration and meaning in their lives. The women in this study found many positive aspects of their work that gave them strength. The women found the work gave them “meaning in life” and “inspiration” and was “the greatest source of strength” and “a motivating force” when the work that they are doing is “benefiting children and communities.” The women believed strongly that the work could be “creative” and “innovative.” One participant shared that “these innovations that are based

on thousands of years of successful caring for children, families and communities and the challenge is to find and think of ways to bridge it forward.” The women identified that the reason why they do this work is because of their love for the communities that they work with and want to contribute towards and see “positive” and “meaningful” changes and “freedom” for their children, families and community, both for the present and future generations. One participant stated:

To be working with members of your own community and to be feeling that level of responsibility, commitment and passion towards the work is so much higher. It is much more difficult when you feel that you are not able to meet all of the needs and you aren't able to make some of the changes that you want to make.

The women all stated that their work is more than a job and not just about a pay cheque. One participant stated, “This work is more than a job or a pay cheque; it is about my community and grandchildren’s future.” The women agreed that because they are working with “historical injustice”, “intergenerational impacts of colonization” and “people that they know and care about” that the level of duty and responsibility is much higher and can be “all-consuming” and “trying”, leaving little time to keep themselves well. Furthermore, one participant said, “We are living and going home everyday and see the results of our work around us.” They also spoke of the challenges and benefits of bringing their own experiences of colonization to the work. They felt that having a similar experience of colonization with the people that they work with makes them “strong social workers” and also requires a need for them to be “self-aware” and “healthy” and to “support” one another so that they do not become “ineffective” in their work.

I think what mostly makes me happiest about my work is seeing the kids. We go out to the communities... You watch the foster kids who have come back home and are with their families... When you watch kids interacting in a positive way with their families and you just know that this work is contributing

and that everything is going to be fine.

The Stress of Unrealistic Expectations and Multiple Roles

The women discussed the unrealistic expectations that come with (1) *the lack of boundaries and expectations that the community members have towards them*; (2) *being women and their work impacting their children*; and (3) *the risks involved in the work*.

The women suggested that the lack of boundaries and expectations that the community members have towards them and their work can elevate their stress. In the small rural communities, “You are the service...and expected to be available 24 hours a day, or so it seems.” One participant said, “You cannot live and breathe this child protection work 24 hours a day and it not have a huge impact on you on all levels.”

The women suggested that the work that they do is “community development work” and their caseloads are based on families, not individuals, which can make the work both more “fulfilling” and “challenging.” The women believed that their role can be “difficult” and “contradictory” because they are attempting to “support”, “empower”, “provide culturally relevant services” and ensure “the safety of and well-being of children in a child protection role” in a system that is about being “directive and asserting authority”, which is a difficult balance. One participant stated, “this (mainstream) social work system is set up to create imbalances and total unhealthiness, and, somehow, we are still expected to work towards restoring balance and health to people...it just doesn't work that way.” Three women stated that they have to be “thoughtful” and “hyper-vigilant” in their decision-making because they are aware that their decisions impact children and families’ lives forever. One participant said, “Sometimes I feel fear in making some decisions and it has made me sick.”

The women suggested that women generally have more unrealistic demands placed on

them because of the responsibilities with their family, community, cultural and social work roles which increased their stress and impacts on their holistic health. The women believed that women “value” and “engage” in relationships more and make “emotional connections” which is why many of them are social workers. They felt that, as social workers, they are always dealing with the “extremities of emotions” and the “pain” of the people they work with. Three women believed that they are expected to maintain “emotional distance” in their work, without the supports and time to debrief which can be overwhelming. One participant expressed that “a lot of energy goes into not feeling in this work.” Another participant summarized:

As a First Nations woman you try to do it all. As a mother and a wife, you have to be perfect at doing everything in your work, your family and your community life. So, for many years, I didn't do for myself because I was too busy doing for everyone else and I ended up with severe stress and sickness and only then having to begin to finally take care of myself.

The women who are mothers felt a lot of “guilt” and “worry” about their families suffering because of the time and energy they spend working. Two of the women worried about their children being “teased” or “negatively impacted by other kids” because of the decisions that they make in their work. The women also expressed their concerns as women about the lack of attention paid to the elements of “risk”, “danger”, “threats”, and “fear” in doing child protection work. One participant said, “When you are dealing with dangerous situations in homes...there is that expectation as a social worker that you will always be strong, but there is always that vulnerability which can be ‘terrifying.’” Another participant discussed getting numerous “hang up” calls right after a removal was completed.

Emotional Costs and Benefits of the Intensity of Relationships

The women felt that knowing their clients could be a “strength” or “cause potential

conflicts” in their work. Strengths can engage in building “sustainable”, “trusting”, “honest” and “established” relationships with people to create meaningful changes. The three women who do not work within their own First Nations communities or with their own families believed that working within your own community is much more challenging and involves more pressure and stress because the work is “up close and personal” and “can’t be objectified as being out there because it is right here.” One participant stated that, “We aren’t strangers working with strangers so there is that complete accountability all the time.” Another participant stated that “We are seen as community members first and social workers second, so the impacts on our health is higher.” The women articulated some of the challenges of working with their own family and community members such as dealing with difficult and uncomfortable interactions with family members, the credibility of their work being challenged and the issue of maintaining confidentiality when the work is right in their own backyard.

The women further felt that there is a different level of “love”, “passion”, “engagement”, “connection”, “commitment”, “loyalty” and “accountability” that comes with working in a small community. The three women who worked or are working within communities that they are not from believe that the community members want to know who you are, your history and where you and your family come from and your values and beliefs and that these can create trusting relationships.

The women emphasized that it is “energizing”, “grounding” and “wonderful” to have opportunities such as community dinners to be able to “celebrate” the strengths of the children, families, community and culture. They articulated that the work could also be very “rewarding” and “gratifying” when they see children and families prospering in the community and they know their work is making a contribution. They also felt it could be “emotionally draining” when things don’t work out for the children and families because you want to see them “empowered”, “happy”, “safe”, “healthy”

and “successful within their own right” and “it is hard when you see children and families in pain.” One participant stated, “the community can be supportive and invite you to cultural gatherings or confront you in the local store or mall.” Another participant said that “when people are angry in the community about a decision that I made, the s---t hits the fan and I have to avoid going to certain social functions.” The women stated that even though the work can create a lot of conflict with the people and they sometimes felt “devalued” or felt a “lack of recognition” in their work, there are always going to be people who are “thankful for your presence in their lives.” In addition, the women felt that they do not get enough personal time living and working in a small community setting. The women sometimes felt “stress”, “exhaustion”, “frustration”, or “isolation” or “alienation” when they were “approached in public places”, “receive after-hours calls” or are “ostracized” for the work that they do:

you are under a microscope... and your parenting and social life is in the limelight... in this work and you don't have the luxury of the type of privacy that people in cities have and it becomes increasingly stressful because everything can challenge your credibility.

The women all believed that giving all the time is hard on their well-being and that there needs to be personal time and boundaries around work in order to rebalance and truly be there for the children and families with whom they work.

Coping and Holistic Health

The women suggested that the stress, unrealistic demands and pressures from both themselves and all of the people involved in their work and lives contribute to some of the “chronic health issues” that they experience such as “headaches”, “backaches”, “stomach aches” and “canker sores.” In addition, the women reported that some of the ways that they cope are through “a lack of sleep”, “not eating properly”, “a lack of exercise”, and “extreme weight gain or loss”. One participant said, “I have made the connection for me between smoking... eating lots of sugar and addiction and stress.”

Another participant declared, “In this work it is easy to disconnect with your body and be out of tune because of the stress.” The women felt that their “immune systems” and “physical resistance” are compromised by the stress of their work which can lead to “low energy” and “serious illnesses.”

The women also felt that their work contributes to feelings of being “tired”, “mentally stressed”, “fatigued”, “too old for age”, “sad”, “angry”, “depressed”, “guilty”, experiencing “low self-esteem”, “hopelessness” “bitterness” and were “worried” and in “denial” about their health. The women discussed the implications of this stress as resulting in them taking stress leave, having to change jobs, finding it difficult to get out of bed some mornings and becoming forgetful about very important things. Four of the women also suggested that it is difficult with the lack of organizational supports to deal with the ongoing “vicarious trauma” associated with their work themselves.

Three of the women emphasized that in social work it is easy to take on all the responsibilities and “negativity” and “toxicity” of their work into their bodies and “normalize” the stress and sickness. One participant stated, “I don’t think the accumulated stress of this work leaves my body and that is why I have the physical illness and sickness.” A second participant stated, “You have to be all to everybody and you can’t be sick...people will still call and they know where you live.” A third participant said, “You are the be all and end all to fix problems and deal with all the emergencies in the communities.”

Three of the women shared stories of near death experiences that were related to severe stress. One participant stated, “I thought I always tried to take care of myself and then I ended up in the hospital...I almost died. One participant said, “Sometimes, no one is there to help us or support us or pick us up until we crash.”

Strategies for Restoring Holistic Health and Balance

The women identified various strategies for restoring and rebalancing their holistic health which will be presented under the headings of 1) *systemic*, 2) *individual* and 3) *collective strategies*.

1) Systemic Strategies

One participant stated, “We need to have other ways of providing services to our own people rather than going through this process and provincial legislation.” The women agreed that the agencies needed “equitable” and “sufficient funding.” The women agreed that self-determination and self-governance would benefit their holistic health by being able to provide their own “culturally and community based services.” The women also felt that receiving “equitable”, “sufficient” and “adequate” resources would decrease the stress of them having to advocate with the government for resources. Many of the women believed that there needs to be “more women in leadership positions” to ensure that the community health and social issues are being addressed. Additionally, the women noted, “in terms of training, I don’t think the mainstream school of social work trains or prepares us.” One woman articulated, “It is important to get education in social work institutions that validate and honour our ways of knowing and being and also incorporate rural social work and community practice.” Another participant stated,

Social work needs to be redefined so that it fits with a First Nations way of working with children and families within our communities and cultural contexts. Also, holistic health needs to be looked at and addressed in terms of the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs of First Nations social workers.

The women agreed that there needs to be “relevant”, “adequate”, and culturally appropriate training for the First Nations agency social workers. They spoke of the need to have a more “holistic”, “interdisciplinary” and “integrated” approach to providing services to children and families in their communities. “Education” and “ongoing dialogue” was identified as being important by the women in order to engage people in a collective process to address

underlying issues that impact First Nations peoples’ holistic health and their own.

2) Individual Strategies

Some of the major individual strategies that the women identified included, the need to create “boundaries”, “stop feeling guilty for time that you need for yourself”, ensure “self-awareness”, “meet and nurture all holistic aspects of self”, “exercise”, “eat properly”, get “adequate sleep”, “make space to process and debrief”, “create supports inside and outside of community”, seek out “mentors” and “peer supports”, and ensure “spiritual practices and cleansing.”

3) Collective Strategies

Some of the collective strategies that the women identified included, sitting down and talking with other social workers about, “what drains us and motivates us in this work”, “the challenges and issues of maintaining holistic health” and “self-care and balance strategies for social workers.” Furthermore, the women discussed the importance of ensuring there is “mentoring in agencies and communities” that “supports” their important work, ensuring and creating “boundaries around work”, “dialogue on all levels”, “community education and “involvement.”

One participant declared,

We need to create boundaries between who we are and what we do and ensure that there is ongoing dialogue happening with the community, so that they are clear about everyone’s role and responsibilities in caring for and ensuring the safety for our children.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although Gold’s (1998) Study findings relate to the experiences of First Nations women CFS Social Workers, the FNWCFSSW participants in my study felt that her study did not capture their experiences of colonialism, or working in a community or different cultural context and its impacts on their holistic health. While Gold’s (1998) study categorized

results into positive and negative aspects of physical and mental health, the women in this study chose not compartmentalize their experiences into positive and negative aspects. The FNWCFSSW wanted to highlight the impacts of their holistic health which also includes the spiritual and cognitive aspects. Like the participants in Gold's study, the FNWCFSSW had similar feelings of powerlessness and lack of control that related to the stress, pressures, lack of resources, lack of personal and professional boundaries, as well as the patriarchal reality that the CFS system operates from.

Overall, the women believe that they are in a colonial relationship with the Canadian government and work between two different cultural systems. The difficult role of managing dual accountabilities makes the work "larger and more complex than that found in non-First Nations communities" (Brown, Haddock & Kovach, 2001, p. 147). The work has huge impacts on their holistic health; resisting the dominant mainstream child welfare system and other colonial mechanisms while advocating for validation of their own systems creates stress and takes a great deal of personal and professional time and energy.

The women in this study not only experience powerlessness in their work, but also in their personal lives as First Nations women who are still under colonial laws, policies and practices. They also all understand intimately the impacts of colonization and want their work to benefit their communities in a positive way that does not cause further intergenerational damage. The women feel a huge sense of responsibility to assist in restoring the balance and holistic health of First Nations communities and cultures that have been disrupted severely by colonialism and see their agencies as a potential catalyst for meaningful change. The women attempt to build on traditional community strengths to meet the needs of children and families and balance the tension that presents itself as a First Nations person who is working under the dominant mainstream CFS system as a delegated CFS social worker.

The women had feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. The women outlined the challenges, pressures and stresses of working within a family, community and cultural context that affects their holistic health. They also discussed the proximity and intensity of relationships between themselves and their client results in significant stresses on both the personal and professional levels: specifically, the accountability that comes from working with people you know versus people who are anonymous to you increases the stressful nature of the work. This impacts the womens' holistic health in different ways than that experienced by non-First Nations Women CFS Social Workers who don't work within their own tribal cultures, families and communities.

The women also believed that their work can be extremely meaningful and that their strength and power comes from working within First Nations communities and cultures and witnessing the beneficial changes for their community members. They further believe that their continued advocacy toward self-government and determination for First Nations peoples and their creativity and innovation in finding strategies to bridge their community and cultural ways of caring for children is their strength. Overall, the women believe that "to only offer First Nations the opportunity to enforce Euro-Canadian (CFS) law in their communities is not good enough" (Absolon, Mitchell & Armitage, 1996, p.13).

The women believe that when they are unable to meet the needs of the community members, their holistic health becomes impacted negatively and the large systemic issues of colonization and oppression are the core reasons that block the way forward. "First Nations peoples have to be empowered, financially, politically, and otherwise, to develop their own child welfare services outside of the framework of existing provincial legislative schemes" (Kline, 1992, p. 417).

For the women, this research process is a first step towards creating dialogue about their own individual and collective strategies to "raise critical consciousness"

and take further “political action” which would assist in benefiting their own holistic health, as well as the health of their First Nations children, families and communities (Brown & Tandon, 1983, p.283).

Implications for Policy, Practice and Research

The participatory community action research process and First Nations gendered analysis has been meaningful in engaging with women in a way that gave voice to their experiences. The process made space for individual and collective conversations to happen about the importance of holistic health and coming up with strategies that can assist in restoring and rebalancing the holistic health of the women and First Nations children and families. The women identified the importance of this research and the relationship with the researcher, along with the need for further research of this nature that respects and validates their voices and experiences. On a personal note, this research process was validating for me personally because of my own struggles of working within a dominant mainstream academic social work program and research course. I did not feel fully supported in that particular social work course, especially of having my Aboriginal decolonization approach and process legitimized within its own right. As I young Heiltsuk woman, I received so much validation, support, pride and teachings from the women. Schools of Social Work and other Social Service institutions need to continue to support First Nations students and peoples in their research and academic endeavours.

The Canadian dominant mainstream society and government systems and employees need to recognize, resource and support First Nations CFS research on the local, provincial and national level that validates First Nations peoples realities, voices and builds on their traditional values, systems, knowledge and cultural and community strengths. The dominant mainstream culture and social work profession can learn from First Nations

peoples research approaches, as it appears that there is a benefit in doing participatory community action research from a gendered First Nations perspective and decolonization approach. Future research could build on this present study and interview a larger sample of women CFS Social Workers, as well as, explore the systemic, individual and collective strategies for First Nations women CFS Social Workers to restore and rebalance their own holistic health and the health of the community members with whom they work. Other areas for future research include:

- ✦ Compare and contrast First Nations CFS and Non-First Nations CFS settings, models and social workers’ experiences;
- ✦ Study existing First Nations CFS programs that are successful within a self-government framework; and
- ✦ Study First Nations and Non-First Nations programs and partnerships that are implementing decolonizing relationships and successful outcomes for First Nations children, families, communities and cultures.

Implications for Social Work Policy

Many reports such as The 1996 Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report(s) and The 1992 Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nations Report confirm the over-representation of First Nations children in social and health statistics. This raises important questions. For instance: What has changed in the relationship between First Nations peoples and the larger Canadian dominant mainstream society and government systems? Have social work practices progressed to a place where it is responsive and respectful to the needs and strengths of First Nations children and peoples? Why have recommendations in reports such as The 1996 Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report(s) not been implemented to respond to First Nations peoples’ testimonials that the recognition of self-government would assist in restoring the holistic health of their Nations and ensure sustainable futures? What recommendations

or commitments has the larger society or government followed through on?

The colonial relationship needs to change between First Nations peoples and Canadian dominant mainstream society and government systems. The Canadian government, CFS systems and social workers need to critically and morally reflect on their ideologies, policies, practices and relationships with First Nations peoples and recognize the impacts of their past and current actions. They need to coordinate their efforts to make necessary moral changes in their practices with regard to First Nations peoples. Bruyere (2001) states, “to me the issue is not one of trying to better a bad way of doing things... [past and current CFS practices & policies]..., but doing things differently... [and being committed to meaningful change]” (p. 312). The current CFS system is not working for First Nations peoples and it is critical that things be done differently or they will continue to negatively impact First Nations peoples on all levels: children, families, communities, cultures and the First Nations social Workers themselves.

The Canadian government needs to acknowledge and fulfill the commitments that have been made to First Nations peoples through such documents as The 1999 Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services Report, The 1996 Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples Report(s), The June 2000 First Nations Child and Family Services Joint Review Final Report, The 1992 Liberating Our Children, Liberating Our Nation Report and other such reports.

Meaningful and respectful consultation needs to happen with First Nations peoples. Policies need to be changed to incorporate a process of accountability and responsibility to building partnership relationships that are based on the sharing of power, adequate and equitable resources and working within the context of self-determination and self-governance. Overall, the Canadian government, along with the social service systems must be vigilant about changing their systems, policies, practices and relationship with Aboriginal peoples in a way that is not colonial and

paternalistic in nature. The Canadian government and social service organizations need to work with Aboriginal peoples to find innovative ways and meaningful solutions to remedy the injustices towards Aboriginal peoples, in particular children: who are the most impacted and vulnerable.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Child welfare continues to have huge impact on the lives and cultures of First Nations peoples. The practice of delegating authority to First Nations peoples places them in position of being a perpetrator against their own peoples, and all the while negates their own ways and systems. This is contradictory to the fundamental philosophy and ethics that social work professes to.

How can First Nations social workers maintain their holistic health under the racism, patriarchy and colonialism that they face in their daily lives and work? The systemic issues have to be addressed and the unique challenges that First Nations peoples and social workers face have to be acknowledged and given voice and attention to at all levels. First Nations women CFS Social Workers have the challenge of rebalancing their holistic health on an individual basis and the even bigger challenge of advocating with the mainstream dominant systems for the dream of freedom and self-determination of First Nations peoples.

The social work profession needs to be vigilant in their practice and efforts to understand the colonial realities and dreams of First Nations peoples. They need to engage in conversations, processes and relationships with First Nations peoples and take actions that will bring about beneficial change for First Nations peoples. Bruyere (2001) notes that First Nations peoples have dreams... [and that]... “the most crucial aspect of those dreams involves the well-being and vitality of Aboriginal children and families.” He asks the question of “what would happen if enough Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples experienced and followed the same kinds of dreams

for Aboriginal children and families in Canada?" He speaks to the importance of vision, immersing ourselves in a shared dream (p. 295). It is time to reconcile and change the nature of relationships between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal peoples, especially within child and family services, for this dream to become a reality.

The women's stories speak to their CFS experiences and challenges in endeavouring to carry out that same dream for our Aboriginal children. I will complete the circle of writing this paper by using the words, hopes and dreams of one of the women that echo my own heartfelt sentiment for the present and future generations:

I only hope that when my grandson grows up, I hope that we are not at the place of still thinking about and trying to bring our kids back home to our communities. They should all be home by then (participant).

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Strengthening the Spirit:

Adapting Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for Native American Youth and Communities

Roxanna E. Torres, MSW,



Abstract

Multisystemic Therapy [MST] is an evidence-based treatment for youth with severe psychosocial and behavioral problems. Discussed are the personal experiences of a Native American student in social work who is engaged in pursuing information on MST for Native youth and communities. Although there is still promise of its efficacy, there are questions on MST's effectiveness, replicability, and ease of implementation as a program. There is little quantitative and qualitative information to date to support its generalizability across race – no outcome results for Native participants have been disseminated. With goals of strengthening Native families and communities, discussion includes how MST can be adapted for use and programs concerns that should be considered.

Introduction

This article researches and qualitatively discusses the adaptability and applicability of Multisystemic Therapy (MST) as a family preservation intervention focused on Native¹ youth and communities, with interest in outcomes and program evaluation. While MST is supported by some evidence on effectiveness, there are questions on its replicability to other locations, generalizability across race, and ease of implementation as a program. There is still some promise for the use of MST with Native youth and communities. However, there is little quantitative and qualitative information to date to support this. This article may be of interest to those who work with youth and families, the juvenile justice system, child welfare, mental health, public policy; as well as those involved or have interest in outcome-based program evaluation, cultural and minority affairs, social work graduate programs, and Native issues and perspectives.

Experiences of a Native Student in Social Work

As a graduate student in social work, the first thing we learn is history: “Industrialization [italics added] was the social crisis which occurred in Western Europe and North America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which led to the creation of social work as an institution and a profession” (University of Edinburgh, 2005). Early in this introduction to social work history, I began to wonder where Natives exist within the collective consciousness of my chosen profession. Having lived in Miami within a refugee community and having one parent who is an Indigenous person, I had seen the effects of colonization, racism and poverty on mental health and well-being. I was interested in broadening the knowledge I had acquired from life and work experiences. However, due to the lack of Native and other minority viewpoints and content, I felt called upon to address indifference within the research literature and clinical practice. It was necessary at

times to teach instead of learn about the perspective of communities of color. As a graduate student of color, I always felt the need to probe further into discussions and research findings to get at the minority perspective and to ensure the representation of people of color in research that would affect the implementation of practices that would eventually impact them.

Over the two years of study, I attended classes and presentations on promising, evidence-based practices; participated in panels on racial disparities; and conducted literature reviews for research papers and other graduate school work with a focus on minority populations – to find that “there is a paucity of evidence based prevention and intervention practices specifically addressing [Native children’s] needs” (Yellow Horse & Brave Heart, 2003). One family-focused intervention that had generated a lot of interest was Multisystemic Therapy (MST). MST is very highly regarded in evidence-based discussions, and I became interested in how Native youth fared with this intervention. In Washington State, it has been court-mandated for adolescents involved in the justice system, and there are discussions of its implementation in the DCFS child welfare system. Knowing that, as a court mandated treatment, MST will affect Natives and that MST claims to be “culturally appropriate” and culturally competent based on its practice methodology (MST Services Inc., 2005; Stewart, 2005), I became interested in further investigation on MST in the Native community. I felt I should more critically analyze emerging best practices because, as Yellow Horse and Brave Heart point out, there are “a number of evidence-based practices assumed effective for [American Indian / Alaska Native (AI/AN)] children because they were utilized with diverse ethnic groups”; and to follow the suggestion that “evidence based and promising practices, with potential to be effective with AI/AN population, should be adapted and evaluated” (2003).

From an academic perspective and with no affiliation with MST Services Inc. (the company which disseminates and licenses

MST as a practice), I probed further into MST, wanting to learn if it would be applicable and adaptable to Native families and to find out its outcomes, if any, for Native youth. I believe strongly in finding intervention efforts that can follow ICWA's mandate to make "proactive efforts to prevent out-of-home placements of Indian children by providing preventative services and supports to Indian families" (Jones, Gillette, Painte, Paulson, 2000). Thus, MST (as a family-centered, "best practice" being considered by state legislatures, departments of corrections, child welfare authorities, and state mental health agencies as the way to handle adolescents with mental health and juvenile delinquency problems) was a practice that was of interest to me as a preventative service for Native youth.

MST: Overview

MST was originally developed in the U.S. in the late 1970s by Scott Henggeler at the Family Services Research Center (FSRC), Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC) (more detailed information about MST can be found at MST Services Inc., 2005). The intervention was to address, very specifically, problems with juvenile delinquents. MST evolved to address youth with severe psychosocial and behavioral problems -- youth with multiple delinquency offenses, who are at risk for out-of-home placements; often with co-occurring disorders such as substance and alcohol abuse (Stewart, 2005). In response to increased interest, MST Services Inc. (a private organization affiliated with FSRC) was created to handle dissemination of MST intervention services, while FSRC continued with research. Research and development in the U.S. and internationally continues; and to date, MST is offered in 25 U.S. states, as well as internationally in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Norway, Northern Ireland, England, New Zealand and Sweden, serving more than 8,000 families annually (MST Services Inc., 2005).

MST is based on a family preservation model, while viewing the youth in a complex social ecology (social-ecological model, see

Figure 1). The approach views "individuals as being nested within a complex network of interconnected systems that encompass individual, family, and extrafamilial (peer, school, neighborhood) factors. Intervention may be necessary in any one or a combination of these systems" (MST Services Inc., 2005). This is congruent with a Native worldview that sees interconnected spheres of influence, rather than discrete individuals or family groups. MST therapists work with youth, their families, along with other people who can affect positive change in the youth's life. For Natives, this could include parents, extended family, elders and spiritual advisors, tribal community, peer, and social groups (a Native ecological model is also discussed in Red Horse, Lewis, Feit, Decker, 1978). Thus, MST intervention services are delivered to the family and community as a whole.

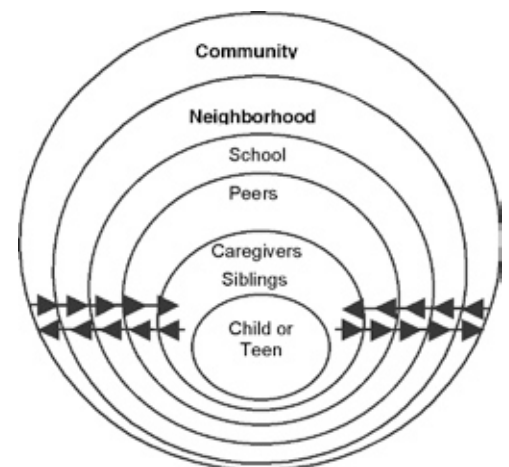


Figure 1. Social-Ecological Model of MST

Ecology model of social support shows caregivers, siblings, peers, school, neighborhood, and other community members as key figures in the lives of children and adolescents. From D.G. Stewart, 2005, *Principles and practices of Multisystemic Therapy (MST)*, PowerPoint presentation, Seattle, WA: Prime Time, University of Washington School of Medicine. Adapted with permission.

As an alternative (sometimes, court-mandated) to out-of-home placement, youth and their families are referred to the MST program. If they qualify, they are assigned to a MST therapist. In a case management approach, therapists handle a small caseload (4-6 families) in order to effectively deliver intensive services. The intervention is

designed to be short-term and time-limited (generally, 4-6 months). Service delivery is home-based, with therapy done at the home, often with several home visits and approximately 15 contact hours during a week. MST therapists are available 24 hours / 7 days a week, on-call through a pager system. Therapists are mental health professionals with masters or doctoral degrees, and MST Teams include therapists, crisis caseworkers, and a supervisor who is a clinical psychologist or psychiatrist. Teams are specially trained and certified, their agencies are approved and licensed, and on-going consultation and training is provided by MST Services Inc. Treatment modality is manualized, available “off the shelf”, and there is emphasis on quality assurance and adherence to the model.

MST as a clinical intervention differs from other approaches in its “multi-system” approach. Conceptualization of the problem is comprehensive, but specific interventions practices are not limited -- a variety of strategies can be employed to address specific problems (in other words, through MST, a variety of interventions can be employed). In addition, it offers a pragmatic approach to the families. Therapists develop, in collaboration with the family, well-defined treatment goals. Daily assigned tasks focus on addressing specific problems, and achievements draw from family’s strengths (strengths-based). Services are provided in the context of the family’s needs, values, beliefs, and culture.

Is MST Good Medicine?

In Washington State, MST has the support of some key “agency stakeholders”, including juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP), a Washington State legislature funded research group, has recognized MST as a “Blueprint Program”(based on The University of Colorado’s Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence Criteria, 2005;

Barnoski, 2004) and as a research-proven “Blue Chip” program, which WSIPP recommends investing public money in (Aos, Lieb, Mayfield, Miller, Pennucci,

2004). From a Euro-Western viewpoint, it was found to be a cost-efficient alternative to juvenile corrections, \$9,316 U.S. dollars per youth, or a return-on-investment of \$2.64 benefit-per-cost in U.S. dollars (ibid).

MST is generally regarded as a tested treatment theory with effective program outcomes. It is cited as “an effective, evidence-based treatment model” by many U.S. groups including U.S. National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institute on Mental Health, Surgeon General’s Office, Center for Substance Abuse Prevention, Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (Littell, 2005, p. 450).

U.S. research studies on effectiveness have found that it prevents further delinquency (long-term recidivism reduced by 25-75%) (MST Services Inc., 2005, referencing studies by Henggeler, Borduin, Brunk, Becker, etc.). In addition, MST also reduced out-of-home placement by roughly about half (47-64%) (ibid) and improved family functioning – outcomes which are aligned with what Native communities most value. MST also resulted in decreased mental health symptoms and problems. The intervention kept youth in their communities, out of custody with less public expense, without putting the community at risk.

Recent research, however, has begun to question the “evidence” behind MST. Interim results discussed in annual program reports in Ontario, Canada [“Ontario study”], conducted independently by Leschied and Cunningham, found no statistically significant differences between MST groups and control groups (2002). Researchers found mixed results – with positive family functioning and psychosocial measures, yet less impact on re-incarceration than expected (Leschied & Cunningham, 2001, 2002; Cunningham 2002; Henggeler 2005).

From a perspective of the science and practice of research synthesis, Littell recently published a systematic review

including a meta-analysis of intervention effects described in prior MST research, following the standards and guidelines of the Cochrane Collaboration and the Campbell Collaboration on conducting and disseminating unbiased research syntheses (2005, p. 447). Littell's systematic review of MST "points to inconsistent and incomplete reports on primary outcome studies, important variations in the implementation and integrity of randomized experiments, errors of omission and interpretation in previous reviews, and findings that differ from those of prior, published reviews" (p. 445). The review also points out that a 2001 WSIPP cost/benefit report may have included MST studies without full samples, and it comments that several MST studies underestimated or did not provide information on attrition in published reports (p. 450).

Cultural Appropriateness

Are effective practices replicable and generalizable to all races and ethnicities, or is cultural adaptation and consideration required? MST in U.S. studies appears to work for a variety of groups – for African Americans, for ethnically Hispanic, for all ages, and for inner-city urban as well as rural youth. When screened for race / ethnicity, outcome results of randomized trials showed no difference. MST Services Inc. concludes that these "outcomes constitute empirical evidence of the cultural and developmental appropriateness of MST" (2005). However, research so far in the U.S. has been limited to focus on African Americans and Hispanics. Can off-the-shelf, one-size-fits-all programs without adaptation to the uniqueness of communities be "culturally appropriate"? Or is MST truly flexible enough and in what areas? By its limitations so far to randomized trials with serious juvenile offenders of only one racial minority and one ethnic minority, can you even evaluate whether MST is truly applicable and generalizable to all minorities?

Without further information to supplement outcome results -- such as correlated cultural measures of study participants; documented cultural

considerations; specifics on the "social-ecology", key participants; and the racial/ethnic makeup and cultural measures of the MST team -- is it even ethical to extrapolate to all minorities? How can MST be sure that cultural appropriateness did not impact engagement, and therefore, outcome results? Although the correlated effect of cultural affiliation and identification is a weak link, it is believed to indirectly affect Native youth. In a survey, Native youth who identified with "Indian culture" were less likely to be involved in alcohol use, and a strong sense of group identification was linked to well being (Sanchez-Way & Johnson, 2000). Thus, it is very important that MST research on Native participants includes correlated measures of culture and group identity in order to identify marginalization and reconciliation with Native communities.

Lack of Recognizing Natives In Research

A question needs to be consistently raised -- are the results also true for Natives? To my knowledge, there are no U.S. MST studies or reports, published or in progress, where Native Americans are a significant treatment population. I asked key MST representatives (who are involved in MST practice and research²), "Why are there no Native Americans?" in their frequently cited research studies and would there be any research to address that question? One response³ was:

- There are few American Indians in South Carolina and Missouri [early MST research sites].
- The Native population is small, and in research, statistically insignificant.
- It's a good idea. It would be interesting to know.

Nonetheless without sufficient research findings, MST Services Inc. and affiliates continue to disseminate and offer MST as a solution for all racial and ethnic minorities. Independently, through literature review with a specific focus on Native Americans, I came across the Ontario study directly from the Ontario researcher's website.

Later, I would find brief mentions of this study on the MST Services Inc. website, (although as of this writing, external hyperlinks to the Ontario group's website were incorrect) (MST Services Inc., 2005).

The Ontario study is invaluable to those interested in MST as an emerging "best practice" for Native Americans, as it appears to be the only MST study that mentions Natives in its demographic information. As self-identified, Aboriginal youth were 13% of the study participants overall (Leschied & Cunningham, 2002), which is roughly representative of Aboriginal youth in custody in the Ontario province (15%, Latimer & Foss, 2004). Although results are yet to be published, interim program reports are available. Unfortunately, initial outcomes are not reported by race. However, Ontario researchers recognize this need, pointing out that "[s]till outstanding" is "secondary analysis of the data presented here, for example, ... the relative outcomes of sub-groups such as Aboriginals..." (Leschied & Cunningham, 2002, p.7). The researchers also point out "it would have been informative to survey the members of both [study] groups to determine their opinions" (Cunningham, 2002, p. 27).

In public discussion, I pointed out that given the over-representation of Native youth in juvenile corrections and child welfare, Native youth were key target populations for MST... yet there is no information as to whether or not MST is being applied to them and what the outcomes were for them. In response, the MST representative agreed that the population exists, but offered no solutions as to future research or directions⁴. In addition, when I brought up the Ontario study's mixed findings, the MST representative theorized that perhaps "[the Ontario study] is a bad study" and later commented that "many organizations faced challenges with programs"⁵. I was surprised the issue was so quickly and efficiently dismissed, especially given that many audience members seemed interested given their own client demographics.

I find that dismissing the Ontario study is irresponsible given the scope of the study

and its participant demographics. Ontario is invaluable to those interested in MST, both as a research study on the effectiveness of MST intervention and as a case study on implementation of an MST services program. It is important to recognize that:

- (1) Ontario has worked in collaboration with FSRC to participate in a National Institute for Mental Health study on "Transportability Study" of MST, linking adherence to the treatment model and outcomes / intervention effects (study results are pending);
- (2) Ontario sites are MST Services Inc.-approved and licensed providers, and thusly, under some level of supervision by MST Service Inc. so fidelity to the treatment modality can be assured to some degree;
- (3) The Ontario study was independently evaluated ("the first replication of MST outside the [FSRC]", Leschied & Cunningham, 2002, p. 11);
- (4) Using study quality criteria, Littell's systematic review points out "higher confidence in the Ontario study" (2005, p. 457);
- (5) The Ontario study was a randomized, controlled trial;
- (6) The study "was the largest MST trial to date (n=409)" (Littell, 2005, p. 457);
- (7) It was a large-scale, multi-site, four-year study; and
- (8) A large amount of Canadian public funds and effort was used to implement and study the project.

In the systematic review of MST studies, Littell (2005, p.446, p.458-459) offers several possible explanations for sources of bias in dissemination and previous reports, including:

- "Publication Bias" -- publishing was more likely when findings were statistically significant;
- "Authority and Tradition" -- with reports appearing in "very prestigious journals and several MST reviews were authored by highly respected scholars and government officials", thus leading

Table 1. U.S. States, By Representation of Native Juvenile Offenders

STATE	NATIVE			Number of MST- Licensed Agencies (2005)
	Percent Representation, General Juvenile Population (2001)	Percent Representation, Juveniles Offenders (2001)	Number of Juvenile Offenders (2001)	
South Dakota	12.1%	41.7%	207	0
Alaska	21.4%	42.1%	147	0
North Dakota	6.8%	35.0%	63	0
Montana	9.3%	22.6%	60	0

Note. The data in column 2 is from Easy Access to Juvenile Populations, by C. Puzzanchera, T. Finnegan, and W. Kang, 2005, Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available online at <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/ezapop/>. The data in columns 3 and 4 are from Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement Databook, by M. Sickmund, T.J. Sladky, and W. Kang, 2004, Office of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, available online at <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/cjrp/>. Columns 2 and 3 are calculated. Data for column 5 is from “MST Targeted Risk and Protective Factor”, by MST Services Inc., 2005, retrieved from <http://www.mstservices.com>.

Table 2. Canadian Provinces / Territories, By Representation of Native Juvenile Offenders

PROVINCE / TERRITORY	ABORIGINAL		Number of MST- Licensed Agencies (2005)
	Percent Representation, Juveniles Offenders (2001)	Number of Juvenile Offenders (2001)	
Saskatchewan	87.9%	203	0
Ontario	15.0%	166	5*
Manitoba	79.8%	138	0
Alberta	35.6%	90	0
British Columbia	41.4%	60	0

Note. The data in columns 2 and 3 are from A one-day snapshot of Aboriginal youth in custody across Canada: Phase II, by J. Latimer and L.C. Foss, 2004, Department of Justice Canada, available online at <http://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/ps/rs/rep/snap2/snapshot2.pdf>. Column 2 is calculated. Data for column 4 is from “MST Targeted Risk and Protective Factor”, by MST Services Inc., 2005, retrieved from <http://www.mstservices.com>. * Includes Ontario study sites.

to reports being “very influential and are frequently cited”; and

• **“Conflicts of Interest”**, also described as “allegiance effects” -- where program developers are involved in the study of their own programs, were authors or co-authors of reports, and were less likely to be critical than independent reviewers.

The fact is -- Ontario’s program implementation concerns and challenges are of interest to all other agencies that are considering MST implementation. Ontario’s interim results bring up questions that MST needs to address, and the question of how effective MST is for Native youth and communities is still unanswered. Given MST’s emphasis on outcomes and measures, it is interesting that there is no information on MST’s effectiveness with specifically Native Americans; that agencies that may have a high Native treatment population have no information for MST Services and affiliates to disseminate (e.g., Apache Behavioral Health, Whiteriver, AZ; the San Diego Unified School District, San Diego, CA; Children’s Psychiatric Hospital, Albuquerque, NM). Why don’t we know more about their outcomes? If evaluation is not in place, there should be target funding to do outcomes reporting in these agencies.

Target treatment population. Are Native juvenile delinquents really a small population for MST studies? In the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons, Native youth represent 60-70% of the confined youth (Scalia, 1997, reports 61%; Andrews, 2000, reports 70%), and most juvenile Federal cases⁶ involve violent offenses (Greenfeld & Smith, 1999). The numbers have increased 50% since 1994 (Andrews, 2000).

In some U.S. states, Native youth are a large proportion of the juvenile offenders in state, local and tribal prisons, representing as high as 42% of the youth in custody (i.e., held in residential placement) (Sickmund, Sladky, & Kang, 2004). Several states (including South Dakota, North Dakota, Montana, and Alaska) with a high representation of Native youth in custody have no available MST licensed agencies for services (see

Table 1). MST program developers should not ignore the population of Native juvenile delinquents. There is a need to develop and test programs to address the unique needs of Native youth and communities.

A similar analysis can be done for Canada (however, MST services are more limited, due to a much shorter history of dissemination and implementation). Representation of Aboriginal youth in custody can be as high as 100% in Canadian provinces and territories (see Table 2).

Can MST Work for Natives?

MST still shows some promise as an intervention for Native youth, families, and communities. It should be kept in mind, however, that there are questions on its general effectiveness, transportability to other sites, and that generalizability to Native families has yet to be documented. There are some areas in which MST could or should be adapted to work with Native communities.

Historical context. MST therapists and clinical supervisors need to know about Native history and our attempts to reconcile families and communities. Awareness could be achieved by incorporating these topics in training curricula, as discussion during an overview of the community to which they are serving, or as part of the process when determining overarching community outcomes.

Native values. MST Teams can have an understanding and incorporate Native values, such as cooperation, group harmony, respect, and respect for elders (Daisy, Brown, Behrens, 2001). It would be interesting to determine, by using qualitative analysis such as interviews and surveys, what the direct experiences are (or were) of Native youth, families, and communities through the program. The Ontario researchers, in retrospect, would have liked to have implemented qualitative work. I have yet to find case studies or descriptive information that can bring the perspective of Native program participants.

Native circles: An adapted social-ecological model. MST's social-ecological model should be adapted, as needed, for a Native view. Natives should engage to have a voice in these discussions, as there are other "circles" within Native communities that may not be apparent to MST professionals. Community stakeholders, such as elders and council members, should be involved in discussing the involvement of the community in program efforts. Native communities value inter-relationships, and MST helps identify those relationships and reinforces those connections.

Program implementation and deployment concerns. Ontario researchers consistently reported "lessons learned", outlining challenges experienced in program implementation and of potential research pitfalls (Cunningham, 2002; Leschied and Cunningham, 2002). This should be reviewed by any agency considering MST implementation. There are some major concerns that are very applicable to Native communities and agencies:

- There is a need to have "fidelity" to the treatment model, a desire and ability to continue with quality assurance efforts, and willingness for agencies to engage in ongoing, paid consultation by MST Services Inc.
- Programs will need to sustain funding and momentum over time (especially when involved in research and determining long-range outcomes over several years).
- Logistics and operational changes must take place for effective program implementation. This includes setting up a 24/7, on-call system. In addition, unionized staff regulations or prior employment agreements may pose some difficulties with professional staff.
- Therapists must be specifically trained for one week, plus quarterly boosters (currently, training is offered in South Carolina; thus, incurring travel fees, as well as training fees). Therapists must be open to supervision, including weekly phone consultations, and criticism. Because there is a lot of fieldwork involved, therapists may feel isolated in

their work, especially those traveling to remote areas. Importantly, there is therapist attrition and high turn-over, which adds to training costs and affects MST Team make-up and performance. Masters and doctoral-level staff are required, and this may be a significant barrier to many Native community agencies. It is unclear if paraprofessional can participate as therapists as well.

- A good referral system must be developed, including support through community service networks. Low referrals will affect assumptions in cost/benefit ratios, leading to lower than expected program benefits and return on investment.
- Community engagement is critical for referrals and participation towards pragmatic goals. Communities must not only be at the table in an advisory capacity but also as a resource for youth.
- Funding is a significant concern – MST is expensive therapy and an expensive program. These costs impact the cost/benefit expected. Agencies must devote ongoing funding for training, travel, supervision, licensing, and importantly, to complete outcomes evaluation.

In Ontario's case (Leschied & Cunningham, 2002):

- Projected cost per case was \$6,000-\$7,000 CDN (however, because of low referrals, actual cost is likely over \$25,000 per case) (p. 124).
- Funding over time was a challenge. First-year, start-up cost was approximately \$22,500 CDN per site (4 sites, for a total of \$91,000 CDN). This included MST consultant site visits and travel, staff training, and annual license fee (\$6,000 US). Second-year cost included the annual fee, plus unexpected costs and exchange rate increases. The Ontario program was initially designed with only one year of MST Services Inc. supervision. However, due to results of treatment fidelity (TAM) studies, MST Services Inc. supervision was recommended into

the next year. Second year costs were much higher than expected: \$115,000 CDN, or roughly \$28,750 CDN per site. Concern over the budget for MST consultation and supervision and an interest in independence, Ontario built supervisory capacity within its program, thus thereafter only paid the annual licensing fee. Program funding to year four was a challenge.

Funding for various research studies and MST programs vary. MST has been funded by Medicaid and other Federal funds, such as Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and block grants; allocation of funds through State and local programs allocated for juvenile justice, mental health, residential treatment programs, foster care, and education systems; managed care organization for the provision of continuum of care; foundations (e.g., Annie E. Casey Foundation); and so on – which indicates that the economics of MST must be further researched.

How would or could MST be funded as a Native American program? The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (2003) reviewed six different Federal departments and found that “there persists a large deficit in funding Native American programs” and that the “government’s failure is systemic.” The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention- Tribal Youth Program (TYP), was funded \$12.5 million in FY 2000, as part of the Indian Country Law Enforcement Initiative, and is involved in the Mental Health and Community Safety Initiative for American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) Children, Youth, and Families (Andrews, 2000). This is one of many Indian programs that could be considered as a potential funding source. In addition, MST may also be funded under ICWA’s provision to provide preventative services. It is unclear as to smaller agencies’ capacity to fund MST program services.

Program outcomes. Overall outcomes should have more emphasis on other measures besides re-arrests and delinquency recidivism. Can MST be a medium for

reconciliation? Towards this initiative, there should be emphasis in Native programs to look further into various family functioning measures. Focus can be on family functioning, family preservation, cultural identity, and engagement in pro-social activities. All interventions (independent variables) should be documented and evaluated to determine best-practices for Native youth, families, and communities. In addition, understanding the perspective of program participants as they engage in MST services is critical in understanding their stories. Documented case studies can be used in education, training and dissemination efforts to explain MST to Native communities and stakeholders.

In Closing

MST as an intervention is designed to effect change by empowering families and communities to address at-risk youth. In theory, the treatment plan is designed in collaboration with family members and is, therefore, family-driven rather than therapist-driven. The goals are to keep youth out of custody and in their homes and communities, while improving family functioning and promoting their health and well-being. MST may be an intervention that helps us prevent the removal of children, address reconciliation, and promote Native communities and families. However, it needs to be skillfully and responsibly implemented with an eye towards the specific concerns and challenges of the community where it is being used. Perhaps for-profit firms like MST Services Inc. are not the appropriate partners for Native communities? It may be that only not-for-profit organizations, with a demonstrated commitment to the community instead of with a monetary stake in disseminating its methodology, are better partners? Perhaps non-Native methodologies are not the way to go at all. Nonetheless, “best practices” therapies will continue to be applied to Native youth and communities, and it is key to critically analyze their impacts.

With the tools to assess and control the placement of our children while also keeping the community safe, we can grow a new generation of whole People and

begin to address and overcome the systemic losses we have suffered. Today, we need to recreate, not a long ago utopia but Sovereign, self-regulating communities with rights and responsibilities that we all share.

MST is currently implemented nationwide in the U.S. (including court-mandated services). We do not know if it is helping or hurting Native youth. It is unknown as to how well it applies to Native communities, or if it requires mindfully adaptation to be sensitive to Native youth, families, and communities. I recommend seeking knowledge of the outcomes and experience of Native participants in MST, and justification of MST's claim of its "cultural appropriateness".

Unlike any other community, Native communities have a special history. We must encourage efforts toward reconciliation, and perhaps, MST may provide an opportunity at providing lasting, positive outcomes.

Roxanna E. Torres

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(Endotes)

¹. The use of the word "Native" and "Native American" is not limited and describes U.S. American Indian and Alaska Natives (AI/AN), Canadian Aboriginals (First Nations, Métis, Inuit), and North, Central, and South American indigenous peoples. Other terms may be

used throughout, especially when referencing citations.

- ². E.W. Trupin and D.G. Stewart, University of Washington School of Medicine, are program designers of the Family Integrated Transitions (FIT) pilot program, which includes MST as one of four evidence-based interventions. The Washington State Legislature directed the Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration to develop the program, which was launched in 2000 and was independently evaluated by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (Aos, 2004). The UW School of Medicine, Division of Public Behavioral Health and Justice Policy, Prime Time Project is a licensed MST agency and affiliate.
- ³. D.G. Stewart, University of Washington School of Medicine, guest speaker -- classroom dialog during "Principles and Practices of Multisystemic Therapy (MST)" presentation to the University of Washington School of Social Work, February 24, 2005.
- ⁴. E. W. Trupin, University of Washington School of Medicine, speaker -- public dialog during "Evidence-Based Practices in Children's Mental Health" presentation, part of the Evidence-Based Practices in Child Welfare 2004-2005 forum series by the Northwest Institute for Children and Families, held at the University of Washington School of Social Work, March 29, 2005. Invited to attend were many key stakeholders in child welfare and juvenile justice.
- ⁵. Ibid.
- ⁶. Inmates may include those sentenced and those pending trial. In the U.S., tribal and Federal laws apply in Indian Country; however, most juvenile cases are handled by Federal courts. If certain types of crimes are committed, Federal laws take jurisdiction. Tribes can transfer to the State systems.

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Can University/Community Collaboration Create Spaces for Aboriginal Reconciliation?

Case Study of the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions Community Projects and Wilfrid Laurier University

Ginette Lafrenière, Papa Lamine Diallo, Donna Dubie and Lou Henry



Abstract

In this article, the authors attempt to illustrate how two Aboriginal community-based projects were conceptualized and developed through the collaborative efforts of four individuals who believed in the merits of a project aimed at survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential school system as well as Aboriginal people in trouble with the law. Drawing upon a small body of literature on university/community collaboration, the authors illustrate the importance of meaningful collaboration between universities and communities in order to enhance a mutually beneficial relationship conducive to community-engaged scholarship. Through an examination of the case study of the Healing of The Seven Generations Project and the Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice Project, the authors hope to illustrate to fellow Aboriginal colleagues in Canada the merits, strengths and challenges of university/community collaboration. Ultimately, what the authors hope to share through this article is an example of how university/community collaboration can create spaces whereby Aboriginal people have become agents of their own healing.

I) Introduction

Our collaboration within the Healing of The Seven Generations Program and the Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice Project is one that has developed over the past two years. The projects have grown from a desire to “help” to full blown active organizations with too many clients and not enough staff to answer to the overwhelming demand on the services provided by the projects. The demands have surpassed everyone’s expectations relative to how badly needed these organizations were to the Kitchener-Waterloo community in Ontario. Organizers are left with little time to reflect on the development and growth of the Healing and Four Directions projects.

On February 23rd, 2005 the Executive Directors of both projects organized a one-day forum whereby all Aboriginal organizations from the Waterloo Region converged to discuss their *raison d’être* within the community and how alliance-building was crucial for both Aboriginal and mainstream organizations in order to best serve Aboriginal clients and community members. Entitled, “Taking Back Our Responsibility”, the leadership of the Healing and Four Directions organizations managed to create a safe and nurturing space whereby people could freely talk about the challenges of working with urban Aboriginal peoples. The afternoon was dedicated to highlighting the challenges of working with survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential schools as well as Aboriginal adults and youth in trouble with the law. Additionally, much time was spent on the merits of collaborating with researchers from Wilfrid Laurier University. Approximately 75 community members, social service workers, students and professors attended the forum. What follows is a brief synopsis of the essence of what was discussed relative to the merits of university/community collaboration.

The article begins by giving some background information on how both projects were conceptualized and informed by the devastating effects of the residential

school system. A very brief illustration of the residential school system followed by descriptions of the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice projects are presented. We then draw upon some of the literature relative to university/community collaboration. We attempt to illustrate the strengths and challenges of our experience of university/community collaboration. We conclude by illustrating five determining factors, which have informed and continue to inform our alliance building through these projects.

II) Recognizing the need for Innovation and a “Better Practice” when Working with Aboriginal Families

As employees in an Aboriginal employment service, both Lou Henry and Donna Dubie recognized the challenges of attempting to work with Aboriginal clients who, while seeking employment were often grappling with alcohol or drug addiction issues. As Donna states working in employment with Aboriginal people was not easy:

It’s like you’re working with C and D, but A and B are missing. I couldn’t place any of my clients because of their issues and I knew that their issues had to do with the legacy of the residential school system. To me, I couldn’t place clients in jobs until they dealt with their personal issues. And when I would place some of them in jobs, they would lose them eventually. It was a never-ending cycle of setting people up for failure. I was sick.

(Personal communication with Donna Dubie, August 2004).

Lou also shared Donna’s frustration in trying to find employment for unemployable Aboriginal clients. His frustration led him to create, by accident, a restorative justice project. It began after one of his clients in trouble with the law had expressed a desire to be involved in some type of Aboriginal cultural healing project. Commissioned by a local judge who knew something of alternative measures to incarceration, Lou was asked if he could work with this client

in a restorative justice capacity. Immediately, Lou organized a sentencing circle, an advisory committee and volunteers to work not only with this individual, but others who followed. As Lou shared with researchers at the university in November of 2004, trying to sustain an Aboriginal specific restorative justice project has not been easy:

In addition to doing my regular job, I would do the restorative justice work in the evenings and on the weekends. It was pretty tough, but worth it. Aboriginal people need to know who they are, not be ashamed to be who they are and connect with their culture through Sundance, sweats and healing circles. We provide that to them because all of us who are working with them have been there. We know what it's like. To have an Aboriginal specific restorative justice project is important to this community when you think that we don't even have a Native Friendship Centre in the Waterloo Region. Donna and I definitely fill a gap in Aboriginal service delivery. No doubt about it (Personal communication with Lou Henry, November 2004).

In May of 2003, we (Ginette Lafrenière and Lamine Diallo) met with both Donna and Lou. After colliding socially with Donna, we were approached to assist in the development of an ambitious healing project proposal for survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential school system. Later, we were introduced to Lou who also wished to transform his volunteer work with Aboriginal offenders into a full-time program. We agreed to assist, and after many hurdles and revisions to project proposals, both the Healing and Four Directions projects received funding. This enabled Lou and Donna to access a physical location and hire staff.

Before going into more detail relative to the width and breadth of our collaboration, we believe it is important to present a very brief but important illustration of the residential school system given that both Aboriginal projects have emerged as viable organizations in Kitchener-Waterloo. The devastating effects of the residential school system continue to influence and

compromise healing processes for many survivors and intergenerational survivors of what we would qualify as Canada's apartheid. The Healing and Four Directions projects are key organizations in the fight to reclaim a sense of justice and healing.

II. 1) Defining the Residential School System

The residential school system was a politically motivated attempt to systematically assimilate Aboriginal people into the dominant white, European culture of "Canada". Thousands of Aboriginal children across Canada were taken from their homes and institutionalized in residential schools.

The system was officially in effect between 1892 and 1969 through arrangements between the Government of Canada and the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the United Church, and the Presbyterian Church. Although the Government of Canada officially withdrew in 1969, some of the schools continued operating throughout the 70s and 80s (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p.54).

In the schools, many children suffered sexual, physical and emotional abuse by the adults who operated them.

Many of these children, in addition to the emotional abuse of being robbed of a family and a culture, were subjected to horrific physical and/or sexual abuse by some of the adults running the schools. Children who tried to escape were beaten, chained, and severely whipped. They were also punished for speaking their language (needles through the tongue was one method used) or for attempting to speak to siblings of the opposite sex (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p.57).

According to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation (2003), there were approximately 130 residential schools, which existed in Canada between 1800 and 1990. In fact, the last school to close its doors was Akaitcho Hall in Yellowknife in the 1990's

(p.2). The residential school system was only an element of a much larger plan to eradicate the “Indian problem” in Canada.

The Indian Act and the Child Welfare, Reservation and Justice systems took over. It is these larger relationships, and the forced assimilationist policy that informs them, which account for much of the varied conditions of Aboriginal life (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2003, p.58).

The evidence is overwhelming relative to the disastrous effects of the residential school system in Canada (Chrisjohn, 1992; Milloy, 1999; Native Council of Canada, 1990; Nichol, 2000; Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association of Canada, 1991; Yellowhorse and Killstraight, 2003). Higher rates of suicide, alcohol and drug addiction, as well as domestic violence are serious challenges, which characterize many urban and non-urban Aboriginal communities across Canada today. The undeniable link between the legacy of the residential school system and social as well as economic inequities amongst Aboriginal people needs to be addressed. Even though the cultural apartheid, which characterizes a large piece of Canada’s history (something rarely problematized in school curricula), is unmistakably hideous, it is at the same time evidence of the resilience of a people who have resisted complete and total cultural annihilation. Fortunately, there are organizations, community groups and individuals across Canada who, as agents of their own healing, have engaged a process of collective recovery in the hopes of addressing the oppressive legacy of the residential school system. The Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice projects aim to respond to the needs of members of the Aboriginal community in the Waterloo Region (Southwestern Ontario).

II. 2) What does Reconciliation and Healing mean in an Aboriginal Context?

In order to understand our assertion that university/community collaboration can
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open up spaces for Aboriginal reconciliation, it would seem prudent to take a short look at what the term “reconciliation” means for us as collaborators. There are various definitions available, some which better reflect what we are talking about here. Generally reconciliation can be understood to involve the restoration of relationship. In our case we are concerned with the restoration of relationship that Aboriginal people have with themselves, their families, the Aboriginal community, the wider non-Aboriginal society and the academy. Obviously our collaborative efforts will at times impact possibly one dimension of that restoration but culminate with other efforts at reconciliation that will one day lead to a healthier community for all.

Sutherland (2004) maintains that “the heart of reconciliation is a parallel process of personal and political transformation from systems of domination to relationships of mutuality” (p.1). Our approach to collaboration is one which is etched in a personal understanding by all members of the collaborative, in what it means to experience marginalization and oppression. We also have an understanding of what the personal toll of such experiences can and have been. Throughout the article we refer to the mutuality of our relationship – that ours is a collaboration wherein both the university and the community-based groups benefit both personally and organizationally from our collective efforts. This takes us away from the traditional view of academe as something that is inaccessible and a place where knowledge is somehow “created” in an academic vacuum far from the community. As a collaborative, we believe that our research is rich and textured, precisely because it is informed by this commitment to mutuality and of wanting to address reconciliation by “bringing together and restoring union”. (Lemay and Piotrowski, 2002, p.1).

Sutherland (2004) also delineates a series of shifts that need to take place in order for this reconciliation to take place:

To transform systems of domination into relationships of mutuality, I suggest the following four guiding

touchstones: drawing on the fundamental worldviews of the parties themselves, transcending the victim-offender cycle, engaging in large-scale social change, and assessing appropriate timing and tactics (p.1).

II. 3) Overview of the Healing of The Seven Generations Project

The Healing of The Seven Generations was conceptualized by Donna Dubie, First Nations intergenerational survivor of the residential school system. The project aims to address the needs of Aboriginal survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential schools in the Region of Waterloo.

According to the initial proposal submitted to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, the Healing of The Seven Generations attempts to work with all Aboriginal people and community members that are suffering from the effects of the residential school system. Within the program, Aboriginal people are encouraged to learn about traditional and non-traditional teachings and ways of regaining and maintaining holistic well-being.

Goals of the Project:

- To engage Aboriginal people in a safe and nurturing, culture-based group healing process so that they can recognize, address and begin to resolve the healing issues that come from sexual and physical abuse at residential schools and/or the intergenerational impacts of such abuse. These impacts may include family dysfunction, addictive behaviours, violence, abandonment, all types of abuse, low self-esteem, unhealthy relationships, grief and other related problems;
- To provide opportunities for learning about Aboriginal traditions, culture and spirituality to Aboriginal people who are survivors of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools or intergenerationally impacted;
- To increase the capacity of service providers to work more effectively with Aboriginal people who are survivors (direct or intergenerational)

- of residential school abuse;
- To engage in public education on residential school impacts and abuse recovery;
- To initiate community support systems for individuals impacted by sexual assault and the intergenerational effects of the residential schools;
- To coordinate and ensure active healing partnerships between individuals and other local service providers;
- To employ the services of Elders, to conduct traditional cultural activities, and professional therapists, who are culturally skilled and adept at individual and family counselling; and
- To assist individuals in overcoming trauma in their personal lives so that they are able to stop the cycle of abuse.

It is expected that once members of the Aboriginal community are imbued with understanding and knowledge of the past history/legacy of residential schools, Aboriginal people will begin to show signs of reciprocal nurturing and positive connections towards their immediate and extended families as well as towards the community at large (Dubie, 2003).

II. 4) Overview of the Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice Project

The mandate of this particular initiative is to implement and maintain culturally-based and community driven pre- and post-diversion programs for Aboriginal people. It is committed to providing meaningful alternative measures to the current criminal justice process by implementing healing plans and making referrals, which address the healing and restitution needs of all those involved (complainants, offenders, community, justice system).

The Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice Program works in compliance with section 718.2 (e) of the Criminal Code and with the Youth Criminal Justice Act. It serves Aboriginal people charged with Class 1 and some Class 2, less serious hybrid offences who appear before the courts in Kitchener-Waterloo,

Cambridge or Guelph. It also serves Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth who have been referred to this program by the police and/or the courts through pre-charge diversion, as directed by the new Youth Criminal Justice Act of Ontario.

The types of healing (disposition) plans developed vary from client to client. Through sentencing circles, the volunteers who make up the Council learn about the personal issues that the clients have been grappling with and through a series of discussions create a consensus-derived plan which is meant to help guide each client in working on resolving their personal issues. At the same time there is focus on meeting the requirements of the mainstream justice system and making direct or community restitution where possible.

Four Directions plays an instrumental role within the Waterloo Region, as evidenced by the enormous demands placed on the staff and volunteers. Communities outside of the Waterloo Region solicit the services of Four Directions, and as such, the program is expanding throughout Southern Ontario. The executive director of Four Directions works in a variety of capacities including public educator, counsellor, advocate, and consultant to area groups concerned with restorative justice. He is also expanding his services to include fee-for-service arrangements with addiction and recovery organizations (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), as well as various detention facilities in Southern Ontario. By connecting Aboriginal people to their roots through circles, sweats, Sundance, and Aboriginal-specific programming, Four Directions Aboriginal

Restorative Justice has enjoyed enormous success. Of the 50 clients who are active within the program, only two known cases of recidivism have occurred.

III) University/Community Collaboration

The literature is quite clear on how Aboriginal people have suffered and survived the effects of colonization and subsequent

cultural atrophy through the residential school system (Chrisjohn et al, 1992; Graham, 1997; Grant, 1999; Richardson, G., Hawks, S. (1995); Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Where there are gaps in the literature is in the area of how universities can be viable and equitable partners working with culturally determined groups and how these groups define and demystify the communities in which they operate. The Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice projects are designed to reach out to Aboriginal people in order to address painful issues relative to the effects of the residential school system and the Canadian judicial system.

It appears to us that the nature of these projects is most interesting given that they are operating from a standpoint of “community” where in fact the notion of “community” has long been challenged. For example, what does “community” mean for urban Aboriginals living in Kitchener-Waterloo? How can the projects re-create “community” when many of its participants have never experienced the safety and nurturing of a healthy “community”? Is it possible to re-create community and redefine the notion of community for Aboriginal people seeking respite and assistance? And finally, can an academic institution assist in this process of redefinition of community in collaboration with community-based projects? Ultimately, how can university/community collaboration create spaces for Aboriginal healing and reconciliation when there are no imitable models from which to draw upon? We believe that we have elements of answers with respect to these questions. What appears to be a common denominator within our answers is our belief in the legitimacy of alliance building and our commitment to anti-oppressive work.

In an article on academic/community collaboration, authors Gronski and Pigg (2000) argue that collaboration between universities and community is key to being able to enhance one’s capacity to serve marginalized members of society. Quoting Walsh (1997), the authors describe the

need for renewed collaboration between various stakeholders in the community:

The multiple and often messy needs of families and communities require a renewed collaboration among business, government, non-profit services and local groups (p.3).

Unfortunately, not everyone shares our enthusiasm for university/community collaboration given that it is still somewhat misunderstood in traditional academic settings. We believe that this climate is slowly changing as evidenced by various funders in Canada who have understood the connection between scholarship and community research. In a recent report on community-based work, the authors discuss certain challenges to what they term as “community-engaged” work, but what we would qualify as university/community collaboration:

The report examines a number of critical challenges that community-engaged scholarship poses to the predominant paradigm of faculty incentives in health professional schools. These include the tendency of faculty peers to classify community-engaged work as service rather than to consider the factors that might qualify the work as genuine scholarship, the under valuing of the role of products of scholarship that are not in the form of peer-reviewed journal articles, and the limited role of community partners in faculty review, promotion and tenure processes (Commission on Community-Engaged Scholarship in the Health Professions, 2005).

As collaborators within the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions projects, we believe that, despite certain challenges, the symbiotic relationship, which has emerged between the projects and Wilfrid Laurier University, has served to create an energy which has been mutually satisfying both from an intellectual and practical standpoint. It has not been without its difficulties given the fact that working for a year on the development and implementation of such projects has invited queries from our colleagues in terms of

the legitimacy of engaging in such a labour intensive endeavour for very little money. According to Marullo and Edwards (2000), “the academic reward system... values most highly the science of discovery and offers fewer incentives for faculty to engage in the scholarships of application, integration and pedagogy”. As newcomers to Laurier, we are often gently and, at times, not so gently reminded that we are to publish and engage in intellectual work, which is meaningful and important. We would argue that this is precisely what we have done by working with these projects and documenting for over a year the trials and tribulations of getting such projects off the ground. We have also examined the role that we have played as academics in terms of facilitating this process. Boyer (1999) speaks to this notion of what we would qualify as “academic repositioning”, but what he qualifies as “scholarship of engagement”, whereby universities are inevitably reshaped as they enter into partnerships with various actors within the community.

Marullo and Edwards (2000) support this idea as evidenced by the following quote: *...the engaged scholar weaves together local or regional constituencies... they must also play the role of organizer among their university colleagues so that networks of interested faculty, administrators, and staff can collaborate with enduring community-based constituencies and develop innovative “win-win” projects for all parties.*

Author Barri Tinkler (2004) states, “Community-based research (CBR) is a new movement in higher education that combines practices from other participatory research models as well as service-learning. CBR requires researchers to work closely with the community” (p.22). Refraining from comment on the notion that community-based research is such a “new” movement, we would however submit that much of the labour intensive work in which we’ve engaged with one another as collaborators has been more about process than it has been about a quantifiable outcome. This fact alone has raised a few eyebrows in our academic spaces. What we attempt to explain to anyone who

wishes to understand the nature of our work is that we continue to work together because we enjoy doing so. Not a week goes by where there isn't a new opportunity to design a creative workshop, or submit a paper to a conference or access funding for an innovative project related to the work of both the Healing and Four Directions programs. We do this work because it sustains us, nurtures us and fuels our belief that what we are doing collectively is important work.

Part of what makes our collaboration with the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions a win-win situation is the free flow of information, expertise and learning that has occurred in the past year. Certainly our students have benefited from Donna and Lou's presence within the university. We anticipate that in the future their programs may well benefit from the presence of progressive and dynamic Aboriginal Master of Social Work placement students within their programs. As academics, we have certainly learned a great deal with respect to challenging the most basic assumptions of community organizing that we have held for a long time. For example, the issue of intercommunity violence and notions of trust are prevalent themes, which we have discussed at great length with members of the Healing and Four Directions projects.

As academics we are forced to consider the enormous complexities of community organizing and development within a community, which does not have a strong base of trust or collaboration. This makes for difficult outreach when attempting to initiate new and innovative community-based projects. Since the forum in February 2005, we have witnessed positive movement in this direction, given the leadership of both Donna and Lou who managed to organize all Aboriginal organizations in the Waterloo Region to converge upon a one-day forum on Aboriginal issues and service provision. This, apparently, is a notable endeavour within the Aboriginal community, which does not have a long tradition of inter-agency collaboration.

Our journey with both projects enables us to draw comparisons and chart the

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progression of the evolutionary nature of the projects. As such, there is certainly much room for reflection and research in terms of how to address and redress the conceptualization and delivery of community projects, which are mutually nurturing and supportive within Aboriginal spheres. While much has been written on the issue of modern anthropology theoretically shaped by colonial conquest and imperialism, we would highlight the writings of Celia Haig-Brown (2001) who states the following:

Perhaps it is my white skin privilege which leads me in the final analysis to an incessant desire to contribute to a project of (re) building the university in a way which acknowledges its strengths, recognizes its historic shortcomings, and feels a need to shift priorities and redefine its "business" in an effort to address some conception of social justice.

We contend that our collaboration utilizes its various strengths as feminist and minoritized researchers within academe to create spaces for community projects like the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice. This has been undertaken in order to enhance the Aboriginal community's capacity to design their own healing and empowerment. Inversely, the creation of such space also means that, through various educational forays, our students and colleagues are sensitized to the needs of Aboriginal people as articulated by Aboriginal people themselves.

This brings us to what motivates us to engage in such a process in the first place. As social justice advocates who are coming from social locations which are quite different (African, Franco-Ontarian and First Nations) we come from spaces which not only understand the notion of oppression and marginalization, but through our research and our work in the community, wish to encourage marginalized communities to feel secure in their attempts to be agents of their own transformative community work. We assert that being able to engage in community-based research and

meaningful collaboration can invariably create spaces for healing and therefore reconciliation within Aboriginal spheres.

As we have attempted to discuss in the past, and continue to reflect upon today, non-Aboriginal researchers can play a role as “allies” as long as we know where to draw healthy boundaries with the communities in which we operate. What has been and remains helpful in our work with the Healing and Four Directions projects is that we are not well versed in issues relative to the effects of the residential school system. We had not even heard of restorative justice until meeting Lou Henry. Inversely, neither Donna nor Lou had any contacts with the university prior to meeting the researchers and had not thought about valuing research as an integral part of their projects.

Over the course of the past two years, all four collaborators have experienced the benefits of working collectively. What the university collaborators bring to the table is: an interest in research; expertise in demystifying funding applications; access to resources at the university; networks of researchers who can assist with certain elements of, for example, program development; and, a host of other tools which may have little to do with Aboriginal healing, but overall can benefit the work in which both Lou and Donna are involved. This, to us, is precisely what makes our collaboration equitable. We are a collective of people bringing various strengths to the table. What follows is a table of concrete examples illustrating how we mutually benefit by working together (See Table 1). We conclude with a series of determining factors, which have enhanced our collaboration thus far.

IV) Determining Factors which have Enhanced our Collaboration

Given our commitment to our collaborative work, we would qualify that our partnership can be etched within an “alliance-building” framework. What this means concretely is that not only have we forged connections

amongst ourselves, but we utilize these connections to build bridges with other partners and allies in order to continue making inroads within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal spheres. While the nature and depth of both the Healing and Four Directions projects must at all times be Aboriginal-specific, it is also flexible enough to embrace, on their terms, outreach to non-Aboriginal clients requesting assistance. For example, at the present moment, both projects have received referrals from the Waterloo Regional Police. On occasion, non-Aboriginal clients benefit from the teachings of Aboriginal people. As one program coordinator commented to us during the Aboriginal Forum held in February 2005, it would appear that it is sometimes beneficial for Aboriginal people to see that non-Aboriginals also grapple with, for example, addictions and domestic violence. Admittedly, there are, at times, very animated discussions on the merits of having heterogeneous circles with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clients. What is curious in this debate is the fact that it is the non-Aboriginal partners who question the logic of such generosity.

As mentioned earlier, despite the challenges, we would assert that there are determining factors, which have positively and continue to enhance our collaboration. They are as follows:

1. **Our initial collaboration grew out of a shared commitment to social justice and, as such, a resulting friendship emerged.**

As individuals we have a long history of working in spheres of social change and social action, so the “buy-in” to work collectively was easy. With respect to the notion of “alliance-building”, it has been our experience that taking the time to get to know one another was important for our relationship. According to authors Thompson, Story, and Butler (2002), collaborative relationships take time, and persistence signals sincere and serious intention.

Our working relationship was forged over a long period of time, which permitted us to get to know one another

Table 1: Symbiotic Factors Contributing to Mutual Satisfaction and Challenges of Collaborative Work Between the Healing of The Seven Generations, Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice and Researchers at Wilfrid Laurier University.

Wilfrid Laurier University	Healing of the Seven Generations & Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice
BENEFITS	BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - ability for researchers and students to be in touch with issues in the community in a meaningful way given the presence of both Executive Directors in class and extra-curricular contexts - ability to share valuable and impactful teachings relative to enhancing social work practice with Aboriginal populations - healthy challenges relative to social work practices which can only occur by having people in the academic sphere who feel safe enough to critique and share personal stories of tragedy and triumph relative to healing - students, faculty and staff are able to demystify Native people and culture and ask questions without fear of ridicule - student and faculty are able to access Aboriginal projects for research, learning, and volunteerism - researchers are privy to dynamics of the work in which both Executive Directors are involved - researchers get to know clients on a social level - researchers can get an in-depth view of the challenges of healing work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assistance in navigating various bureaucracies in town - university is a credible partner for some funders as evaluation is at times an important component within the context of a project proposal - researchers are able to demystify the process of applying for funding - learning about research is enjoyable and empowering as the creation of a research caucus for both projects has been initiated - researchers are strong advocates for both projects within the community - both projects get to promote their programs within the university through conferences, class presentations, etc... and also influence and sensitize future social workers at the Faculty of Social Work - both Executive Directors of the projects have the opportunity to inform and shape course content of several courses at the Faculty of Social Work
CHALLENGES	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - demands on time which can be very consuming and compromise other priorities relative to work/research/life balances - at times, seeming incompatibilities relative to time and organizational issues (for example, a bureaucratic dance is always engaged when smudging is to take place in a public forum at the university given issues relative to university smoking policy); - some university colleagues may question the intimate proximity which is enjoyed with community collaborators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - university bureaucracy is most frustrating (for example, to be issued a reimbursement cheque for community collaborators is a long process; innumerable parking tickets are acquired when meetings take place on campus as well as very strict rules around smoking both within and outside the university campus buildings) - at times, both Executive Directors may feel that their message may not be understood by the majority of non-Aboriginal students and Faculty members - the university setting is not always a welcoming or safe environment to share aspects of one's life or culture

and as a result an emerging friendship ensued. While some may think that merging friendship and collaboration is inadvisable, we would respectfully join Shragge (2003) in submitting that the basis of many social action or social change collaborations is etched first and foremost in personal relationships.

2. What brought us together were individuals not institutions.

It is important for us to highlight that while we are connected to academic and community institutions, we are quite clear on the concept that the chemistry, which we have as individuals was what brought us together initially, and what sustains our mutual enthusiasm to keep working in a collaborative fashion. Alliance building for us is not so much about dealing with the “other” in an “institution” but with individuals with whom we believe we can get along. While this may sound simplistic (and we recognize that it is) we also recognize that after 17 years of community organizing, both in Canada and abroad, we have learned that the notion of an “ally”, on the purest and simplest level, has to do with the individual and not the institution which s/he represents.

3. **There was a strong common denominator of oppression and marginalization as experienced by someone who is African and individuals who are Aboriginal.**

Not to negate Ginette’s experience of oppression and marginalization (or her contribution to the collaboration), it is most legitimate to state that given our respective experiences with the devastating effects of colonization both in Africa and here in Canada, there is a silent and recognizable mutuality of experience relative to the experience of colonization. There is very little research which points to alliance building between African and Aboriginal people in Canada, but we would submit that we are “natural” allies even though the present-day effects of colonization in our respective geographic spheres may be quite different. As such, our collaboration with the Healing of The Seven Generations is a way to manifest solidarity for Indigenous

people everywhere who continue to suffer and, more importantly, resist the colonizer’s design of cultural and economic suffocation.

4. There was strong leadership on the part of the initiators of the projects and as such partners were very clear about mutual expectations.

Without a doubt, Donna Dubie’s vision and strong leadership has brought the Healing of The Seven Generations to a space of respect and much solicitation. At the beginning of our alliance, Donna was very clear as to what her expectations were: she required some assistance with the mechanics of submitting a proposal and needed a sponsor until she was incorporated as a non-profit. Upon reflection, the key determining factor, which influenced the initial journey was the fact that Donna was able to take a risk and ask for help. She also knew instinctively that there was perhaps some merit in developing an alliance with an academic institution.

As for Lou’s project, his is one that is more labour-intensive at the moment given that he has not received as much funding as the Healing Project. His project however, has enormous potential to thrive given the overwhelming community response, which he has received during the past year. Research actually plays a much more prominent role in his project than Donna’s at the moment, given the nature of the funding which he has received.

Another key determining factor, which has permitted us to sustain our alliance, is that we, as academics, have been very clear with both Lou and Donna with respect to what we can or cannot contribute to the project. At the beginning of our working relationship, we articulated that we had no experience whatsoever working on any aspect of residential school system redress nor did we know anything about restorative justice issues. We are not clinicians and as such could not and cannot offer anything in terms of how to deal with the effects of sexual abuse, for example. What we did articulate is that we are interested in university/community collaboration and we would be most interested in documenting

the relationship between the projects and the university. We would also assist in accessing funding to help sustain the projects and help create spaces whereby we could mentor members of the Healing of The Seven Generations and Four Directions projects in matters of research and data collection. We also offered our documentary-making services to shoot a video on each project in order to facilitate dissemination of information relative to the projects. As a result of our alliance, we identified people who worked as videographers, as well as individuals who are involved in arts-based social development work. As a result two documentary videos have been created and an Aboriginal theatre group has emerged through this collaborative. Inversely, our university has benefited much in terms of having members of the project and the larger Aboriginal community help our students and colleagues understand the devastating effects of the residential school system on Aboriginal people in Canada. For us as academics, we certainly have been challenged and encouraged to reflect upon Eurocentric ways of writing and engaging in meaningful community-based research.

5. Academic partners had for the most part very supportive academic work environments, which encouraged such community-based work.

We believe that if allies, working in academic institutions, wish to collaborate with Aboriginal communities in any manner, they need to have nurturing and supportive work environments. It is very important that academic workplaces show great flexibility in order to accommodate community partners. A simple task such as accessing parking passes for community collaborators can be most helpful in creating accessibility for our partners. Larger issues, such as valuing community-based research, are also essential in sustaining the enthusiasm for one's commitment to this type of research.

V) Conclusion

Since the beginning of this journey, our alliance has been both intellectually and

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personally satisfying. Given that our collaboration is still in its infancy stage, there is much room for future research on how our work has evolved and been shaped by our mutual collaboration. We believe strongly that our alliance works because of the determining factors described above. These are influences, which are specific to this particular alliance, and should be viewed and appreciated as such.

We have, however, taken the time to share our experiences because even though these determining factors are specific to both the Healing and Four Directions projects, we believe that they may be useful in inspiring others in academic institutions and communities engaged in similar types of partnerships. Of particular importance is the attention, which we, as a collective, have purposefully attributed to our own social locations and how our experiences with marginalization have informed the way we are committed to this project. Of note is the fact that we believe that the personal friendship, which we've developed not only with Lou and Donna but other members of the project, is fundamental in making this alliance an honest success.

Future research on the impact of the project on consumers of the programs as well as the evolving relationship between Wilfrid Laurier University and the Healing and Four Directions projects will inevitably mean opening up our alliance to fellow collaborators. It is hoped that in the future we will also have a clearer, more well defined illustration of the dynamics of each and every one of the determining factors, which have shaped our collaboration thus far. What is important to us as allies is to continue in our commitment to creating spaces whereby academia and community can work together in order to enhance the lives of members within various Aboriginal communities living in the Region of Waterloo.

Can university/community collaboration create spaces for Aboriginal reconciliation? We believe that our collaboration illustrates certain examples, which would lead us to answer "yes". Evidently we have much work ahead of us to truly show the evidence of the

work that we do and the claim that we make that university/community collaboration can be empowering to Aboriginal spheres and thus Aboriginal reconciliation. We are most painfully cognizant of the fact that historically, Aboriginal people have not been the benefactors of research executed in Aboriginal milieus. What we hope our collaboration does, is help to turn the table on years of academic exploitation in favour of a model, which may be viewed as imitable.

Authors' Note:

Certain segments of information contained herein have been illustrated in other academic forums particularly around the information sharing on the Healing and Four Directions projects as well as pieces of the literature review. The result of this particular article is more of a reflective presentation on the strengths and challenges of our collaboration and the meanings, which we attribute to our partnership and how it relates to the broader work of Aboriginal reconciliation between two Aboriginal projects in Kitchener-Waterloo. There are several more articles that can and will be teased out and expanded upon in the coming years regarding this collaboration. Here we try to give the reader an introduction to the first stage of our work together. We are grateful to our colleagues in Winnipeg and the two reviewers for the opportunity to illustrate our partnership through this medium.

Ginette Lafreniere

Ginette is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Work at Wilfrid Laurier University. She teaches in the area of diversity, oppression and marginalisation, community interventions and research. She is the Director of the Social Innovation Research Group which values university-community collaboration. She is currently engaged in research relative to community interventions with survivors of the residential school system and best practices for social service providers working with survivors of war, torture and organized violence in Africa.

Papa Lamine Diallo

Lamine is an assistant professor at Wilfrid Laurier University (Brantford Campus) in Organizational Leadership Studies. Lamine has worked for many years within various ethnocultural spheres, primarily working on issues relative to social inclusion of African communities. He is the President of the African Association of the Region of Waterloo as well as the current Chairperson of the Healing of the Seven Generations. He is involved in several projects aimed at enhancing capacity building for African and Aboriginal people in the Waterloo Region. His research interests include non-profit management and collaboration, decentralized cooperation and international development as well as race relations amongst francophone Africans in Ontario and Quebec.

Lou Henry

Lou Henry is the founding Executive Director of the Four Directions Aboriginal Restorative Justice Project in Kitchener, Waterloo. He works with adults and youth offenders through sentencing circles and aboriginal-specific healing plans in order to restore personal and spiritual balance in the lives of Aboriginal people. He has recently produced a video on his project which is gaining enormous popularity in the province of Ontario due to the low rates of recidivism of the Four Directions project.

Donna Dubie

Donna Dubie is the founding Executive Director of the Healing of the Seven Generations Project (H7G) which is a community-based initiative aimed at redressing the traumas endured by the survivors and intergenerational survivors of the residential school system. Donna enjoys enormous success within the community as evidenced by the overwhelming amount of people utilizing and benefiting from the services which H7G provides. She too, has recently produced a video on the merits of university-community collaboration and the work which she does with the Aboriginal community in the Region of Waterloo.

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Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice “Pathways to Peace”

Joe Pintarics and
Karen Sveinunggaard



Abstract

Community justice initiatives are now common in Canada, both for young offenders and in adult criminal cases; there are only a few examples of alternative methods for dealing with justice issues in the area of mandated child welfare services. The initiative outlined in this paper represents one of the most comprehensive family justice initiatives in First Nations Child and Family Services in Canada.

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice offers a new way of addressing conflict in child and family matters, outside of the regular Child and Family Services (CFS) and court systems. It incorporates the traditional peacemaking role that has existed for centuries in Northern Manitoba Cree communities, alongside contemporary family mediation. The program brings together family, extended family, community members, Elders, social workers and community service providers in the resolution of child protection concerns through the use of properly trained Okweskimowewak (family mediators). The Okweskimowewak’s role involves assisting participants to articulate their personal ‘truth’ (dabwe) and to hear and respect the dabwe of others; to create a safe and nurturing context by addressing inherent power imbalances; to explore the root causes of family conflict in order to address the long term best interests of children; and to facilitate innovative and collaborative planning outcomes for families.

The program was developed by the Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, a mandated

First Nations Child and Family Service agency, although it receives its service mandate from the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Executive. It is jointly funded by the Aboriginal Justice Strategy of Justice Canada and the Manitoba Department of Family Services and Housing. Overall direction for the program is provided by the First Nations Family Justice Committee, a sub-committee of the MKO Executive consisting of the Grand Chief of MKO, the Executive Director of Awasis Agency, and representative chiefs of the MKO region. The program currently employs a Program Coordinator, two full time regional Okweskimowewak, two full time community-based Okweskimowewak and an administrative assistant.

Since its inception in 1999, the program has received referrals involving more than seven hundred families, including well over 1900 children and 1500 volunteer participants. Services have been provided in seventeen First Nation communities in Northern Manitoba as well as in Thompson, Winnipeg, The Pas, and Gillam.

The *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* program responds to all aspects of mandated child welfare, as well as other situations where the best interests of children are in jeopardy. These have included mediating care placement arrangements; child-parent conflicts; family-agency or family-agency-system conflicts; assisting in the development of service plans in neglect and abuse cases; advocating on behalf of families attempting to access services; family violence; larger community-wide

conflicts; and working to address systemic problems which impact the lives of First Nations children and families. We believe that by establishing processes which focus on restoring balance and harmony within families and communities, we are working towards an overall increase in the health and wellness of community members.

*And you who would understand justice,
How shall you, unless you
look upon all deeds
In the fullness of light?
Only then shall you know that the erect
And the fallen are but one
man standing in
The twilight between the
night of his pigmy-self
And the day of his god-self.
K. Gibran*

To those who dream, and refuse to yield...

To the elders, visionaries, and wisdom keepers who breathed life into the program; to the children and families who so willingly step forward and trust the sacredness of the circle; to the First Nations leadership and communities who created the space, and continue to tend the soil in which the program blossoms; to the social workers and community service providers who work to deconstruct old and obsolete – and yet pervasive -- power structures; and, to our funders who continue to “risk doing things differently”...

we thank you!
Ekosani!

Joe and Karen

Barriers To Conciliation In Mandated Child Welfare

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice program was born out of a great deal of frustration experienced by mandated First Nations Child and Family Services agencies in general, and the Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba in particular. The following section highlights various legal, legislative and practice barriers experienced by First Nations Child and Family Services agencies, and offers insights into the context from which the program grew¹.

Mandated child welfare practice tends to focus on deficit reduction much more readily than on promotion of capacities and assets (Thomas, 1994). Practice is often developed from case-specific, protectionist frames of reference, and as a result is more reactive than proactive in nature. Auxiliary service providers, particularly in remote northern communities, are scarce and restricted by narrowly defined mandates and funding structures. Too often, there is little attempt in the present system to look at the larger familial or community contexts, and little opportunity for genuine dialogue or collaborative planning (Mayer, 1985). Holistic approaches to health and well-being for children and families

that bring together all of the required supports and services are lacking.

The 'best interest' standard (commonly known as the 'test') has for some time governed Canadian judicial decision-making and social work practice. Manitoba's *Child and Family Services Act* sets forth a list of criteria that must be applied to every aspect of a social worker's interactions with a child, including placement and planning. The court's reliance on this 'best interest' test has, more often than not, proven discriminatory for First Nations families. It has often been cited as being too vague and subject to the personal values and interpretations of the decision-maker, resulting in inconsistent judgements (Bernd & Issenegger, no date; and Monture, 1989). As is the case for all Canadian common law, Manitoba's *Child and Family Services Act* is based on the standards of behaviour generally set by Euro-Canadian middle class society. Seldom is the larger, antecedent problems of poverty, racism, oppression and post-colonial residuals incorporated into legal decisions (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997).

Motivated by the 'best interests' of a child, Manitoba's *Child and Family Services Act* grants enormous power to social workers to remove children from their homes. "*Once children are removed, the onus falls on the parents to disprove any accusations regarding neglect or abuse...The social worker-family relationship is jeopardized when the worker apprehends the child, while at the same time trying to establish a working relationship with the parent*" (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.34, 37). Due to fear of incrimination, parents unsuccessful in meeting their child care obligations are not likely to admit their 'failures' for fear of permanent removal of their children. Likewise, the agency and system are not likely to admit any potential wrong-doing on their part, either from fear of potential litigation or simply out of fear of losing standing. Such an environment can neither defuse conflicts nor resolve any difficulties the participants may be experiencing.

Once First Nations children and families find themselves caught up in the provincial

legal system, they often become further discouraged and disempowered. The quality and quantity of legal representation available to First Nation families in Northern Manitoba is often woefully lacking. They rarely have a personal interview with their lawyer, often only speaking to him or her on the phone just prior to court proceedings (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.36). While the legal profession's code of ethics obligates lawyers to provide 'vigorous' legal representation to the best of their ability, in too many cases in Northern Manitoba, legal advice is motivated more by the expediencies created by inadequate funding than by exploring all legal options available to a child or a family. Coupled with poor, and at times absent, translation services and protracted court processes, these impediments combine to create a sense of bewilderment for families. From the ensuing lack of understanding and involvement in court proceedings (Maresca, 1995), "*(p)arents have been known to ask their lawyer after a permanent order has been granted on their children, "When do we get our children back?"*" (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.24).

Responsibility, accountability, and ownership rest with the mandated child welfare or legal systems and away from First Nations families and communities (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.24). When parental rights are terminated by CFS agencies or the courts, so are parental responsibilities toward the child. "*First Nations communities are disempowered of their community responsibilities toward families when cases are taken through judicial proceedings under the authority of the provincial or federal court system*" (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.37). Accountability for service outcomes is to funders and regulators, not to First Nations children or families. 'Ownership' of programs and services is often maintained by outside agencies or departments and not by First Nations communities.

The practice methodologies and philosophies that produced these barriers continue to operate in the existing

framework of mandated child welfare in Northern Manitoba. Even as new, culturally-consistent agencies and programs take the place of old mainstream services, these often continue to serve pre-existing regulatory power structures and systemic paradigms. The *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* program was specifically developed as one option for addressing many of these barriers. The program focuses on promoting families' strengths and capacities while exploring the best interests of children from a family and community perspective, away from the courts. To accomplish this, we bring together all the important decision-makers in a child's life in a safe and collaborative environment, with the goal of long term harmony for the family.

Program Background

Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, one of the mandated First Nations Child and Family Services (CFS) agencies in the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) region, began in the early 1990's researching alternative ways to address child protection concerns outside of the legal system. Although Awasis Agency had been created in 1984 to offer culturally specific child and family services to First Nations communities, the agency thought that establishing services outside the realm of provincial court systems would further improve outcomes for First Nations children.

This early research phase included an in-depth literature review as well as the practice methodologies of various alternative justice initiatives and mandated child welfare developments throughout Canada, the United States, New Zealand, and Australia. While many of these programs promised attractive possibilities, each lacked fundamental components deemed important for successful implementation in Northern Manitoba. Many were still too closely tied to what were known to be ineffective external systems; some had entities other than the family as their point of entry; others had their focus more on retribution than on reconciliation. In

consultations with Elders, Chiefs, and communities, Awasis Agency decided to revive and re-establish the traditional peacemaker role (Sawatzky, Pintarics & MacDonald, 1990) that has existed in First Nations communities for centuries.

Although the program was developed by the Awasis Agency, it receives its 'formal' service mandate from the Manitoba Keewatinowi Okimakanak (MKO) Executive. Since participation in the program is totally voluntary, its real mandate comes from the participants themselves. We have deliberately situated the program outside mandated child welfare as well as current justice structures, in order to ensure neutrality.

Funding for the program was secured in the fall of 1999, in a cost-shared arrangement between the Aboriginal Justice Strategy of Justice Canada and the Manitoba Department of Family Services and Housing. Overall direction for the program is provided by the First Nations Family Justice Committee, a sub-committee of the MKO Executive consisting of the Grand Chief of MKO, the Executive Director of Awasis Agency, and representative chiefs of the MKO region. Several articles and booklets, along with a book entitled *First Nations Family Justice: Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* (1997) were written detailing the development of this initiative.

The Cree Language

Language carries culture, and culture carries... the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world (Ngugu Wa Thiong'o, 1997).

Language shapes and is shaped by our perceptions. From the outset, the Elders and Wisdom Keepers expressed a strong reluctance to 'decontextualize' the process. The development team knew that in trying to name the '*manito*', the 'mystery and magic' of the peacemaking process, they needed to begin with the Northern Manitoba Cree language. Language is the medium through which history, culture and world

view are transmitted. English simply cannot capture the soft shades and nuances of meaning contained in the Cree language. These nuances or shadings are ‘of a fabric’ with the lived experience of the people, who fashion them, first into their appreciation of life (*ininisiwin*), then into their regard and deep respect for “our place in the universe” (*ototemitwin*), and finally, into the language (Marris, 1976; and Hall, 1976)3. In peacemaking these same nuances contain – as holons (Wilbur, 2001) – the meanings of ‘conflict’ as well as those of ‘resolution’.

Cree, like most First Nation languages, is predominantly verb-based rather than noun-based, with an emphasis on retaining and regaining balance and harmony with all things. Individuals and events are understood within their temporal and spatial contexts and are seen as dynamic and ever-changing.

Things are perceived not so much as separate “things in themselves” but in terms of their activities, with special emphasis placed upon their constantly changing relationships with all other “things” that surround them...Verb-based languages also suggest that things such as events and people cannot be viewed as static and unchanging. Individuals continue to grow and develop. Life is a journey that is filled with events that challenge and affect the paths chosen...As First Nations language describes existence in terms of relationships, it is understood that it is in and through relationships that people grow, learn, heal and achieve health and wellness (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.41) .

Very deliberately, the program was named *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin*: First Nations Family Justice. In Northern Manitoba Cree, it stands for “Let’s all set our families right”. It is based on an understanding of harmony, of family, of community, and of “justice”. The word justice is not directly translatable in the Cree language. The closest is to ‘achieve harmony or balance’.

Our understanding of justice and our first experiences with justice are formed or occur within the context of our families. In

the Cree language, the family (minisiwin) is seen as the place to create beauty. If through community justice our efforts are aimed at creating minahsin (a state of beauty or goodness; health), and when we understand that the place of beauty is the family (minisiwin), then our efforts must be directed at the family level. Meenoostahtan Minisiwin involves both “justice by community” and “family justice”. The community becomes the context within which family justice is addressed (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.7).

The following Cree expressions⁴ were chosen as cornerstones of the *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* program:

- ♦ **Dabwe:** “say things right.” There is no word for absolute truth. This word implies to speak as right as you can about a particular subject – what you know to be true to you.
- ♦ **Inninu:** “Human being.”
- ♦ **Ininisiwin:** “Wisdom.” Its connection with inninu (human being) implies that wisdom lies within each individual.
- ♦ **Kanawapamisoo Pitama:** “Look at yourself first.” Introspection.
- ♦ **Manito:** Spirit; that which is known or accepted to be but not seen.
- ♦ **Meenoostahtan:** “Let’s set things right.” To reset an object or situation to its proper path or state.
- ♦ **Minahyawin:** derivative of minahsin (beauty). This word is now used to refer to the well-being of an individual or a situation.
- ♦ **Minahsin:** “beautiful” or “good.” In a state of beauty or goodness.
- ♦ **Minisiwin:** “family,” “to create beauty or place of beauty.” This suggests that the family was seen as the place of beauty or the place to create beauty.
- ♦ **Minoopuhniw:** also derived from minahsin (beauty). Something or someone is flowing beautifully; it is in harmony; something is in harmony and following on its proper path.
- ♦ **Okweskimowew:** “headman” or person who speaks; one who speaks well

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin Framework⁵

The framework of the *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* Program is depicted in the diagram below. The circle represents the gathering of individual, family, and community. The circle is depicted as three strong, interwoven strands representing mind, body and spirit, and individual, family and community.

The Elders teach us that individual strands can break under pressure; alone, an individual, a family, or a community can also break. Woven together with mind, body and spirit, the individual, family and community are strong.

Around the perimeter of the circle is the process of inquiry, learning and action which is interspersed with reflection. This represents the developmental processes which the individual, family and community go through when moving towards the outcome of *Meenoostahtan: Minoopuhniw* (harmony), *Minahsin* (beauty) and *Minahyawin* (health). Justice is attained when harmony, beauty and health are achieved at the levels of individual, family and community.

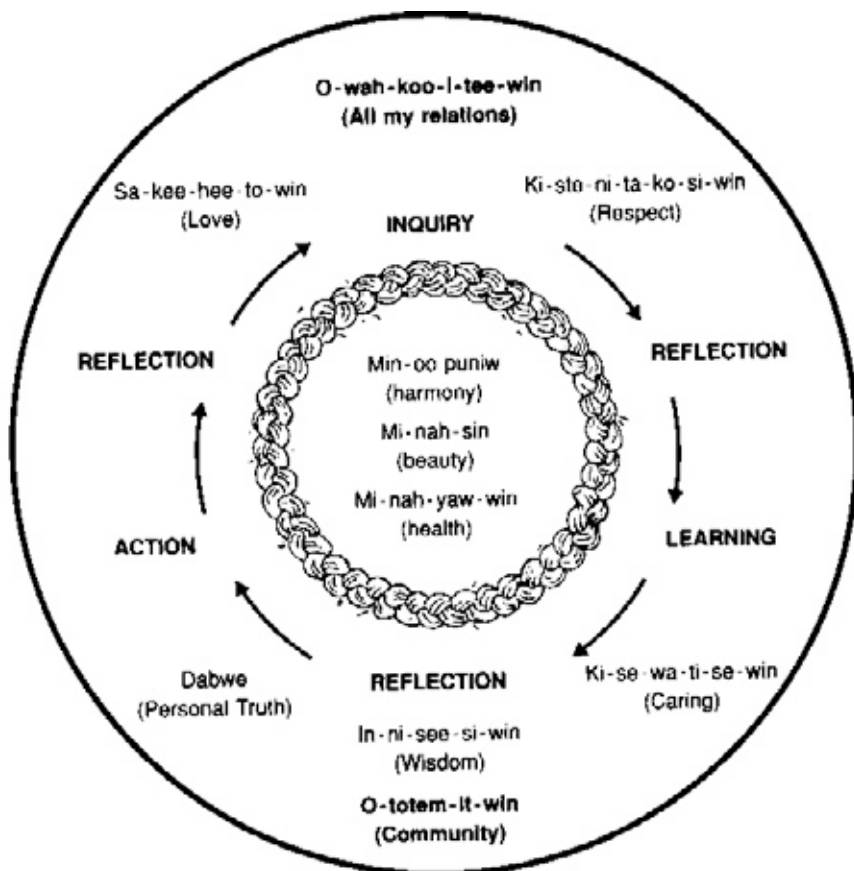
The framework of the program is supported by *sakeeheetowin* (love), *kistenitakosiwin* (respect), *kisewatisewin* (caring), *inisiwin* (wisdom), and *dabwe* (respect for personal truth). The entire framework is encircled by *owahkooiteewin* (all my relations) and *ototemitwin* (community) as any action can only be taken in the context of relations and community.

Program Overview

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice Program offers an alternative method for addressing child and family matters outside the regular CFS and Family Court systems. The program brings together family, extended family, community members, elders and community service providers in the resolution of

child protection concerns through the deployment of properly trained Okweskimowewak (family mediators). The Okweskimowewak are trained to provide either traditional peacemaking or a more contemporary form of family mediation.

The focus of interventions with families is on facilitating the care and healthy development of children, and on restoring the health, harmony and balance in the family. The emphasis is on establishing strong care-giving environments through the assistance of community members and service providers, and on ensuring that the responsibility for addressing child and family matters remains with the family and the community. The process does not assign blame; rather it identifies the supports and developmental opportunities required to assist the family in becoming strong and healthy care-providers. The CFS worker continues to act as monitor and resource in planning for the child throughout the process (Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997).



While the program strives to facilitate the development of healthy family environments so children can remain at, or return home, in the event this is not possible, temporary alternative placements will be sought with extended family, other community members or such other placements as the children's safety and care needs may dictate.

Program Goals

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin aims to establish a community based collaborative process that begins from a place of strength and wisdom and emphasizes relationships and the restoring of harmony and balance in addressing the best interests of First Nations children and families. Our goal is to establish equitable and just processes that enable the sharing of power, the involvement of the wider community, and the establishment of plans that address the immediate, mid and long range goals of the family.

Program Scope

Since September 1999, the program has provided services in the following Manitoba First Nations communities: *Manto Sipi* (Gods River), *Manto Sahkabikan* (God's Lake Narrows), *Moosocoot* (War Lake), *Kawechiwasihk* (York Factory), *Kinosao Sipi* (Norway House), *Pimicikamak* (Cross Lake), *Nisichawayasihk* (Nelson House), *Barren Lands* (Brochet), *Bunibonibee* (Oxford House), *Fox Lake*, *Northlands* (Lac Brochet), *Sayisi Dene* (Tadoule Lake), *Shamattawa*, *Tataskweyak* (Split Lake), *Opaskwayak* (The Pas), *St. Theresa Point*, *Opipon Napiwin* (South Indian Lake), as well as Thompson, Winnipeg, The Pas, and Gillam.

The program responds to all aspects of mandated child welfare, as well as other situations where the best interests of children are in jeopardy. These have included mediating care placement arrangements; child-parent conflicts; family-agency or family-agency-system conflicts; assisting in the development of service plans in neglect and abuse cases; advocating on behalf of families attempting to access

services; family violence; larger community-wide conflicts; and working to address systemic problems which impact the lives of First Nations children and families.

Program Personnel

As indicated earlier, the program currently employs a Program Coordinator, two full time regional Okweskimowewak (family mediators), two full time community-based Okweskimowewak and an administrative assistant. In the first few years of program operation, part-time Okweskimowewak were employed in six First Nations communities. Four of these positions were turned into regional positions to allow for increased program flexibility and to offer the services in a larger number of communities.

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin philosophies, roles and responsibilities, training requirements, program protocols, policies and procedures, and reporting and monitoring requirements are consistent with the Code of Ethics of Family Mediations Canada. They were designed in consultation with Elders, Traditional Wisdom Keepers, community leaders, as well as men's, women's and youths' circles.

The Okweskimowew's Role

The role of the Okweskimowew is not to solve a problem; he or she facilitates the understanding and discussions that lead to a resolution. An Okweskimowew may be involved in any or all of the following roles: communications facilitator; process advocate; process monitor; objective third eye, ear, heart; validator; permission giver; explorer; educator; reframer; translator; reality tester; protector; and, limit setter and boundary keeper (*Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba, 1997, p.63-64*). The roles adopted by any one Okweskimowew are influenced by his or her personality, style and specific circumstances, as much as by the perceived requirements of any one *Meenoostahtan* process and its participants.

Program Referrals

Referrals to the program come from a variety of sources: CFS agencies, schools, Chief and Council, court system, other community service providers and self-referrals. All referrals are required to meet the following basic eligibility criteria. First, we generally only accept referrals related to mandated child welfare concerns. Secondly, in order to benefit from our service offerings, participants must come voluntarily; we both screen and coach as needed, to ensure that each is able to articulate their own story -- either directly or indirectly; and we advocate and clarify, so that each of the parties understands the repercussions of all possible outcomes. The care and protection of children is not negotiable; this is secured before the start of Meenoostahtan, as is the safety and protection of all individual participants. Everyone must agree to abide by the rules of the group and is asked to sign a memorandum of agreement, pledging to maintain confidentiality. Finally, all the participants are asked to commit the time and energy necessary to reach an agreement, and, to then sign and agree to uphold the terms of the collective plan of action developed through the process (Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: Family Justice Program Standards Manual).

The participation of children is encouraged, either directly (if children are deemed mature enough and the context of the sessions will not further traumatize the child) or indirectly through a designated support person or an advocate (for example, extended family or community members; specific service provider; the Children's Advocate, etc.) with whom the child has a relationship. When the agenda calls for a lot of 'grown-up' talk, children would only be invited to participate in sessions specific to their concerns. Sessions are automatically stopped by the Okweskimowew if ever the best interests of any children present are deemed in jeopardy. Depending on the presenting issues, sessions may be resumed as soon as the needs of the children are addressed.

Program Outcomes

Since program start-up, well over seven hundred families have been referred to the program⁶. This represents services to more than 1900 children. With the exception of the first year of operation, the program has maintained an average of 200 cases per year on their caseloads. Families remain on the program's caseload for an average of nine months, with some cases followed for one year after reaching an agreement. The number of new referrals for the 2004/05 fiscal year was down substantially due to staff turnover, although the complexity of the cases referred have continued to increase over time (see Case Examples starting on page 76). The program has been successful in attracting large numbers of 'volunteer participants'. Volunteers are participants who join our process as children's' or parents' support persons and other extended family.

The formalized evaluations (both external⁷ and internal⁸) which have been completed on the program have consistently found high levels of program satisfaction from both families and referring agents. The latest program evaluation (completed in fall of 2004⁹) found 100% satisfaction rate amongst family participants, with 81% indicating they were very satisfied with the services received from the program. Participants most often listed more positive and open communication; a safe environment; and the experience of 'being heard' as the best aspects of the program. One hundred percent (100%) of participants indicated they would use the program again should the need arise.

Ninety percent (90%) of referring agents stated that the program was adequately addressing a community need, citing 'preventing children from entering care' and 'planning for children after apprehension' as the two main reasons for making a referral to the program. Referring agents most often listed 'keeping families together' (48% of respondents), 'restoring harmony and balance' (48%) and 'improving working relationships between families and CFS and community' (43%) as program benefits. 'Allows for better working relationships with family'; 'voluntary nature of program';

and ‘family-centred versus child-centred’ were cited as the main difference between the program and CFS by referring agents. Ninety five percent (95%) of referring agents stated that the program was valuable to their First Nation community.

Although the vast majority of individuals who have participated in a *Meenoostahtan* process have stated positive experiences with the program, there continues to be a certain amount of resistances from referring agents, and to a lesser degree from families, to ‘do things differently’. This was again listed in the 2004 program evaluation as the largest barrier to participation. Feedback from social workers suggests that referring to the *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* program can ease their workloads in the long term and can improve their working relationships with families. At the same time, involvement with the program increases practice transparency and accountability which seems to lead to a hesitation to refer. The reluctance of some families to participate is most often cited as a lack of understanding of the process and a concern regarding confidentiality. Ensuring confidentiality is maintained in small rural communities where the lives of families are intricately intertwined is a legitimate concern. The *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* program has established very strict confidentiality requirements which apply equally to all participants, including professionals (for example, note taking during sessions is limited to memory jogs, and all documentation is destroyed at the close of the sessions, with the exception of the Okweskimowew drafting an agreement).

Resistance to participate in ‘alternative dispute resolution processes’ has been cited in other research studies, including Carruthers’ (1997) review of Nova Scotia’s legislated child protection mediation program, and the newly released British Columbia Task Force on Family Justice (2005):

There once was an expectation that if mediation or other ‘alternative dispute resolution’ (ADR) options were simply made available, people would recognize their advantages and seek them out, rather than choose to go the court. This has not

happened to the extent some expected. Although more and more families are aware of “ADR”, public awareness of these options still competes with a lifetime of exposure to the court system....The fact is most people learn about mediation when they participate in it, and most are pleased with the process and the result (BC’s Justice Review Task Force, 2005).

A statistically sound cost-benefit analysis has not yet been effectively performed on the program due to the number of variables involved. These include the difficulties of predicting alternative outcomes when it comes to ever-changing family dynamics (i.e. whether a child would or would not have entered care had the program not been involved), and estimating court costs versus program costs. However, we have reason to believe that the program achieves similar results as those found in other research studies using mediation with child protection as reflected in the following statement:

There are a variety of implications for cost and time savings when mediation is used in child protection. Benefits are both financial and outcome related with respect to the best interests of children. Improvement in judicial economy was noted such that reduced demands on the judge’s time allowed for greater attention to detail to other matters (pg 4)...Additional cost savings may be realized for cases in which mediation results in a higher rate of compliance with service plans, court orders and mediation agreements than would otherwise occur. Better compliance in turn may reduce time in costly out-of-home care or negotiating visitation or living arrangement that may promote stability for children and fewer complications for child welfare workers (pg 7)...Calculation of precise financial saving for Michigan as a result of permanency planning mediation may be elusive because of the multiple factors to consider... However, concluding that there is a financial savings to be gained from mediation seems reasonable (Anderson & Whalen, 2004, pg 9).

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin Process

There are three components of the *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* model that are used to ensure that services are standardized and consistent: (1) Intake and Pre-mediation; (2) Meenoostahtan process; (3) Follow-up.

Intake and Pre-mediation process

The intake process involves receiving, documenting, researching, and screening all referrals received by the program. In preparation for all family sessions, the Okweskimowew meets independently with the participants and informs them about the *Meenoostahtan* process and the reasons for the family sessions. Pre-mediation sessions are always held in private: most often, families are met in their homes or at such places as they deem safe for themselves. Social workers and agency personnel generally prefer to meet in their offices. With each of the parties in turn, the Okweskimowew specifies the care, protection and safety issues that underlie the referral and clarifies that the focus of the *Meenoostahtan* is on future choices, not past grievances (although these may be brought up to start the healing process of the relationships of the participants). The use of ceremonies or specific rituals (opening and closing prayers, the use of a smudge, eagle feathers or talking sticks, or other ritual requests) are discussed. The Okweskimowew outlines process expectations and rules of conduct, and determines the appropriate participation of children and support people. Finally, any conflict of interest questions that may arise are addressed.

Early in the life of the program, an important ethical clarification was reached in discussions between the program and the Awasis Agency about the voluntary nature of participation. In order to ensure a relatively level playing field for agencies and families alike, it was decided that while participation is voluntary for families and the agencies, this did not extend to individual workers; the way an agency chose to represent itself in mediation was deemed to be an internal

management decision, and not an ethical choice for mediators to make.

A great deal of time and energy goes into the “pre-mediation” process. For the participants, pre-mediation is a time to ask their difficult or embarrassing questions. It is also the time when we coach participants to find the best ways to get their message across to ‘the other side’ so that both will be and experience being heard, and yet for neither to be pushy or offensive. Some of our strategies include feedback, brainstorming options, role-plays, playing devil’s advocate, and the like. The primary intent is conciliatory: we help the parties to become focussed on their ‘interests’ rather than their ‘positions’¹⁰, and to draw attention to the relationships that exist between them. At the same time, we begin to explore ‘antecedent causes’ rather than focusing exclusively on ‘presenting difficulties’¹¹, understanding that in order to facilitate long term outcomes we need to look beyond the ‘symptoms’.

Another key aspect of our pre-mediation process is that participants decide the format of the meeting. Some feel comfortable in a traditional circle and have strong preferences for certain elders or other support persons they wish to bring along. Others experience greater degrees of safety in the formality of mediation contexts. All these features are negotiated among the parties, ‘shuttle diplomacy’ style: all the ‘primary disputants’ must reach agreement before we proceed. But in all cases, the participants are architects of their own process.

Some cases do not progress beyond this point, as the parties are either unwilling to commit to the expectations of the program, or they have managed to resolve the issues on their own. For some, the shuttle diplomacy in negotiating process is sufficient to settle their concerns, while for others still, since the program is built on voluntary participation, individuals are simply not interested.

Meenoostahtan Process

Deliberations of the presenting concerns often take place in a sharing or talking

circle format – but always as the parties have agreed in pre-mediation. These circles may extend over several hours or even days. Each participant is given the opportunity to voice their views and their perspectives on the issues. At times, strong feelings are expressed; these are processed by the Okweskimowew as they surface. Discussions led by the Okweskimowew assist in determining the underlying problems, and ways to resolve them.

As already noted earlier, the Okweskimowew is not there to fix anything or to problem-solve. Most of the Okweskimowew's energies are devoted to the creation of space in which the participants can meet one another, and shift their position from being conflicted or oppositional with one another to one of joining forces to collectively address the real problems. Facilitative space is created to allow the participants to 'absorb' the conflict back into their relating. Once the relating shifts enough that it becomes safe to include ambivalence, or even to just agree to disagree, then there is more room to attend to the real concerns.

In the traditional Peacemaker role, the Okweskimowew may, at times, become directive of process, as fits the specific gifts of each individual practitioner. A Pipe Carrier may, for example, choose to hold a Pipe Ceremony. He or she would then share with the participants the Teachings the spirit guides have disclosed. The Teachings would often include direction for the holding of a ceremony, such as a Sweat Lodge, or a Feast, but one in which the participants must collaborate in some way. This is not a linear process. The 'sacrifice' or the 'giving of yourself' is not intended to be retribution. The participants may be directed to work together, to learn collaboration or cooperation in 'non-ordinary' space/time in the spiritual realm.

Here too, the intent is to create the possibility for a new way of relating – one that offers the possibility to contain ambivalence or even agreeing to disagree, but not from a conflicted place, but rather from an honoring or a valuing of 'differentnesses'. The Teachings are always

given in a spirit of kindness, and always contain aspects of the Seven Sacred Laws: *Sakihiwewin* (loving), *Kistenimitowin* (respecting), *Tapwewiwin* (being honest; truthful), *Sookitehiwewin* (being brave), *Tapahthenimowin* (being humble), *Ininisiwin* (being human; wisdom) and *Dabwe* (truth). Often, these Teachings are indirect; the lessons flow from the experiencing. Space is created in which learning can occur.

Power balancing is central to successful resolutions. Advocates are often used to amplify the voices of the children, and at times, those of adults as well. Explaining the role of advocates, John Paul Lederach (1995) states that "(t)heir work pushes for a balancing of power, that is, a recognition of mutual dependence increasing the voice of the less powerful and a legitimation of their concerns' (Lederach, 1995, p.13). Ensuring that the voices of all participants carry similar weight leads to the possibility of negotiation by creating a better understanding of interdependence and balancing of power (Lederach, 1995, p.13). "*Women can feel safe to deal with their issues, children will have a voice, men can let their guard down, elders can become students as well as teachers, and leaders can follow instead of leading*" (Monias, 2005). This room to negotiate makes it possible to work out a new paradigm for relating among the parties.

Balancing power occurs at all levels of our process: between parents and children, where there exists mistreatment that requires addressing; between families and agencies, or in other situations with asymmetrical distributions of power and authority; between agency and community or agencies and their regulatory bodies, as well as in relation to their super-arching political structures. The intent is to make it possible for the participants to relate to one another in a less defended manner. From this less defended place, it becomes more feasible for the participants to plan for different future outcomes.

Based on sharing, discussions and deliberations, the group develops a plan of action. The plan identifies the work to be done to ensure that the immediate and

long term care and protection of children is adequately addressed. It outlines who, or which resources need to be involved; how activities will be completed; each participant's contribution; the monitoring of the agreement; and finally, any contingencies that may arise. Often, the work of planning is anti-climactic: once the group is working in synchrony, the plan becomes almost a matter of course.

The Okweskimowew documents all the aspects of the action plan, and once the participants agree that it accurately reflects the will of the group's process, they all are asked to sign it. The 'original' stays with the program; numbered and tracked copies are made for each of the 'primary disputants'. Courtesy copies are also given to corollaries who have specific tasks to accomplish in relation to the agreement.

Follow Up on Family Plan

At time-intervals determined in the sessions, the Okweskimowew follows up with the 'primary disputants' to see whether the plan is being implemented as agreed, and whether the plan actually works to meet the needs of the participants. Our default process requires follow-up at the one-, three-, and six-month interval following the agreement. Both the frequency of follow-up contacts as well as the length of time a case remains open following agreement are highly case specific. A resolution or agreement with a one-year life-span would be followed up until its conclusion; while a child abuse matter would have a higher frequency of follow-up visits, structured in such shorter time intervals as may be dictated by the children's and participants' safety requirements.

Where a plan goes askew, the Okweskimowew may choose to reconvene the family sessions when further discussion and planning are warranted. This would be the case where goodwill among the participants is intact, and further clarification of issues or positions is needed to ensure continued compliance with the plan. Where goodwill is deemed eroded, and one or more participants are no longer

willing or able to abide by the terms of the agreement, then the Okweskimowew would generally alert the mandated child welfare agent if child welfare concerns surfaced, or the next higher administrative level in the event a service provider failed to follow through. This degree of scrutiny speaks more directly to a "peacekeeping"¹² function in the Okweskimowew's role, which flows from the mandate to serve the best interests of children. In such a case, any possible decision to reconvene would be made only after all child protection or other concerns have been addressed.

Additional Program Activities

Skill development and awareness enhancement for the Okweskimowew(ak) – in both contemporary and traditional peacemaking methodologies— have been an important focus of the program. Training has included: accredited customized mediation training; Neurolinguistic Programming; life skills training; communications training; personal, family and community asset development; personal development; and traditional methodologies based on the teachings of the Elders and Wisdom Keepers as taught in the Teaching Lodges and other ceremonies. All personal development opportunities and traditional teachings are open to community members as well as other service providers.

In June 2004, the program received a small grant from the Aboriginal Justice Initiative of Justice Canada to help bring to light the situation of Northern Manitoba youth caught up in the justice system. A working group, representing all community interests was struck and given the task of assessing the full nature of the problem faced by these youths, and to recommend appropriate action.

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: Pathways To Peace

The countless paths one traverses in life are all equal. Oppressors and oppressed meet at the end, and the only thing that

prevails is that life was altogether too short for both (Castaneda, 1972).

Today, alternative dispute resolution is sometimes seen as a magical solution to all the woes of our ailing justice system. And yet in too many jurisdictions, conflict resolution remains shackled to existing judicial processes. The mainstream justice system is failing most our citizenry because it is so weighted down with impossible, arcane rules that no one can find their way through. To bind mediation to the court's process is to doom mediation to the same fate, and in a far shorter time. The rules already exist; now they only need to be appended.

As well, in the mainstream culture there exists a perception that wrongdoing is related to weakness of character or to some other personal shortcoming. Even when the parties agree to mediate, most often the stated goal -- and therefore inevitably the resolution to the conflict -- comes in the form of some agreed upon tangible: apology, monetary compensation, work in lieu of compensation, and the like (Sawatzky, Pintarics, & MacDonald, 1990). One of our greatest challenges is to resist the temptation to turn peacemaking into a more subtle way of meting out retribution, or worse still, one of abrogating the rights of participants in our hurry to find a goal or object-based resolutions.

Mediative processes are becoming more popular in mandated child welfare. There appears to be a lot of pressure, particularly from the system, to use social workers as mediators, believing them better equipped to understand the complexities of the system. When professionals (the mediator and the agency worker) of equal socio-economic standing, with similar worldviews and educational backgrounds, and who may share the same work environment deliberate with family members who represent a lesser socio-economic standing, this scenario presents enormous challenges to mediator impartiality. Unless appropriate safeguards are built into the process, child protection mediation becomes a 'velvet masked' medium for transmitting the same dominant values and standards, while

wielding the same power over families.

The Northern Manitoba Cree worldview holds that in a conflict, it is the relationship between the parties that is harmed or out of balance, and needs to be restored. There is a generally held belief in an oneness of the created order (Sawatzky, Pintarics & MacDonald, 1990). Healing strategies are brought in to re-establish the oneness of the family and of the community following an open expression of conflict, or in our case family disruption. Peacemaking is an effective process for exploring the histories and elements that impinge on any given situation, for witnessing the impacts and difficulties experienced by those caught up in the conflict and collectively working to restoring balance, to "set things right" (*meenoostahtan*). Its use with child protection cases or family conflicts is a deliberate attempt to create a process that is holistic; one that focuses on building strong family relationships by addressing the underlying issues which surface as family conflict. This working as a collective in a nurturing and supportive way is a crucial distinction that sets our program offerings apart from other conflict resolution processes.

At its core, Native American Peacemaking is inherently spiritual; it speaks to the connectedness of all things; it focuses on unity, on harmony, and balancing the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical dimensions of a community of people... Peacemaking is more conciliation than mediation. It is relationship centred, not agreement centred...Peacemaking is generally not concerned with distributive justice...as it is with "sacred justice"...Sacred justice is going beyond the techniques for handling conflicts; it involves going to the heart (Bluehouse and Zion, 1993, p.321-322).

Meenoostahtan Minisiwin is premised on the belief that the family (*minisiwin*) has a right to be nurtured and supported in the raising of healthy children; that we all "lose our way and fall off our path" from time to time; that no reconciliation is possible without first the sharing of our respective stories (*dabwe*); and, that those connected to

the family must gather together (*ototemitwin*) and give willingly their offers of support to restore harmony (*minoopuhniw*), beauty (*minahsin*) and health (*minahyawin*).

The larger form of reconciliation we speak of (*minoopuhniw*) cannot occur in the immediate. Though our process must address the presenting issues (e.g. the apprehension of a child, or some acting out behaviour from an adolescent) that brought the participants together, our work is about naming and addressing both mid and long range goals with the family by expanding the circle much wider. While we respond to “cases” – one at a time -- the work is actually with the entire community.

By way of example, a youth had been involved in a severe boundary violation with a young girl. Once the criminal investigation was completed (the case did not proceed to court due to insufficient evidence – a perennial problem in the North due to a general lack of resources) the families were convened together to discuss this problem. The youth’s family in its entirety – the parental sibling set, as well as the key members of the youth’s siblings and cousins all agreed to attend a healing event as a family. They believed the family as a whole carried issues that needed addressing at the systemic level. In this one case, the system was comprised of some 25 adult members of the parental cohort and six youths¹³. Support plans developed for individual members in this group involved expanding the circle wider to include various community service providers and support persons, as well as the community’s leadership.

Case Illustrations

The following cases are presented as examples of the type of reconciliation work the Meenoostahtan Minisiwin program undertakes. They are grouped in the following manner: (1) Family Reconciliation; (2) Family and Agency Reconciliation; (3) Service System Reconciliation; and, (4) Community Reconciliation.

1. Family Reconciliation

A most overt example of this form of mediation involves parents struggling with adolescent children to renegotiate ways of parenting and living together. The following case illustrates an extreme situation, but one which brings to the fore the dynamics in a family that experiences dramatic (and traumatic) disruptions in their history. This case involved multi-layered conflicts and an inordinate number of stakeholders; it therefore highlights the versatility of the program, as well as its ability to tackle complex and difficult situations.

Case Example

This case involved the structuring of a care plan for a 13-year-old boy who was in care in a level-5 placement facility, and with respect of whom the agency of record was seeking a Permanent Order of Guardianship, having exhausted all other legal options. The divorced parents were experiencing a great deal of unresolved post-divorce conflict.

The following additional data was uncovered in the pre-mediation process:

1. The original nuclear family configuration consisted of a Caucasian father and a First Nations mother and their three children (the older two were of age of majority at the time of the referral). The parents had separated soon after the birth of the boy, and later divorced. The custody of the children was awarded to the father as Sole Guardian.
2. The family has had an exhaustive history of contact with the mandated child welfare system. Agencies of record have included a major urban Child and Family Services Agency, the mother’s home community Agency, and a second urban Child and Family Services Agency -- the current agency of record.
3. Recently, the child was ‘living’ with his mother in her home community, as a result of an access visit from which he was never returned. Father claims that his attempts to have his son returned were blocked by systemic attitudes of “...white father trying to take away child from Aboriginal mother and community”.

Soon after this, mother had left her community, and relocated to the urban setting, where "...there were better services to help her son." Soon after the move, there is on record a crisis line call voice recording of the boy phoning in for help because "...my mother is sexually abusing me." When the boy is apprehended, three days later, it was a school complaint about a school-yard fight and not the boy's call that prompted the apprehension. Eventually, a short-term order is awarded to the agency of record, and the boy is placed in a level-5 facility.

4. During the intake period (3 months between referral and start of mediation), the boy had just recently been returned to the level-5 care facility. Over the holidays, he had been granted a weeklong access visit with his mother (who had by now relocated to her home community). At end of the visit, rather than returning the son, the mother made allegations that every staff member and every other resident in the level-5 facility had sexually abused or exploited her son. This caused a two-week delay in the son's return to the care facility, while these allegations were investigated. According to the investigators, the mother showed no concern for the implications of such allegations on the other residents in the facility.
5. According to the current agency of record, the mother is sexually enmeshed with her son (emotional incest). The original apprehension notation "child out of control of parent" was intended to explain a level of disturbance so acute that the boy would regularly defecate and urinate on the apartment floor and then smear the walls with his feces, and/or severely tantrum in the face of any limit setting. The level V care facility reported in pre-mediation interviews that the boy would regularly return to the soiling and tantrum behaviours following each visit (in person or by telephone) with his mother, and that these would then take about 2 – 3 days to bring under control. No such acting out was noted in response to access contact with the father.

6. The mother has steadfastly refused to collaborate with agency attempts to assess her functioning as a parent, or with offers to coach her with parenting skills specific to her son's issues. While reluctant, and clearly fearful of the chaos his ex-wife can cause in his life, the father continued to participate in the boy's treatment plan, and participated with him in family therapy sessions. The father also clearly verbalized his view that the boy needed more help than he was able to provide, and that he was afraid that the placement would not work out.

Throughout the planning, the mother showed a remarkable ability to obfuscate issues. Between the times of referral to the start of mediation proper, the mediation team dealt with innumerable phone calls from the mother. These were filled with vitriolic criticisms and obscenities. Additionally, we fielded formal and informal complaints from, among others, the Office of the Children's Advocate, the office of the Provincial Ombudsman, the Awasis Agency Executive Director, the MKO's Social Services Director, the Director of the MKO Family Secretariat, Band politicians, the Provincial Family Services Team Leader, as well as two provincial cabinet ministers.

Despite efforts by many parties to involve her in the process, Mother chose not to participate. Mediation proceeded in her absence on the following reasoning: 1) She was not a legal guardian of the child; 2) the agency of record would not place the child with her in any event, given the above, and was supporting efforts by the father to regain care and control of his son; 3), mother's appointed support (and the CFS Portfolio Councillor in the mother's home community) was present and participated in the proceedings; and 4) all the parties present felt the need to develop consensus on a care plan for this child, regardless whether mediation or court was the avenue of decision.

A Meenoostahtan process brought together the agency of record's Assistant Director, Supervisor and Case Manager; the community-based agency's Assistant Director, Supervisor and Case Manager;

the provincial family services team leader; the Deputy Children's Advocate; Mother's Advocate, the CFS Portfolio Councillor from Mother's home community; 3 key staffs from the level-5 facility; the boy and his father.

Over an intense ten hours of deliberations, the process produced an agreement which saw the boy return to partial care of his father in less than six months, and a full return to the care of the father within a twelve month time-frame, with appropriate (multiple-) agency and therapy supports. Deliberations included jurisdictional questions between the agency of record and the home community agency. Regulatory concerns brought forth by both the Office of the Children's Advocate as well as the Provincial Team Leader were aired and resolved. Mechanisms to involve a third agency to provide direct case management were established, as the father resided some five hundred miles away from the offices of the agency of record. Finally, a vigorous discussion about the care needs of this boy, complete with matching time lines, produced an all-party agreement on an equivalency to a six-month Short-Term Order of Guardianship with the agency of record, starting on the date of the Agreement. This was immediately followed by an agreed-to equivalency to a six-month Order of Supervision, which contained both mechanisms for increasing frequencies of access contact between father and son, with supports from the level 5 facility, on-going therapy as well as mechanisms for case transfer to the Services to Other Regions program, who would support the case from the father's home community. The discussions also included consensus on appropriate frequency and conditions of access contact between the boy and his mother.

Given the mother's enmeshment and her propensity for involving numerous service providers and their regulatory agencies, as well as the courts, we believe this case would have – in the normal course of events -- been entangled in the courts until the boy reached age of majority. Formal care would have in all likelihood involved

nearly five years in a level-5 care facility, coupled with constant individual therapy.

At last review, the mother had attempted to launch one court challenge to regain custody of her son; it failed, as the mother would not trust any lawyer to bring her case forward. No Motions have been filed since then, to our knowledge; the boy remained with his father; the placement was relatively stable at our last follow-up contact, 12 months after the agreement.

2. Family And Agency Reconciliation

By far the most common sort of reconciliation we provide falls into the category of family and agency conflict. When children have been apprehended, or difficulties arise that may lead to the apprehension of children, we are called in to both broker an agreement between the agency and the family and to provide a formal setting in which serious discussions take place.

Case Example

The initial reason for the referral to the project was to determine care-giving options for a child who was no longer able to reside with his paternal grandparents, because their health had deteriorated. The paternal family did not see mother as an effective parent, and peacemaking was sought to resolve concerns regarding care of the child.

At the same time, the agency in the mother's home community had apprehended her other two children (residing with her) and would also apprehend this third child, were he to come to live with her. They thought mother privately placed her youngest with paternal grandparents as a ruse, to avoid his being apprehended.

Father and his current partner have a baby (6 mos. old). There had been another violent outbreak between them, and the partner had been at the nearest shelter for battered women. She was granted a restraining order against the father and the housing committee established her in the family home so she could parent her baby 'at home' (she is not a band member). This situation – the violence and the restraining order --

produced several additional layers of conflict: father and his partner could neither have access visits, nor support the grandparents with the care of the child. Additionally, the paternal grandparents thought that their son's home was being taken from him, and they were angry with Band Constables for enforcing the Restraining Order and at the Housing Committee for their position.

The Okweskimowew, with the assistance of the Project Coordinator, was able to mediate a resolution to the conflicts identified and facilitate the drawing up of a care plan for the child. It included all parties agreeing to the child returning to the mother on several conditions. First, the child would be placed home with the agency having equivalency to an Order of Supervision; secondly, the mother agreed to work with an Elder in her community who would take responsibility to provide parenting skills coaching to her; both parents agreed to an equitable access arrangement for the father, and both agencies agreed to a formula to support the plan – including monitoring as well as financial supports as needed; finally, all parties agreed to a further Meenoostahtan process to broker on-going care plans for the other two children who were still in care in the mother's home community.

3. Service system Reconciliation

Often when issues spill over beyond the agency, policing and regulatory agencies are called in, such as the Children's Advocate or others. Generally, the process involves family members, the agency, as well as the regulatory bodies in a multi-party process.

Case Example

One of the most protracted and complicated cases included a multiplicity of presenting issues, involving the mandated child welfare services and related Psychological services as well as family counselling services; the Children with Complex Medical Needs Program; the entire spectrum of justice services – including police, courts, legal and Probation Services; and the Thunderbear Healing Lodge.

The initial referral came to us nearly two

years ago (CFS referral, November 2003, and a concurrent referral from Justice -- Community and Youth Corrections July 2004). The work entailed extensive sequential pre-mediations with the parents to help them bring under control the relational violence they were perpetuating on one another. Pre-mediation sessions were scheduled approximately two months apart, and included a thorough review of the integration that had taken place, both as a result from the conflict resolution process as well as from the personal and relational counselling that both parents were attending as part of an interim agreement.

Separately, all the children met in pre-mediation processes to help them develop clearer appreciations of their positions *vis a vis* the parental violence, and also in regard to the direct and indirect violence each had had to cope with. Much energy was devoted to help both the adult and the minor children find their 'voice', and coaching them to garner the strength to speak their truth across the table from their parents. Two male children were in care outside the community. This meant our having to structure the all-sibling meetings to coincide with times when the brothers were in the community, for visits or court. It also required that the mediators spend individual time with the two brothers – one was in a care placement in Selkirk, the other in Winnipeg – to keep them current with developments for the rest of the family and also to give them individual time to voice the way they integrated new and present learnings or insights, and to be able to keep the rest of the family current with their perceptions.

We worked with the justice program – police, lawyers, crown prosecutors and courts – as well as with a group home, to shepherd 3 sets of criminal charges (father and two older sons) through the court's process which eventually concluded in 2 separate family group conferences facilitated by the presiding Judge. Work with the police included keeping the force updated on new developments for the family as well as other agencies, and also giving them ground level intelligence on when to be

strict in the enforcement of existing court orders (when the couple were struggling). With the lawyers, we helped the flow of counsellor-client communication. This was particularly important so the lawyers could understand the relevant (to court process) outcomes of various healing initiatives family members were undertaking. As well, lawyers needed to be regularly briefed so appropriate motions and updates could be provided to the court on behalf of clients.

Finally, much energy was devoted to coordinating the work of the mandated child welfare agency, with the CWLLCMN program and the care institutions, as well as being updated on progress from the psychologist and the therapist. Near the end of the process, energy was devoted to pulling all the agencies together so that, even though each would work from their respective mandate, they would still collectively present a cohesive agenda. This was thought a very crucial piece of the overall process, because the children did not progress fast enough in their ability to hold the parents accountable for their behaviour – mostly from fear of possible later reprisals from the parents. For this reason, it was judged by the mediation team that without first creating sufficient gatekeeping energy from the agencies collectively, the children will simply cave and placate the parents rather than address their feelings with them.

4. Community Reconciliation

Situations and/or conflicts that extend beyond family based conflicts into the larger community and where the resolution of the conflict has lasting community repercussions.

Case Example

A young man in a position of trust was charged with sexual impropriety (sexual assault/sexual exploitation) in relation to adolescent female programme participants. RCMP investigation identified 2 victims prepared to come forward, and testify in court in relation to these incidents. RCMP knew of one other victim, from a prior incident, but she would not collaborate with the investigation.

Chief and Council had requested the Crown transfer the case to community resolution, believing this approach to be more healing for the community as a whole, as well as for the victims. We sought the opinion of the Children's Advocate's Office; they supported the community's wish for a community resolution and also agreed to formally participate in the process.

Working with the RCMP and Band Constables, the CFS agency, Chief and Council, and a community employer (and with the Magistrate Court in the background), we were able to identify all the victims who were willing to come forward to tell their story. Eventually, six victims came forward, and were interviewed by the CFS agency staff in the Meenoostahtan pre-mediation process. When asked why they had not come forward in the police investigation, they all said that they were aware of the police investigation. They were afraid to come forward for fear that their reputation would be damaged by having these issues disclosed and, in particular, cross-examined, in a public court hearing. As additional guarantee that there be no risk of further victimization, we had asked for assistance from the Office of the Children's Advocate. The Deputy Children's Advocate had met all the victims individually, as well as in group interviews, and participated throughout the mediation. Once all the parties came forward, each with their identified supports (most had parents or parental adults with them); we had a total of 24 participants in the process.

For the alleged perpetrator, the ethic of voluntary (duress free) participation was challenged by the size of the gathering. Additionally, the possibility of criminal charges in the courts, were the process to fail, and the possibility of having his name entered on the Child Abuse Registry were also important factors. He too was encouraged to bring along appropriate supports.

As he was not able to articulate his thoughts and feelings in the initial sessions (spread out across three days), an interim agreement was reached by all the parties, that he would attend a program to help

him become sensitized to issues of sexual victimization for a period of three months. The Nelson House Medicine Lodge agreed to tailor a sexual addictions program; participation and progress were monitored by the Meenoostahtan Minisiwin program. When the three months were completed, (during the discharge interview) the young man asked to be allowed to stay for an additional four weeks so that he better integrate the lessons learned in the setting. On his return home, the circle was reconvened and appropriate closure was facilitated for all the parties. In case follow-up, there have been no recurrences noted.

If we use the best interest of children as the test, the Meenoostahtan Minisiwin process empowered two adolescents to speak very directly to the resolution of their victimization, as opposed to just being 'witnesses' in a court case. Additionally, three other adolescents and one young adult participated in the resolution of their victimization; these cases would not have made it to court at all.

In the normal course of events, this case would have gone through the courts, and, assuming the two initial victims stood their ground in the process of examination and cross-examination, a guilty finding may have sent this young man to a brief stay in prison. Most observers thought this unlikely, and agreed that at most, an improbable guilty finding might have resulted in a fine.

Our process was convened, with the direction to resolve the following issues:

1. To find a holistic and comprehensive resolution to the issues at hand.
2. To give victims a direct say in process and outcome.
3. To generate community-wide awareness about sexual exploitation.
4. To generate skills, and a matching language and vocabulary for individuals and the community as a whole to be able to speak out on this issue.
5. To provide healing and restoration, rather than retribution.

We believe it was an unqualified success.

Conclusion

The aim of the Meenoostahtan Minisiwin program is to strengthen ongoing relationships and to restore harmony and balance within the family unit and within the larger community. As program staff, we hold a long-term view of reconciliation much like that offered in John Paul Lederach's (1995) model. He speaks to the need to adopt a 'long view' of conflict transformation and suggests that different aspects of the conflict need responses at different times and within different time-lines. Our approaches need to be both responsive to the immediate situation experienced by the participants as well as in keeping with the goals of both a mid-range as well as a long term vision.

Much of our work entails 'creating and holding the space' that allows the participants to name and address a myriad of issues sufficiently well that the long-term best interests of children can be met. An important component of this work is the balancing of power so as to *encourage the dabwe of all participants to be heard and valued, and for a multiplicity of possible outcomes to emerge.*

In our training programs, we continuously emphasize that all systems, including our own, have a shadow-side which tends to remain unconscious, yet enormously influences all aspects of our work with families. The field of Child and Family Services continues to operate from an entrenched mode of 'power-over': parents, supposedly, have power over their children; social workers have power over parents; agencies have power over workers; regulatory bodies have power over agencies. *Balancing of power first necessitates becoming aware, and then 'deconstructing' entrenched power structures.* Peacemakers and mediators alike must remain cognizant of the allegiances which form, overtly and covertly, as a bi-product of their role. Without this awareness, we will do more harm by continuing to maintain intact a power based system that fails children as well as their families.

Alternative dispute resolution processes in mandated child welfare must create congruent non-blaming environments to enable genuine sharing. They must allow for participation from extended family and the wider service community, and facilitate collaborative long range plans for supportive services. Monitoring the plan's implementation, facilitative peacekeeping, and ability to reconvene when required are essential components in effective long term resolutions.

Peacemaking moves beyond romantic notions of reconciliation and forgiveness, where everyone can speak their truth and then all "kiss and make-up" before they all go home happy. It involves acknowledging the responsibilities we all have towards tackling the residuals of a long history of oppression and creating the mechanisms that encourage individuals and collectives to move forward together. Perhaps at times, the best we can aim for is a 'dynamic peace (Lederach, 1998, p.178),

"one in which the past can be remembered, the loss of tangibles and dreams can be mourned, and the way is found to move past the ugliness and the history, and begin to rebuild our lives, our families and our communities" (Lederach, 1998, p.177).

We move on then, in spite of the injustices and oppressive power structures, or perhaps even because of them.

Joe Pintarics, BA

Joe holds a Bachelors degree in Arts and has completed the Pre-Master's in Social Work as well as all the academics for the MSW program, specializing in cross-cultural family therapy, at the University of Manitoba. He holds a certificate as a Cross-Cultural trainer, and he is certified as a Master Practitioner in Neurolinguistic Programming. Over the last thirty years, he has worked in a number of capacities, in youth and childcare, mandated child welfare, and as a post-secondary instructor. Since 1988, he has maintained a private practice

as a cross-cultural family therapist as well as a consultant in program design and human resource development, particularly in the area of alternative justice program development, blending First Nations Traditional practices with contemporary clinical methodologies. Since 1999, he has served as the Program Coordinator of *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice*.

Karen Sveinunggaard, BA, MEd.

Karen holds a Bachelors Degree in Arts and the Masters degree in Adult and Higher Education from the University of Alberta. She has worked in various roles within the child welfare and mental health fields for the past 22 years; developing, monitoring and evaluating community-based aboriginal and non-aboriginal programs. For the past 12 years Karen has worked as a Program Development Consultant for *Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba*, a mandated First Nations Child and Family Services agency. Her role has included social policy and community-based research; program and organizational development; strategic planning; training; and, program evaluation activities for various First Nations communities. Karen was a core member of the initial development team for the *Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice Program* and continues to provide evaluative and development support to the program.

(Endnotes)

¹ The content in this article draws generously from the book *First Nations Family Justice: Meenoostahtan Minisiwin* (1997) Awasis Agency of Northern Manitoba

² Cree for spirit; that which is known but not seen.

³ Both these seminal writers argue that culture is a people's tangible which can be lost, and whose loss, therefore, needs to be mourned. Expression of grief leads to the discovery of a 'thread of continuity' between past and future. A new culture of the possible 'now' is established by weaving together the core paradigms of the past with 'possible futures' to arrive at a collective current reality. Language is the vehicle to record the process.

⁴ There are many different 'dialects' of Cree.

These expressions were chosen by our Elders to best represent the heart and spirit of the work we are called to do.

⁵ Adapted from the Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice Community Booklet (1997).

⁶ These numbers represent formal referrals, although Okweskimowewak are routinely asked to advocate or support families or agents on an informal basis. These interventions are not captured in program statistics.

⁷ First Nations Family Justice Project: Annual Evaluation and Workload Statistical Report, April 2000

⁸ Selected Case Reviews 2002; Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice Evaluation Framework, 2004

⁹ Meenoostahtan Minisiwin: First Nations Family Justice Evaluation Framework, 2004 (unpublished)

¹⁰ Mediation terms: positions are defensive stands, taken out of fear of loss of face or other similar reasons; interests are generally the long-term goals and wishes, or belief and values based attitudes held deeply.

¹¹ Peacemaking looks beyond the presenting difficulties to explore the larger historic, familial and intergenerational contexts – the antecedent causes.

¹² Peacekeeping involves the roles of “protector”, “limit setter” and “boundary keeper” as outlined in Role of Okweskimowew earlier in this paper.

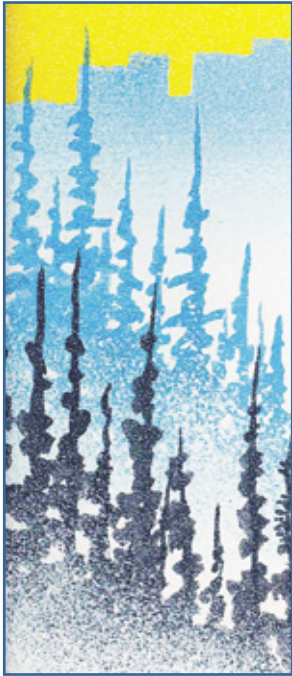
¹³ Parenthetically, we have not yet succeeded in finding the funds to make this happen. It appears that strategies that actually work fall in no one’s particular bailiwick, or perhaps that bureaucracies established to provide help prefer to barricade themselves behind walls of red-tape to actually helping.

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Applying Maslow's Hierarchy Theory

to the Research Needs of FNCFS Agencies Participating in Cycle II of the Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect

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Abstract

This paper evolved from the outcome of a feedback meeting held between the principle researchers of Cycle II of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS), the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and a number of representatives of the First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies (FNCFS Agencies) which participated in Cycle II of the CIS (CIS-2003) and numerous Research Assistants tasked with collecting information from the FNCFS Agencies. The authors present a profile of the historical and contemporary experience of Aboriginal children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system and include a discussion on some of the findings from two analyses that have been conducted on the data from the 1998 Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-1998). An overview of the challenges as well as the positive aspects of the study from the perspectives of the FNCFS Agencies and the Research Assistants is included along with an examination as to why research may not figure prominently among the service priorities of FNCFS Agencies. The strengths of challenges of participating in CIS-2003 provide rich insight into the perspectives of the Research Assistants and FNCFS Agencies who participated in this national study. The paper concludes with

recommendations by the FNCFS Agencies and the Research Assistants on how to improve the data collection process with FNCFS Agencies for future Cycles of the Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect.

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge all of the FNCFS Agencies that participated in Cycle II of the CIS, including various community participants and numerous Research Assistants in who provided advice in the writing this collaborative inquiry. Without their involvement, this experience on the First Nations' reflections of participating in CIS-2003 would not have been possible. The work that went into the feedback process and in producing this paper has been a tentative process of crossing cultural boundaries and successfully building relationships based on cooperation, collaboration and respect.

Introduction

Within Canada there are over 120+ First Nations² Child and Family Services Agencies (FNCFS Agencies) funded through the First Nations Child and Family Services (FNCFS) Program of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (DIAND). These agencies are primarily funded by DIAND to assist First Nations in delivering culturally sensitive child and family services to on-reserve communities, and to ensure that the services provided by the agency to First Nations children and their families on-reserve are comparable to services available to other provincial residents in similar circumstances. However, since child and family services is an area of provincial jurisdiction, FNCFS Agencies are required to obtain their mandate and authorities from their respective provincial or territorial governments. Further, FNCFS Agencies are expected to function in a manner consistent with existing provincial or territorial child and family services legislation. According to DIAND "FNCFS are mandated by the province in accordance with provincial legislation, to deliver: (1) prevention services to families, in order to keep children in the home; (2) protection services to children at risk; (3) adoption services where required by provincial legislation" (Shangreux & Blackstock, 2004). DIAND's commitment to assist in the development and establishment of FNCFS Agencies

to serve First Nations people residing on-reserve can be seen in the growth of the number of FNCFS Agencies from 34 in 1989 to 105 by 2000 and in the increase of overall FNCFS program expenditures which increased more than 61% from 1992 to 1999 (Shangreux & Blackstock, 2004).

In essence, FNCFS Agencies are charged with the responsibility of helping families and children by protecting children, strengthening and preserving families, and helping to build healthy communities through the provision of child and family services. Although there is variance in the degree of mandated and statutory responsibility from province to province, most FNCFS Agencies have been mandated by their First Nations communities and by their respective provincial/territorial authorities to deliver a range of child and family services, including child protection services, services to children in care, adoption services, services to families and services to community (Shangreux et al., 2004). The delivery of child welfare services to First Nations children, families and communities is as diverse as the Aboriginal peoples within Canada. In addition to this diversity, the field of First Nations Child Welfare is unique in that culture is a significant and key ingredient incorporated into the delivery of child welfare services to First Nations children and families. Child welfare practice in First Nations communities also varies considerably from agency to agency and from region to region depending on how FNCFS Agencies organize themselves (Bennett, 2004a).

Most FNCFS Agencies recognize the need as well as the importance of gathering and reporting information about the child welfare needs, realities and trends in their respective communities. Such information is essential for planning their community based services; for evaluating child welfare practices that affect the lives of children and families in their communities; and for summarizing their resource needs to federal, provincial, and other funding sources. Yet, gathering and presenting comprehensive statistical and demographic information is not always

an easy task. Increasingly FNCFS Agencies are being asked to participate in local and national research projects. Although such invitations are generally welcome, becoming a community partner or participant in research initiatives poses some unique obstacles that limit the research participation by FNCFS Agencies that must be understood by those who inevitably wish to do research with them. Invariably participating in research requires an agency to expend resources such as personnel time and technical assistance by frontline staff, management and finance personnel, as well as time from board members and committee members, which can severely strain their existing funding and human resources. In most FNCFS Agencies, the time that managers, supervisors, and frontline staff have to devote to research initiatives is scarce as they may lack professional expertise, technological tools and computerized database systems that would simplify the statistical recording and reporting processes regularly required for mandatory reporting to funding bodies and research initiatives. Some FNCFS Agencies, while aware of the importance of research, are reluctant to participate in research because of the time and energy involved and the sense that research has been misused in the past (Bennett, 2004b; Davis & Reid, 1999). There is also a belief that findings have been simply ignored by the government when it is more convenient to do so than to implement the recommendations that come out of research (Blackstock, Cullen, D'Hndt, & Formsma, 2004b). To outsiders, it might appear that FNCFS Agencies do not place a great deal of priority on participating in research initiatives, but such is not the case. It is important to understand at the outset that there are many challenging factors that directly impact on the ability of FNCFS Agencies to participate in research (Bennett & Brown, 2005). Debatably, it is not that research is not important but that research is an activity that often competes with other endeavours which dominates the majority of FNCFS agency's time, human resources and funds. These endeavours include ensuring that fundamental and basic needs of children, families and community members are met first. On the scale of importance,

when compared to the fundamental and basic needs of children and families, research is of less significance. Yet, despite these competing endeavours (as articulated later in this paper), FNCFS Agencies do know and see the value of participating in research initiatives like the CIS II 2003. Research serves a critical role in the triangulated relationship that exists between policies, practices and research. Documented findings can influence changes in policies, service provisions and the way funding is allocated to meet research findings. However, the opportunity to participate in research activities is threatened by lack of adequate funding and personnel.

This paper evolved out of the feedback received from a meeting among the principle researchers of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect, the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), the government body which funded both cycles of CIS (1998 and 2003), representatives from geographically diverse FNCFS Agencies who participated in both CIS 1998 and 2003 as well as numerous individuals contracted with collecting this information from the participating FNCFS Agencies. The authors present a profile of the historical and contemporary experience of Aboriginal children and families who come into contact with the child welfare system and include a discussion of some of the findings from two initial analyses of Aboriginal data from the CIS 1998. An overview of the challenges as well as the positive aspects of participating in the study from the perspectives of the FNCFS Agencies and the Research Assistants is presented. The authors, utilizing a theoretical construct put forward by the Psychologist Abraham Maslow on the "Hierarchy of Needs", offer a comparative "FNCFS Agencies' Hierarchy of Needs" to examine and hypothetically explain why research may not figure prominently among the service priorities of FNCFS Agencies, even though at times they may benefit from the results of research (Davis et al., 1999). These hierarchical models help to solidify this understanding. The article concludes with recommendations that evolved out of the feedback provided by the Research

Assistants and the FNCFS Agencies on how to improve the data collection process and ideas for encouraging and engaging more participation by FNCFS Agencies in future cycles of CIS. It is hoped that the knowledge gained from the feedback meeting will translate into effective changes aimed at strengthening the recruitment, participation and retention of future FNCFS Agencies and research personnel in Cycle III of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect slated for 2008.

I. The Historical And Contemporary Experience of Aboriginal Children And Families

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Report (1996) describes the special place that children hold in Aboriginal cultures:

According to tradition, children are gifts from the spirit world and have to be treated very gently lest they become disillusioned with this world and return to a more congenial place. They must be protected from harm because there are spirits that would wish to entice them back to that other realm. They bring a purity of vision to the world that can teach their elders. They carry within them the gifts that manifest themselves as they become teachers, mothers, hunters, councilors, artisans and visionaries. They renew the strength of the family, clan and village and make the elders young again with their joyful presence.

The special place that children hold in Aboriginal cultures is increasing threatened by family dysfunction and family breakdown. The impacts of colonization have eroded Aboriginal family systems of care. Consequently, many Aboriginal "at risk" families breakdown resulting in Aboriginal children coming into protective care. These Aboriginal children continue to be placed in out-of-home care at a disproportionate and alarming rate. The phenomena of Aboriginal family breakdown has not gone unnoticed by community leaders, government officials,

educators, human services professionals and grassroots people, all of whom share the view that something must be done to help these families. Many believe that intervention in families "at risk" should come earlier, before problems escalate to the point of breakdown. Aboriginal family breakdown and the disproportionate risks faced by Aboriginal children have garnered international attention as well. The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child has called for Canada to take action to address these inequalities (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child: 34th Session, 2003).

Examining the Causes of Aboriginal Family Breakdown

It is important to recognize at the outset of this paper a contextual review of the historical factors that have impacted Aboriginal families. The negative impacts of colonization, the federal residential school policy, misguided mainstream child welfare practices, the debilitating effects of poverty, and apathy by the voluntary sector of society are issues that face Aboriginal families today (Nadjiwan & Blackstock, 2003). Non-Aboriginal social workers often do not understand the depth of feelings and the impact that past historical policies and practices have on First Nations peoples today. Nonetheless, these early negative historical legacies, coupled with the current poor socioeconomic conditions that are endemic to many reserve communities, have played a large part in family breakdown and result in children and youth being removed from their parents and placed in out-of-home care arrangements. The multiple factors that have contributed to the breakdown of Aboriginal families are discussed in more detail in the paragraphs that follow.

The Impact of Colonization on Aboriginal Family Systems

McKenzie and Morrissette (2003) noted that on reserves unemployment is almost three times the national average, and in

some First Nations communities 90% of the community is unemployed which is viewed as one of several causes related to the social problems found within Aboriginal communities. Unemployment and the lack of access to money leads directly to poor health, housing, a cycle of poverty and cultural disintegration. The Aboriginal population in Canada is growing more rapidly than the general population and is a considerably younger population than the overall population (Castellano, 2002; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2003). Children under 15 accounted for 35% of all Aboriginal people in 1996, as compared with only 21% of Canada's total population. The 1996 Census reveals that almost one-third of Aboriginal children under the age of 15 lived in lone parent families, twice the rate within the general population (Hull, 1996). Infant mortality rates are still twice as high in First Nations communities in Canada as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2003; Luo et al., 2004). Suicide rates are average two to seven times that of the population of all of Canada (Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003), and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease are increasing (Young, Reading, Elias, & O'Neil, 2000). The incarceration rates of Aboriginal people are five to six times above the national average (RCAP, 1996) and Aboriginal children are overrepresented among those taken into care by the child welfare system (Mandell, Carlson, Blackstock, & Fine, 2003; Trocme, Knoke, & Blackstock, 2004). Aboriginal women are more economically deprived than non-Aboriginal women and Aboriginal men (Hull, 1996). A study done by the Ontario Native Women's Association found that eight out of ten Aboriginal women have experienced physical, sexual, psychological, or ritual abuse, and that these factors were related to drug and alcohol abuse in Aboriginal communities (Ontario Native Women's Association, 1989). Such issues are associated with problems of child care according to McKenzie and Morrissette (2003) which helps explain the disproportionate rate of family breakdown in Aboriginal communities.

The current challenges that Aboriginal families face are rooted in a history of struggle that began with colonial governments and continues today with modern society and its insistence on absorbing "Indians" into mainstream Canadian culture and society.

First Nation families have been in the centre of a historical struggle between colonial government on one hand, who set out to eradicate their culture, language and world view, and that of the traditional family, who believed in maintaining a balance in the world for the children and those yet unborn. This struggle has caused dysfunction, high suicide rates, and violence, which have had vast inter-generational impacts (McDonald, Ladd, Assembly of First Nations, First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies, & Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, 2000).

Consistent with the findings of RCAP, the Joint National Policy Review's Final Report, completed in 2000, describes a list of historical and socio-economic issues that influence the health and well being of First Nations families today. First Nations peoples are still striving to overcome the historical trauma of colonization that resulted in the disenfranchisement of First Nations peoples from their lands and the concordant destruction of traditional economies and ways of life. The colonization of First Nations peoples in Canada took the form of compulsory education, economic adjustment programs, social and political control by federal agents, and much more. These policies, combined with missionary efforts to civilize and "Christianize" First Nations people resulted in widespread fractures to traditional cultures, autonomy and feelings of self-worth (Kirmayer et al., 2003).

Contact with Europeans, or postcolonial contact, has caused intergenerational stress and historical trauma among Aboriginal Peoples spanning many generations. The policies developed and implemented by the early Canadian government regarding Aboriginal people devastated North American Indigenous cultures and life ways that has produced what some have

called “historical trauma” (Struthers & Lowe, 2003). The symptoms resulting from historical trauma are numerous and affect the psychological, social, economic, intellectual, political, physical, and spiritual realms of Aboriginal peoples. Links have been made between the phenomenon of historical trauma and states of imbalance and disease. Responses to trauma manifest psychologically as unresolved grief across generations, high rates of substance abuse including alcoholism, depression, suicide, and overeating. Social concerns resulting from historical trauma include poverty, crime, attainment of low education levels, and high rates of homicide, accidental deaths, child abuse, and domestic abuse and violence. Effects of historical trauma occurring on the physical plane include hypertension, heart disease, diabetes, being overweight, and cirrhosis, among many other physical maladies. In the spiritual realm, historical trauma is referred to as wounding of the soul (Struthers et al., 2003).

The Legacy of the Residential School Experience

The sad legacy of the federal residential school policy has become part of Canadian history and it represents a sad chapter in history of the dealings of the federal government with First Nations peoples (Milloy, 1996; Milloy, 1999). The residential school policy was designed to assimilate “the Indian” through the eradication of his language and culture (Milloy, 1996). The physical and sexual abuse that First Nations children suffered while in these schools is well documented and the wrongness of it all has been recognized and indeed there is a process underway today to offer compensation to the victims of abuse (Law Commission of Canada, 2000). The residential school experience has had a profoundly negative and painful impact on family functioning that “reverberates through successive generations ... resulting in “layers of pain” that touch whole communities as well as individuals” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996; Castellano, 2002; Brant Castellano, 2002). The experience affected the development

of healthy parental skills among students. For children, the residential school deprived them (and future generations) of healthy parental role models, replacing the nurturing loving parent with a cold and often cruel “dean or matron” who served as a surrogate parent. In turn, when these children became parents, many of whom suffered from “a diminished capacity as adults to care for their children” (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002).

Misguided Mainstream Child Welfare Policies

First Nations families have also suffered because of past child welfare policies (Hudson, 1985). In a phenomena known as “the Sixties Scoop” (Manitoba, 2001; Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2002) provincial child welfare social workers, in a misguided notion that they were helping, removed thousands of Aboriginal children from the care of their families and placed these children in non-Aboriginal adoptive homes throughout Canada and the United States. RCAP (1996), quoting statistics compiled by the Department of Indian Affairs, noted that over 11,000 status Indian children were placed for adoption between the years 1960-1990. This statistic does not even include those children whose status was inadvertently not recorded or non-status Aboriginal children (Blackstock & Trocme, 2004a).

The “Sixties Scoop” points to two major problems that have been associated with the practice of mainstream child welfare in Canada, problems that continue today and now plague First Nations child welfare practice. First, “child removal was relied upon as the primary intervention in child Abuse cases versus the intervention of last resort” (Blackstock, Trocme, & Bennett, 2004c). Secondly, as the removals took place there was little effort by governments to address the etiological drivers of child abuse such as poverty, unemployment and sub-standard housing conditions or the lack of culturally based prevention services (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2002; Blackstock, 2003).

The Debilitating Effects of Poverty

Statistics about the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal social conditions indicate that the life chances of Aboriginal people as a whole lag far behind those of the general Canadian population. “The Human Development Index (HDI) published by the United Nations Development Programme is a widely quoted measure of well-being (Beavon & Cooke, 2002). It quantifies the standards of education, income and life expectancy (as a proxy for health status) prevailing in nation states and ranks them on a composite index. Canada has regularly ranked number one in recent years. An analysis done by the Research and Analysis Directorate of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) using 1996 census and INAC departmental data indicated that registered Indians on-Reserve would rank 62nd and registered Indians on- and off-reserve would rank 47th on the HDI” (Castellano, 2002; Brant Castellano, 2002; Beavon et al., 2002). The social and economic conditions experienced by many on-reserve First Nations people are similar to those experienced by families in third-world countries. Pervasive poverty, substandard housing conditions, widespread alcohol and solvent abuse involving adults and children, and high suicide rates among youth are stark realities (Kirmayer et al., 2003).

The negative impact of poverty on early childhood development is well documented throughout the world and it continues to be one of the most important determinants of life chances (Campaign 2000 & Hubberstey, 2004; Blackstock et al., 2004b; Pelton & Milner, 1994; Harlem, 1999; UNICEF, 2003). The condition of poverty threatens the health and well-being of children and risks excluding children from the chances and opportunities to succeed. The impact of poverty on Aboriginal children and youth in Canada is also well documented, while the depth of the governments’ commitment to addressing the issues spawned by poverty is questionable. The government’s demonstrated commitment to the cause of children’s rights suggests that some

populations have been less well-served than others. First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and youth are a case in point. Not only do they suffer from significantly higher rates of morbidity and mortality than other Canadian children, but poverty is endemic in many First Nations and Inuit communities, resulting in a sub-standard quality of life and widespread alienation (Dion Stout & Kipling, 1999; Blackstock et al., 2004b).

A United Nations report on a decade of child poverty in Canada found that

Among Aboriginal children, whether living on or off reserve, almost one in two lives in poverty. Aboriginal people are 4 times more likely to report experiencing hunger than the non-Aboriginal population. Furthermore, Aboriginal children and families especially in northern remote communities cannot afford healthy affordable foods because of the high costs of shipping which leads to multiple health consequences such as diabetes, which is prevalent in many Aboriginal communities. Many children in First Nations’ communities do not have access to the essential public services that most people in Canada take for granted. Among all Aboriginal households (owners and renters), an estimated one-third have ‘core needs’; that is, their housing does not meet today’s standards for adequacy, suitability and affordability. ... Most of the nations that have been more successful than Canada at keeping low levels of child poverty are willing to counterbalance the effects of unemployment and low paid work with substantial investments in family policies (United Nations, 2002).

While the impact of poverty on early childhood development is well understood, the impact of poverty and its attending problems on First Nations families whose children are placed in out-of-home care due to child abuse is only starting to be documented. According to the 1998 Canadian Incidence Study of Reported

Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-98) (Trocme, MacLaurin, Fallon, et. al, 1998), Aboriginal families experience an extremely high rate of hardship. Aboriginal families were characterized as experiencing significantly less stable housing, greater dependence on social assistance, younger parents, more parents having been maltreated as children, higher rates of alcohol and drug abuse, and being investigated more often for neglect or emotional abuse. Higher rates of suspected and substantiated cases and child welfare placement were explained by the disproportionate presence of risk factors among Aboriginal families (Blackstock et al., 2004c).

Before turning our attention to the analyses on Aboriginal specific findings from the 1998 CIS data, general socio-economic conditions, as highlighted above are important to recognize when reviewing the historical context of the Aboriginal experience, but there are limitations to such information. First, conditions and circumstances vary considerably among different Aboriginal individuals, groups and communities. Second, any description of these problems is incomplete without a discussion of causality. Finally, this information reflects a problem-focused description that gives inadequate attention to the strengths and resiliency of Aboriginal people. These positive characteristics must be recognized as most Aboriginal communities and FNCFCS Agencies endeavour to operate from a strengths-based model of practice (McKenzie & Morrissette, 2003) despite the lingering legacies of colonization and racism. Added to this is recognition that there are distinct worldviews and cultural diversity among Aboriginal people which requires further consideration.

II. The Canadian Incident Study of Report Child Abuse and Neglect, 1998 and 2003

Until recently there was no source of comprehensive Canada-wide statistics on children and families investigated because of suspected child abuse and neglect. Although

statistics on child abuse are routinely kept by provincial and territorial governments, the different definitions and methods for counting abuse statistics makes it difficult to aggregate this information in a systematic way that could be applicable across the country (Trocme et al., 2001). Statistical information specifically about Aboriginal children and families receiving child welfare services has been even more difficult to ascertain (Blackstock et al., 2004b). National data and statistics on First Nations children in care are kept by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, which funds child welfare services on reserve (Trocme et al., 2004). The statistical information about other Aboriginal children (e.g. Métis, Inuit, non-status Aboriginal people and especially those residing off reserve) are embedded within, but not necessarily identified, the statistics produced by the 13 provincial and territorial child welfare jurisdictions. With respect to cross cultural placement concerns, it is regrettable that not all provinces/territories track the degree to which Aboriginal children in care are placed in Aboriginal homes; however, the available data suggests that much improvement is needed. For example, in 1998 the British Columbia Children's Commissioner found that only 2.5% of Aboriginal children in the care of the Ministry for Children and Families were placed in Aboriginal homes. The increasing numbers of First Nations children in care coupled with the lack of a cultural match in placement does not support Aboriginal children in maintaining their connections with family, culture and community (Blackstock et al., 2004a).

The 1998 Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-1998) became the first national study to examine the profile of children and families coming into contact with the child welfare system in a systematic way and includes the tracking of information about Aboriginal children and families receiving child welfare services (Blackstock et al., 2004a). In 1998, 51 randomly chosen child welfare authorities including three Aboriginal service providers participated in the first cycle of CIS (Trocme, Phaneuf,

Scarth, Fallon & MacLaurin, 2003). A sample of 7,672 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect was culled from these participating authorities. Case openings for service between October 1 and December 31, 1998 were screened by investigating workers to identify cases that met CIS-1998 definitions of suspected Abuse. The CIS documents 22 forms of abuse that are subsumed under four categories: (a) physical abuse; (b) sexual abuse; (c) neglect and (d) emotional abuse (Trocme, Phaneuf, Scarth, Fallon & MacLarin, 2003). Trocme, et al (2001, 2003) state that this classification reflects a broad definition of child abuse and includes several forms of abuse not specifically included in some child welfare statutes (for example, educational neglect and exposure to family violence).

Information for CIS-1998 was obtained through the use of a three page response form which was designed to capture information directly from investigating child welfare workers about their clinical observations regarding the child's caregivers, information about the family's child welfare service history and specific information about each child under investigation including specific investigation outcomes (Trocme, et al, 2001, 2003). The study did not track unreported cases of abuse or cases that were investigated by police alone, nor did it track cases that were screened out by child welfare authorities before being fully investigated. Also, new reports on cases already opened by child welfare authorities were excluded (Trocme et al., 2004). A more complete analysis and overview of the findings from this study can be obtained from the final report jointly authored by, MacLaurin, Fallon, Daciuk, Billingsley, Tourigny, Mayer, Wright, Barter, Burford, Hornick, Sullivan, and McKenzie (Trocme et al., 2001).

Two statistical analyses from the CIS 1998 study about children from the three Aboriginal groupings (e.g. First Nations, Métis and Inuit) have been published to date. The statistical analysis of the Aboriginal samples presented in this paper are drawn from two previous analysis of the CIS-1998 dataset done by Blackstock, Trocme

& Bennett (2004) and Trocme, Knoke & Blackstock (2004). In both sets of analysis, the authors' caution that because CIS-98 was not originally designed to provide national estimates for Aboriginal children, the finding within the two analyses should not be used to derive precise statistical estimates specific to Aboriginal children. Nonetheless, the CIS-1998 stands as the only source of comparative data available on abuse and neglect issues for Aboriginal children in Canada.

The first analysis of Aboriginal data from CIS-1998 was conducted by Cindy Blackstock, Nico Trocme and Marlyn Bennett (2004) who found that 16% of children under the age of 16 comprise only 5% of the Canadian population. In comparing children of Aboriginal origin to children representing other visible minorities (14% of investigated children) and to Caucasian children (70% of investigated children), the analysis found that Aboriginal families have significantly higher rates of poverty, less stable housing, younger parents, more parents who were maltreated as children, and higher rates of parental substance abuse and impaired functioning. Blackstock, Trocme and Bennett found that reports about Aboriginal children to child welfare authorities are more likely to be substantiated (50% of Aboriginal cases are substantiated in comparison to 38% of non-Aboriginal cases). Furthermore, when placed in care, Aboriginal children are nearly twice as likely to be placed in out-of-home care (the statistics reveal that 9.9% of Aboriginal children in the sample were placed in care as compared to only 4.6% of non-Aboriginal children) (Blackstock et al., 2004c).

The second analysis conducted by Nico Trocme, Della Knoke and Cindy Blackstock builds upon the first analysis which statistically explains the higher rates of case substantiation and pathways to overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in out-of-home placements in comparison to Caucasian children in Canada. The findings in this second analysis show that Aboriginal family heads are younger (49.5% of the Aboriginal sample of parents were 30 years or younger compared to 35.6% from the

Caucasian sample) and more often single (56.5% versus 51.2% for the Caucasian sample), dependent on social assistance (58.1% vs. 37.7%) and living in unsafe housing (7.9% vs. 4.6%). These families are more likely to have moved multiple times in the year prior to the study (17% versus 8.3% for Caucasian families). Aboriginal families are statistically more likely to have previous child welfare case openings (67.1% versus 46.3% of the Caucasian sample). Most of cases of substantiated abuse involve neglect (57.9% compared to 34.9% for Caucasian families) as opposed to physical abuse. Alcohol abuse is noted as a concern for almost two-thirds of the Aboriginal parents, compared to 22 percent of Caucasian parents. Drug abuse, criminal activity, cognitive impairment, and lack of social support are also statistically more common among Aboriginal parents. On the other hand, Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock's analysis indicates that the child functioning variables (e.g. emotional or physical harm, depression or anxiety, and self-harm behaviour) for the Aboriginal children in this sample do not differ significantly when statistically compared to Caucasian children. Their analysis does suggest that 74% of investigations involving Aboriginal children are classified as suspected or substantiated compared to 59% of the investigations involving Caucasian children. Also, it appears from the analysis of the data that 10% of Aboriginal children are placed in out-of-home care during the protection investigation while only 4.6% of investigations of Caucasian children were placed in out-of-home placements during investigation. Thus, from Trocme, Knoke and Blackstock's analysis, it appears that the pathways to overrepresentation of Aboriginal children in substantiation and out-of-home placement data may be related to a combination of complex factors that reflect on multiple disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal families. It is plausible that the high rates of parents' own histories of childhood abuse contribute to the complexities of the problems facing Aboriginal communities; experiences of abuse, particularly in residential schools might undermine the capacity of the

present generation of parents. The multiple disadvantages and challenges documented among Aboriginal families place Aboriginal children at higher risk for future abuse.

In 2003, the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare launched the second cycle of the Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003). The study is being led by Nico Trocme (University of Toronto) and a team of researchers including Bruce MacLaurin (University of Calgary), Richard Cloutier and Daniel Turcotte (Université du Québec), Ken Barter (Memorial University of Newfoundland), Richard Sullivan (University of British Columbia) and Cindy Blackstock (First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada) (Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, 2003). The main objective of CIS-2003 is to track changes and trends in cases of child abuse and neglect investigated by child welfare authorities since the first CIS was conducted in 1998. With child abuse investigation rates increasing rapidly in most jurisdictions across the country, Dr. Trocme, one of the principle investigators, stated that CIS-2003 will help identify some of the key factors driving this increase.

The second cycle of the CIS will enrich the understanding of the nature and extent of child abuse and neglect in Canada and in developing a system of cyclical data collection, analysis and interpretation, we can build on the foundation of CIS-98, begin to identify changes in the incidence of child abuse and better assess the effect of child welfare policies and programs (Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare, 2003).

With the assistance of the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada (the national networking organization for the First Nations Child Welfare Service Agencies in Canada and one of the co-investigators of CIS-2003), a total of eight First Nations Child Welfare Service providers were invited to participate in the second cycle of this national study. This composition includes five new First Nations service providers including the

original three FNCFS Agencies who participated in CIS-1998. In addition to the FNCFS Agency involvement, a total of over sixty child welfare service providers from across Canada participated in Cycle II the study. The continued participation of the original three First Nations Service providers in Cycle II of the study provides an opportunity for rich information which will track changes in Aboriginal child welfare services not previously available. As in the first cycle, the data collection phase for CIS-2003 focused on case openings over a three month period from October 1 to December 31, 2003 however to accommodate the late participation of some of the FNCFS Agencies in the study the collection phase focused on case opening between November 1 and January 31, 2004.

Although there was an expression of interest by many, agreement to participate in Cycle II of the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect was not in all cases readily given by some of the First Nations CFS Agencies approached. Many found the timing was not conducive to their present circumstances and many were clear that they just did not have the time or the personnel in which to be able to participate. In one particular case, it was necessary for the main principle researcher along with the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society to meet in person with the FNCFS Agency's Board of Directors to explain the CIS-2003 study in-depth. The meeting provided the FNCFS Agency Director, staff and board members to ask more questions, to get an understanding of the depth of the research and provided an opportunity for answers as to how the CIS would benefit their agency and their communities. This meeting was also necessary before consent could be granted to the researchers to undertake the CIS II study with their agency.

In addition to the recruitment of FNCFS Agencies, various individuals were also recruited to act as liaisons (hereafter called "FN Research Assistants") between the CIS Research Team and the FNCFS Agencies participating in CIS-2003. Where possible, the majority of individuals recruited for

the FN Research Assistant positions were Aboriginal but came from outside of the FNCFS Agency and their respective communities. These Research Assistants provided assistance to the FNCFS Agencies in gathering and verifying the data required under CIS-2003. In addition to answering questions from the FNCFS Agency staff, the Research Assistants confirmed that the data collection forms provided complete information and that the responses provided within the form were logical before they sent in completed forms to the central CIS office at the University of Toronto.

Prior to attending at the FNCFS Agency, most of the FN Research Assistants, along with other Research Assistants involved in the study, participated in two days of comprehensive training with the principle researchers of the CIS-2003. The training consisted of an introduction to the CIS objectives, methodology and the three-page data collection form. A guidebook was provided detailing the study's methodology, procedures, definitions and explanations about each item found on the three-page response form. The Research Assistants were also trained on how to fill out the form using information from case vignettes. In addition, the First Nation Research Assistants also participated along with the other CIS Research Assistants in regular follow-up conference calls to ensure the data quality was consistent and as a way of learning from each other. During these calls the CIS research team provided updates about the study's progress and answered questions posed by the all Research Assistants collecting data from multiple sites (Tonmyr, 2005). These conference calls were valuable in assisting the FN Research Assistants with understanding what was happening at other sites and provided insight into scenarios and questions posed by other non-Aboriginal child welfare agencies who were also engaged in the CIS data collection process.

After initial training, the FN Research Assistants traveled to each FNCFS Agency with one member of the CIS research team for the purpose of providing training to the FNCFS Agencies about the objectives,

methodologies and how to use the CIS-2003 data collection forms. All workers identified as having some responsibility for investigations were invited to attend the training session along with supervisors and managers who would support the workers in following through with the data collection. Prior to this training, each FNCFS Agency was asked to fill out a short questionnaire detailing how the agency operates, how intakes occur in the agency, how many cases had been opened the previous year as well as within a given month, how cases are tracked (were they recorded manually by recording case numbers or was this done by a computer) and the process for intakes, screening, and investigation. After the initial visit and comprehensive training, the FN Research Assistants scheduled at least three monthly follow-up visits. However as the study progressed it became evident that the staff at the FNCFS Agencies required more assistance than was anticipated and that follow-up visits in some cases, needed to be more frequent than once a month. The actual number of visits to each of the FNCFS Agencies by each of the FN Research Assistants ranged from four to eight depending on the extent of the assistance that was required within the FNCFS Agency.

As previously indicated, the data collection phase for the FNCFS Agencies started a month later in comparison to the other child welfare service providers. Consequently completion of CIS-2003 with the FNCFS Agencies wrapped up much later due to a number of unforeseeable problems which are elaborated on more fully in the discussion below on the challenges and benefits of participating in the CIS-2003 study as expressed by the FNCFS Agencies and First Nations Research Assistants.

The CIS-2003 data collection from the eight First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies, for the most part, wrapped up in the fall of 2004, somewhat later in comparison to the other non-Aboriginal child welfare agency participants because of their late inclusion in CIS II. Data collection for all sites has now been completed but preliminary statistical analysis

of the information is yet to be released. A final report including an analysis of the Aboriginal data obtained from the eight participating Aboriginal service providers will be available in October 2005 through the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). The specific data collected from the First Nations Sites will be available from the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society. The First Nations Child and Family Caring Society will assist in statistically analyzing the Aboriginal specific data from CIS-2003 and will make this information available to all, including the participating FNCFS Agencies, as it becomes available.

III. Feedback from First Nations CFS Agencies regarding CIS-2003

In connection with the CIS-2003 study was an opportunity to evaluate the process and obtain feedback from the FN Research Assistants tasked with obtaining the data from the eight participating FNCFS Agencies. Such an opportunity came in February 2005 at a follow up meeting held in Winnipeg, Manitoba between the principle researchers of CIS-2003, the Public Health Agency of Canada, the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society and the FN Research Assistants. Initially only the FN Research Assistants were invited to the meeting but it was quickly realized that such a meeting would be missing a key ingredient and a holistic understanding of the pros and cons of the CIS-2003 data collection process with the FNCFS Agencies. An invitation was then extended to key persons from each of the eight participating FNCFS Agencies to attend the feedback meeting as well. The feedback meeting provided the FN Research Assistants and the participating FNCFS Agencies with an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and perspectives regarding their participation in the CIS 2003 study. It was also an opportunity to reflect on ways in which the data collection process with FNCFS Agencies could be strengthened and to look to the feedback participants for ideas and recommendations on improving data quality for future cycles of the CIS.

Strengths of Participating in CIS-2003

The FNCFS Agencies and FN Research Assistants were excited to be a part of the CIS-2003 national study and were eager to contribute to the research process. When the invitation was extended to them to attend the feedback meeting, the FNCFS Agencies were just as eager to participate in sharing their experience in participating in the study and on brainstorming ideas to make it a more effective experience for other FNCFS Agencies and communities in the future. Of the five FN Research Assistants, only three were able to attend in the feedback meeting. While all eight FNCFS Agencies in the CIS-2003 expressed a desire to attend, only six were able to attend. The six individuals who attended on behalf of the First Nations CFS Agencies indicated that it was necessary to share their experience and that their participation in the feedback meeting would be instrumental to the community and the agency. They saw themselves as key actors in the process of enforcing accountable and respectful sharing of First Nations knowledge. Their willingness to participate in the feedback session signifies the importance of reciprocity placed on the research process.

Relationship building was seen as an important element to the success of the CIS study among the FNCFS Agencies and FN Research Assistants. It was acknowledged, in particular by the FNCFS Agencies present at the feedback meeting, that the CIS study had been instrumental in building relationships that did not currently exist between their agencies, the CIS research team and the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada. The relationship building process was seen as a necessary ingredient that contributed to increased trust essential for the success of the study. The relationships that were established before, during and after were seen an opportunity useful for building upon the established relationships in the future.

Participating in CIS for the most part has contributed to a learning process that many participants felt would enhance the data collection process for the next cycle of CIS and that perhaps knowledge

gleaned from this participation would also attract more agencies to participate in the future. The chance to participate in the study also created an understanding of each agency's role in terms of the various challenges and opportunities that exist at a frontline/research level.

Some of the more positive comments shared by the FNCFS Agency participants include the reference back to the two analyses of Aboriginal data from CIS-1998 which were discussed earlier. Some of the FNCFS Agencies participants indicated that their agencies used both of these analyses from time to time to support their planning within the community. Many also noted that these analyses were also useful in assisting their agencies in justifying requests for increased funding from DIAND. The FNCFS Agencies are aware of the magnitude of the study and noted that it helped their agencies understand the different capacities of FNCFS Agencies to provide services. More importantly they also saw the study as imperative for improving upon the access to more factual based Aboriginal data that does not presently exist. Participants in the feedback session felt that more comparable Aboriginal data similar to what exists in the literature about mainstream service providers was greatly needed in the literature.

Challenges of Participating in CIS-2003

As is typical in the child welfare field, FNCFS Agencies are very busy and conducting research is an activity that does not fit within the mandate or purview of their everyday activities. There were concerns expressed by the participating FNCFS Agencies that the timing of the study was not optimal for them as data collection period occurred prior to, during and after a peak holiday and vacationing season. This reason alone made it difficult to connect with agency staff to participate in the training sessions and to assist the FN Research Assistants with collecting the case data and agency contextual information within the timeframes of the study. This fact was also consistent with all the other child welfare agencies that participated in Cycle II of CIS (Tonmyr, 2005)

Due to the busy and demanding schedules and workloads of the agency workers, FN Research Assistants noted that in some cases throughout the data collection period, both during and after, it was difficult connecting with staff members who were in possession of the data. Many of the participating FNCFS Agency staff felt that their time was more valued elsewhere given their workloads and thus any sense of responsibility for completing the response forms fell to the wayside. Some of the FN Research Assistants expressed frustration with the fact that it took a long time to get the data collection forms completed due to the schedules and workload of staff. This information was also particularly difficult to obtain when staff left on vacation or for extended periods of leave stretching past the data collection phase. In many cases only one individual was in possession of the needed information and other staff within the agency simply could not step in and complete the data collection form for those individuals. Some of the activities that the FN Research Assistants observed which dominated staff's daily responsibilities included travel to the various communities served by their agency including various emergencies. Understandably, many FN Research Assistants noted that scheduled meetings sometimes had to be cancelled due to emergencies in the field. This was particularly frustrating for those FN Research Assistants who had to travel considerable distances from outside the community.

For those FNCFS Agencies that participated in the CIS 98 study, they were less apprehension about participating in CIS 2003 study. Some of the FNCFS Agencies participants, while wanting to participate in the CIS 2003 study, were apprehensive about the amount of time required of the staff to participate in the training and filling out of survey forms. Many indicated that the 10 to 20 minutes of time allotted in which to complete the survey had been misjudged. Many of the FNCFS Agency staff felt that it actually took much longer to complete the survey forms than was conveyed to them in the training sessions. Some also noted that the way in which the information was

collected in the data forms did not reflect the social work practices of the participating Agencies and communities thus making it difficult to complete the survey forms.

Feedback participants also pointed out that effectiveness of the vignettes utilized in the training sessions would be better enhanced if the scenarios reflected within this tool reflected the realities of families living within First Nations communities. Although this suggestion was only a minor concern, it was seen as being a more effective measure of the realities within in First Nations communities that would aid the FNCFS Agency staff with understanding how to fill out the three page form.

In terms of the training sessions, both the FNCFS Agencies and FN Research Assistants expressed concern that one training session was not enough time for them to fully grasp the extent of the research project and what their respective responsibilities would be under the study. The FNCFS Agencies and FN Research Assistants felt that it would be more beneficial to schedule more than one day of training with the agency well before the start of the data collection period. One First Nation CFS Agency indicated that more additional training sessions needed to occur. Another Research Assistant also noted that there had been long periods of time between data collection which can cause a loss of focus in regards to the information that needed to be collected.

One agency representative talked about the need for trust to be established before their agency was willing to pass on case data and statistics or agency contextual information. FNCFS Agencies need to be assured that the data being gathered was not going to be used against them at the provincial or federal level. They reiterated that their involvement in the CIS-2003 study be used to strengthen and support their positions with government. The FNCFS Agency participants also noted that all of the data extracted from CIS-2003 needs to be contextualized within the historical and contemporary framework of First Nations experience in Canada.

Both the FNCFS Agencies and FN Research Assistants agreed that a better match between CIS collectors and FNCFS Agencies needed to be considered in the future. The cultural requirements to work in the community needs to be better understood. Language was in some instances a barrier to communication. It was noted that ways of communicating within agencies varied between First Nations communities and for this reasons many of the FNCFS Agency representatives felt that in the future qualified individuals from within either the FNCFS Agency or from within the communities should be hired as Research Assistants because of their knowledge of protocols within these communities and agencies. On the other hand, some of the FN Research Assistants felt that they were not really part of the study holistically, and were only present as the “token” Aboriginal person and consequently felt devalued in the process. Although the individual making this comment wasn’t present at this feedback meeting, she did ask that in her absence her observations be passed along to the principle researchers of the CIS-2003 study as a consideration for the recruitment of research assistants for future cycles of the study.

FNCFS Agencies also acknowledged that the geographical distance between sites, compounded by structural changes and staff turn-over all contributed to difficulty in collecting the data on a timely and consistent basis. One FNCFS Agency participant pointed out that there is an absence of strength based research on Aboriginal people. Others noted that a process seemed to be missing a key element that would allow an opportunity to share the research analysis and other research ideas specific to the Aboriginal sample within the study that have come forward as a result of this study and that perhaps this information should be shared at the outset when training sessions are scheduled for participating FNCFS Agencies. Many also felt that research is not high on the agenda within their agency, boards of directors and/or regional bodies.

At that meeting, one of the representatives of the participating FNCFS Agencies posed

some challenging questions to the principle investigators and funders of the CIS-2003 study regarding the role of research and its applicability to the goals of FNCFS Agencies. How can research help FNCFS Agencies? What are the impacts of research on FNCFS Agencies? This individual summarized his recollection of the history of First Nations Child Welfare in Canada and reiterated as many others have, that to date, it seems that research has not made any impact in the way that the federal government funds on-reserve child welfare services or the way in which Provinces go about making child and family services legislation. The essence of his question is paraphrased as follows:

In the early 70s it appeared as if money grew on trees but as the years went by, funding became more restrictive and soon thereafter a national funding formula was imposed on FNCFS Agencies. FNCFS Agencies deal with multiple changes to provincial legislation, trying to find funding formulas that will fit their particular style of service provision while at the same time, the numbers of children in care continue to rise. Today FNCFS Agencies are consistently being asked to participate in national research studies but what good is research given the past and the constant jurisdictional changes, policies and practices as dictated by the provinces? The ability of FNCFS Agencies to respond to these changes is determined by funding and legislation, two processes of which are entirely outside of First Nations control.

This individual’s question and framework of reference provide a good background for addressing the issue of why more research is needed as well as, what kinds of research, the approaches taken to gather research data and issues surrounding the ownership of the data collected. First Nations people, in general, do not have much reason to trust either the federal or provincial governments when it comes to research. What has research been used for in the past? How is it that many facts that “fly in the face” of government are routinely ignored; like the endemic nature of child poverty among

Aboriginal people and the chronic problems of alcohol abuse and domestic violence, and other socioeconomic problems that contribute to family breakdown? These problems are at the very center of child welfare, they are core problems that lead to family breakdown, but the governments' (both federal and provincial) commitment to solving them is questionable, at best.

Still, research into the causes and solutions to Aboriginal family breakdown is necessary and can be of use to help move governments and to help shape public policy in the future. In the next section of this paper, we turn our attention to the concerns expressed by the FNCFS Agencies in the feedback meeting regarding the perception that they are not committed to participating in research generally. The next section provides a reasoned argument using Maslow's theory on the "Hierarchy of Needs" as to why research is not necessarily high on the agenda of FNCFS Agencies.

IV. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow, a psychologist, developed a "Hierarchy of Needs" framework to show human potential (1943). Essentially, Maslow argues that a human being cannot achieve "self actualization" at the top of the hierarchy without having first met his needs at the lower levels. Maslow constructed his hierarchy of needs, as a theoretical framework comprised of five sets of basic needs, to explain motivation in human behavior. The hierarchical elements as described by Maslow are reproduced below:

1. The 'physiological' needs:

These needs that are usually taken as the starting point for motivation theory because they are the most dominant of all needs. The human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion is most likely motivated to meet his physiological needs first, before turning his energy and attention to others needs. A person, who is lacking food, safety, love, esteem, and a higher education, would most probably hunger for food

more strongly than for anything else.

2. The safety needs: If one's physiological needs are relatively well gratified, then a new set of needs emerge, which are the safety needs. A human being requires shelter to be safe from the extremes of temperature and he requires a sense of safety in society wherein he feels protected from criminals, assaults and murder, tyranny, etc. As these needs are largely satisfied, they no longer become the dominant motivators of behavior. Just as a man who reposes after a fine evening meal no longer feels hungry, a safe man no longer feels endangered.

3. The love needs: If one's physiological and safety needs are fairly well gratified, then the love, affection and belonging-ness needs emerge. A human being requires a family, friends, and sense of belonging in order to feel complete. While he may no longer be starving, he will hunger for affectionate relations with his family, friends and people in general; he will be motivated by the need to achieve this goal.

4. The esteem needs: Human beings have a need or desire for self respect and self esteem, or a high evaluation of themselves. Human beings are motivated by the need to achieve and the desire for freedom, independence, strength, mastery and confidence in the face of the world. Human kind is also motivated by the need to be respected by other people, by a desire for reputation or prestige, recognition, attention, importance and appreciation. Satisfying the self-esteem need leads to feelings of self-confidence and self worth, while thwarting these needs produces feelings of inferiority and helplessness.

5. The need for self-actualization: Even if all these needs are satisfied, most human beings will still experience a new discontent and restlessness unless the individual

is doing what he is fitted for. This need is called self-actualization. It is a desire for self-fulfillment, a desire to be all that a person can potentially be. "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately happy. What a man can be, he must be." The specific form that these needs take varies greatly from person to person (Maslow, 1943).

Maslow's thoughts about the preconditions for the basic need satisfactions point to the kind of environment necessary to achieve self-actualization.

There are certain conditions which are immediate prerequisites for the basic need satisfactions. Danger to these is reacted to almost as if it were a direct danger to the basic needs themselves. Such conditions as freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes so long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express one's self, freedom to investigate and seek for information, freedom to defend one's self, justice, fairness, honesty, orderliness in the group are examples of such preconditions for basic need satisfactions. Thwarting in these freedoms will be reacted to with a threat or emergency response. These conditions are not ends in themselves but they are almost so since they are so closely related to the basic needs, which are apparently the only ends in themselves. These conditions are defended because without them the basic satisfactions are quite impossible or at least, very severely endangered (p.384).

According to Maslow, mankind's behavior is dominated by the desire to achieve, to satisfy the basic needs on this hierarchy and to maintain this sense of satisfaction. As his needs are met at one level, man experiences a newer emerging need to satisfy other needs at a higher level. This emergence of new needs and the motivation to satisfy them is a cycle that repeats itself, as one area of need is met and new centers of need arise. Lower level needs are more dominant than are higher level needs in this hierarchy; consequently man is not as motivated to meet his higher level needs as he is to meet the lower level

of needs. In some extreme instances the desire to have a basic need satisfied can be so great that other needs become non-existent or non-important, as in the case of a man who is starving. He, most likely, will not be thinking about philosophy and religion, instead all of his energy and his mind will be turned to satisfying his hunger. In most cases however, it is common for an individual to be partially satisfied in all of the basic needs on the hierarchy, while being partially dissatisfied in all of these needs as well.

The Hierarchy of Needs for First Nations Child and Family Services Agencies

Maslow's "hierarchy of needs" as a motivation of human behavior is a useful model or tool (a system of ranking and organizing things (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, 2005)) for analyzing the hierarchy of needs of FNCFS Agencies and their motivation and ability to reach higher levels of success, be it in service, research or in achieving autonomy in child welfare matters. The philosophical, funding and service challenges faced by FNCFS Agencies today include frontline socioeconomic conditions in their communities that are formidable, coupled with operational funding that is generally inadequate. The scope of mandated responsibilities and the community's capacity to respond to the child welfare needs in their communities needs to be accomplished with a recognition of Aboriginal ways, values, and world views and the research support to integrate this knowledge into practice, cumulating ultimately in self actualization or self government type control and autonomy in child welfare matters.

It is our opinion that research is a higher needs activity on the hierarchy of needs and that other lower level needs on the hierarchy dominate the time, energy and resources of the agencies. In some respects then, participating in research initiatives is more of a luxury for most agencies, than it is a priority. The primary reason lies in the fact that a FNCFS Agencies' mission is to serve

families and children at risk, so their focus is primarily on service and not on philosophical issues such as research for instance. To assist in understanding our analysis a diagram depicting the comparative interface between Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs and the hierarchy of needs of FNCFS Agency is presented below in Figure 1.



Figure 1.

Source: Diagram developed by Corbin Shangreaux based on discussions between the two principle writers of this paper.

In Maslow's hierarchy of needs, it is difficult (if not impossible) for human beings to achieve self-actualization without first meeting the basic needs of food, shelter, safety, love, and a sense of self worth. Likewise, for FNCFS Agencies specifically, we believe that it is very difficult to achieve the higher levels of need reflected in Maslow's hierarchy theory simply because FNCFS Agencies' time, energy and resources are consumed by the more dominant socioeconomic needs of families that lead to family breakdown within the community at the lower levels. As well, the basic needs at the front lines of child welfare in most First Nations' communities are formidable. Consequently time, energy, and resources expended by FNCFS Agencies' are more likely spent on responding to the multiple needs of individuals from within the communities that they service. Having to respond to the many child welfare needs at the front line community level is often an overwhelming task because the sheer volume of families and children needing support, intervention, treatment and restorative services are

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enormous. Added to this reality is the fact that FNCFS Agencies' service more than one community, making distance another complicated factor in meeting individual and community service needs. These needs can easily monopolize an agency's consciousness, time, energy and resources, leaving little time to prioritize and conduct research.

Among the challenges faced by FNCFS Agencies as they attempt to reach the higher levels of the hierarchy are:

1. Socioeconomic Needs:

An FNCFS Agencies spends most of its time, money, and human resources responding to basic needs. By design, First Nations' communities expect the Agencies to respond to basic child welfare needs which at times can be difficult to undertake. Who has the time and resources to pursue "higher ideals" or other such luxuries further up the hierarchy? Also, chronically poor socioeconomic conditions coupled with substance abuse impact families and contribute to the breakdown of family systems and higher rates of child Abuse. In some communities, these conditions are seemingly endemic and unchanging and they continue to overwhelm the helping systems of many families. Furthermore, the numbers of First Nations children in care continues to rise and many of them have extensive and complex needs that extremely tax the capability and resources of FNCFS Agencies. FASD children, for instance, continue to represent a formidable cost to the system.

2. Funding Adequacy:

FNCFS Agencies are funded, on average, 22% lower than mainstream Agencies making it not only difficult to meet their legislative requirements but participate in research as well (McDonald et al., 2000). In addition, these Agencies – like all child welfare Agencies – must balance the important work of responding to child and family crises against carrying out research activities. Particularly when funding and resources are scarce, child and family crises take precedence over research activities.

The Joint National Policy Review Final Report lists 17 recommendations aimed

at improving the funding levels of FNCFS Agencies. The National Policy Review, which is largely driven by First Nations' concerns, is leading to changes in the way the federal government funds FNCFS Agencies. The current federal funding formula for operations is mainly driven by the on-reserve 0-18 threshold of child population statistics, which generally increase from year to year, but not in all cases (McDonald et al., 2000). This funding is susceptible to decreases, if the child population declines or in some cases is not properly reported.

The current federal funding formula is not driven or geared toward high needs communities or Agencies that deal with high needs communities. Some family systems are characterized by chronic dysfunction that is intergenerational and extremely complex which makes assisting these types of families difficult. While child population is a good place to start, FNCFS Agencies require adequate funding and support that will enable them to respond in a comprehensive way to immediate child welfare needs and to the high needs of families and kinship systems (McDonald et al., 2000).

Most FNCFS Agencies, and in particular the agencies impacted by small child population counts on reserve, do not have an adequate level of funding available to them to do policy analysis and research. There is inadequate federal funding to allow FNCFS Agencies to follow a "least disruptive measures" model for at-risk families and to support children staying at home while the family receives family support and family preservation services. The Flexible Funding Option for Federal Child Maintenance Funding allows FNCFS Agencies the flexibility to design and deliver community based child welfare services in an alternative way that is more culturally appropriate than common mainstream approaches (McDonald et al., 2000; Shangreux et al., 2004).

Furthermore, FNCFS Agencies continue to be impacted by size, resources, time and technological tools. Added to this is the fact that many FNCFS Agencies are impacted by geographical challenges, some are urban and some are remote. As a result,

staff travel (which is) necessary in order to respond to child protection, family support and treatment situations is not just a given, it is a must – if an agency is to properly fulfill its mandate. Staffing levels must be adequate so that Agencies can properly respond to all child welfare situations. The Agencies require up to date technology, software, and database systems in order to take advantage of the huge technological advances that are currently available in this internet and information sharing age. FNCFS Agencies are impacted by the number of First Nations communities served by the agency and the uniqueness of each of these communities, their needs, and capacity (Shangreux et al., 2004).

3. Mandate and Community Capacity:

FNCFS Agencies are First Nations empowered entities and as a result are expressions and an extension of a community's helping systems. Their primary purpose is to support traditional community kinship systems for the benefit of families and children in need of support, intervention, rehabilitative and restorative services. However, their ability to support and intervene is dependent on being mandated, first by the First Nations that they serve and secondly by the provincial government under whose legislation they must operate. In addition, FNCFS Agencies' ability to intervene and provide effective services at the community based level is impacted by the quality and quantity of human resources available upon which they can draw to find community based helpers, family support workers, alternate caregivers, etc. In addition to these individuals, most FNCFS Agencies rely upon their community Elders, kinship systems, and traditional values as a well of traditional knowledge about families handed down through grandparents and parents to guide child welfare practice. Without this traditional knowledge and the complementary wisdom of the Elders, the Agencies would be lost and no different than the mainstream Children's Aid Society Agencies. FNCFS Agencies are part of the community. Most were created in response to the needs of the community and the desire that a FNCFS Agencies provide service to

them. FNCFS Agencies also have multiple involvements in other endeavours beyond the community such as being part of tribal councils and regional organizations and they now are part of a national networking organization in the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada.

4. Recognition and Research Support:

FNCFS Agencies have gained increasing recognition and funding support from federal and provincial governments as the proper entity to respond to First Nations' child welfare issues. Despite this recognition, FNCFS Agencies lack the funding, time, and human resources to engage in critical research and analysis. There is a need to better understand why some families resort to child abuse in hard socioeconomic times and the best ways to help these families to prevent children from being abused. There is a need to develop, implement, and replicate effective community based prevention programs that target high risk families to prevent FASD, HIV/AIDS, etc.

An increasing number of Agencies are building their capacity through higher education distance programs for their staff and agency participation in research like the Canadian Incidence Studies (CIS 1998 and CIS 2003) into reported child abuse and neglect. Activities in this area are only now starting to gain momentum, but haven't yet reached a critical mass. Increasing the number of First Nation and Aboriginal University Graduates in the child welfare field will impact practice in a positive way (Bennett & Blackstock, 2005).

"Best Practice" models should be identified, and merit based and innovative approaches should be funded, researched and replicated where possible. These programs should be characterized by their flexibility in approach that allows them to respond to situations with both a structured application and in a case-by-case manner. They should be cost effective and supported by good outcomes. Targeted prevention, intensive treatment and comprehensive family support programs should be developed to help FNCFS Agencies deal with the chronically

dysfunctional families that end up being "recurring cases and cost drivers of child welfare". Early Intervention, Early Childhood Education, Young Families Support Programs, Comprehensive Coordinated Community Response Programs to deal with FASD, AIDS, etc. – should be researched, funded, developed and replicated.

5. Self Government:

FNCFS Agencies are compelled to use provincial legislation and rely upon outside funding to deliver services at the community level. As such, funding agreements require FNCFS Agencies to follow provincial legislation and practices. Consequently, Agencies impose non-Aboriginal standards and expectations on families, when less intrusive measures would be more effective. Also related to this is the fact that there is no national First Nations Child Welfare Act despite the call for such legislation for the past 20 years. To date, there is also no National Statement on Native Child Welfare Principles despite the need for such a document to guide child welfare practice for mainstream social workers serving Aboriginal families and children. The Aboriginal Justice Inquiry-Child Welfare Initiative is significant as it is leading to the restructuring of the child welfare system in Manitoba and recognizing the off-reserve jurisdiction of FNCFS Agencies throughout Manitoba. However, the process is considered to be an interim measure and is dominated by resource transfer activities that leave some FNCFS Agencies with the impression that they are not being given adequate resources to effectively carry out their new responsibilities under this initiative (Hudson & McKenzie, 2003).

Stability of funding and control of the decision making (as opposed to being always compelled by legislation) leads to increased flexibility and the ability to respond to community needs, as opposed to always "reacting" to these needs. On-reserve child population is a natural place to start, but FNCFS Agencies and First Nations communities need increased funding so that they can respond to emerging needs in their communities and

offer family support services in a manner that is respectful, protects children, and enables agencies to intervene, when needed, in a least disruptive manner.

Like many families, FNCFS Agencies need a “hand up” (not a hand out) in order to reach the higher levels of the hierarchy. In the case of FNCFS Agencies, they need to “join hands” with others of like mind in the community so that they can build momentum and “move up” the hierarchy by expanding their circles of understanding and support. Indeed, the only way they can reach the top of this hierarchy is by expanding their circles of relations through giving and receiving support to each other throughout the whole process (see Figure 2).

and non-Aboriginal alike. The challenge for FNCFS Agencies is to build effective relationships within each circle...a process that requires mutual respect and cooperation.

V. Recommendations

Given the discussion above, a number of general recommendations that arose from the feedback discussion that may help strengthen the perceptions around research and encourage more participation from FNCFS Agencies wishing to participate in the next round of the CIS. They are offered as a suggestion of strengthening the role of research as part of the ongoing services provided by FNCFS Agencies.

Some of the recommendations identified by the participants in CIS-2003 include:

- 1) *The need for more agency staff trained to undertake and assist in research related activities:* From attending this feedback meeting it is clear that FNCFS Agencies do not have the personnel in house or the funding to be able to hire additional research personnel so that they can participate effectively in requests to assist numerous research initiatives such as CIS-2003 or any other research project. In consideration of their funding needs it is vital that FNCFS agencies receive additional funding over and above their maintenance and operating costs to cover the salary of a full time policy analyst and/or in house researcher so that FNCFS Agencies can effectively contribute to more evidence based research and discourse that incorporates culturally relevant and competent perspectives on the multiple aspects of service delivery within FNCFS Agencies;
- 2) *Meaningful analysis of all statistics gathered by FNCFS Agencies:* In connection with recommendation 1 above, the information that FNCFS Agencies are required to collect and forward to their funders (e.g. Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Development) as part of their funding agreements are being collected without an analysis on what this data may reveal

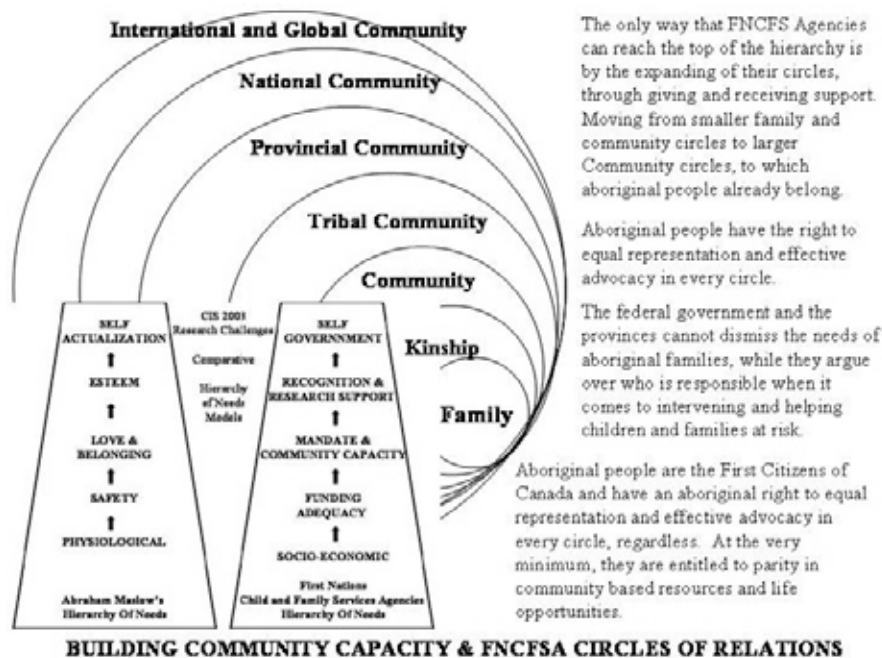


Figure 2.

Source: Diagram developed by Corbin Shangreux based on discussions between the two principle writers of this paper.

FNCFS Agencies have to build capacity and it starts by increasing the involvement of the larger community in child welfare matters, so that it becomes a “community owned” approach to supporting children and families in need. The higher up the hierarchy FNCFS Agencies are able to go, the more they require the understanding and support of community and political leaders, Aboriginal

locally, regionally and nationally in terms of the current trends in Aboriginal/FN child welfare. An understanding of that data is needed so that trends can be monitored, and sound information can be provided to those who develop and evaluate policy and programs that affect Aboriginal people. For example, very little is known about the birth outcomes among First Nations versus non-First Nations children in urban areas (Luo et al., 2004). Another example can be found in the Criminal Justice System which shares one attribute with child welfare systems in that both record an overrepresentation of Aboriginal populations in both systems. The challenge of collecting data on Aboriginal people in the Criminal Justice System as of late has also focused its attention on need for better statistics and analysis of those statistics (Kong & Beattie, 2005). Moreover, information and statistics collected by FNCFS Agencies for DIAND reporting purposes is in many cases used against the agency as well³. The funds to hire researchers would be useful in providing a trend analysis of this information from a perspective that is rooted in the community and the culture (Bennett et al., 2005). If information is the key to prosperity in the new knowledge-based economy, it follows that the richness of that information and the knowledge that can be drawn from it are critical to the success of FNCFS agencies. As is the case in all communities, better data leads to better knowledge leads to better public policy. Having authentic, highly accessible, quality information about Aboriginal peoples can facilitate cross-community and cross-cultural education and learning needed to tackle Aboriginal issues in child welfare in a more meaningful way (Jock, Simon, Fox & Nickerson, 2004).

- 3) *Access to information and communication technologies:* The technological needs of FNCFS Agencies, particularly for more remote and geographically disbursed Agencies, are great. As Bennett and Brown (2005) noted in their short

commentary, among the many research challenges faced by FNCFS Agencies is the lack of access to sophisticated computer equipment, updated software, computerized databases including appropriate infrastructures and adequate funds to support such an environment as well as specific expertise to utilize such resources in an effective manner. Disparities in technology and Internet connectivity between Aboriginal and mainstream Canada are well known and captured in concepts like the “Digital Divide” and “learning divide” (Sciadas, 2002; Downing, 2002). These facts are supported by Statistics Canada’s research on the digital divide in Canada, which indicates that there are large differences among income groups characterized as ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ (Sciadas, 2002). Rural and remote First Nations communities in particular are considered among many of the ‘have-nots’ with respect to the Internet and the convergence of information and communications technologies (often referred to in the literature as ICTs) (Jock, Simon, Fox, & Nickerson, 2004). Although there have been significant improvements to bridge this digital divide, there is still a long way to go before FNCFS Agencies and communities are able to effectively and equitably engage in research activities and the emerging and evolving knowledge based economy within Canada. ICTs hold the potential for Aboriginal communities to break down the barriers of geography and scale and would significantly increase their ability to address the critical cultural, economic and social needs within their communities (Jock et al., 2004). The opportunity to benefit from new technology obviously requires money and funding for this purpose therefore needs to be increased to FNCFS Agencies so that they are able to fully participate in and enjoy the benefits of using ICTs as a way of improving service delivery to the citizens within their communities. Access to the new emerging technology will provide FNCFS Agencies with more effective means of collecting,

- using, managing, increasing skill levels, and sharing information (knowledge transfer) in a more timely fashion.
- 4) *Dialogue on the development of new laws:* This is not a new idea but there is a need to create a law (or at the very least, principles) that governs the way non-Aboriginal child welfare Agencies deal with Aboriginal children when Aboriginal children come into mainstream care (Northwest Indian Child Welfare Institute, 1987);
 - 5) *Research and analyses that focus on the strength based aspects of FNCFS Agencies:* Research has until now focused more on deficit models of service provision (McKenzie et al., 2003) and it was recognized by the feedback participants that there needs to be more analysis from within the CIS-2003 data which focuses on the strength based models being utilized by FNCFS Agencies in the delivery of child and family services to children and youth who have been abused and/or neglected;
 - 6) *Respectful research that is community-based and collaborative:* A need to ensure that research processes are respectful of Aboriginal/First Nation's communities, protocols and structural processes (McKenzie et al., 2003; Davis et al., 1999). The participants agreed that individuals from within the FNCFS Agencies or communities should be hired as Research Assistants in future Cycles of CIS. These researchers already come equipped with understanding the community, the protocols and as well, understand the structural processes that exist within the communities and how FNCFS Agencies provide services. Such an individual would likely be more effective in obtaining the data that needs to be collected and can further solidify collaborative relationships with outside researchers. Furthermore, the FN Research Assistants recruited to assist the training sessions that will be specific to the agency they will be assisting;
 - 7) *Training Sessions tailored to the realities within First Nations communities:* Training sessions for FNCFS Agencies on the objectives, methods and how to fill out the forms needs to be scheduled over two days for optimal learning and understanding by the agency staff as to the goals and objectives of CIS. Training should be delivered by Aboriginal researchers and consultants where necessary and if available;
 - 8) *Modification of the three page data collection forms:* Future CIS data collection forms should undergo some modification to make the questions more specific to the realities within First Nations communities (for example, see the sections on public housing and caregiver sections).
 - 9) *Modification of training material and access to specialized training to assist in the analysis of CIS data:* Future CIS orientation and training with FNCFS Agencies should include First Nations specific information, data and analysis of the Aboriginal data as well as access to general CIS data sets and information. Case vignettes utilized during the training session with the agency needs to reflect Aboriginal realities and scenarios; This would also require opportunities to attend training sessions on how to utilize the SPSS database to analyze the data such as was done at the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare's Research Forum on the Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect at Val David, Quebec in 2001 ;
 - 10) *Implementation of an Aboriginal Advisory Committee:* An Aboriginal advisory committee should be established to oversee the recruitment of FNCFS Agencies, including monitoring the data collection process, all research activities and overseeing the research outcomes that result from the CIS-2003 Aboriginal data and future studies. The role of this Advisory Committee should also be to monitor how researchers take and give back to communities, including making sure that research participants'

information, knowledge and/or statistics are returned and shared with Aboriginal communities in an accessible format and a respectful manner (Cottrell, 2001);

- 11) *A longer recruitment process:* The recruitment process in the efforts to encourage and engage more FNCFS Agencies in future cycles of the CIS must be done well in advance of the training and data collection periods. This will obviously mean that it may take longer to get FNCFS Agencies on board. The recruitment process is important to the process of building relationships so that trust can be established between the FNCFS Agency and the CIS researchers. Relationship building is necessary and crucial to the success of the CIS;
- 12) *Opportunity for more feedback from FNCFS participants:* Despite the amount of time it takes, getting and giving feedback and information at every stage is critically important, particularly during the planning stages. Without constantly checking in with the groups involved, projects can be undermined and money wasted. CIS organizers must go to into First Nations communities and engage FNCFS Agencies in the process and spend time with them so that it is possible for people to share their ideas. The principle researchers of CIS need to ensure that scheduled feedback sessions with community members as well as FNCFS Agencies are conducted during and after research to ensure correct collection and interpretation of the data as well as a means of evaluating the process of participation (Davis et al., 1999);
- 13) *A national First Nations specific study:* Last but not least, many participants strongly voiced the need to undertake research, including longitudinal research on child abuse and neglect, with all FNCFS Agencies in Canada. As was noted, the inclusion of only a few FNCFS Agencies in the CIS-2003 study does not provide a statistically significant understanding of

maltreatment issues for this vulnerable sector of society. A First Nations CIS focused study is viewed as necessary in order to understand the trends occurring in First Nations communities around child maltreatment and neglect issues. Undertaking such a study no doubt requires time to develop an approach and money to support such an undertaking. This will also require the funders and principle researchers of CIS, the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada and FNCFS Agencies and community to engage in more collaborative dialogue and planning as to how this can be effected for the future.

VI. Conclusion

There is a range of historical factors that have impacted First Nations children, families and communities which continues to encumber subsequent generations of children, families and communities. Colonization, the legacy of the residential school experience and earlier misguided child welfare policies have all played a part in the cultural disintegration of protective factors that were once a natural aspect of Aboriginal families prior to contact. The ongoing impoverishment within First Nations communities continues to threaten and significantly challenges the strength and well-being of children and families and. Poverty is seen as one of the etiological drivers of the child welfare industry yet very little research exists which looks at the connection between poverty and the involvement of child welfare in the lives of Aboriginal peoples, families and communities. The two comparative analyses published to date on Aboriginal data from the CIS-2003 is just beginning to uncover and help us understand some of the pathways that lead Aboriginal children and families into the child welfare systems within this country. This information, of course, would not be possible except by conducting research. Research is a timely and costly process, not just for those who engage in research on a full time basis but those who are asked to participate or collaborate in such endeavours. While First Nations have

adamantly and rightly argued they have been researched to death, there is not yet enough evidence-based research which reflects the unique and conflicting realities of practice and service provision by FNCFS Agencies in First Nations communities. Research plays a valuable role in the process of change and evolution for FNCFS Agencies. We have attempted to highlight some of the perceptions on the challenges and strengths of partaking in the CIS-2003 study. In reflecting upon the challenges and strengths of the experience of FNCFS Agencies in CIS-2003, we have endeavoured to bring about awareness as to the unique challenges faced by FNCFS Agencies in the efforts to engage their organizations in contributing to evidence based research. While research is laudable and recognized as important to FNCFS Agencies, it is an activity that competes with the very real reasons why FNCFS Agencies exist. Utilizing Maslow's theory on the hierarchy of needs reveals that research, even though important in and of itself, figures outside the needs of agencies. Though research outcomes may in the long run benefit FNCFS Agencies and is necessary for bringing about change, in the short term, research to some extent hinders a FNCFS Agency's ability to meet the immediate and very real needs of children and families in their communities. FNCFS Agencies are charged with the responsibility of helping families and children by protecting children, strengthening and preserving families, and helping to build healthy communities through the provision of child and family services but research is critical to understanding and exploring new ways to ensure that this comes about. The recommendations from the feedback with FNCFS Agencies and the FN Research Assistants provide some answers as to how this conflict with research can be solved and how more research activities within FNCFS Agencies can be supported in the future cycles of CIS. As researchers, we need to be prepared to address and adopt alternative research practices and recognize the auxiliary learning that occurs when researchers conduct research in FNCFS Agencies and communities. The implications of sharing this critical reflection are compelling.

Marlyn Bennett

Ms. Bennett is employed by the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada as the Director of Research for the First Nations Research Site, one of four sites associated with the Centre of Excellence for Child Welfare. Ms. Bennett also operates a Consulting, Research and Event Planning Company and has been involved in a number of program evaluations for the federal government and non-profit Aboriginal organizations. Ms. Bennett serves on the boards of Child Find Manitoba, Beyond Borders, and Animikii Ozoson Inc. (a new child welfare agency operating in the City of Winnipeg). Ms. Bennett is the coordinating Editor of the First Peoples Child & Family Review and is involved with the editorial boards of the Envision Journal of Child Welfare in Manitoba and Native History of Manitoba (which publishes manuscripts on Native history in Manitoba in conjunction with the University of Manitoba Press). She is involved with the Manitoba Strategy on the Prevention of Child and Youth Exploitation and is professionally affiliated with the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Manitoba. Ms. Bennett holds a B.A. and an Interdisciplinary Masters of Arts, has completed two years of law school and will undertake an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. at the University of Manitoba in January 2006. Ms. Bennett has authored and co-authored various articles on Aboriginal Child Welfare in Canada and assisted with data collection for the Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect in 2003. Ms. Bennett is a member of Sandy Bay First Nations, Manitoba and is the proud mother of a 12 year old daughter.

Corbin Shangreaux

Mr. Shangreaux is the Executive Director of Animikii Ozoson Child and Family Services, a new child welfare agency operating in the City of Winnipeg. Mr. Shangreaux is a Native American graduate of Montana State University. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts in Theology in 1975, a Bachelor of Science and Education in 1981 and a Masters Degree in Education in 1985. In 1988 Corbin moved to Canada

with his family and became a member of Peguis First Nation. Corbin has three children. Mr. Shangreux has over 25 years of experience as a director/senior manager in Native child welfare services (in both Canada and the U.S.). Prior to moving to Canada, Mr. Shangreux was a foster parent for American Indian youth. He has served as the Coordinator for Volunteers in Services to America (VOA) providing case management, supervision, recruitment and training of American Indian foster parents in addition to developing culturally appropriate programs for American Indian children and their families being served by VOA. Mr. Shangreux was the founder and Executive Director of The In-Care Network, Inc., an agency which serves emotionally disturbed American Indian youth. Upon moving to Canada he worked for West Region Child & Family Services for 10 years as a senior manager overseeing culturally appropriate child protection, family support and community based prevention services to 9 First Nations. In addition, Mr. Shangreux has worked as a program consultant and has significant research experience having recently assisted in the collection of First Nation data for the second cycle of the Canadian Incident Study on Reported Child Abuse and Neglect in 2003. Mr. Shangreux has diverse knowledge regarding federal funding policies in relation to First Nations Child and Family Services in Manitoba. Most recent, he completed research for the First Nations Child & Family Caring Society of Canada regarding federal funding formulas on First Nations Child and Family Services within Canada. Mr. Shangreux has assisted in the review and evaluation of child welfare services in the Northwest Territories and other provincial jurisdictions in addition to writing and co-publishing various articles and research findings on Aboriginal child welfare.

(Endnotes)

¹ These individuals represent some (but not all) of the First Nations Research Assistants who assisted the principle investigators in collecting data for the 2003 Canadian Incident Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect study. While they did not have a direct hand in writing this paper, it is based on

their collective comments from participating and sharing in the February 2003 feedback meeting regarding the challenges and successes to collecting data for the CIS-2003 study. Draft copies of this paper were circulated in advance to all First Nations Research Assistants for additional comments and/or clarification before it was submitted for publication to this journal.

² "First Nations" refers to those persons identified and registered as "Indians" within the meaning of the Federal Indian Act legislation. Although the term "First Nations" is predominantly used throughout this paper, no legal definition of it exists. The term "Aboriginal" refers to one three groups of people (First Nations, Inuit and Métis) who have been constitutionally recognized under the Constitution Act, 1982.

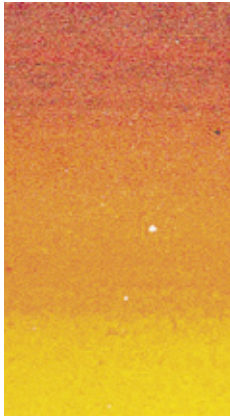
³ Personal communication. Confidentiality requirements prevent identifying these individuals by name or position.

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Qallunaat Crossing:

The Southern-Northern Divide and Promising Practices for Canada's Inuit Young People *

Shannon Moore, Wende Tulk and
Richard Mitchell

Abstract

Life for Inuit communities in Canada's northern territory of Nunavut has been impacted by rapid change over the past fifty years in particular, a pattern that has similarly impacted First Peoples' communities across the southern portion of the country for centuries. Unfortunately, inadequate resources often leave young people from Nunavut challenged to safely navigate these abrupt changes within their communities and culture. The chronic lack of resources for young people is compounded by the lack of educational opportunities for Inuit adults to enter professional roles in support of the region's next generation. As a result, non-Inuit (or Qallunaat) professionals from southern Canada are frequently recruited.

This paper examines some of the challenges faced by Inuit communities and Qallunaat professionals as they traverse the North/South divide within a cross-cultural educational context. This process is characterized by struggles and joy in finding the balance between meeting young peoples' basic social and emotional needs, and professionals who are often ill-prepared to teach and learn within a cultural context with which they have little familiarity. In response, the authors describe some of the unique attributes of Inuit life and some of the many challenges faced by young people. They also suggest that a

"transdisciplinary" approach be established (Holmes and Gastaldo, 2004) towards educating Qallunaat professionals as an important step in achieving effective practice within northern communities - one which integrates knowledge from Inuit Elders with cross-cultural counselling techniques, multicultural competency development and practice-based wisdom. Specific application of these skills will be explored in this paper to illustrate ways of engaging "multiculturalism" within this context while accounting for the right of Canada's Inuit young people to have their basic social, emotional and cultural needs recognized during a transformative historical epoch.

* This paper was adapted from a presentation for Multicultural Days International Conference at Brock University, June 2005.

Introduction

This paper is a response to the need for enhancing transdisciplinarity for non-Inuk (Qallunaat) professionals when working with the young people of Canada's most northern territory, Nunavut. While initiatives such as the Akitsiraq Law School and its recent graduating class of 11 new Inuit lawyers have focused on creation of educational opportunities for Inuk people within their home communities (see Mankin, 2005) such opportunities are rare in remote Arctic regions. As a result, Qallunaat will continue to be recruited to practice in the North for the foreseeable future, and may even provide the type of "bridging frameworks" suggested by Dahlberg, Moss and Pence (1999, p. 164) as integral to the evolution of children's education. Holmes and Gastaldo (2004) suggest this trend towards "transdisciplinarity" is moving beyond traditional professional perspectives by allowing diversity and plurality to include alternative forms of knowledge that cross disciplinary boundaries (p. 259). As an example, transdisciplinary teaching professionals are now called upon to have both educational and social welfare roles in their day-to-day work with young people.

The authors of this paper argue that Qallunaat professionals could benefit from a similar transdisciplinary understanding of Inuit culture, the unique challenges faced by northern communities, and specifically, by Inuit young people themselves. Towards this end, the paper has been co-written by Shannon Moore, a clinical counsellor and graduate instructor within Brock University's Faculty of Education with an interest in cross-cultural counselling and restorative justice; Wende Tulk, an educator in Nunavut for the past decade and a recent graduate of Brock University's Faculty of Education; and Richard Mitchell, a child and youth rights researcher and instructor within Brock University's Child and Youth Studies Department.

The paper explores aspects of Northern life for transplanted professionals while suggesting strategies for integrating practical, cross-cultural competencies in the support of promising practice for

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Qallunaat and the benefit of Inuit young people. To achieve this aim, the paper is organized into several sections. To begin, an overview of challenges characterizing northern life is offered the current cultural/historical context. Next, a critical reflection written by a Qallunaat teacher from her lived experience in the North is presented. Finally, strategies to address the challenges described throughout the paper are provided through a synthesis of insights from Inuit Elders and healers, cross-cultural counselling discourses, and practice-based wisdom.

Overview of Current Challenges

The challenge of survival has historically been integral to Inuit communities and this has been magnified by the dramatic rate of social, cultural and environmental change faced by these Aboriginal peoples (Kulchyski, Mc Caskill, & Newhouse, 1999; Kusugak, 2004; Statistics Canada, 2001a; 2001b; Uyarasuk, 1999). This is expressed poignantly through the voice of an Inuit women's association:

Unparalleled rate of change: It would be difficult to overstate the effect on Inuit women of the fact of their culture changing in less than fifty years from an isolated, family-centred economy, based on subsistence hunting and seasonal relocation, through fractured family structures and children taken far away and educated in a foreign language and culture, to population migration from small communities to regional centres and an economy of wage earning employment and life in permanent housing (Dickson, 2004, p. 5).

This atmosphere of profound transformation has leveled a severe cost on the Indigenous people of the Canadian north.

As one result, from across disciplines the non-Inuk professionals who are recruited to practice in this Arctic region need to be informed of this socio-historical dynamic as they struggle within a cross-cultural context for balance in a reality of extremes:

If we have the determination to adapt our behaviours and attitudes with the desire to overcome ethnocentrism, we may begin to know the feelings of exhilaration that come when we have made contact with those from other cultures far removed from our own sphere of experience. This willingness to reach out, risk, learn and experience others is a challenge for everyone (France, Rodriquez & Hett, 2004, p. 55).

As non-Inuk human service professionals such as educators, social workers, and counselors search for balance in Arctic communities it is essential to reflect on the socio-historical context established well before their arrival (France et. al., 2004; Kline, 1992; Kauffman, 2000). A history of colonialist ideologies, oppression and racism (Wayland, 1997) has spawned unequal power relations in favor of southern Canadians over those from the north, and as result, Inuit culture has been under consistent threat from the hegemony of the dominant culture for generations. The complexity of change in northern life that has resulted since contact also includes the following “root causes of social problems”: alcohol and drug abuse and addiction, cycles of trauma and abuse, high unemployment rates, family violence, high suicide rates, cultural dissonance and loss of cultural values (Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association, 2004, p. 18; see also Alexander & Alexander, 1998; Elrick, 2004; Mankin, 2005; Statistics Canada, 2001a, b).

Across Canada, all children and young people from Aboriginal communities are bearing the fallout from similar social-historical-cultural crises. Aboriginal young people are “likely the most vulnerable group of children and youth in Canada today and in the future” (Finlay, Parker-Loewen, & Mirwaldt, 2005, p. 10). This is most clearly demonstrated through the appalling suicide rate among First Nations and Inuit young people: In Canada, female youth are eight times more likely to commit suicide and males five times more likely than their non-Aboriginal peers (ibid.; see also Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D’Hondt, &

Formsma, J., 2004). In the entire region of the Northwest Territories, the rate of suicide is 43.1 per 100,000 – almost four times the Canadian average of 13 per 100,000. Some communities have greater rates of suicide than others, and the numbers of adolescents who completed suicide in Nunavut have increased dramatically over the past two decades. For Inuit young people, well-being and health are confounded by multifaceted dimensions of social, psychological, historical and cultural factors including:

- ✦ Cultural stress, loss of spirituality, lack of recreational activities, as well as family breakdown due to death of a relative, alcoholism or abuse. High rates of suicide are also suspected to be exasperated by a somewhat accepting attitude towards suicide among young people.
- ✦ High rates of unsafe sex compounded with early pregnancy and larger families for Inuit women. There is also a high rate of alcohol consumption for pregnant Inuit mothers and resultant higher levels of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FAS/FAE).
- ✦ High rates of substance use, abuse, and addiction including solvent, marijuana, and hashish; although alcohol use has been considered somewhat less of a problem comparatively [It is noteworthy that both cocaine and crystal methamphetamine recently are becoming widely available in Nunavut].
- ✦ Levels of environmental toxins in the North are queried to have a strong relationship with high rates of developmental challenges among Inuit young people.
- ✦ Although the Indigenous language – Inuktitut - is considered strong in Inuit communities, knowledge that is traditionally passed on from Elders using Inuktitut is not reaching young people. This creates further cultural dissonance and intergenerational barriers (see Dickson, 2004; also Stout & Kipling, 1999).

Arguably, this context of risk is one of Canada’s most significant human rights

challenges at this time. These factors also highlight the complexity of the social and educational arenas that Qallunaat enter when they cross the southern-northern divide in a professional role.

Moreover, professionals training to work with children across southern Canada are generally unaware of children's human rights, and the implication of Canadian commitments to the United Nations human rights monitoring bodies (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1991; UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 1995, 2003). This lack of understanding on the part of professionals charged with ethical and democratic practice with young people results from inadequate human rights education across disciplines (Mitchell, 2003a; 2003b; see also Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt & Formsma, 2004). As Williams (2005) also notes, the Convention on the Rights of the Child (or CRC) is relatively unknown in Canada, although as a nation Canadians think of themselves as human rights proponents on the world stage. Williams (2005) notes further that the treaty is frequently met with trepidation by Aboriginal peoples many of whom have seen the CRC as yet another instrument of dominant culture oppression. Perhaps wary of previous colonialist ideologies defining the "best interests of the child" (see Kline, 1992; Mitchell, 1996), Inuit teens early on requested the treaty be translated into their own Inuktitut syllabics - a rare example of such a translation based upon CRC Article 30 (Onalik, 1995).

Overview of the Northern Context

The new territory of Nunavut is home to fully one-half of the Inuit population, about 26,000 individuals that are scattered among 2 million square kilometers. Nunavut is a new territory since April 1st, 1999 when the region was carved out of the Northwest Territories to change the internal boundaries of Canada for the first time in 50 years and only the second time since confederation (Natural Resources Canada, 2004). Nunavut covers one fifth of Canada's total land mass,

and is a seemingly boundless wilderness with the kind of severe climate typical of the high Arctic (Alexander & Alexander, 1998). This cold climate - winter temperatures drop to minus 52 degrees Celsius rising to only 6 degrees Celsius in the summer when the wind chill is taken into account - is composed primarily of barren land and permafrost. This land has been occupied by the Inuit peoples for many thousands of years, and "Nunavut" meaning "Our Land" in Inuktitut, indeed boasts a population of eighty-three percent Inuit. Although many qualities of living are shared among all Inuit peoples of Nunavut—such as the two months of total darkness and near complete darkness for an additional 2 months each year—it is important to note that much variation in lifestyle may be found among communities especially when rural as opposed to urban living is taken into account.

The most recent Canadian census indicates that one million people identify themselves as Aboriginal, and about 5%, or 45,000 report they are Inuit. This is a staggering 12% increase in just past 5 years (Statistics Canada, 2001a). This growth in Inuit population is largely due to demographic factors such as higher fertility rates and increased life expectancy. Although the Inuit birth rate has actually declined in recent years, it is still double the overall non-Aboriginal birth rate while the Inuit population is among the youngest for Aboriginal groups in Canada. The median age for the Inuit population - where one half of the population is older and half is younger - is about 20 years. Of the overall Inuit population about 39%, or 17,500, are 14 years old or younger (Statistics Canada, 2001b).

Overall these demographics support the notion that the Aboriginal, and Inuit population specifically, is young and growing in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001a; 2001b). Also, the history of the people of this far northern land has been focused on survival given the extreme climate (Natural Resources Canada, 2004). Nonetheless, the culture of the Inuit people has been dramatically jeopardized since contact

with peoples from the southern climates (Alexander & Alexander, 1998; Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, 1989; 2004). While they were "pulled" into settlements to obtain better health care, housing and education, they were also "pushed" from the land by decreasing caribou herds and low fur prices that often left the Inuit impoverished. Nobody, it seemed, could foretell the problems that were to come (Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, 1989). The Nunavut Land Claims Agreement created in 1993 was both a symbolic gesture and an effort to begin to mend the social fabric torn in this region since contact (Mankin, 2005).

Similar to the colonial ideologies that buttressed assimilation, abuse, discrimination and racism experienced by other Aboriginal people throughout Canada, Inuit families were torn apart through establishment of residential boarding schools and the dislocation of children and young people from their families and communities (Fleras & Elliott, 2002; Freideres, 1999; 2000; Wayland, 1997). For Inuit children, this led to relocation in larger settlements such as Churchill on the coast of the Hudson's Bay, a center to prepare for a new life in a modernized Arctic (Alexander & Alexander, 1998). Inuit young people have become trapped between two cultures. Children and young people were removed from their families and their land contributing to a lack of skills for survival such as hunting. The culmination of these processes contributed to a sense of cultural dissonance and loss of cultural values in Inuit communities (Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, 2005). Moreover, this pattern of physical and cultural dislocation from traditional teachings that began with residential schools still impacts how current educational systems are perceived. For example, school-based education is still met with apprehension, suspicion and fear by some community members, such that some young people are prevented from entering the new school system by parents and Elders.

Moreover this 'modern Arctic' offers insufficient employment opportunities coupled with a loss of traditional survival

skills, and Inuit are often forced to depend on social welfare resulting in a loss of identity and self-esteem. Emerging out of frustration, boredom, and traumatic cycles of abuse many Inuit have also turned to alcohol and drug abuse while others are driven to suicide (Alexander & Alexander, 1998; Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, 2005).

Reflecting upon the fracturing of this collectivist-nomadic society coupled with the youthful population and ancestral capacity for survival in the Arctic region, an opportunity for healing and reconnection presents itself. Young people are found within the educational systems while healers are traditionally the Elders of the Inuit communities (Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association, 2005). While the majority of the schools focus on an English language curriculum with Qallunaat from regions across Canada, efforts are currently underway to bring Elders into the education system to teach Inuktitut and traditional practices (see Kulchyski, McCaskill & Newhouse, 1999). From the perspective of Inuit Elder Pauloosie Angmarlik, the important contrast between traditional and contemporary education is described as follows:

We were taught by our ancestors, not in a school system, about hunting, survival skills, and so on. The school children are taken out in good weather only. From my experience the school children should go on outings even if it is not good [weather] so they will learn skills that they need when bad weather hits. They should be taught how to make an igloo if it is really windy out or in a blizzard....If kids are taught how to survive in bad weather, it would mean building an igloo....As I have said our ancestors were straight forward (Angmarlik, 1999, pp. 284-285).

Accordingly, although Inuit young people have rights to the preservation of their language and culture within both the educational system and society at large (CRC Article 30; Blackstock, Clarke, Cullen, D'Hondt & Formsma, 2004), this principle is less of a reality in contemporary practice.

The majority of educators and professionals come from non-Inuk heritage and Inuktitut is not taught regularly in schools nor is it spoken widely in young people's homes. This barrier to the use of Inuktitut impedes communication with Elders whom most often speak their own indigenous language and are less fluent in English.

In closing this section, the voice of another Inuit Elder, Rachael Uyarasuk from Igloodik, Nunavut, eloquently describes her times, her land and her people:

Life today is what I find strange. It was said that we were changing and I used to wonder what this meant and how we were changing. We have changed since back then. We are no longer scared of death. As I grew up I was controlled and guided by my older relatives and parents. I was not left aside. If we were like this now, it would be better. We are just disintegrating because we are outside. Our young people of today have a different life now than when we were young (Uyarasuk, 1999, p. 272).

This paper now turns to a closer exploration of the lived experience of being Qallunaat educator and the process of confronting some of the challenges discussed above.

Critical Reflection: Voice of a Qallunaat Teacher

Several questions guide this section in its exploration of finding balance and navigating change: How can Inuit people, skilled counsellors, teachers and other professionals work together to benefit Inuit youth? How can we find a way to balance values with meaning? How can we find that mid-ground between Inuit knowledge, customs, and values - and academic notions that should be balanced with great sensitivity and understanding for the Inuit people? How can we learn from one another? Finally, why is this questioning important at this time? It matters because teachers and other Qallunaat professionals can make a difference, and this author's voice comes from the experience and perspective of one who has taught in the Nunavut region for the last decade. Lived experiences and relationships

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developed in the north are invaluable sources of knowledge that cannot be obtained in a textbook. Furthermore, by integrating practice-based wisdom in this paper, it is hoped that other professionals will be encouraged to practice in a manner that respects and supports young people to return to their communities from the "outside".

It is important for educators to learn how to better counsel all students since much of the teaching day is consumed dealing with students' personal problems. This is unavoidable if learning is to take place, and teaching is no longer confined to mathematical fractions and English poetry. Reflecting back, I know I have grown both professionally and personally while living in the north, but challenging and sometimes tragic events that were centered on my students have forced me to deal with very sensitive issues that tested my strengths and weaknesses. I have come to understand that as an educator one needs to synthesize and implement both teaching and counselling skills. You need to find a way to combine your love of students and their culture, and understand the importance of creating a safe and healthy classroom.

Coming from a cross-cultural context, my professional competencies were shaped by a multitude of factors which included the cultural lens through which I perceived my professional and social worlds in Newfoundland. These included customs, attitudes, values, religious beliefs and practices that shaped my worldview, and what is normal behaviour for the teacher is not necessarily sensible for any of the students. At the same time, educators, counsellors and other professionals need to be conscious of each choice and not excuse unsafe behaviour simply due to cultural factors (France et al., 2004; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2005).

Some teachers feel that simply by teaching the curriculum we are educating and helping Inuit children and young people. I disagree. Personal experiences, supported by research such as France et al. (2004) and others, affirms that educators need to learn, understand and appreciate their own biases and attitudes before they can

effectively teach and assist youth from other cultures. This responsibility to strive for deeper understanding is the other side of our privileged professional position.

Addressing the Challenges by Striving for Balance

The following is a synthesis of insights from Inuit Elder healers, discourse related to cross-cultural counselling and practice-based wisdom from restorative justice processes. These are integrated with the aim of providing a framework to guide effective practice when Qallunaat teachers and other professionals work with Inuit young people.

To begin, a definitive definition of ‘healer’ in Inuit culture doesn’t exist as ‘healing’ is understood as a process; however, we can call on recent research into the characteristics of Inuit healers to inform an approach for professionals in Canada’s north. Inuit healers and Elders have been described as follows:

- warm, enthusiastic, empathetic,
- humorous, self-confident,
- focused on the behaviour and not blaming the individual,
- respectful of those whom they counsel,
- strong belief in the importance of Inuit culture,
- practical,
- respect for cultural values, Elders, and Inuit ancestors,
- awareness of the realities of contemporary Inuit society,
- assertive,
- able to discuss sensitive topics such as sexual abuse; and
- hold the belief that people can change (adapted from Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association, 2004, p. 11).

These qualities of Inuit Elders and healers are similar to the characteristics of effective counsellors and professional helpers from traditionally Eurocentric discourses in counselling psychology (Cormier & Hackney, 2005; Corsini & Wedding,

2005; France et al., 2004; Moore, 2004). The links between qualities of indigenous healers and characteristics that facilitate change in western psychotherapy have also entered into discourse in restorative justice as healing justice nationally and internationally (Moore, 2003; 2004; in press), forming a bridge between worldviews.

Restorative justice focuses on the healing of harm by bringing together affected parties in an effort to mend the social fabric of a local community. Since these processes are grounded in wisdom from indigenous cultures the world over, it is not surprising that they also call for facilitators to exude many similar characteristics noted by the Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association (2004) regarding Inuit healers. In addition, these are focused on the behaviour and not focused on blaming the individual, respectful of those whom they counsel including victims and perpetrators of hurt, involvement and respect for Elders in the community, and a willingness to discuss sensitive topics openly and honestly combined with a respect for the values, beliefs and culture of those involved (Moore, 2004; Van Ness & Heetderks Strong, 1997; Zehr, 1995).

Other aspects of Inuit healing share similarities with both restorative justice processes, and the healing processes linked with mental health and psychotherapy from Eurocentric discourse (Moore, in press). By integrating these diverse culture-bound perspectives the process of traversing the cross-cultural divide between the northern and southern worlds in Canada may be eased for practitioners. For example, restorative justice shares a focus on with Inuit healing as neither can be categorically defined rather these are major philosophical and social constructions in contemporary society (Moore, 2004, p. 347; see also Blue & Rogers Blue, 2001; Van Ness & Heetderks Strong, 1997; Zehr, 1995). The links between the healing potential of restorative justice, and the processes of story-telling and confessional within both Eurocentric psychotherapy and indigenous cultures have now been established (Moore, in press). Similarly: “Inuit healing is about telling one’s

story to someone who uses and describes the world in a similar way” (Pauktuutit Inuit Women’s Association, 2004, p. 11).

Furthering this exploration, Inuit Elder and healer Meekka Arnakaq shares that Inuit “healing makes you realize what you have forgotten. You feel better, especially when you have been stuck in the same place for a long time” (cited in Dickson, 2004, pp. 10-11). Another Inuit Elder, Angaangaq, explains that Inuit “healing means to help someone stand strong...to help them stand by talking with them, letting their feelings out, letting their thoughts out, so that they may be able to stand....the Inuktitut meaning of healing is that you can speak of your thoughts and your feelings. When you can speak of your feelings, then you can stand strong” (cited in Dickson, 2004, p. 12). It is also essential -across cultures - that individuals in helping relationships also have the capacity to speak of their feelings, have self-understanding, and are assertive and expressive of their thoughts prior to supporting others to do the same (France et. al., 2004; Moore, 2004). Thus, in all of these processes, healing begins with the personal qualities of the Elder, healer, counsellor, professional helper, or educator.

Multicultural competencies in a cross-cultural setting include aspects of non-verbal and verbal communication as well as the qualities described above for educators, counsellors and professional helpers. To more effectively work with Inuit young people from a cross-cultural perspective, it is suggested that educators and counsellors consider the following dimensions of communication (adapted from Moore, 2004, p. 352-353):

- **Proximity** between the educator or professional helper and the student or client. For example, this includes physical distance that is comfortable; degree of face to face contact which varies vastly across cultures: Inuit young people may be uncomfortable with face to face contact.
- **Body Movements** includes the degree of eye contact, gestures of approval or disapproval such as smiling or frowning. For example, eye contact

communicates very different messages across cultures, power relations and age: Inuit young people may be reluctant to share direct eye contact with an educator or professional helper.

- **Paralanguage** includes forms of vocal cues such as hesitations, inflections, silences, intonation, cadence and projection of one’s voice: Inuit young people may communicate with fewer words and more silence, choosing non-verbal cues over verbal utterances--- such as raising eyebrows to say ‘yes’ and wrinkling one’s nose to say ‘no’. Thus, when carrying on a conversation with Inuit people, words may not be spoken. This is also the case when difficult emotions associated with traumatic events are expressed. Inuit young people are also more likely to “show you” how they feel rather than “tell you”. This is highlighted in times of stress, trauma and challenge as emotions may be demonstrated through punching a wall, kicking a chair or fidgeting with hands.
- **Density of Language** includes the verbal delivery of ideas: Inuit young people may be more receptive to concise, sparse and direct communication from educators or other professionals; although, their response to questions may be circuitous, indirect and more focused on the process of communicating rather than finding answer or relevant response. For example, “the poetry of the story may be more important than the content of the story and may actually be the point of the story” (Umbreit & Coates cited in Moore, 2004, p. 353). It is important to know that asking questions is not the Inuit way, so questions will not always be answered, or one might not be any wiser even with an answer given. This style of communication contradicts southern Canadian teacher training, for example. This difference in delivery of ideas should not be interpreted as disrespectful or disinterest—much of how the Inuit individuals communicate is demonstrated through observation and telling stories about events.

It is also important to highlight the extreme linguistic difference between Inuktitut

syllabics and English language. Since 80% of individuals in Nunavut speak Inuktitut, and in smaller centres this is the primary language, many young people experience more fluency and freedom when using their indigenous language. This is especially true at times of crisis, stress, or trauma. Educators and other professionals may find that students will listen and be attentive to English language speakers, but they may also choose to reply in Inuktitut.

Guidelines for integrating multicultural competencies, cross-cultural counselling, and restorative justice principles into school-based interventions have already been established by Moore (2004). These are combined with the above practice-based insights from a northern teacher and wisdom from Inuit Elders. To achieve a sense of professional and personal balance in northern cross-cultural contexts, Qallunaat may be guided by the following dimensions (adapted from Moore, 2004, pp. 351-352):

1. **Start with Self:** self-awareness and self-knowledge about one's own values, beliefs, worldview and prejudices, as well as emotional and cognitive experiences will build strength and assertiveness in one's approach to enable more effective practice. An integral aspect of this process is the act of bringing one's own culture to the level of consciousness as a central influence upon understanding others and the 'self'. To make assessments and judgments are part of human-ness, but to effectively help others in a cross-cultural context, it is often essential to suspend judgment and understand that our personal filters impact interpretations - quite simply things are not always what they seem to be (see also France, et al., 2004; Hernandez, 1997; Miller, 2001).
2. **Respect for Diversity & Individuality:** A valuing and respect for another person's worldview, culture and value system, with a genuine curiosity and desire to understand another's perspective, are central to cross-cultural helping relations. It is also important to be open and honest about similarities and differences. This process of opening

our selves to understanding diversity can also build personal power while suspending judgment and creating space for diversity aids in self-acceptance (see also France, 2004).

3. **Gain Cultural Knowledge & Encourage Indigenous Language Use:** Actively seeking out and accessing knowledge about the heritage and traditions in cross-cultural contexts are important ethical and practical standpoints. This is an ethical responsibility because of our power relationships as professionals working with others in a healing context (France et. al, 2004). For example, it is valuable to know that some Inuit feel that *Qallunaat* - 'people who pamper their eyebrows' or 'white people' - are nosy, hostile and too free with their opinions. Qallunaat are also credited for their ability to manage and manipulate others. Often these qualities come in conflict with Inuit values, and can make interactions strained or awkward (Pauktuutit Women's Association, 1989). The Inuit culture is passive - almost serene - in which individual goals and successes are of less value when compared to the goals and best interests of the community. In addition, it is also essential to consider language use in the context of valuing culture, heritage and diversity. To value culture sensibly means encouraging indigenous language use and the welcoming of Elders into the school and other systemic contexts—which often increase performance of students, personal capacity of individuals by strengthening cultural identity (see Cummins, 1989).
4. **Building Trust & Unconditional Listening:** A willingness to listen unconditionally to another's story, history, belief system and spirituality are essential to building trust, and a sense of mutuality. It is also important to be mindful of the severity and frequency of personal and familial violation that are common, but have historical antecedents that have impacted communities through cycles of abuse,

discrimination and racism. However, many Inuit communities witness Qallunaat professionals leave after brief periods of only 2 years (Pauktuutit Women's Association, 1989), and this process increases apprehension towards building trusting relationships.

- 5. Being Genuine:** Capacities to exude respect, genuineness, availability, congruence are part of the core conditions of helping relationships across contexts (see Rogers, 1957; Raskin & Rogers, 2005). Cross-culturally, an attitude of humility leaves one open to learning diverse ways of 'being' since the communication of these core conditions becomes increasingly challenging as greater diversity is met. In working within Inuit communities, a "professional front or personal façade" (Raskin & Rogers, 2005, p.131) will create interpersonal barriers and communication and trust deteriorates.
- 6. Being Visible & A Role Model:** A willingness to open our selves to a wider circle of diversity and experience through engagement in community events allows opportunities for visibility as a role model. This process helps to form diverse connections through which understanding is mutually gained. In this way, opportunities to establish credibility, to seek and solicit support from Elders, and to move beyond being a visitor to becoming an active and accepted member of the community occur. This is especially valuable in small communities since it is essential to understand that relationships extend beyond the boundaries of the school and the classroom, or other professional contexts, into larger social and political systems. For example, in contexts such as teaching Inuit students – many of whom have a quiet nature - much learning emerges from participation and attending northern community events. For Qallunaat, opportunities to be with Inuit families and community allow seminal learning to occur regarding traditional ways that are not accessible within textbooks: for example, skidoo

hunting trips, traditional childbirth, and survival in the north based upon communitarian values (see also Miller, 2001; Rodriquez, Hett & France, 2004).

- 7. Seeking Support & Guidance:** It is essential that individuals know the limits of their capacity to work with others in any context while of heightened concern cross-culturally due to misunderstandings. Support can come from colleagues for one's professional needs, but in contrast, it is important to access the kind of support available only from Elders, respected community members, and individuals that are part of a close social circle. Saliently, this is facilitated only if professionals have already made themselves visible in the community while learning about customs, traditions and the culture of others. In Inuit communities, individuals that are strong, open-minded, bilingual and willing to support Qallunaat are often available. It is also helpful to consider inviting a young person's close friend to participate in the classroom when difficult issues or debriefing of critical incidents are required - as familiar social supports help ease stress (see also France et. al., 2004).
- 8. Child Rights-Based Approach:** Qallunaat must gain knowledge and awareness of how to apply the principles and provisions of the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child. This human rights-based framework increases capacity for participatory and democratic practices with young people within every cultural context. It is essential that professionals practice an ethical understanding based upon Canada's commitments to the UN to up-hold those rights – particularly those of Inuit and other First Peoples. A rights-based approach respects the dignity, diversity and capacity of children and young people to be partners in social justice and positive structural change.

Final Reflections

Throughout this paper, the authors have described various aspects of northern life

for southern professionals who are actively engaged, or anticipating future engagement, within Inuit communities. The aim was to highlight some of the challenges working with this growing and youthful population within a transformative historical epoch. At the same time, an effort was made to provide practical information for Qallunaat or 'people who pamper their eyebrows' as professionals who often struggle to find the personal and professional balance required to survive in this cross-cultural context. To achieve this aim, wisdom from Inuit Elders, practice-based insights from a veteran educator who has crossed the north/south divide, and an analysis of cross-cultural counselling, restorative justice and rights-based techniques argued to be vital for application in the Canadian northern context have been discussed.

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and relationships she has developed are invaluable and added to her life immensely both personally and professionally.

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Same Country: Same Lands; 78 Countries Away

An exploration of the nature and extent of collaboration between the Voluntary Sector and First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies in British Columbia

Cindy Blackstock



Abstract

As the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2003) noted, Aboriginal children face more discrimination and increased risk factors than other Canadian children. Their lived experiences are shaped by the policies of assimilation and colonization that aimed to eliminate Aboriginal cultures through repression of fundamental freedoms, denial of ownership and the operation of residential schools (RCAP, 1996; Milloy, 1999). First Nations child and family service agencies have expressed concern about the lack of resources available to support families in redressing the significant impacts of colonization. The voluntary sector provides a myriad of important social supports to Canadians off reserve and this research project sought to determine how accessible voluntary sector resources were for First Nations children, youth and families resident on reserve in British Columbia. Results of a provincial survey of First Nations child and family service agencies and child, youth and family voluntary sector organizations indicate very limited access to voluntary sector services. Possible rationales for this social exclusion are examined and recommendations for improvement are discussed.

Introduction

In 1998 Canada was cited by the United Nations as the best country in the world to live based on the Human Development Index (HDI). At least this was the case for most Canadians but not for First Nations peoples as the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development found when it applied the HDI to registered (also known as status) Indian peoples living on reserve in Canada. Results indicate that the quality of life for status Indian people residing on reserve would be equivalent to the 0.739 HDI scores of Brazil and Peru, which are ranked 79th and 80th in the world respectively¹. The findings of this report came two years after the completion of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) which documented Canada's history of colonial policies and practices toward Aboriginal peoples whilst tabling significant recommendations designed to ensure a respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Canadians.

First Nations recognize that the impacts of colonization and assimilation in their communities are extremely troubling and they have been active in developing child and family service agencies (FNCFSAs) throughout Canada in order to respond to community needs and restore community capacity to care for children within a cultural context. These agencies, funded by the federal government, receive their statutory authority from the provincial child welfare statutes unless a self-government agreement that includes authority for child welfare exists between the First Nation(s) and the Canadian government. FNCFSAs face many challenges including high service demands, limited resources and the conundrum of bridging colonial individual rights based child welfare legislation with the communal rights based cultures of communities. The Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children confirmed in its 1999 report that "Canadian jurisdictions are working toward the transfer of child welfare services to Aboriginal agencies. However, these agencies are struggling with overwhelming demand and a limited

supply of culturally appropriate early intervention and treatment services²." This situation suggests that resources should be augmented through increases in government financial support and flexibility in funding regimes (Assembly of First Nations, 2000) coupled with increased support from the corporate and voluntary sectors.

Working with First Nations to respond to the needs of children, youth and families residing on-reserve fits the aspirations of Canada's voluntary sector which can be broadly described to "be a full partner with government in discussion and work undertaken to pursue a social development agenda."³ and to acknowledge the "vital role the voluntary sector plays in shaping and sustaining a high quality of life for Canadians and in turn increasing their engagement in community life⁴." The voluntary sector, through initiatives such as the Voluntary Sector Roundtable and Voluntary Sector Initiative, have sought to promote the coordination of efforts of the voluntary sector so as to direct, in a more focused, way Canadian public policy. The mobilization of voluntary sector resources in Canada is significant in its collective impact and influence on government as Delaney Turner notes "the economic impact of the sector [in Canada] is tremendous with 90 billion dollars in annual revenues, 109 billion dollars in assets and 22 million people making in-kind or financial donations to the sector."⁵

Several child, youth and family serving voluntary organizations at the national, provincial/territorial and community levels have identified their desire to include First Nations in the dialogue shaping Canadian public policy and ensuring a high quality of life for First Nations peoples.

This project seeks to contribute to the collaborative dialogue by exploring the nature and extent of engagement between First Nations Child and Family Service agencies and child and family voluntary sector organizations operating in British Columbia in order to determine the degree to which First Nations children, youth and families on-reserve are currently receiving services provided by the voluntary

sector. First Nations child and family service agencies are the key child, youth and family service provider and service referral agent for on reserve families and thus provide an excellent conduit to gauge voluntary sector engagement.

For me, as an Aboriginal person who works in the voluntary sector, this paper is also a search for answers- to understand why the lines demarcating the reserves seem to create a humanitarian boundary over which the rest of Canada has not overcome and beyond which First Nations are not recognized and legitimized as valued and distinct citizens of this country. For years I worked as a social work(er) within the provincial government and I witnessed the significant benefits brought to children and youth by the voluntary sector and then when I traveled about 8 blocks away to work on reserve, the voluntary sector was not only absent, it often appeared to find reasons for not crossing the reserve boundary at all. As one who believes that our freedoms and humanities are intertwined, I could not understand why the reserve lines held the power to separate peoples from one another, to separate Canadian values from Canadian actions and to separate all of us from our historical and contemporary truth.

The paper begins with an overview of the First Nations experience of colonization and assimilation within Canada specifically focusing on how these processes continue to shape the lived experiences of First Nations children, youth and families in British Columbia. The First Nations context is then contrasted with the role, objectives and missions of the voluntary sector in Canada, and in British Columbia more specifically. Collectively these historical contexts frame the findings of a research survey designed to measure the explicit nature of engagement between voluntary sector child and family serving organizations in British Columbia and the First Nations child and family service agencies. The paper ends by analyzing the survey findings within the historical context and providing recommendations for promoting future collaboration.

First Nations Context

Long before the first European settlers crossed the Atlantic, the original citizens of Canada had a rich and vibrant culture, a profound spirituality and deeply held social values based on respect for the earth and all forms of life. The political structures that existed in the indigenous nations were so highly developed that the Iroquois Confederacy served as the model for the first concepts of federalism, on both of which our own system today is based.... We had and continue to have, much to learn from the first nations people. Their full participation in our national culture, can be mutually enriching and beneficial”⁶

History is not just a collection of interesting anecdotes of our past; it is an integral link in the process of knowledge itself. It frames our understanding of who we were, who we are and who we can become as a human society (Llosa, 1998). It informs our understanding of our role in the interdependent web of life, and frames our understanding of the importance and value of relationships within it - including our relationships with peoples of other cultures and nation states. Its value is so fundamental that freedom of expression is often constitutionally protected by democratic nations in order to avoid the manipulation of history to support agendas that are not in the public interest. So if a true and authentic history is not one engineered and unified story – it is an inclusive record of diverse knowledge and experiences then what does the voluntary sector (VS) know about the history of Aboriginal peoples in Canada and how has this shaped their relationships with them? As this historical summary will demonstrate there are significant reasons to question the degree to which the voluntary sector acts as a protective factor in cases of pervasive structural discrimination and rights violations. In a country endowed with a well developed voluntary sector, academic community and structured legal system it is difficult, but critical, to understand why

what is about to be described happened at all. Critical because the only way to stop it from happening again is to learn why it happened in the first place.

Anthropological evidence confirms that indigenous peoples have lived on these lands for thousands of years as sustainable, diverse, communities. Radiocarbon dated evidence at Charlie Lake Cave in BC proves that indigenous peoples lived on the lands now known as British Columbia for over 10,500 years (Muckle, 1998).

They had complex societal systems and knowledge that cut across all major schools of contemporary study – engineering, architecture, pharmacology, ecology, physics, astronomy, arts, education and social work. This complex knowledge collectively reflected as culture varied from community to community but was tied together by a holistic worldview that valued interdependence and communal rights. The keepers of this knowledge were the Elders; it was their role to transfer this important knowledge, known as oral history, from one generation to the next ensuring it's survival in perpetuity. As Elders were the most knowledgeable of all community members they were given primary responsibility for guiding the care of children. No society was ever without its challenges and First Nations communities had highly developed systems to support children and families in need through systems such as custom adoption whereby community members would care for a child indefinitely if he/she could no longer be cared for by his/her family.

The Beothuck peoples met explorer John Cabot, amongst the first colonial visitors, on the shores of what is now known as Newfoundland in 1497. Early contact between First Nations and the colonists can be generally described as mutually beneficial as it was based on a trading relationship. However this soon changed as colonial interests shifted from trade to settlement and resource expropriation. As the immigrants migrated west, they encountered other First Nations peoples and began to construct settlements. The two primary colonial powers, the British and French struggled for

control over the new world. This struggle culminated in England defeating France in the Seven Years War resulting in British control over much of what is now known as North America. The British victory was due, in part, to the substantial aid provided by the Iroquois Confederacy and thus it was in the interests of Britain to develop territorial settlement plans that would ensure that they remained on good terms with the Indians (Titley, 1986; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The British set out the terms of territorial settlement in the Royal Proclamation of 1763. This proclamation is a significant legal basis for what was termed Aboriginal Rights and Title in the Constitution of Canada (1982). The Proclamation contains the following significant passage:

And whereas it is just and reasonable, and essential to our Interest, and the Security of our Colonies, that the several Nations or Tribes of Indians with whom We are connected, and who live under our Protection, should not be molested or disturbed in the Possession of such Parts of Our Dominions and Territories as, not having been ceded to or purchased by Us, are reserved to them, or any of them, as their Hunting Grounds⁷.

The Royal Proclamation informed the development of the *Indian Act* in 1867 which set out that Canada, not the provinces/territories, was responsible for Indians and Lands reserved for Indians and thus had a primary role in treaty making (Mercredi and Turpell, 1993). Treaties were negotiated in other parts of Canada although Canada's role in the negotiation process and the implementation of the treaties themselves has been broadly criticized (Berger, 1977; Mercredi and Turpell, 1993). In British Columbia, treaties were not signed, except for the Douglas treaties and Treaty 8, due to two key factors: 1) the province of British Columbia, upon entering into confederation in 1871 steadfastly frustrated any attempts to resolve the lands question and 2) Joseph Trutch, Canada's representative on the treaty issue, unilaterally decreased the amount of lands allotted per person in other treaties

making any agreement entirely unsustainable and thus disagreeable to First Nations (Di Gangi and Jones, 1998; Titley, 1986).

Under the assimilation regime, the federal government policy shifted from exercising its trust responsibilities in ensuring resolution of treaties and fair treatment of Indians, to a policy of assimilation in hopes of eradicating Indian peoples and by extension Indian land ownership as described in 1920 by Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs:

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department.”⁸

Scott, along with being the most influential Canadian public servant on Indian issues for the first three decades of the 1900’s was also an essayist and poet (RCAP, 1996, Titley, 1986). The coordination between his own personal racist views and Canada’s policy of assimilation is expressed in many of his works. The following stanzas of the poem *Onondaga Madonna* are one example:

*She stands full-throated
and with careless pose
This woman of a weird and waning race
The tragic savage lurking in her face
Where all her pagan passion
burns and glows
Her blood is mingled with her ancient foes
And thrills with war and wildness in her veins
Her rebel lips are dabbled with the stains
Of feuds and forays and her father’s woes
And closer in the shawl about her breast
The latest promise of her nations doom...⁹*

Whilst implementing the assimilation policy, the Canadian government actively impeded progress on the Treaty making front by amending the *Indian Act* to make it illegal for First Nations to hire legal counsel for the purpose of treaty making or to gather in groups to plan or protest. In addition, socio-political ceremonies such as the Potlatch and Sundance ceremonies were outlawed and the Canadian government legally compelled First Nations to assume a band council system

displacing traditional forms of governance.

There were other abuses as well. Until 1960, the *Indian Act*, defined a person as “an individual other than an Indian”¹⁰ effectively denying Indians the rights and benefits of Canadian citizenship such as secondary education, veterans benefits and the right to vote.

All of this occurred against the catastrophic backdrop of loss of Indian lives from small pox, tuberculosis, starvation and murder associated with colonization. Some First Nations communities in Canada, such as the Beothuk of Newfoundland, were entirely eradicated (Howley, 2000) and others, such as the Haida Nation, lost 93% of its population over a sixty-five year period between 1850 and 1915 (Globe and Mail, 2000). The impact on a community of losing 93% of your citizens is horrendous- the grief of loss of life, relationship, knowledge and skills continues for generations. The tragedy is that at least in the case of the Haida the loss of life was preventable as explorers intentionally off loaded an infected sailor onto the shores proximal to a Haida village as described by a Chief of the Haida Nation ““They almost wiped us out with smallpox,” Guujaaw said. “It went down to 500 people. We had driven off the miners and every attempt to colonize our land. We whooped them every time. It was pretty clear from our point of view that the smallpox was deliberate. We have documented evidence someone dropped off one man on our island with smallpox and our people attempted to care for him.”¹¹

The colonial powers often rationalized the annihilation of Indian peoples as being necessary to free up land for European settlement and to ensure their safety. The Bismark Star published this editorial following the massacre of Indian peoples at Wounded Knee in 1890:

The pioneer has before declared that our only safety depends on the total extermination of the Indians. Having wronged them for centuries we had better, in order to protect our civilization, follow it up by one

more wrong and wipe out these untamed and untamable creatures from the face of the earth¹².

This theme of the settlers being at risk from the Indians was reflected in many cowboy and Indian westerns of the 1960's and 1970's. It fed a persistent and false stereotype that Aboriginal people are a risk to the rest of Canadian society. This is simply not supported by the historical or contemporary evidence – if anything it is the reverse that is true society has posed risks to Aboriginal peoples.

Another critical factor contributing to the massive loss of life was starvation. As settlers moved into First Nations territories they often recklessly expropriated resources, including the wildlife upon which First Nations depended. The Plains Indians relied on buffalo for food, shelter and clothing. It is estimated that in 1800 there were over four million buffalo on the North American plains, after 95 years of sport and professional hunting by settlers there were only 1,000 left resulting in starvation and significant disruptions in traditional ways of life for First Nations (Hirschfelder, 2000).

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples estimates the average loss of life amongst First Nations in Canada due to disease, starvation and murder to be at 80% of the population (RCAP, 1996). According to oral history and anthropological evidence there had never been such a catastrophic loss of life as there was during these years. To put this loss of life in a global historical context it is estimated that 20% of the population of Great Britain lost their lives during the Plague and two of three Jewish persons were tragically lost in the Holocaust (US Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2002) – there are few historical incidents that match the degree of depopulation suffered by First Nations in Canada.

The devastation from depopulation was made even more difficult for the surviving Haida peoples as along with being subject to a plethora of colonial policies, anthropologists harvested the memorial poles for museums that they had erected

in memory and respect to those who had died. This practice of removing memorials and even more disturbing, the unearthing of First Nations burials sites, was not a unique practice. As Douglas Leechman, archaeologist for the National Museum of Canada, describes the scene on one of his own bone collecting expeditions in 1944, “On my arrival at the island, I found one picnic party already established and three other groups arrived during the two or three hours that I spent there.... In conversation with these people I learned that digging for Indian bones was a recognized form of amusement for all bathing and picnicking parties who visited the island [Aylmer Island.]”¹³ The whimsical view of the value of First Nations burial sites is contrary to mainstream values sanctifying the deceased. The hypocrisy in values and actions of non Aboriginal Canadians is symbolic of the systemic dehumanization of First Nations peoples that accompanied colonial and assimilation doctrines. This dehumanization supported mainstream Canada in rationalizing the serious disconnect between the values it espoused and its antithetical actions towards First Nations.

But this was not the extent of the hardship endured by First Nations, the residential school policy initiated in the 1870's was particularly offensive in that it aimed to assimilate and eliminate Indian peoples and used their children as a means of accomplishing this. The government of Canada, via the *Indian Act*, forced Indian parents to send their children to these schools, engaging police to enforce the law where necessary and employing the churches to run the schools thus supporting the proliferation of the Christian agenda. Marlyn Bennett, a First Nations researcher, describes the child's experience of residential school as follows:

“the RCMP also assisted by arriving in force. They encircled reserves to stop runaways then moved from door to door taking school age children over the protests of parents and children themselves. Children were locked up in nearby police stations or cattle pens until the round up was complete, then

taken to school by train. In these schools, children were often segregated by gender, received inadequate education, forced to work, and suffered beatings for speaking their Native language, humiliated and ridiculed and sexually abused. Children were taught to hate their Native Culture and as a result became "cultural refugees" (Boyko, 1995:187). Residential schools are an example of the most unmitigated form of cultural racism carried out by the government and missionaries in their attempts to "civilize" Aboriginal peoples.¹⁴

The conditions at the schools were deplorable. The federal government, in an effort to reduce costs required that the schools be built with the cheapest materials and workmanship and this was reflected in the consistent problems with heating, ventilation and the prevalence of safety issues resulting from poor construction (Milloy, 1999). These issues, along with the federal government policy encouraging the churches to maximize enrolment in the schools created conditions for the ravage spread of small pox and tuberculosis. There are those who argue that the deaths from disease were accidental, simply a causality of peoples from differing cultures coming together. But if that were true the Government of Canada Department of Indian Affairs would have responded to the reports issued by their Chief Medical Officer, PH Bryce in 1907 who concluded, "even war seldom shows a large a percentage of fatalities as does the education system we have imposed on our Indian wards."¹⁵ Bryce had surveyed the health of some 1537 children in 15 residential schools and found that the death rate was 24%. If Bryce tracked the health of the children over a three -year period then the death rate increased to 42% (RCAP, 1996). The only meaningful response from Indian Affairs to Bryce's report, which was confirmed by the findings of a non medical government of Canada investigator F.H. Paget in 1908, was that Indian Affairs eliminated the Chief Medical Officer position (RCAP, 1996).

Queens Counsel SH Blake later noted in that the Department failed

"to obviate the preventable causes of death, [it] brings itself within unpleasant nearness to manslaughter."¹⁶

Over 100,000 First Nations children attended the schools throughout their over one hundred years of operation. Although the schools began slowly closing in the 1940's, it was only in 1996 that the last school operated by the federal government closed in Saskatchewan making it a very recent experience in the lives of many First Nations children, youth and families (INAC, 2002). The residential schools' legacy is one of multi-generational and multi-dimensional grief and dysfunction that is evident at many levels of community life as described by Rosemary Kirby an Inuit Teacher in Paulatuk during her submission to the Berger Commission:

There was a time after being raised in residential schools when an Eskimo person felt that they were useless. They were worthless, that what they were something to be ashamed of, and so we grew up to feel ashamed of being Eskimos, being ashamed of being Indian¹⁷

The child welfare system moved in to provide services to First Nations children and their families on reserve beginning in the mid 1950's. Unfortunately, the philosophy that Aboriginal children are best cared for by non-Aboriginal caregivers that underpinned the residential school system also pervaded the child welfare system. Social workers, lacking any critical awareness of the colonial factors that resulted in such pervasive poverty and multi-dimensional grief and despair on reserves removed large numbers of Aboriginal children and placed them in non-Aboriginal homes – often permanently. One, and regrettably not unique, example is a BC provincial social worker who in the 1970's actually chartered a bus and removed 38 children in one day from the Spallumcheen First Nation (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2002). These mass removals which occurred throughout Canada became termed as the "sixties scoop" and contributed to the further erosion of community morale and capacity to care for their

children. In reviewing the circumstances of the 60's scoop, Manitoba Judge Edwin Kimmelman described the practice as "cultural genocide" (Balfour, 2004).

Fifty years after provincial child welfare authorities began looking out for the safety and well being of First Nations children and youth there is very limited evidence that the situation has improved. First Nations children are more likely to be incarcerated than graduate from high school continue to have inequitable service access on reserve and are at higher risk for health problems. There are currently between 22,000 and 28,000 Aboriginal children in the care of child welfare authorities in Canada (Bennett and Blackstock, 2003). This figure is shocking when one considers that there were approximately 9,000 children in residential schools at the height of those operations in 1939 (Milloy, 1999). In it's 1998 report the B.C. Children's Commission found that only 2.5% of Aboriginal children in care were placed in Aboriginal homes despite a statutory requirement that social workers place children in Aboriginal homes unless safely unable to do so (Childrens' Commission, 1998).

There are other problems as well; Aboriginal youth in Canada have one of the highest youth suicide rates of culturally identifiable groups in the world (Chandler, 2002). Poverty is a significant issue on reserves and off reserves as well. In its report to the Vancouver Richmond Aboriginal Health Board, the Vancouver Aboriginal Council estimated that of the 4300 Aboriginal children aged 0-6 years in the area eight children out of ten live in poverty (Vancouver Aboriginal Council, August 2000). The issue of poverty is critical as the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children acknowledges saying:

"Poverty and despair provide fertile soil for child abuse and neglect and the social problems families suffer across the country tend to be even more concentrated in Aboriginal communities. The destruction of native social systems by the mainstream society has

left many Aboriginal children vulnerable and many Aboriginal communities mistrustful of child welfare interventions. Canada has made little progress in improving the outcomes for Aboriginal children.¹⁸"

In its report for the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on Children held in May 2002 in New York, the Canadian Coalition for the Rights of Children noted "a steady deterioration of the supports required to enable children with special needs to enjoy the very rights afforded them under the Convention. In fact, support and services for children with special needs, Aboriginal and First Nations children, and other disadvantaged children, and their families are being rolled back in many places¹⁹." At almost every level an evaluation of current conditions faced by First Nations children and families reflects a failing of contemporary social work practice and calls for the affirmation of First Nations knowledge in caring for their children, investments in sustainable community development including self- government and self-determination frameworks.

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples provided significant recommendations to move away from the Indian Act toward reconciliation and the recognition of Aboriginal self-determination, however, as Hurley and Wherrett (2000) argue Canada's implementation of the recommendations has been inadequate "In April 1999, the United Nations Human Rights Committee also expressed concern that Canada had "not yet implemented the recommendations of the [RCAP]," and recommended "that decisive and urgent action be taken towards the full implementation of the RCAP recommendations on land and resource allocation."²⁰"

The continuing reality for First Nations peoples is that the government of Canada still imposes significant restrictions to the freedom and self determination of First Nations peoples whilst neglecting to vigorously correct structural discrimination in government policies. For example,

Canada still defines who is, and who is not, an Indian pursuant to the *Indian Act*, it legislates First Nations forms of governance, and regulates the provision of services to First Nations peoples through funding regimes or direct legislative powers.

Whilst communities are actively engaged in processes of restitution and recovery they build upon an amazing resilience which has survived them through conditions that arguably meet the definition of genocide contained in Article 2 of the 1948 *United Nations Convention on the Prevention of the Crime of Genocide* that reads as follows:

...genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) *Killing members of the group*
- (b) *Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group*
- (c) *Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;*
- (d) *Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;*

Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.²¹

This resilience is admirable and necessary to meet the challenges ahead. However, as First Nations regroup to address the impacts of colonization there continues to be pervasive silence in the Canadian and international community to First Nations' past and present experience of colonization. The domestic and international community mostly turned its head to the hypocrisy between what Canada committed to in numerous international human, political and cultural rights declarations and its treatment of First Nations peoples. As recently as 2002 Amnesty International Canada noted in its report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination that "In its report to the Committee, the Canadian government has recognized that the status and treatment

of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada gives rise to questions about Canada's record of compliance with the Convention [UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination]²²" Astonishingly, Canada filed this report in the same year that the Honourable Robert Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development stated "there is no evidence in these modern times of racism in Canada."²³ Far from being significantly admonished for its violations of international conventions, Canada's reputation as a peacemaker and observer of human rights grew during its time of oppression and assimilation of First Nations to a point where it is often cited as a positive example for other countries to emulate.

Why was there so much silence? Why when, as a country, we did so much to ensure international human rights abroad didn't our Canadian concepts of humanity and justice apply at home? Where were the human rights, health, cultural and social organizations of the voluntary sector? Why weren't Canadians outraged when there was so much evidence of human, cultural and physical genocide – and why is there so much silence today?

Instead of the focused analysis these questions would seem to deserve, the trend in government and in Canadian society more broadly is to simply assume colonization is over and requires no further response. In doing so we miss an opportunity to fundamentally explore how the voluntary sector can act as a vital protective factor against gross human rights abuses in Canada and it negates the opportunity of the sector's involvement in ensuring a high quality of life for all Canadians. Without active reflection on colonization coupled with a deliberate commitment to change, the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples will continue to be largely unimplemented and the world for First Nations children will remain the same.

First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies: Working to Close the Incomplete Circle of Support Services on Reserves

...we will make mistakes because we have embarked on a journey that has an uncertain outcome. But we also believe that we will correct these mistakes because we do not have a massive bureaucracy to move first. The Federal and Provincial governments believe they have experts who can teach us and guide us but the truth is that we have much to teach them...²⁴

Debbie Foxcroft, Founding Director of Nuu-chah-nulth USMA child and family services and current First Nations child and family service consultant

During the past 30 years over 100 First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSAs) have developed throughout Canada in an effort to stem the tide of children and youth being raised in non-Aboriginal homes and to build on the cultures of communities to affirm and restore community capacity to care for their children and youth. The 19 FNCFSAs in British Columbia face considerable challenges, including inadequate resources, in meeting the significant community requirements arising from colonization (MacDonald, 1999). Like other First Nations child and

family service agencies in Canada, FNCFSAs in BC are funded by the federal government pursuant to a national funding formula known as Directive 20-1 Chapter 5 and receive their legal authority to deliver services through the provincial child welfare statute. A national review of the funding formula found that there is inadequate funding for a statutory range of protective services intended to keep children safely in their homes known as least disruptive measures (MacDonald, Ladd et. al., 2000). Seventeen improvements to the Directive were made however there has only been very marginal implementation with no new funding having been identified to support FNCFSAs. The provincial government typically does not fund on reserve service delivery and there is very limited funding for municipal types of services on reserves such as recreation parks and libraries. This means that agencies can not draw upon the resources of a diversified public sector to meet the needs of children – they have to respond to significant community need on the basis of federal funding only.

There are other social supports on-reserves but these are often limited to forms of civic engagement that are based on the traditional cultural concepts of interdependence – neighbors helping neighbors types of support. There is very limited evidence of funded non profit organizations on reserves (Lemont 2002).

Figure 1: Contrasting Social Supports for Children on and Off Reserves in Canada

Sector	Off Reserve Supports	On Reserve Supports
Public Sector	Federal programs Provincial programs Municipal services	Federal programs based on population count
Corporate Sector	G-8 economy provides family incomes of \$37,757 for non Aboriginal workers in Canada (Campaign, 2000)	Limited corporate sector annual family income 7,165.00 per annum (Beavon and Cooke, 2001)
Voluntary Sector	90 Billion dollars per year in annual revenue (Turner, 2001)	Extremely negligible evidence of VS service delivery or funding of FN based forms of volunteerism (Nadjiwan and Blackstock, 2003)

Economic development is also limited by the *Indian Act* and lack of resolution of Treaties resulting in a corporate sector that is often based on a very limited number of small businesses or resource based industries such as fishing and logging.

The layering of these factors means that counter to prevailing stereotypes that view First Nations as preferred beneficiaries of Canada's resources, children on reserve have significantly less resources available to them than children off reserve as demonstrated in Figure 1.

Given this inequality of access to resources it is not difficult to understand why First Nations families are finding redressing the impacts of colonization so challenging. After all, it is likely that Canadian families would experience significant decreases in quality of life if they had to make do with the very limited social supports available to First Nations families on reserve.

Despite the significant contributions of the FNCFS, they cannot meet the overwhelming need on their own. There is a need for a greater range of resources that are designed and delivered by First Nations or in respectful partnership with the private, voluntary or government sectors. The following section explores the nature of the diverse voluntary sector in Canada with a particular focus on how voluntary sector objectives may impact First Nations children, families and communities.

The Voluntary Sector

The voluntary sector has the most direct influence on government policy and on the development of public policy as a whole (Milne, 2002). The Voluntary Sector Roundtable emphasizes the important role of the voluntary sector in Canadian society stating that "The long term goal is to strengthen the role of the voluntary sector as the third pillar of Canada's social and economic order – equal in importance to both the government and private sector."²⁵ This role is supported in general by Canadians who in the Scan on Research on Public Attitudes

toward the Voluntary Sector (2001) held the following views about the sector:

- 90% of those surveyed agreed that the importance of charitable organizations in Canadian society was increasing.
- 79% felt that voluntary sector organizations understood the needs of Canadians better than governments
- 59% indicated that charitable organizations do a better job of meeting the needs of Canadians than governments.
- 58% agreed that the voluntary sector should speak out on issues such as the environment, health care and poverty.²⁶

The socio-economic influence of the Canadian voluntary sector is confirmed by the Delaney Turner (2001) who noted:

There are currently 75,000 registered charities, 100,000 non-profit organizations and 1.3 million employed in the voluntary sector. 6.5 million people were involved as volunteers, contributing approximately 1 billion hours each year. The organizations, some of which were run by a mixture of volunteer paid staff, varied in size from very small to very large. They are involved in a wide range of activities and services, including social services, health, sports, international cooperation and aid and faith based organizations. The economic impact of the sector is tremendous with 90 billion dollars in annual revenues, 109 billion dollars in assets and 22 million people making in-kind or financial donations to the sector²⁷

In British Columbia, Volunteer BC (2002) reports that there are over 22,000 voluntary sector organizations collectively representing over one million hours of volunteer service valued at over 2.7 Billion dollars. This significant pool of resources is deployed throughout British Columbia to benefit a myriad of causes including social welfare and justice, recreation and sport, the arts, and the environment. Although there is no data indicating how many of these organizations have as their specific mandate the well being of children, youth and families anecdotal evidence indicates the numbers are significant. First Call, a cross-sectoral coalition of child, youth

and family organizations lists over 50 provincial child, youth and family serving VS organizations amongst its members and the United Way of British Columbia lists hundreds of community child, youth and family organizations on its website (First Call, 2002, United Way of BC, 2002).

Their collective efforts have undoubtedly contributed to the well being of children and families but as the sectors' influence on Canadian public policy increases so too does its responsibility to ensure that the voices and needs of First Nations peoples are included in the reshaping of Canada (Centre of Philanthropy, 2002).

The most significant development in the area of Aboriginal involvement in the voluntary sector is the establishment of the Aboriginal Reference Group for the Voluntary Sector Initiative in 2001. This reference group draws its mandate from a strategic plan developed by a selected group of Aboriginal peoples in July of 2001. The strategic plan stresses the importance of engaging the diversity of Aboriginal peoples within Canada through a national consultation process to determine Aboriginal concepts of volunteerism, voluntary activity and unearthing means of supporting the Aboriginal voluntary sector (Voluntary Sector Initiative, 2002). The consultation process is envisioned to be respectful of linguistic, literary and cultural diversity and to incorporate the views of as many Aboriginal peoples as possible. Regrettably, although some progress has been made on an awareness video to advance this project, according to Aboriginal Reference Group meeting minutes dated November 2001 and January 2002, progress in achieving the strategic objectives has been impeded by inadequate human and financial resources (VSI 2001; VSI, January, 2002; VSI, November, 2002). It is important that the works of this table be adequately resourced so that the stated objectives to affirm promote and support Aboriginal volunteerism and voluntary sector organizations can be achieved. In addition, efforts to promote effective and respectful collaborations across cultural lines between Aboriginal peoples and non

Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations and the philanthropic community are required. Enhanced collaboration could serve to address immediate community needs which are outside of the current capacity of the Aboriginal voluntary sector or are better met through partnership arrangements.

According to leading collaboration theorist Rosebeth Kanter, a critical part of forming effective collaborations is information. In the case of collaboration between First Nations and the voluntary sector this would include gathering information on their collective historical experiences, contemporary contexts, organizational missions, values and structures. Unfortunately, voluntary sector industry publications appear to lack any meaningful information and discussion on these important issues. There is also a dearth of research on current engagement patterns between First Nations and the voluntary sector in general and in regards to the needs of children, youth and families on reserve in particular. In fact, I was unable to locate any Canadian or international studies that had explored the nature and extent of engagement between the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector and First Nations peoples on reserve. This gap in information inspired my own research and the following section describes the results of a survey research project in 2002 to assess the level of current engagement between the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies in British Columbia. The project also highlighted ideas on how to inform and promote collaborative relationships between First Nations child and family service agencies and the voluntary sector.

Methodology

In the absence of relevant research to inform research design, a survey based research design was selected. Two separate surveys were developed, one for child, youth and family voluntary sector organizations and another for First Nations child and family service agencies. Although there were questions that were

specific to each research group, whenever possible, efforts were made to include consistent questions in both surveys to facilitate cross comparisons of results.

Some respondents were contacted after the completion of the survey to clarify interview responses to inform aggregate data analysis. Conversations with colleagues in the voluntary sector and in First Nations child and family service agencies also helped shape data analysis and findings. Confidentiality of participating organizations is ensured through the presentation of survey findings in aggregate form only.

Nature and Extent of Collaboration between FNCFSAs and the Voluntary Sector in British Columbia: Survey Findings

Yes, I see a need for other non-profit organizations in a community. Our agency can't do it all because of time constraints and funding issues. Too many jurisdictional issues to deal with when working on and off reserve

First Nations Child and Family Service Agency Survey Respondent

The First Nations child and family service survey was sent to 19 First Nations child and family service agencies (FNCFSA) 6 of which completed the survey. Two other FNCFSA responded indicating that although to date there had not been any collaboration between their agency and the voluntary sector they felt their agencies were too new to complete the survey.

Of the six agencies completing the survey, three were fully delegated (delivering a full range of child protection services) and three were partially delegated (support services to families and foster home recruitment). The agencies served 47 First Nations located in the northern interior, northwest coast, central interior, lower mainland and island regions of the province. One agency was located in a remote community, two were in rural areas serving rural communities and three were located in, or proximal to, urban environments.

Only one agency had a child population size exceeding 1000 status Indian children on reserve. As funding for preventative services and community development are allocated under Directive 20-1 according to population count this is the only agency that received full operations funding. Of the remaining five First Nations CFS agencies, two received 25% of operational funding, two received 50% operational funding and the other received 75% of operational funding. FNCFSA that do not receive full funding under the operations formula have a very limited pool of resources for preventative services and community development.

Of the responding child, youth and family serving voluntary organizations, two are members of provincial organizations based in Vancouver and the others provided services on a regional basis in Northern Interior, Vancouver and Vancouver Island. The mission statements of the organizations varied, however, all stressed a capacity building approach to child, youth or families including wording such as “promote and advance” “independence and empowerment” and “fostering full potential” and “recognizing that children are our future.”

The participation of the First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies and voluntary sector organizations is critical to this study and their frank and open conversation is a generous gift to others in the sector interested in fostering positive collaborative relationships in future. To follow is a summary of the research findings, presented in aggregate, in order to protect the confidentiality of respondents.

Perception of First Nation Community Needs and Service Requirements

The First Nations child and family service agencies identified the following key needs in the communities they served:

Poverty

Five of the six First Nations child and family service agencies cited poverty as the most significant issue facing the children,

youth and families in their communities.

Substance Abuse

One agency identified this as the most significant issue, while four more ranked it second to poverty in importance. The lack of culturally based addictions services for adults and children are key concerns.

Low rates of Education Success

Low rates of educational success were identified as a key issue by four First Nations child and family service agencies. This reflects provincial statistics indicating that only one of four First Nations youth will graduate high school.

FNCFSAs also identified the following key issues impacting children and families on reserve: sexual abuse, youth suicide, mental health, racism, neglect, physical illness or disability and bingo.

When voluntary sector respondents were asked how aware they were of the needs of First Nations children, families and communities on reserve all five said “somewhat.” Sample responses include:

- Need for intensive family preservation work to enable children to reside in home rather than be removed.
- From our perspective mostly, articulated needs from the band was for parenting support.
- Some First Nations children come to our tutoring programs. There is a greater rate of school dropout in FN communities.
- Have direct experience working with a diversity of FN youth, though I would be reticent to identify any specific needs without consultation with them.

All First Nations child and family service agencies identified that there was a need for additional services to meet community needs such as: cultural programs, substance abuse programs, education services, mental health/suicide intervention programs, safe homes, recreational opportunities, employment services, parenting and family skill development programs and supports.

Is there a Role for the Voluntary Sector on Reserve?

The FNCFSAs were in unanimous agreement that the voluntary sector had a role in meeting the needs of First Nations children, youth and families on reserve. Sample responses from FNCFSAs include:

- Yes, I see a need for other nonprofit organizations in a community. Our agency can't do it all because of time constraints and funding issues. Too many jurisdictional issues to deal with when working on and off reserve.
- Yes, meal programs for on-reserve schools, transportation is a HUGE need (no public transit) hitchhiking is the only transit in remote communities. VS could fund community buses, after school programming, sports equipment, field trips and exchange options to provide hope to youth.
- Yes, when population size does not support the creation of an entire program on reserve partnerships may contribute to their development and success.
- Yes, issues of poverty and limited resources.

When voluntary sector respondents were asked what role, if any, they saw for the voluntary sector in responding to the needs of First Nations children, youth and families on reserve, all agreed that the sector did have a role. Two of the voluntary sector organizations identified public education as a key contribution the sector could make. Other suggestions included providing services, or to “act as flow through agency to transition the knowledge or funding they have to other organizations depending on the size of the population group.”

Current Nature and Extent of Collaboration

Both sets of respondents were asked to report on the current nature and extent of collaboration between voluntary sector and FNCFSAs in meeting the needs of First Nations children, youth and families

resident on reserve. Of the five voluntary sector agencies responding to the survey three indicated that they were aware of the number of First Nations reserves in their catchment area and, of these, two organizations were aware of the number of First Nations child and family service agencies. Two of the voluntary sector participants report that FNCFSAs contacted their organization regarding services this past year whilst three reported contacting FNCFSAs in the same time period. None of the participating voluntary sector agencies had worked with a First Nations child and family service agency to provide services to an on-reserve client in the past year.

Out of the six First Nations child and family service agency respondents, two agencies reported two occasions each where services were provided by the voluntary sector to residents on reserve this past year. The four voluntary sector organizations involved provided family support or mental health services to community members. The relationship quality was described as varied from fair to excellent with most on the latter end of the continuum. One FNCFSA commented that “some families are more comfortable working out family issues with people they don’t see on a social basis. [The voluntary sector organization] skills are good.” Another noted that the First Nation had a desire to develop the capacity to deliver the services on reserve to reflect, more closely, the cultural context of the clients they serve.

The two FNCFSAs that had collaborated with the voluntary sector to provide services collectively represented 7 of the 47 First Nations serviced by agencies participating in this survey. This limited engagement likely means the citizens of the remaining 40 First Nations did not receive services from the sector this past year as FNCFSAs act as the primary service referral agent for children, youth and families on-reserve. It is important to note that FNCFSAs in urban areas were the least likely to report collaboration with the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector debunking the myth that distance is a significant barrier to relationship building.

Opportunities and Barriers in Collaboration

The following section reviews respondent perceptions of the barriers and opportunities to collaboration between FNCFSAs and the child, youth and family serving voluntary sector in order to promote future respectful collaboration.

In identifying the main barriers to forming relationships with the voluntary sector, FNCFSAs identified the following key issues:

- Voluntary Sector lack of knowledge on the needs of First Nations children, youth and families living on reserve.
- Voluntary sector lack of cultural knowledge.
- Voluntary sector lack of knowledge of First Nations child and family service agencies.

Other issues include FNCFSAs lack of information on the voluntary sector, lack of time to form collaborative relationships, and distance of voluntary sector agencies to on-reserve communities.

In contrast when the voluntary sector respondents identified the main barriers to building relationships with FNCFSAs, a slightly different series of factors emerged as priority areas:

- Four of five respondents listed lack of time as the top barrier to forming collaborative relationships with FNCFSAs.
- Four respondents indicated voluntary sector lack of knowledge of First Nations Child and Family Service agencies as a key factor.

Lack of cultural knowledge, or awareness of needs of First Nations children, youth and families were also frequently cited as barriers. Other issues noted were distance between VS and reserve communities, and not wanting to assume that voluntary sector organizations would be welcome so they have not asked.

FNCFSAs offered the following suggestions to enhance collaboration:

- Dollars to develop our own voluntary

sector based on examples of voluntarism in the [First Nations] community

- Inter-agency community meetings
- Knowledge and information on both sides. Information needs to be provided to the VS on FNCFS. Information for the public and voluntary sector on the needs of First Nations children and families on reserve.
- Best way [for the voluntary sector] to help community is to work with the community as well as [First Nation program] departments such as child and family services, health, income assistance, and employment services.
- Ask [First Nations] communities what their needs are...look for volunteers and leaders within each of the communities, develop a relationship and partnership. Share with them the non-profit's experiences – good and bad and together decide what might work for community.

First Nations child and family service agencies identified that a shared vision of community development that builds on the assets of the community is a cornerstone of successful collaboration. Building community capacity not dependency was strongly emphasized. In order to achieve this, respondents believed that the voluntary sector “must have knowledge of cultural and traditional ways of that community. Must be non-judgmental of how a community and family functions. Must not try to force their own values/morals on our community.” There must also be a willingness by voluntary sector organizations to support First Nations directed resources and voluntary activity.

The voluntary organizations described the following characteristics of successful collaborations with FNCFS:

- Need to know about organizational details of both organizations.
- Collaboration in articulating the problem, designing and delivering a program
- Knowing what the expectations are of each party and negotiating how mandates and missions work together.

- Some way of developing the relationship – this has taken us and continues to take a lot of time.
- A clear definition of community needs and assets as defined by FNCFS.

In reflecting on what would assist relationship building between the voluntary sector and FNCFS, two respondents indicated that there needs to be a forum to facilitate relationship building “If FNCFS wanted to work with the sector then a respectful space to meet and create relationship [is needed] which has as it’s main goal relationship building but as well includes some form of concrete, easy to deliver, project.” Another respondent suggested “It’s also important that all the collaborators have a firm understanding of the history of each of the groups involved so that you don’t get blinded by a romantic idea of what is happening. A realistic clear-eyed grasp of the situation at hand is always a good place to start.” Other suggestions included; additional information regarding First Nations issues, a team approach that resourced opportunities for First Nations to be hired by voluntary sector organizations, integration of First Nations cultural and context into training programs for voluntary sector staff, and additional financial and human resources.

Discussion

While there were differences in some responses, the data indicates that there is very little evidence of engagement between child, youth and family serving voluntary sector organizations and First Nations Child and Family Service Agencies in BC. This is distressing and puzzling given the significant needs of First Nations children, youth and families and the sector’s desire to be inclusive, and responsive to the needs of all Canadians. The second key finding is one of hope, and that is that all respondents, First Nations and Voluntary Sector, agreed there was a role for the sector in building on the assets of communities to respond to the needs of children, youth and families and have identified a myriad of ways to foster collaboration.

The identification of barriers by survey respondents partially explains the lack of engagement, however, as many organizations have successfully overcome these barriers in other settings they do not account for the significant and pervasive absence of the voluntary sector in the face of such profound need.

As the sample size of voluntary sector organizations is small there is no definitive way of explaining the social exclusion based on the data, therefore, in order to promote further dialogue on the etiological drivers of the social exclusion of First Nations children, youth, and families, four possible rationales are explored:

1. Lack of Information
2. The Liberal Tradition of the Voluntary Sector
3. Differing Values and Beliefs on Volunteerism
4. Colonization, Racism and Reconciliation

Although I have organized these into four separate discussions, it is my belief that it is in the blending of these and other possible dimensions that the experience of both the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies is likely best reflected.

Lack of Information

The First Nations Child and Family Service Agency and the Voluntary Sector respondents both identified the lack of knowledge of the voluntary sector on First Nations cultures, child and family serving organizations, and community needs as a key factor that limits voluntary sector engagement. Information has also been identified by key collaboration theorist Rosbeth Kanter(1993) as critical component in the effective development and maintenance of organizational collaborative relationships. So in light of the need for information in order to facilitate collaboration what do we know about the historical/cultural knowledge of leaders in the voluntary sector and their access to reliable information to support further learning?

Although there is no specific information to assess the nature and extent of historical knowledge, particularly regarding First Nations peoples, amongst Voluntary Sector leaders and organizations, we can draw some information from national studies. In 1998, the Dominion Institute and the Canada Council for Unity commissioned Ipsos-Reid to conduct a poll on the Canadian's knowledge of their history. Interestingly, this test of Canadian history contained no questions regarding Aboriginal peoples. Nonetheless only half of respondents passed the test. An Ipsos-Reid poll in September 2001 indicated that 76% of Canadians are embarrassed by their lack of knowledge about Canadian history (Ipsos-Reid, 2001). So why do we know so little about our history, what are our institutions of knowledge such as schools and the media doing about it and what implications does this have for the shaping of Canadian society?

Canadian historian and author, Jack Granatstein, sums up the historical academic curricula in the elementary and secondary schools of the nation as follows:

“...astonishingly four provinces have no compulsory Canadian history courses in their high schools. Others bury it in a mishmash of civic, pop sociology and English as a Second Language, eliminating anything that might offend students, parents and school trustees, in an attempt to produce an airbrushed past free of warts (except for the officially approved historical sins that can be used for present-day social engineering.²⁸)

If elementary and high school provide Canadians with an inadequate understanding of Canadian history then what about the colleges and universities that graduate many of the voluntary sector leaders. Former University of British Columbia History Professor, Michael Ignatieff, points to the exclusionary telling of Canadian history in the university system as playing a key role in perpetuating Canadian historical ignorance:

“[T]he other reason the history I

was teaching wasn't national history was that it left out almost all of the people. It was a history of the politics, diplomacy and warfare that lead to the creation of British North America and the Canadian political system. While this has to be core of any national history it leaves out a lot...and as for the aboriginal peoples, whose civilization had marked the history of the Pacific Northwest, if my students wanted to study them, they had to head over to the anthropology department. Their achievements – and their tragedy- had no place in the Canadian story²⁹."

Historical ignorance allows Canadian governments and the voluntary sector to claim a higher level of morality and justice on the international stage and to hold tight to the values of democracy, freedom, compassion and peace upon which we found our national identity. We call on countries such as South Africa to end apartheid, the G-8 to end child poverty and China to recognize the distinctness of Tibet and yet Canada is home to the *Indian Act*, First Nations children live in conditions that lag far behind other Canadians, and little progress has been made to recognize Aboriginal rights and title in this country. Aziz Choudry offers this assessment of the contemporary relationship between the voluntary sector and First Nations peoples "Many social justice campaigns, NGO's and activists in these countries operate from a state of colonial denial and refuse to make links between human rights abuses overseas, economic (in) justice, and the colonization of the lands and peoples where they live³⁰" Choudry emphasizes that it is not possible to understand the contemporary context or experience of Aboriginal people in Canada without having a knowledge of the history.

Considering the significant socio-economic needs in Aboriginal communities, access to meaningful information on Aboriginal peoples in reports such as RCAP, and the desire for the voluntary sector to serve all Canadians it is unconscionable for the sector to continue to bathe

comfortably in its own ignorance.

It is also important to note that survey results suggested that First Nations child and family service agencies also required further information on the voluntary sector. In contrast to information on First Nations, accurate, and reliable information on the child, youth and family serving sector is available through non-profit organizations and networks at the community, provincial and national levels. However, a need for focused dissemination of information to First Nations child and family service agencies is clearly indicated.

If voluntary sector leaders are invested in renewed relationships between Canada's non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples then they must actively seek out multiple sources of historical truth and perspective on which to base their future actions. If the enthusiastic support for increased collaboration and learning from both FNCFSA and voluntary sector agencies participating in this project are any indication we have reason to be hopeful – now we must mobilize it into deliberate and thoughtful action.

The Liberal Tradition: The Mask of Inequality and Diversity

The voluntary sector is largely premised on the liberal tradition that seeks to affirm individual rights through organizational governance and service delivery structures that do not discriminate on the basis of issues such as race, religion, gender or political affiliation (Taylor, 1994). This is admirable but it also assumes a lot. For example, the liberal approach considers that service recipients all share a cultural framework founded in the liberal tradition, it assumes misapplication of liberal ideology will be obvious and preventable, and that everyone is starting from the same socio-economic advantage.

The problem is that these assumptions are likely only half-truths even when applied to non-Aboriginal Canadians let alone applied to First Nations whom experience political, economic and social oppression

to a degree that is not shared by other Canadians. Thus the difficulty arises in that the liberal tradition propagates and supports inequality through the equal treatment of unequals. This type of ethical blindness is easily sustained couched in language of equality and universality when a void of reliable organizational ethical auditing procedures exists (Bird, 1996).

The perpetuation of inequality, although often not deliberate, can be as destructive in its consequences as intentional discrimination. In the case of the voluntary sector that tends to provide services in the liberal tradition, this may result in the exclusion of the First Nations children, youth and families as service recipients or in a cultural mismatch between services provided and the cultural context of the service recipient. A conversation with a non-Aboriginal director of a child and youth voluntary sector organization provides some insight into how the liberal tradition manifests in practice. Upon hearing about the disproportionate numbers of First Nations children in care that were serviced by the organization she remarked “we don’t focus on First Nations children, we look out for the interests of all children.” While looking out for the interests of all children is admirable it can lead to the development of universal programs that fail to consider the inequalities and contexts experienced, in this case, by over 40% of the organization’s clients.

An over reliance on universal descriptors such as Aboriginal, Indigenous or Native to guide voluntary service governance or service delivery can also mask the significant differences between Aboriginal peoples in Canada resulting in a myriad of services and programs that do not adequately respond to various constituencies. Take for example the issue of the nature and extent of engagement between the voluntary sector and First Nations child and family service agencies that is reviewed in this paper. If the question was framed to measure whether or not voluntary sector organizations provide services to Aboriginal peoples, I would hypothesize that the engagement rates

would have been somewhat higher in light of the higher profile of urban Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations. By asking specifically about voluntary engagement with on-reserve First Nations child and family service organizations a significant gap was identified. Another example is Michael Chandler’s research on Aboriginal youth suicide in First Nations communities in British Columbia. His study found that although Aboriginal youth in Canada are at higher risk per capita of youth suicide than any other culturally identifiable group in the world, there were First Nations in BC that had a zero youth suicide rate over the past 13 years. In comparing First Nations with high suicide rates with those where youth suicide was not a concern, Dr. Chandler found that decreased suicide rates were highly correlated with increased community self-government and self-determination (Chandler, 2002). This finding supports other research suggesting that community self-government precede improvements in economic and social well being in First Nations communities (Cornell & Kalt, 2002). If Chandler did not unpack the term Aboriginal to examine differences in suicide rates amongst diverse First Nations communities this critical preventative factor for youth suicide would have not been identified.

Another example of misuse of taxonomy is the tendency to include First Nations as part of the “multi-cultural” community in Canada. While at first glance it may seem appropriate to lump First Nations in with other peoples of color, the First Nations experience and impacts of colonization, assimilation and expropriation of lands supported by Canadian legal, political and social instruments is so significant that cross comparisons with immigrant groups is not substantiated (Bennett & Blackstock, 2002). So although the multi-cultural service delivery approach offers the value of simplicity for the service provider it essentially denies the diverse realities of the service user and in this way perpetuates the homogeneity of diversity that the multi-cultural approach seeks to admonish.

The liberal tradition whilst wanting to

achieve notions of non discrimination can result in a lack of recognition that the services provided are not culturally neutral and the needs and contexts of the target population are not consistent and universal. Respecting difference and responding to difference does take time and it is definitely more complicated than presumptions of homogeneity and equality however it is also incumbent on the sector to do. The lack of engagement of the voluntary sector with First Nations child and family service agencies is a strong signal that current approaches need rethinking and redesign if the sector wishes to contribute to the well being of all Canadian children, youth and families.

Differing Values and Concepts of Volunteerism

The principles of institutionalized volunteerism are significantly correlated with the presence and strength of Christian based religions, particularly the Protestant faith. This is believed to be based on the protestant notion that one volunteers his/her faith to the church whereas other Christian faiths such as the Catholic Church view their teachings as universal and thus not elective (Woolley, 2001). If a fundamental principal of the faith is volunteerism then it is not surprising that civil society reflects these principals in their concepts and constructs in countries and regions with a strong Protestant tradition – such as in Canada.

So if Woolley is right and concepts of volunteerism, and by extension voluntary organizations, are significantly correlated to Protestant teachings then what does this mean when these organizations provide services to First Nations peoples? This will likely vary in accordance to the degree to which the organization acknowledges that it is not culturally neutral and adopts strategies to abort inappropriate projection of values and beliefs. At a macro level – if voluntary sector organizations founded on these predicates are inadequately reflective and responsive to changing cultural contexts, services can be experienced as irrelevant, incoherent, or actively challenging to

the values and beliefs of clients. Take for example, the tendency for child and family services to be structured to respond to the needs of the nuclear family versus extended family and kinship networks. If services are provided to individuals devoid of the context of community then application in communally based cultures is questionable.

As noted in *Strategic Planning for Aboriginal Input*, a document produced in July 2001 by Aboriginal participants for the Voluntary Sector Initiative, concepts of volunteerism can be influenced by differing values and beliefs. For example, civic engagement in First Nations communities is based on a strong tradition of interdependent communal life reflective of cultural values, beliefs and practices. Volunteering in the Euro-western concept implies choice however in First Nations communities' civic engagement is not, strictly speaking, elective – it is an expectation necessary to ensure the sustainability of community. Both of these traditions are valid however if the voluntary sector organizes itself strictly around the Euro-western framework it effectively fails to recognize and support other forms of civic engagement. The implications of this are reflected in the findings on the National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating which found that although 3 out of 10 Canadians volunteered with organizations 7 out of 10 indicated that they participated in other forms of civic engagement (NSGVP, 1997). The current narrow focus on institutionalized volunteerism, volunteering through an organizational structure, effectively marginalizes the efforts of four out of ten Canadians. This can, and does, result in First Nations communities being denied recognition of traditional forms of volunteerism and financial resources to support said activities.

There has been much debate on what constitutes a voluntary sector organization in Canada but this has mostly been confined to whether the organization has volunteers or relies on paid staff. The debate on how to support First Nations cultural constructs of volunteerism within a multi-cultural

Canada requires further thoughtful deliberation by the sector, government funders and the philanthropic community.

Colonization, Racism and Reconciliation

On January 7, 1998 Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jane Stewart, read the following passage in the statement of reconciliation on the floor of the House of Parliament:

Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In renewing our partnership, we must ensure that the mistakes that marked our past relationship are not repeated. The Government of Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people, women and men, were not the way to build a strong country. We must instead continue to find ways in which Aboriginal people can participate fully in the economic, political, cultural and social life of Canada in a manner that preserves and enhances the collective identities of Aboriginal communities, and allows them to evolve and flourish in the future. Working together to achieve our shared goals will benefit all Canadians, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike³¹.

This statement was to signal a new beginning, a relationship between Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Canadians informed by history and founded on respect and honour. Although, there is significant debate as to whether the statement went far enough in apologizing for Canada's colonial policies and whether the government has met its commitments in the statement, it is important that the statement was made. It indicates a need for the redistribution of power to restore First Nations self-determination and calls for a significant renovation of the relationship between Aboriginal peoples, the state and other Canadians. Many agree, including government, that empowerment, often termed capacity

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building, should be supported in First Nations communities -the difficulty is that empowering First Nations peoples necessarily results in the disempowerment of the colonial interests of government and mainstream Canadian society and it is here that road forward is often blocked.

A revitalization of reconciliation begins with understanding the harm in a way that can not be rationalized or tolerated. It requires accepting responsibility for the past and for involvement in the solutions that pave the way forward. For the voluntary sector this means accepting responsibility for their knowledge and lack of knowledge; for past actions and inactions; and its collective and individual relationships with First Nations peoples.

It also calls for a greater understanding of the insidious normalcy that clothes racism and how it envelopes itself in the language of safety, community and justice making it so damaging and pervasive in public affairs. Zygmunt Bauman's definition of racism emphasizes how it can become so normalized in our daily experience that we hardly notice it at all:

“Racism stands apart by a practice of which it is a part and which it rationalizes: a practice that combines strategies of architecture and gardening with that of medicine – in the service of the construction of an artificial social order, through cutting out the elements of the present reality that neither fit the visualized perfect reality, nor can be changed so that they do so³².

As a part of a constructed reality, racism can permeate and influence our construction of just and safe communities (Bauman, 2001). At a time when threat appears to come from the most unexpected directions, community is a word we all feel good about – a blanket that wraps around us making us feel safe and secure. As Bauman (2001) argues the need to maintain that feel good sense of community at a local, regional or national level can result in a progressive tendency to protect that concept of community by rejecting and oppressing peoples or ideas

that are inconsistent with it. In this way we become morally blind to the realities experienced by the others and either fail to see the connections between our actions and their situation or rationalize those actions as being necessary to ensure community safety. The massacre at Wounded Knee discussed earlier in this chapter is a good example of how mass murder of Indian peoples was rationalized as being necessary to ensure the safety of the settlers. In more recent times, the unarmed protest by First Nations peoples to protect an ancient burial site at Ipperwash Provincial Park in Ontario in 1995 brought out the Ontario Provincial Police Tactics and Rescue Squad resulting in the shooting of an unarmed Ojibwe protestor, Dudley George and the beating of two others (Edwards, 2001). Media surrounding the killing of Dudley George and the subsequent criminal prosecution of a police officer has put in focus again how race influences perceptions of threat resulting in excessive use of force by mainstream society. An inquiry is finally going to be held into the shooting of Dudley George; however, there are few indications that the inquiry, or other processes, will meaningfully redress the collective rights violations of First Nations peoples that gave rise to the Ipperwash Crisis in the first place. Canadian human rights mechanisms continue to focus on individual rights violations making it very difficult to address collective rights violations resulting from structural discrimination and oppression.

As this study highlights, the voluntary sector community has somehow constructed structural barriers between it and First Nations peoples in Canada. This social exclusion persisted over time regardless of the degree of devastation experienced by Aboriginal peoples, including the pervasive deaths of children in residential schools. Even today, statistics outlining the landscape of harm facing First Nations children – racism, poverty, social exclusion, institutionalization and lack of social support – are normalized. We have edged our collective tolerance for rights violations of Aboriginal children and youth upwards to a point where it is hard to imagine how bad things need to get to implore the focused

action and attention required to redress those conditions. This exclusion and moral blindness are so antithetical to the role and values of the voluntary sector that we are compelled to understand why it happened – why it is happening now and what can we do to make sure it does not happen again.

I have had many informal conversations with leaders, staff and volunteers of non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal voluntary sector organizations which provide some insight into the silent supports that exclude Aboriginal peoples. Although all the non-Aboriginal people I spoke with were well intended and supported social inclusion, many acknowledged a distinct discomfort when thinking of how to involve Aboriginal people in their organizations. Some thought the discomfort had to do with lack of information, or that the whole “Aboriginal issue” is too complex. Others said it was because they do not want to do more harm or because they found it difficult to recruit Aboriginal people for their organizations – still others simply did not know why that discomfort exists.

It is important to acknowledge that this discomfort in crossing the cultural boundary is real in the voluntary sector as it can lead to a decision to not involve the Aboriginal community or, after one or two failed attempts at engagement, to simply stop trying. One voluntary sector leader described how this surfaced in their organization saying that each year during the board strategic planning session the issue of needing to engage more Aboriginal people in the organization would surface. The board would agree that this was important; someone would ask if anyone there knew someone Aboriginal who they could contact, no one did – so it was put off until next year.

An Aboriginal man shared how the exclusion occurs in even high level meetings of those involved in children’s services. He was the only Aboriginal participant in a group that were setting national priorities for action. He shared the data and stories mapping out the significant, and disproportionate, risks faced by Aboriginal children and the solutions that



had been developed to redress those risks. After he finished there was silence – no one said anything – and then they moved on with the rest of the discussion. At the end of the day, the experiences of the Aboriginal children he spoke about were not among the top ten priorities for action.

Another Aboriginal man said that still in Canadian society one of his key roles is to be a contradiction – to be what the stereotypes say he can not be – educated, articulate, generous, caring about peoples across cultures and not wearing regalia all the time. Like many of my Aboriginal friends, he gets comments like “you’re different from the rest [Indians]” or “you are good at walking in both worlds.” Although these are often offered as well meaning compliments, they reflect a failure to appreciate the implied power imbalance when “walking in two worlds” is only an honourable duty for Aboriginal and visible minority peoples and not for mainstream Canadians. They fail to understand that the brilliance they see before them is not an exception amongst Aboriginal peoples, it is a glimpse at what was lost in Canadian society when Aboriginal peoples and their gifts of knowledge and caring were relegated to the other.

I have experienced what I call the set aside – where non-Aboriginal peoples, not understanding the harm, or wanting to avoid discomfort, set aside the concerns of Aboriginal peoples. Over the years I have participated in many non-Aboriginal working groups in the voluntary sector and find that the conversation of rights violations is too often centered on those violations that affect non-Aboriginal Canadians whose basic rights have already been recognized. Legitimate middle class concerns such as ensuring family friendly work places, and improving recreation parks overshadow the need to eliminate the race based Indian Act or the significant risk factors facing Aboriginal children. As Aboriginal peoples our rights violations are too often only an uncomfortable interruption in the conversation of the privileged. And so it is in many rights based publications that our story is often relegated to the

back chapter of a book under the headings vulnerable, at risk and marginalized.

The sharing of these stories underscores the reality that even amongst enlightened social organizations where there is a desire to engage with the Aboriginal community there is often too little shared commitment, information and action. There are positive exceptions of course, and these need to be highly recognized and supported, but in doing so they should inspire more generalized action within the sector and not lull us back into complacency.

It is natural, when working in cross cultural contexts for there to be some apprehension over cultural etiquette, understanding, and language and also an important calling to understand local history and context but the sector, through its’ work in areas such as international development, the arts, and international projects on child well being, has routinely demonstrated success in collaborating with distinct cultures worldwide. For some reason, it seems more difficult for people working in the voluntary sector to collaborate with First Nations in Canada than it is to work with people abroad including Brazil and Peru – countries that parallel the ranking of First Nations living on-reserve in Canada.

The whole question is likely complex and varied but perhaps part of the answer is that Bauman is right – that for many Canadians acknowledging the history of First Nations not only brings a great appreciation for First Nations peoples and cultures of this land it also calls to account the values of justice, peace, honesty, democracy, equality, and individualism upon which we found our identity as a country, as a voluntary sector, and as Canadians. It explains why as a country we celebrate aspects of Aboriginal and First Nations culture that are consistent with our perceived values as evidenced by things such as the prolific presence of Aboriginal art in the airports, museums, and government buildings whilst we turn away from the conversations of reconciliation, restitution, inclusion, and accountability. Too often, it is the celebration and inclusion of First Nations arts without the celebration

and inclusion of First Nations peoples. It is the masquerade of acceptance and humanitarianism toward First Nations that Canada sends out to the world blinding itself to its continued need to have First Nations fit into Euro-western constructs of humanity. It is what assimilation looks like today.

First Nations are no longer willing to be set aside or be asked to be only what other Canadians believe they should be, and nor, do I believe and hope is the voluntary sector willing to support their exclusion. For the voluntary sector, achieving this means actively challenging our sense of comfort, in making room in our mental circle of humanity for those who are not included in our current concepts of the voluntary community, acknowledging our past exclusion and vigilantly watching for those moments when our community secures its barriers to rebuff an inconsistent ideology, action, person or group of persons. Most difficult of all it is to understand that racism can, and does, exist even when there is good will and in the absence of stereotypically concrete signals— it is often pervasive and insidious. It can be normalized within the broader community context and is only loud and violent to those who are oppressed. Its continued existence is perpetuated by the ethical blindness of society's watchdogs such as the voluntary sector and our collective silence as citizens.

Breaking the silence requires promoting the voices of First Nations to quicken our national moral deliberation and action. Frederick Douglass, a former slave, who was asked to provide an Independence Day address in 1852 eloquently, informs the courageous conversation ahead:

it is not light that is needed, but fire; it is not the gentle shower, but thunder. We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake. The feeling of the nation must be quickened; the conscience of that nation must be roused; the propriety of the nation must be startled; the hypocrisy of the nation must be exposed; and its crimes against God and man must be proclaimed and denounced³³.

Some may say that such bold actions are unnecessary to address violations of civil, cultural and human rights in a modern civilized country such as Canada— but we also know that the major civil change called for in RCAP has not happened in its absence. And we also know from the fine examples of Ghandi and King that often civil change and development has been preceded by courageous, loud, and often controversial conversation framed within non violent resistance.

In all dimensions, the voluntary sector's role in reconciliation must be shaped by an understanding that First Nations peoples are knowledgeable, resilient and valuable peoples in their own right. And despite the ravages of colonization and assimilation we are not a broken people waiting to be fixed by Euro-western "community development" approaches. We have our own answers, they need to be heard, respected, resourced and they need to guide the involvement of the voluntary sector. This includes setting the pace for change. It is true that for many First Nations communities the road back to the restoration of peace and harmony for children, youth and families is a long one —and voluntary sector organizations working in collaboration with First Nations should not be deterred should their acts of giving not show any immediate change. The goal is to affirm and strengthen what works for community and to be patient and respectful as community increasingly embraces confident action toward a future they define.

Conclusion

If you have come here to help me,

You are wasting your time....

But if you have come because

Your liberation is bound up with mine,

Then let us work together.

Lilla Watson, a Brisbane –based
Aboriginal educator and activist³⁴

What is it that is so powerful that separates us from one another? That makes us believe

that as long as one is not hurting and can not hear the cries of another then all is well. What makes us believe these are matters best dealt with by chosen leaders and not by the rest of us? What is the story, the fact, or the picture that needs to flash upon our collective consciousness to understand that loving and caring about us means loving and caring for them?

Reconciliation is not just about doing right by oppressed peoples it is about breathing life into our oppressed humanity. It is about making authentic those things we believe that are most important about ourselves. In these times of increased conflict it is essential to a sustainable future for all of us.

For the voluntary sector, it means understanding that social inclusion and reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples in Canada are not discretionary – it is essentially required to make real our collective mission to ensure a sustainable quality of life for all of humanity and the environment that we share. Without it we remain tangled in contradiction and we contribute to the marginalization of another generation of Aboriginal children.

It is not too complicated-it begins with a first step. Becoming eager students of history, and willing partners, who understand that they have just as much to learn from First Nations as they themselves have to give – it is the balance of giving and receiving that is the foundation of the balance of power and the basis for respect.

It requires an understanding of the rich diversity that exists within the Aboriginal community and developing partnerships based on respect that are reflective of history and recognize the capacity of Aboriginal peoples to act in their own best interests.

On a broader level, it calls for the sector to question its identity. To learn from the history we both share as Aboriginal and non Aboriginal peoples in Canada and to involve ourselves in solutions that lead to respectful coexistence.

It is important to understand the seductive power of not doing anything. After all,

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historically the sector has principally relied on this strategy as the primary response to the harms experienced by Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The voluntary sector needs to actively defend against the many rationalizations that make standing still OK by reminding ourselves that standing still has had devastating consequences for Aboriginal children and youth. As frightening as doing something might feel, we can not feel morally absolved in standing silent – we must with our entire humanity embrace what hurts so that we can ensure a world fit for children – all of our children.

The voluntary sector, with its wisdom, resources and influence, has a unique opportunity to be part of the solution-to put redressing the social exclusion of First Nations children, youth and families at the top of the national agenda. It is simply too important to set aside again – a generation of children are depending on our willingness to do the difficult but not impossible task of shaping a respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal Canadians. *What example will we set for them?*

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A member of the Gitksan Nation, Cindy has worked in the field of child and family services for over twenty years on the front line, in professional development and research. In her current capacity, Cindy is honoured to be the Executive Director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada (www.fnfcfs.com) This national organization seeks promotes the works and knowledge of First Nations child and family service agencies and regional organizations in Canada by providing research, professional development and networking services.

Cindy was honoured to participate in numerous provincial and national research projects. She has published numerous research papers, articles and curriculum related to Aboriginal child welfare in Canada. Current professional interests include being a member of the NGO Working Group of the United Nations Convention on the

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